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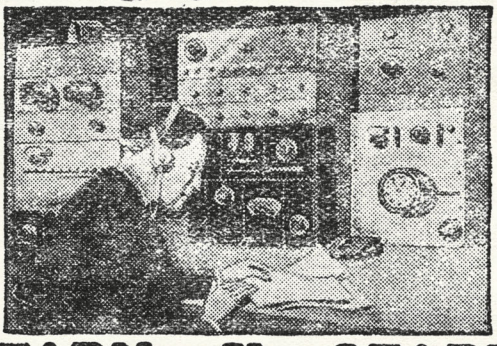

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THE RED

A Complete Book-Length Novel

By KENNETH GILBERT

A Human Whirlwind Ready to Loose Its Fury Upon the World Holds China As Under a Dragon's Claw in This Pulse-Stirring Story of Oriental Intrigue and Adventure

SHANGHAI is cosmopolitan. Or, rather, it is a half-caste city in whose life currents, flowing sluggishly, are strains of East and West, which have met at last.

The Old City, with its narrow, tortuous streets; the rabbit-warren, low-roofed buildings, drooping with weathered banners and festooned paper lanterns, the acrid, sullen atmosphere traced with noisome, unknown smells—this is China as it always has been. A quicksand for white men whose straying feet have led them thither, the jealous mother of an unwholesome brood, a withholder of secrets, guarded as the crumbling walls have guarded her for centuries.

And yet outside those walls, in the European concession, if one can ignore the sight of thousands of plodding, black-bloused Chinese clerks,

TYPHOON

tradesmen and servants, or forget that just off the Bund, in the towny waters of the river, the shoals of sampans are huddled even as they were, perhaps, when the Great Khans led their savage hordes out of the North. It might be fancied that one was in a thriving Occidental city with the characteristics of continental Europe and perhaps a dash of America as well.

For example, there is the Cafe Riche, in the French quarter, where you may not enter after nine o'clock at night unless in evening dress, or wearing an officer's uniform of one of the great powers. The Cafe Riche, with its spike-mustached *garçons,* its spicy aroma of French cooking, glittering mirrors and snowy linen, might have been lifted from the most fashionable boulevard of Paris itself.

And yet it was in China.

But a mile or so distant was the festering hole of the Old City, brooding behind her crumbling walls, resentful of the encroachment of foreign devils; a slow-smoldering ash-heap of intrigue, unhurried, unreckoning of time. For China is old, and if one would understand, one cannot be restless. So much has happened in China that the immediate present seems no more than a tick of the Clock of Ages. One must not be impatient in China.

Craig Brightly knew this, for he had lived four years in Shanghai. He knew it did not pay to be restless, for experience had taught him why. Yet he found himself sitting there at a table in an alcove of the Cafe Riche, and glancing nervously every few minutes at his wrist-watch. Idly he

fingered the thin stem of his empty liqueur glass.

He was aware that he was being watched, but so far he had detected nothing malevolent in the glances which others in the cafe directed at him from time to time.

In fact, he was used to it, for he dined often at the Cafe Riche. Just being there was a sort of antidote for homesickness. For, while the place was by no means American, it was so wholly unlike China that it helped him forget.

Nevertheless, he was—in the rare moments when he allowed his keen, practical brain to be gripped by fantasy—merely between the paws of The Dragon which drowsed in the Old City. At any instant he could be crushed beneath those paws, if the sleepy monster awoke.

But it was not good to dwell upon such a possibility. It was worse than useless. The Orient had taught him something of what fatalism means, and the fundamental idea of it is that impatience is folly.

NINE forty-two. The last time he had looked at his watch it was nine thirty-nine. Again he twirled the empty liqueur glass, and Francois, the alert *maitre,* came forward quickly, expectantly.

But Brightly shook his head. In a voice which would not carry far, he asked:

"Francois, who is that Eurasian occupying the third table from the end, at the other side of the room? The man who has just entered, accompanied by that Chinese in evening clothes?"

Brightly spoke in French, and Francois replied in kind:

"But that is Monsieur Quintaro, that Eurasian. I do not know him well, for he comes here but rarely. A mysterious man, monsieur. The Chinese I do not know. There are many such, who have been educated in Europe, or your own United States. He speaks excellent English. I could make inquiries—"

"No," interposed Brightly. "It is of no consequence." He glanced again at his watch.

"You are certain no one has inquired for me?" he asked. "A lady, perhaps?"

Francois shrugged.

"But, no," he replied. "I have issued orders. Perhaps if monsieur will give us the lady's name, a brief description. It would be helpful. But not necessary, perhaps."

Brightly grimaced.

"I don't know who she is, much less ever having seen her," he answered.

Francois smiled, his eyes lighting. He had the soul of a romanticist, had Francois.

"Ah, monsieur!" he exclaimed. That was all, but there was a world of meaning in that "ah!" This Monsieur Brightly was a likable, polished gentleman; clean-cut, good-looking—certainly attractive to most women as Francois had shrewdly observed in noting the rather wistful glances which unattended lady patrons of the place had cast toward the lone diner. A little affair, perhaps? But, why not?

"Ah, monsieur!" exclaimed Francois again, twirling his tiny waxed mustache, and winking knowingly.

Craig laughed outright, and shook his head.

"No," he assured. "I fancy this is a cold-blooded business proposition. The appointment was made by the consul's office; and the fool clerk who handled the deal neglected to jot down her name. I came down-river from Hankow only this afternoon. The note was awaiting me at my quarters.

"For all I know, she may be a well-preserved old dowager."

"Monsieur!"

It was a garçon who spoke. He had come up soft-footedly, unnoticed, and was standing at Brightly's elbow.

"A lady to see you, monsieur!"

BRIGHTLY got to his feet, hastily, face reddening, comforted only by the thought that he had been speaking in French. For, at the garçon's side stood a woman, and it was certain that she had overheard him. And, at that moment he would have cheerfully traded a year of his life rather than have her understand what he had been saying.

Certainly she was no well-preserved old dowager, as Brightly had surmised. To the contrary, she was young, decidedly pretty, yet with a scared little look in her eyes as though all this was strange to her.

She wore her clothes well, without ostentation. No jewelry. And none of that rouged, mascaraed makeup which characterized other white women in the Cafe Riche.

Brightly had a sudden pang of homesickness. She was like a breath from home.

He seated her, forestalling the alert Francois. The *maitre* permitted himself a soulful sigh, twirled his mustache, then departed, shooing the *garçon* ahead of him. Brightly was aware now that many persons in the cafe were staring at his table curiously. The Eurasian, Quintaro, and the Chinese had ceased talking, and were regarding him and the girl boldly.

Brightly told himself that sometime he'd indulge in the pleasure of slapping the Eurasian's bloated, dead-white face. He ignored the other.

But the girl was regarding Brightly with frank curiosity. He fancied he saw approval in her gaze, for she smiled suddenly, and the worried look went out of her eyes.

"I am Janice Leeds," she said. "They told me at the consulate—of you——" She paused, groping for words. "Well, I rather expected to find you a gray-haired, fatherly sort of person!" and she smiled again. "Is it true that you have done all the things they told me about?"

Brightly laughed.

"Without knowing just what I'm supposed to have done," he replied, "I dare say I can't confess."

"But—you are Janice Leeds! I had a friend named Jim Leeds. No relation, of course?"

INSTANTLY the scared look came back into the girl's eyes.

"My brother," she said simply. "He—that is what I came to see you about!"

He studied her without replying. So this was Jim Leeds' sister! There was a trace of family resemblance, but not much. Still, Brightly reflected, the ravages of dissipation had probably changed Jim Leeds greatly. Brightly could not remember that the man had ever spoken of having a sister.

"They told me at the consulate that you are a friend of Jim's," she went on. "They also told me that if there is one person in the world who could help me, it would be you!"

Brightly heard her in amazement. She had said "are" instead of "were" when speaking of his friendship with Leeds. Didn't she know that the man was dead—wiped out with the Farrand exploring expedition that had gone into the Gobi Desert?

An untimely end for Leeds, perhaps, yet not wholly unexpected. It had only been a question of time; no man could do what Leeds had done, and live long. In one short year the change had been accomplished—that was the pathetic part of it.

From the popular, respected representative at Shanghai of a big New York importing firm, Leeds had taken

a swift plunge into oblivion. The knowing ones had said that the Orient had "got" him. Yet, Brightly had been puzzled. A man doesn't needlessly throw everything worthwhile to the dogs.

There had been a reason for it—maybe a woman—but Brightly had never learned the truth. Eventually his company dismissed him, when his conduct became insufferable, and he lapsed into that most pitiable of all characters, a white "bum" in a land of yellow men. Even his friends of the European quarter sickened of him finally, and it was said that he had withdrawn to the Old City, to wallow deeper in the mire.

IT had been Brightly who had dragged him forth. When old Farrand stopped at Shanghai, on his way into the Gobi, Brightly had persuaded him to take Leeds along.

"He knows a half-dozen dialects," Brightly had told Farrand. "He'll be more valuable to you than any native interpreter — if you can keep him away from booze!"

Brightly himself had found Leeds in the Old City, hauled him out and made him half-way presentable. And Farrand, who was less interested in the man's morals than in his ability to speak the various dialects, had taken him on. From Shanghai they had gone north, struck into the Gobi —and vanished.

Weeks later there filtered down from Peiping a rumor that the entire expedition had been destroyed by bandits. And Brightly, although saddened a little, for he had liked Jim Leeds despite the latter's depravity, philosophically saw the hand of fate in it. It had been for the best. For years in China had strengthened Brightly's belief in fatalism.

"I'm sorry," Brightly told the girl. "You heard, of course, that he was—dead?"

She flashed a startled look at him.

"You mean the destruction of the Farrand expedition?"

Brightly nodded. She sighed.

"I heard that," she replied, "and believed it. But, that was supposed to have taken place a year and a half ago.

"Now, I know it's not true. At least, Jim is alive! For I have received a letter from him!"

SHE said this a little breathlessly, leaning across the table toward him. He saw her eyes go around the room, as though fearful that she would be overheard. And then, as abruptly, she relaxed, for Francois was standing smilingly at the table.

"Somesing, m'sieu?" he suggested pleasantly in English to Brightly. "*Dejeuner*, perhap'?" But Brightly shook his head.

"Monsieur," said Francois suddenly in French, "that Eurasian, Quintaro—"

But Brightly straightened up impatiently.

"Later, Francois, later!" he told the *maitre*. "Can't you see we are occupied?"

Francois squared his shoulders. He gave his mustache a little twirl, rolled his eyes, and stalked stiffly away, plainly offended.

JANICE had opened her wrist-bag, and took from it a folded square of paper. She uncreased it, spread it out on the table. Brightly saw that it was covered by lines of odd-looking hieroglyphics, somewhat resembling the pothooks of shorthand.

"It is a simple code which Jimmy and I made up," she explained. "We used to write each other kid messages when we were separated at different schools. You see, there's just the two of us. But I'll translate it for you. It says:

"Am somewhere in North China, on unknown river. Farrand and others dead. Am safe for present, under protection. Good health. Don't worry. Write you again in a month. Big secret. Riches—lots.

"'JIMMY.'"

The girl looked up at him.

"That letter was mailed five months ago, in Shanghai," she went on. "I didn't save the envelope, but it bore the Shanghai postmark. But I haven't heard from him since. I worried, decided to come here. I arrived this morning, and inquired at the consulate. They told me to see you, said you would return today from Hankow."

Her eyes filled.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Brightly!" she whispered. "Terribly afraid. I *know* something has happened to him.

"When he first came to Shanghai, he wrote me of how wonderfully well he was doing. Then the tone of his letters began to change; they were more infrequent, too. Finally, he said he was quitting his job. I never heard from him after that—until I received this letter.

"I couldn't understand what had happened to him. Jimmy and I have always been so close to each other. He was a brother of whom to be proud. But I have heard that the Orient affects some persons like a disease. Maybe that is what happened to Jimmy! Will you tell me?"

Brightly, thrilled by what she had said, nevertheless was quickened by some sixth sense which he could not have defined at that moment. He could only recognize the sensation, for it had occurred to him before. For want of a better name, he had termed it "the old bird-dog sense." The intuition of a hunter who *feels* that game is near.

"Let me see the letter," he requested, holding out his hand.

THE message was written on cheap paper, characteristically Chinese. There was nothing unusual about it. And yet, the very fact that the message was from the supposedly-dead Jim Leeds gave an added interest to it. He studied it closely.

On the table was a softly-shaded lamp. To get better light, Brightly removed the lamp-shade, held the paper close against the glowing bulb. This made certain erasures—the message was written in pencil—stand out more clearly. But the changes were only a letter here and there, probably not enough to change the meaning of the thing.

A voice broke in on his contemplation. It was Francois.

"Monsieur," said the *maitre* in French, "Eurasian, Quintaro—"

Brightly gave a startled exclamation and half-rose from his chair. Yet it was not to interrupt Francois, whom he had not heard. Francois, however, reading the action for a rebuff, backed off hastily.

What Brightly saw was something which was barely distinguishable through the paper. Probably it was a crude sort of water-mark, yet so faintly did it show that his eye had not caught it at first.

It was a large outlined letter, Chinese in form, yet resembling the English letter "T." In the glow from the lamp shining through the paper, the letter had a faint reddish tinge.

"What is it?" demanded the girl, wonderingly.

Brightly folded and handed the paper back to her.

"Don't lose that, please," he told her. He glanced around the room. The Eurasian and the Chinese were gone, but Francois, a determined look on his face, was approaching again.

"I'd rather not explain—here," went on Brightly. "Let's go to the consulate. Got something important I want to report to Robbins!"

He stood up.

This time, however, Francois would not be dissuaded.

"That Eurasian, Quintaro," he stated in French. "All the while he study you, and mademoiselle. Very interested, so! He ask me many questions, who you are, who she is. But, do I tell him? Ah! Not Francois, the fox!"

He rolled his eyes grandiloquently, gave his mustache a fillip.

"Magnificent, Francois!" applauded Brightly, smiling. He crushed a bill of Chinese currency into the *maitre's* hand. "Watch that Eurasian closely. He looks suspicious. But he will not fool *you,* my friend!"

FRANCOIS bowed, backed away, almost overcome. Such praise as this, coming from Craig Brightly, the brilliant one known only to a few as the confidential diplomatic agent of the United States. A man who was said to have a finger in every political pot-pie in the Far East. It was praise indeed. Francois considered regretfully that with such natural gifts he, although *maitre* of the Cafe Riche, might have become a detective. A fitting contemporary, he thought, of such a master as Craig Brightly.

At the curb, while he handed the girl into his own car, which had been summoned — experience had taught him that 'rickshas drawn by coolies were unsafe in traversing darkened streets—Brightly whispered to her:

"I'm afraid, Miss Leeds, that you won't hear from your brother—soon." It was on his tongue to say "ever," but he wanted to spare her. "On that letter you carry is a clue, the mark of a Thing—maybe a man, or a group of men; in any event, it's a sinister Intelligence. The thing I'd give my life to destroy, because the sacrifice would be cheap enough; it would mean the saving of many other lives, later. The devilish thing I've been fighting for four years, ever since I came here.

"It killed Brand, my predecessor, at Nanking. It is called The Red Typhoon!"

CHAPTER II

The Warning

ROBBINS, the consul general at Shanghai, faced Brightly and Janice Leeds across his desk.

"Of course, the matter is wholly in your hands, Brightly," he stated. "It's too much for me; I'm merely the commercial representative here. But I'll make a report to our minister at Peiping. The American fleet is at Foochow. A destroyer could be here within twenty-four hours!"

Brightly smiled and shook his head.

"Thanks," he acknowledged, "but there's no need for such a move, just yet. There's a thread or two to unravel right here in Shanghai.

"This letter," and he tapped the paper which Jance had shown him, "was mailed in Shanghai. Somebody carried it here for Jim Leeds, if it is true that he is in the interior of China. That person must have been a friend; assuming, of course, that it is not part of a plot.

"But Jim Leeds didn't die with the Farrand expedition, for he mentions that the others are gone. In some manner he escaped. He speaks of riches. What could that be, Robbins? You're supposed to be familiar with the resources of this country."

Robbins considered.

"It could be gold," he mused. "It has been found in North China, but the threat of bandits has always discouraged white prospectors, whereas the natives have only crude methods of going about it. There is a man

here, however, who doubtless can give you accurate information about that part of the country. A Eurasian. Quintaro is his name. Smart fellow, too!"

Brightly stiffened.

"I've seen him," he remarked. "Saw him tonight, in fact. A Chinese dressed like a white man, was with him. Can you guess who that Chinese could have been, Robbins?"

The consul pursed his lips.

"It could have been Ki-Lung," he replied. "He's pretty close to Quintaro. Graduate of Oxford, I understand. I can't guess what his game can be. But," he added, "it might be something worth your attention, Brightly!"

THE latter nodded, as he got to his feet.

"I'm going to look up this Quintaro," he decided, "just as soon as I take Miss Leeds to her hotel." He turned to the girl.

"I may be gone for a few days," he went on. "Keep in close touch with Robbins, here. *And be careful!* Shanghai is a strange place."

"Ready?"

The girl smiled.

"You sound mysterious," she reminded him. "If I could forget to worry about poor Jim, I'd enjoy this thrill. Why should I be afraid? And why should this dreadful thing you call The Red Typhoon be interested in my brother? What *is* The Red Typhoon?"

Brightly looked sober.

"I can't tell you that," he replied, "because I'm not certain myself. But its purpose seems fairly well established. In this part of the world a typhoon, you'll understand, typifies destruction. The purpose of The Red Typhoon seems the destruction of the white man's supremacy, at least in the Orient. After that—why the storm may sweep the world before it blows itself out! At least, that's the ambitious hope of the man or men behind it. It is closely linked with the Chinese Communists, which accounts for the 'red' part of it.

"Yet it is in reality yellow, for that is the hue of the human whirlwind that is slowly gathering force out here. When the fury of it is loosed upon the world, why, even the sun is going to have a yellowish tinge, as it does after a typhoon has passed."

"And you think Jim is involved in this some way?" asked the girl anxiously. "They may kill him, if they haven't already done so!"

"I'd gladly give my own life, if I could destroy this thing," declared Brightly. "So would Robbins, here. So would any real white man. Unless I'm mistaken, Jim Leeds would make the same sacrifice willingly, if he understood the significance of it.

LIFE is cheap in the eyes of this menace. A white man dies here, another disappears there, still a third goes haywire. It's been going on for years, and not until they killed Brand at Nanking did the significance of these happenings become plain. Moreover, the time is drawing near when the pent-up emotions of the rabble may overflow and cause serious trouble, perhaps bloodshed.

"So far, we've managed to forestall it. But the thing is getting away from us; it is *not* going to die of its own accord, as we had hoped. They are getting ready to strike, and we've got to beat them to the punch.

"Our only hope is that the brain of it, the nerve-center, is one man; and we have reason to believe that this is probable. It is easier to scotch one snake than a hundred. If our guess is correct, then by destroying this nerve-center—or, still thinking of it as a typhoon, by breaking

the center of the storm—the whole thing will collapse.

"That's why you'll understand when I tell you that one white man's life—my own, perhaps—is a small price to pay if the great thing can be accomplished!"

He was in deadly earnest. So was Robbins, who had risen, and was standing there with sober, serious face. Again that scared look came into the girl's face.

"Come," said Brightly. Nor did he speak again until he had dropped her at her hotel. Then he smiled.

"Sorry if I seemed a bit carried away tonight," he apologized. "But there is no reason to keep you in darkness about it. I wanted to impress upon you the seriousness of the situation."

The girl held out her hand to him.

"If I can help—" she suggested.

"You may be invaluable," he told her. "Our purposes coincide. You want to find your brother, and so do I. Because I believe that in unraveling the mystery concerning him, I'll be getting closer to the truth I've been seeking for four years.

"Meanwhile, stay close here until you hear from me. Robbins will locate me for you, if something important happens."

He glanced at his wrist-watch. Near midnight.

"You'll hear from me soon," he promised. "Don't forget what I said—that strange things may happen here!" Then he was gone.

CHAPTER III

The Lead

THE House of the Golden Dragon, the place was called; and Brightly stood on the threshold for a moment, trying to accustom his eyes to the dim lights, the smoky haze which softened the cheaply barbaric trappings, and made moving figures within almost indistinct. Then he stepped inside.

Swiftly, a change came over the place. Until then there had been a semblance of gayety about it. Above the chattering of Chinese, the sing-song cries of waiters, and the throaty bellowing of some drunken white sailor in one of the booths, there was throbbing of a marimba played by sallow Visayans from the Philippines; the steady thudding of hammers upon its wooden cylinders sounding savage and weird.

On a cleared spot in the center of the room swayed the lithe figure of a Eurasian girl, barefooted, fingers and toes heavily ringed, while the rope upon rope of beads she wore glistened and shot fire in the light with every movement of her body. It was her eyes, fixed on the door, which caught sight of Brightly standing there, and as though in surprise, she stopped in the middle of her dance.

THE marimba quit in the middle of a bar. The chattering died, and eyes were turned upon the doorway. The bellowing of the drunken sailor ended in a gurgle, as though somebody had clapped a hand over his mouth.

White men were not strangers to the Golden Dragon; not even white men who wore evening clothes and apparently showed no signs of being drunk. But somehow Brightly's appearance had the effect of clashing with the atmosphere of the place. He was foreign—too foreign to suit them.

A Chinese waiter hurried toward him, bowing deferentially, and Brightly permitted himself to be led to an ebony-covered table. He ignored the curious stares, many of them plainly hostile, and seated himself.

"Quintaro!" he told the Chinese.

The man eyed him for a second, then ducked his head and backed away. As Brightly settled back in his chair, the marimba resumed hesitantly, then broke into its regular rhythm. Mechanically the girl began dancing once more, yet her eyes scarcely left Brightly's face. Gradually the murmur of voices swelled in volume, yet a certain restraint was apparent.

A well-dressed white man who came thus to the Golden Dragon in the Old City, at this unholy hour of the night, evidently had a purpose in mind. Seemingly they had forgotten him, however, yet in reality he knew that he was still being scrutinized.

Then a voice at his elbow:

"Yo' wish to spik wiz me, sar?"

QUINTARO was standing there at Brightly's elbow. At such close range the Eurasian's bloated, dead-white face seemed more dull and expressionless than ever. Yet there was nothing dull about the black eyes which peered from beneath thick, purple lids.

Brightly motioned the other to a chair, and even smiled.

"I took a chance on finding you here, Quintaro," he remarked. "I believe you were asking about me earlier tonight?"

For an instant the eyes gleamed questioningly then it seemed that a shutter was drawn over them, so that the thoughts behind them could not be read. Quintaro smiled, and rubbed his hands.

"Ah, yes," he agreed. "I remembaire! I see yo' tonight—and wondair why we haf never met. Yo' are a stranger in S'anghai, yes? I hope I haf not given offense, sar!

"Hi, boy!" he called to the waiter. "Burgundy, *chop-chop!*"

Diplomatic, thought Brightly. Never a mention made of Miss Leeds, although, according to Francois, the Eurasian had been deeply curious about her. But he would not offend Brightly by speaking of it now.

"No offense," Brightly assured him, when twin glasses of the dark-red wine were set before them. "I dare say you know about me fully now, even though the *maitre* at the Café Riche did not prove very voluble. Am I right?"

Quintaro smiled, and ducked his head.

"Yes, sar," he agreed, "I do know about yo'—now, as you haf guessed! I am flattered that yo' come down here in the Old City at these time of night to see me. May I be of service?"

"Robbins, our consul, spoke of you," said Brightly. "He told me that you are familiar with a region in which I am interested just now—North China. Is that correct?"

Quintaro drew back a little, suspicion in his eyes.

"What ees it yo' wish to know?" he countered. "Maybe I can be of help—maybe not."

Brightly had dropped his own gaze to the table. Carelessly, it seemed, he had spilled a little of his wine, and now he was idly tracing a queer pattern with it. Fascinated, Quintaro watched him, for Brightly seemed to be preoccupied. Suddenly the Eurasian's breath drew inward with a hissing sound.

THE spilled wine had been traced into a capital letter "T," which nevertheless resembled a Chinese character. Abruptly, Brightly looked up, caught the other's eyes.

What he saw there made his own eyes harden, and he opened his lips, but at that instant there was an interruption.

It was the dancing girl. The music had ceased, and she had slipped over to the table. Now she said something hurriedly to Quintaro, who re-

plied shortly in the same tongue, which Brightly, trained for the diplomatic corps and schooled in several languages though he was, could not catch.

Quintaro got up, smiling in oily fashion.

"Yo' will haf to excuse," he told Brightly. "Verree important message has come for me. I must hurree off. I am sorree, sar, but I cannot help yo'. I know but leetle of thees country of which yo' spik!" Then, bowing abruptly, he crossed the room.

At another table on the far side, he paused for a moment to speak to a tall, haggard-faced white man who sat there and who had doubtless just arrived, for Brightly had not seen him before. But at sight of him, the light of recognition leaped into Brightly's eyes.

"Crawleigh!" mused Brightly. "So you're mixed up in this, too? When a white man does go bad, he goes the limit!"

But the dancing girl had slid closer. She shot a glance at Quintaro's back, then whispered hurriedly to Brightly

"I am Luchee. Meestaire, I lak yo'. Thees verree bad place for yo' *now*. Yo' go queek!" Then she whirled away from the table and plunged into her dance, swaying, gyrating as before.

Brightly saw that Quintaro had vanished through a narrow doorway leading off the main room. Crawleigh was sipping slowly from a glass of whisky-and-soda and, while pretending to be interested in something at the far end of the room, nevertheless was watching him out of the corner of one eye, Brightly saw.

BRIGHTLY smiled, yet he was tense, watchful. Before him on the table was his glass of Burgundy, which he had not yet tasted. Now, however, he lifted it to his lips, cupping the glass with his hand. He set it down presently, licking his lips.

The beat of the marimba quickened; Luchee went into a mad, spinning dance which whirled her among the tables. Once she looked anxiously at Brightly, who seemed to be sliding slowly down in his chair.

The marimba throbbed more savagely; the lithe, gyrating body of the girl seemed to hang poised for a second over Brightly, and then she vanished, while from somewhere came a shout in English.

"Look out, you dude!"

There was a crash, as the cord which suspended the string of paper lanterns across the room, the only illumination of the place, broke, and the trappings came down.

Hard on the heels of it Brightly came to life with astonishing suddenness. He straightened up, a service revolver in each hand, while three men, Quintaro at the head of them, halted the swift rush they had started toward his table.

Now the paper lanterns had flamed up, lighting the place redly and filling it with acrid smoke. Brightly, his face aglow, was backing toward the door; but as he did so, he gestured with his right-hand gun at the figure of a man in an American sailor's uniform who stood weaving drunkenly at the far end of the room. It was the sailor who had jerked loose the cord holding the lanterns.

"Come on, you!" cried Brightly to him. "I owe you something. And I'll save your life as you tried to save mine!" Brightly's guns held back Quintaro and his aides as the sailor walked with difficulty toward the door, and outside.

Suddenly Brightly wheeled and was after him. As he vanished the

tension broke and the place went into an uproar.

THEY were stamping out the flames licking along the floor, while above the commotion the voice of Quintaro could be heard, shrilling orders. Brightly caught the sailor by the shoulder, shoved him into a waiting 'ricksha, and jumped after him. The 'ricksha coolie nearly dropped the handles of his cart as the gun muzzles menaced him.

"*Chop-chop!*" ordered Brightly. "To the gates." Then, as the frightened coolie started off, the 'ricksha with the two men in it swaying after him, Brightly turned to the man he had rescued.

"You thought they had doped me," Brightly said, "which was the thing I wanted them to believe. But you risked your life to warn me. Who are you, and why did you do it?"

The other stared at him owlishly. The sailor was not tall, but was wide of shoulder. Probably thirty years old. A boatswain's-mate rating badge showed on the right sleeve of his blouse. It was his voice which Brightly had heard when first entering the Golden Dragon.

"I'm Bill Tremper," the man replied. "*U. S. S. Luzon*—or *was*," he added as an afterthought. He hiccoughed. "Saw you sorta passin' out, and saw them gettin' ready to rush you. Couldn't stand for that—and you a white man. What's your name?"

Brightly told him, but Tremper shook his head.

"You're sorta handy with a gat," he remarked. "If you hadn't bluffed them yellow devils, I reckon they'd sliced me some. And you didn't run out on me, either!"

Apparently he was highly pleased. He slapped Brightly on the back.

"What a pal!" he cried. Then he sobered a little. "Reckon it's 'curtains' for me when I get back to my ship. They must have me posted as a deserter; must be two weeks I've been gone!"

He tried to stand up in the swaying 'ricksha as sudden realization gripped him.

"Let me out!" he demanded. "I'm goin' back there and clean out the whole yellow gang! They 'framed' me—slipped me doped booze—God, I guess I've been crazy!"

"Who are 'they'?" asked Brightly.

"That yellow-bellied Quintaro and his crew!" exclaimed Tremper. "They got me drunk, promised me a lot of things they were going to do for me. They'd buy my discharge from the navy, and set me up like a king, if I put in with 'em.

LET me out!" he insisted, and it was all that Brightly could do to hold him. "I'm goin' back there and square yards with 'em!"

"What did they want you to do?" persisted Brightly.

The sailor's wild words thrilled him somehow. Powerful as Brightly was, he was hard put to it to keep the man in the 'ricksha, for Tremper, despite the effects of his long debauch, was muscled like a gladiator.

"Steady, old man!" counseled Brightly. "No good to go back there now. But maybe we'll both go back together—later—if it seems wise. Why did they want you to put in with them?"

Tremper subsided a little. It was plain that he trusted Brightly. And plain, too, that he was vastly disturbed by the predicament in which he had just found himself.

"How do I know?" he replied. "I'm a sailor, for one thing—sail or steam. And I'm middleweight champion of the Asiatic Fleet. *That's* what seemed to interest Quintaro—he said he wanted a fightin' man!"

Tremper was trying to roll up his right sleeve.

"Why, they even put a tattoo-mark on me!" he cried. "Sort of a joke, at first. Then they told me that all I had to do was to show it, and I'd get out of any trouble that might come up out here. I'll show it, if I can get this blamed sleeve—"

"Don't bother," said Brightly quietly. "It's a red T, isn't it? A sort of a Chinese letter?"

Tremper swung around to stare at him in amazement.

"You know that?" he demanded. "Then there *is* somethin' to it, after all?"

Brightly nodded. The method of The Red Typhoon varied but little. No fish was too small to escape the net, if that fish could be made useful. Always some white man was the victim. A man like Jim Leeds; and then this sailor, Bill Tremper. Other white men in the Orient had mysteriously collapsed and disappeared. But at that moment Brightly's attention was distracted by something ahead.

THEY were near the gates of the Old City, and beyond lay the domain of the foreigners, the European concessions. It seemed improbable that with the start they had acquired, Quintaro could overtake them and, of course, there was no such thing as a telephone in this section, or other means of getting word ahead of their flight. Nevertheless, Brightly knew that the thing had been accomplished, for, as they were about to pass through the gates, the shadows disgorged men.

Soft-footed men, who came running swiftly, the gleam of metal in their hands. They might have been merely lurking there for such prey as would come their way, but Brightly guessed otherwise.

Their 'ricksha man veered, terrified, but Brightly's guns had once more jumped into his hands. Nevertheless, the sudden lurch of the 'ricksha nearly upset it, and did hurl out Bill Tremper. With a scream, the 'ricksha man tried to wheel and run, but a shadowy form was on him in a catlike leap, and his cry ended in a choked gurgle. Life is cheap in the Orient, and nowhere is it cheaper than in the Old City.

But Brightly's right-hand gun smashed life out of the killer, then he was out of the 'ricksha, his guns talking. One, two, three of the killers went down. Grim business, this, and hardly in accord with the normal conduct of a diplomatic attache, but the state department could thresh that out. When a man's life was at stake —when there was even a bigger stake than that—

Bill Tremper was roaring, and the narrow, alley-like street echoed to the reverberation of his barking guns. The sudden, fierce offensive checked the onslaught of the attackers. Beaten back, they dashed off like startled rats, leaving still forms behind them.

"Come on!" cried Brightly. "Got a car outside!"

They broke past the gate, hurried along the dimly-lit street. But as they did so, from ahead came the shrilling of a police-whistle. The patrol of the European concession was ever watchful of the Old City, and the echoing sounds of the gunshots had been heard.

Brightly swung down an alley, Tremper after him, while from behind came sounds of pursuit. Another twist and dive, and then, pulled alongside the curb, the chauffeur leaning anxiously from the window and watching, was Brightly's car.

YET they were not to reach it so easily.

Across their path leaped a tall Sikh policeman, swinging his heavy leather club. There was reason why these gi-

gantic fighting-men from India were used as policemen in the foreign quarter, instead of small, rabbit-souled Chinese. The size and fierceness of the Sikhs were enough to intimidate, and they hated the yellow-skinned natives.

And Brightly knew that if he were stopped now, with those men lying back there in the street, all sorts of complications might ensue and his plans would go awry in a glimmering. Killing in self-defense, as he had done, was one thing, and potting a Sikh policeman was quite another. But with the destruction of The Red Typhoon as the main objective, no one life was too costly. Couldn't be fettered by red tape now.

Brightly swung up his gun, as the Sikh, shouting terrifyingly in his own tongue, charged them. From the alley sprang two other Sikhs.

"Let *me* take 'em!" roared Bill Tremper.

The first Sikh could never have known exactly what happened. A squat man leaped at him, and instantly the world dissolved in a blaze of shooting-stars, as the knockout punch went home. Then, with the engine of the automobile thundering impatiently, the sailor leaped after Brightly into the car.

"Shipmate," declared Tremper, as the car shot away, "you're right handy with guns, and we seem to be gettin' in deeper and deeper. Just what is the lay, anyhow?"

Brightly shook his head.

"Bill," he said, "we're going to work together, but I can't tell you now. Before we're through, you'll not only be cleared of desertion, but the admiral himself is going to compliment you!

"You've put in some licks for a great cause, Bill. Just you leave everything to me, and don't worry about the *Luzon*. I can use a fighting man as well as the folks who put that tattoo-mark on your arm!"

CHAPTER IV

Trapped

IT was late afternoon when Brightly awoke. On a couch in the other room, Bill Tremper still snored lustily, recovering like the healthy animal he was from the prolonged debauch into which he had been led by Quintaro.

Bill's nerves would be rasped for a time, but he already had sworn fealty to Brightly for having inadvertently rescued him from the clutches of Quintaro's gang.

But for hours after they had returned to Brightly's lodgings from the affair in the Old City, the diplomatic agent had been busy. He had telephoned Robbins, rousing the latter from sleep, and set in motion certain machinery which would change the status of Bill Tremper in the eyes of the navy. Military regulations are not made to be broken, but they may become pliant when enough pressure is put upon them.

Tremper's status, although he did not yet know it, was that of a man on detached service, or would be as soon as the American minister at Peiping could take up the matter with the admiral of the Asiatic Fleet. The latter official was already under orders to lend all aid in his power in furthering Brightly's plans, and Tremper's status could be easily arranged.

For the time being, however, Brightly thought it best not to inform Tremper that the latter was no longer an unintentional deserter. Some men work best under restriction, and Brightly felt that the sailor might be difficult to handle if he knew too much.

Likewise, Brightly had gone over the entire case, with the new developments weighed and catalogued. Quin-

taro's entry in the affair was timely. Until now, the Eurasian had so successfully cloaked his connection with The Red Typhoon organization that Brightly had given him no thought. He had heard the man's name mentioned, but that was all. Even Robbins had not suspected that Quintaro was other than the unimportant figure he had seemed to be.

THERE was but one personage whose place in the scheme of things still needed to be determined. The European-educated Chinese, Ki-Lung. More or less a crony of Quintaro's, it would seem that he was at least a part of the organization. If The Red Typhoon was an individual instead of a group devoted to one purpose, Ki-Lung might be more important than one would suspect.

The Red Typhoon himself? Or could it be Quintaro who was the master mind? Or both of them, and others? But there was no proof as yet, and Brightly had ever been slow to jump to hasty conclusions.

When he had completed his work, daylight was streaming through the window. He sought his bed, determined that first of all he would see Janice Leeds. He was troubled a little about her; he was not quite sure that she appreciated what a strange place Shanghai could be. He'd have Robbins keep a close eye on her.

His first move upon awakening was to telephone the girl at her hotel. But he was informed that she had gone out. The clerk didn't know where.

Robbins said he hadn't heard from her. Worried a little, Brightly made himself ready for the street as quickly as possible, and in fifteen minutes was at the girl's hotel.

The clerk confirmed that she had been gone about two hours. She had gone alone. He recalled, however, that a Chinese boy had arrived with a note and, soon after, she had called for a 'ricksha and set out rather hurriedly. Would the gentleman wait, or leave word?

"Call the manager!" demanded the gentleman curtly.

IT took fifteen minutes, a revelation of Brightly's identity, which was corroborated by Robbins himself, before they would allow him to see her room. Only a wild hunch it was, yet he had to make a beginning somewhere. What he needed now was a clue. And he found it, a neatly-folded piece of paper peeping from the covers of a book on the reading-table.

"I have news of your brother," read the writing, which was in rather tremulous script, as though the author was in deadly fear, "but I dare not leave here, as I am watched. Call at the fourth door past the stone lions on Bubbling Well Road."

And then, deeply underscored, were the words:

"Tell no one of this. Spies are everywhere. It means life or death!"

The astonished manager of the hotel felt himself thrust aside, as Brightly charged down the stairs. Brightly paused long enough only to scribble a note, which he gave to his chauffeur.

"Take it to the sailor in my rooms," he directed. "If I am not home by midnight, tell him to look for me at the address in the note!"

Then Brightly set out for the Bubbling Well Road.

Darkness had fallen over the city when he reached the place. The fourth door beyond the stone lions proved to be a dingy, forbidding place. The neighborhood itself was none too prepossessing, and the swarm of 'ricksha men who sighted him and instantly gathered, jabberingly offering their conveyances, seemed bolder than usual.

When they saw that he paid no

attention to them, they muttered among themselves, and regarded him scowlingly.

At Brightly's rapping, a small panel was slid back, and the weazened face of an old Chinese woman appeared.

"A white lady came here?" asked Brightly. "Where is she?"

But the crone shook her head, as though she did not understand, and promptly closed the panel. As he hammered on the door again, he heard her feet shuffling up the stairs. Brightly threw his whole weight against the door, while the awed 'ricksha men gabbled speculatively.

Again he surged, as he felt the panel give. The next time it went inward with a crash. From the tail of his eye, Brightly saw the inevitable Sikh policeman approaching on the run, evidently having heard the crash of the breaking door.

But Brightly did not pause.

The Sikh would be more of a hindrance than a help under the circumstances; indeed, it was improbable that the officer could be made to understand why it was necessary to force entrance in this fashion.

UP a flight of stairs Brightly sprang. At the head of them he saw the Chinese woman, evidently frightened, just disappearing within a door. But he slammed after her before she could close it. He flung her aside, and raced down a corridor. From below came the shouts of the Sikh, but Brightly didn't worry about him now—the second door would stop the policeman for a time, at least.

Brightly was acting on impulse and intuition rather than surmise. There was the scurrying of padded slippers ahead of him somewhere, a clatter, and suddenly, around a corner appeared the startled face of Crawleigh. The man had a gun in his hand, but before he could lift it, Brightly was on him like a tiger.

As they went down, Crawleigh beneath, Brightly caught a glimpse of a dimly-lighted room just off the corridor. And he saw Janice Leeds, just as she had half-risen from her chair, startled.

But he had Crawleigh, whose dissipations had sapped him of such strength as he might have possessed. He had the man's gun, held him pinned to the floor, then jerked him to his feet. Then he shoved him into the room where the girl was waiting, and closed the door.

"*He* sent for you?" Brightly demanded, indicating Crawleigh.

She nodded.

"He said he could tell me something about my brother," she replied, "but I believe he was lying. He begged me to wait, telling me that somebody was coming who could lead me to Jim—" She broke off, coloring, and Brightly's eyes glinted.

"You wrote that note?" he demanded of the captive. Crawleigh shrugged, although there was fear and uneasiness on his face.

"What of it?" Crawleigh asked with an attempt at boldness. "I'll admit I was lying, but I believe I could help her, at that. I saw her—took this means to get acquainted—"

"Sit down!" commanded Brightly, forcing the man into a chair. His practiced hands explored the other for weapons, but found none. "You weren't lying then, but you are now, Crawleigh. You *can* shed light on this mystery, if you will. *And you're going to do that very thing!*"

THE man's eyes flickered, but he smiled contemptuously.

"I say now!" he jeered. "You're a bit fast, aren't you? What makes you think I'm going to do anything? Unless, perhaps, to throw you into jail for breaking into my rooms in this fashion! I fancy I could do that. I

dare say there's a Sikh officer below this very moment!"

"But you won't call him," pointed out Brightly. "Because you don't dare to, Crawleigh. And the very fact that you're informed of Miss Leeds' search, although she has been in Shanghai less than forty-eight hours, proves that you *do* have the information we want!"

"And what if I have?" demanded Crawleigh nastily. "Why should I tell *you?*"

For answer, Brightly got up and tore loose the tasseled cords hanging from the window-shades. Then, before Crawleigh could struggle or voice protest, Brightly had bound him in the chair. The man's eyes watched him fearfully, yet in puzzlement,

Smiling, Brightly seated himself, and lighted a cigarette.

"There *is* a Sikh below," he remarked to the prisoner easily. "But I'm the one who is going to call him, unless you talk Crawleigh. And do you know what I'm going to say? I'm going to tell him your little story, which I happen to know!

"I'm going to tell him what happened on His Majesty's ship *Monmouth,* where you were executive officer. Of how you gambled away the mess fund with which you were entrusted and, when accused of it, killed—"

"Stop!"

CRAWLEIGH'S voice was suddenly hoarse. His eyes had widened with horror, and he looked around furtively, as though Brightly's words had been heard by somebody in the room.

"I dare say the chase for you has cooled down, Crawleigh," went on Brightly. "But your shipmates haven't forgotten. There's a British man-o'-war at Woosung this minute. If they could lay hands on you, you'd be dancing at the end of a yard-arm before the sun has risen and set twice. No matter how I learned it; it's my business to know a lot of queer facts that may be useful—"

"Stop!" cried Crawleigh again. "My God, man, I didn't believe there was a soul in Shanghai who knew *that!*" His voice dropped to a whisper, as he glanced around the room again. A cunning look came in his face. "You give me your word that you won't hand me over—if I'll tell you what you want to know?"

Brightly nodded casually enough, although he found difficulty in concealing his elation.

"Agreed, Crawleigh," he said. "You deserve hanging, but I've kept your secret for some time now. You talk—and then take three days to get out of Shanghai!"

Crawleigh whimpered.

"I'll probably die if I do, and die if I don't!" he moaned. He jerked his head toward the girl. "I was told to get her here, and keep her. She'll tell you that I've treated her as a gentleman should. I'm not the rotter you think, even if I am a—"

But he could not say the word.

"Why was she brought here?" Brightly pressed him. "And where is Jim Leeds?"

Crawleigh licked his lips nervously. He was afraid of Brightly's threat, tremendously afraid; and yet he could not shake off the fear of something else.

"He—The Great One—wants her," whispered Crawleigh. "Leeds—on the Kuoming. A good cruiser—land at mouth of river—three days' trip upstream—they'll kill you—"

"My God!" His voice ended in a whine. Brightly, even Janice Leeds, who was watching this grim third degree with horror-stricken eyes, had heard the sound. All turned toward the door. That slithering noise, the soft scuff-scuff of slippered feet, just outside. Brightly rose, the girl, too.

Noiselessly he turned the knob, then threw back the panel. But there was nobody there. However, there was the patter of feet down the corridor, and Brightly raced in the direction of the sound, Janice behind him as though afraid of becoming separated from him in this gloomy, mysterious place.

Down the hall they went, swung around a corner which led off to another corridor full of shadows. But Brightly, although he seemed to be doing a foolhardy thing, for at any moment a figure could have stepped from an alcove and knifed him before he could shoot, did not pause. The chase led to an open window, whose curtain was still swaying. Peering out, he saw the roof of another building there.

Whoever had been listening outside the door had escaped out the window and across the roof. Brightly turned.

"You shouldn't have followed me like that," he told the girl rather severely. "There was danger in you doing so!"

"But you didn't seem to mind it!" she pointed out.

He led the way back to the room, disturbed a little. Yet, there was no reason why the prowler should worry him. He had Crawleigh, at least, and the man was on the point of talking. He had triumphed there.

The door, he noticed, was closed. He opened it—and then shut it abruptly, feeling a little faint at what he saw.

Crawleigh was still there, but *dead!* Without a sound he had been killed, and the knife which had slain him was still sticking in his neck, where it had been driven by one who had approached from behind.

Defiantly, there had been drawn in his own blood on his white shirt-front the letter T!

CHAPTER V

Plans

SHAKEN despite himself, Brightly managed to get the girl to the street. Happily enough, the Sikh policeman had gone on about his business, evidently deciding that the unceremonious entry of the white man into this questionable place was no affair of his anyway. Brightly fought his way through the swarm of 'ricksha men, finally found a two-seater into which he and the girl climbed.

Just how the killer had managed to "get" Crawleigh, Brightly could only guess. Evidently the conversation within the death-chamber had been overheard all the time. Crawleigh, showing signs of weakening and about to blurt out a secret, had been calmly knifed.

Brightly, feeling a little foolish, decided that the noise outside the door and that mad, precipitate flight down the corridor had been staged for his own benefit, that he might be away so that the killer could get at Crawleigh. He wondered now why an attempt hadn't been made to kill him, too; seemingly, it would have been just as easy as killing Crawleigh.

But Brightly realized, with some chagrin, that the murderer had let him live for a purpose, and had scrawled that ominous red T on Crawleigh's chest in order that there might be no mistake as to the slayer's identity.

It was at once a warning and a promise. The Red Typhoon had disposed of the renegade as punishment for intended treachery, and at the same time hoped to put fear in the heart of any meddler.

Brightly knew now what he had suspected for some time—that his own connection and status were known to the enemy. Yet he had striven to guard his identity closely;

aside from Robbins, the only man in Shanghai who knew his secret, so he had hoped, was Francois of the Cafe Riche. But he trusted Francois, and had only revealed himself to the *maitre* because he sensed that the man was in a strategic position where he might pick up information that would be extremely valuable.

And so it had worked out, with Francois very much flattered at being Brightly's confidant. Now, however, Brightly fancied that The Red Typhoon would play with him only a little longer. The arrival of Janice Leeds had brought matters to a crux.

The foe—The Great One—wanted to get hold of her, Crawleigh had admitted. And Jim Leeds was on the Kuoming. A moment more and Brightly might have wrung from Crawleigh's unwilling lips the all-important secret of who the mysterious Great One was, although there was no certainty that the renegade knew. But now the would-be traitor was silenced for all time.

These were Brightly's thoughts as the 'ricksha rolled down Szechuen Road, beside the old canal; but he did not voice them. Likewise the girl was silent, shocked by the thing she had seen. Once he touched her hand and found it cold. She was trying to keep a grip on herself; to fight against a nightmarish web of circumstance which seemingly would drive her, screaming, into wakefulness.

"From now on," he told her suddenly, "you're going to stay with Robbins and his wife. He'll keep watch over you. I'm going to be gone—for some time!"

"To find Jim?" she asked.

"I hope so," was the reply. "But I'll have to be lucky. They know what Crawleigh confessed; they'll be waiting for me. 'A good cruiser—land at mouth of river.' They'll be watching every boat that leaves Shang—"

He broke off suddenly, with an exclamation of delight.

"What is it?" demanded the girl.

Brightly chuckled.

"They'll be watching the boats," he pointed out. "But they won't be watching the sky!"

"A plane?"

He nodded, putting his finger to his lips.

"Easy," he cautioned her. "Even this coolie hauling us may know enough English to understand. It's not improbable that he's one of the gang; they have spies everywhere!"

"But—you'll take me with you on this trip?" she asked. "I'm not afraid; not so afraid as I'd be if I stayed here!"

"No!" he told her with finality. "Too dangerous, for one thing. We'd be playing right into the hands of this outfit!"

"It's *my* brother for whom we're looking!"

Brightly shook his head.

"We'll find Jim, if we can," he explained. "But the thing is bigger than just one man. It means more than one man's life—my life, for instance, or even your brother's!"

She made no reply, but he knew that she was hurt and angry. Nor did they speak again until he had dropped her at Robbins' house, and told the consul the circumstances.

"They could get a plane here from Foochow in time to start by dawn," pointed out Robbins. "The admiral's all set for quick action. My guess is that you won't let this Red Typhoon outfit get word to Kuoming ahead of you, if you can help it!"

"Correct!" Brightly nodded. "Hustle the message through for me. Tell 'em I want Lieutenant Tim Flynn, if I can get him. I know that chap; he's got the scrappy disposition necessary for this job. And, say," he added, as an afterthought, "tell 'em I want a big plane, a bomber. There's

a sailor named Bill Tremper going with me. He may recognize some of 'em—if we get that close!"

With a leaf from his notebook, he jotted down a memorandum, which he handed to Robbins.

"If you don't hear from me within a week—" and left the sentence significantly unfinished. Robbins' eyes widened a little as he read it, but he nodded agreement.

It was as though a ponderous machine was slowly starting up. The touch of a lever here, a valve there, and soon the great flywheel would be spinning swiftly, omnipotently. But, opposed to it would be a force equally powerful, one that would hurl its own massive weight and strength against the other. And in the struggle between these giants, one must crush and annihilate the other, for there could be no compromise.

Brightly turned to the girl.

"If Flynn gets here, I'll start at daylight," he told her. "And when I get back, I hope to have Jim with me, or I'll bring word from him."

Janice smiled.

"Good-bye, Mr. Brightly," she said cheerfully, holding out her hand. "We'll see each other again—soon."

The way she said it puzzled him a little. Yet he nodded curtly enough, and left. Robbins was already taking steps to flash a message to the American fleet anchored at Foochow. Within a few hours Brightly would be ready for his *coup*. The foe probably surmised that he'd strike for the Kuoming at once. But they'd expect him to go by boat, not by plane. He might get the jump on them.

At his rooms he found Bill Tremper nervously pacing the floor.

"Tried to find a drink in your place," he said reproachfully to Brightly, "but it seems that there ain't none. And I didn't dare leave and hunt one up. Figured I'd get a call from you.

"Say," he added, "there's somebody here to see you. Been waitin' nearly an hour. An educated Chink he is—says his name is Ki-Lung."

CHAPTER VI

Mystery

BRIGHTLY scarcely repressed a start. Ki-Lung? The last time he had seen the man was at the Café Riche, and Ki-Lung then had been the companion of Quintaro. And Quintaro was definitely placed as an important cog in the enemy machine; he might be all-important. Then, who was Ki-Lung?

And why did he come here in this open fashion? Was it part of some bold plot which the foe had conceived? Watchfully, yet with face impassive, Brightly entered the room where the other awaited.

The Chinese stood up politely and smiled. He was above normal height for one of his race, and Brightly's guess was that he was of the Manchu strain—the race of conquerors. There was a certain hawk-like boldness in his features.

Yet his voice was pleasant enough.

"You know me, I think," he said. "And I have heard of you, Mr. Brightly—ah, quite a good deal. That is why I have come to see you."

Brightly sat down, pushed a tobacco-stand toward the other, and lighted a cigarette for himslef. Bill Tremper was outside the room, the door of which had been closed.

After that first statement, silence came, with Brightly waiting for the other to go. Apparently, Ki-Lung was choosing his words.

"You are a very bold man, Mr. Brightly," said the Chinese presently. "More bold than discreet, I

should say. You knew that you were very near death tonight?"

Brightly smiled. The black eyes of Ki-Lung searched his face questioningly, narrowly.

"Then you were there?" Brightly parried. "You know who killed Crawleigh?"

Ki-Lung started a little, shaken out of his habitual calm.

"Crawleigh killed?" he echoed. "I was not aware of that! No, I was not there, as you suggest."

Brightly leaned forward suddenly.

"Let's get down to cases," he said abruptly. "Doubtless you know all that is worth knowing about me. I know that you are a friend of Quintaro's. And, Quintaro is—well, we'll let that go for the time being.

"Why did you come to see me?"

Ki-Lung glanced around the room as though he expected to find an eavesdropper. Then he said in a low voice:

"Does wealth mean anything to you, Mr. Brightly?"

The latter settled back. Somehow, he had rather expected this. It seemed to be the only explanation as to why Ki-Lung should have troubled to look him up in this fashion. But at the same time he experienced a mild thrill. If they were about to offer him money, why, that was as good as admitting weakness.

Brightly grinned, and threw his cigarette into the tray.

"If I wanted to be melodramatic, my friend," he assured the other, "I might leap to my feet and order you out of the room. But I'm not inclined that way.

I'LL sum it up in good old United States lingo: 'Nothing doing!' Is that clear?"

Ki-Lung smiled and rubbed his hands.

"Perfectly," he agreed. "I guessed as much. But you have been in China long enough to know that 'cumshaw' is asked and expected in every deal, no matter how minor. You have taken no offense?"

"None," replied Brightly, "for the very reason that I don't believe you came here to bribe me at all. What is your real mission, Ki-Lung?"

The eyes of the Chinese snapped in appreciation. If there is one quality which the Mongolian race values, it is discernment. It was clear that Brightly had it.

"You have the 'inner eye,'" he approved. "I know now that I may be frank with you."

He hesitated, then lowered his voice as he whispered:

"I came to you, my friend, because I need your help, as you need mine. You understand? *Our objectives are the same!*"

Brightly, startled, half-rose from his chair. Had Ki-Lung suddenly drawn a knife and lunged at him he would have been less astounded.

"You say—what—"

Ki-Lung inclined his head.

"It is quite true," he said. "I do not hesitate to speak, because I feel that this is, perhaps, the only place in Shanghai where we would have no eavesdroppers."

He paused, and then a glitter came into his eyes.

"You wonder why I am fighting The Red Typhoon?" he asked. "I love my own country, even as you love yours, Mr. Brightly!"

He turned back the lapel of his coat, and a round, button-like ruby glowed there—the mark of a mandarin.

"My father's," explained Ki-Lung simply. "He was well-beloved and trusted by the Court at Peking—not Peiping, as they have renamed it. These rebel dogs, they killed him! They drove the old dynasty into exile.

THEN came The Red Typhoon, a greater evil, even though at first I was hopeful that it would be the means of restoring the lost glories of China. I have worked with them, lent them my aid, for I have the confidence of the old Manchus who would see the dynasty restored.

"But I know now that I have been merely a tool in the hands of an unscrupulous foe. Secretly they smile at my gullibility. When The Red Typhoon is let loose, and not a white man, woman or child is left living in the Orient, they will laugh openly at me then! 'Go, join the rest of the Manchu dogs!' they will say. 'Fool!' they will jeer at me. 'Spawn of a Tartar horde! The executioner awaits you!'"

Ki-Lung's voice had risen a little in his excitement. Brightly sat there, thrilled and impressed, yet outwardly impassive. Nevertheless, he felt the sincere ring in Ki-Lung's words. The man was in earnest. This was no play-acting, designed to entrap the white man.

Slowly Ki-Lung smiled, his normal calm restored.

"You believe me?" he asked. "You wonder why I am telling you this?"

Brightly shrugged.

"It sounds plausible," he admitted. "But, you haven't told me anything in reality. There is one question, Ki-Lung, which, if you will answer truthfully, will clear away all doubts.

"Who is The Great One—*who is The Red Typhoon?*"

But Ki-Lung shook his head.

"If I knew that," he replied, "my work would be simpler. It would be like cutting off the head of a snake—to kill that man! The rest of the body would die. But no one knows!"

"Is it Quintaro?"

"Who can say? I doubt it, but the thing could easily be possible. Quintaro is a clever, cunning man, as shrewd as he is unscrupulous. Of late, he has been suspicious of me; I have felt it. The night we saw you at the Café Riche, he had been upbraiding me. Then he saw this girl, Miss Leeds, and straightway he forgot all else."

DID *you* have a hand in trying to deliver her to this—this Great One?" demanded Brightly harshly.

Ki-Lung shrugged, shook his head.

"Is that why Crawleigh was killed?" he asked.

Brightly told him of the circumstances, convinced that the man was sincere. When he had finished, Ki-Lung nodded.

"It would be that way," he decided. "I knew nothing of it, but word came to me that you were marked for death. In fact," and he smiled again, "I have been delegated to that honor."

He lifted his hand slightly and disclosed a small automatic pistol concealed in his palm.

Brightly laughed outright.

"I wondered about that," he exclaimed. "Do you know, Ki-Lung, that you have been 'covered,' as we say in America, ever since I entered the room? I shoot equally well with either hand." He moved his left hand, disclosing that it was in his coat-pocket.

"Besides," he added, "I doubt that you could get past Mister Bill Tremper, who is just outside the door. Tremper, by the way, is a brand rescued from the burning. He bears the mark of The Red Typhoon, but he quit cold when he saw through Quintaro's plan to murder me in cold blood in The Golden Dragon."

Ki-Lung inclined his head courteously, and laid his gun on the table.

"Of course," he apologized, "I had no intention of carrying out the orders given me. Else I should not have warned you. Nor can I tell you from whom I received my orders.

The word came—as it usually comes—your name and nothing else on a note delivered by a coolie.

"BUT," and he spread his hands, "we waste time. We should make our plans together. You know that this Leeds is on the Kuoming; it is a country strange to you, but one with which I am familiar. If I am not mistaken, you will go there at once. Very well; I shall go with you!"

Again Brightly laughed.

"I like your style, Ki-Lung," he declared. "And I'm not afraid of you. Moreover, I believe you are sincere in what you have told me.

"I'd rather have you with me than elsewhere, working against me. But I do not fear to trust you. We—"

He was interrupted by a rap on the door.

"Somebody on the phone, skipper," said Tremper. "Name's Robbins. Says he wants you, quick!"

Brightly jumped up, went to the instrument.

"Listen," came Robbins' worried voice, "your little bird has flown out of the window. Or somebody climbed the fire-escape and got her!"

"What's that?" demanded Brightly.

"I mean the girl, Miss Leeds," declared the other. "She asked me every question she could think of, and then went to her room. When Mrs. Robbins called there a moment ago, the window was open and the girl was gone!"

CHAPTER VII

Strange Company

LIKE some monstrous bird of the night, a great seaplane bomber was at rest on the yellow waters off the Bund. At a respectful distance around it swarmed a cloud of sampans. They were afraid to come too near, afraid of the roaring threat of its propellers; afraid, too, of a nervous, helmeted figure who leaned from the forward cockpit and threatened them with dire things. Volcanic always, the loss of a night's sleep had not improved the temper of Lieutenant Tim Flynn.

In strong, salty language he cursed venturesome sampan-men who sculled their craft too near the big amphibian which lay there with motors idling.

Now, in the brief gloom which followed the false dawn, a sampan headed directly for the bomber.

"Sheer off, there, you blasted heathen!" yelled Flynn. "You foul this ship and I'll sink you without a trace!"

Still the sampan came on, its pilot jabbering placatingly, for he was not only fearful of the seaplane, but fearful of white men who bellowed at him in such tones. Then Flynn saw that there was a passenger in the tiny cabin of the boat.

"Brightly party!" called the passenger, as the sampan nosed alongside.

"All right!" agreed Flynn crossly. "Hop aboard, and stow yourself. Where the devil is that swordfish who tore me loose from the first poker game in months I've been winning?" Flynn and Brightly were old friends, but the navy man always affected bluffness toward him.

"He'll be here soon," was the reply. Then the passenger stepped hesitantly aboard, and vanished within the cabin.

"He'd better," grunted Flynn. "Yep, he's coming now." Another sampan had hove in sight. "*Three* of 'em!" he cried, as he spied the passengers. "What does he think I'm running, a blasted ferry-boat?"

But from the darkness of the cabin the passenger did not reply. Indeed, the stranger appeared to have

vanished utterly, as though concealed behind a seat, or stowed in some cubby-hole.

BRIGHTLY hopped aboard, follow by Ki-Lung and Tremper. The grayness of dawn had come swiftly, so that faces were distinguishable. Brightly's was creased with anxiety.

"All right, Flynn!" he cried. "Let's go! Mouth of the Kuoming!"

The pilot, as he settled himself at the controls, looked at his friend strangely. Brightly didn't seem to be himself. Ordinarily there would have been ribald greetings exchanged, but now Brightly was grim with determination which didn't encourage byplay.

"All right and aye-aye!" agreed Flynn, as he made ready. "Somebody heave short that anchor!" He saw that the passengers beside Brightly were a Chinese and an American sailor. "What we got here," he demanded. "The Foreign Legion?"

But Brightly was in no mood to banter. Nimbly, Bill Tremper skipped forward and hauled up the mushroom weight which had held the plane's nose upstream. The motors spoke thunderously, drowning all conversation. Then, while sampans in its path sculled madly for safety, the big ship taxied slowly around and headed seaward, into the face of the rising breeze.

Its speed quickened as its twin motors bellowed more loudly. Then imperceptibly it left the water, veered around and headed northward.

"What's biting you?" demanded Flynn at last, when he had leveled out, and the big ship was boring through the air toward the northern sky, while the yellow hills on the port beam were outlined in the rays of the morning sun. He looked oddly at Brightly. "What I know about this cruise you could drop into the eye of a sail-needle and still have room for the thread. I get rush orders to meet you at Shanghai, and here I find you as solemn as though you were going to your own funeral. 'Mouth of the Kuoming,' says you. And says me 'For why?'"

BRIGHTLY swiftly gave the pilot an outline of the situation, and why they were headed north on this mission. Flynn's lips puckered in a soundless whistle.

"But that's not all," added Brightly. "They've got Miss Leeds. I've raked Shanghai from one end to another, and Robbins is still at the job, but we couldn't find her. If it hadn't been necessary to get to the Kuoming ahead of them, I'd still be hunting for her. But I couldn't wait. Robbins promised he'd keep up the search, but he won't find her. This devil called The Red Typhoon wants her—the Englishman Crawleigh said so—and I guess he's got her!"

Flynn, though he clucked sympathetically, nevertheless looked askance at the other. Then he squinted at the wavering needle of the inductor-compass.

"Tough luck," he commented. "Reckoned you had it all figured out you'd marry the girl? Well, that's the way it goes. Poor old Uncle Sam might have lost a darned smart detectatiff—"

"Oh, shut up, Flynn!" cried Brightly, enraged.

Bill Tremper could not repress a grin, but the Chinese, Ki-Lung, did not smile. He was all intent with the purpose of the cruise, and stared steadfastly over the nose of the ship which was held on the northern horizon. Up there on the Kuoming, a whimsical fate had already set the stage for the working out of the destiny of everybody aboard this great plane. Some might return,

some might not. Life or death, success or defeat—all was arranged, according to Ki-Lung's reasoning. In the hands of the gods.

"Say!" exclaimed Flynn suddenly. "I'd forgotten! What became of the fourth member of your party, who came aboard just ahead of you?"

Brightly whirled on him as though struck.

"What?" he demanded. "You fooling? There's but three of us."

Flynn jerked his head aft.

"Back there, somewhere," he suggested. "I can't leave the controls!"

A GUN jumped into Brightly's right hand. For a moment he stared at Ki-Lung, but there was only surprise on the face of the Chinese.

"Do not suspect *me*," urged Ki-Lung. "I know nothing about it!"

Grimly Brightly bent his head in the low-roofed compartment, and started aft in the rather commodious compartment, which had been cleared of its war-time fighting equipment. Despite the fact that the plane was a big one, there was really little room to hide. Suddenly he stiffened.

"Come out of there!" he ordered, his gun ready.

From a corner, behind a spare tank of gasoline, a figure emerged. A flyer's helmet, leather coat, putteed legs. But at sight of the stowaway's face, Brightly nearly dropped his gun.

"Janice—Miss Leeds!"

Her face was flushed, defiant.

"You wouldn't let me go, so I came anyway!" she told him. "I've as much interest in this venture as you have!"

Up forward, Lieutenant Tim Flynn slewed around in his chair, and scowled speculatively as he eyed the two confronting each other back there. Then he swung back to his instruments, glaring fiercely at them.

"Jinxed!" he exclaimed to himself. "They'll court-martial me for this, if the admiral ever finds it out. What'll the flotilla gang say when they find out I've been piloting a blasted honeymoon?"

On into the north roared the great bomber, with a strange company bound on a stranger mission. Only Ki-Lung seemed as impassive as before. That was because he believed in faith.

CHAPTER VIII

The River

FOG, billows and billows of it, which rolled beneath like a great sea as the sun dipped low in the west. Flynn, still at the controls, scowled in disgust, looking for a hole through which he could drop. But there was no gap, no break in the clouds. Only the fact that they were flying at twelve thousand feet gave them visibility at all, and presently that would be gone, as night came.

"Must be somewhere near the place," he told Brightly. "This map of the coast is detailed, although we don't know much about the country inland. I've logged her by dead-reckoning ever since we hit this blasted fog. We're either right over the river-mouth, or a bit inland.

"We've none too much gas to spare—enough to get us back to Shanghai, and a little more. Can't float around all night up here; I've *got* to set her down. Might as well chance it now as to wait until it gets dark. We—"

He broke off as he caught sight of a rift in the clouds. Below it seemed to gleam a wavering line of silver.

"There's you river!" he exclaimed in satisfaction. "That's the Kuoming, or I'm a lubber. Wide and smooth enough to set down there, too. I'll chance it if that hole doesn't close up!"

But Brightly gave an exclama-

tion, and pointed off to the north. Another rift showed there. It, too, had the flat whiteness of water; and likewise a mirage-like effect of houses, most of them low, flat-roofed, but here and there were towers. One of them, with a succession of upturned cornices, appeared to be a pagoda. Its roof was blue.

Ki-Lung was watching, too; and now he gave a cry. He turned excited eyes upon Brightly.

"They mentioned it often," said the Chinese, "although I have never seen the place. The City of the Blue Pagoda!"

"You mean," demanded Brightly, "that it belongs to The Great One—who calls himself The Red Typhoon?"

Ki-Lung nodded emphatically.

"In such a place The Great One has entrenched himself," replied the Chinese in his precise manner. Then he pointed to where the city had been.

"Look, it has vanished!"

Flynn nodded.

"Farther inland than I thought," he decided, "but it could easily be possible. You said this man Leeds was three days' hike from the mouth of the river. Then we must be at least sixty miles from salt-water.

"Blast this fog! We've got to turn west now, until we're over salt-water, then set her down until daylight. We'll be lucky if the sea is calm enough to let us ride during the night. Gotta do that, or swing back for Shanghai, or at least until we run out of the fog. But the blamed stuff may be spread all along the coast. I've known fogs at this time of year out here to last two weeks.

"Sorry, Brightly, but it doesn't seem to be in the cards!"

But Brightly shrugged.

"Can't afford to wait," he announced. "I'm going down! Delay now might disrupt everything!"

HE dragged out a parachute stowed in a rack.

"Show me how this blame thing works!" he demanded. "I'm going into that town down there, if I can land without breaking my neck!"

Flynn regarded him admiringly. Janice seemed about to protest, but said nothing.

"You're game, all right," said Flynn. "This way!" And he showed Brightly how to strap the thing on. Ki-Lung watched with widened eyes.

"You—you are going down there, alone?" the Chinese asked. Brightly nodded shortly. Then he spoke briefly to Ki-Lung and the others. They were to land when they could, as soon as the fog thinned out sufficiently to see where the plane was going. But only Ki-Lung was to follow him into the city. The Chinese carried with him an outfit of native garb, and he would not be suspected. The others would await word before trying to penetrate the city.

"Okay," agreed Flynn. "I think you're taking a crazy chance, but I don't see how you can do otherwise. Anyway, if they 'get' you, they won't be able to enjoy it. There's a couple of bombs slung under the plane. I'd like a little target practice on that place down there!"

He levelled the plane.

"When I give the word," he announced, 'you bail out.' Don't jump, but *dive!* Hang onto that ring, and count eight, then jerk it, hard!

"Ready!"

A little white-faced, Brightly swung back at the door of the cabin. Below, the fog lay spread in fleecy billows. What lay below the mist, he could only guess.

THERE was no certainty that the parachute would open properly; even if it did, he was dropping into the heart of the enemy's camp, where he need expect nothing but short

shrift. Still—there was a chance, and he felt that he dare not wait longer.

His guns were in their arm-pit holsters. He was dressed warmly enough in the leather flyer's jacket and helmet. There were a couple of bars of chocolate in his pockets, enough to sustain him for a time. After that—well, he would have given much to have possessed the fatalistic viewpoint of Ki-Lung's.

He glanced once at Janice Leeds. She was standing there, hands clasped, lips parted. It seemed that she wanted to say something, but pride forbade her to speak. Not since her discovery on the plane, against Brightly's orders, had the two spoken after that first clash.

He was worried about her, and at the same time her blithe disregard of his wishes that she remain in Shanghai, infuriated him. On the other hand, she was determined to share whatever risk there was to be undertaken; her excuse being that it was *her* brother's life which was at stake.

"Bail out!" cried Flynn suddenly.

Brightly dived.

A whistling rush downward, a bullet-like drop which seemed to suck the air from his nostrils. He could not get his eyes open. And then he was aware that he was counting—six, seven, *eight!* He jerked so hard on the rip-cord ring that he feared it must have been torn loose.

Yet the response was instantaneous. A teeth-jarring shock, which almost snapped him in two, and then he was conscious that his descent had been checked. He opened his eyes to find himself in the thick fog, while just above him had bloomed the umbrella-like spread of the 'chute.

Indeed, he felt that he was not falling at all, for there was no fixed object visible by which he could guage his movement. Thicker and thicker was the fog, and still he seemed to hang poised in that great white void. From far above him there came the drone of Flynn's plane, but this sound quickly dwindled into nothingness. And there was silence, awful silence.

Anxiously he looked down, for common sense told him he was dropping more rapidly than he realized. Soon he would have to undergo the ordeal of landing. Somewhere he had read that to land from a 'chute was like jumping to the ground from a perch about fifteen feet in height. Chance for a twisted ankle, or even a broken leg. But there was no escaping it.

THEN, suddenly, he caught a glimpse of earth below. Only a glimpse before the fog closed again. Three seconds later, however, he saw it again, but more to the left. Then, directly below him, there appeared water!

The river!

He tugged at the stays of the 'chute, hoping to manipulate the contrivance so that he would be carried ashore, but the air currents were sluggish. Frantically he tore himself loose of the straps—and then he struck with a splash and went under.

He was glad now to be free, for the 'chute had dropped over him, so that he was compelled to dive to escape it. As he came up he saw that he was clear, but he was being borne swiftly downstream, the 'chute floating ahead of him. Turning, he struck out for shore.

But the current was stronger than he had believed. Moreover, he saw that the bank for which he was swimming was steep; its crest fully fifty feet above water. But the river was bitterly chill, and he knew that he would not last long if he could not get out.

There was some chance that he might catch hold of a log or low-hanging branch, and draw himself

out. Likewise, his movements were hampered by the heavy coat, but he would not discard that until the matter became absolutely necessary.

A sharp turn in the river occurred while he was yet fifty feet from shore. A sandbar jutting out from the bank appeared. Gratefully he headed for it. None too soon he dragged himself clear of the water, and lay there for a moment while he sought to regain his breath. Then as the chill struck him he got to his feet and listened.

There was no sound save the hissing of the water as it slid off the point of the sandbar. Gloom was settling upon the river, for the sun was down. As he moved off along the sandbar his eyes noted tracks in the gravel.

The river was evidently at a low stage, and apparently there had been no rain for some time, and yet the tracks were indistinct, indicating that they were old. At the moment he saw no importance in the discovery.

As he neared the clifflike bank, he saw what appeared to be a well-defined trail leading down to the water. On a shelf above was the dark mouth of a cave. It was while he was skirting the edge of a deep pool, where the river curved in an eddy that he got a shock.

In the bottom of the pool, outlined against the white sand, was what appeared to be a log. Yet it was the odd form of it which drew his attention. He bent lower, to take advantage of the rapidly weakening light sifting down through the water.

Then he saw that the supposed log was the body of a man, and a white man at that!

CHAPTER IX

The Cave

AGHAST, Brightly gazed in astonishment at the still form so immobile down there that the man appeared to be sleeping It was queer in a way that, dropping out of the sky as he had done, he had made this discovery. And yet on second thought it was not so strange at all.

He had landed in the wide river because Flynn had been flying directly over the stream after that first glimpse of it. There was no wind to cause the 'chute to drift. And, once in the water, there was no chance to get out of its swift current between the high banks, save on this very sandbar.

Downstream and upstream as far as Brightly could see, the banks were still precipitous.

This very man now lying in the bottom of the pool had evidently walked up and down the sandbar for the obvious reason that it was the only spot for some distance, probably, where the river could be reached with any ease. There was little of chance in it after all.

THE fact that it was a white man suggested much to Brightly. His first thought, of course, was that it might be Jim Leeds. But why was the man lying so motionless there in the swirl of the chill water? That was a lesser mystery, but no less pressing than the other questions which popped into Brightly's mind.

He hurried to the inner end of the sandbar and there, from a mass of driftwood, found what he wanted, a long pole. The light was fading rapidly now: he'd have to work fast. Carefully he probed to the bottom of the pool, seeking with the end of the pole to fasten to the unfortunate's clothing.

Then he saw that the man, heavily bearded, was wearing a wide leather belt about the middle. Brightly hooked the pole into the belt and tugged.

Evidently he yanked too hard, for the belt broke although it still remained wound around the end of the

pole. And then an odd thing happened. As though aroused from sleep, the man was caught buoyantly by the current and hurried away downstream. In an instant the man was gone, but Brightly was lifting the heavy belt from the water.

Then in the dim light, all forgetful of the fact that he was soaked to the skin and but a short time before had been shaking with a chill, Brightly examined the belt.

He knew now why it was that the man had been so moveless down there. For the belt was pouched, and in each compartment was a double handful of flake gold! Probably the belt weighed nearly twenty-five pounds. No wonder it had anchored the body of its wearer down there in the water.

Brightly hefted it, looked about him as though expecting to find himself observed. Yet night was closing down swiftly, and the fog seemed thicker than ever. It was doubtful if he could reach the city until daylight came. He knew, too, that he must have a fire and dry himself. Shelter for the night.

THE cave suggested possibilities. Still carrying the belt, he moved toward the dark mouth of the place. But as he approached it, he held one gun ready, on the chance that the place might be the lair of some animal.

But it was empty, and fairly roomy, he saw. Moreover, he found that it had been occupied previously, for just before the entrance were the ashes of an old fire. Stacked inside the mouth of the cavern was a pile of wood.

With matches from a waterproof box he soon had a small blaze going. This lighted up the cave, and he stepped inside, pulling off his coat. In the far end, about thirty feet from the mouth, was an old felt hat. Not such a hat as Chinese wear.

Brightly knew that undoubtedly it belonged to that dead man in the river. Examining the sweat-band, he saw the faded letters "J. L." stamped thereon.

"Jim Leeds!" he exclaimed softly.

There seemed no question, then, but that the unfortunate who had died down there in the pool was the man for whom he was searching—the brother of Janice.

But the manner by which the man had met death in the stream was something which Brightly could only guess. Maybe he had fallen in, and had been pulled down by the weight of the gold-laden belt. Where the gold had come from was also a mystery. It might have been "panned" from the sandbar.

As he dried his clothes he looked forward with dread to the time when he must tell Janice of her brother's death. That, however, was something to worry about later. Here he was, marooned in a cave near a bandit stronghold, while she was floating around up there in space, while Flynn looked in vain for a place to land the plane.

The plight of the plane worried Brightly more than did his own. His method of procedure when he reached the city was something which he could not foresee; he'd have to take the plays as they came up. But Robbins would not fail him. Other means failing, Brightly told himself, all he asked was one crack at the mysterious one call The Red Typhoon.

After that, it didn't matter so much what happened. He didn't fancy the rôle of a martyr, but he had brooded over and worked on the problem so long that he was willing to make a sacrifice of himself, if necessary, in order that the gigantic conspiracy might be broken up.

HE munched a little of the chocolate, put wood on the fire, glad that he would not have to sleep in

wet clothes. It was a sound outside the cave which attracted his attention.

There was a rattle of loose gravel down the bank, and he froze listening. But although he stood there moveless and intent for fully two minutes, he heard nothing more. His nerves were jumpy, he told himself. The gravel might have been loosened by somebody above, but it was more likely that the phenomenon was merely a natural one; doubtless the cliffs were caving continually.

Brightly's thoughts turned back to the man who had evidently occupied this cave, but who had met death in the river. There seemed no doubt but that it was Jim Leeds.

Why had he hidden here? And where had he obtained the gold? Was it here that he had written the note to Janice? And who had carried that message to Shanghai to be mailed? Leeds had spoken of riches; doubtless he had this flake gold in mind. He—

Brightly turned abruptly toward the cave entrance, but not soon enough. He saw three evil-looking Chinese crouched there, and one of them held a short-barreled carbine at his heart.

Then gabbled something in the northern dialect, but he could not understand it, although he had a smattering of Chinese. But the meaning of the command was plain. Slowly, Brightly lifted his hands above his head.

He had slipped off most of his clothing, and his guns, in their holsters, lay beside the fire. With a grunt of satisfaction, one of the Chinese scuttled forward and seized the weapons. Then, as though the tension was lessened, they all stood up, and grinned at him malevolently.

THEY indicated that he was to put on his clothes. As he complied, Brightly watched them. Bandits, undoubtedly. The country was infested with lawless bands, always eager to capture a white man and hold him for ransom. Brightly had no fear that eventually he would win his freedom, but the delay would upset his plans wholly.

He cursed his own lack of caution. That rattle of gravel had meant, then, that they had seen his fire from above and had slid down the steep bank. He should have been more careful. Then, suddenly, a wild thought of how he might impress them, popped into his head.

As he finished slipping on his coat he bent over and traced on the sand that mystic symbol—the Chinese-looking letter T. Then he watched their faces.

Curiously they stared at the symbol, then regarded him shrewdly. Then they broke into fierce jabbering among themselves. Evidently there was an argument between the man who seemed to be the leader, and the other two. But the leader apparently won his point. He it was who carried the rifle, and now he had possessed himself of Brightly guns. He moved off up the cliff, following a hardly distinguishable path, while his two companions fell in behind the white man, and indicated that he was to move.

Brightly groaned. His ruse had failed after all. Seemingly these bandits had never heard of The Red Typhoon. And yet he would have said that such a situation was impossible; all yellow men knew of the destroying force.

Up, up and still up, they climbed, and so thick was the darkness that Brightly could scarcely see the man in front of him. If he'd had his guns he would have willingly taken a chance on a break, shooting it out with them, but he knew it was futile to try to escape without weapons.

They gained the top at last, and struck off on a more well-beaten trail.

All directions were the same to Brightly, but it did seem that in general they were going upstream and were following the river. But where were they taking him? To their camp, doubtless, where he would remain a prisoner until ransomed.

At the end of half an hour, however, he descried a light just ahead. Then they stopped before a great wall, beyond which it seemed that he could see the outlines of buildings.

Then and there the truth broke on him. He had been captured by The Red Typhoon's men, and taken to the very city which he sought!

CHAPTER X

Summoned

AT the massive entrance gate they stopped, and upon being recognized, Brightly and his captors entered as the gates swung open. A half-dozen other Chinese, some armed with rifles, others with swords and spears, examined the newcomers by the light of lanterns hung on poles. They grunted at sight of Brightly. Then he was led down a narrow street, pausing at last before a building much larger than the rest.

It was fully three stories in height, and behind it he saw the shadowy outlines of a great pagoda. This was the city of The Red Typhoon, which they had seen from the air.

Down a long, gloomy corridor and then Brightly was thrust into an evil-smelling place which seemed pitch black. A door closed behind him. He heard the sound of an iron bolt being shot home, and then he was alone.

Groping his way about, he found a pile of straw in one corner, and on this he rested. From the darkness came the squeaking of rats, and he could hear them scurrying about. One of them boldly ran over his outstretched leg. It was going to be difficult, he foresaw, in getting any sleep. Doubtless the noisome hole had even more disgusting vermin than rodents.

But he felt that he could have endured it stoically enough if he had know more of the situation. What had happened to the plane and its passengers? He had vast confidence in Flynn, but if the fog held, there might be no opportunity to land the ship.

Flynn might be compelled to turn back to Shanghai. That, at least, was preferable to a forced landing on this unknown terrain which was infested with bandits. If Flynn did go back, Brightly hoped that Janice Leeds would be left behind next time. With that grim discovery in the river by the cave there was no further need for her to expose herself to dangers in search of her brother.

"And where is The Red Typhoon?" he asked himself.

That question, however, seemed certain of an answer before very long. Brightly knew now that he was held by no ordinary bandits, with ransom in mind. That they had not killed him outright was for the very good reason that they were working on instructions to bring him alive, that his fate might be decided by some power higher than heirs.

But, withal, he felt foolish at the way he had played into their hands. Yet there was no help for it.

By and by he was aroused from his reverie by someone at the door with a lantern. It was a man accompanied by two guards. They offered him a steaming bowl of rice and a pot of hot tea. Despite his unsavory surroundings he managed to eat, for he was hungry.

Yet he had no sooner downed the food than it seemed that drowsiness

stole over him. Even the rats didn't annoy him, for he slept. When he was aroused, it was because somebody was poking him roughly, and he sat up, a splitting headache making him wince.

Guards.

The light of a lantern was in his eyes. They were saying things to him which he could not understand, but their meaning was plain. They wanted him to get up, and follow them.

How long he had been asleep, Brightly could scarcely guess. But, as his brain cleared a little, he surmised now that the food which they had given him was dosed with some sleeping-potion. He may have slept for days, for all he knew.

He staggered drunkenly as he followed the guards down the darkened corridor, while others marched behind him. Slowly, however, it came to him that this moment was more important and impressive than it seemed. They were taking him somewhere. But where, and why?

And they had drugged him so that he would give them no trouble until they were ready. He shook himself, and his lethargic senses awakened. And then, as they turned a sharp corner of the seemingly endless passage, he saw the glow of light ahead.

Toward it they moved, passed between tall, tapestried hangings, and then Brightly was blinking painfully as his eyes tried to accustom themselves to the sudden light. Still he was led forward, and then the guards ahead stepped aside, and he was left standing alone.

As his pupils adjusted themselves, he saw that he was in a large high-ceilinged room. He was not alone, for, besides the guards behind him, there were fully a dozen other Chinese, all of them armed, in the room. He stared around him oddly, as his still-foggy brain tried to assimilate the significance of what he saw.

The color scheme of the great room was red—a barbaric red! Red silk, heavy brocades on a red background. Red of a splendor and magnificence, the richness of it, that smote like a blow. And yet there was also a motive of white in the scheme. And white, in China, is the color of mourning. Flaming red — and the hue of death!

HE became aware that the side of the room which he faced seemed to be draped with long strings of silvery tinsel, which glittered and sparkled in the reflected light from lanterns which hung everywhere. On only this one side of the room did the tinseled streamers hang.

Suddenly, then he became aware that on the other side of this curtain, which was more or less transparent, for the streamers were not thickly-hung, was a figure which he had not observed before.

The figure of a young Chinese, dressed in the same red color which made the great room a blazing riot. The young man was standing beside a dais, upon which was a huge chair of carved ebony. In this chair was seated another figure, and now Brightly tensed as his gaze rested upon the latter.

A man, also dressed in red, but whose crimson garments were more elaborate than any of the others. A hooded man, for a square of white silk, pierced only by eye-holes, dropped from his forehead, fully covering his face. Even his hands were hidden by loose folds of his richly-colored jacket.

And Brightly knew that he was face to face with The Red Typhoon!

All this mummery and flub-dub were purely Oriental, which ever turns to the bizarre. Under any other circumstances, Brightly might have

been amused. But there was a definite grimness about this moment now which drove the last vestige of drugged stupor from his brain, and brought every sense to the alert.

The master plotter had granted this audience—doubtless for a very definite purpose. That he had not hesitated to expose himself, even though masked, to the gaze of this white man, was significant in itself. Less than thirty feet separated the two—and a wild impulse surged into Brightly's heart.

In a sudden rush, he could close that gap, tear his way through the flimsy screen which separated them, and, with his bare hands, kill this monster before the guards could seize him. Still with the thought in mind, he glanced out of the tail of his eye at the nearest guard, to the right and behind him. But the guard seemed nowise disturbed. It may have been that the dull brain of the guard never conceived such a mad possibility as the sacrifice which Brightly contemplated.

BRIGHTLY looked back at the hooded figure. The very complacence with which the unknown regarded him, was somewhat unnerving. Indeed, Brightly could almost see the sneer in the eyes peering through that mask, as though the white man's thoughts were being read and scorned. Brightly hesitated, warned by instinct. The thing seemed too easy of accomplishment. And yet—

The voice of the young Chinese broke in. The man was speaking precisely, in English.

"The Great One knows why you are here," intoned the Chinese, "but wishes to know where are your companions. You will be wise, foreigner, to reply truthfully. It is the wish of The Great One!"

Brightly heard the words with a feeling of relief. No matter what his predicament, Flynn and the others were safe for the time being.

Almost he smiled. Answer such a question? He could have laughed aloud. Even if he could have told where the plane was at that moment, it was preposterous of them to expect that he would tell — unless they judged him to be a coward.

"I don't know," he replied honestly enough. "And I wouldn't tell if I could!"

In a low mumble, the interpreter repeated these words, and the eyes of the hooded man did not change, but were fixed on Brightly with a malevolent glare. As for Brightly, his speculations as to the identity of The Red Typhoon were now wholly upset.

Quintaro understood English, and spoke it as well, hence there was no apparent need for this Chinese interpreter. Ki-Lung, first under suspicion, was up in the plane with Flynn and the others. The Red Typhoon was a greater mystery than before. Who, then, could the master plotter be? There were many answers to that, but none of them seemed plausible.

Again Brightly felt that impulse to break away and come to grips with the other. And again instinct told him that it was futile; that the hooded man had anticipated that very thing. Still, those strings of tinsel were flimsy, as the points of them sparkled in the light from many lanterns. He *might* try—

BEFORE he could move, however, his arms were seized by the guards, evidently at a signal from the interpreter. And then the young Chinese was speaking again.

"You have two hours in which to think it over, foreigner," he told the prisoner crisply. "At the end of that time, if you do not agree, you will die!"

There was no more melodramatic quality to the statement than that; and yet it seemed to convey a significance greater than though the man had shouted it.

The hooded man, impassive as ever, stared at the prisoner. Smoldering eyes, peering through those holes cut in the silk mask. Then, the hooded man inclined his head slightly, and Brightly felt himself whirled about, and hustled away the way he had come.

He did not resist, and once he was clear of the great red room, the guards released him. Again he was in the dungeon, and the door closed behind him.

THE place seemed darker than ever, after that brief glimpse of light in the audience-room. There was no way of telling the time. His watch had stopped, probably from immersion in the river and subsequent neglect to wind it. He still had his matches. Far up in one corner of the room was a hole about six inches square, through which light sifted. But whether this was from the sun or some artificial light, there was no way of knowing.

Two hours! And what then? Death, the interpreter had said. But it would not likely be a swift death, nor an ordinary one. They knew who he was, knew his mission; it would be entirely in keeping with their savage instincts if they tortured him. And, of all peoples, the Chinese have brought torture to a scientific refinement almost incredible.

Brightly shuddered. And yet he knew that even if it was in his power to betray the rest of his party, he would not do so. Better be dead, than to live and remember that. Besides, it was not likely that such an act would purchase his own life.

He brooded there in the darkness. It was the waiting that was hardest. But he had already determined upon one thing; that if they brought him face to face with The Red Typhoon again, he would attempt to kill the man. It was as much as he could hope to accomplish now, and he would not waive the opportunity, for death was certain anyway.

Minutes passed, stretching, on indefinitely. Then came stealthily footsteps outside, and he got up and tiptoed to the door. They had come, then, for their answer! He steeled himself for the ordeal.

He heard the bolt slid back, then his name called in a soft voice. The visitor carried no light, but he knew he had heard the voice before.

"It is Luchee!" came the whisper. "Follow me quickly, but make no sound!"

And then a small hand found his in the darkness, and he was being led along the corridor.

CHAPTER XI

Grim Jest

INDEFINITELY, it seemed, they went on; Brightly moving swiftly yet furtively after the Eurasian girl. The corridor was so black that he could not see her, but evidently she was familiar with the place, for she made no mistake. At last he saw a glow of light ahead, and then she was outlined against it. But she turned aside.

From beyond the light, however, it seemed that he heard sounds of activity. There was a murmur as of rushing waters, a rattling sound as of pebbles being shaken together, and he had one glimpse of men toiling, bent over with what appeared to be shallow wooden dishes, with which they scooped up earth, dipped it in a swiftly-flowing stream of water, and then revolved the pans with a curious, circular motion. Only a glimpse

he had, however, and Luchee was pulling him aside.

"The mines!" she whispered. "They dig for gold!"

Then she was leading him down another corridor.

But this ended shortly, as she opened a door, and he found himself in a lavishly-furnished room. Bronze statuary, such as the Laughing Lions, and the inevitable Buddha, and other objects of Oriental art were about the place, while on a teak-wood stand an incense-burner gave off pungent, perfumed smoke. The floor was covered with expensive rugs, while on the walls were heavy brocades and tapestries—all with the red motif predominating.

THE girl was dressed as a Chinese, in expensive red silk. Jewels gleamed on her fingers, and in her hair. There was anxiety in her eyes, their lids heavily mascarred while her lips were a startling red, yet she smiled at Brightly almost archly.

"I save you!" she informed him. "They sure to kill you. I know!" She shuddered. "Like they have killed other men!"

She raised her eyes to his.

"You like Luchee for what she has done?" the girl asked.

Brightly put his hand under her chin.

"I owe you much, Luchee," he told her. "More than I can repay, perhaps. But, they will kill me anyway, for they'll miss me. And—"

"I show you the way out of the city!" she assured him. "We go—you and I. It is so? We go far away from the place. I have money! We go to Hong Kong, Singapore, Europe, maybe your country—any place away from here! You do that for Luchee?"

Brightly dropped his hand, and smiled at her.

"I wouldn't lie to you, Luchee," he told her. "I couldn't run away now, even to save my own life! But, if you'll help me, you won't be sorry!

"Who is The Red Typhoon?"

They were standing close together in this room, which evidently was the apartment of the Eurasian girl. To the right of them the thin spiral of smoke from the incense-burner curled upward. Scarcely did it vary its position; although unnoticed now its symmetry was broken, flattened, as though caught in a sudden draught. A vagrant air-current stirred the tapestry behind the girl.

SHE looked at him with shrewdness in her sloe-black eyes. A bargaining look, such as one might see in the eyes of women in the markets. At his first words, disappointment had come into her face, but now cupidity was there. She smiled, showing her even, white teeth.

"You want to know *that* so mooch?" she hazarded. "That is great secret, known only to a few!"

The girl, whose blood was traced with the taint of a lien race, wanted this white man. Moreover, she knew that she was comely in the eyes of either white man or yellow.

"You will go with Luchee if I tell?"

Brightly caught her by the slender shoulders.

"Listen," he told her earnestly, "if I can bring about the downfall of The Red Typhoon, I'll go to hell, if necessary! I mean just that. I'll do anything you say!"

She stared up at him, and saw that he was speaking the truth. She smiled contentedly, satisfied. She had won!

Then a look of fear came into her face. She glanced around nervously; then reached up and put her arms around his neck, that she might whisper and be heard only by him.

But even as her lips were about to form the word, the thing happened. She gave a choked cry, as the single lantern which illuminated the room was dashed to the floor, and darkness

came like a thunderclap. Brightly felt her snatched from his arms.

And, although the next second he had lunged forward to seize her, he caught hold of nothing more tangible than the heavy drapes. Somewhere in the darkness a door slammed, and then silence came.

CRAIG BRIGHTLY prided himself on being able to control his emotions at all times. He scorned anything that bordered on the hysterical. And yet at that moment he wanted to do nothing so much as to let go of himself and yell in a futile outburst of disappointment. Nor was he far from unmanly tears.

To have almost had the precious secret; then to have it snatched away from him—the prize which he had sought for four years, wrested from his grasp—rasped his over-taut nerves almost to the breaking-point.

But only for a moment; then he had himself in hand once more.

His first move was to locate the lantern which had been dashed out. He found it, but he could not locate the tallow wick, even though he lighted practically all of his precious matches looking for it. The next thing was to find the door.

This he did without difficulty, but the panel was secured firmly from the outside. Moreover, he found two other doors, one of which opened behind the tapestry where Luchee had disappeared. But they were locked by outside bolts.

Unwilling to use up the last of his matches, he groped his way to a low stool, and sat down — to wait. For what? Presumably death. They had found him easily enough after his short and mad flight from the cell when Luchee had liberated him. Yet they had made no attempt to return him to the dungeon.

There was a fine bit of psychological torture in permitting him to "stew" here alone in the darkness without knowing when the dread summons would come.

But he did feel sorry for the girl. She had been willing to be a traitress —because she loved him. It made no difference that he felt no such emotion in return. He did pity her, for it was not likely that she would receive any mercy, now that her intent was known.

He started to his feet, as it seemed that he heard footsteps. But he did not hear them again, and he concluded that it was merely his jumpy nerves playing him tricks.

How much longer would they let him live and suffer this way? There wasn't one chance in ten thousand that he could be rescued. Not if the entire United States army was outside the gates. This spot would swallow him, digest him even as it had other white men, perhaps. He would vanish utterly, and nobody except The Red Typhoon and his cohorts would know what had happened.

But—*when* would it happen? The uncertainty of waiting was almost driving him crazy, he felt. He was ready to jump at the slightest noise, and yet there was no noise. His tenseness had become a greater torture than he could have conceived.

THEN, suddenly, he *did* hear a noise, and it was like a welcome relief from the dread silence. He stirred as he listened, and there was nothing to be heard. Yet he would have sworn that one of the doors had opened and closed softly; in fact, he could feel a sudden cool draught of air. But, which door?

He fumbled for his matches, determined to settle the thing with a look. Anything was better that waiting for something to happen. But, even as his fingers groped beneath his jacket, he felt a presence stirring near him in the room.

The difficulty was that he could not locate it. Whatever it was seemed to be in front of him, and yet he was not sure; it might be over there to the left. He finally got the match-box open, and as his fingers closed about the sliver of wood, he heard the thing coming nearer.

With a sudden movement he drew the match across the knurled edge of the box. But, ere it flamed up he was borne backward by something that leaped upon him. In an instant he was fighting with hands and feet as the unseen assassin hurled him to the floor.

Yet luck was with him at that moment. He knew by the twist of the other's body that the man had a knife. The knife-arm fell in a chopping blow, but the blade, although it cut through Brightly's leather jacket, did not touch flesh. And then, intuitively, he had the man's wrist.

Moreover, he instantly had the happy realization that he was stronger than his antagonist. Snarling savagely, the other tried to get free, but Brightly held him fast. At the same time he twisted the arm with an old jiu-jitsu trick — back and still back until he knew that the bone was on the point of snapping.

With his other hand he drove home one short jab after another, and felt the blows thud into flesh, yet he could not knock the man out. His only hope was that wrist-lock, and now he put everything he had into the effort to break the man's arm.

There was no resisting it. And suddenly, fight went out of his foe. The voice of the other screamed.

"Oh, my God!"

Then the would-be killer's form went limp. And that was the only thing which saved a broken bone, for the pressure which Brightly was applying suddenly turned the man's body, easing the fearful strain.

Still Brightly held him, not to be tricked. Yet the other was motionless, non-resistant. Brightly's free hand groped until it found the knife which had been dropped from the nerveless fingers. Then, triumphantly, he located the match-box on the floor.

He was a-tremble with eagerness now. There was something vaguely familiar in the voice which had uttered that cry in English, something which stirred old recollections in Brightly.

The match flared up at last and he squinted for an instant, shading the light, while he peered at the face of the other. A bearded face; that of a white man. As he held the match lower, the man on the floor turned toward him, the eyes opened.

Brightly gave a shocked exclamation.

"Jim Leeds!"

CHAPTER XII

The Coup

UNTIL the match burned his fingers, Craig Brightly bent over the other, staring incredulously. Then, as the light went out, recognition had leaped into the eyes of the man on the floor.

"Brightly!" he exclaimed in awe. There was a puzzled note in his voice.

"Aye!" agreed the victor. "And you tried to murder me in the dark, you dog!" He struck another match. "Look at me!" he whispered. "Take one good look, because it's the last you're going to have. I'm beginning to understand something of this mystery!"

"But you don't!" cried Leeds. "I didn't come here to kill *you!* I came here to kill the Red Typhoon!

"That young Chinese devil, Wong Chee, put me up to it. Told me there had been a revolt, and that The Red Typhoon was hiding in this room. None of the others dared enter. But he gave me a knife, told me to slip in, and kill the monster!

"You understand that, Brightly? They tried to make me kill you. It would be their way; their idea of a joke!"

Brightly got up slowly.

"I believe you're telling the truth, Leeds!" he exclaimed softly. "By the Lord Harry, it would be *their* way—the way of The Red Typhoon. But I thought you were already dead, man!" Briefly he told of the finding of the man's body in the river. Of the gold-laden belt, which his captors had confiscated along with his guns.

"THAT would be Furness," replied Leeds. "I heard that he had escaped from here a month ago. They said he'd been captured, and shot. There's always a patrol of these yellow devils along the river. Maybe he tried to get away from them, and jumped into the river and drowned. He had some of my clothes. My hat. You thought it was me! But it makes no difference now!"

"No," agreed Brightly, "it makes no difference now!" Then, hopefully, he asked:

"Do you know the identity of The Red Typhoon?"

The third match had burned out before Leeds answered.

"No," he replied. "I've seen him, but he's always been hooded. Not more than three or four in this place know who he is. But, even that is going to make no difference to us!"

"No," agreed Brightly mechanically, "no difference!"

"But," insisted Leeds, "you've got to know the truth, even though we're both certain to be killed now. They dragged me down, Brightly; easy at first, and then more swiftly. I'd always been a potential booze-fighter, and they played upon that—that and other things. You know what they did to me.

"A party of them wiped out the expedition into the desert. They didn't kill me because they knew me. They brought me here to this accursed place, and kept me a prisoner. They promised at first that they'd let me go, when the time was ripe. I knew Janice would be worried, so I sent her a letter. Evidently they let it go through. But I wrote her another which she probably never received, for Furness, who was a mining engineer brought here to supervise these old placer diggings—"

"They dig gold, Luchee told me!"

"Plenty of it," went on Leeds. "They've opened up ancient diggings, and by more modern methods are making a clean-up. That's one of the ways The Red Typhoon is financing himself.

"Furness showed them how. I knew nothing about mining, but I did savvy dialects, and they had a use for me when once they got their clutches on me. But they couldn't make me a willing aide because they couldn't 'get' anything on me, like they did Crawleigh—"

"Crawleigh is dead!" interposed Brightly.

"HE'S better off," was the rejoinder. "If it hadn't been for the hope of getting clear some day, for the sake of Janice, I'd have taken the shortest way out. But they knew that if I killed you with my own hand, they would have me for keeps, the devils!"

Brightly straightened up.

"Leeds," he whispered, "we're going to reverse this little joke on them. They're at the door now — I hear them. They'll open for you when you tell them the job is finished! They won't be suspicious; if there are not too many, maybe we can handle them. Do you know the way out of this infernal rat's nest, once we get clear?"

"I think I could find it," was the reply. "There's a big courtyard back of this palace. The Blue Pagoda is

on the other side. There's an airplane out in that courtyard, always ready for a getaway, if The Red Typhoon should need it. If you could fly that ship—"

"But I can't!"

"Nor me!" was the gloomy rejoinder. "Well, that's out. But we can at least take a crack at them before we go under.

"I've got the knife, Brightly—and I'm going to use it as much as I can! So long, old man—here we go!"

They tiptoed toward the door behind the tapestry as nearly as they could judge in the darkness. Then Leeds cried out something in dialect.

Instantly there was a stir outside. The door was opened, cautiously at first, but with more assurance as they saw him standing there. There were three guards, and they carried a lantern on a stick. Instantly the two white men flung themselves on the trio.

The lantern crashed out and Brightly heard a shrill scream as Leeds struck. As for himself, he smashed his fist in the face of one astonished Chinese who fell back with a grunt. He struck again, and the third man, who had been holding the lantern, took the blow.

Then came Leeds' shout:

"This way!"

AHEAD in the darkness, Brightly could hear the pounding feet of the other, and he followed as best he could. But ere he had gone far, he had crashed head-on into a wall, and from the left he heard Leeds shouting at him. Too late he had missed the turn.

But the corridor was filled with other sounds now — shrill shouts of alarm. Either the guards who had been attacked had revived, or others had heard them. Somewhere in the gloom, Leeds was shouting encouragement; but Brightly could not locate him. It was useless to try, and Brightly, throwing caution to the winds, dashed on alone. In this labyrinth of tunnels, he'd have to play hide-and-seek as best he could, and pray for luck.

Far ahead a light danced toward him — a guard hurrying with a lantern. To the right yawned the blackness of an off-shoot corridor, and into this Brightly dodged. He was utterly lost, and there was no telling what kind of trap he would stumble into. He only hoped that Leeds had escaped them; but Leeds knew something of this intricate network of passages.

Another light glowed ahead, and Brightly stopped. But this one was stationary, proving that it was no lantern. Cautiously he tiptoed forward, hoping against hope that he had discovered an outlet. Soon he made out that it came from another passage, which twisted up a flight of stairs.

The thing looked promising. Up and out of the enemy-infested place, where he was playing the part of a helpless rabbit hunted by bloodthirsty weasels. The light came from a single lantern, and he dodged by this, and went on up.

But the passage ended in a door. He listened; then, hearing nothing, gently opened it. Another light on the other side showed him the way. From somewhere ahead he heard the intoning of a familiar voice.

The Chinese interpreter, whom Leeds called Wong Chee. Moreover, the man was speaking in English, although Brightly could not hear plain enough to catch the words. Gripped by curiosity now, he stole forward; and, suddenly, a panorama was spread before him.

HE was overlooking the great red room where he had been brought face to face with the hooded man. The scene was staged as it had been

before; the guards about the room, the hooded man on the throne, and Wong Chee beside him. Through a slit in the masonry—doubtless there was some purpose for this hidden vantage-point—Brightly could see it all.

Behind him, was a short flight of stairs which evidently opened out on the roof, for he could see the star-sprinkled sky, clear of all fog. Possible escape lay in that direction.

But, that would wait, for something of greater interest taking place in the room below claimed his attention. The Red Typhoon was sitting in judgment, and the prisoner at the bar was no other than the Eurasian girl, Luchee.

CHAPTER XIII

The Ordeal

FOR one thing, the girl's hands were bound behind her back, although her feet were free. Her lips were sealed with a strip of silk wound tightly across the lower part of her face. Brightly guessed the reason for this; she had in her power a club which she could still wield over The Red Typhoon, if given an opportunity to use it.

She knew his identity, and she could scream it aloud. Possibly none of the guards in the room knew the secret and it did not suit the master plotter that they should learn it.

—"the fate of all traitors to the Cause," the interpreter droned on, evidently pronouncing sentence. "Your usefulness is gone. Judgment has been given. Are you willing that it should be so?"

Brightly could not see the girl's face, for he was almost directly behind her, and above. But he saw her tense, and then nod her head. As she did so, the hooded man stirred as though uneasy. Then he inclined his head as though giving the signal.

Guards sprang forward to seize her, but before they did so, there was a sudden clamor. Into the great room ran two men whom Brightly recognized as the guards he and Leeds had attacked. He felt a glow of satisfaction as he saw their battered faces. The third man was not there; evidently Leeds' knife had settled him.

THEY prostrated themselves, and babbled something in Chinese. The interpreter did not trouble to translate; it was unnecessary, for the hooded man understood. Brightly saw the latter straighten up in the great chair, heard him mumble something to Wong Chee. It was plain that the guards were reporting the escape.

Suddenly Wong Chee lifted his hand dramatically, while he intoned an order. As he finished, other guards seized the hapless ones on the floor, and hurried them away, doubtless to pay the penalty for allowing the two white men to escape. But Luchee still stood there.

As the hooded man regarded her, it was apparent that fresh inspiration came to him, for he muttered to Wong Chee, who bowed, and spoke to the girl.

"Your white lover will soon be captured," Wong Chee told her. "The two of you shall die together!"

Then, he rasped out an order in Chinese to the remaining guards in the room, who promptly scattered, undoubtedly for the search. Then it was that Craig Brightly reminded himself again of the passage leading to the roof, beyond which he could see the stars.

For, it was unlikely that he could escape the searchers utterly if he remained here. He had no doubt that they would go over every inch of the place eventually, and he would be found. Things were going to be warm from now on. If only he had his guns!

AT THE foot of the stairs up which he had climbed, he heard the sudden patter of slippered feet. The searchers! Up the short flight to the roof he went, and stood there for a moment in the cool, fresh darkness, while he considered the situation.

A noise below him indicated that the hunters were coming closer. Doubtless they would likewise come up here for a look around—and there seemed hardly any way to escape. But a looming edifice just beyond the roof on which he stood, offered a possible solution.

It was a tall, cylindrical-shaped building, with oddly-upturned cornices. This, he surmised, was the blue pagoda of which Ki-Lung had spoken. The building which housed the great red room and quarters of The Red Typhoon adjoined the pagoda, or temple, so that a cornice of the latter projected within fifteen feet of the roof.

Brightly knew that if he could bridge that space in a mighty leap, he might find a window in the pagoda, and penetrate to the interior of the structure. It was not likely that they would look for him there. Anyway, he'd have to chance it.

But if he missed the leap, there was a sheer drop of at least forty feet to flagstones. He had a short enough run at best, but he took it as the sounds below grew louder, indicating that the searching party was coming closer.

The footing was bad on the roof, and he could not get up speed; but he chanced all in a prodigious effort, and found himself shooting through space, hands outstretched for the upturned cornice. Moreover, he made it, although he struck with a fearful shock, but the upcurved tile gave him a handhold. Though he landed with more or less of a jolt, he drew himself up quickly, and cautiously slid around the circular roof until he was opposite the point where the hunters would be standing. Then, as silently as possible, he began to climb toward a dark opening above him.

The pagoda itself was unlighted. It may have still been in use by Taoist priests, but there was no sign of life. As he worked upward, winged creatures which he knew to be bats, whizzed and zoomed past his head. From the heavens came the harsh note struck by nighthawks as they dropped from the sky. But Brightly kept on, and at last he drew himself inside the opening.

THERE was no light, and no shelf below. He groped for his matchbox, but could not find it; evidently he had lost it in his flight. As he balanced there on the rim of the opening he heard somewhere the faint drone of an airplane, and he thrilled at the thought that it might be Flynn and the others. Still, Leeds had said that The Red Typhoon also had a plane at his command. No time to waste in futile conjecture, anyway.

Carefully he let himself down in the darkness, and swung back and forth until his foot touched a ledge. It seemed solid, and wide enough to stand upright. He let go his hold with one hand, while he found a grip on a wooden rail with the other. He stood there on the shelf for a moment, then began feeling his way forward.

Suddenly, from the depths of darkness below there boomed the brassy, echoing sound of a great gong. Three times it sounded, and then there was silence. But immediately he heard the patter of feet below, and, far down there, he saw a moving light.

But he also saw that, just ahead of him was a long flight of stairs, and down these he started. The theory of pagoda construction, he had heard, was that the upturned cornices

were to prevent evil spirits which flew about at night from descending to ground after alighting on the spire. But evidently there was nothing to prevent one from descending inside. Doubtless some priest had left the high window open, perhaps for ventilation.

In any event, it was to prove Brightly's salvation, for he knew now that he could get down into the Blue Pagoda, but whether he could get out of it, and away from the city, would be another matter.

As he descended, he saw below him a huge shrine, with the carved figure of an ugly god squatted behind an altar on which incense-burners smoked. Before the altar, too, were several prostrate worshipers, no doubt priests. Even as Brightly watched the odd ceremony, he saw a group of figures enter the room, and approach the image.

TWO of them, it was apparent, were guards, for they were armed; but three others evidently were priests—their flowing robes and weird headdresses indicating their calling. Just in front of them marched a Chinese, bareheaded, and with arms folded across his breast. There was something familiar about the newcomer, but Brightly could not see well. The angle of vision was wrong and he could not get a glimpse of the man's face.

But the man approached to the foot of the image; then prostrated himself, as did the other priests. Only the guards remained standing, watchful as ever. Again, from somewhere, the great gong boomed thrice.

A wailing chant arose from the priests, and the Chinese who apparently had been brought here for his devotions, stood up and spread his arms widely, while he lifted his face. Then and there, Brightly got a shock, for the man was no other than Ki-Lung, whom Brightly had left aboard the seaplane with the others!

In his astonishment and consternation, Brightly straightened up on the stairs. He was not more than thirty feet above those on the floor in front of the image, but until now their attention had been focussed wholly on the ceremony. Moreover, he had blended into the shadows above.

Yet in his recklessness, he exposed himself.

If Ki-Lung was captured, then what had become of Flynn, of Tremper—of Janice Leeds? True, Ki-Lung had intended to follow Brightly into this city; indeed, the Chinese wore the native costume which he had brought along for that very purpose. But, something told Brightly that matters had indeed gone awry, and that Ki-Lung's presence now indicated that disaster had overtaken the others as well. Still, they were nowhere in sight.

KI-LUNG, however, had the air of a man under the sentence of death. He was making peace with his gods; his hour had struck, and he was content with the fatalistic fulfilment of destiny. Brightly knew that he was powerless to aid the Chinese who had forsworn The Red Typhoon, and yet—

It was a startled cry from one of the guards which told the white man that he was discovered. Up the stairs three at a jump raced the men, swords uplifted. There was not time to turn and run, even if there had been sanctuary near-by. To run to the top of the stairs would only mean that they would cut him down even as he fled.

But he "took out" the first man in an unexpected way, by a straightout kick which sent the man crashing backward. Before Brightly could repeat the feat, however, the second guard was upon him, swinging the sword flatwise like a bludgeon.

The world seemed to dissolve into a flare of sizzling pin-wheels, yet through it Brightly retained consciousness, although his muscles seemed sluggish of response. He found himself helpless in the grip of the triumphant guard; then the other, or, perhaps, the priests themselves, had him, and he was being dragged down the stairs.

As though in a daze, he saw the procession form. Ki-Lung was in it, too. The Chinese was saying something in English, but Brightly's wits were too fuddled to understand.

They started off, and where they were going, Brightly had no idea. But they went miles, it seemed; miles and yet more miles, down long, half-lighted corridors. Sometimes they were met by men who stopped and peered at them, and then wheeled and vanished, cackling triumphantly. On and still on.

And then, his eyes were hurting a little by the unaccustomed light from many lanterns. The smell of incense was in the air. They were in a large room, strangely familiar. Everything was red—and white.

And there, seated in the great chair of carved ebony, was The Great One, who called himself The Red Typhoon.

Indeed, it seemed that he had not moved from that chair since Brightly had first seen him.

But there were others present. Before a row of guards facing the seated master, were Luchee—and they who had flown north from Shanghai in the seaplane. Prisoners all, and the eyes of the hooded man seemed to burn a little brighter, as though in triumphant contemplation.

CHAPTER XIV

The Long Hazard

THEY were not bound, save that the Eurasian girl was secured as before, muffled that she might not betray the secret which Brightly desired most. Their expressions were varied. Janice Leeds was white-faced, uneasy, yet bearing herself courageously. Bill Tremper was scowling, as he sized up the situation. The Chinese, Ki-Lung, was impassive as ever. Of what use is it to struggle against destiny? Only Flynn seemed normal. But Flynn was used to sitting cheek-by-jowl with death. He understood that it was only when you allowed fear to creep into your mind that you weakened. Flynn would not crumple.

"Well, well!" he called cheerily, as silence fell over the great room at Brightly's approach. "So, there you are! You've kept us waiting, shipmate!"

That was Flynn's way. Yet it was no time for jest, and Brightly understood what Flynn was trying to do. So long as fear can be jibed, it is not fear.

"Don't think much of this lodge you've joined, old man," went on Flynn. "It's flashy as new paint, but the boys seem to take the 'work' too seriously. Now, that visitin' delegates are here, I suppose they'll trot out the goat—"

"Silence!"

It was the Chinese, Wong Chee, who spoke. He sensed that Flynn was jeering, and the effectiveness of the spectacle relied heavily upon dignity.

"To the life-boats, folks!" muttered Flynn. "Breakers ahead!"

There were a dozen question which Brightly wanted to ask. How had the party fallen into the hands of The Red Typhoon? What had become of the seaplane? And what, too, of the other plans which Brightly had confided to the navy pilot? Was the trap ready, or would it be sprung too late?

Instead, Brightly told Janice Leeds:

"Your brother is safe, I think! He's probably made his escape by now."

The girl gave a little exclamation.

She would have spoken, but the nasal tones of the Chinese cut in angrily. Moreover, the hooded man was speaking rapidly, in a whisper so low nobody save Wong Chee could hear.

Wong Chee straightened up, an evil grin on his face. Evidently he enjoyed this rôle of basking in reflected glory, almost as much as though he was The Red Typhoon himself. Raising his voice, he spoke slowly, clearly.

"It has been decided," he announced. "There are six of you." Apparently he included the Eurasian girl. "Six are to die, unless—"

He hesitated, delighted at the suspense he created.

"You," and his finger indicated Luchee, "are already as good as dead. We have awaited only the capture of your white lover," and he indicated Brightly, who started angrily.

"Ho!" cried the imperturbable Flynn. "You been makin' a little hay, Brightly, while—"

"It's a damned lie!" exclaimed Brightly. "And you know it, Flynn. For Pete's sake, shut up!"

Wong Chee was scowling; it was plain that he did not like this interruption.

"You," and he singled out Ki-Lung, "are a traitor to your kind. Death to you! And you, who wear our mark," he went on, glaring at Bill Tremper, "the Death of a Hundred Hours!"

He smiled at Flynn.

"We give you an opportunity to live, bird-man," he added. "We are in need of such men as yourself. Do not decide now; wait until you see what death can mean to the others, ere you make up your mind!

"For you," and he turned to Brightly, "The Great One has special solicitude. You are our most active enemy; you have cost us much effort and worry. And yet, beside the magnitude of our undertaking," he went on boastfully, vaingloriously, "you are no more than a gad-fly—"

"WHO has stung you, brother?" cut in Flynn, with a chuckle, "and who'll sting you again, if you're not careful!"

"More like a fly who has walked into a spider's nest," insisted Brightly bitterly. "Shut up, Flynn! Let's get the bad news in one gulp!"

"What d'ye mean, 'bad news'?" insisted Flynn, still trying to keep up a bold front. "Didn't you hear the yellow boy just offer me a job?"

"Please, Mr. Flynn!" pleaded Janice Leeds.

The hooded man was speaking rapidly to Wong Chee. The levity of these foreigners was apparently irritating to The Great One. They refused to be frightened; but that, perhaps, was because they did not fully understand.

Wong Chee whirled on them again.

"Laugh while there is yet time, fools!" he cried. "The precious seconds are slipping away.

"You!" and he pointed his finger at Brightly again. "You are the one to whom I address myself, yet speaking for The Great One," he qualified hastily. "We may even spare you, as well as the bird-man. It all rests with the white girl!" he finished suddenly, turning sharply upon Janice.

She gasped, and stepped back.

"With me?" he repeated.

Wong Chee nodded, rubbing his thin hands together.

"You are pleasing in the eyes of The Great One," he told her unctuously. "He foresees that you will be very useful to—to The Cause!" He smiled, but a moment later became stern.

"If you do not agree," he cried, "it is death—as terrible as may be devised. Death for six! In your hands rest the fates not only of yourself,

but these white men," and he indicated Brightly and Flynn.

THE girl turned troubled eyes upon them; then looked back to Wong Chee.

"You mean that *I* can save them?" she asked. "But how?"

Wong Chee smiled at her; the eyes of the hooded man lighted a little.

"By allegiance to The Cause!" he explained. Then he went on hurriedly:

"But do not decide hastily. You white foreigners are stubborn; you have a way of making up your minds, and then adhering to it. Wait—and see what happens if you fail!"

He clapped his hands and snapped out an order in Chinese. Immediately two of the guards seized Luchee.

"Watch!" promised Wong Chee, but as he did so, there was an almost animal cry from Ki-Lung, who had been standing there motionless while the harangue had gone on. At sight of the guards gripping the Eurasian girl, Ki-Lung took half a step forward, involuntarily. Wondering, Brightly saw it. Perhaps he alone of the others understood.

Ki-Lung, the yellow man, educated though he was in the schools of the western world, was in love with this little Eurasian girl. Certainly Brightly had not suspected it; maybe the girl didn't know it herself. It may have been that Ki-Lung had striven to keep it a secret.

But now, about to be sent to her death, she could not go while he stood helpless. What he did might have been with the assurance that he would meet her again in death, for the religions of all men are much the same when it comes to the hereafter.

For as the guards seized Luchee, the man came to life. He hurled himself straight at the hooded figure who sat there unmoved by the dramatic force of the situation. As Ki-Lung did it, he must have known that he would die, and yet he bravely met the ordeal even while certain of the outcome. There *was* a chance—though hopeless—that he might kill The Red Typhoon.

SO he tore at the flimsy, tinseled cords with clawing hands. He ripped them down, but they seemed to writhe about him like snakes. And then he screamed.

A short, choking cry, but one which sent a prickle of horror up Brightly's spine. Ki-Lung fell, still with those cords wrapped about him, and across his face so that they left a score of reddish streaks where the skin was cut. Still trying to fight his way ahead, Ki-Lung died there on the floor. Those tinsels were fine needles dipped in a powerful poison!

But the savagery and unexpectedness of his attack was not without effect. For a moment the hooded man seemed actually to cower in his chair, for it appeared that Ki-Lung would break through. Fear showed in the man's eyes, and as Ki-Lung made a last lunge which carried him almost to the feet of The Red Typhoon, the latter threw up one arm defensively. The act was wholly involuntary, but Brightly saw it. Moreover, he caught sight of something else which stamped itself indelibly on his brain.

The palm of the hooded man's right hand, turned outward for a second, showed a scar—a jagged cicatrice, dull red against the yellowish-white of his skin. It was curiously like the symbol which Brightly had come to know, a crudely-shaped capital letter T.

That much Brightly saw, and then himself went into action. He, too leaped forward, but not directly at that death-wall. From the scabbard of a guard holding Luchee he snatched a curved, short-bladed sword. Then he swung this like a man cutting his

way through a vine-festooned jungle. The sword was sharp, and a way was opened through the wall.

But now the hooded man leaped up, an automatic pistol jerked from the fold of one broad sleeve. Wong Chee, however, was fleeing at sight of the onrushing Brightly. From behind came the bellowing roar of Bill Tremper, and the shout of Flynn as they, too, went into battle.

As Brightly ducked, the hooded man's gun spat fire twice, but the bullets went wild. Then, with astonishing agility, he whirled and raced after the fleeing Wong Chee. But Brightly, swinging the sword, was after him, headed him off as the man would have leaped through the doorway where Wong Chee had gone.

The man wheeled, and his gun spoke sharply again, twice, three times.

BRIGHTLY felt the wind of the bullets, and at the last shot his sword arm went numb, and the weapon clattered to the floor. One lucky shot had struck the blade.

But the hooded man either had no more cartridges in his gun, or feared to pause long enough to use them. Again he was running, but now to the sanctuary of his guards whom Tremper and Flynn were fighting out there on the main floor. Through the same hole that Brightly had cut in the death-curtain, the man ducked, Brightly after him.

The battle was going strong out there. Flynn had the cleaver of a guard he had downed, and was whooping joyously as he drove the guards back.

Bill Tremper was giving him protection from flank and rear. Tremper had no weapons other than his good fists, but he was quicker with these than were the guards armed with swords. If a man tried to rush Flynn from behind, Tremper took him out in a manner almost as deadly as though with a club.

At the same time both were trying to protect Janice Leeds. Into the massed guards drove the hooded man, and they surrounded him quickly, sheltering him. Brightly found himself faced by the drawn swords of the yellow men.

It was the fierceness and surprise of the white men's attack that had spread consternation among the guards; and now, with The Great One there to urge them on, they rallied strongly. Moreover, from other entrances reinforcements were pouring into the room. They outnumbered the white men at least eight to one, and were fully armed.

Nevertheless, their courage was weak before the threat of these scions of a dominant race, who believed they were as good as dead anyway, and were determined to take as many of their foemen with them as possible, when they went "out."

BUT the hooded man was urging them on; and, under the lash of his vituperative tongue, they massed and came at the defendants with a rush.

There was no time for Brightly to seize a weapon, even though there were a number scattered over the floor, for a half-dozen of the guards were down. He could only swing right and left with his fists, knowing that the fighting Tremper was beside him, cool as though in a ring battle, yet driving home each blow with a vicious smack that upended his foes as though he was swinging a sledge-hammer.

Flynn, making his blade sing, was holding them back on his side. Twice they came too close, and then drew back as the three guards in the forefront fell under the Irishman's blade.

"Whurro!" he yelled. "Fire when ready, Gridley! Don't give up the ship! We've just begun to fight!"

It was a magnificent gesture, but futile, for the guards were wearing them down. Moreover, spears had shown up among the attackers, and these were more dreaded weapons than swords, which could only be used at close infighting.

Tremper ripped out a blistering oath as a whizzing spear cut through the flesh of his neck. But there was also a disadvantage in the use of this weapon, for it menaced the guards on the other side of the embattled few.

From somewhere Brightly had snatched a sword, and now he was trying to beat down a huge Mongol armed with a short-handled axe. Then he was conscious of a strange thing, that beside him stood Janice Leeds, gripping a sword with both hands. Though she handled the weapon with no skill, the sight of her bravely trying to play a man's part in the defense was encouraging. In that hurried mêlée, with hoarse cries, fiendish shrieks, the tiled floor slippery with the blood of yellow men strewn about, she proved that she came of fighting stock.

"Good girl!" yelled Brightly, then punctuating his words with parries and slashes, exchanged with the giant guard in front of him: "Won't have time—to tell you what I've—wanted to say—ever since I saw you! You shouldn't—have come—"

"But I'm glad I came!" she cried. "I'm glad. Because I could be—with you!"

It almost cost Brightly his life, did that statement; for he unwittingly dropped his guard and the Mongol, like a stroke of lightning leaped and struck.

HE dodged, yet knew it would be too late. Then something was hurled between himself and his foe. A lithe body which dived under the sword-stroke, catching the Mongol in the middle. The sword fell—but the stroke was shortened. The cruel edge did not reach Brightly, but fell squarely upon that form which had intervened to save his life.

"Luchee!" he cried.

Then his cleaver bit through bone and flesh of the thick neck of the Mongol who had slain her. And the fury of Brightly's charges carried him forward so that he dropped two other guards before they could fall back. Thrice she had saved his life, and had not counted the cost too great. He'd avenge her if he could, before he went under.

"Look out, Brightly!" cried Flynn suddenly, from somewhere nearby. "They're coming from behind!"

Brightly whirled to see the new rush of men coming. Dimly he saw the heads of Flynn and Tremper; they were still on their feet, though probably wounded. And Janice was here with him, fighting with the berserk rage of the cave woman who battled beside her mate against the onslaught of savage troglodytes in the Stone Age.

What if Wong Chee had declared that Brightly was the lover of the Eurasian girl? What if Luchee had sacrificed herself to save Brightly's life? Nothing mattered now to Janice Leeds beyond the fact that she was fighting as one of her own clan—the dominance of the white race over all others.

But with that new horde swarming in there was no question as to the outcome. The defenders nerved themselves to the last effort.

AND then from somewhere appeared Jim Leeds.

Moreover, he was armed with a gun in each hand—Brightly's guns, in fact —and the sharp bark of the weapons rose above the tumult of the fighting mob. The guards in the forefront went down screaming before the

spraying bullets and panic seized them suddenly.

They whirled and fled, and Brightly saw in the midst of them the hooded man, carried along by the terror-stricken retreat of his followers. Brightly would have leaped after him, but Flynn intervened.

"Quick!" yelled the bird-man. "They'll be back, and they'll get us next time. We can get out of here—through the gates. The plane's in the river—maybe they haven't found it yet. They caught us when we tried to get in the city. No time to lose."

The Red Typhoon was gone.

Brightly could have cursed Flynn for interfering. There was one chance that the hooded man might have been stopped. Killed, perhaps, or at least his mask torn from him. But he was gone now.

Nevertheless, there was straight common sense in Flynn's idea. To wait meant that the foe would return four-fold, and would finish the job. The next instant the four white men and Janice were hurrying after Jim Leeds, who knew the way.

Battered they were, and not a one of them that wasn't wounded. But their retreat was in good order. Out through the doors of the big building they streamed, and guards whom they encountered fled before them.

At the gates, however, they found the way barred. But like a band of wolves they descended upon the sentries, scattered them. The gates swung open, and then out into the night, racing for the river. Hurrying, stumbling in the darkness—Leeds and Flynn ahead, while Brightly was half-supporting Janice, in whom the reaction from those awful moments of the battle had set in.

Behind them lumbered Bill Tremper, a jagged cut across his face where a sword-point had flecked him, while his uniform was shredded by the slashing blades of yellow men whom he had fought only with his bare hands.

FARTHER behind in the city they could hear excited shouts, as the pursuit began. But, just ahead of them was the river, and there, looming in the darkness, was the familiar bulk of the plane.

They tumbled aboard hastily, and cast clear. Then, as Flynn seated himself at the controls, Tremper spun the propellers. While a savage mob came running to the river bank and stopped, the motors thundered and the mechanical bird taxied along the surface for the take-off.

"Safe!" cried Janice hysterically, and then she was in her brother's arms, for not until now had there been time for their reunion.

"Aye, safe, Sis!" echoed Leeds.

And his haggard, bearded face seemed to light up with a new determination which wiped off the ravages of what he had been through. Jim Leeds was thinking of how he had been saved not only from death, but something worse than death.

But Craig Brightly, slumped in the cockpit with his head in his hands, merely groaned. For he knew that he had failed after all. His plans had gone awry. Not only had he failed to break The Red Typhoon's power, but the arch-fiend had escaped.

CHAPTER XV

Retribution

UP, up and still up zoomed the big seaplane; then banked sharply. But Brightly was paying no attention. He was still preoccupied with thoughts of his failure. Nor did he seem to hear when the others gave an exclamation.

"There's the rat-hole!" cried Jim Leeds.

Brightly started up then, and as he did so, the plane seemed to give a

little hop. Two seconds later it happed again. And then from below came a gusty blast which lifted the plane mightily, while a gusty detonation rolled upward.

"Fair hit, sir!" announced Tremper jubilantly.

Brightly peered downward in time to see reddish flame burst from the shattered pile of debris where the building that had housed the great red room and the blue pagoda had stood.

"Hit?" demanded Flynn, as though surprised. "I must have pulled those bomb-triggers by mistake?" He smiled grimly at Brightly. "Bombing a Chinese town, even though it's full of murderous bandits, would be an act of war, wouldn't it? Mustn't have anything like that happen!

"Besides," and he swung the plane around and headed for the mouth of the river, "the boarding cutters from the fleet lying down there must be pretty well upstream by now. 'Twould be a shame to leave anything for the boys to scrap when they get here!"

Brightly said nothing. It was true that the cutters must be on the way —part of his plan, as he had left instructions with Robbins. But it made no difference. Even though the fearful destructiveness of the bombs had not only wiped out a ruthless band of cut-throats but obliterated the sinister head of an organization whose aim was to overthrow the supremacy of the white race, Brightly was not comforted. He had failed, for now it would never be known who that individual was.

White men had already died trying to learn that secret. Ki-Lung, a brave man, had died as a result of it. So had Luchee. And, if the monster himself still lived, others would die.

NEVERTHELESS, Brightly felt that he had failed. Now the master-plotter, if he still lived, would be a greater menace than before, because he would operate more secretly than before. It would not be known for a long time if The Red Typhoon had died in the bombing of his stronghold.

Failure!

Suddenly Janice Leeds gave a cry and pointed toward the southern sky. Brightly looked. It might have been an illusion, yet it seemed that he saw a shadow pass across the blue-blackness of the heavens—the silhouette of a speeding plane!

By some miracle of fate, the plane which Leeds had said was always kept in readiness for The Red Typhoon, had escaped. And now it was fleeing from the fire-reddened ruins of the bombed city.

There was no certainty that it carried the hooded man—yet Brightly felt that it was so!

For some unaccountable reason, he felt better. The fight was not hopeless yet. He felt secure in the belief that he could prove himself the equal of the other, and track him down eventually.

Only a glimpse, and the fleeting plane was gone. No use trying to chase it with the heavy bomber. Brightly told himself he'd have to wait. Yet he was on edge with impatience throughout the long hours until Shanghai, like an intricate mosaic design, lay below them in the afternoon sunshine.

With Janice Leeds he was having dinner at the Café Riche. All was pretty much as it had been before, save that both were in a different mood. Two weeks had passed since that memorable night in the stronghold of The Red Typhoon; weeks in which all had recovered from the ordeal.

Flynn had returned to the fleet, and even Bill Tremper had been restored to duty with honors. And Jim Leeds, with Janice, was going back to the

States, to make a new start to shake off the insidious hold which the Orient had laid upon him.

Brightly had been urged to return with them, but he had refused, even though Janice had made the refusal difficult. He knew that he could never leave China so long as his task was not completed.

For, The Red Typhoon lived.

His presence had been manifested in many ways. True, the bombing of his stronghold had dealt his plans a tremendous blow, but he had survived and was covertly weaving a stronger web of plot and counterplot than before.

So, while Brightly was having this last dinner with Janice, for the Leeds were leaving next day, he could not shake off that feeling of impatience at being compelled to sit back and wait for The Red Typhoon to strike.

Yet it was a happy occasion, for all that. Janice was athrill with the moment; she was leaving China tomorrow, and she had found Jim. True, she was leaving Craig Brightly, but her woman's intuition told her that it would not be for long.

The dinner, the service, were excellent. In the background hovered Francois, watchful to see that everything went right, and not a little proud of his guests.

A few minutes later he was once more bending solicitously over the table of his special friends, Craig Brightly and Janice Leeds. He was admirably calm, he told himself, and yet his eyes gleamed with triumph.

"Ah!" he exclaimed in a low voice to Brightly. "You have not forgotten *m'sieu,* that you requested me, Francois, to keep open the eye as regards strange happenings here? *Bien!* You shall see, then, how Francois Dijon remembers!"

Brightly looked quickly at him. There was something in the attitude of Francois which stirred the "bird-dog sense" in the other.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A MAN who sat in the far corner," Francois went on hurriedly. "For several nights he came here, but never while you have been here, until tonight. Observe, *m'sieu,* how I watched him! He had a full black beard. Ah, that beard! Never did it deceive, not for a second. False! I assure you, *m'sieu,* I was often tempted to snatch it from his face. But, is that a way to treat a guest? *Non!* So I smile, but all the while I am watchful, *m'sieu!*

"Tonight he is already here when you and mademoiselle arrive. He stare at you—ah, he does not take his eye from you! Then, he calls for his check. Victorie signals to me; I go to his table. And then Victoire, the clumsy one, spills a carafe of water on the table. And what happens?

"The black beard starts from his chair—his right hand, it is thrust out, so! He is afraid the carafe will drench him. His palm is toward me. And what do I see, *m'sieu?*

"It is this!" On the smooth damask he outlined a letter T. *"In the palm of his hand was a mark like I show you."*

Brightly rose abruptly, tensed, his eyes flitting around the room. For, Francois' words were like an electric shock. *The hooded man who had sat in the carved ebony chair had a palm scarred that way!* The Red Typhoon—here!

"Where is he, Francois?" demanded Brightly harshly. "Quick, man, quick! *Where is he?"*

Francois rolled his eyes upward.

"Gone, *m'sieu!"* he announced. "Gone. Yet but a moment ago. You may still find him outside! He—"

But Brightly did not wait for the rest of it. Without even pausing to excuse himself to Janice Leeds, he

was hurrying for the door, dodging waiters and arriving guests. As he flung out of the door, he saw a 'ricksha hurrying away in the darkness. Jerking out a gun, he raced after it.

Ordinarily he would have been able to overtake such a conveyance; but of a sudden the thing speeded up. The bearded man in the 'ricksha knew that he was being pursued.

ON one wheel the 'ricksha took a corner; then shot straight for the Bund, and a cluster of sampans at the foot of a gangway leading to the water. Here, too, was a long, narrow power launch. If the bearded man reached it he'd escape. Brightly made a new burst of speed, came alongside the 'ricksha.

"Halt!" he yelled, throwing up his gun.

But he was answered by a lashing knife-stroke as an arm appeared suddenly. Even then he could have emptied his gun into the carriage, but he could not be certain that the black-bearded man was the one he wanted above all others. Moreover, he would capture The Red Typhoon alive, if possible.

Therefore, he threw his weight against the 'ricksha, and it capsized. But as it went over, the passenger leaped from it, and Brightly's jump for him fell short. Yet he did get his fingers on the other's coat-collar, which tore loose. He caught hold of the beard, jerked it off. But the big coolie who had been drawing the 'ricksha was on him like a cat.

The fellow had a short club, and he swung this at Brightly's head, but missed. Nevertheless, the blow fell on the white man's gun arm, and the pistol dropped. But Brightly's left hook, driven with a short, vicious swing, sent the coolie sprawling.

Nevertheless, the pursued man was up and gone. Brightly heard the thudding of his feet on the gangway; an excited shout from the launch. Then, almost immediately, the whine of a self-starter as the craft's motor turned over. At the same time figures on her deck were casting her clear.

This much he saw as he gained the head of the gangway and stopped, for the pursuit was at an end. The launch was already moving off in the blackness. And, from the street behind him came the shrilling of a police whistle.

BUT Brightly smiled. For he knew that he had not failed after all, The Leeds were leaving on the morrow. Perhaps he could induce them to wait a few days. For he felt certain that now the hunt for the master-plotter was nearing an end.

A radio message to the American fleet lying at Woosung would appraise them of this launch fleeing downstream. They'd round it up quickly. But even if The Red Typhoon escaped them, he could not evade pursuit much longer.

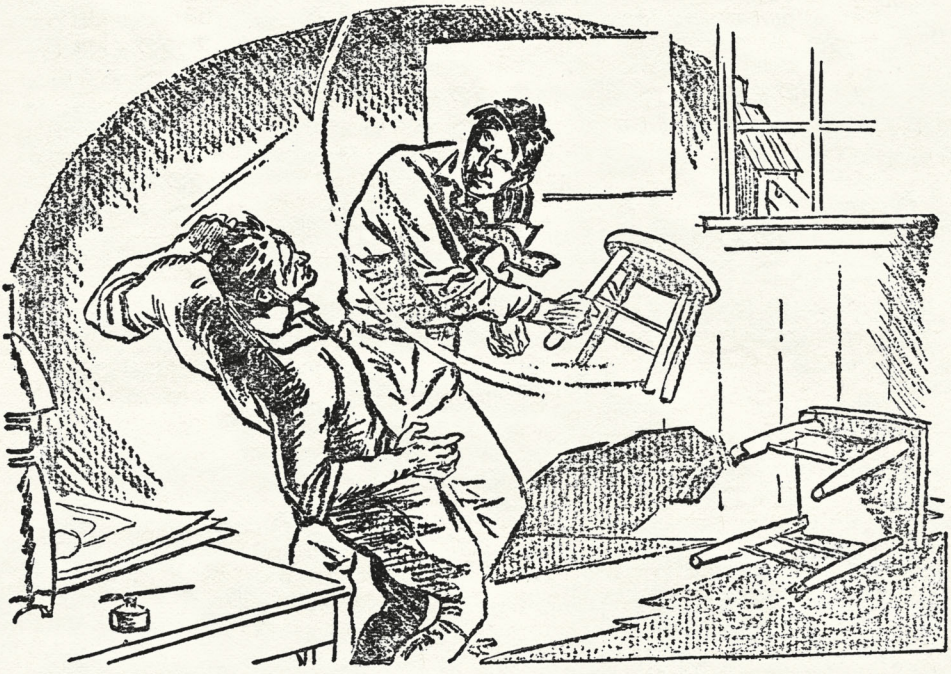
His identity was known!

Brightly had caught one glimpse of the fellow's face as the beard was pulled off. And Brightly knew what he had suspected; that the interpreting of Wong Chee had been merely a blind to identify The Red Typhoon as a Chinese who spoke no other language.

Jim Leeds might go home, if he wished. But now Janice might be willing to remain for a while longer; and then go back to the States on her honeymoon as Mrs. Craig Brightly. Only a while longer to wait, for at last he held trump cards in the grim game he had been playing.

Through the magic of radio and telegraph the net would be cast at once. All over the Orient would be broadcast urgent orders to arrest on sight a pallid-faced little Eurasian named Quintaro!

Hard Rock Men



A Tense Struggle With Unscrupulous Tricksters in the Mining Regions of Alaska

A Complete Novelette

By BEN DEACON

Author of, "Spawn of Death," "Under the Great Bear," etc.

DONALD MUNRO ducked into the open doorway of the Hansen bunkhouse, seeking momentary haven from the wind that swept down from the notch on the far side of the Arm across the little beach town of Rupan and on up through the mine buildings and bunkhouses on the slope of the mountainside.

Lighting a pipe in that breeze was out of the question. As he fumbled for matches Munro glanced around the deserted bunkhouse and for a moment the worried look on his face gave place to one of amusement. A disorderly litter of grimy work clothes, still damp and stained from the drippings of the mine shaft, told the story.

The men of the hard rock crew had left in a hurry.

The troubled expression returned to Munro's face. It was unfortunate that Hansen and his men had chosen this particular time to go down to the beach on a spree. He was anxious to

speed up the work on the cross-cut the hard rock men were driving to pick up the big vein of ore beyond a fault. Certain recent happenings had made him vague uneasy and had urged upon his mind the necessity for hurrying that job.

But there was nothing to be done about it. He sat on the edge of a bunk and lit his pipe with a philosophical air. That was the way with hard rock men. They worked hard and they played hard, and no one could dictate to them as to when they must work or when they might play.

His eight years as a mining engineer in Alaska had taught him that. It had also taught him to like and respect these huge men of Viking breed and to understand why they held themselves aloof from the muckers and other less skilled laborers of the mines.

AND the respect was mutual. Hansen and his men fairly worshiped the engineer-manager of the Rupan. In physique he was their equal. His big-boned frame, over six feet in height, was covered with muscles that were like steel springs.

He was as tireless as any of them, and if the necessity arose he could tackle any job above or below the mine-head. His long, lean face was rugged and stern—though often there was a kindly twinkle in the deep-set blue eyes when he talked to the men—and his head was thatched with a mop of thick, unruly hair of a distinctly reddish tinge.

He was slow to wrath but once aroused he was a dangerous man to cross, and this was a characteristic he shared with the hard rock men.

A sudden gust of wind blew a slip of yellow paper in through the open door of the bunkhouse. It swirled around for a moment, then dropped to the floor almost at Munro's feet. He picked it up and spread it out on his knees, examining it idly.

It was a telegram and he read the few words it contained automatically, without giving them much heed. Then suddenly he straightened up and his face became thoughtful. He read the message through again slowly:

"G. F. Perrim,
Matsan Mining and Development Company. Rupan, Alaska (via Cordova)
All set here. Act immediately as per agreement.
Ashford."

The message had been filed in New York the day before. It must have been brought up from Cordova by old Dave Logan, the "skipper" of the company launch which plied between Rupan and Cordova carrying mail and supplies. Evidently it had been dropped either by Dave or by the man to whom it was addressed.

DON MUNRO mentally reviewed the events of the past week, dating from the unexpected arrival from San Francisco of George F. Perrim, vice-president and general manager of the Matsan Company, which owned and operated the Rupan mine, and Frederick Schnact, a geologist.

Perrim was a shriveled-up timid-looking little man, but Schnact made up in bulk for the general manager's meager stature. He topped Munro by at least an inch and his muscles bulged out the sleeves of his jaunty Norfolk jacket. And he had ratty-looking little eyes.

It was the big man who had first aroused Munro's suspicion. The engineer had watched him carefully and had come to the conclusion that he knew about as much geology as Jan Hansen knew of theology. He was merely going through the motions of

examining the property—killing time.

In fact, to Munro it had seemed as though both men were only pottering about in a futile manner, but with a constant air of expectancy. They were obviously waiting for something.

"Act immediately as per agreement." Had they been waiting for that message? If so, what did it mean and what did they plan to do?

A voice outside the bunkhouse interrupted his thoughts.

"I tell you I saw it blow up here." It was Perrim. He had evidently been hurrying, for the words were punctuated by little gasping sounds.

"Aw, what does it matter?" came in Schnact's harsh, booming voice. "You know what you got to do now."

"Matter?" Munro noted the scorn and anger in Perrim's tone. "Do you suppose I want that message blowing about for everyone to see? Why did you let go of it?"

MUNRO stepped out of the door with the telegram in his hand. "Perhaps this is what you are looking for," he suggested.

"Thank you, Mr. Munro." Perrim took the slip of paper, hesitated and then added: "You didn't—er—read it?"

"Yes, yes," Don admitted calmly. "Yes, indeed, Mr. Perrim, I read it."

"Why did you read it?" barked Schnact. "It wasn't addressed to you."

"As for that, it wasn't addressed to you either, Schnact."

Munro turned his back on the big man.

"I apologize for reading you message," he said to Perrim. "I did it unconsciously. But as I *have* read it and happen to be in charge of the Rupan mine perhaps you may wish to tell me whether it has any bearing on the operation of the mine."

"No. Just a personal message, but —" Perrim hesitated and looked uneasily past the engineer to Schnact, as though seeking reassurance, then continued in a rather unsteady voice: "I am not at all satisfied with conditions up here. You are merely wasting time and money driving through to try to recover that lost vein. Just a foolish waste. And you have no discipline, Mr. Munro. Where are Hansen's men? Down in the town carousing while our good money—"

"That's contract work," Munro interrupted. "The more rock Hansen and his men pull, the more money they get, and if they pull no rock they get nothing. When they lay off there's no loss of money."

Perrim laughed nervously. "Perhaps it's just as well then," he declared. "We will save at least two days' pay for that crew. You should never have started that cross-cut. It is useless. The vein of ore has petered out altogether."

"Petered out!" repeated Don. "Why, who told you that?"

"I did," Schnact declared truculently, "*I did,* and what have *you* got to say about it?"

THE mining engineer's face flushed. His temper was rapidly rising, but he held himself in check.

"It's only a simple fault, Mr. Perrim," he said, ignoring Schnact. "The surface indications are clear—can't mistake them—and I worked the line out carefully. Another thirty feet—three days' work at most for the hard rock crew—and we'll be on the vein again. And we'll be loading the cars with the richest ore this company ever mined."

A loud, raucous laugh burst from Schnact. It shook Don Munro's rapidly diminishing restraint, but though the hot blood was pounding in his veins he managed to control his voice.

"Your *geologist* appears to find

that amusing," he suggested, and the emphasis he placed on the word geologist was a deliberate insult.

"It *is* funny," declared Schnact, "because it shows what a fool you are."

Munro continued to address himself to the smaller man with his back turned to Schnact.

"And your geologist's sense of humor," he added, "is quite as mysterious and quaint as his mineralogy."

Schnact caught his arm and pulled him around so that they faced each other.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"I mean that you know nothing whatever about geology and a good deal less than that about mining."

"Please, gentlemen—*please!*—don't let us have a scene," beseeched Perrim.

But Schnact made a sudden lunge toward the mine engineer, who was standing just outside the open door of the bunkhouse. Munro dodged the blow and, in the fraction of a second that the other was thrown off his balance by the force of his swing, he reached out, grasped Schnact by the collar and whirled him into the bunkhouse. With the other hand he slammed the door shut in the face of Perrim.

"YOUR first lesson in mining," he announced with a wide grin of satisfaction, "has to do with a bunkhouse and happenings therein."

Schnact tore off his tight-fitting coat. Munro also snatched off his coat and hurled it aside. They stood facing each other for a moment, sizing each other up.

Then suddenly Schnact leaped at the engineer and shot out a huge fist. Munro blocked the blow and landed a swift uppercut on his adversary's jaw. He was surprised at the solidity of that jaw. His blow was a heavy one, delivered with all his force, but it did not seem to have any effect.

A moment later the engineer received a second surprise. They sparred for an opening. He hooked his right to Schnact's head, then swiftly crossed with his left and landed again. But neither blow bothered Schnact.

Munro, becoming careless, stepped in and took one of Schnact's big fists just over the heart. The force of that blow nearly crumpled him up. He felt as if his ribs had caved in.

For a second he was dazed and almost helpless. He fell into a clinch and hung on desperately until the pounding of his heart eased up and his head began to clear.

He realized that he was up against a dangerous adversary. He had imagined from the flabby appearance of the face that the other was soft and out of condition; that the big muscles would be slow-moving and ineffective. He saw that he had underestimated the man's strength and fighting ability.

The thought came to him that it was strange he had been able to drag Schnact into the bunkhouse with so little effort. And then he understood. The alleged geologist was an iron man—a first-class fighting machine—from the waist up, but his legs were inadequate for the weight of his body. He was very slow on his feet. Seemed to be almost weak-kneed, Munro noted.

THE mine engineer immediately adopted new tactics.

He feinted and teased the big fellow until the latter swung viciously again and again. He dodged the blows, jumping back nimbly, or sidestepping swiftly. He kept Schnact on the move all the time, dodging here and there as the other aimed blows at him, darting in when he saw

an opportunity and landing a fist on the other's face or body.

None of these blows appeared to do any serious physical damage, but Schnact soon became half-blind with rage. He rushed after the engineer, becoming all the while more and more unsteady on his feet.

Munro hit him often, but without apparent effect. His swift footwork saved him from retaliation. Only now and then he felt the sting of a glancing blow which he did not quite succeed in dodging.

Munro dashed in and beat a rapid tattoo upon his opponent's face. The latter swayed backward and seemed about to fall. Don pressed in close to finish the job and Schnact's fist, swinging upward, caught him on the point of the jaw.

He went over like a log, his head striking the edge of a bunk as he fell. For a moment the bunkhouse seemed to be swaying about like the cabin of a ship in a storm and everything became blurred.

He rolled toward Schnact, reaching out to grasp his legs and pull him down. Dimly, he saw Schnact step back and pick up a small bench, swinging it up above his head. Then the bench came crashing down and black darkness fell over him. . . .

Don Munro struck out feebly, trying to breast the swift-rushing current that seemed to engulf him. Then he opened his eyes and stared into an upturned pail whence the torrent had come.

"Cold water is good—yes. He's come alive again."

The voice was familiar but the words came to him indistinctly as though from a great distance. He painfully dragged himself up to a sitting posture and gazed about him to discover that the pail was grasped in the massive hands of Jan Hansen. Standing around him watching him anxiously, was a group of hard rock men.

"You was out—out cold, Mr. Munro," Hansen told him. "We thought you was dead at first."

MUNRO stared up at the little circle of faces with a bewildered expression. There was a spot on his head that hurt him. He put his hand to it and found that his hair was matted with blood. The blood had streaked down one side of his face and he began to rub it off.

"Get more water, Ole," he heard Hansen order.

In a moment Ole Andersen was kneeling beside him.

"Here, boss, take this. It's a clean one."

He dipped the tail of a flannel shirt in the pail of water he had brought and handed it to the engineer. Munro rubbed it over his face and the cold water gradually began to revive his senses. He noted the soft glow of the Alaska twilight through the open door.

"Yes, I was out," he admitted. "Must have been out a long time."

He tried to remember what had happened. He knew he was in the Hansen bunkhouse. How had he got there? How had he come by that painful bump on his head? It didn't matter.

The hard rock men were back from the beach. That was the important thing. Now he could go ahead with the cross-cut. Yes, that was important because Perrim and Schnact—

Schnact! He remembered now. He had been fighting with Schnact and Schnact had hit him with something.

"That lousy——"

HE expressed his opinion of Schnact in language that was the familiar tongue of the hard rock crew. The men looked relieved and

approving. Ole chuckled noiselessly.

"The boss, he's good man," he remarked when Munro was forced to stop for lack of breath. "Whoever done it is goin' to get a bad time."

"It wasn't none o' my crew, Mr. Munro." There was anxiety in Hansen's voice.

"Of course not, Jan." Munro rose to his feet rather unsteadily. "It was Schnact. We fought over something or other, and he hit me when I was down. Hit me with—well, it felt as if the roof dropped down on me."

"Seen the boss anywhere?" It was the squeaky voice of old Dave Logan.

Dave hesitated in the doorway. No one, save the mine manager or the members of the crew, ever entered the Hansen bunkhouse without a very definite invitation.

"Here, Dave," Munro called.

"Come in," Hansen commanded.

"I got a letter for you," Dave announced as he stepped into the bunkhouse. Then he stopped, agape with astonishment, as he saw the blood-smeared engineer. "Sumpin' happened, mebbe?" he hazarded. He drew Hansen to one side. "I ain't read the letter, Mister," he whispered, "but I know what's in it. Everybody knows what that letter says. It ain't what you might call a pleasin' letter, so mebbe—"

"Let me have it, Dave," came in a crisp tone from Munro.

OLD Dave advanced, dragging a sheaf of papers from his pocket. Munro snatched them from him.

"Please, Mister, they ain't all for you," Dave protested feebly. "Some's tellergrams I'm a-goin' to take down to Cordova."

But Munro had torn open the first envelope that came to hand and was dragging out a yellow telegraph form. He read it through and emitted a long, shrill whistle.

"So that's the game," he muttered.

Slowly he scanned the faces of the hard rock men. In them he read staunch friendship and support. They were his allies. He know he could depend upon them.

"Listen to this," he said, and read the message out loud:

"Elmer Passmore,
The Mining Review,
San Francisco, Cal.
Careful survey by experts has disclosed Rupan lode exhausted Stop Impossible to continue operations profitably Stop Closing down immediately Stop Munro has resigned Stop Give this news to Associated Press but regard source as confidential for present Perrim."

PROFANE mutterings came from the men, shot through by weird expletives in old Dave's high-pitched, quavering voice.

Munro smiled as he noted their anger and bewilderment. He calmly proceeded to open the other messages and read them through. The hard rock men watched him expectantly.

"That first message tells the story," he announced after studying the other papers for a moment. "There's a wire to one John P. Ashford, Broad Street, New York, saying 'Action taken as per agreement,' and there's another to old Peter Brant, the president of the company, full of regrets—'Regret to advise you,' and 'regret conditions are such,' and so on.

"But the meat of it is the mine is being closed down." Munro paused and glanced once more over the papers in his hand. "That's all," he added, "except the letter to me, which informs me in very beautiful business language that I am a punk miner, and I have wasted a barrel of money on a hopeless proposition, and

my immediate resignation is very much desired."

The puzzled expression on the men's faces became more pronounced.

"They will close the mine—yes?" Ole asked.

"Why?—what for?" questioned Jan.

Old Dave shook his head mournfully. "I don't get it, Mister," he mumbled. "I don't savvy at all."

"Well, here's the low-down on it," Munro stated. "Perrim has gone in cahoots with this Ashford fellow in New York. He must be some sort of a stock manipulator, and—"

"Manip-what, Mister?" squeaked old Dave.

"Well, crook then," Munro amended. "Might as well use plain terms. They are rigging it between them to get control of the company. They know the mine is a valuable property, but they'll close it down. That will throw a thousand men out of work and bring the stock tumbling down to next to nothing because the Rupan is the only pay mine the company owns. Thousands of investors —good, honest folk who put their money in trusting the management—will be squeezed out.

"Old Brant will likely be forced out, too. Perrim and his gang will buy in quietly at one-tenth the real value of the stock. Then they'll reopen the mine, finish the cross-cut to the main lode and go booming along with the stock shooting up again and all the money in their pants pockets."

THAT'S right," agreed Hansen. "I can see it—yes! When that news gets out—"

"Well, it won't get out!" Don Munro ripped the words out angrily. Then in a quieter tone he continued: "Come here, Dave, and listen to me. I want you to go right down to the launch and put your gas engine on the fritz. Understand me? Break the ignition line somewhere where it can't be spotted, or do something to it so it can't be run. But leave it so you can fix it up again quickly if we need it."

"That's easy," Dave declared. "Say, Mister, I know that old piece o' junk like I was it's daddy."

"All right. Then stay by the launch and if Perrim or Schnact come around pretend to be trying to fix the engine. Don't tell 'em anything. Just be awfully sorry you can't run the boat. I'll keep the messages."

Dave started off briskly, but at the door he turned and hesitated for a moment.

"I think mebbe I'd ought to tell you sumpin'," he said. "There's hell poppin' in the camp. That there stenog'fer talked like he allus talks 'bout everythin' he learns, and all the camp knows what's in that letter."

"We heard it down at the beach," Hansen cut in. "That's why we beat it back here. What do *you* know?"

"Well, it seems like when the news 'bout closin' the mine came to git circulated 'round some, a bunch o' the men—mostly Bohunks an' breeds, and that kind—went to Perrim and Schnact, an' them two sorta passed the buck along to Mister Munro here. Told them it was all Mister Munro's fault some way—don't just 'xactly know how, but somehow."

"Did the men believe it?" asked Munro.

"Well, I reckon in a manner o' speakin' they did." Old Dave's voice cracked into a shrill, excited treble. "When I come down past the mine-head just now that there crazy Briggs feller was holdin' forth to a mob o' them, tellin' them they'd ought to lynch you or run you out o' camp."

MUNRO laughed, but nevertheless a feeling of uneasiness came to him. Briggs was a cockney Englishman from Prince Rupert with a gift for oratory of the inflammatory type. He was a born trouble maker. Recently he had made a number of communistic speeches at impromptu meetings down at the beach and had found sympathetic listeners among the more ignorant of the Rupan laborers. The engineer reflected that Briggs might easily cause serious trouble at this particular juncture. His speculation about this, however, was interrupted by old Dave's piping voice:

"I'll do just like you said," he promised, "but I'll fix it so I can start off right quick in case you want to make a get-away."

"Thanks, Dave, but I'm going to stick around."

At his words a murmur, that was like a suppressed cheer, came from the hard rock men. Don Munro felt a thrill of pride and confidence. With these great men of iron muscle to work for him, and if necessary fight by his side, he felt he had the whip hand. He could accomplish anything.

"We'll beat this game, boys," he said with a note of assurance in his voice. "The most important thing is to get that cross-cut finished so we'll be on the vein again. Just another thirty feet to go. Get your men down into the mine, Hansen."

In a moment the air was full of clothing as the men hastily threw off the garb of their social interludes, letting each piece lie where it fall, and donned their work clothes. One by one they finished this lightning change act and walked silently out of the bunkhouse.

Munro watched them with a smile. Suddenly the fierce throbbing pain in his head, of which he had been only dimly conscious before, began to increase in intensity. He felt weak and dizzy.

"Think I'll borrow one of your bunks for an hour or two, Jan," he said.

He might as well rest for a little while. There was nothing else he could do right now. He lay down in the nearest bunk. Hansen threw a blanket over him, knocked on the edge of the bunk for good luck, then followed the last of his men through the door.

DON MUNRO awoke with a start to find a large figure bending over him. Dusk had descended, the dusk that passes for summer night in the Northland. He could easily make out the big shape that was leaning into the bunk carefully pulling the blanket from him.

It was Schnact.

"Ah, our geological expert has returned," he said impassively. "I'm afraid I'm incapable at the moment of giving you the reception you deserve."

"Give me those messages," growled Schnact.

Munro ignored this.

"It was a good fight," he said reminiscently, "until you spoiled it by hitting me with—whatever you hit me with. I had understood it was to be conducted without the use of lethal weapons. Your action was a bit unfair, and, shall I say, uncouth?"

"Shut up! Give me those messages."

"Just now I am still feeling somewhat unsteady," the engineer continued. "But if you will have a little patience—wait, say, an hour or two—we will resume where we left off."

"Give me—"

"What messages?" Munro demanded sharply.

"You know what I mean and I'm going to get them," snarled the other.

"That old fool at the launch told me you had them."

"You lie! Dave wouldn't!"

"Well, he hasn't got them. I turned him inside out. The damned old idiot claims he can't start the launch. Claims he lost the messages. He—"

AH! I knew you were lying." Munro started to move out of the bunk, but in an instant Schnact's hands were at his throat, pushing him back.

"Call me a liar, will you!" he yelled, his voice shaking with wrath. "This time I'll finish you."

Munro squirmed about in the bunk like an eel and tore at the hands that gripped his throat. He could not break loose, however, and he battered wildly at the face that leered above him. He fought desperately, but Schnact still held on and Don, his breath shut off, felt as if his lungs would burst.

Then suddenly Schnact was catapulted into the bunk on top of him. The suddenness of it made him loosen his hold. Just as suddenly his legs were seized and he was jerked out of the bunk, hitting the puncheon floor with a jolt that seemed to shake the building.

For a moment the mine engineer saw a fierce struggle of giant forms rolling about on the floor and realized that some of the hard rock men had returned to the bunkhouse just in time.

Then he caught a glimpse of Schnact being carted bodily, cursing and struggling, to the door and hurled out into the night.

"And don't come back at all—never—no more!" the big Swede, Ole Andersen, roared after him. "This is Jan Hansen's bunkhouse and it ain't for you—never!"

Ole's hard rock pals chorused acclaim.

BUT Schnact did come back, and quickly. Ole had barely finished when there came a sudden thunderous sound followed by the shouting of many voices outside. The sound was caused by a shower of stones hitting the tin wall of the bunkhouse. This barrage was followed by a rush of a mob of several hundred men, Schnact and Briggs in their lead.

The hard rock men darted to the door and met the onslaught. Grim and silent, they stood before the entrance to the bunkhouse and awaited the tide of attackers.

Don Munro leaped from the bunk to join his volunteer bodyguard. But the sudden movement sent such a pain shooting through his head that he became sick and dizzy. For a moment or two he was obliged to stand clutching a table for support.

By the time he had recovered sufficiently to stumble to the door the men of the hard rock crew had repulsed the first mad rush and had cleared a little space before them.

The front rank of the attackers stood in a semi-circle around them, hesitating. Stones thundered against the tin wall. In the clear space an inert form bore testimony to the fighting prowess of the hard-hitting giants of the Hansen crew.

Munro's appearance was the signal for a sudden roar from the crowd, a medley of curses and threats. Indignation seized upon the mine engineer. These men whom he had treated kindly, to whom he had always given a square deal, had allowed themselves to be swayed by a blathering hothead and a villain who had thrown them out of work to serve his own selfish and crooked purposes.

They sought his life, the fools! Well, he still had a lot of life left in him. He would show them. Curi-

ously, as his anger rose his strength returned to him. The pain in his head was forgotten.

He was in fighting trim again.

THE mob rushed. Munro and his companions held them in check, hitting right and left, knocking heads together and hurling the attackers back. Occasionally there came the sharp crack of a revolver, but no one was hit.

Only a few of the invaders carried firearms and those who had them were firing wildly. After a few minutes of rough-and-tumble warfare the crowd fell back a few feet and the fighting subsided. A large figure squirmed through the mass of men and started forward.

"Let me have him!" Munro cried, leaping in front of one of his big allies who was moving to meet the attack.

Don had recognized Schnact. He had been looking for him since the start of the battle, but in the general mêlée had not happened to encounter him. With a snarl of rage Schnact dashed at him. Munro ducked a vicious swing and caught the other as he was off his balance, sending him reeling backward with a stiff jolt on the jaw.

Schnact appeared surprised by the blow. He hesitated for a second. Munro started for him, tripped on a stone and went hurtling forward. He grasped Schnact around the knees and the latter went shooting over him, coming down with a tremendous thud.

The mob surged forward, but their attack was spiritless and in a moment the hard rock men had beaten them back and were pounding away at them, driving them further and further away.

As Munro scrambled to his feet an idea flashed into his nimble brain. He had been a star tackle. Why not make use of the knowledge he had gained on the gridiron?

As soon as Schnact was back on his feet Munro dived again and slapped him to the ground. Schnact was slower coming up the second time. Then Don fooled him. He ducked as though he planned to tackle again and Schnact made a clumsy effort to evade him. But Munro, instead of diving this time, straightened up suddenly and whipped his right and left to his adversary's face.

Schnact swung wildly in turn and hit only air but nearly toppled himself over by the force of his swing. Putting the whole weight of his body behind the blow, Munro caught him on the side of the head and sent him crashing down. Schnact lay prone on the ground for a moment.

The mob surged forward. Munro found three men rushing at him. He stopped the first with his fist, dodged a blow that one of the others aimed at his head with a pick handle, then grasped the heavy hickory club and wrested it from the man's hands.

He laid about him lustily and the crowd gave before him. But Schnact had crawled away and was lost in the ranks of the attackers.

THE hard rock men had brought grief and pain to many of the invaders and again the enthusiasm of the mob cooled suddenly and there was a clear space in front of the bunkhouse door.

The engineer kept the pick handle swinging threateningly with one hand and held his other up for silence.

"Listen, men!" he shouted. The clamorings of the mob sank to an angry murmur. "Listen! I want to tell you something," he called loudly.

Briggs stepped out of the ranks of the men.

"We don't want to 'ear it, do we, mytes?" he yelled.

He hurled a stone at the engineer. As it whizzed past his head Munro leaped forward. His fist shot out and Briggs suddenly sprawled on the ground. Whining he crawled away on his hands and knees and took sanctuary behind the front rank of his fellow laborers.

For a moment there was comparative silence.

"The mine will not close," Munro declared in a loud voice. "I am running the Rupan and I say no. Now get to hell out of here!"

The men hesitated, looked about them for their leaders, then began to slink away. A few minutes later they were all gone. Munro sent his bodyguard back into the mine to join the crew working on the cross-cut, with the exception of Ole.

"We'll go down to the beach first, Ole," he stated, "and I'll let Doc Fraser patch me up a bit, then we'll look things over."

BEFORE they reached the town Don Munro had another idea. "I'll visit the Doc later," he murmured more to himself than to his big companion. "I haven't finished with Schnact yet. First thing is to find him."

He smiled at Ole whose face broke out into a wide sympathetic grin. "Maybe there'll be more work for the Doc after I meet Schnact."

"He made me ma-ad, that man—yes. When I finish with him Doc will have big job—yes."

"You'll let him alone. He's my pigeon. We'll go down to the launch. He'll be sure to turn up there."

But when they came to the rickety wharf there was no sign of old Dave or the launch. They searched the waterfront, thinking Dave might have moved the boat to evade Perrim and Schnact, but without success.

Then they came across a breed woman who had seen the launch start out from the wharf and head down the Arm with three men in it. It had left only a few minutes before, she told them. Evidently old Dave had disobeyed orders.

Munro felt a sudden wave of anger, which however, lasted only a moment. After all, Dave was an old man and Schnact was a brute. No doubt he had put the screws hard to the "skipper"—tortured him perhaps. He could not blame old Dave.

There was only one thing to do and that was to try to head off Perrim and Schnact at Cordova before they could send out their false report and catch a southbound boat. Failing that, he could at least wire the truth to Peter Brant from Cordova. But that would mean only a slim chance of frustrating the plans of the schemes.

HE knew how quickly and easily the stock market was influenced by unfavorable reports. Nevertheless, it was the only chance. The next round of the battle must be fought in Cordova.

He instructed the breed woman to find her husband, Emile Garneau, an expert waterman, and tell him to bring a canoe to the wharf and be ready to start for Cordova at once. Then he sent Ole to join the crew in the mine, went to the doctor's and had his wound hurriedly dressed, and returned to the wharf.

He found Garneau waiting for him there with a companion. "My woman she's tol' me you look ver' sick, boss," Emile explained, "so I bring wit' me Skeena Joe. He's good man wit' paddle. The water, wit' dis wind, she's ver' bad—bad like I don't never see her before—an' if maybe-

p'raps you don't feel so good it moch better you don' try for paddle."

Munro was grateful. He felt in no condition for a six-hour struggle through the wind-whipped waters of the Arm. He rested in the center of the canoe while Emile and Joe forced it along with great sweeping strokes of the paddles.

Once he fell asleep, but awoke abruptly with Skeena Joe's paddle prodding him in the back.

"Don't do dat, boss," Joe warned. "You pretty-near almos' tip dat canoe." Then came a low laugh which rose to a merry shout, and he added: "Dat's be good joke on Emile. 'cos he can't swim at all."

THE incident aroused Don Munro from the lethargy into which he had fallen. Suddenly he realized the importance of speed. He burned with impatience and insisted upon spelling his two companions at the paddle.

Every half hour or so they ran into shelter behind a point while they changed places, and with one fresh paddle thus coming into action at quick intervals they made rapid progress.

They were gliding through the comparatively sheltered waters of Orca Inlet. Munro watched the orderly rows of well-built houses drawing closer as they approached the city of Cordova. The last half mile seemed interminable.

At last they reached the little dock where the company launch always tied up. There was no sign of Dave or his boat.

Munro hurried to the cable office. The clerk on duty had seen nothing of old Dave and no message had been filed by Perrim or Schnact. He had Emile and Joe scout the waterfront while he visited the hotels.

At none of them did he find any trace of the men he sought. Later his paddlers reported there was no sign at any of the wharves of the arrival of the launch.

The Rupan engineer was puzzled. The launch could make faster time than a canoe and it must have had at least half an hour's start on them. Nevertheless, they had arrived before it. Perhaps something had happened to the launch. It might have broken down on the way.

In any event, it was certain that Perrim and Schnact had not as yet arrived in Cordova. That was a break. All he could do was to await their arrival.

FOR two days Munro and his men kept careful watch along the waterfront and at the cable station, but there was no sign of the launch or of any of its three occupants. Then he could stand the suspense no longer. Evidently the launch had floundered in the rough weather or was lying disabled in some inlet or cove in Cordova.

Early in the morning of the third day they set out for Rupan. Munro was in a fever to get back. He spelled his men at the paddles and they made fast time.

As the canoe touched the little wharf at Rupan, Munro leaped out and hurried through the town to the steep road that wound upward to the mine buildings. At the mine-head he was quickly surrounded by an excited group—office workers, mine captains, muckers, hard rock men, enginemen.

They were all talking at once. "Back on the main lode." . . . . "Congratulations, Mr. Munro." . . . "It's rich—richest ore in Alaska." . . . "You were right." . . . "It's a darb all right." . . . "Vein must be forty-foot thick."

He shook hands until his arm was

limp, then managed to escape to his office.

They brought him the samples and he could see at a glance that his men had not exaggerated the value of the ore.

"Just grab samples," said one of the mine bosses, "taken from the cars as they passed me. We're beginnin' to take it out."

Munro knew that the ore from the retrieved vein would assay high. Well, the Rupan would not close now. That was settled anyway. First thing to do was notify the president of the company. Joe and Emile would have to make another trip to Cordova in the canoe.

HE sent one of the office hands to find them. A few minutes later, while he was busy writing the message to Brant, Emile came into the office, cap in hand.

"The launch she's come back all right, boss," he announced. "Dat ol' Dave, he's send me to say please could you come down. He's can't come up, ol' Dave, so maybe-p'raps you come down."

Munro hastened to the wharf. He saw Dave sitting in the stern of the launch calmly puffing his pipe. There was no sign of Perrim or Schnact. Evidently Dave had dropped them off in Cordova just after the canoe had left for home and had made good speed back. The San Francisco men were probably on a southbound boat now, having sent their messages ahead of them. If only he had waited in Cordova. If only Dave had obeyed orders.

Yet as he looked at the old man Don checked the words of reproach that came to his lips. Dave looked old and feeble as he sat there humped up in an attitude of utter weariness. What chance had the old man of opposing the will of such a man as Schnact?

"I was delayed, Mister, in a manner o' speakin'," Dave announced as the engineer came up to the wharf.

"Did you leave them in Cordova?"

Old Dave shook his head. "Ain't been to Cordova."

"Well, where are they, then—Perrim and Schnact?"

Dave took his pipe from his mouth and pointed the stem at the door of the little cabin. "In there," he stated, "layin' down."

DON jumped into the launch and opened the cabin door. Perrim and Schnact were wedged tightly into the little room. They were trussed up with so much rope they looked like a couple of mummies. Growls and curses came from Schnact as Munro looked in at them while the smaller man began to whine.

Then suddenly Perrim launched forth in a vehement tirade against his big companion. "Cheap New York crook. . . . Jailbird. . . . Dirty thug," were a few of the expressions the engineer caught before Schnact's harsh voice boomed out in reply, roundly cursing the little man.

"Better shut the door, Mister," Dave advised. "They ain't et nothin' today an' they ain't, as you say, right pleasant comp'ny just now."

He puffed on the pipe meditatively for a moment, then continued: "I meant to do just like you told me, Mister, but it come to me suddenlike that mebbe, you bein' purty busy, it'd be a sight better if them two city galoots was to be out o' the way for a spell, seein' as they was startin' riots on you an' cuttin' up bad in a manner o' speakin'. So after they went away first time—when they found I didn't have them messages—I got some grub an' blankets aboard, an' fixed up the old engine, an' when they came back after the

rumpus up to Hansen's I started out with 'em.

"But, Mister"—old Dave paused and allowed one eyelid to drop slowly—"we was only just started, as you might say, when that danged old engine went flooey again. We was right handy to a little bay where there was quiet water, so I ran in an' anchored an' tried to fix her up. The big feller, he cussed me sumpin' awful, but 'fore long he got tired o' that an' started helpin' me fix the engine.

AN' that was very obligin' of him, in a manner o' speakin,' 'cause he got down on his knees with his back to me, which was convenient-like for me. I soaked him on the head with a pick-handle I'd brung along for that there purpose, an' he went right out without no bother at all. Then I took his gun an' scared the little feller with it so bad that he was right willin' to help me tie up the big one an' drag him into the cabin.

"After that I didn't have no trouble tyin' up the little feller, an' I went ashore an' made camp. I fed 'em the first day, but the grub wasn't holdin' out any too good, bein' as I was purty hungry myself, an' anyhow they never said no thanks for what I give 'em. They just kep' cussin' me in an ungrateful way—so I et the rest o' the grub myself an' I guess mebbe they're feelin' some hungry by now."

Munro went into the cabin and cut the ropes that bound Perrim. Then he passed him out to Dave, who hoisted the little man, completely exhausted both physically and in spirit, to the wharf. Then the engineer freed Schnact. The latter glared at him and cursed, but when the last piece of rope was loosened he crawled hastily out of the cabin.

"You helped this old fool tie me up, Perrim, you dirty double-crosser. I'll get you!" With a string of oaths he started for Perrim, but Munro pulled him back.

Perrim darted away. When he had reached a safe distance he turned.

"I'll put you in prison," he screamed, shaking with fear and anger. "I know enough about you to send you to prison for life."

"Go and get something to eat and then come to my office, Perrim," Munro ordered. Then he turned to Schnact. "You had better rest up a bit, Schnact, and get some grub into you. I have a little matter to settle with you after I finish with Perrim."

BUT Schnact made a sudden leap to the wharf where Dave was standing. He threw his arms around the old man, holding him for a moment while he fumbled for his pocket. With a roar of triumph he came away with his gun in his hand, hitting Dave a cruel blow in the face as he stepped back.

Old Dave crumpled down on the wharf. Schnact whirled and fired. But the engineers' quick eye had caught the gleam of the revolver as Schnact pulled it from old Dave's pocket.

He dropped a fraction of a second before the report came and the bullet whizzed over his head. His hand came into contact with the pick-handle lying on the floor of the cockpit.

As he straightened up again he hurled it and the heavy club struck Schnact's hand just as the latter fired again. The second bullet went wild and the revolver clattered to the wharf.

Schnact stooped to recover the gun and with a flying leap Munro was upon him. The rickety old wharf bent and swayed as they rolled over and over, pounding viciously at each other. Schnact was on top and he

held the engineer for a second with one hand on his throat while he reached out for the gun. With a superhuman effort Munro broke loose and kicked the gun into the water just as Schnact's fingers were almost upon it.

They were on their feet again, Munro with his back to the launch almost at the edge of the wharf. Schnact rushed for him. Don made a sudden dive, grasped Schnact around the legs and whirled him over his shoulder. Schnact went hurtling into the cockpit of the boat and lay there an inert mass.

Munro leaped into the launch after him and stood over him for a moment, ready to continue the battle. But Schnact did not stir. His head had struck the fly-wheel of the engine and he was unconscious.

Old Dave was sitting up on the wharf looking about him in a dazed fashion. Munro helped him to his feet.

"Come on, Dave," he urged. "Pull yourself together. That crook won't bother us for a while."

He put his arm around the old man and started slowly up the road leading to the bunkhouses.

AN HOUR later Perrim sat in Don Munro's office facing the engineer. His face was chalk-white and the corners of his mouth twitched nervously. Word had just come that the launch had disappeared and Schnact with it. For a long moment Perrim waited for Munro to speak, staring at him apprehensively.

"He's wanted in New York for manslaughter—I know that," the little man burst out suddenly. "That's why Ashford sent him up here — to get him out of the way. He should be in prison, the crook!"

Munro pulled a crumpled piece of paper out of his pocket and spread it out on the desk before him. "Careful survey by experts has disclosed Rupan lode exhausted," he read aloud. "Your name is signed to that message, Perrim. You called him an expert. Now, speaking of going to prison—"

"I got into their hands, Mr. Munro." Perrim's voice trembled. "I owed Ashford money — a lot of money. He proposed the scheme. He sent Schnact to bully me into going through with it. I was afraid of him. I'm sorry—I—" His voice trailed off in a fluttering whisper.

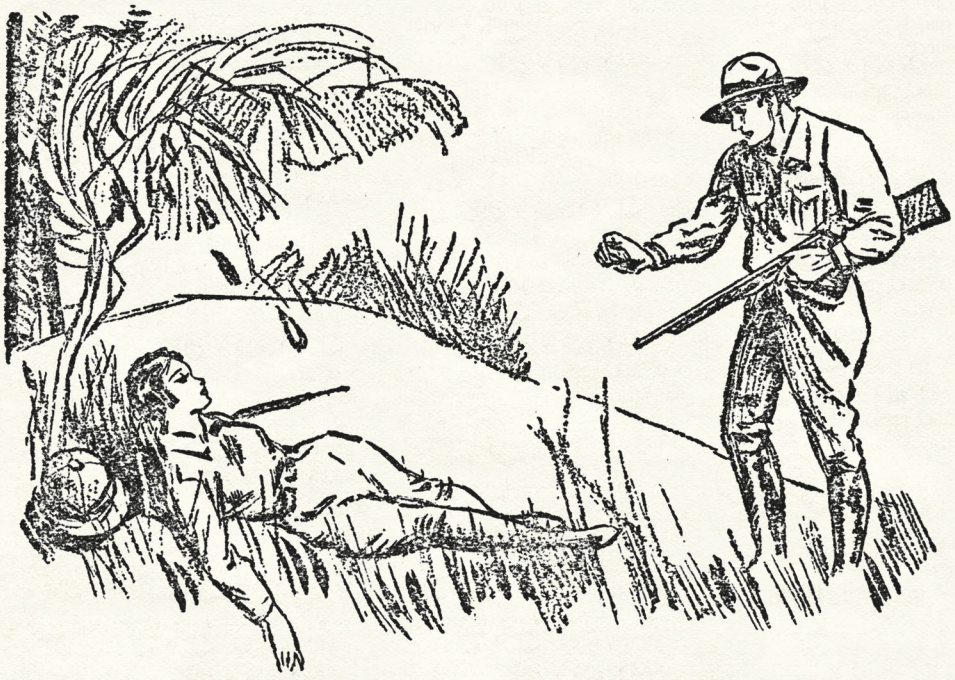
Perrim squirmed under the engineer's searching glance.

"I believe you," Munro said at length. He pointed to the sample on the desk. "Take a look at that ore. It's from the recovered lode and you can take my word for it there's enough in sight to keep the Rupan running on a paying basis for years to come. Perhaps you'd like to change that message to Mr. Brant. I'll call the stenographer."

"Glad to advise Rupan lode recovered," Perrim dictated in a low voice. "Ore very high grade Stop Large quantity in sight Stop All due to splendid work of Munro."

He paused and looked up at the engineer with tears in his eyes. "And your splendid generosity, so far as I am concerned," he murmured.

The Butterfly *of* Death



Its Iridescent Wings Are a Signal of Doom in This Dramatic Jungle Story

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

Author of "Conrad the Saxon," "The River of Darkness," etc.

I

BELIEVE me, Mr. Easton, I would not deceive a man, least of all when there is a toss-up between life and death," said Dr. Raymond Sartoris, meeting the grave, penetrating scrutiny of the young man seated in his study with a bold, unwavering eye and a bland smile.

"You are about to ask why a professional naturalist like me does not do his own hunting and discovering, and why I am so willing to pay the extravagant reward of ten thousand dollars for two specimens of the *Morpho eros.* I shall try to make it all clear to you."

"Yes, I am naturally curious about it," assented Howard Easton quietly, not greatly impressed by the entomologist's show of frankness and honesty.

"The habitat of the *eros,*" Sartoris went on earnestly, lowering his voice to a note of mystery, "is a particularly rich field for entomologists, ornithologists and botanists. There are undiscovered birds there, and orchids that would sell for their weight in

gold—yes, in platinum. But naturalists are as tenacious of life as all other mortals, Mr. Easton—are they not? Well, I must tell you, in all fairness, that more men have gone into that alluring paradise than have come out of it."

"Bad air and fevers?" murmured the visitor rather casually.

The scientist nodded solemnly.

"Among other perils; yes, Mr. Easton. But explorers are not often stopped by bad air and fever. The fauna of the Quezalgalpa district include human beasts who are more to be dreaded than any of the four-footed or crawling vermin thereabouts. The little fever camp they call Quezalgalpa is the trade center. It has a floating population of cut-throats, and if you leave the village with anything less than a machine-gun battery for an escort, you'll do well to maintain a rear guard."

HOWARD EASTON smiled a little skeptically.

"It must be a desperate crew, Doctor, if they live by robbing naturalists. My tent and gun are about the most precious things I take into the jungle."

Sartoris scowled, resenting any implied doubt.

"The natives there are the most vicious savages I've ever known," he explained. "And you know yourself that the morale of a district may be controlled and swayed by one intelligent man. There is a naturalist living there—*existing* would be the better word. His name is Anatole Lastour. He is the living example of the dog in the manger. You know that a scientist may become a megalomaniac; such cases are not uncommon. Lastour is crazy, and he dominates the natives with the genius of a fiend."

"I've met explorers who were extremely jealous of competition," said Easton, taking the earnestness of the doctor lightly.

"Ha! Jealous of competition, yes! —but not to the point of inhuman cruelty and murder! It takes insanity for that!"

Sartoris got up, impatiently tore off his cravat and collar, and unbuttoned his shirt. He was a large man, square-shouldered and powerful; swarthy-skinned, with black hair and beard, and the whites of his eyes jaundiced to blood-shot yellow.

"Will you be good enough to look at this?" he challenged, laying bare his right shoulder and pointing to a jagged white scar an inch below the clavicle. "By lacerating me, and probing with butcher-knives, they removed the bullet from the lung. It was Lastour's bullet, if you please. Jealous of competition, eh? Lastour shot to kill, because I had discovered the *Morpho eros* in his jungle—because I had named it, and was about to announce my discovery.

LASTOUR has a veritable museum of his own discoveries in his hut, but he will not leave the jungle. A mad man! He shot me and drove me into the jungle to die. I had the vitality of a giant; I survived. But my vitality is impaired; my resistance to hardship and disease is gone. I cannot go back to *get* Lastour."

"So you want me to get your *Morpho* butterfly, Doctor Sartoris, and also get this man Lastour?" murmured Easton, the corners of his mobile mouth twitching slightly.

"Don't misunderstand me. Mr. Easton—don't misjudge me. I harbor no grudge against a lunatic. I only want *you* to defend yourself and get me the butterfly—two perfect specimens, male and female."

"Your proposal is this, as I understand it," said Easton gravely: "I am to stake myself for a trip to Quezalgalpa, to go into the jungle and look

for a practically unknown butterfly of the genus *Morpho*. If I succeed in getting it, I'm to take the still more remote chance of getting back to Quezalgalpa alive, according to your own account of the hazards. If I'm completely successful, you will pay me ten thousand dollars for two specimens of the butterfly, provided they conform to your description and sketches published in the journal of the American Entomological Society."

Sartoris nodded, with beaming gratification. "You will do it, then?"

"Not while in full possession of my faculties, Doctor Sartoris!" was the answer, uttered with sharp emphasis.

"My faith!" cried the entomologist, amazed and hurt, "is there no longer any element of sport in our scientific work? I wrote to you, Mr. Easton, and asked you to come here, because you have an enviable reputation, for a young man. Your published report of the expedition to Borneo was excellent, and I noticed in the newspapers at the time that you had serious trouble with natives, and came out with a record for bravery and good judgment. Now you talk about taking chances; you seem to be as cautious as a tradesman. What in the world would you require of me, Mr. Easton?"

"I have been figuring it out tentatively," said the younger man. "I'd be willing to leave here with a thousand dollars of your money in my pocket, and furnish what more I might need from my own funds."

SARTORIS rolled his eyes and waved his hands in the air distractedly, but Easton went on without giving him a chance to interrupt the speech.

"As for the payment of the ten thousand , a bond might be acceptable security, but I might want the money when I come out of the jungle; that is, without any appreciable delay. You might deposit it with the American consul at Teguzillo, with a description and sketches of the specimens for identification."

"Great heavens; you talk as if I were a wealthy and prodigal amateur collector! What if I should place the money with the consul, and then die before you returned?"

"And what if I secured the specimens, and then died before I could come here to collect the ten thousand, Doctor Sartoris?"

"I am not quite such an easy mark!" declared the naturalist heatedly.

"Then there's no further discussion," said Easton, rising and taking his hat and walking-stick from the table.

"Wait! Don't be so childish and impetuous, my friend. I desire your services, but I am surprised to find you so—so commercial. However, I will give you a thousand dollars, and deposit nine thousand with the consul at Teguzillo."

"Ten thousand!"

"Oh! I cannot haggle with you! Ten thousand, then."

"The American consul will notify me by cable when the money has been deposited with him, before I start," said Easton.

II

A MONTH later the *S. S. Melton Castle* hove to off the tiny harbor of Taguzillo, and Howard Easton was rowed ashore in a small boat, with his light baggage and collecting paraphernalia. He was accompanied by one servant, a black boy from San Domingo, who had served him efficiently during a winter in the Caribbees.

He called on the United States consul, Felix O'Grady, at once, and found him vastly interested and amused over the amount of money posted for two little blue butterflies.

"But that Doctor Sartoris is a sharp fellow, at that," he observed. "I saw quite a bit of 'im when he was down here, and I've an idea you're not often caught napping yourself, Mr. Easton, or you'd never 'a' struck such a bargain as that with 'im. And here's just a bit of a friendly tip by the way: I'd recommend that you mention his name as seldom as possible hereabouts, especially in Quezalgalpa. The man's not just what you might call extremely popular."

Easton smiled understandingly.

"Sartoris warned me to watch my step in this district. He said it was infested with cut-throats."

"I wouldn't go for to say that exactly. We don't make out to get the upper crust of society in these parts, but I've been doing business of all sorts here for the past eleven years, and I'm still alive—though I have my own doubts o' that sometimes, when we don't get a steamer for three months together."

"I have to hire a bunch of Indians or blacks before I start into the jungle," said Easton.

"Take 'em from here," said the consul readily. "They'll be a lazy, worthless lot anyhow, but the boys around here see more white men; they've a bit more respect for a fist or the toe of a boot."

WITH the help of his servant, Julio, Easton enlisted a squad of nine men: six blacks, and three Oripala Indians. Julio stood six feet and carried two hundred and forty pounds of muscle and bone, and he hired no man that was his superior in bulk or strength.

The party of eleven moved up the river with their boxes and equipment in a motor scow, asthmatic with age and ill-treatment, but still serviceable on the shallow, sluggish stream. They camped on the shore the first night, with Julio on guard to discourage desertions, and late in the afternoon of the second day they disembarked, without rejoicing or celebration, at the village of Quezalgalpa.

There was a score of palm-thatched huts, and half a dozen more pretentious dwellings of battened boards with warped tin roofs. Three rambling, ramshackle storehouses stood by the river bank, and from these the meager exports of the district were occasionally sent down the river to the warehouses at Tuguzillo.

The only white man in sight as Easton stepped ashore was a cadaverous fellow of doubtful age, standing a little way off and regarding the new arrivals with what might have been taken for disfavor, if his face had not held so much of the pathetic indifference of the chronic fever victim.

His thin black hair was matted on his forehead under the brim of a tattered straw hat that was pushed back on his head; a wisp of a mustache straggled over his thin lips like wilted corn silk; his skin and the whites of his eyes were saffron hued. He wore a suit of white drill, rumpled, but fairly clean, flapped upon a scarecrow frame of parchment-covered bones.

Easton touched the brim of his sun helmet in a friendly salute as he went forward.

"My name's Easton," he said. "I'm from the States. Are you living here?"

"I'm here," answered the man. "Can't seem to get away."

HE spoke like an American, but with a barely discernible trace of French accent, and Easton was not surprised when he added:

"My name is Lastour. I am a naturalist."

"So am I," Easton responded cheerfully. "I've come here collecting, you see."

"Collecting what?"

"Lepidoptera: I'm after some of your nymphalid butterflies."

"Come over to my shack, and rest," sighed the man, as his knees began to shake with weakness.

He led the way to one of the smallest of the tin-roofed shacks, and waved Easton to a chair on a narrow veranda, then brought two bottles and some glasses.

"Rum or swizzle?"

"Swizzle, thanks. I'm rather shy of rum in the tropics."

LASTOUR poured a generous measure of the punch, then gave himself an even more generous one of raw Jamaica rum.

"I'm like most of the exiles here," he said. "We start on water with a little rum, then change to rum with a little water. I'm in the third and last stage: I can't get any rum that's strong enough."

"I've seen your name in print, I believe," Easton said diplomatically, hoping to form an estimate of the man's intellect and his mental condition.

"I published a paper on the diurnal lepidoptera of this region," responded Lastour, a note of bitterness stealing into his voice, "and they had the effrontery to edit out my discovery of a new variety which I named *Morpho eros*."

He was obviously high-strung and abnormally nervous, but he appeared sane enough for any man in such a situation. Easton decided to throw down his cards and take the consequences.

"I have some sketches of the *eros*, given me by Doctor Raymond Sartoris," he said quietly.

Lastour tottered to his feet, and his eyes were wild.

"Sartoris stole one of my specimens! I know it was by his influence that the announcement of my discovery was suppressed. You are a friend of his?"

Easton was making a quick estimate of the man, and put him down for a hard-drinking, embittered derelict of a type with which the jungles and beaches of the tropics are littered.

"I'm not well acquainted with Doctor Sartoris," he answered, "but he sent me here to collect specimens for him."

LASTOUR'S next action went far to bear out the doubts of his sanity. He pounced upon the untasted glass of swizzle in front of his guest, and jerked it away.

"I should have asked questions before I offered you my hospitality," he cried furiously, and dashed the glass to the floor.

"Come, now, Mr. Lastour," said Easton, "my frankness should recommend me to your confidence. I've concealed nothing from you. My reputation in scientific circles is probably quite as good as yours, and I try to treat everybody fairly. Your quarrel with Sartoris is a matter between you and him, and I'll have nothing to do with it. We're two white men, almost alone in an unfriendly jungle, and I'd rather have you for a friend than an enemy."

"Get away from me and my house!" the man yelled fiercely, in a shrill, hysterical treble, and shook so violently that Easton feared dire results from the reaction.

The guest got up, shaking his head regretfully, and walked the length of the veranda; and in a fleeting glimpse of the shack's interior, through the half-open door, he saw a startling conglomeration of the wonders of that isolated jungle. Dried bird skins hung on the walls, dazzling the eye with radiant plumage; setting-boards, suspended out of the reach of ants, displayed moths as large as bats, and butterflies of all the exquisite hues

of precious stones; cattleya orchids in all the shades of purple, crimson, mauve, and gold, bloomed in baskets hanging from the roof.

It was hard to go on without pausing for a longer look, to see what priceless treasures might be there, but he hurried away from the muttered threats and imprecations of the maddened host.

On the crooked path that led to the river he met a tall, lithe Indian of the Oripala type, carrying a rifle and wearing a half-filled cartridge belt from which a machete was slung.

"Honda!" shrieked the raving Lastour; and as the Indian halted, startled and alert, he poured forth a torrent of wild gibberish in some native dialect.

At a turn of the path Easton paused and looked back. The Indian was staring after him intently, while Lastour danced about him in a frenzy, gesticulating and pointing toward the young naturalist in a manner which could mean nothing less than war to the knife.

III

EASTON spent an hour in weeding out everything from his equipment that was not plainly necessary under the prevailing conditions, then distributed the boxes and bundles impartially among the nine carriers, and started them on the march. He took no guide, for his destination was the playground of the blue butterfly he sought, and a native guide would merely look wise and lead him on a wild-goose chase.

The men marched in single file, the jungle-wise Julio leading, and the white man at the rear. Toward evening they were overtaken by Lastour's Indian, Honda, and Easton greeted him, but got no response. He was traveling swiftly on some errand through the trackless wilderness, and scarcely broke his long, free stride in passing.

As the sudden fall of tropical darkness approached, Julio pitched four waterproof shelter tents in a clearing surrounded with stunted logwood, ironwood, and cedars, and lighted a smudge to discourage mosquitoes from foraging. The carriers were far from trustworthy, and Easton and Julio took turns at mounting guard through the night.

WHILE he smoked his pipe through the second period of his guard duty, the alert Julio, who could hear more while sleeping than a white man could hear awake, stirred uneasily.

"Somebody come!" he whispered. "No wild pig. Something wit' two feet."

He touched the rifle at his side, and as Easton nodded assent, he rose suddenly to a sitting posture and fired into the darkness, apparently aiming toward a definite point, though the white man could hear and see nothing.

Instantly there was a sound of swift retreat through the undergrowth, and the carriers started up in blind panic, ready to stampede. Julio kicked one in a tender spot, cuffed another smartly, and bullied them into silence and order.

"It was Honda again," Easton remarked. "He's watching us, and he's civilized enough not to be afraid of the jungle night. Probably as capable a thief as most of these boys, and Lastour wouldn't stop him."

At dawn they marched directly into the denser, wilder jungle, where gaudy, bizarre flowers splashed the landscape with riots of color, and strange birds and insects flocked to the lure of the pungent, almost intoxicating perfume.

Easton had a long-handled net

ready, and one of the boys attended him with collecting kits.

Rare swallowtails and other winged gems fluttered over his head, and he reluctantly let them pass, keeping on the alert for the shimmering, iridescent blue of the *Morpho* genus.

Most of the coveted butterflies of the tropics are rare because they are difficult of capture, flying high and seldom settling to the ground, and the hunter used his binoculars frequently, surveying the upper reaches of the jungle.

AT NOON Julio discovered an abandoned camp site, and said it had been occupied by a small party during the previous night. The logwood and gum harvesters made permanent camps as a rule, so Easton decided that another collector might be afield—despite the vigilance of the hostile Lastour and his warlike Indian henchman.

Two hundred yards from the camp Julio discovered also a bamboo ladder, built into the trunk of a hundred-foot palm tree, and they could see a narrow scaffold at the top of the tree. It was clearly one of the ladders employed by collectors in the jungle to reach the high flyers that feed on the parisitical flowers of the giant palms, and Easton tested it with his weight, then took his chances of reaching the top safely, followed by the anxious eyes of his man.

He found a secure seat on the small platform, and viewed the rolling sea of verdure below his perch and a shining blue lagoon half a mile away.

A rare black-and-gold swallowtail poised itself above an orchid within his reach, and he swung his net and captured it. Then, as he twirled the net to envelop it securely, a rifle cracked in the thick jungle below, a bullet hummed close to his head, and a cluster of purple orchids fell on the platform, clipped from their stem.

Julio and the carriers set up a clamor below, but Easton waved his hand reassuringly and scrambled down the long ladder. On the ground he handed Julio his net and took the rifle.

"I'm after a butterfly," he said grimly, "but first of all I'm going to get the fellow that fired that shot."

The negro was usually free with comment and advice, but the look in his master's eyes awed him and he was silent. Presently he vented his emotion in sundry orders and threats to the excited carriers, and set the procession in brisk motion as Easton strode resolutely into the jungle.

"If we had reliable boys," said the white man, "we could spread out and find that bushwhacker before dark. I've got to depend on you, Julio, and the man may get us in range before we see him."

"Somebody jes' reck'n you go up de ladder, an' dey layin' for you all de time," said Julio gravely.

EASTON led the party now, his eyes searching every vista of the forest. To perils under foot he paid little heed. The plentiful coral snake, or something yet more deadly, might lie in his path, but he never lowered his glance, and he held the rifle ready.

From a dense thicket of Spanish cedar, less than a hundred yards ahead, came a shot, and Julio close behind his master, shrieked and fell backward with a crash.

Like an echo to the shot sounded the report of Easton's rifle, and he charged into the ambush, reckless of consequences.

Honda, the tall Indian, leaped out from the farther side of the thicket and ran like a deer. The white man, dashing in pursuit, fired again, but without effect. He pumped the rifle frantically, and ran on, though he caught only fleeting glimpses of the fugitive through the trees.

Honda let out a loud cry, evidently for help, and it was answered quickly from a distance by a shrill voice; so Honda was not alone in his murderous operations.

Easton, however, only ran the faster. Julio's cry had been that of a man stricken with death, and the master was full of rage and bitterness.

The jungle opened out to a clearing and the sun grew brighter. Honda appeared in an open space, and Easton halted and fired with grim purpose.

THE Indian pitched forward and lay prone, without moving; and then Easton's eye caught the flash of a white sun helmet far ahead.

At the same moment a rifle cracked and a chip of tree bark hit Easton's face. He took cover from the sharpshooter and watched eagerly for the new enemy. Three more shots came, but they did not find him. Then he saw the helmet once more, and he aimed below it with a steady hand and squeezed the trigger.

The report was followed by a shriek, and there was no answering shot. The cry might be a trick, he thought, but he was eager to meet the unknown foe, and he held the rifle ready and went forward.

Suddenly, he came upon two tents, with camp equipment scattered around them, but there was no living thing in sight except parrots, humming birds, and butterflies.

Fifty feet from the camp, however, he found the results of his last shot. The wearer of the white helmet lay in a tangle of low undergrowth, groaning faintly, with a small brown hand clutching a bleeding right elbow. The figure was slight and boyish, and as he went closer, a puzzled frown knitting his brows, he uttered a cry of consternation.

The fallen enemy was in khaki, with full-sprung riding breeches, and leather puttees, but the face was beardless and the hair escaped from the helmet in brown ringlets. The avenger's duel had been fought out with a woman.

IV

THE amazon was a girl in the middle twenties, slim, well formed, and deeply tanned by jungle life. She turned her head as Easton came near, her brown eyes flashing fire, and the face was lovely in spite of grimaces of pain and rage.

Easton was both horrified and angry, and felt that he was hoaxed into a situation outrageous and humiliating.

He lifted the girl in his arms, paying no heed to her savage protests, and carried her to the little camp where he placed her on a bed-sack and examined the wounded arm. The bullet had passed through it cleanly, and there was nothing to do but dress the wound.

"Where do you keep your medicine kit?" he asked bluntly.

The girl glared at him malevolently, but glanced about the clearing.

"It's gone," she said sullenly. "Your men, I suppose, have looted the camp."

He made no reply, but washed the wound with water from a canteen and bandaged it with a handkerchief.

"Thanks!" she blurted out fiercely. "You're very kind—for a man who hunts butterflies with a rifle — and shoots human beings who get in his way. Raymond Sartoris would do it, and you're one of his kind!"

"I've no apology to make," said Easton curtly. "When I'm fired on from ambush, I can't wait to learn the sex of the enemy before defending myself. And I'm not one of Sartoris's kind, by the way: I came to this damnable place peaceably, but a man named Lastour, at Quezalgalpa, de-

clared war. I don't know who you are, or what—"

"I'M Anatole Lastour's sister," she said coldly, but a little more calmly. "I came out from New Orleans to take him home, but he wouldn't go. I've been helping him in his work, trying to restore him to a normal condition, but that devil, Sartoris came here and nearly drove him mad. People make their own laws in the Oripala country, and it seems that educated men 'go native' and lose their self-respect. Raymond Sartoris tried to steal my brother's specimens; and he tried to steal me, too. He wouldn't dare come here again, but the Indian, Honda, told me that he had sent you to finish his dirty work."

"You're a very daring young woman," said Easton, "to come out here to hunt your enemies, alone."

"Don't be a fool!" she retorted. "I didn't know anything about you till this morning. Honda met me and told me that war was declared again. I've been fifty miles away, trying to get medicine from a mission for my brother."

"Well, I know very little about Sartoris, but I'm forming an opinion," said the young man. "I haven't seen a specimen of the trouble-making *Morpho eros,* and I'm not sure that I care to, now. If you can walk, I'll try to find the way back to Quezalgalpa. My bearers are scattered, and I'm afraid my servant is dead. We ought to get out of this beastly jungle before night; it's getting dark already."

"You've lost track of the time," she said. "It's not late, but there's a tempest coming on. Do you know anything about tropical storms?"

"Too much!" he exclaimed, with sudden realization, as a vast sheet of lightning blinded him, and thunder came like a salvo from a mortar battery.

He jumped for the rolled tent flaps and tied them down in frantic haste, but the palms were bending and lashing in the racing gale, and as he thrust the girl inside the tent the clouds opened and poured a deluge upon the jungle.

Down went the tent, and he extricated the girl from the wreck, wrapped his waterproof jacket around her, and carried her to the middle of the clearing, where there was the least danger from falling trees and flying debris.

The torrent was splashing about his knees, and he held her in his arms and braced himself against the fury of the storm.

As the sudden darkness gave way as suddenly to gray light, and the gale abated, the girl raised her head and looked at the man. He was a picture of wretchedness, and his teeth were chattering as he was racked with a chill.

"You were kind," she said, with a touch of contrition. "Do you know what it means for you? If you don't get quinine today, there'll be weeks of fever and sickness for you."

"I've been through all that before," he replied, setting his jaws and trying to steady himself.

"Then I'm all the more grateful," she added. "Now let me down; I can stand as well as you can."

THE sky turned to primrose, orange, and gold, and shafts of sunlight touched the treetops and set them sparkling. The jungle would rally and appear as it had before, in another day, but it was a scene of ruin. The trees were bent and broken, dead birds lay on the ground, and giant beetles and moths scrawled along the soggy ground, the winged creatures fanning their bedraggled wings.

"Look!" cried the girl. "The *eros* —there on the tree!"

On the trunk of a palm Easton saw flashes of blue fire. The butterfly was crawling feebly, fanning its splendid wings—dazzling turqoise enamel, studded with drops of mother-of-pearl.

Easton needed no net now. He walked to the tree, half ashamed of taking such advantage, and lifted the butterfly with care. At the girl's suggestion he opened one of her watertight collecting boxes, killed the insect, and placed it in an envelope.

"Here! another one!" she called. "It's larger—it's a female *eros*."

He captured the second one.

"My contract calls for the capture of two specimens, Miss Lastour," he said. "I shall give you half of the money: five thousand dollars."

Her eyes opened wide in astonishment; then she laughed bitterly in derision.

"You look as if you meant it—and believed it! Do you think Raymond Sartoris would pay you ten thousand cents? He's not as crazy as that! It's a newly discovered variety; it will always be rare, but—you might get two hundred dollars from some museum, or some amateur collector. Sartoris sent you here to take up his feud, and—well, I don't think he expects you to come back."

"There's a valid contract," he said, "and the money is posted with the consul at Teguzillo. I have a lot of puzzles to find answers for, but I think I shall go back."

V

THE nine carriers that went out with Easton returned to Quezalgalpa and told gravely of a battle in the jungle, and of the deaths of Easton, Julio, and Honda. Lastour was in bed with fever and delirium, and paid no heed to the reports. The residents of the village talked over the tragic affair with the carriers, then shook dice with them for the naturalist's property, cheated them, and chased them out of the village.

Next morning Easton staggered in, carrying the girl in his arms. Her wound was infected and she was ill, and Easton's eyes were bright with fever. He had a case of butterflies slung from his shoulder, but nothing else of value or interest to the villagers.

He took the girl to her brother's house, ransacked the medical stores without ceremony, and was fiercely cursed by the bed-ridden Lastour while he dressed her wound with expert skill and made her comfortable. Then he helped himself to quinine and brandy, and lay down on a cot to sleep, deaf to the imprecations of the host.

For a week he doctored himself from the medicine chest, and staggered feebly about the house, serving as physician and nurse to the girl, and administering remedies to her half-mad brother by force.

HE lay sleepless one night, hating the tropics and listening with irritation to the stertorous breathing of Lastour at the other side of the room. A hot copper moon threw fantastic patches of light on the floor through the vines on the veranda, and night birds squawked in the trees along the banks of the Oripala.

He dozed, and when his eyes opened again he heard a faint sliding, rustling sound near his cot—like the crawling of the five-foot cobra that had lived over the rafters of his hut in Burmah. The wheezing of Lastour had stopped, and the strange noise on the floor was all that he could hear.

One of his hands was touching the pillow—he had rested his cheek on it as he slept—and he had scarcely to move it to grasp the butt of his re-

volver under the pillow. He held his breath, listened, and waited.

A dark head rose above the edge of the cot, and was outlined by the friendly moonlight. Then a hand came up beside the head, and it held a gleaming knife.

Easton jerked the revolver from beneath the pillow and fired. The explosion shook the house, and the assassin's knife clattered on the floor.

Marie Lastour screamed in the next room, and at the same moment there was a pattering of unshod feet on the veranda.

Easton sprang from the cot, over the body on the floor, and plunged through the open door. A man darted down the path in the moonlight carrying a butterfly case under his arm. Easton fired over his head and ordered him to halt.

THE man turned and fired point-blank at his pursuer with an automatic, and the ball seared Easton's scalp. He fired again at ten paces, and the man dropped the pistol and sank to his knees, groaning, then rolled over and lay still.

Easton darted back into the house and lighted an oil lamp, as Marie came from her room, wild-eyed, but silent as a wraith. She heard Easton call out her brother's name, and with him she stared at the cot from which came no response.

"Anatole!" she cried weakly, "why don't you speak?"

Then she uttered a blood-chilling scream and threw herself down beside the cot. Easton leaped to her side and looked, and saw a dark stain spreading on the blanket that covered the man. The Indian assassin had been at work before he crept to Easton's cot.

Sick with horror, the young man left the swooning girl and walked out to the garden path with the lamp.

The man lying on the ground was dead, with the butterfly case burst open beside him—six specimens of the *Morpho eros* flashed like blue flame in the light of the lamp. The man was Raymond Sartoris, who had come secretly to Quezalgalpa to forestall the collection of the ten thousand dollars.

O'GRADY the U. S. consul, sat in his little office at Teguzillo and regarded his two visitors with lively interest. Howard Easton looked ill, and ten years older than when he had last seen him. Miss Lastour was very pale and sad-eyed, but still an agreeable picture to look upon.

"Well, Mr. Easton," said the consul, "I suppose the authorities will hear of the affair in a year or so, and make an investigation, but I don't think you've anything to worry about. You did pretty well with a bad job, I'm thinking; I doubt I could 'a' done better myself.

"It's little I know about butterflies," he went on, "but I see no reason for holding back the money. It was deposited here with plain instructions, and a contract is a contract."

Easton shook his head gravely.

"Please do what you can, Mr. O'Grady, to settle all that with Doctor Sartoris's estate. I couldn't touch it. You can understand."

"But Miss Lastour?" said the consul. "The man ruined her brother, and she—perhaps she—"

"Miss Lastour would not touch the money, either," said Easton. "We both hope that we may never see another specimen of the *Morpho eros*. It should be called *Morpho mortis*, the butterfly of death!

"Thanks for your interest, Mr. O'Grady," he added a moment later. "I am not in actual need of the money I came here to win, and Miss Lastour has done me the honor to place her future in my hands."

The Two Bottles

The Wrong Bottle Meant Death in this Tense Story of Jungle Enmity

By WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

Author of "The Street of Armed Men," "The Red Barong," etc.

WOLF BLOUNT'S bloodshot-eyes watched the river trail narrowly as his thick fingers fumbled with the lock of Gerber's brass-bound box. Gerber would be coming back any minute now and Gerber was apt to shoot first and ask questions afterward.

Blount twisted viciously on the key which he had found in the bottom of the dugout where Gerber had dropped it that afternoon.

The lock clicked softly and the lid sprang up.

Blount swore bitterly at what he saw. He had expected to find jewels, gold anyway, from the way Gerber had guarded that box all the way up the river. He remembered what Gerber had told him at Mabang before they started up the river into the jungle.

That had been three weeks ago now.

"I know several little things about you, Blount," Gerber had said as he stared at the other with his cold blue eyes.

Gerber was a big man, not as heavy as Blount, but tall, with a respectable flare of shoulder and a lean, brown

face which bore the marks of the fever. There was a sort of hard ruthlessness about Gerber which had impressed Blount.

"I know you, Blount. I've hired you for the trip up the river and if you swing your paddle and don't get curious, I'll pay you a thousand dollars, gold, the day we land back in Mabang. On the other hand, if you try any of your little tricks, Blount, you'll never come back to Mabang. Is that quite clear?"

Blount had nodded his head craftily. It was a long trip up the river; a wicked trip this time of year and Gerber didn't know the country. Wolf Blount knew the country, through, and if it was worth a thousand, gold, to Gerber to make that trip, it would be worth more to Wolf Blount.

"All right," Gerber had said softly. "Just remember what I said about curiosity, Blount. Curiosity is sometimes—unhealthy!"

BLOUNT glanced at the river trail again. There was still an unhealthy twilight hanging over the river, but it was dark back in the jungle. The heat pressed down around Blount's temples with a moist, deadly hand; for three days now it had been raining and the water dripped sullenly through the mat of tangled creepers and sizzled on the hot embers of the small fire, beside which he crouched.

Blount swore again as he looked at the contents of the brass-bound chest. In place of the treasure which he had expected to see, was an orderly array of small square bottles, each held in its place by a wooden compartment.

The firelight glinted redly on the glass stoppers as Blount pawed them in disgust; in black letters across their tops they bore meaningless names.

A leather flap fastened to the lid of the chest caught his eye and he unfastened the catch with awkward fingers. Inside was a thin sheaf of papers which he sorted hurriedly.

A sentence struck his eye and, with a growl of satisfaction, he carried the letter closer to the fire. The paper was worn and dirty from much handling and the writing was dim, but he was able to make it out. It was a message to Gerber and Blount's eyes gleamed as he spelled out the words.

". . . ran across it by accident. It's an emerald, the biggest one I ever saw and it's without a flaw. It's worth a half a dozen fortunes and it can be picked up for a song from the old chief. Go up the river until you reach the mouth of the Upper Malu; then turn up the—"

THERE was a quick step on the river trail. Blount dropped the paper and whirled, his lips lifting from his teeth and his hand dropping to the butt of the gun at his hip. A cold voice slashed at him out of the night.

"Don't touch it, Blount!"

Gerber stepped forward into the firelight, his hard face expressionless, his eyes wary over the black muzzle of the gun in his hand. He stepped softly toward Blount and, with a quick movement of his left hand, dragged the other's gun clear of its holster. He swung his arm and Blount heard the weapon splash in the marsh to the right.

"You didn't believe what I told you about curiosity, did you, Blount?" Gerber asked softly as he stooped and picked up the packet of papers which the big man had dropped. "Now, just walk over there and sit down with your back against that tree—and sit very quietly, Blount. If you should happen to

make any sudden moves there might be a regrettable accident."

Blount's eyes were murderous as he did as the other ordered. He licked his lips as Gerber thrust his gun back into its holster and stooped over the open chest. Gerber was playing for high stakes—and Wolf Blount was going to cut himself in on those stakes.

He cursed the luck which had allowed Gerber to surprise him before he had learned the location of the village where the emerald was. Gerber snapped the lid of the brass-bound box and turned back to the big man.

HE held the letter, which Blount had been reading, between his fingers and, with an unpleasant smile on his lean face, he slowly tore it across. Blount watched as he dropped the torn pieces on the red coals; the fire flared brightly as the paper burned.

Gerber walked slowly forward.

"Stand up!" he ordered harshly.

Blount's little eyes flickered as he heaved himself to his feet, uncertain as to just what was coming. He saw Gerber's muscles gather under the wet shirt; Gerber's thin lips tighten. The other man's fist shot out suddenly and the blow caught Blount squarely in the mouth.

Blount rose, spitting blood and cursing viciously. With cold, expressionless eyes, Gerber struck again, and then again and again. The blows thudded sickeningly in the darkness and Blount slid forward, his face in the slime of the jungle floor.

The night was quiet except for the occasional splash of a crocodile in the river and the sodden drip of the rain. Blount's breath whistled harshly as he rolled over and tried to rise.

"I'll get you for this, Gerber," he snarled hoarsely through broken lips as the other man stood over him. "I'm going to get you for this and when I dc you'll wish, by God, that you'd never been born, you black devil?" Blount's face was contorted hideously as he sat up and wiped the blood out of his eyes.

GERBER said nothing as he turned back to the fire. He sat down wearily on the brass-bound box and rolled a brown paper cigarette. The firelight flickered redly on his lined, gray-templed face as he inhaled deeply and watched the other clamber to his feet. Blount slapped angrily at the cloud of insects about his head and then walked stiffly toward the shelter which they had built from a strip of canvas. Gerber's voice halted him.

"Blount!"

The big man turned, a snarl on his lips, his fists clenched. Gerber had not moved, but he was staring at the other with his blue, expressionless eyes. Blount was a little afraid of those eyes.

"Don't try that again, Blount!" Gerber's voice was soft, but there was deadly warning in it. Black anger flooded into Blount's heavy face as he half crouched at the edge of the firelight.

"The next time, damn you—" He stopped at what he saw in Gerber's eyes.

"There won't be any next time, Blount," said Gerber, quietly.

The rain dripped sullenly on the river as they started again the next morning. Neither spoke as Blount took his place in the bow of the narrow dugout and Gerber knelt behind him. Twice during the morning Blount laid down his paddle and drank deeply from the square-faced bottle of gin which he had placed between his knees. His face was badly bruised and swollen from the

severe beating he had received and his red-rimmed eyes were crafty.

The river was narrowing; in places the dark, stinking jungle crowded down until the river was a dark tunnel crawling through a twilight of creepers. Blount wiped the rain from his face and cursed morosely.

THIS was bad country—dark, sinister country and farther up-river than he had ever been. The rain was a sullen roar around them; the heat made each breath an effort.

They camped that night where the river made a sharp bend to the east. The banks were low and swampy and vicious insects swarmed in clouds about the heads of the two men. There was no conversation as they made their meager camp and ate cold food out of tins.

After a while Gerber rose and rummaged in the packed boat. When he sat down again he held a bottle in his hand. Blount watched as the other spilled quinine into a cigarette paper and then washed it down with a long swig of whisky. Gerber pushed the quinine and whisky toward Blount.

"There's fever here," he said shortly. "Take a good dose." Blount sneered as he reached a hairy paw for the bottle.

"Awful anxious about my health now, ain't yuh?" He shoved the quinine bottle aside and tipped the whisky bottle above his mouth. He drank deeply and then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Afraid I'll kick off and leave yuh all by your little self, eh?"

He leaned forward and glared at Gerber from beneath red, inflamed eyelids. Far back in the rainy forest some creature screamed in agony as its death swooped down upon it. Blount cursed deeply and scrubbed at his eyes with a dirty knuckle.

"You're a fool, Blount," said Gerber indifferently. "I know that you would stick a knife into my back if I gave you a chance—but I won't give you a chance. Alive you are useful to me—but not too useful. Don't make any mistakes, Blount!"

Blount laughed harshly and reached for the half-empty bottle of whisky. The damp drizzle ate into his bones with an ominous chill and brooding hate grew in his heart as he watched the man a half-dozen feet away. Soon Gerber would slip, would make one mistake, and Wolf Blount would be waiting.

THE two men talked no more as they huddled under their makeshift shelter and waited for light enough to go on.

Blount's chance came sooner than he had expected. It was early afternoon the next day when Gerber drove the dugout in close to the right bank and shipped his paddle. For the last three hours the river had been widening and becoming more shallow. Several times the two men had had to use the poles to shove the flimsy craft over the sandbars. Blount laid down his paddle and twisted his head to look. A hundred yards ahead, screened by the creeping jungle, was the mouth of a smaller stream.

A triumphant gleam came into Blount's eyes as he looked. This was the mouth of the Upper Malu, he guessed. Rising out of the marshy ground at the junction of the two rivers was a long, flat mound which covered a half a dozen acres. It was toward this that Gerber was looking.

"Get out," he said shortly to the other man. "We're going to camp here tonight."

Blount stepped into the knee-deep water of the sandbar and then screamed hoarsely. A scaly, brown form heaved itself out of the marsh on stubby legs.

"Crocodile!" Blount yelled thickly.

GERBER jumped, but he was too late. The big reptile's tail snapped with a piledriver blow which caught the flimsy dugout amidships, smashing it into kindling wood and hurling Gerber ten feet away. There was a deadly numbness in his side, a fiery pain in his leg, as he clawed his head above the shallow water and gasped for breath.

Blount still stood in the shallow water, his face a sickly green and the painter of the wrecked boat in his hand. He splashed forward slowly as Gerber yelled. The crocodile had gone, threshing the muddy water into a brown foam.

"My leg's broken," Gerber said in a harsh strained voice. "Get me up to that high ground."

An ugly light flickered in Blount's eyes as he saw that the gun was gone from the other's holster. He wiped the water from the mat of dirty stubble on his cheeks and grinned nastily.

"Oh, ho! Askin' favors of *me* now, eh?" His broken, discolored teeth gleamed unpleasant through his thin lips. "I'm a fool, am I? See how you like a little of your own medicine!"

He swung his open palm and it smacked viciously against Gerber's face. Gerber slumped forward, the pain from his crushed side driving red hot needles through his body. The water on his face brought back his wandering senses and he struggled up again.

Blount's face was fiendish. He slapped again and again. Gerber fell forward. Blount kicked at the other man's injured side and the world went black for Gerber as the terrible pain flowed over him in a red hot wave.

As he lost consciousness he heard Blount laughing crazily.

WHEN Gerber regained consciousness he was lying on the top of the little mount at the junction of the two rivers. The rain had stopped and the red light of the fire which Blount had kindled threw vague, distorted shadows in the darkness. Gerber was lying on the soaked ground; across the fire Blount's face grinned evilly. There was no compassion in that face—only triumphant malice. Gerber knew that he could expect no help from the man whom he had beaten.

Blount threw fresh wood on the fire as Gerber groaned and tried to sit up. At the third attempt he made it. His side throbbed dully and his left foot was twisted awkwardly. Blount was cursing in a low monotone as he rubbed viciously at his inflamed eyes. He reached for the bottle which sat on Gerber's brass-bound chest and drank; then glared at the wounded man.

"Well, here yuh are, Gerber," he said thickly. "What are you going to do about it?"

With thick, clumsy fingers Gerber was slitting his muddy shirt. He pulled the cloth away and bit his teeth to keep back a groan as he inched closer to the light. His side was blotched and discolored and as he looked, he knew that he was done for. The blow of the big reptile's tail had caved in the whole side of his ribs. He lay back wearily while Blount watched.

"You're done for—finished, Gerber," said Blount brutally. "If I wanted to, I couldn't get you out of here with the boat smashed—and I don't want to, anyway. I'll have enough trouble getting out myself."

Gerber watched as Blount drank again. After a minute Blount rose to his feet and stepped around the fire. He thrust a rough hand under Gerber's head and held the bottle to the man's lips. The whisky was hot

and it was good. Gerber felt better. Blount saw the gratitude in his eyes and snarled back at the wounded man:

"I didn't give it to you to help you any, you lousy ape!" He grinned again and spat into the fire. "Not Wolf Blount! When I'm through with you, you can die and be damned to you, but first I've got a question or two to ask you."

Gerber's lips twisted thinly as Blount propped him against a tree. The pain was not so bad now and the whisky had driven new life through his veins. With much effort he rolled a cigarette out of damp, soggy tobacco and inhaled deeply. Blount watched, his eyes mean. Then he laughed nastily.

"Where's the village you been headin' for, Gerber," he asked casually. Gerber coughed and then spoke with an effort.

"What's that to you?" His voice was cold and calm. Blount laughed again.

"You might as well come clean, Gerber," he jeered. "I know what you were after. Now Wolf Blount's goin' tuh get the emerald and you're goin' to die right here. Right here on this little knoll, Gerber, an' when I get back to Mabang I'll tell 'em about the sad accident and even tell 'em where tuh find yuh—if there's any cares tuh look!"

THE rain had started again and it felt cool against Gerber's hot face. The light glittered evilly on the brass hoops which bound the chest which Gerber had guarded so carefully. Blount was speaking again while his red eyes gloated at the wounded man.

"You'll tell me, Gerber," he was saying. "Oh yes, you'll tell me. Wolf Blount has ways of making people tell him things. I might tell you a pretty little story about another man Wolf Blount persuaded to tell. Fellow named Sanderson, up Gorbu way."

Sudden lines slashed down Gerber's lean face; his eyes were pinpoints of cold, deadly light. He braced himself with his good hand on the ground. When he spoke his voice was as expressionless as ever.

"Lies," he said harshly. "You wouldn't dare."

He knew well that Blount was capable of anything, but he wanted Blount to talk. The big man laughed hoarsely and stirred the coals of the fire with the barrel of Gerber's rifle.

"Wouldn't, eh? What's to stop me?" He chuckled brutally. "It's made to order, Gerber. I'll tell 'em I did my best for yuh, when I get back tuh Mabang."

GERBER coughed thickly.

"What about Sanderson?" he asked in a low, even voice.

"You seem damn interested," said Blount. "I'll tell you, Gerber, because you're never goin' tuh tell anybody. Oh no, Gerber, you're not goin' tuh give me away." He chuckled obscenely at his own joke and held the rifle barrel in the coals so that it would heat evenly.

"Sanderson got lost up in Gorbu—just wandered away and nobody saw him again." Blount leaned forward and his eyes glittered crazily. "Sanderson knew things, see, Gerber? He knew too many things, so just before he got lost somebody poked his eyes out!"

The big man threw back his head and laughed until the hideous sound echoed back and forth in the stinking rain. Gerber's face had become a white, terrible mask; only his eyes were alive. Blount seized the whisky bottle and drained it; then flung it from him. It crashed dully out beyond the circle of firelight.

"He yelled, Gerber. By God, he

yelled like a crazy monkey, but it didn't do him any good. You'll yell, Gerber, but it won't do any good, either."

He seized the gun barrel from the fire and stepped forward. The hot steel glowed redly in the gloom as Gerber watched it steadily. Blount came closer, the weapon in his hand.

"All right, Gerber. Are yuh goin' to talk now or am I goin' tuh have tuh persuade you a little? Where's the emerald at?"

GERBER didn't move. His blue eyes were sardonic pin-points of light and he was laughing softly, a terrible laugh which made no sound, but which twisted his face satanically. Blount paused, fear in his eyes. There was something awful in the wounded man's white face.

"You're a fool, Blount," Gerber gasped. "I told you before that you are a fool!"

Blount fell back a step as Gerber's lips twisted again in that laugh. A monstrous, furry bat swooped low under the trees, its wings beating silkily in the hot air. The sullen rain sizzled on the hot coals of the fire.

"There's no emerald, Blount." Gerber's voice was harsh with pain as he mocked the big man. "You should have read farther, Blount! Wiley brought the emerald out to Mabang six months ago while you were up in Gorbu—with Sanderson. Wiley and I got a hundred thousand out of it, Blount! A hundred thousand all nicely tucked away in a Singapore bank."

Gerber stopped and coughed hoarsely while Blount stood in the dripping rain with the cooling iron in his hand. Blount's face was murderous as he looked at the other. Gerber was lying—lying to save his skin.

The big man brushed a hand across his face and cursed angrily. He was getting the fever, he guessed. Since yesterday morning his head had ached viciously; now and then flashes of red light shot across in front of his eyes. Gerber was speaking again.

"You'd like to know where I was going, Blount? You'd like to know why? I'll tell you! I was looking for the man who did Sanderson in. Sanderson was a friend of mine, Blount. I'm glad to know that you're Sanderson's murderer. It make's it easier for me, Blount."

BLOUNT'S face was livid as he leaped forward, his mouth working under the ragged fringe of beard. The wounded man's naked chest gleamed whitely in the gloom under the trees; his eyes were watchful, sardonic.

"You'll never tell anybody who killed Sanderson," Blount yelled. "You'll never tell anybody anything! Where's that village, you whitefaced ape?" He kicked Gerber viciously in the other's wounded side and laughed as the man's face drew tight with pain. "Where's that village, damn you?"

Gerber fell forward and lay without moving as Blount threw more wood on the fire. The big man thrust the barrel of the rifle back into the coals, and, as he turned back to the unconscious man, his eyes were filled with a deadly purpose. He dragged the other closer to the fire and pulled the cork from the remaining bottle of whisky, all that he had salvaged from the wreck of the dugout. He jammed the bottle against Gerber's pale lips and held it until the other swallowed. Gerber choked and life came back into his eyes.

"You're lying, damn your black soul," said Blount grimly. "Now you're goin' tuh tell the truth. I told you once that you'd wish that you'd never been born. Remember that?"

Gerber lay without moving as he

watched Blount make his preparations. He hadn't a doubt but that Blount would carry out his threat—and there would be no one to interfere. Wiley lay sick in the village two days' travel up the Malu—the square bottles in the brass-bound chest had been for Wiley.

From across the fire, Blount's red, blood-streaked eyes watched him. There was something queer about those eyes; Gerber racked his brain to remember where he had seen eyes like that before.

SUDDENLY it came to him.

Old McQueen down at Moresby!

They had found him stone-blind, wandering in the bush, and his eyes had looked like that. A wave of nausea flowed over Gerber as his side throbbed dully. Then he looked again and knew that he was right. Blount brushed a dirty hand across his face again and then stirred the fire. He looked curiously at the man who lay in the rain. It seemed to Blount that there was a yellow halo about Gerber's head; he swore bitterly as that red flash of light speared in front of his eyes again. He drank deeply from the whisky bottle. Gerber raised himself on one arm and Blount, fear clawing at his heart, saw that the man was laughing again, silently.

"Blount!" Gerber's voice was scarcely more than a whisper, but the hair on the back of Blount's neck prickled. "You're done for, Blount!"

Blount leaped to his feet and his voice bellowed through the rain.

"Shut up, you white-faced fool! Shut up, before I kick your guts out!"

Gerber was still laughing—that awful, twisted laugh.

"You're finished, Gerber! You put Sanderson's eyes out and left him to die in the jungle. Now you're going to die in the jungle just like Sanderson did—blind! Blind, you understand?"

Blount glanced wildly into the night; he brushed his hand stupidly across his face. The big bat swooped down again, squeaking obscenely. The hot rain seemed to be eating into Blount's brain.

"You're a fool, Blount? If you weren't a fool, you'd know what's the matter with your eyes. You see things, don't you, Blount? Now and then you see a red hot sheet of light flash in front of your eyes. Look at me, Blount! You see a fuzzy rim of light about me, don't you, Blount?"

Gerber's voice was weak, but there was amusement in it; terrible, cynical amusement.

HIS words drove darts of cold fear into the big man on the other side of the fire. Blount stared at the wounded man with a fascinated gaze.

"Don't try to lie, Blount. Your face won't let you—and you're going to die too soon to blacken your soul any more. Do you know what's wrong, Blount? I'll tell you. You've never heard of Glaucoma, eh? I didn't think so. Nice word, isn't it, Blount? Means 'hardening.' That's what's wrong with your eyes—by this time to-morrow you'll be stone-blind, Blount. Just like Sanderson, eh?"

Blount's heavy face contorted horribly. He started to speak and choked on his words.

"You lie!" he shouted finally in a strangled voice. Gerber laughed on, silently.

"Put your fingers up to your eyes, Blount," he whispered huskily. "If I'm not lying, your eyeballs will be as hard as rocks!"

With an oath Blount raised his big hands and touched his forefingers to his closed eyes. He screamed aloud, a terrible scream of fear. Instead of a velvety softness, his fingers touch-

ed eyes which were as hard as the eyes of a stone idol. Cold sweat stood out on his forehead as he dropped to his knees and pawed at Gerber's still form.

"What is it? God! What is it, man?" Gerber smiled thinly.

"*Glaucoma,* you fool," he said weakly. "It's a disease. You'll be as blind as Sanderson was in twenty-four hours. Justice, eh, Blount?"

Blount screamed and tore at his face with his fingers while Gerber watched indifferently. There was no longer any pain in Gerber's side—only a soothing numbness. He was glad. He wanted to be able to watch Blount. The big man pawed at Gerber again and there was stark fear in his voice.

"Gerber! Gerber! What can I do about it? You're educated. You know about such things. *I* can't go blind, Gerber. You've got drugs in that box. I've seen them. Can't you give me something to keep me from going blind?"

Gerber was laughing again; laughing as he painfully unlocked the brass-bound chest and threw back the lid.

"Know how Sanderson felt, don't you Blount? Look at me, Blount!"

Gerber raised his right hand weakly and selected two bottles at random from the array in the small chest.

"See those, Blount? Look closely while you can. Observe that one has two red crosses on its stopper while the other has only one. That is important, Blount."

Gerber's voice was mocking as Blount watched, his eyes fascinated. He had always feared Gerber. Now Gerber was dying but still he held the upper hand. Blount wiped the sweat from his forehead with fingers which shook. Gerber began to speak again, his breath whistling sharply between his teeth.

"One of those bottles contains *Philocarpine,* Blount. You can wash your eyes with that and it will hold the blindness off long enough for you to get to the coast and a doctor, understand?"

Sudden comprehension flowed over Blount's heavy face. He lunged forward, but Gerber gestured warningly as he held the bottle in his fingers.

"Not so fast, not so fast. You wouldn't care to have me smash this over that rock, would you? I thought not."

COURAGE was coming back into Blount's gray face. He watched the wounded man with eyes which were crafty once more.

"Now look at this other bottle, Blount." Gerber's voice was faint and unsteady, but it was still edged with cynical amusement. "It bears only one red cross on the stopper, Blount. Remember that. That's the only way you can tell the two bottles apart. This bottle contains a clear, colorless fluid, you will notice. That's aconitine—wolfsbane, Blount, the deadliest poison in the world."

Gerber paused for a moment, listening to the sullen drip of the rain.

"One drop of wolfsbane in your eyes, Blount," went on Gerber suggestively, "and you will know what it felt like when you burned out Sanderson's eyes." Gerber's voice was suddenly hard and cold.

"Put out your hand, Blount!" Like a man in a daze, Blount did as he was ordered. Gerber placed the two bottles in the other's thick paw. "Look at them carefully," said Gerber in a thin, tense voice. "One cross for wolfsbane; two crosses for *Philocarpine,* Blount. One cross is horrible death and the two crosses are life. You didn't give Sanderson that much chance, did you, Blount?"

GERBER'S voice was very weak as Blount's big hand closed on the two bottles. He dropped gratefully to the damp earth—it was good to rest.

"It would be funny if I had switched the bottles on you, wouldn't it, Blount? You're a fool. You couldn't tell the difference—until you felt the wolfsbane tearing at your eyes!" Gerber's head dropped back and his eyes closed.

Blount screamed with unreasoning fear as he stared at the two bottles which he held in his hands. Gerber had been right. Blount didn't know. He studied the strange names on the stoppers, but they told him nothing; he stared at the red crosses with awful fascination until knife-like pains shot through his eyes and even the bottles began to grow dim.

Gerber had lied! Sanderson had been Gerber's friend and he, Blount, had boasted to Gerber that he had murdered Sanderson—put his eyes out and left him to die horribly.

He stared half blindly at the two bottles again. Wolfsbane! That was what Gerber had said. Wolfsbane for Wolf Blount!

With a howl of terrible fear Blount hurled the bottle with the two red crosses on the stopper far out into the tangle of dripping creepers. Gerber had lied! Wolf Blount knew that he had lied, for Wolf Blount had killed Sanderson—had been going to kill Gerber, too.

WITH fingers which shook so that he could scarcely hold the bottle, the big man pulled out the stopper of the other bottle. His teeth chattered as he wet his fingers with the colorless liquid. He opened his burning eyes wide and smeared the drug across the eyeballs.

The rotten log, beside which Blount had built his fire, still smoldered in the hot afternoon air. A narrow dugout, manned by natives, slid out of the narrow mouth of the Malu and headed for the spot where Gerber's canoe had landed the day before.

The prow of the boat touched the bar and a short, wiry man with a yellow, pock-marked face, stepped out. Two natives followed as the white man walked cautiously to where the fire still smoldered. He threw his rifle to his shoulder and then lowered it while he stepped forward, cursing bitterly.

"Get whisky," he snapped to one of the natives. "It's Gerber!"

Gerber still lay by the fire, his face pale and bloodless. The small man slipped an arm under his shoulders and forced the liquor, which the native had brought, between Gerber's slack lips. The big man groaned and then choked as more whisky burned at his throat. The color glowed faintly in his gaunt face as he opened his eyes with an effort.

"Hello, Wiley," he said with an effort. "How'd you get here?" The short man swore with feeling and propped Gerber against his knee.

"By God, Joe, it looks like I got here just in time, eh? We were coming down the river this morning when we saw the smoke and then we came like hell."

Gerber rolled his head weakly to one side and then smiled thinly. There at the edge of the jungle, lay Blount, his face turned up to the rain, his eyes terrible, red blots. He was dead and the terror of his death was written on his twisted features.

Wiley looked and then turned his face away.

"God!" he said softly. "What—?" Gerber's face twisted in a noiseless, terrible laugh.

"So you didn't believe me, Blount," he said softly.

Gobs Can't Shoot!

Subway Scotty and Montana Magill Mixed Like Oil and Water, and Each Rated Deuce High With the Other . . . Until Grim Danger Yawned.

By SYL MacDOWELL

THE crack new cruiser, *U. S. S. Norfolk,* had finished her shakedown cruise. After booming up the latitudes from Rio, she was now at anchor off the U. S. Naval Station in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The scent of mangrove swamps was in the nostrils of the crew and the men longed to be ashore. A thrill of expectancy ran through the ship when at quarters that morning, the division officers announced that small-arms practice would begin immediately.

"The range party will report at the port gangway!"

"That's me!" spoke up a lank, bow-legged seaman. "It's shore been a long time sence I bin on the range!"

"Haw, haw!" A short, red-headed shipmate greeted the remark with a harsh cackle. "Dis ain't no cow-range, Montana, ya rubber boot! Dis is a rifle-range, see?"

"Montana" Magill was an ex-cow-puncher. "Subway" Scotty, his taunter, was the son of a New York cop, an urchin of the city streets. They mixed like oil and water, this pair.

"Haul in yore lip, Subway," answered Montana, "what does a gutter-snipe like you know about gun-totin'? I kilt my first deer when I wuz only a eight-year-old. Plugs him smack-dab through the heart with my old man's .30-30. He was runnin', too!"

"G'wan!" snorted Subway. "My ol' man learnt me tuh swing a gat faster'n enny rube out West. Dat time we cleaned up de Robert gang on de docks—"

"Whoa, there, Subway!" The tall Montana towered over the runty sailor now, fists clenched, eyes blazing. "Take that back, callin' my old man a rube! No runty maverick like you can—"

"Stow it, you swabs!" The voice of the chief quartermaster fairly crackled. He thrust himself between the pair. "If you birds gotta fight to settle, do it in the ring at the next smoker. C'mon, fall in, men! Down the gangway and into your places in the motor launch!"

THE white-clad line of the range party filtered down the gangway and arranged itself in rows on the athwarts seats in the motor launch.

"Shove off for the recreation landing!" sang down the officer of the deck.

A minute more, and the small boat was crossing the sparkling waters of the man-o'-war anchorage towards the southern shore, a mile distant.

Montana and Subway, seated together, still rumbled with argument.

"My old man was sheriff o' Powder River County onct," declared Montana. "He shot up more bad men than enny ham-hocked cop in New York City ever dreamed of! Mor'n onct he's had his hoss shot from under him!"

"Yeah!" jeered Subway. "My old man wuz a patrolman, see? He didn't have no horse tuh hide behind! He—"

"Pipe down, for'ard there!"

This time it was the voice of Lieutenant Shornell, in charge of the range party. The officer was standing in the stern sheets with the helmsman.

"Magill, you and Scott sound off too much. Save your pep. You'll need it before the day is out."

A half hour later, the *Norfolk's* range party came alongside the recreation landing, poured ashore, and in a long file marched up a white coral roadway towards the rifle range.

THE rifle range lay along a low, barren tideland, pocketed in the hills that ran down to the bay. The pits were back against the hills, ugly and arid.

There was a brief preliminary instruction, consisting of sighting exercises, position and rapid-fire exercises and sight-setting.

Then the first squad was lined up on the 200-yard firing line. Both Montana and Subway Scotty were in the No. 1 squad. Their positions were together, on Targets No. 8 and 9.

"The first ten shots will be slow fire from a prone position." The chief quartermaster was speaking from above them. "On your bellies, you weisenheimers! Let's see what you can do!"

Montana and Subway Scotty stretched out on the hot ground. The chief quartermaster stooped and helped them to adjust and tighten the slings on their left arms.

"We never bothered with no such trifles," said Montana, "where I wuz brung up. We cinched on our saddles, but not our guns."

"Jeez, wotta chanct a guy'd have doin' this if the Roberts gang wuz on his tail," said Subway Scotty. "Crack down on 'em quick, dat's my motter!"

"Ready on the firing line!" sang out the range officer.

Out on the bank of earth that marked the target butts, a flag went

up, waved back and forth, then was lowered.

Five seconds later the targets rose simultaneously.

THERE was a scatter of firing along the line. The Springfields had an ugly crack. Montana and Subway Scotty rested their cheeks on the stocks, squinted through the peep sights, gave their triggers a long, steady squeeze, and fired in unison. The recoil of their guns jabbed their elbows painfully into the gritty soil.

They worked the bolt actions awkwardly and jerkily, then fired again. Three times. Four. It seemed they had been firing half a day when the chief quartermaster bent down and touched them on their shoulders.

"That's fine," he told them.

"Port arms, open chambers, leave your chambers open," sang out the range officer.

"Down targets," the telephone detail told the pits.

Montana and Subway Scotty laid their hot muzzles across the wooden stakes that marked their firing positions and got to their feet, rubbing bruised shoulders and skinned elbows.

Then, out where their targets had sunk, black markers shot up. They waved once.

"Swabo!" the chief quartermaster spoke up loudly. "That means *both* you mugs missed the targets!"

The black markers waved again.

"Swabo!" cried the scorekeeper, marking goose eggs on the blackboard in back of them.

A third jeering wave of the markers.

"Swabo three!" cried the scorekeeper. "Ho, ho!"

Twice more the rival sailors gazed aghast at the gloomy black markers. White "bullseye" markers, checkered fours and red "threes" were waving at the targets of their shipmates.

The chief quartermaster thrust himself between them.

"Well, you guys," he exulted. "Not so good, huh? Where's all that fancy crackin' down on gangsters with a police revolver?"

Subway Scotty swore under his breath.

"I bet sumthin' was wrong wit' dat cock-eyed gun I had," he declared. "I wuz holdin' it dead on!"

"Yeah!" came witheringly from the chief quartermaster. "Holdin' it dead on *the wrong target!* That's what *you* did, kid! You run up the score on No. 7 target at your port hand about 15 above possible!"

Montana laughed.

"You needn't feel so gay, broncobuster! The trouble with you was you had your sights set for 500 yards! Now if you guys has got over the swell head, maybe I can set you right on the next five rounds."

"This kind o' shootin' is a heap diff'runt than free-hand with open sights," complained Montana. "Also, I ain't accustomed to no saddle cinch on a gun."

"A lot o' hooey, if ya ask me!" said Subway Scotty, surprised to find himself agreeing for once with Montana.

"You alibi hounds! Gawd help the U. S. A. if we had a lot o' punks like you on a landing party!"

BY the time the day was over, and the firing party was trudging back to the docks, the two young bluejackets were sore in body and spirit. They were dejected and resentful. They were gloomy and brooding. They smarted under the taunts of the chief quartermaster and they were discouraged with the entire United States Navy. It seemed to them to be a particularly trying organization. Jaded from long sea-drill, and nerve-frayed now from their first bad day on the range, they were in a desperate mood.

At that moment there came from down the road in the direction of the naval station and its cluster of buildings, the shrill, insistent tremolo of a siren. All hands paused and looked.

Toward them, jouncing and careening at a mad pace, came a motorcycle side car.

The side car was upon them in almost no time. It hauled up with a squeal of brakes. An excited marine rode the vehicle.

"What's the excitement, Paul Revere?" called out the chief quartermaster.

"Robbery!" yelled out the marine. "A gang of locoed Cubans just held up and shot the paymaster down at the station! Got away with twenty thousand berries!"

"Wot are we s'posed tuh do—cry?" yipped Subway.

"It was the post payroll!" bleated the marine.

"Har, har! You leathernecks will have to stay sober now fer two whole weeks!"

THE chief quartermaster reeked sympathy. He just loved the whole marine corps.

"Well, listen to this! The commandant orders this firing party to give chase!"

Lieutenant Shornell spoke up now.

"Nonsense! Can't you marines take care of your own troubles? Good Lord, it wasn't our pay they got!"

"But the barracks is empty, sir! The entire garrison is out on a practice march. I'm company cook — I can't chase them cut-throats alone, can I?"

Lieutenant Shornell groaned.

"Hear that, men?" he said.

The intelligence sifted slowly through the skulls of the firing party. Chasing hold-ups! Exciting, all right. But Lord, they were hot and hungry and tired! Those dry, cactus-studded hills didn't look one bit inviting.

But the commandant's order had come, and orders were meant to be obeyed.

Lieutenant Shornell lifted his sun helmet, wiped his wet forehead, then clamped the headpiece back on with sudden decision.

"Squad formation!" he barked. "Right about face! Forward—march!"

The tread of thirty men beat the hard-packed coral in unison. Thirty faces were turned towards the hot hills, whose harsh ruggedness was emphasized by the slanting rays of a late afternoon sun. Thirty Springfield barrels glinted over thirty shoulders. Back somewhere in that wilderness of palmeto, cactus, Spanish dagger, yucca and *chapparral* lurked Fausto, the renegade Cuban, with his seven swarthy desperadoes, recklessly drunk with Oriente rum—monkey rum.

"At the top of the first ridge, men," sang out Lieutenant Shornell, "deploy and advance slowly, in skirmish order.

"Quartermaster!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"You command the left wing. I'll remain on the right."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

MONTANA and Subway, again at each other's side, toiled up the long slope under the watchful eye of the quartermaster, thirty feet to their left.

The old-timer was grinning through the sweat that ran down from his bushy eyebrows.

"Where's all the argyment, you birds?" he wanted to know. "No guts, I guess! Maybe you'll show us, Magill, how to crack down on a runnin' bandit, like he was a deer!"

"I reckon if I had my old man's .30-30, I could perforate a gook's gizzard. But I can't hit nuthin' with this yere hunk o' hardware."

"Gimme a police model, .38 Special Smith & Wesson," put in Subway,

"an' paint a target on the seat of a crook's breeches an' turn him loose. I bet I'd—"

"Quiet!" called out Lieutenant Shornell. "This is no basket picnic! Keep your traps shut and your eyes open!"

THEY topped the first rise, scattered, then picked their way through the scattered underbrush.

A red-throated lizard leaped from a palmetto stalk and scampered through the dry leaves. Subway started nervously and gripped his Springfield at ready.

Overhead a buzzard wheeled in lazy circles, its shadow flitting on the earth. That much was familiar to Montana. His outdoor-trained eyes were fixed on the ground, searching for sign. His range and trail experience was serving him now. All at once his gaze was arrested by something else vaguely familiar—a hoof-mark.

It was very dim, barely powdering the harsh, dry soil. But it was a recent sign—very recent. He was about to speak up and tell the chief quartermaster when—

"Cr—rack!"

With the sharp report came the angry whine of a bullet.

The man at his left, a third-class water-tender named Collins, gave a gasp, then fell heavily on his face. His rifle clattered out of his grasp.

"Down!" shouted Lieutenant Shornell. "Prone position, men! Find cover, then fire at will. There are our bandits, riding through that gap dead into the sun! Set your sights for five hundred!"

Montana flashed a glance at the fallen man. Collins half-raised his body on one outthrust arm, and with the other hand clutched at a widening blotch of crimson in the V of his white blouse.

"God!" he croaked. "They got me! They—"

He collapsed limply.

"C'mon, he's a goner!" rasped the chief quartermaster. "Into action, Magill! Damn these whites we are wearing. We're perfect targets!"

Behind a slight rock outcropping, Montana snuggled. Fausto's gang certainly had the weather gauge. They were almost invisible in the blaze of the setting sun, as they filtered through a depression in the hills. They were lashing their tiny Cuban ponies into a mad scramble.

A RATTLE of answering fire came from the Americans now. Dust spurted up around the distant horsemen, as they poured rapidly through the gap and out of sight.

The last rider in the procession paused and waved his rifle over his head. His gesture of bravado proved his finish. Because the chief quartermaster, squatted behind a yucca bole, elbows resting on his knees, at that moment pressed his trigger to the final squeeze. His Springfield leaped. The last rider stiffened, flung his gun into the air, pivoted in his saddle, then plunged to the ground!

A cheer went up instantly from the sailors.

"Up and at 'em, men!" shouted the lieutenant.

They crashed through the undergrowth. It was perilous going. Collins' body was left where it had fallen.

Fausto overlooked a point of strategy. Had he left one man in the pass, a lone sharpshooter, he might have picked the Americans off, one by one, as they advanced across the five hundred yards of billowy ground.

But when the first panting members of the range party reached the gap, they found only the quartermaster's victim awaiting them. The fel-

low lay in a heap, his shirt ripped slantwise by the savage course of a Springfield bullet. He was as dead as Collins.

But of greater interest, to Montana at least, was the fact that the dead bandit's gun lay near him. The ex-cowpuncher picked up the weapon and recognized it instantly, A Winchester .30-30 carbine—a gun like his dad's! The gun *he* had learned to shoot! He dropped the heavier Springfield now, with a stealthy glance around him.

The act was unobserved, so he ripped the bandilerro, heavy with ammunition, from the dead Cuban's shoulders, flinging it over his blouse.

THE chief quartermaster, blowing like a porpoise, came up now. With him was Subway Scotty. The quartermaster eyed Montana critically. But he was wise enough to say nothing about the exchange in armament.

"Look!" spoke up Subway hoarsely. "He's got a rod, too!"

He jerked a six-shooter from the fallen bandit's waist holster and inspected it expertly in the flat of his hand.

"She's not no police model," he said gravely, "but she'll do."

His eyes sought the chief quartermaster's. They saw a silent permission there, so Subway tucked the revolver in his own waistband.

Montana, trail-bred, was again taking interest in the signs left by the fugitive horsemen. Their trail was barely perceptible through the rocks. He was forging ahead when Lieutenant Shornell appeared and called a halt.

"It's no use!" puffed the officer. "The commandant should order an airplane search. The bandits will soon lose us in this wilderness!"

"'Scuse me, sir," spoke up Montana, "but I reckon I kin foller 'em. I'll lope on ahead if yuh say so."

"Not alone," said the lieutenant. "Scout a ways with one companion. A signalman, I'd say. How about you, Scotty?"

Subway's mouth flew open with dismay. He and Montana side-kicks on a death-hunt? Not much!

"Him an' me don't agree," he declared, sullenly.

"Yellow, are ya?" sneered the chief quartermaster. "An' you're the bird that made all this talk about your tough old man!"

"He never had to work wid no hayseed," he stubbornly maintained.

"Chirp that agin, Subway," warned Montana, "and I'll shove yore ugly face up again the back o' yore neck!"

Lieutenant Shornell, wise in managing men, saw here an opportunity. Two of his party had their fighting spirit up. If they could only wage it against the enemy!

HE didn't make it an order. But he sent Subway forth on the bandit's trail with a grimmer determination than any command could have instilled into his soul.

"Quartermaster," he said "we better pick a man that can hit something. This fellow Scott is a clown with a gun. Who else—"

Subway's eyes blazed.

"I kin beat dis long-legged jaybird!" he flared. "I kin—" His hand found the reassuring pressure of the revolver in his waistband.

"Then go on with Magill," snapped the officer. "If you see the enemy, wig-wag us from any hilltop. We'll wait here for your first message!"

Two minutes later, like a hound on a scent, Subway Scotty found himself on a half-run in the wake of his detested rival, Montana Magill. The two men were pursuing the loot-laden bandits through the laby-

rinthean dips, spurs and angles of the Cuban hills!

The tropical night descends with the abruptness of a theatre curtain. Day had paused briefly on the brink of an amber twilight when Subway's first signal came. He stood on a wooded rise, a quarter-mile away.

Another signalman in Lieutenant Shornell's party received the wig-wag.

"He says: 'Nothing in sight yet. Brush denser, but fresh machete cuts make trail easy to follow.'"

Ten minutes more, and from a bald knob farther still came the visual signal:

"Trail bears sharply toward coast. We are following."

"No, no! Recall them!" ordered the officer.

"Too late," reported the bluejacket. "He's gone on."

"Light a signal fire," said Lieutenant Shornell. "They surely won't go on alone."

Flames soon were leaping from a pile of dried brush.

A half hour of suspense. Then a full hour passed. There was no sign, no call, from Subway or Montana.

"We must turn back and report aboard," decided the lieutenant. "One killed, two missing! What an ungodly mess! We must carry this gook's body back to the landing, too, and pick up poor Collins."

BY this time Montana and Subway Scotty were three miles back in the *chapparral* wilderness. They had followed the bandits' trail until darkness made further progress impossible. They were resting now, under a ledge of rock. Although without food or water, Subway had found a lone cigarette in his blouse pocket. This he had cut squarely in half, sharing with his erstwhile enemy, Montana. The two pin-points of light gleamed as they talked.

"Come moonrise we kin mush on, Subway," Montana was saying.

The city-bred sailor fondled the revolver he had taken from the dead bandit's body.

Montana's fingers toyed with the hammer of the carbine, but he said nothing.

AS he had predicted, moonrise brought light enough to follow the fugitive with ease.

The trail now bore straight for the coast, a desolate region some five miles south-east of the Guantanamo Bay anchorage. Both men had glimpsed this coast from the cruiser's deck.

An hour of travel brought them to the sea, glinted with silvery moonbeams.

Approaching the sea, the trail wound down a sharp slope and entered a small cove that some age-old torrent had chiselled in the long line of cliff.

Both men were tense, feeling that the end of their quest was near. They were silent, although the pound of the sea on the rocks would have drowned out their voices.

All at once Montana, a few feet in the lead, halted, Subway came to his side, then he pointed. In a tiny, grassy amphitheatre in the cove, no more than one hundred yards from the spot where they crouched, were the vague, shadowy forms—

"Horses!" whispered Montana.

Unconsciously, Subway began to count.

"Seven of 'em!" he murmured hoarsely.

He was carrying the revolver in his hand now.

Montana sank flat on the ground, pressing Subway down with him.

"These cussed whites!" he said. "We loom up like ghosts!"

SUBWAY'S answer was to peel off his blouse, then his undershirt. His bare, muscular torso was tanned by tropical sun. He was fairly inconspicuous now.

"Good leather!" grinned Montana. He laid down his carbine and stripped off his upper garments. Their bodies gleamed like naked savages' now, as they inched down the trail toward the horses.

They had progressed about half the distance when the flicker of firelight in the rocks to the left of the cove caught their gaze. They halted again.

Montana maneuvered a few feet farther down the slope, and from this position saw the gleam of a campfire on the shore. It was nearly two hundred yards, he estimated. Suddenly he felt Subway grip his shoulder.

"I kin see 'em!" his shipmate whispered hoarsely. "C'mon, let's sneak up on 'em! We nabbed de Magor gang dis way, my old man an' me! We—"

Montana stealthily drew down the lever of his Winchester, barely enough to open the breech and assure him that a cartridge was in the firing chamber. He closed it again, then reached out his right hand to Subway.

It was met by a firm grasp. Both sailors felt a thrill. Two hours before, they had hated one another. Now, all at once, they knew, each of them, that the other was a friend that would wager his life for the other. Men can know no greater trust than they felt then, or no stronger tie.

Crouching, creeping, sometimes on hands and knees, they approached that campfire in the rocks.

IT WAS not long, although it seemed hours to the two sailors, before they were on the beach, as close to the circle of firelight as they dared to go. Their crawling progress had dimmed the pristine whiteness of their pants to a fairly neutral shade.

They could make out the bandits' faces, could plainly hear fragments of their conversation in Spanish. The unsuspecting Cubans were easy victims. With rifle and revolver, they could fire into the group around the fire; it would be easy. They could rout them.

But the man-o'-war code prevented them from shooting unsuspecting men. A ship, before going into action, flutters a battle flag. Seamen who are worthy of the name do not strike without warning.

No word was spoken between them, yet both Montana and Subway understood this. Even though fair play might cost them their lives, they would live or die like American man-o'-wars'-men.

Montana cleared his throat, and Subway drew back the hammer of his revolver. This carbine went up to the Westerner's shoulder. He knew no Spanish, so in his own tongue he flung the command:

"Hey, you gooks! On yore feet! Paw the air, quick! We got you covered like a mustard plaster!"

They rose like automatons—all except one, who flung himself down flat on the gravelly beach and whipped out a revolver. It glinted in the firelight as he levelled it in the direction whence the shout came.

There was the "spang!" of one shot from the Winchester and the prone figure gave a death jerk. A scream rent the air.

Then once more Montana spoke—

"Don't move! Yore *Companero* is *muerto* dead! You'll all be *muerto* as hell if you so much as wiggle yore ears!"

A BRIEF silence, then one of the captives spoke in a quavering voice:

"*Carramba!* Who are you?"

"This is the Navy, *hombre!*"

"*Veamos*—let us see!"

Subway strode rapidly forward. He entered the circle of firelight as the eyes of the six standing bandits were fixed on him. He carried his captured revolver with an easy confidence.

Fausto, the leader, a tall man with high cheekbones, a wide mustachio and slits of eyes, was plainly skeptical. His flitting gaze swept the darkness. But he made no resistance as Subway plucked his weapons from him.

Subway quickly heaped the arsenal a safe distance from his captives, who stood with hands upraised.

"Now flock close together, youse birds! Set in a row, over dere!" Subway flipped his revolver.

OBEYING the gesture, the bandits arrayed themselves like whipped children. The wounded one whimpered with his bloody forearm.

"Now wot, Montana?" sang out Subway. "I've run outa idears!"

There was a crunch of gravel, and the tall sailor strode out of the shielding darkness, facing the six scowling captives.

"*Por Dios!*" burst from Fausto. "'Ere iss ze Navy! Only two! Damn!"

Montana sauntered over to the outstretched figure and turned it over.

"Smack-dab atween the eyes, Subway! Blame good shootin'."

"Aw, you coulda done jest as good, Montana! Dese yere is great guns!"

Back in the hills, an hour after sun-up next morning, *Señor El Capitan* Eduardo Gomez, with five hard-riding members of that Northwest Mounted of the tropics—the Cuban Constabulary—came upon the strangest cavalcade he had ever encountered in his varied career.

"By all the holy saints!" exclaimed Captain Gomez.

The amazing caravan that confronted the brave Gomez and his band was mounted on six runty Cuban ponies.

The foremost pony was ridden by a lank sailor, stripped to the waist, his body whip-sawed with brush cuts, welted with insect bites, and his belly lean with long hunger. Besides an unbelievably dirty and bedraggled pair of flappy-legged pants, he wore a wide, satisfied grin. In the crook of his tanned arm he carried a battered Winchester carbine.

The hindmost pony in the procession bore another half-nude gob. Awkwardly he rode, resting much of his weight on one hand that clutched the pommel of his saddle. The other hand held a revolver.

Four other ponies made up the center. Three of them were bestrode by six dejected specimens of humanity, two to an animal.

THE fourth animal in the center of this unusual group bore a rider who was not astride. He dangled, head and feet, athwarts the saddle. He was dead.

"Hey, Subway, here's some help!" sang out Montana.

"Help, hell! We don't need no help!" croaked Subway.

"But, *señors!*" pleaded Captain Gomez, riding alongside. "Cannot I influence you to pause and rest? Cannot I influence you—"

"Use yore influence, if any," broke in Montana, "with our skipper. That's where we need influence, old settler!"

"Damn right!" agreed Subway. "Jeez, Montana! I bet we're in fer it! D'ye reelize we're most twenty-four hours over-leave?"

Begin This Thrilling Serial Novel of

The RED HAWK of the RIO

A Three Part Serial

By EDGAR L. COOPER

PART II

SYNOPSIS

Tex Tolliver of the Slash-T Rancho, thirty miles north of the Rio Grande, is a cattle-baron, free-lance adventurer and gun-slinger. His companion, Ken Curry, is one of the fastest guns on the Rio.

Tex Tolliver's planes are the very last word in airships. And he, known as King Tolliver, is a master aviator.

Suddenly, while spending a social hour together, Tolliver and Curry are startled to hear, through a radio broadcast, the news of a ghost ship flying over the Rio Grande country and spreading havoc.

No one knows the nature of the plane, or the rider; at night the mysterious death-dealing journeys are made, and the border country is terrified.

It is generally believed that a half maniac young Mexican, de Allende, is the night rider. He has destroyed much public property in his prowlings, and the United States government is after him tooth and nail.

He is pursued in vain, however. Sheriff Dragoo and young Markley of the Rangers are among those who do all they can to capture the mad pilot and fail.

Tex decides to take a hand in the matter. He employs the hexagon motored plane, The Red Hawk, which he owns, for the purpose.

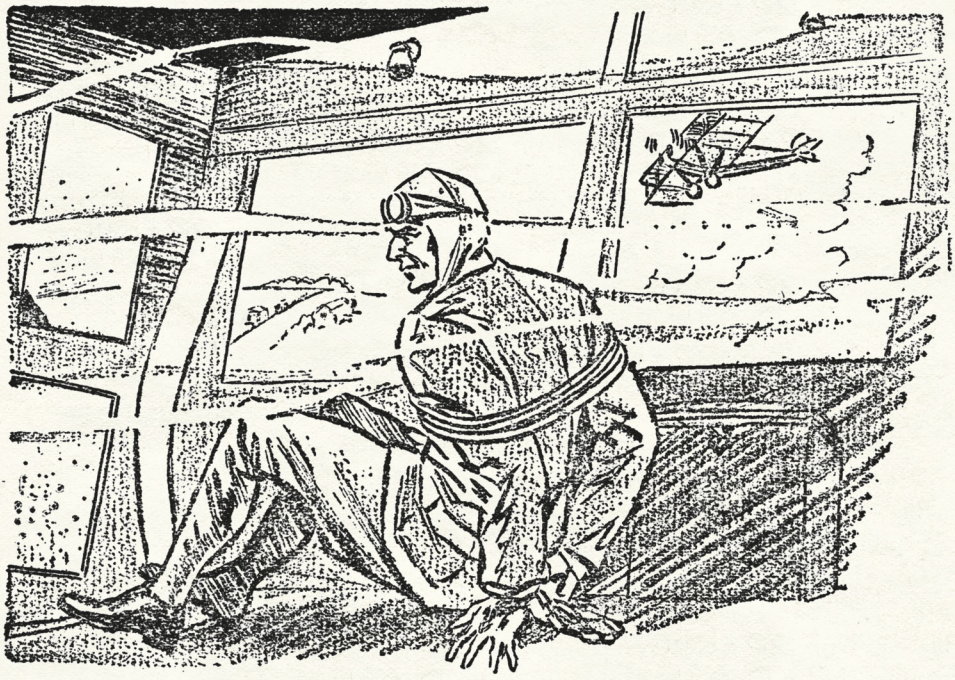
With Ken Curry, he takes The Red Hawk out for secret plundering trips into Mexican territory. He destroys Mexican property. The mysterious night rider is blamed, and now two countries are on his trail. Mexico took the rider's American exploits lightly, but when he does havoc on her own soil, as all believe, she is determined to find and punish him.

Tex is quite satisfied that he has paved the way for the capture of the maniac. But, sleeping the sleep of one who has done his work well, he is suddenly awakened by a viselike grip of fingers gagging his mouth. A sharp knife is at his throat!

Now Go On With the Story

HE could make out nothing behind the white light, and painfully blinked.

"If Señor Tolliver values his life one tiny bit," purred a whispered voice beyond the beam, "he will keep very, very silent. The knife is dipped in *peyote* paste, senor—Yaqui *peyote* paste of Sonora. *Sabe Vd?*"



Tex did, only too well. An insidious Indian poison that killed in two, perhaps three days with a lingering, torturing venom; a poison that medical science had never found a remedy for. One slight prick of that treated blade—finee.

A chill trickled along his spine as he slightly nodded in answer to the question, a riot of thoughts surging through his brain. And out of them stood forth the grisly fact that the hand holding that knife belonged to none other than Faustino de Allende, self-styled Black Bat.

But how, in God's name, had he got in the house? What was he doing in Texas, on Slash property, anyhow? How had he crept up on him?—

The knife came away very slowly—the silky voice spoke again.

"The señor will get up out of bed, oh, so carefully!—and switch on the electric light. Every second this pocket flash, and this pistol, will cover him. After turning on the light, he will stand very still, his hands above his head."

Tex warily obeyed. He knew without being told that there was nothing but certain death to be gained by resisting. De Allende, with the uncanny cunning of a madman, had trapped him.

A pistol was under his pillow, and two guns hung from cartridge belts on a wall peg near the head of his bed, but all were equally inaccessible. Step for step the Mexican kept behind him, the cold bore of a pistol ringing his thinly clad spine. Very quietly and silently Tex snapped on the light and surveyed his captor.

HE saw a slender, wasp-waisted fellow, average tall, clad in a wet mackinaw and muddy laced boots; a leather helmet on his head,

goggles, looped loosely around his neck, and a black silk mask of domino shape covering the top part of his face.

The lower part of his features were bronzed by much exposure to sun and wind, and slashed by a livid scar that threaded from the corner of his mustache-shadowed mouth upward along the right cheek. And out of the holes in the mask gleamed two eyes as coldly glittering as a snake's.

Swiftly the fellow pocketed the flashlight with his left hand, and the hidden fingers darted up from his waist with the knife, gripping it lightly. His right fist clutched a squat automatic, muzzle trained unwaveringly on Tex. His two red lips curved in a mocking smile, showing the edges of even, blue-white teeth.

"It is disagreeable out," came the barely whispered slur of words—faultless, cultured English with just a trace of accent. "The Señor of the Slash-T has two minutes, no more, to don trousers and shirt, boots and coat. The helmet on the table, too, if he likes. And no tricks, my friend. No raising of your voice. I can throw this knife as swiftly as I can shoot the gun—and as accurately. I can kill you in half a second, then make an easy escape."

Tex swore under his breath, his eyes green and narrow, his body rigid. De Allende spoke truly, balanced on the balls of his feet like a shadow dancer, his hooded eyes malevolent as a rattler's. Tex nodded almost imperceptibly. He was trapped, cleverly and neatly. "Who are you?" he asked under his breath.

"A courtesy I overlooked, but shall be glad to correct later," said the Mexican, with a slight bow. "When we have more time, señor. The seconds tick away, and it would be most unfortunate if anyone in the *casa* should hear our whispers, or wake up and see the light. You had best get into your clothes, unless you prefer to accompany me clad in pajamas."

Closely followed by his captors, Tex went to the closet, gathered up shirt, pants, coat and boots, and at an order tossed them upon his bed. While the Mexican's deft fingers played over the garments in search of a weapon Tex disrobed, and began putting on the clothes, the gun ever menacing him.

His keen eyes caught the open window—the cut in the screen where a hand had thrust through and unlatched the catch. They flicked a look at the clock on the dresser—five minutes to two o'clock, A. M.

The rain still peppered on the tiles and the wind blew gustily, moaning and whimpering. The house was silent, a place of sleep.

NOT a chance of Keno waking up, Tex reflected grimly as he laced his boots. His room was across the hall, farther back. Even now he could hear his snores. The bunkhouses were behind the hacienda, and Link Spillane was pounding his ear in the hangar, where he insisted on sleeping the past week.

And there hadn't been the slightest chance to secrete a weapon of any sort, for those basilisk eyes didn't miss a single move of Tolliver's; that gun trailed him like a stalking ocelot. Finished dressing, Tex picked up his leather helmet, then glanced questioningly at the Mexican.

"Put your helmet on your head, and your hands behind your back," de Allende commanded brusquely. "Now, turn around. So."

There was a little click, and twin rings of steel enclosed Tex's crossed wrists, pinioning them closely. Handcuffs. Next moment a rawhide thong looped around the steel, drew taut, and the Bat held the loose end of it in his left hand.

He cast a swift glance around the

room, listened a moment, then punched off the light switch.

"Go very slowly through that screen, señor," came the sleazy order out of the darkness. "The knife-tip is exactly one half inch from the spot between your shoulder blades. When your feet touch the ground, take two steps forward, then halt."

Tex cursed again under his breath. This bird knew his onions, no mistake about that. Didn't leave the tiniest loophole anywhere. A damned worthy antagonist. He eased himself through the screen window, which the Mexican held open with one hand, as it was the sort that swung outward.

There was a little thud on the hardwood of the dresser. Tex heard, but could not see, but as Allende slid out of the opening like a stealthy shadow, a slim arrow stuck up, quivering before the mirror. An arrow with something wrapped about the shaft near the feathered end.

IN silence the pair skirted the casa, cut across the compound, past outhouses and hangars, left the last corrals behind. Obeying a curt word or two from the Mexican, Tex quickened his pace, striking straight into the mesquite and sage due west of the rancho, slogging on in the stormy blackness of the night which covered the plains like an inky shroud. Now and then a vivid streak of lightning would etch sky and landscape, a ghostly glimpse of cloud scud and dripping prairie, then following the smashing peal of thunder the rain would redouble its intensity.

Where in hell was this *pelado* taking him, anyhow? A queer curiosity was roweling Tex, despite his cognizance of the seriousness of his position. The route led into a maze of coulees and swales in the Coyote Creek country, some three miles distant, and the intervening pasture land was studded with scrub greasewood and cactus, the grazing ground of a herd of humpbacked Brahma cattle, Pastureage dotted with several leperous white alkalie flats . . .

Tex smiled tightly into the darkness. Of course—the Bat had a plane out there, parked on one of those levels. He could have made a landing in the storm undetected,—no one could have heard him at midnight, and in such weather. But how did he manage to fly in it all? The captive broke the long silence by idly asking,

"How about a little flashlight, hombre? There's lots of prickly pears hereabouts—no need in making pincushions of ourselves."

A low, mocking laugh answered him; the Mexican jerked amusedly at the rawhide halter in his hand, bobbing Tex's manacled wrists.

"A Black Bat needs no lantern, Señor Tolliver!" sardonically. "And is a red hawk's eyesight so poor?—even in the darkness?"

He chuckled, then, *"Coraje,* my friend. It is but a little way, now."

TEX spat audibly as answer in silent contempt, and heard the swift indrawn breath of de Allende at the gross Spanish insult. He half expected to feel the gouge of the poisoned knife in his back in retaliation, but the Mexican apparently mastered his anger. His only reply was: "Move faster, gringo. *Vamanos."*

And after five minutes, "Even with clipped wings and futile talons a *halcon rojo* had his beak!"

The malicious mockery of the words was topped off with the sinister chuckle. "Importance ill becomes the red killer of the chaparral—it is as gall to his tongue that he, oh, so badly!—underestimated the ability of *El Garrote Negro!"*

"You're a murderous swine, de Allende," said Tex coldly and matter of factly, curbing his fury with diffi-

culty. The fellow's words got under his skin. "You ought to be sewed up naked in a green hide and put out in the sun to dry."

The Mexican laughed insolently. "Perhaps I shall give you the choice of that, señor Halcon—or of an ant hill. You know them both, I take it. But there is my plane . . . later we will talk. So sorry, *amigo mio,* but I must make you rather uncomfortable for awhile . . ."

The dim shape of an airplane hove up in the wet blackness directly ahead, resting on one of the narrow alkali flats like some graceful night bird. Arrived at it, Tex saw that it was a cabin ship, a thick-winged, sleep-lined biplane, its engine hood and prop covered by a spread tarpaulin.

Without more ado de Allende opened the door, threw the beam of his flashlight inside, and motioned Tex to climb aboard and take position in the cleared space behind the pilot's seat. The two swinging chairs belonging there had been removed, leaving a roomy cubbyhole.

THRUSTING Tolliver prone on his stomach, the Mexican swiftly bound his legs in Spanish knots, tying them dexterously, expertly. Then he caught Tex by the shoulders and with an unsuspected strength hauled him to a sitting position, his back braced against the cabin wall.

The loose ends of both ankle and wrist leashes were made fast to seat rings in the side of the ship, leaving him trussed up neat as a fowl, powerless to move more than an inch or two.

The dome light in the cabin had been switched on, and by its glow de Allende inspected his handiwork, then swung outside and removed the shiny tarpaulin, thrusting its wet folds carelessly back against Tex.

It needed but one expert survey of the interior to show Tex that this cabin job wasn't the feared Black Bat. This plane was no stolen Boeing—it was a Hornet-motored bipe, three passenger, with a top speed of maybe 150 to 175 miles an hour, a neat little power plant.

And above the instrument dash a black machine-gun poked its nose over the coaming, scarf mouthed, its belts of cartridges neatly coiled to one side. Probably another stolen ship.

Faustino de Allende climbed inside, slammed the door and took his seat behind the wheel stick, leisurely lighting a cigarette. He snapped off the dome light; switched on the dash bulbs; made contact and cut in the starter.

Squalls of rain pelted down, sounding like sticks on a drum as they lashed about the ship's cabin. And mingled with the roar of the Hornet, thunder pealed and reverberated; serpents of lightning darted across the black sky. The storm seemed to be gathering anew, and it was certainly no night to take the air.

A nasty, treacherous night for any flier, enough to make the bravest and most hardboiled veteran of the dark sky trails hesitate. But the pilot calmly puffed his cigarette while the sturdy engine warmed up, his fingers idly jazzing the throttle, his masked eyes vacant, clouded with thought.

To all appearances he had completely forgotten his bound captive behind the seat, acted like he had all the time in the world to loaf. And his face had gone a little white beneath the bronze.

BUT Tex had not forgotten him. The first few puffs of that cigarette told him the truth about the Black Bat—the man was a *marihuana.* A slave to that lethal, narcotic weed of the same name that warps men's minds into strange tangents

and makes them demons; a devotee of "Indian hemp" whose brain was poisoned and endowed with a merciless, diabolical cunning. There at the controls sat a man who had turned fiend; a maniac whose one obsession was to kill. Tex smiled crookedly. He might have known. Those aimless raids, the wanton murders, that madman ultimatum about the lost Mexican province. And his fiendishness covered by a sleazy cloak of culture.

Tex felt a nasty little shiver run along his spine. Here he was, bound and helpless as a rat in a trap, in the power of a madman crazy and vicious enough to kill just for the fun of it. His heart beat a sudden trip-hammer tattoo and for five seconds he fought his bonds, straining every muscle, cold beads of sweat breaking out all over his body. Then the wave of sheer funk passed, leaving his eyes green slits and his jaw ridged with small, hard muscles. Heads up, old son!

The *marihuana* flipped away his cigarette looked to his seat chute and snapped on a powerful searchlight attached to a wing. He looked back at Tex, his masked eyes glittering like a viper's, a cruel malevolent grin on his red lips. Then his fingers slapped open the throttle, he kicked off the brakes, and the Wasp lunged forward like a freed bird.

BOUNCING and swaying over the uneven, scrubby flat, the bipe slittered its wash, flinging much and clods, the glaring beam of light from its wing boring into the welter of rain and wind and sparkling into a million tiny rainbows.

De Allende pulled back the stick, taut at the controls, his body crouched like a tiger's. Wobbling and lurching drunkenly, the Wasp slowly left the sodden earth, its under-carriage audibly scraping the tops of mesquite and chaparral. By sheer skill and a helping push of old Lady Luck he had gotten her off, was fighting upward into the howling teeth of the wind.

Tex, his teeth gritted, rolled from side to side the length of his bonds, awash in the back of the fuselage by the dipping and jerking. Every second he expected to see the biplane go plunging to earth; was all set for the crash.

But somehow the Mexican battled upward, slowly gaining altitude. He had switched off the searchlight, and the only illumination in the cabin was the glow of one green blub on the dash. It was a nerve-tearing, grass-cutting take-off and climb—the air above ground wasn't much better. Visibility was nil. The plane bucked like a sunfishing broomtail, wallowed like a skiff in a high sea as the taut pilots jockeyed her, the gauges on the board constantly in his vision. Not once did he look back at his prisoner.

Tex had no way of reckoning time nor direction. It was all some hellish nightmare, an unreal thing that bathed one in icy sweat and drained the color from a face. This storm was the worst he had ever experienced, and he had been through many. Dully he wondered if anything in the air could live through such a tempest.

Yet the deep, resonant roar of the motor had a confident note, and the mad pilot seemed just as confident in his ability as the minutes crawled on. Tex cursed himself savagely and bitterly for letting this predicament happen; he had baited a clever snare for the Bat by raiding Mexican territory, and had in turn been neatly trapped by his victim. His idea had been to lure the Bat into snooping around Zaragoza to see what the idea of the demanded levy was all about, then to pounce him or let the National planes there hop to the job. And instead . . .

HE bit back an oath of pain as his head banged hardly against the cabin wall. They evidently had arrived in the very center of the storm. The sturdy ship quivered like a tortured living thing, was being tossed about by the screaming wind like a dancing leaf.

The blinding streaks of lightning were incessant, forking through a seething, redshot fog of boiling clouds—the crash of thunder shook the plane in every brace and cotterpin. Faustino de Allende was crouched at the controls like a man ready to leap, tense as a jockey riding down the stretch. Once, twice, three times he desperately hauled the bipe out of started spins, its wires shrieking like demons and engine racing madly.

Tex Tolliver, gash-mouthed, battered and helpless, closed his eyes for the inevitable end. He would crash down to a mangled death, helpless to move arms or legs, imprisoned in a crippled ship staggering blindly to its doom, without a Chinaman's chance. His feelings became curiously numb and dulled; the world was non-existent and life a maddening nightmare.

He felt as though he was spinning dizzily in an aerial whirlpool, with the wind and rain, thunder, lightning and stuttering roar of the motor a devil's chorus beating his ear drums into his brain. Up and down a thousand feet at a time in the snatching currents, breathtaking dives and crazy sideslips, the searing lightning flashes burning through his closed eyes into the back of his skull. Queerly, he wondered if his broken remains would ever be found. He had not the faintest idea where he was.

Then, so suddenly that it was a shock, a strange peace and quiet seemed to reign. The lurching ship keeled level, fell into an air pocket, bounced like a rubber ball a time or two. With roaring motor the plane sprang forward, shaking rain from its body like a spaniel shakes water from its skin. They were out on the rim of the maelstrom.

THREE minutes later and they were below the stars, a cloud-shredded sky above in the high ceiling and an endless sea of chaparral beneath. Southwestward, there wasn't a cloud—to the north, that hellish storm was moving southeastward. Far to the south, in Mexico, it was clear.

Faustino de Allende saw all this, but Tex Tolliver didn't. The American was too bruised and battered to care much about anything—he was limp with relief at the cessation of that vicious pounding his helpless body had put up with. He vaguely realized that they had fought clear of the storm, and were traveling swiftly in some direction. The Mexican looked back at him a second time, grinned his devil's grin.

Minutes or hours later, Tex knew not which, the pilot cut on the searchlight, circled about a moment, then stuck the nose of his ship down and wheeled lazily lower and lower, finally bringing the Wasp swooping to touch wheels and tail skid on level ground and roll to a jarless stop. Then, gunning the engine by fits and starts, he taxied off at an angle, braked up; a flick of his hand silenced the motor. The prop ceased turning.

Allende opened the cabin door, and Tex heard voices outside. He opened his eyes, studying a face that popped into the aperture. The face of a little, wizened Mexican whose ratlike eyes met his boldly, triumphantly, his yellow teeth bared in a grin. A lantern flashed behind him; came exclamations, laughter.

The Spig pilot snapped on the domelight, leisurely removed helmet, goggles and gloves. But he kept on

the black silk mask as he silently bent over Tex and untied the leashes in the wall rings, then freed his cramped legs. Again with that surprising show of strength he hauled Tex bodily to his feet; motioned him to the door with a slight, sardonic bow and crooked smile.

"Welcome to my humble abode, Señor Tolliver," he said mockingly. "My poor house and everything in it is yours."

TEX didn't reply. Painfully he swung down from the cabin, blinking a little at his vague surroundings. The plane seemed to be parked under the overhang of a bluff, a perfect hangar formed by nature. The gallery was deep and long, and to the left a cave seemed to open on its back side, with a light shining in it. Tex's lynx-like glance took in this much, then swept to the patch of sky on the western horizon. It was becoming overcast, and far to the north thunder muttered. Two Mexicans stood by the plane, the little wizened mozo and a tall, sombreroed fellow whose features were in shadow.

De Allende waved Tex toward the smudge of light, after giving orders to the pair in regard to the plane. Not a word about the storm had he mentioned.

They entered a natural room in the cliff, some twenty by fifteen in dimension, rock walled, ceilinged and floored. The entrance was narrow and arched, the floor fairly level. A crude table, two rawhide-laced peon chairs, a cot with neatly folded blankets and a wooden locker comprised the furniture; a white gas lantern with low turned wick etched the place in dim light. Two skin rugs of goat and deer lay on the floor; large maps of Mexico and Texas were nailed on the wall.

And on the table, connected up with a maze of batteries, wires and headphones, was a radio set of recent make, its copper indoor antennae looped around the ceiling coaming.

TEX noted all this in a swift survey as he halted by the table, staring in narrow-eyed puzzlement. The flicker of a smile passed over de Allende's lips as he turned up the light, touched a match to a black cigarette and inhaled luxuriously.

He picked up some sheets of paper by the radio that were filled with scrawled writing, scanned them rapidly a moment, then tossed them aside. He turned to Tex, his smile pleasant, and with a gesture unmasked, dropping the black silk domino beside the papers.

"Pardon, señor," came his low, cultivated voice. "Turn around, and I will unlock the bracelets. The last two hours must have been very uncomfortable ones for you. Unfortunate, but quite necessary. A drink and a smoke might be most welcome, *no es verdad?*"

Tex was baffled and puzzled. Flexing his bruised wrists, he stared at the Mexican long and quizzically, his green eyes narrowed. Why this sudden change of manner, the surprising courtesy? What did he have up his sleeve, anyhow?

The face now revealed in the white light was darkly handsome, its clean cut features Grecian in mold, lean and with high cheek bones. His body, now clear of the mackinaw, was of slenderly athletic build, steel muscled and narrow waisted. His hair was black as the sheen of a crow's wing, his dark mustache slim as an eyebrow. Every movement bespoke culture and breeding.

Yet that livid scar on his right cheek, snaking from eye corner to chin—those slightly oblong, ebony eyes spoiled the disarming ensemble. Eyes blue-black in color, almost a violet. And there was about them a

chill, impersonal glitter of cruelty that one sees in the eyes of a snake.

Peculiar eyes they were, of a chilling deadliness. Veiled now, under a film of polite, disarming suavity.

Tex nodded to himself. They were indeed the eyes of a *"marihuana."*

HE sank into a chair, still massaging his wrists, tapping his toes on the floor to increase circulation. De Allende was busying himself at the locker in a corner, juggling glasses and bottles; Tex picked up the packet of black *cubanos* on the table, sniffed one to see if it was laced with *marihuana,* found it to be free of the weed and snapped a match to its tip. Making up his mind suddenly as to the course of action he would pursue, he waited silently.

The Mexican returned to the table with a bottle of *aguadiente* and two glasses, both filled. He handed one to Tex, raised his own with a slight nod. "To our better acquaintance, Señor Tolliver," he said. "And a good morning's sleep."

Tex grunted. "Happy landings," he replied drily. He tossed off the fiery liquor—felt it flow through his battered body in a warming tide, easing his aching bones. The Mexican, glass empty in his slim fingers, looked at him, smiled, motioned to the package of *cubanos* and the bottle. Tex refilled his tumbler, sinking down in the chair.

But he never finished the drink or the lighted fag between his fingers. A deadly drowsiness crept over him —a lassitude which gripped him in every nerve and fibre. The room swayed and blurred in front of his closing eyes; grew dark and cool. He couldn't think, reason, remember. Brain and senses numb, his head slowly bent forward until it rested on his crossed arms, pillowed on the table top. The half filled glass of *aguardiente* toppled to the floor, splintered with a tinkling crash.

Faustine de Allende stared down at the sleeping Texan a minute, his eyes inky bayonet tips between slitted lids. Then his knuckles rapped on the table sharply. The two Mexicans entered the cave, picked up the unconscious gringo and carried him through the entrance out into the night.

KENO CURRY awoke at dawn that morning, looked sleepily out of the window at the gray sky and gusty pelt of rain, then turned over to grab an hour's extra sleep. He had pounded his ear all night long, caught up with a lot of much needed sleep, and arose feeling cock-a-hoop. A breakfast of ham-an', flapjacks and steaming black java would set him on top of the world. Back in the kitchen he could hear Washee banging pots and pans.

Walking up to Tex's door, he turned the knob and shoved it open. "Hey, you damned sidewinder!" he greeted. "Gonna sleep all day? Rise and shine—"

He stopped abruptly. His widened eyes swiftly took in the mussed bed, the discarded pajamas, the muddy tracks on the floor. They darted to the swinging, gashed screen window —rested on the slim arrow stuck in the woodwork of the dresser before the mirror. For a moment Keno stood so, staring with bulging eyes, frozen in his tracks.

Then he swallowed with difficulty, and in three strides stood before the dresser, regarding the arrow. With an oath he ripped it loose, tore the piece of paper tied with a bit of thread from its feather end. And Keno Curry grew exceedingly silent at what he saw.

On it, in black ink, was the neatly drawn picture of a spread winged bat, rampant upon a red etched skull

and crossed bones. And directly below the grisly figure were the written words: *"El Halcon Rojo* is in the lair of *El Garrote Negro.* And he is not there for ransom."

KENO read the message twice. Three times he slowly perused the last seven, ominous words. His features were drawn and white beneath their saddle-leather bronze, his thin lips a slash, his agate eyes terrible. For three minutes, the ex-*buscadero* stood motionless, surveying every inch of the room, plainly reading signs. Then he stepped to the window, opened it wide and quietly dropped to the ground.

Thirty minutes later, he, Spit Lacey, ranch foreman, Link Spillane, and José Escajeda, a Mex *vacquero* who could track a coyote on caprock, had followed the dim spoor to the sodden alkali flat where the plane took off. Two punchers were racing to Del Rio to inform the authorities, for the telephone line was down.

Other grim-jawed and hard-eyed waddies of the Slash were riding hell bent to the neighboring ranches to round up search parties; still others, impotent and cursing, milled about the hacienda doorway, all for striking ahead into a Stetsoned and chapajeroed invasion of Mexico. To hell with the government and international law!

A beehive or hornet's nest was tame besides the rancho of the Slash-T that dark wind-swept day. Sheriff Dragoo, Ranger Markley, two G-operatives and a Border Patrol plane were soon out there; low flying ships drummed through the sky and scoured the mesquite for signs of a wreck.

All agreed, cool heads and not, that no airplane could have flown in that storm and survived it. Posses of ranchers and cowboys combed the surrounding country; *rurales* and Mexican cavalry from Via Acuna, across from Del Rio, joined in the search.

The Señor of the Slash had been abducted—stolen from his house under the very noses of his men!

BUT what to do? Keno Curry, smoldering rage in his eyes and his jaw clamped tight, walked around like a caged coyote, helpless, impotent and roweled with a thousand black forebodings. His calico pony was saddled, his six-shooters tied down low on his hips, and he smoked one brown quirly after another.

Six or eight punchers of the Slash stood by, armed to the teeth and their broncs also saddled, waiting for him to lead the foray across the Rio Grande.

Inaction was as gall to Keno's soul, but cold common sense told him that his hands were tied. Tex Tolliver was to him what ham is to eggs, and Keno knew that his *compadre* could expect scant mercy from that sky-killer called the Bat.

"We're doing all we can, brother!" said one of the Federal men, testily.

"Yeah?" snarled Keno, his fingers working. "You're about as worthless as a tick on a steer!—the whole damned spread of yuh!" He wheeled to the granite faced waddies. "C'mon hombres. It's across the river for us. And kill every *cabrone* that opens his trap or tries to stop us over there!"

SHERIFF SAM DRAGOO, as canny a man as ever lived, walked over to the white-lipped Keno, his keen old eyes sympathetic and his grizzled face full of understanding.

"Don't cut loose at half-cock, son," he said quietly. "I know yuh better'n you think, Keno. You're slicker than greased lightnin' on the draw, faster'n nine kinds of hell with

hip gun or hideout, an there ain't nothin' you won't stop at to gain your ends. You can read sign on the ground like an Injun and can stay in a chase as long, or longer, than any hairpin who ever et outa a skillet or braided a rope necktie. But you don't know the air, son—not 'less you're ridin' in the Hawk with somebody else stickin' spurs to it.

"Now, it won't do no earthly good to go rampagin' into Mexico blind with a crowd of itch-fingered cowpokes. You'll just get a whole slew of lads sanded out in the deal, and won't help Tex non, either. That's the unbolted truth, Keno."

The rage and fear that was eating Curry registered in every facial expression, but he got himself in hand with a mighty effort. "You're right, sheriff," he said briefly. "Sense talks there."

"An' that" nodded the veteran peace officer approvingly, "is showin' a *heap* of sense. S'pose you just kind take charge of the rancho the rest of the day, and stick around? I might be needin' yuh."

"All right," said Keno sullenly. "I gotcha. But I'm statin' to the cock-eyed world right now—if that son of a sidewinder has rubbed out Ace, I'm gonna follow him plumb to hell, an' make some of those greaser torture tricks look like a Sunday-school picnic besides what I'll do to his dirty carcass. Sure as God made green apples, I will!"

He turned on his boot heel and walked rapidly away, not once looking back. And the old sheriff watched him go with thoughtful, troubled eyes.

TEX TOLLIVER awoke, blinked his eyes twice, popped them wide open. For a few moments he lay still, his gaze upon the cool rock ledge above his face. The last shreds of drowsiness fled before the cold needle bath of remembrance—the events of the night came back in one swift rush. His kidnapping; the nightmare flight in the storm; the doped drink. Very cautiously he raised upon an elbow and surveyed his surroundings.

He was laying on a couple of blankets on the ground beneath the overhang of the red cliff, and a sultry, cloud veiled sun beat down on a long, narrow alkali flat facing it. Across this flat the bluffs rose again, gashed the coulees and barrancas, clothed with pinon and juniper. North and south, at the ends of this miniature valley-pass, the mesquite desert stretched away in every direction as far as eye could reach, barren, waterless and desolate.

Tex did not need a second look to know he was in Mexico, and a pretty far way down into it at that. Furthermore, he ruminated wryly, the prospects looked none too bright of getting out.

HE sat up, saw no one in sight beneath the ledge, then got to his feet. Funny that they left him alone like this. His clothes had not been taken off, his muscles ached and his skin was black and blue from the hammering in the plane. A nagging little headache was a hangover of the doped *aguadiente*.

He walked southward under the ledge, and around a jutting shoulder which had obscured his vision. The smell of Mexican cooking tickled his nose, and in a cornice of the rock he saw the wizened, rat-eyed *peelow* squatting before a 'squite root fire doing something with some pans. Three or four cave mouths honeycombed the base of the cliff—in two of them were planes, before a third sat Faustino de Allende.

He glanced up as Tex appeared.

"'Dias," he nodded pleasantly. "And did my guest sleep well?"

"Thanks to your doped drink, yes," replied Tex shortly.

THE BAT put away the novel and leisurely lighted a black *cigarro*, blowing a curling smoke ring ledgeward. "I doped your drink so you would sleep long and unfeelingly," he stated with cool frankness. "The flight across the *Jornada*, with all the rocking, would have kept you awake with aching bones. I wished you to feel fresh and strong today."

"Why?" demanded Tex bluntly. "So that I would last longer under a slow fire, or on an ant hill? Or maybe so a green hide would take a few extra hours to squeeze the life out of me?"

Allende leaned back and laughed. "You are curious," he purred lightly, jeeringly. Then, lowering his voice gravely, "When death rides the *Jornada*, who can tell how, or when it will strike?"

Tex shrugged carelessly. "Who wants to live always?" he countered. He would play this shuck's game with him card for card. And wait for a break.

"Who cares to live always?" repeated the Mexican, his eyes mocking Tex. "Most of us do, *amigo*." He got to his feet quickly, lithe as a cat.

"But I forget," he apologized suavely. "You must have hunger, also thirst. Chongito will have dinner prepared in a few moments. I did not awake you for breakfast—you were sleeping so soundly. Perhaps a cup of coffee now, or a glass of tequila, before dining?"

"With more dope in it?" demanded Tex drily. "No thanks, *Garrote*."

"God and the devil!" swore Allende. "Did I not tell you why I dropped the *golosina* in your liquor, Señor Tolliver! It is a harmless sedative, discreetly used, with no ill after-effects. Why should I again put you to sleep—when I very much want you wide awake and in possession of all your faculties?"

MY error," replied the unsmiling Texan.

The drinks disposed of, the rat-eyed, pock-faced greaser called Chongito had dinner ready.

The meal was good. Chongito hovered near, alert for the slightest nod of de Allende, his wizened body moving like a shadow. He was a big, black-moustached greaser, swarthy and evil-faced, with arms and shoulders like a gorilla. He flung a shrewd glance and malevolent grin at Tex.

"What luck, Bigote?" asked Allende carelessly.

"A blacktail," replied the mozo. "Young venison, senor."

"Bueno," nodded the Bat. "I wish a tender steak for supper tonight."

TEX didn't miss the hidden import of that word exchange. De Allende hadn't asked him what his choice on the menu would be! So his demise would probably take place that afternoon sometime.

"After dinner we will talk, my friend," de Allende said affably. "As you say in your country, 'get down to cases.' Eat well, eat very well and take your time, for—"

Allende suddenly leaned forward, hands on the table, his face transformed into an animal snarl.

"Eat well," he spat out, "for it will be your last food on earth!"

What is the Fate of Tex Tolliver in the Merciless Hands of de Allende? Read the Next and Final Instalment of "The Red Hawk of the Rio" for the Thrilling Conclusion of this Exciting Story

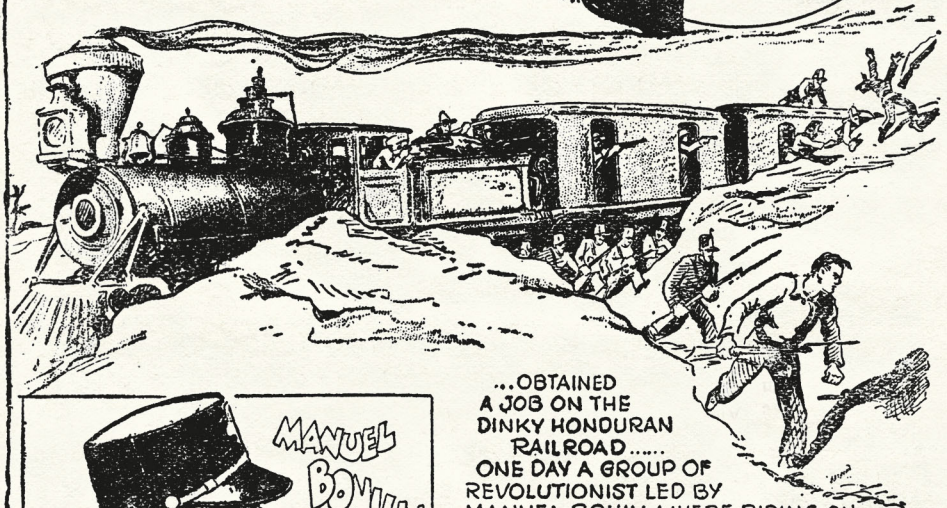
Famous Soldiers of Fortune

NO. I.

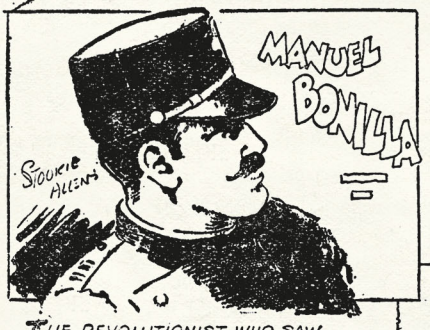
GEN. LEE CHRISTMAS

THE LOUISIANA RAILROAD ENGINEER WHO TOOK UP FIGHTING AT 30 AND BECAME A FIREBRAND LEADER OF GUERILLA REVOLUTIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

CHRISTMAS LOST HIS JOB ON THE ILLINOIS CENTRAL BECAUSE OF AN ACCIDENT AND ONE DAY SHOWED UP ON THE BEACH AT PORTO CORTEZ, HONDURAS PENNILESS

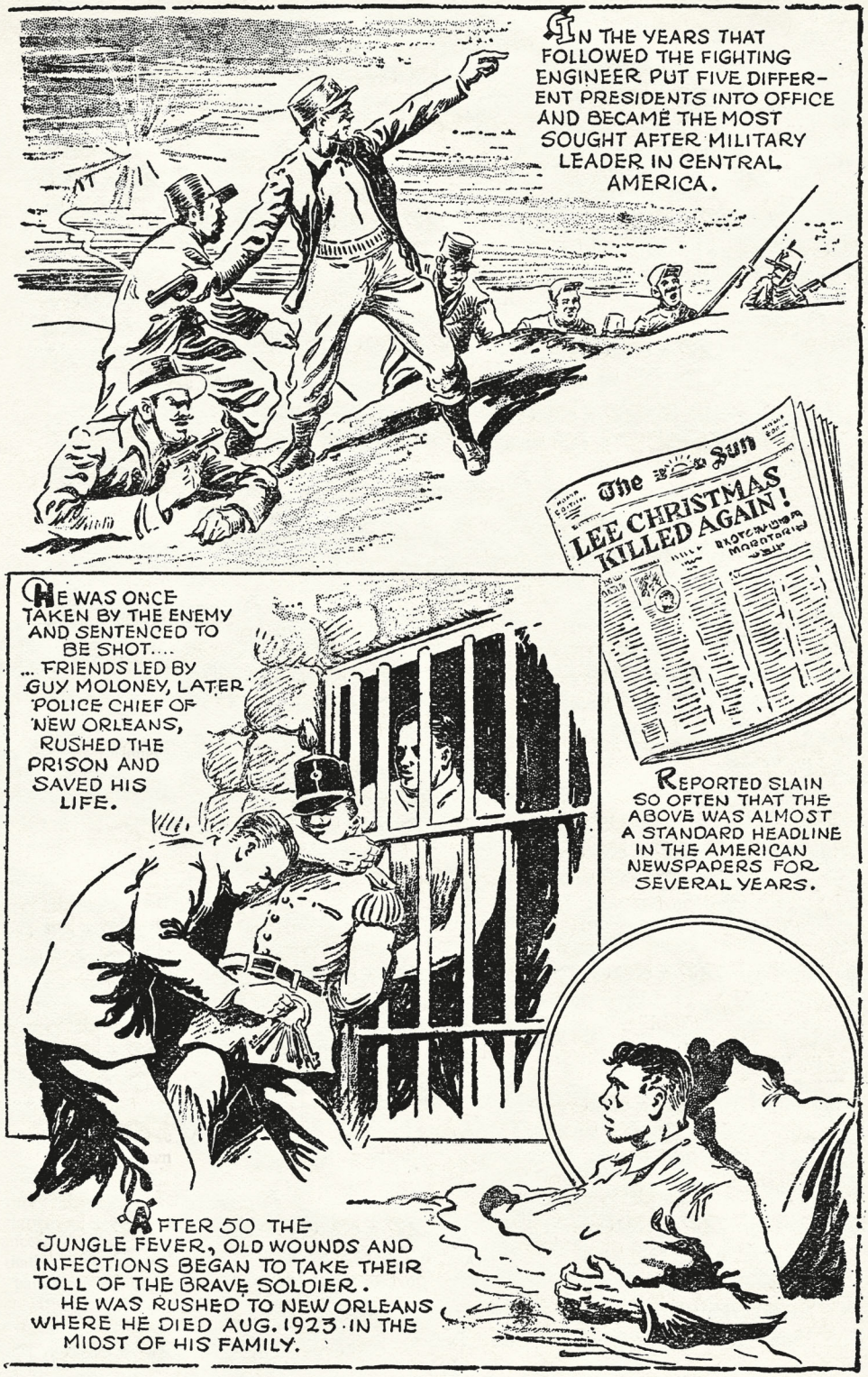


...OBTAINED A JOB ON THE DINKY HONDURAN RAILROAD..... ONE DAY A GROUP OF REVOLUTIONIST LED BY MANUEL BONILLA WERE RIDING ON HIS LINE WHEN THE FEDERALS SUDDENLY BEGAN TO FIRE ON THE TRAIN..... ... ENRAGED, CHRISTMAS GRABBED A GUN AND LED A CHARGE THAT QUICKLY PUT THE GOVERNMENT TROOPS TO ROUT.

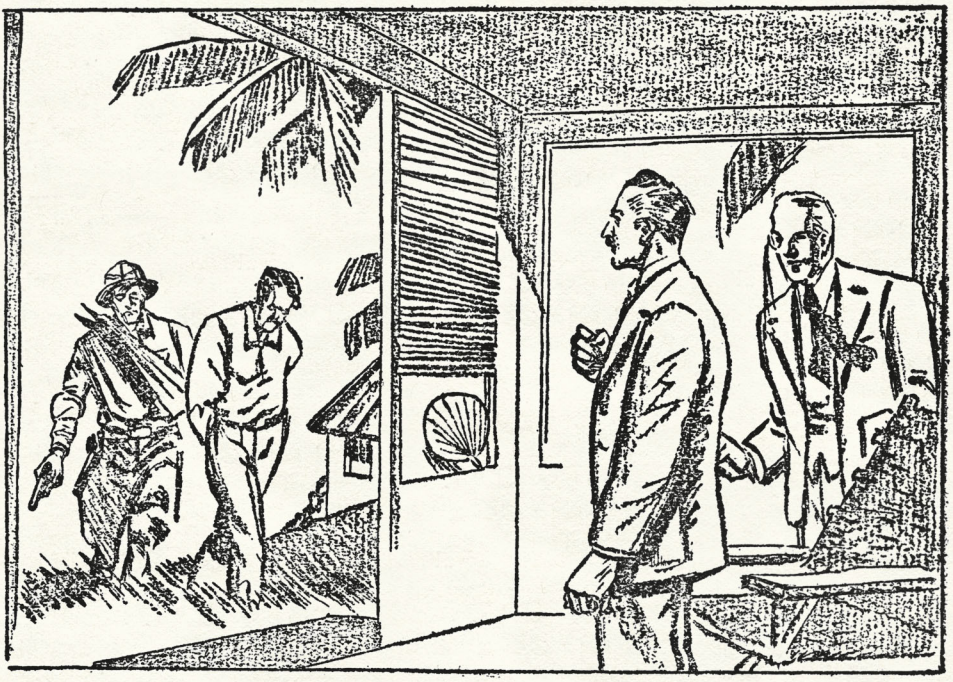


...THE REVOLUTIONIST WHO SAW THE DARING CHARGE OF CHRISTMAS AND PERSUADED HIM TO JOIN HIS FORCES AS A CAPTAIN. CHRISTMAS MADE HIM PRESIDENT.

CHRISTMAS WAS QUICKLY PROMOTED TO A GENERAL AND WHEN BONILLA BECAME PRESIDENT HE WAS GIVEN VALUABLE MINING PROPERTIES.


IN THE YEARS THAT FOLLOWED THE FIGHTING ENGINEER PUT FIVE DIFFERENT PRESIDENTS INTO OFFICE AND BECAME THE MOST SOUGHT AFTER MILITARY LEADER IN CENTRAL AMERICA.
The Sun
LEE CHRISTMAS KILLED AGAIN!
HE WAS ONCE TAKEN BY THE ENEMY AND SENTENCED TO BE SHOT....
... FRIENDS LED BY GUY MOLONEY, LATER POLICE CHIEF OF NEW ORLEANS, RUSHED THE PRISON AND SAVED HIS LIFE.
REPORTED SLAIN SO OFTEN THAT THE ABOVE WAS ALMOST A STANDARD HEADLINE IN THE AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS FOR SEVERAL YEARS.
AFTER 50 THE JUNGLE FEVER, OLD WOUNDS AND INFECTIONS BEGAN TO TAKE THEIR TOLL OF THE BRAVE SOLDIER. HE WAS RUSHED TO NEW ORLEANS WHERE HE DIED AUG. 1923 IN THE MIDST OF HIS FAMILY.

DARK RIVER



A Breath-Taking Story of the Far East And the Maddening Urge For Revenge

By BENGE ATLEE

A CURSE twisted John Harrow's purplish lips. He was staring at the *Moth* seaplane that lay at anchor on the muddy river outside—another of the useless tools the Irrawaddy Trading Company had sent him. Kearns, the pilot, had gone sick a week ago—and there the damned thing lay, eating up overhead.

One of the boys came running: "Tuan! White man come canoe! Plenty seeck!"

Harrow lumbered to his feet, drained the remnant of the gin and limes. It'd be good to see a white man—even a sick white man—in this damned jungle heat-hole. He followed the boy out into the midday heat, down the jetty to its end, where a group of his men were lifting a limp form from a canoe.

One of them said with a long face: "Him die, Tuan! Look him face—see!"

It was a young face, matted blonde hair streaking the forehead, but it was purple, bloated, the eye-balls staring and bloodshot.

"Bring him bungalow!" Harrow

jerked a thumb towards the house higher up under the cluster of palms. He led the way past the factory, up the narrow path.

Knowing considerable of tropical medicine, he got the sick man undressed and then under his primitive shower bath. While the barrel above emptied itself of cold water he held the limp, naked figure under it. Then he carried him to his own bed and ordered his boy to get the punka going.

It was nightfall — and there had been several more cold showers in the meantime—before the sick man recovered consciousness. That happened suddenly. The boy sat up abruptly, his eyes frantic and staring: "Parker!" he gasped. "Paunglung! . . . Cut off by Shans! . . . Going to murder him! . . . Came to get help—name's Grainger!"

"Parker, eh?" Harrow's eyes narrowed sardonically. "So they've turned on him at last! Lie back and take it easy, son. He's only getting what's coming to him."

The sick man staggered up out of bed. "Got to get back with help! Got to—"

HARROW caught him as he was collapsing, laid him back on the bed again. "Forget about Tom Parker," he said gruffly. "Let him take his medicine. And for God's sake calm down or all my work on you'll be undone. You're sick."

The youngster lay flat, exhausted, his eyes closed. But only for a moment. Some irresistible urge forced him up to the sitting position again in spite of his weakness.

"Listen, Harrow," he panted, "they mustn't get him! I've got to bring him down river. For God's sake, give me a hand!"

"I wouldn't raise a finger to save the dirty rat if he was the last man in the world, son," Harrow answered grimly. "Neither would any other white man on the upper Chindwin. He's done things to the natives that are unforgivable. We believe, although we haven't any proof, that he killed old Dan Connors. It was a funny thing that Connors should have died so mysteriously after discovering that ruby mine. Why are you mixed up with him? You seem a decent chap."

The boy stared at him—queerly, searchingly. Ignoring the question, he said hoarsely: "You'll let the niggers kill him—a white man—one of your own kind?"

"A white man, did you say?" Harrow laughed ironically. "The rest of us thank you for the compliment." And then his face hardened. "I'd go to Siam for any other man on the Chindwin, Grainger. I wouldn't walk ten feet to save Tom Parker from his deserts. That's final."

A look of desperation came into Jeff Grainger's haggard eyes. He stared at Harrow.

Suddenly he leaned forward: "Listen," he gasped, "I've got to bring him back! I've come half way 'round the world to get him. It's taken me four years. I can't fail now."

A NEW interest gleamed in the Englishman's heavy face.

"I don't just understand, son," he said quietly. "Just why have you chased him half way around the world?"

The boy stared ahead of him—into a bleak and troubled memory. A sort of agony seemed to writhe under the haggard lines of his young face. Suddenly he swung on the other man.

"He used to work for my father. Dad was general manager of Cardew & Co., New York jewelers. The Creightley jewels — famous old collection—were brought to the store to be reset. Parker stole 'em—planted

some of 'em on dad. Dad was sent to Sing Sing—died there—disgraced. He knew Parker was the real thief. Couldn't prove it.

"Listen, Harrow, when I saw dad dying of a broken heart, I made up my mind I'd clear his name. I followed Parker to Buenos Aires. Lost him there. It wasn't until five months ago I got word he was here. Sheer chance. Tramp skipper told me in Rio he'd landed him at Rangoon from Valparaiso. I found him five weeks ago. I've been working for him. He doesn't know who I am. I haven't got the goods on him yet—but I will have them!

"He still has the Creightley diamonds—hasn't dared try to sell them yet. If I can get back and rescue him from those Shans he'll bring them away with him and I'll have him arrested with them on him! If the Shans get him, he'll carry the secret to his grave. I won't be able to clear dad's name. Don't you see that you've got to help me now?"

HARROW was visibly impressed. There was concern in his usually hard-boiled eyes.

"I'll send word down to Mowbray tonight, son," he said. "He's the D. C. at Mungti and it's his kind of job. I reckon he'll be glad to have something on Parker at last."

"But it'll take a day to get word to Mungti!" the boy cried. "And another day for Mowbray to reach here! The Shans'll get their dirty work in before we could possibly reach Parker's post! Can't you get up a rescue party and start up-river with me tonight."

Harrow shook his head regretfully.

"Sorry," he said, "but I've got a warehouse full of trade goods and no one I can trust to leave in charge of it. I'm afraid you'll have to wait for Mowbray."

Jeff Grainger staggered to his feet from the bed. "Then lend me some canoe-boys!" he said hoarsely. "I'll go back alone! I'm going to get him! I won't let him—escape me—now!"

He started for the door.

Harrow went after him, crying: "Come back to bed, you young idiot! You're not fit to—"

The boy reached the veranda before he collapsed limply. Harrow carried him back to the bed.

JEFF GRAINGER woke with a start, leaped up wildly. Dawn had come crashing over the jungle, but it took him some minutes to realize where he was, that he hadn't fallen asleep inside a ring of savage *parangs*.

This was Harrow's bungalow, Harrow's bedroom. Harrow had left a bundle of clean clothes on the chair beside the bed.

Suddenly the dominating purpose he had served for four years clamped itself on his mind again—Parker! He must waken Harrow, borrow some of the trader's boys and start up-river at once. His collapse last night had lost him over twelve hours. The Shan spears would be creeping close to that stone hut in the jungle.

He was putting his head through the neck of a white shirt when suddenly he froze into an attitude of amazement. Out through the window there—on the river!

Was he delirious or was that a plane? A plane here! Crazy—

Suddenly he gasped: "God!" and a glitter of wild triumph shot into his haggard eyes. Noiselessly he drew on the rest of the clothes Harrow had provided. He crept stealthily towards the living room. The Englishman lay snoring under a mosquito net on a couch in the far corner. On the near wall, close to the door, a Winchester repeater hung on a rack, two full bandoliers below it. He took them down cautiously

on his way. Then out on to the veranda—down the path.

The meditative Burmese foreman lounging in the riverside door of the warehouse removed the cheroot from his mouth and murmured: "Greetings, Tuan." Then his body stiffened suddenly with fear.

"Get gasoline—petrol! Big can! Quick!"

The Burman backed away from the menace of the rifle—into the warehouse.

"No have petrol, Tuan," he said, his eyes now half-lidded in the secretive Mongol way. But the eyes were sly.

"Don't lie to me! Trot it out!"

TINS in the corner behind piled goods—Shell Spirits. The Burman picked up two, Jeff took another, they went along the jetty to the canoe that swung at its end. Under the white man's curt orders the Burman paddled them out to the anchored *Moth,* lifted the tins into the rear cockpit. As the gas gurgled into the half-empty tank, Jeff watched the bungalow anxiously. But Harrow slept on.

The engine was logy from disuse. The Burman sweated over the prop. But the reassuring roar split the dawn silence finally. Jeff waved the Burman ashore, let the unmoored plane float with the tide while her engine warmed up.

He was on the point of giving her more gun when a sound reached him above the racket. Harrow in pajamas, rushing down the jetty, shouting his head off.

With a grim smile, Jeff waved a hand at him. The *Moth* began to glide out onto the bosom of the river —gathering speed. He concentrated on her working more closely. Back in America five years ago he had done some flying, dabbling at it like so many other well-to-do men's sons. But only land planes. This was going to be different perhaps—but it would bring Tom Parker back to retribution. He had no doubt of that now.

It was written in every confident line of his young, eager face.

DARKNESS was settling over the river again. He waded out into the little creek in which he had kept the *Moth* hidden all day and dragged up the anchor. With a length of bamboo he had cut at the forest's edge, he poled her out into the Chindwin. The current caught her; she began to sweep slowly downward. By this time it was quite dark.

He kept her close to the shore. Paunglung was three miles below. Flying low over the village that morning he had seen Parker and his three men on the roof of the stone hut.

The rest of the village was deserted, the Shans hidden in the surrounding jungle. Parker had waved up at him furiously, trying to attract his attention—which proved that his peril still surrounded him.

An hour later he saw the light on the roof. Keeping the *Moth* out as far as he dared, he let her float below the village a full half mile. Finally, some distance from the shore he let the anchor down. The plane dragged a little as the current swung her around, but finally rested.

He let himself over the edge of the pontoon into the water. Fifty yards to shore. Fifty yards of peril from gaping-jawed crocs. But he'd taken worse chances than that. As his feet touched bottom, the sharp staccato of rapid gunfire shattered the silence. The Shans must be making another attack.

He crept up the bank into the undergrowth and began to make his way stealthily village-wards. It was a pity he'd had to leave the rifle in

the plane, but immersion would have rendered it useless. It left him with no other weapon than his two hands.

He kept close to the shore. There would be a group of Shans clustered about the half-dozen dug-out canoes drawn up on the river bank in the centre of the clearing.

His hope was to slip in between them at the nearer edge of the jungle. Anywhere else he was bound to encounter the savage semi-circle of brown men.

He halted suddenly.

Something had moved against the thinning shadows ahead. Shans! They were standing at the very junction of jungle and river-bank. There was only one way to get past them—risk the crocs again. He crept back a dozen yards, slid down the bank into the water.

Swimming silently he made slow time against the current. The machine-gun fire had died down, he could see the light in the barred window of the stone hut. Finally he swung shorewards. Voices floated down gutturally from above where the Shans guarded their dug-outs.

HE crept slowly out of the water —until a sudden swirl at his very heels sent him shooting forward. The crocodile's gaping jaws snapped within inches of his toes. Climbing a few feet higher he pressed his body against the bank.

Had they heard him?

He waited a full five minutes before climbing higher. From the top it was a hundred open yards to the nearest deserted reed huts.

Worming slowly forward on his stomach, it took him twenty minutes to reach the shadow of the nearest hut. Everywhere silence lay like a heavy pall. He started around the hut on his hands and knees. Parker's house lay a dozen yards beyond, towering over the native dwellings.

Suddenly, directly ahead of him a figure shot up. He was rising from his knees as the huge jungle-knife plunged downward at him. Desperately he sprang aside. His hand went out, caught a bony wrist, gave it a twist that sent the *parang* thudding to the ground.

Then two Shan arms were around him like the coils of a panther. He fought frantically for a hold. Neither the Shan nor himself spoke a word. The native was evidently in too great fear of a fusilade from the roof of the stone hut.

They went down, began to roll over and over. The Shan's grip moved higher—steadily higher. He suddenly straddled Jeff, got him by the throat. With his last ounce of strength the latter heaved his body in a bow, let it sag sharply, and then brought his knee sharply into the native's stomach.

A low grunt—a loosening of that terrible grip. Jeff swung the winded and half-dazed Shan over on his side, struck him fair on the chin with his clenched fist. The brown body went limp—lay still.

LEAPING up, Jeff shot towards the hut.

"Parker!" he hissed through the darkness. "It's Jeff Grant! Don't fire!"

Another dozen paces. An open door.

"Atta boy! You done it, kid!"

The door clanged shut as a wild yell rose from the jungle wall outside.

Parker's heavy body shook with chuckles as he listened, the smile that twisted his uneven and cruel lips relieving his face of some of its harshness.

"Didn't think you had it in you, kid! That sure was one grand one you pulled on Harrow! Serves the

dirty buzzard right for acting the way he did!"

"The sooner we get out of here, the better," Jeff said. "We'll have to fight for it. There's a bunch of them standing guard over the canoes."

"We can swim. You did."

"Not again, thanks." Jeff laughed grimly. "Besides, we'll need the canoe for your men. I'll tow 'em down river a dozen miles. That'll give 'em start enough. The plane'll only hold you and me."

"Got lots of gas?" There was a sharp tightening about Parker's little dark eyes as he asked the question.

"Yes. The tank's full and I've got a spare tin."

"We could go all the way to Rangoon, then?"

"Sure. But we won't. I owe it to Harrow to return the plane. Nobody could have done more for me than he did yesterday. I hated like the dickens to trick him."

"Don't pay to be too squeamish in this world, kid. Go up and bring the boys down. They're on the roof. Better give me ten minutes to collect some things before you come down. We don't want a surprise attack at the last minute."

JEFF went up the ladder. The little Burman crouched behind his rifle above the parapet smiled at him softly through the darkness.

"Greetings, Tuan Grant!" he whispered.

"We're leaving soon, Rao Chun," Jeff told him. "Down river to safety!"

"It is good!" hissed the little man.

Jeff moved over to the other Burman, gave him the same message. Then he crept back to the opening in the roof.

Parker was doing something to the wall of the hut from a spot where the big cupboard had stood. The cupboard was moved out. He was digging with a chisel at the masonry. Finally one of the stones came away. He thrust his hand into the hole, drew out two long cases.

Jeff's eyes glittered. So that was where the stuff had remained hidden! No wonder he hadn't been able to locate it! But did those cases really contain the jewels he had come so far to find?

He drew back sharply as the man below glanced furtively up. Then he saw Parker remove his shirt. Parker was wearing a canvas pouch strapped about his waist. He opened one of the long cases. Jeff's heart sank suddenly. It contained not the Creightley jewels, but blood-red rubies. They'd be old Connor's find!

He hung there tensely as Parker transferred them to one of the compartments in the canvas pouch about his waist. Then Parker opened the other case. A low, tremulous breath of relief soughed through the boy's lips.

THOSE glistening white stones—there could be no doubt about them!

He crept back to Rao Chun, waited a few minutes and then whispered: "Bring your gun. We go now."

The two Burmans followed him down the ladder, grinning like children. Parker was putting some shells into his revolver. He turned finally with his twisted leer.

"Let's go!"

Moments that seemed hours. Jeff could hear the quick, tortured breathing of the Burmans beside him as they crept on hands and knees in a line behind Parker. His own heart was hammering suffocatingly. The last lap. Another fifty yards to the edge of the river-bank. So near—so far. Only those half-dozen Shans guarding the canoes stood between them and escape, between himself and that larger escape that would

mean the clearing of his dead father's name.

But something lay heavy in his heart—a sense of apprehension—a feeling that here at the very edge of victory defeat lay waiting. He tried to shake himself clear of it. He couldn't fail now—

Parker had reached the edge of the bank, waited until they drew level. The night about them lay blanketed in a thick, stifling silence.

"Six of 'em—ready?" he hissed in Jeff's ear.

"O. K."

Parker shot to his feet, leaped down the bank. Jeff and the two Burmans sprang after him. They were practically on the Shans before the latter's sharp yell of alarm split the silence.

PARKER'S revolver barked savagely. Jeff had his rifle by the barrel, swung the butt at a Shan head. For a moment it was wild melee—a mass of wavering bodies. Rao Chun's parang swung in front of Jeff, sunk into the breast of the big Shan who was lunging at him with a spear.

Yells from the jungle behind. Close—shrieking across the clearing. In another minute or two the whole Shan mob would be on them.

And then the miracle happened. Parker had broken through the guard, was dashing towards the canoes at the water's edge. Jeff came after him with the two Burmans like the tail of a flying wedge.

There was no time to pick and choose—no time even to bash in the other canoes. They leaped into the nearest frail craft, pushed off. All five grabbed paddles, dug them into the stream, sent the canoe flying.

Two minutes later Jeff clambered up the nearest pontoon into the cockpit. He was panting heavily, but that heavy feeling of apprehension had gone. The way was clear now. Dawn would come soon—and then Mungti, where Mowbray, the D. C., would play his part in the last round of the drama that was rushing to its close.

As the *Moth* roared into life a moment later something slashed into the fuselage, quivered there. A spear.

"Hasten, Tuan!" cried Rao Chun in the canoe behind. "They come quickly!"

He was clinging to one end of a paddle, the other end of which Parker held in the rear cockpit.

The *Moth* moved forward, gaining speed. Above the engine's roar Jeff heard a yell that seemed strangely more touched with terror than rage. A half mile down river he eased the throttle. Parker leaned forward.

"What's the delay? Give her more juice!" he shouted.

"I don't want to spill the boys out of the canoe!" Jeff replied.

The other man let out a cackle of laughter.

"You don't have to worry about them. I let 'em go. Too risky hanging on to 'em. Our lives are worth more than a couple of natives."

Jeff swung, horror and anger seething in his breast. It was only with an effort that he beat back the raging impulse to strike at that grinning, leering face. Parker would pay for this! He'd pay—and pay.

LIGHT coming up over the jungle. The first crimson rays of the sun glinted on the *Moth's* wings as she rose above the little cover where they had waited for the dawn. Three hundred feet up Jeff headed her down river.

Suddenly the voice behind him grated: "Swing east!"

He turned, shouted back: "It's safer over the river in a bus like this! Can't make an emergency landing except on water!"

Parker's eyes were glittering, the man showed his taut excitement in the leer that froze his lips over the vulpine teeth."

"East, I said, kid! You're going to take me to French Indo-China!"

Indo-China! Jeff's heart sank suddenly as he saw the gun in the other man's hand. This was going to tear everything, ruin his carefully thought-out plan! Parker might escape him in Indo-China!

And then he got the last malicious kick of fate.

Parker was grinning. Parker was saying: "Clever kid, ain't you? Thought I didn't know who you were! Jeff Grant, you said you were! Didn't suspect I knew you were Jim Grainger's son all the time! Nor that I knew you was trying to get something on me! Just too bad!" He let out that harsh laugh again. "But you're going to serve your purpose. You're taking me to Hanoi. I'll get a boat there for somewhere after I've settled your hash. Head her east, I tell you. I'm taking as much risk as you are over the jungle. We'll hit the Sung-ka River a couple of hundred miles away. After that its water all the way to the coast. Get going!"

PARKER had been playing him for a fish all along! The boy let out a groan. He had lost—lost everything. He'd lose more—his own life—as soon as they landed at Hanoi.

His life! What was his life worth now anyway! He'd made a mess of it—failed like a fool—

Something terrible and desperate glittered in his young eyes as he glanced below.

He shot the stick sharply forward, put the *Moth* into a nose-dive.

"Hey! What you doing! Cut that out, you young fool!"

His turn to laugh now—to laugh back at that startled, evil face. He had nothing to fear from that gun now—and if Parker used it they'd still crash together.

The green tree-tops came rushing up. The wind sang in the wires. And then a thought shot through his brain. He *was* a fool! It wasn't really necessary to take this crash! Parker couldn't fly the plane! He, Jeff Grainger, could do what he liked with the *Moth* and the other man wouldn't dare to use his gun!

He'd carry out his plan as he had intended. It was worth taking the chance even if Parker tried to kill him as they landed opposite Mowbray's bungalow at Munti. Parker couldn't get away with it under the D. C.'s very nose. He'd hang for it!

He drew the stick back sharply. The *Moth* was about a hundred feet above the trees. But something went wrong as she levelled off. Perhaps her pontoons brushed an extra-high leafy top.

Her nose shot down—straight at the river bank. He tried again to level her off, but like a scared bird she took another swerve, her lower wing caught another tree-top at the very edge of the jungle. She swung around, went whirling down—straight at the muddy bank.

Crash! . . .

A HAMMER pounded in his brain. The pain in his body grew. He opened his eyes. He swayed upright into a sitting position. He had been lying in the mud close to the water's edge.

The wrecked *Moth*—and it was a wreck—hung crumpled around the big mangrove tree. The sun was directly overhead.

Parker! What had happened to Parker?

He staggered to his feet. His left shoulder hung limp at his side—broken collar-bone.

He glanced wildly around. No sign of the other man anywhere. He dashed into the nearest underbrush, called out—plunged on further—called again. And then, leaning weakly against the trunk of a tree, he found himself staring along a narrow foot-path that skirted the river's edge.

Parker had gone that way—down-river! It came to him with a clairvoyant certainty.

FOR the moment tears stung his eyes, a half-hysteric sob strangled him. But only for a moment. His lean body stiffened again, a grim, terrible look came into his eyes. Parker couldn't escape him! The world wasn't big enough!

If he could get to Harrow's station—just that far. He could have word sent to Mowbray—Mowbray might get a wire through to Rangoon before Parker left the country.

It came black night. He stumbled on—over tree roots—into swampy holes—fell—got up again—staggered on.

"Stick it!"

Another half hour. He couldn't go much further. Wiping the sweat from his eyes he halted for a moment to get his breath. Suddenly his eyes dilated.

Light!

He leaned weakly against a tree, waiting for his heart to stop pounding. Someone had lit a fire on the trail directly ahead.

Tom Parker?

He started forward—stealthily. Finally he got down on his hands and knees, wormed his way off the trail into the undergrowth. Then on again—on his stomach.

There was a shelf of dry mud where the trail actually traversed the river bank. On that shelf, beside a fire that had burned past its full glow and was going out, sat Parker.

It really was Parker. He was eating out of a bully-beef tin and Jeff's mouth drooled as he watched. Parker had a great gash above his forehead, there was blood on the side of his face. He hadn't come out of the crash unscathed either.

PARKER finished his meal, looked doubtfully across the murky river, stretched himself out on the ground beside the fire.

Waiting . . . until long after those snores had taken on a steady rhythm . . . until the other man had sunk far into an exhausted sleep. Then he began to worm his way silently around the bank of dried mud until he was behind the sleeper's back.

Another ten minutes. Once more Jeff moved. Then he was bending above the sleeping man. Then his hand went out for the gun that lay close to the heaving stomach. His fingers closed around it. He crept back to the edge of the trail a dozen feet away, put his back against the trunk of a tree—to wait for another dawn.

TWO men sat over a late breakfast on Harrow's veranda—Harrow, himself, and a lean-faced, lean-figured man who wore a monocle over a glass eye—Mowbray, the D. C.

Mowbray was saying in his Oxford drawl: "It was as much your fault as his, old thing. You should have gone with him. Any man on the river owes it to the rest to do anything he can to get something on Tom Parker. It's characters like him that destroy all the good the rest of us do. The boy's a stout fella."

An odd procession had turned the corner by the warehouse below, was coming up the slope. Two ragged, staggering men—one lumbering in front with bent head, his hands tied behind him; the other following, one

arm in a sling, the other dangling free and gripping a gun.

"Great Scott," exploded Harrow, surging to his feet. "It's the boy himself—and Parker!"

The two mud-covered, sweating figures came up the steps. In Parker's savage little eyes was the look of an animal at bay.

The boy said to Harrow hoarsely, through cracked lips: "Bust your plane—sorry."

And then his glance fell on the remnants of breakfast. He made a famished grab—got the mango between his teeth—sucked hungrily at its pulp. Then he turned to the two men who were staring at him, grinned self-consciously.

"Sorry! Nearly dead with hunger!" His face hardened suddenly. He swung about, jerked a contemptuous thumb at Parker. "I brought him in, Mowbray. Put him under arrest."

"I'll be delighted, old dear," drawled the D. C. "I take it you've got a charge against him you can back up with evidence."

"I've got it all right," answered Jeff, swaying there like a tree in the wind. "I want you to arrest him for the theft of the Creightley jewels four years ago, and for the theft of old Dan Connor's rubies."

"And the proof?"

"Yeah," Parker growled with a sneer, "show us your proof, you young fool!" He swung on Mowbray and Harrow. "He's crazy! Talking through the roof of his hat. He's got nothing on me!"

"Open his shirt," Jeff said to Mowbray. "You'll find a canvas pouch strapped to his waist. The evidence against him's inside it."

PARKER'S heavy lips moved in a leer. There was an unmistakable swagger in his manner as he said: "O. K. with me! Take a look!" He tore his shirt out from the belted trousers, lifted it high under his armpits. "I told you he was crazy!"

There was no canvas belt around his waist!

Jeff shot forward, wide-eyed, patted the man's hips. There was nothing beneath his trousers either. He staggered back—pale—haggard. The fox had hidden the jewels somewhere on the trail—deep in the jungle where it would be like hunting for a needle in a haystack to find them.

"Too bad, old son," Mowbray laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. "If it's any consolation let me tell you I've tried for two years to get the goods on Master Parker—and failed, too."

Parker was grinning, his little eyes beady with triumph.

JEFF was swaying there beside the veranda rail—terrible-eyed—like a man in a daze. He had lost. He couldn't go on any further. He w a n t e d to cry like a baby.

Someone was coming up the path from the jetty—a Burman jungle-dweller. He stopped at the foot of the veranda, salaamed to Harrow.

"May I speak, Tuan?"

"Come up!" Harrow grunted back indifferently.

The Burman reached the top of the steps. Jeff's wild cry—Parker's growl of anger—came together.

"Behold, Tuan, this thing I have found an hour back on the river trail. It was flung into the undergrowth, but had caught by a branch. I have brought it for the white man's reward."

Mowbray snatched at the belt before Parker got there. He took it to the table, emptied the glittering red and white stones on the cloth. Then he turned to Jeff with outstretched hands.

But the boy had slid fainting to the floor.

The Globe Trotter

Adventurers! Here's your own corner! Here's where we're all going to ask questions, discuss problems, and talk things over in general.

Are you curious about some foreign custom? Have you forgotten the date of an expedition in which you are interested? Do you wish to settle a dispute as to the events in the life of some famous adventurer?

Why, then, just drop us a line and we'll make haste to answer your questions in this department—not that we know everything, but we know those who know what we don't.

* * *

You don't have to go to the North Pole, Calcutta or Timbuktu in order to be an adventurer.

But whether you're a stay-at-home or a globe trotter yourself, you've surely had some high spots of adventure in your life. As the old saying goes, there's a good story in every man!

We want yours!

That's why, right at the start, this department's giving you a chance to win some money.

We are offering three cash prizes for the best letters on "The Most Thrilling Adventure of My Life."

The first prize is $15; the second, $10, and the third, $5. The rules, which follow, are very simple:

All readers of THRILLING ADVENTURES are eligible, except employees and members of employees' families.

Letters must be no more than 500 words.

Write on one side of the paper only.

Mail before February 15th, 1932.

In the event of a tie, the amount of the prize competed for will be given in full to each tying contestant.

Now come on, adventurers, sit right down and spin your yarns!

* * *

We have received a letter from the Veterans of the French Foreign Legion, New York organization, thanking us for the interesting Legion story in our last issue, *Legion Steel*, by Peter Forrest.

"We were greatly interested in the story," writes Maurice A. Hamonneau, President of the organization.

"We are over four hundred veterans of the French Foreign Legion representing fifty-two years of service. Our members are of twenty-four different nationalities and have fought in Algeria, Tonkin, the Soudan, Madagascar, the Sahara, Morocco, France 1914-1918, the Dardanelles, Serbia, Syria and Tunisia."

The contest on "Why I Like THRILLING ADVENTURES" has certainly kept the mail-man busy, carrying bundles of mail to our editorial door!

We are reading all your letters as fast as they arrive. Prizes will be announced shortly after the contest closes. No letter received after January 15th will be eligible for a prize.

Thanks for your letter. *And here's hoping you win!*

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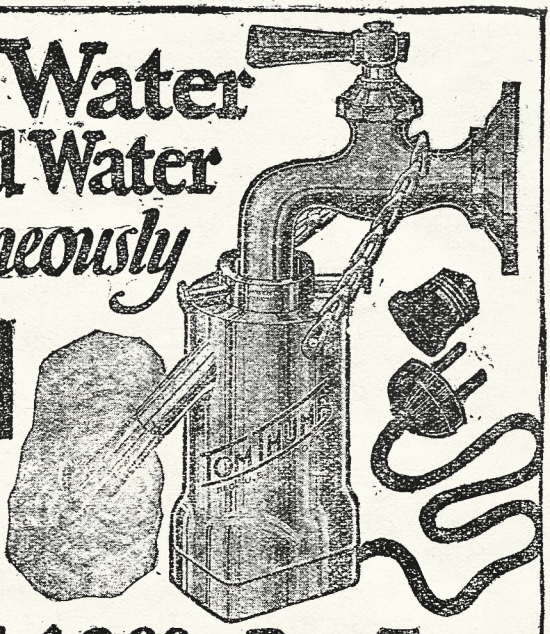

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Just plug in at the nearest electric outlet and presto!—you have instantaneous, continuous running hot water from your cold water faucet. This tells you in a nutshell why the invention of the Tom Thumb automatic electric hot water heater will make it easy for you to make up to $40.00 a day.

The electric heated steaming hot water comes direct from the faucet instantaneously—yes, as quickly as you can turn on the current and the hot water runs indefinitely until you shut off the electricity. The cost is small—convenience is great. Useful wherever hot water is needed—no fuss or bother—attached to any faucet in a jiffy. Works on either AC or DC current. You and your customers will marvel and be delighted at this new discovery of electrical science. The small cost of $3.75 for the Tom Thumb, Junior (110 volts), or $5.75 for Tom Thumb, Senior (220 volts), does the work of any expensive hot water heating equipment costing several hundred dollars—the Tom Thumb absolutely eliminates the plumber or any other additional expense. Order direct from us! We are the originators, manufacturers, owners and patentees of the famous and original Tom Thumb electric hot water heater.

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Terminal Products Co., Inc.
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☐ 1. Enclosed find money order for $2.75. Please send me one Tom Thumb, Junior, order blanks and selling information. It is understood upon receipt of this sample outfit I will be permitted to take orders and collect $1.00 cash deposit for every Tom Thumb, Jr., I sell, or $1.50 for every Tom Thumb, Sr., I sell. It is understood I will send the orders to you and you will ship direct to my customers C.O.D. for the balance.

☐ 2. I would like to have additional information before acting as one of your agents. Please send this by return mail free of obligation.

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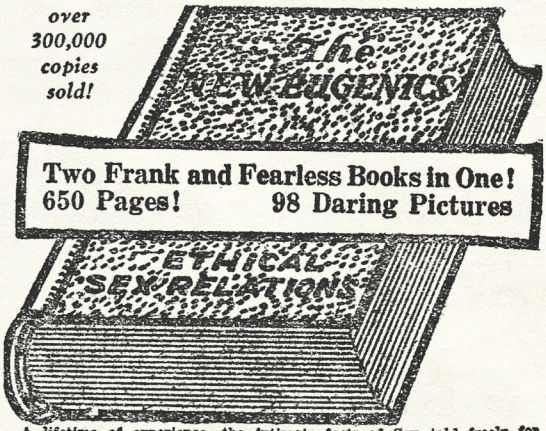

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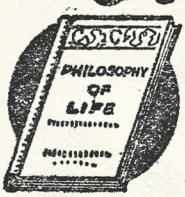

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"Until I got this Railway Mail Clerk job I was always worrying about money. Nowadays I never give a thought to lay-offs or slack times that have other fellows scared. Increases in pay come regularly when you're with the government. Everybody gets the same square deal.

"Every year, Bill, I get 15 days' vacation and 10 days' sick leave with full pay. Mighty few fellows who are not in the government service get a break like that. Best of all, Bill, you don't have to keep worrying about the future all the time, wondering whether some day you're going to be 'living on' your relatives and all that sort of thing. Your retirement pension takes care of you.

Then I Wrote for This FREE BOOKLET

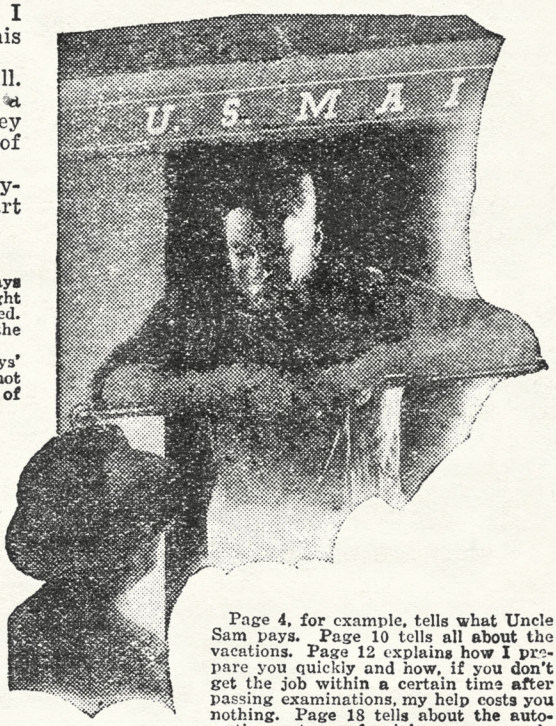
"I suppose I'd be worrying myself sick right now, just as you are doing, if I hadn't happened to get hold of a booklet written by a fellow in Rochester named Arthur R. Patterson. Patterson was a Secretary Examiner of the Civil Service Commission for eight years. It was through the help he gave me that I got such a high rating and got my government job so quickly.

"If you are 'shaky' about your job and wondering what's going to happen to you, I suggest, Bill, that you write to Arthur R. Patterson in Rochester right now. I forget the name of the booklet he'll send you, but it's good sound stuff.

"Well, so long, Bill, we pull out of here in a couple of minutes and I have to get going."

* * * *

The title of the booklet which this Railway Mail Clerk refers to is "How to Secure a Government Position." If you are a citizen, 18 to 50, this booklet will tell you how to get the government job you want—and a lot of other interesting facts about jobs with the government.



Page 4, for example, tells what Uncle Sam pays. Page 10 tells all about the vacations. Page 12 explains how I prepare you quickly and how, if you don't get the job within a certain time after passing examinations, my help costs you nothing. Page 18 tells about the automatic system of giving you yearly raises.

There is no obligation of any kind in sending for this booklet. My only suggestion is that you get ready NOW for the next Railway Postal Clerk examination! So mail this coupon at once—and get going toward something that stops you from worrying about "hard times" and losing your job. Mail this coupon today. Address A. R. Patterson, *Civil Service Expert*, PATTERSON SCHOOL, 91 Wisner Building, Rochester, N. Y.

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