

TEN CENTS

# THRILLING ADVENTURES

10¢

DECEMBER

THE FEATHERED  
SERPENT

By THOMSON BURTIS



FEATURING:

**WHITE  
IVORY**

*A Complete  
Book-Length Novel*

*By* **ALLAN K. ECHOLS**



# "Know Thyself"



A BRIEF character analysis, prepared from your handwriting by Dr. M. N. Bunker, founder of the well known American Institute of Grapho-Analysis, will be sent to everyone who writes me.

Handwriting tells your character so accurately and intimately that it may surprise you. Hidden talents may be revealed. Success or failure, your business, social, or love affairs—all trace back to the proper use of talents with which you have been endowed. It may help you to "Know Thyself."

## I WILL PAY \$250.00

For the most interesting specimen of handwriting sent me for analysis. Not the fanciest—not the plainest—but the most interesting.

You may write a letter if you wish, but really need WRITE ONLY THESE FIVE WORDS, "What does my handwriting indicate?" Write with pen or pencil, on any paper—the coupon—or a postal card. Style and penmanship do not count. ANY handwriting will do and ANY may be the most interesting. You need not write fancy or even plain. Any handwriting may win. The farmer or mechanic has just as much chance as the school teacher. Mail this to my address and Dr. Bunker's brief report will be sent you promptly.

Simply sending your handwriting for character analysis qualifies you for the opportunity to . . .

## WIN \$3,500.00 CASH

or New Studebaker 8 Sedan and \$2,000.00 Cash

This stupendous prize is additional and entirely separate from the cash prize offered for the most interesting specimen of handwriting. Picture \$3,500.00 for yourself—all yours—to be used as you like. Rush your handwriting to me now for your character analysis. Yours may be the winner.

Interesting Chart Send You FREE!

With the character analysis made from your handwriting you will receive absolutely FREE, a chart such as Dr. Bunker uses in his American Institute of Grapho-Analysis work. With it you may tell something of the characteristics of your friends. Write a few words, use the coupon or a postal. Do it now before you forget it . . . you may win \$250.00!

## RICHARD DAY, Mgr.

Cincinnati Dept. AK-704-P Ohio

ARE YOU HAPPY

At home—  
with your sweetheart

Are You Working

What's Wrong

Is It Your Fault

Your Handwriting Tells the Truth  
... So Write Today!

### SIMPLE — EASY RULES

If you are over 16, able to read and write and can use \$250.00, you are qualified. The specimen submitted must be your own handwriting and only one specimen accepted from a family. Write anything you like with pen or pencil—or write. "What does my handwriting indicate?" Use the coupon or any paper—even a postal card will do. The most interesting specimen submitted in the opinion of the American Institute of Grapho-Analysis, will win. (Replies will be property of Richard Day, Mgr.) All replies must be postmarked not later than January 20, 1933. Duplicate prizes awarded in case of ties.

BE PROMPT! . . . I will  
send you a \$100.00  
Cash Certificate AT  
ONCE!

If you will see that your letter is postmarked not more than three days after you read this notice, I will send you a Cash Promptness Certificate entitling you to an extra \$100.00 in Cash should yours be the most interesting specimen of handwriting submitted. In the opinion of the American Institute of Grapho-Analysis.

WRITE  
TODAY!

## \$250.00 PRIZE COUPON

RICHARD DAY, Manager,  
Dept. AK-704-P, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Here's my handwriting for a brief character

analysis: .....

.....

My name is .....

Address .....

Town..... State.....

Date I read your offer.....

I am to receive FREE a brief character analysis from my handwriting and a FREE Character Analysis Chart.



# I'll Send My First Lesson **FREE**



It Shows How Easy it is  
to Learn at Home  
to fill a  
**BIG PAY**  
Radio Job

**Here's  
Proof**



## Made \$10,000 More in Radio

"I can safely say that I have made \$10,000 more in Radio than I would have made if I had continued at my old job."

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## \$500 extra in 6 months

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## Many Radio Experts Make \$50 to \$100 a Week

In about ten years the Radio Industry has grown from \$2,000,000 to hundreds of millions of dollars. Over 300,000 jobs have been created by this growth, and thousands more will be created by its continued development. Many men and young men with the right training—the kind of training I give you in the N. R. I. course—have stepped into Radio at two and three times their former salaries.

## Get Ready Now for Jobs Like These

Broadcasting stations use engineers, operators, station managers, and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Manufacturers continually employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, service men, buyers, for jobs paying up to \$6,000 a year. Radio Operators on ships enjoy life, see the world, with board and lodging free, and get good pay besides. Dealers and jobbers employ service men, salesmen, buyers, managers, and pay up to \$100 a week. My book tells you about these and many other kinds of interesting Radio jobs.

## Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time Almost at Once

The day you enroll with me I send you material which you should master quickly for doing 28 Radio jobs common in most every neighborhood, for spare-time money. Throughout your course I send you information for servicing popular makes of sets. I give you the plans and ideas that have made \$200 to \$1,000 a year for N. R. I. men in their spare time. My course is famous as the course that pays for itself.

## Television, Short Wave, Talking Movies Money Back Agreement Included

Special training in Talking Movies, Television, and Home Television experiments, Short Wave Radio, Radio's use in Aviation, Servicing and Merchandising Sets, Broadcasting, Commercial and Ship Stations are included. I am so sure that N. R. I. can train you satisfactorily that I will agree in writing to refund every penny of your tuition if you are not satisfied with my Lesson and Instruction Service upon completion.

## You Don't Risk a Penny

Mail the coupon now. In addition to the sample lesson, I send my book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It tells you where the good jobs are in Radio, what they pay; tells you about my course, what others who have taken it are doing and making. This offer is free to all residents of the United States and Canada over 15 years old. Find out what Radio offers you without the slightest obligation. ACT NOW!

**J. E. SMITH, President**  
National Radio Institute, Dept. 2NH7, Washington, D. C.



## SPECIAL Radio Equipment for Broad Practical Experience Given Without Extra Charge

My Course is not all theory. I'll show you how to use my special Radio Equipment for conducting experiments and building circuits which illustrate important principles used in such well known sets as Westinghouse, General Electric, Philco, R. C. A. Victor, Majestic, and others. You work out with your own hands many of the things you read in our lesson books. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home easy, interesting,

fascinating, intensely practical. You learn how sets work, why they work, how to make them work when they are out of order. Training like this shows up in your pay envelope—when you graduate you have had training and experience—you're not simply looking for a job where you can get experience.



With N. R. I. equipment, you learn to build and thoroughly understand set testing equipment—you can use N. R. I. equipment in your spare time service work for extra money.

**I have doubled  
and tripled the  
salaries of many.  
Find out about  
this tested way  
to BIGGER  
PAY**



**FILL OUT AND MAIL  
THIS COUPON TODAY**

**J. E. SMITH, President**  
National Radio Institute, Dept. 2NH7  
Washington, D. C.

I want to take advantage of your offer. Send me your Free Sample Lesson and your book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." I understand this request does not obligate me.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

"R"

**The Famous Course That Pays For Itself**



# THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. IV, No. 1

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

December, 1932

## COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

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*Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet*

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**Read our companion magazines: Thrilling Detective and Thrilling Love.**



**"THANK HEAVENS FOR THIS BOOK" *Thousands Will Say***



**LOVE or LUST—  
How Could She Tell?**

So many young people miss love altogether—or fail to recognize it when it comes. What is the subtle secret that leads some girls to the altar, while others, equally charming, face disappointment and despair? (See page 65.)

# ***At Last! Secrets of Sex and Marriage Revealed*** *From a Doctor's Private Office!*

The answers to questions you would like to ask your own doctor and DARE not. The **RIGHT** methods to follow for sane sex experiences—marriage that will remain a lasting honeymoon—a love life that will grow more complete with the years, unashamed and unfettered by doubts and fears. Now in a revolutionary new book a busy family physician comes to your fireside and bares **ALL** the mysteries of life and love, gained from years of private practise—including many "inside" stories, hitherto hidden behind office doors.

**T**HOUSANDS of books on sex and marriage have been written—but hardly one more outspoken, and yet still tenderly sincere. "Sex and Marriage," by R. J. Lambert, M.D.—just published—instantly wipes out all the dirty sentiment and misinformation blanketing the subject and reveals sex and love for what they **REALLY** are—beautiful and sacred when properly understood! This brand new book digs into the heart of the problem—fearlessly tells you everything you should know about your desires—gives you exact instruction for happy marriage and contented living. No concession to Prudery. Just frank information in plain language!

Is ignorance or false modesty robbing you of the joys of normal sex relationships? Do you want the **NAKED TRUTH** on questions the world evades? Will your marriage be happy—or wrecked by indifference, repression, love starvation? Knowledge prevents and corrects missteps—as disclosed in this unprecedented book.

**Only a Doctor Can Tell All**

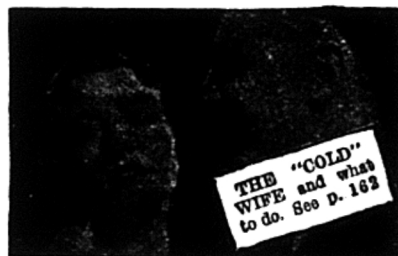
Here are answers to problems only hinted at by others. Absorbing as fiction. "Sex and

Marriage" contains true stories of lives made wretched because they didn't know. Shows what happens when you disobey Nature's laws. Tells secrets of how to find love, how to preserve sexual attraction. Explains every unescapable perplexity—from the awakening of the sex urge to life's harvest period. Distinguishes between love and lust and offers hundreds of enlightening disclosures everyone married or single must understand.

**Mrs. W.—'s Daughter**

Young, Romantic, Eager for life—but lacking the vital knowledge to guide her safely past unsuspected pitfalls. A true story with a tragic warning. (See p. 60.)

Thirty-two fascinating chapters! Each covering a different phase of sex and marriage. Clear, scientific! Even one chapter can mean the difference between blasted hopes and lifetime happiness. Here are a few subjects treated: Why Sexual Knowledge Should Be Told; Structure and Use of the Reproductive Organs; Is Continence Harmful?; Sexual Magnetism; True Love versus Sensual Love; Mistakes of the Bridegroom;



Immorality in Marriage; Pregnancy; Determination of Sex; Abortions and Miscarriages; Birth Control; Heredity; Eugenics; Sterility and Frigidity; Self-Abuse; Prostitution; Venereal Diseases. 250 pages, vividly illustrated with anatomical charts that make everything clear! You simply must examine the book!

**SEND NO MONEY**

Simply mail coupon. When postman brings "Sex and Marriage," deposit with him \$1.98 (plus a few cents postage). Then go over the book thoroughly. Find the solutions to intimate problems that worry you. If you don't insist on keeping this book for its sane advice and for valuable reference, return it within 5 days and we'll refund your money gladly. But don't delay. Often the price of neglect is costly sex mistakes, broken health, lost vitality! Send coupon TODAY and face the world confidently and unafraid.

**The Bare Truth Everyone Should Know**

- |   |                                     |  |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| —Mistakes that kill love.                   | —Can sex be predicted before birth? | —Intimate facts of courtship.                              |
| —How to attract the opposite sex.           | —What to do about barrenness.       | —What kind of men make best husbands?                      |
| —Is continence desirable?                   | —Should young people discuss sex?   | —What the signs of excesses are.                           |
| —Mistakes the bridegroom should avoid.      | —How to treat female disorders.     | —Should offspring be limited?                              |
| —Is repression of desires harmful?          | —What men can't endure in women.    | —The essentials of a happy marriage.                       |
| —When marriage is a crime.                  | —The tragedies of ignorance.        | —Are venereal diseases hereditary?                         |
| —How to keep love aflame.                   | —Errors in personal hygiene.        | —Dangers of the "Change of Life."                          |
| —The never-failing secret of sex magnetism. | —How to recognize true love.        | —The mystery of twins.                                     |
| —Preparing for maternity.                   | —Why husbands tire of wives.        | —What every young woman should know.                       |
|   |                                     | —Sex health and prevention.                                |
|   |                                     | —and many other startling revelations on sex and marriage. |

**WARNING:** This Book is NOT for Minors!

**JUST!  
OUT!**



**Franklin Publishing Co.,  
Dept. W-2116  
800 N. Clark St., Chicago, Ill.**

**FRANKLIN PUBLISHING COMPANY  
800 N. Clark St., Dept. W-2116  
Chicago, Ill.**

Send "Sex and Marriage"—Doctor Lambert's amazing book. I will pay postman \$1.98 plus postage. If not satisfied I may return book within 5 days and you will refund my money.

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....



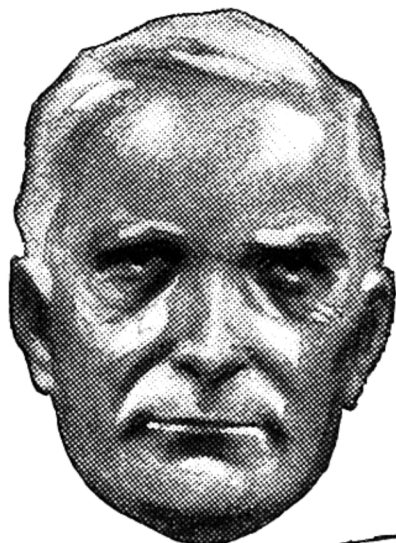
# This Little Gland Robbed Me of Sleep and Health



HEADACHES



SCIATICA



NIGHT RISING



EXHAUSTION

## Until I Discovered a New Hygiene for Men Past 40

IT HAD been coming on for years—this devilish thing called "Prostate Trouble!" I gave it little thought at first, because I figured that all men experience a certain change about my time in life. That was my big mistake. I thought it was just the breakdown of oncoming age and that I would have to put up with it. I did for a while, but a year later, my condition went from bad to worse at an alarming rate.

### These Common Symptoms

My sleep was broken a dozen times every night. In fact, one hour's fitful sleep was a luxury. Pains had developed in my back and legs, and I was chronically constipated. I was run down in body and almost broken in mind—practically an invalid at 58. I talked to scores of men. In fact, I talked to practically every man I met or could get to listen. As I look back now I think I was practically insane on the subject.

### Faces Surgery

It has been my experience that a majority of men past 60—and a surprising number even at 40—had one of these distressing symptoms, but few men had it as bad as I did. I had seen my doctor, of course. But he could offer me but little relief. I spent hundreds of dollars

in an effort to avoid an operation, for I had learned that gland surgery was usually dangerous. This insidious little gland that robbed me of sleep and health now threatened my very life.

### The Turning Point

Then I read one of your advertisements. I admit I mailed the coupon without the slightest hope. There probably never was a more skeptical mind than mine. But this simple little act turned out to be the biggest thing in my life.

I can never thank you enough. I am now sixty. I can go to bed at ten o'clock and sleep straight through. My doctor has pronounced me in normal health. My entire body is toned up, and I feel almost like a youngster. I have had no return of the trouble, and now use your pleasant treatment just fifteen minutes a day, over one or two months, just to make sure that I keep my perfect health.

### Millions Make This Mistake

When I was at my lowest ebb, I encountered so many prostate sufferers that I know there must be millions of men doctoring for sciatica, pains in the back and legs, bladder and kidney weakness, chronic constipation, loss of physical and mental capacity and a host of supposed old age symptoms, who should probably be treating the prostate gland! In fact, I learned not long ago that certain medical authorities claim that 65% of men at or past middle age suffer from disorders of this vital gland.

My advice to these men is not to make the mistake that I made. Send the coupon for that little book, "Why Many Men Are

Old At 40." Find out the facts about this little gland, which the book contains. It explains a prominent scientist's discovery of a new home hygiene—explains how, without drugs or surgery, without massage, diet, or exercise, this method acts to reduce the congestion and combat the dangerous symptoms.

### Scientist's Book Sent Free

See if these facts apply to you. Learn the true meaning of these common complaints and see why these ailments in men past 40 are so often directly traceable to a swollen prostate. The book, "Why Many Men Are Old At 40" is sent without cost and without obligation.

Simply mail the coupon to W. J. Kirk, President, The Electro Thermal Co., 4260 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.

If you live West of the Rockies, address The Electro Thermal Co., 500 Wm. Fox Building, Dept. 42-P, Los Angeles, Calif. In Canada, address The Electro Thermal Co., Desk 42-P, 53 Yonge St., Toronto, Toronto, Can.

W. J. Kirk, Pres., Electro Thermal Co.  
4260 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio

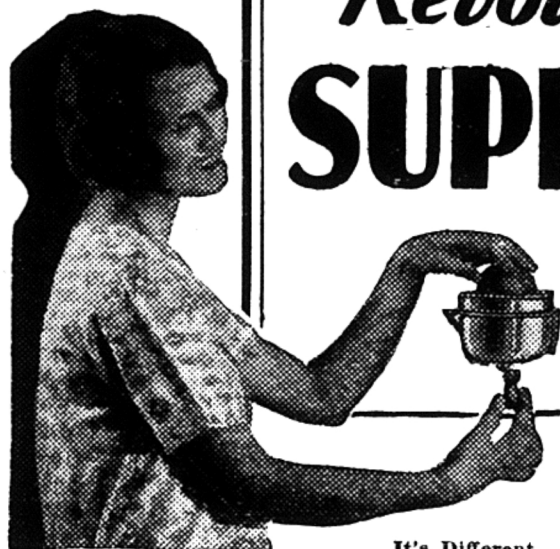
Please mail me at once your Free booklet, "Why Many Men Are Old at 40," and full details about the new home treatment. I am not obligated in any way.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....





# Revolutionary **NEW** SUPER-JUICER

**Banishes Another  
Hateful Kitchen  
Job!...**

**It's Different  
Hangs on the Wall!**

**Oranges, Lemons, Small  
Grapefruit Juice Themselves  
LIKE MAGIC!**

At last a new kind of automatic Super-Juicer makes the dream of every housewife come true! Different. Hangs on the wall. Just a turn of the handle and fruits juice themselves instantly. No waste, work, worry or bother. Easy to clean—cannot rust. Priced amazingly low. Agents pocketing the money of their lives. Rush coupon below for **UNIQUE LIBERAL NO-RISK TEST OFFER** at once!

## **AGENTS!**

**Just Turn the Crank and Make Up to  
\$17 IN A DAY Easy!**

**A**LMOST everyone today drinks fruit juices for their healthful vitamins. But housewives up to now have had to contend with makeshift gadgets and squeezers—with waste, work, worry, mess and bother. Now comes an astonishing automatic Super-Juicer to bring new kitchen freedom and to provide men and women everywhere with a once-in-a-lifetime money-making opportunity! Imagine a simple little automatic device that gets all the juice like magic from oranges, lemons, small grapefruits, etc. That hangs on the wall. That does not have to be screwed or clamped to table every time used. Just a turn of the crank and every ounce of rich, pulpy juice is ready to pour. Strains all seeds, pulp and pith. Easy to clean—no parts to rust. Beautifully finished and guaranteed for 5 years. Yet priced amazingly low to sell on sight!

### **Now 4 Profits on One Sale**

Shrewd old-timers and beginners alike are flocking to the SUPER-JUICER in order to cash in on it while it is still brand new and selling fast. Introduced to a waiting world only recently, this amazing new device is already bringing Speedo people everywhere as high as \$8 in an hour, \$27 in a day and \$125 and more in a week! Coupon below brings facts about this and the three other equally marvelous devices needed in more than 20 million homes. Get **NO-RISK TEST OFFER** that guarantees sales. Send no money—just mail the coupon at once!

**CENTRAL STATES  
MFG. CO.,  
Department W-5946  
4500 Mary Avenue,  
St. Louis, Mo.**



#### **Easy to Operate**

Lifts in and out of the Patented SPEEDO wall bracket. Hangs on the wall. Just a few easy twirls of the handle and fruits juice themselves. So simple a child can do it.

#### **Easy to Clean**

Here's a priceless feature. After juice is poured, you simply turn handle to left and rinse the SUPER-JUICER under the faucet. No parts to rust.

**No-Risk  
Test Offer  
Simply  
Mail Coupon  
NOW!**

**Central States Mfg. Co., Dept. W-5946  
4500 Mary Ave., St. Louis, Mo.**

Rush details of the new SUPER-JUICER **NO-RISK TEST OFFER** new 4-Profit Plan.

Address.....

Name.....

City..... State.....

☐ Check here if interested only in one for your home.



## CHAPTER I

### *Jungle Death*

**D**USK settled over the jungle like a great blanket, burying it in an ominous silence. The medley of the forest song started up, then died away quickly as though suddenly surprised by some unexpected danger. Now it was supplanted by a death-like stillness, oppressive and foreboding.

Down the jungle trail walked a white man, clad in khaki shorts, and

## WHITE

### *A Complete Book-*

By **ALLAN**

*Author of "Murder Hotel,"*

behind him trailed a string of blacks with bundles of gear on their heads and the look of terror shining out of their white eyes.

This file of strangely frightened and silent men came to a small opening, a spot where long before some jungle storm had uprooted a few trees, leaving a small, grass-filled clearing in the matted undergrowth.

*Follow Baas Hardy on His Exciting,*





# IVORY

*Length Novel*

**K. ECHOLS**

*"The Jungle Scorpion," etc.*

Here Warren Hardy, the lone white man, looked upward to see the sky filled with boiling dark clouds that raced across the little view with the speed of death riding a black horse.

Hardy barked a hasty order at his headman and the blacks started unloading their burdens.

Suddenly one of the men halted in the act of dropping his load. His

face became contorted with agony. The bundle fell from his hands and the man slowly sank to the ground with a groan.

Both Hardy and the headman heard the shouts of the blacks and raced to the fallen carrier; the headman with a frank look of fear, Hardy with one of nervous apprehension.

The man lay on his back, his body twisting slowly in his death agony. His face was turned ash-gray and was horrible to behold.

"Turn him over," Hardy ordered. Kali, the black headman, stooped

*Perilous Quest of the Graveyard of Elephants*

before the fallen man and turned him on his side. Then his eyes looked with horror upon what he saw.

HARDY saw it, too, and his jaws set grimly. He glanced about hastily and spoke sharply to Kali. The headman repeated the order to the blacks, who had gathered about and stood in helpless fear born of what they saw.

The dead man now lay on his face. From his back protruded a bamboo sliver, hardly a foot long. But it told its story, told it in its mute evidence as clearly as though it had been shouted from the highest jungle tree.

Blowgun dart!

The camp was surrounded by savages. Quiet, silent, slinking blacks whose weapons of death sent their messengers with such secrecy and deadly accuracy that the exposed men in the clearing were helpless against them.

The carriers, blubbing with fear of the trap they had fallen into, ran about the camp in response to the headman's orders. He barked at them to pile up the bundles into a breastworks behind which they could find some protection from the poisoned darts of their invisible attackers. But the men in the frenzy of their fear seemed to have lost all reason.

Kali brought out his whip, a stocky wooden handle to which was attached a long lash of leather. The six feet of leather whistled through the air and snapped at the back of one of the frantic carriers with the bark of a pistol.

Again and again the whip barked, and it was only because of the pain of its biting lash that they were forced to pick up their bundles and stack them as Hardy directed. It was seldom that the lash was used

on a black—only when the man's own lack of sense necessitated that he be guided forcibly in an emergency, like an animal.

Suddenly another carrier fell. He screamed loudly and writhed on the ground like an injured snake, and his cries brought forth moans of anguish from the rest of the blacks.

Hardy whipped out his Webley automatic and sprayed the thicket from which he thought the last dart had come. He was rewarded with a shrill cry as one of the jungle savages leaped into the air and fell dead.

And he was further rewarded by bringing upon his group a veritable shower of the little poisoned arrows. Two more of his men fell. He called to his others and crowded them into the little circle of luggage they had managed to get piled.

This would be a losing fight if he spent an entire magazine of his ammunition to kill one of his attackers. The woods would be full of others to take that one's place. So Hardy withheld further fire.

NOW Kali, his headman, had his rifle out and at hand, but still Hardy did not fire. He looked around at the faces of his men and he felt sorry for them. The whole *safari* was doomed.

It was sunset and they were surrounded. The jungle was laden with death for them and they could not fight back. Out of the darkness would come more of those little bamboo darts, tiny poisoned messengers so deadly that the merest prick of their points would kill a man in half a dozen seconds.

And the darts came noiselessly, giving no intimation of the location of the attackers who lay safely concealed in the dense jungle thicket. It seemed horrible to perish there without being able to fight back.



Again Hardy felt sympathy for his loyal carriers, but was glad that death would come to them all so quickly, with so little suffering.

AS for himself, it didn't matter much when he died, but he would have liked to finish this one trip, the one that meant so much to him, that might mean the clearing up of the mystery of his own past. But that was not to be. Death had him surrounded.

Unless—

Hardy looked up at the little patch of sky that was black with the clouds of the jungle storm. If he could hold out for a while, it would be well, it might mean a chance for his life. But that chance was slim, hardly one in a thousand.

For the savages who surrounded them had them at their mercy. Unseen they could blow their little darts of death at the exposed group without danger to themselves.

And the savages knew their advantage and rejoiced in it. Mboga, brother of the chief of the Obagi, squatted behind a bush and spoke.

"I think we have got them helpless, oh, brother," he said. "Do you think we should try to take them?"

"Caution," answered the chief, Obagi, who took his name from the tribe itself. "The white does not give himself into slavery to us so easily."

Mboga was young and had not the experienced caution of his older brother, of whom he was jealous.

"Caution. It is always caution with you. Where is your famed bravery—where is the man in you that walks on the living fire—"

"Silence! You speak with the tongue of an infant." Obagi was losing patience with his upstart young brother.

But Mboga had plans of his own. Now the warriors were encircled

around the little *safari*, some fifty or more of them hidden in the brush, and all their eyes were upon their chief, awaiting his signal for the rush. Mboga had friends among them, the younger warriors who were dissatisfied with the older chief who often held them under restraint when they would rush into deeds of spectacular daring.

And Mboga knew they were impatient to rush these intruders into the jungle and capture them in hand-to-hand fight. But Obgai was restraining them.

Now would be time for a grand coup. Mboga would show them the kind of a chief they ought to have.

Suddenly Mboga shouted, then followed his own voice, hurling himself forward as the younger group, seeing his move, came out of hiding and raced toward the little barricade of luggage.

Hardy heard the shout, gripped his Webley and opened fire with a feeling of relief. It was better to die fighting than helplessly dodging the darts of an unseen foe.

Kali had Hardy's rifle to his shoulder. Now his gun spoke, now Hardy's automatic. They were unhurried, the shots coming at what seemed slow intervals.

HARDY and Kali did not waste ammunition in careless firing. Every shot was aimed squarely at the middle of one of the onrushing savages, and every shot found the guts of one of the blacks and sent him spinning to the ground with his life blood gushing out of a tearing dum-dum wound.

The first savage that caught Hardy's eye was a shiny, young buck dressed with more elaborate decorations than the pair that flanked him on either side. Hardy took slow aim, sighted carefully down the bar-

rel of his pistol and pulled the trigger.

Just as his pistol barked one of the blacks took advantage of the second wasted in careful aim and threw himself in front of Mboga, the chief's younger brother, and Hardy's bullet caught the man in the chest.

**I**T was a hollow-pointed lead bullet and when it found the breastbone of the loyal black the lead flattened out into a shapeless mass of destruction. It plowed through the man, and ripped his whole front open, leaving a jagged hole to his lungs.

The bullet passed through the man's body and buried itself in the side of Mboga, but its force was nearly spent. Mboga staggered and fell, then his savage caution prompted him to lie as one dead.

The slow fire from the guns of Hardy and Kali was deadly, and it stopped the rash rush of the savages, sent them scurrying back to cover, losing half a dozen of their men. It had been a costly and foolish move on the part of the blacks, and profitable for Hardy. For the first time he had some hope they would continue to charge, for in their exposing themselves lay his only chance to defeat them.

Now the sunset changed to complete darkness with that suddenness peculiar to it in the tropics. Hardy heard a slight shuffling outside his little barricade and knew that the savages were carrying their dead and wounded back into the brush.

Two warriors dragged the wounded Mboga back to the side of the chief. The older man looked down on the writhing body with scorn.

"Such comes with the wisdom of children," he said to the fighters. "We have the strangers completely surrounded and at our mercy. There

was no use in killing them, for dead men do not make good slaves. And we shall be richly rewarded for the white slave. We must get him alive."

"Your words are wise," answered one of the men.

"They are always wise," agreed Obagi. "Listen to my orders. We will wait a while yet to give them time to become thoroughly frightened, then offer to lead them out of the jungle if they will surrender peacefully."

"But what of the storm? What of the leopards? We have no beast fires, nor protection from the storm."

"Do you question me?" the chief asked angrily. "Such a prize as this white man and his belongings have not come to us for many moons. We will not desert our luck. Go back to your places."

Hardy and Kali huddled behind the scant shelter of their bundles and waited, listening. The blacks with them squatted trembling with fear, for the elements opposed to them were overwhelming, death threatened them from all sides.

**THEY** were outlanders who lived on the edge of the jungle and who had been taught to fear it all their lives. It had taken all the persuasion at Hardy's command and many presents to their chief for him to get the use of them in the first place, and it took all his knowledge of their nature for him to keep them from deserting him.

Now they looked squarely in the face of death, and it took the threats of Hardy's pistol to keep them from bolting panic-stricken into the jungle to be destroyed separately one at a time, for they never would have been able to reach the edge of the jungle alive.

Obagi was exultant. The little



group of intruders would be his, a dozen slaves to trade for ivory which in turn he would take to the coast and trade for more wives for his already overflowing harem. He signaled to the nearest of the concealed warriors.

"The time has come," he announced. "Pass the signal. And they are to be captured alive. Death awaits the man who kills one of them."

## CHAPTER II

### *Voice from the Sky*

**H**ARDY'S ears were attuned to every whisper of the jungle. The black walls of the trees seemed to be bearing down on his camp to add to their sense of doomed imprisonment. The very air clutched at them, smothered them in its stillness, and the faces of the blacks burst out with perspiration. It was becoming hot, stifling, and difficult to breathe as though the silence itself were a blanket that smothered them.

Then Hardy's ears caught the first roll of thunder, the first sound to break the deathlike silence since the natives' abortive attack. The roaring seemed far away at first, but it increased swiftly, like the mad race of a tidal wave.

Now came the first puff of air, gentle and soft, swaying the leaves with a slight whispering sound as though ghosts of the night were giving their allegiance to the savages that lurked around them. But quickly the wind grew and the trees bent before its pressure, while the roll of the thunder was heavy as the war drums of some heavenly army.

Obagi's men shivered with fear, but crept closer to the camp under the greater fear of disobeying the orders of their chief. And great was

the bravery, for wasn't Obagi defying even the thunder god, himself, something that never before had been done except at the cost of life?

And while the savages crept closer toward the camp, a great circle that gradually diminished, ever tightening around him, Hardy peered into the darkness, and listened, hoping that even in spite of the storm that roared he might catch some sound that would reveal the presence of his enemy.

His blacks were worse than useless. Alone, he might have outwitted the savages as he had done before, but he was responsible for these men and would not desert them. He groped for his gun and listened.

Suddenly the heavens opened up with a crash and a blinding flare of lightning that outlined every tree and face. Above the cannon roar of the lightning came the rending sound of a monster tree near the camp as it burst where the lightning-bolt had struck its midriff and sent it tearing through its lesser neighbors, bringing them down with it.

This was instantly followed with a veritable barrage of chain lightning—the heavens bent to the attack on a battlefield the length of the forest. The storm unleashed its whole army of destruction, the wind whipped the trees with savage fury and drove leaden pellets of rain before it with the stinging force of grapeshot.

The lightning lit the jungle with sudden flashes of blinding light that outlined every twig. Hardy saw the forms—the forms of the savages, caught suddenly, unconcealed. A circle of black men crouching and running toward him from all sides.

This was the end. He had hoped they would retreat to a place of safety before the thunder god. But they had defied their own deity—and Hardy was lost.

The storm found renewed energy

and its angry rage increased a thousandfold. The deafening noise increased to an unearthly roar that vibrated the whole mighty forest until it bent like grass before it. Above the soul-deadening roar of the thunder the lightning crashed with an ear-splitting peal that shook the earth to its very foundation.

**A**ND the heavens opened wide and poured out great sheets of water that torrented down with the force of a Niagara, sweeping everything before its unstemmed tide.

There came a sudden white flash—blinding beyond description. The whole sky was a seething arc light, brighter than the molten sun. The earth exploded.

Hardy felt the very air pressing against him from all sides as though the jungle were a gigantic compressed air tank.

Lightning! The whole white picture seared itself on his brain—a glimpse of an exploding tree, living splinters of jagged wood a yard long—green timbers weighing a ton hurtling through the wood-filled air. Trees ripped up by their roots, sent twisting and tearing through the air in a mad cyclone of flying things that choked the air with their density. Bright pictures of a living hell, a jungle uprooted and boiling through the air.

All in the flash of an eye! Blacks lifted bodily from their feet and flung limp against trees—one native cut squarely in two by a flying sliver of wood—the whole camp caught up with a gigantic hand and thrown into the air like the explosion of tons of dynamite.

A sudden jolting—stunning pain in his side—great floating balls of blinding fire—then darkness and oblivion.

Hardy regained his senses slowly. First he became conscious of a burn-

ing pain in his side. He moved his body cautiously and felt his ribs. His fingers found a wide indentation in his side, and he knew that at least two of his ribs were broken.

Then he tried moving his arms and his legs and felt some satisfaction in learning that they weren't damaged. So long as he could get about he could go on in spite of the ribs—he'd had them broken many times before. He tried opening his eyes.

It was daylight, and a man sat on a camp stool beside the cot on which he lay, which he recognized as his own. The man was young and fair, and though he wore khaki shorts and shirt Hardy instantly decided he was not of the jungle. There was a softness—or rather a suggestion of inexperience about him that marked him as a stranger to these parts. The young man was smiling pleasantly.

"Quite a jolting you got, old man," the stranger said pleasantly. "Feeling better?"

Hardy managed to get himself to a sitting position on the cot in spite of the burning pain in his side. He looked about him wonderingly.

"Feeling better, thanks," he answered. "But piece the story together for me, will you? I believe I left off with lightning striking my camp and a bunch of savages surrounding me. What happened after that?"

**H**E looked about at the wreckage which littered the ground. It was what was left of his camp, all right, but there was little left that would have identified it as his. New tents, two of them, were pitched and there was nothing about that he recognized as his gear.

"The storm seems to have wiped you out—and saved you at the same time—so far as we could guess," the man answered. "We found you dur-

ing the middle of the morning—it's the middle of the afternoon now—and you were lying on the ground with a six-inch limb of a tree across your middle.

"The ground was fairly well covered with dead blacks, apparently yours and part of an attacking party. One of your men will live, but we've got rid of the rest. Your gear's all gone. We salvaged your cot."

Hardy introduced himself.

"I'm Dennis," the other man answered. "Terry Dennis, and I'm shooting pictures for Mr. George Peabody. He'll be along soon—out shooting some dinner now."

HARDY did not recognize the name of Peabody as anyone he had ever heard of, and he knew every white who had business in the jungle. He was waiting for Dennis to tell him more when Peabody himself arrived in camp followed by his black gun bearer.

Peabody was an entirely different type from Dennis. He was a tall gray man, almost a skeleton, and he had the marks of the tropics on him.

Yet there was something unfamiliar about the man; something that did not mark him as an African man. Hardy thought it strange that he couldn't quite make him out, that he didn't recognize him or his name at least.

The gray man with the big nose and the scraggly mustache stood before Hardy's cot and barked at him. Hardy got the impression that the other was distinctly annoyed that he should have been an unintentional intruder.

"Close shave you had," the man said. "Good thing we came along when we did. You'd be gone now."

"Thanks," Hardy answered. He was not accustomed to men mentioning so pointedly the favors they had bestowed.

"Yes," the man said. "I'm Peabody. I've heard of you, Hardy, though you might not know me. I've been in South America quite a while, although I used to be around here—before you were born, no doubt. Are you able to travel?"

Hardy concealed his amusement. He had traveled with worse handicaps than broken ribs, but he did not mention this to the officious old man. He nodded in the affirmative.

"Good," the other answered. "Then I can make you a proposition. I understand you know this jungle better than anybody else, but I must say I'm pretty good myself. Now down to brass tacks." The man's words were short and clipped.

"Your outfit's destroyed, so you can't go wherever you had started. By the way, where were you going, anyway?"

Hardy tried to ignore the man's rude presumption because he owed him something for saving his life, but he evaded answering the question. "Just on a little wild-goose chase," he answered.

"Well, I'm here on business—serious business," Peabody snapped. "And I can use you."

Hardy waited for him to proceed.

"It's just this—in confidence, of course, if you don't go with me. I was in Robeetchi when there came to me, through what source I'm not in a position to reveal, some information which I take to be authentic. And that information, Hardy, was surprising—astounding. Hardy—I'm on my way to that long-looked-for place—the graveyard of the elephants."

HE stopped to see what effect this news would have on his listener, but Hardy's face was inscrutable. He did notice, however, that Hardy was visibly affected.

"I know," Peabody continued,



"that every hunter and trader since time began has hoped to find that place, and that none have ever been successful. But I will find it—I have the right information this time."

Hardy's face was a mask.

Peabody became eloquent. He knew that of all the men who went into the jungle Hardy was the greatest, that if he could get Hardy's help he would be successful.

"Think of what that means, man," he said earnestly. "Literally millions for us. Think! Elephants have been dying just as they have been living in this jungle for hundreds—for thousands of years—for tens of thousands of years.

"And everybody knows that they all go off by themselves to die—that they disappear and go some remote place where their ancestors went before them when they felt death coming on.

"There will be literally tons of ivory there—hundreds of tons of it—and it will all be ours. A fortune beyond your wildest dreams. And, Hardy, I know where that place is. I'm the only white man living who knows where it is—I'm the only man, white or black, who knows where it is. For the black who told me is dead."

**H**ARDY'S face took on a peculiar look.

"Dead? How did he die?"

Peabody hesitated a moment. "They found him with a bullet in him one morning," he answered vaguely. "That's all I know."

Hardy looked at him sharply. "Did the black have a gray scar running down the left side of his face?" he asked.

It was Peabody's time to look startled.

"Yes," he answered, although it was apparent he did not like the

turn of the conversation. "Did you know him?" he asked suspiciously.

"He was a very good friend of mine," Hardy answered evenly. "And later I will find and punish the man who killed him. He was the finest black I ever knew, and—but never mind."

**P**EABODY paced the ground a moment in concentrated thought.

"Then if he was a friend of yours he must have told you what he told me," he said almost accusingly. "You were going to the graveyard of the elephants, too?"

"Yes, for one thing," Hardy answered. "But I had other business there."

Hardy had formed an instant dislike and distrust of Peabody, but he had had so little dealings with whites that in his desire to be fair to the man he decided to reserve his judgment. But no matter how fair he tried to be his senses warned him that this man was selfish and deceitful—dangerous. He wondered how the younger Dennis came to be with him.

Peabody tugged at his mustache for a moment, then grunted. "Your outfit is destroyed," he said. "I'll make a bargain with you. You can help me by your knowledge of this jungle. I can supply the men and the gear.

"I've promised young Dennis a share of the ivory for his photographic work, bringing him along so if we failed we'd still have the pictures to make pay for the trip. If you will join us, you will share with us. I take half and you and Dennis divide the other half between you. Is it a go?"

Hardy asked for a little time to think it over, and spent the rest of the afternoon seeing that his headman, Kali, the only one of his blacks still alive, was comfortable.

He was sure that Peabody was not the type of man to share the promised great rewards so liberally. So his promises must be empty, he must contemplate some treachery. Hardy had been too long in the jungle to take words at their face value. He might be too suspicious sometimes, but his life had depended on his caution.

On the other hand, the plans of his lifetime had been wrecked by that lightning bolt which had almost cost him his life. Ever since he was a boy, a white boy among the Bangoonis, he had planned secretly to investigate the strange story the old chief had told him about his father and mother.

A strange story indeed it had been, one that no white alive would have believed. And that was why Hardy had been called mysterious.

He had never repeated it to anyone but he had spent his life in the jungle, learning its ways, listening to its tales, hoping always, planning always to follow that queer tale to its end, to prove its truth, for he believed the honest old chief who had kept his people away from contact with the whites, knowing in his wisdom the harm that would befall them.

**H**ARDY'S father, the old chief had told him, was a strange white, a man who had come across the great water to enter the jungle and study its ways. The elder Hardy had been sent by somebody, the chief said, who was different from the other whites, for he had not come to kill and carry them away as slaves, but had come to write about them, to tell his own people how the natives of the jungle had lived.

And the elder Hardy had done another strange thing, something foolish, perhaps. He had brought with him his wife and his young son and

baby daughter. And this family he had taken into the jungle with him. He had made friends with the Bangooni, even though the tribe had at first intended killing them like all whites deserved.

**B**UT the Hardys had lived with them for a while. And then evil days fell upon the Bangooni. Slave traders were penetrating deeper and deeper into the jungle, and they caused the tribes to make war upon one another, for they would capture prisoners and these they would sell to the traders.

And so it came about that the tribe of the Bangooni had been almost destroyed and only saved itself by penetrating deeper into the jungle than any tribe had ever before done. But even at that, most of their men had been killed or captured.

And worse still, the strange tribe that had fallen upon them so suddenly had carried off the elder Hardy and his wife and his daughter. The boy they had overlooked.

And thus it was that Warren Hardy had been reared by savages with their own children, and had learned the ways of the jungle.

The story of his father and mother and sister had not been kept from him, but the old chief had told him of it as soon as the boy could understand. And the youthful Warren had formed a firm resolve to find his family or learn their fate if it took a lifetime.

The old chief of the Bangooni had loved him as a son, even as he had loved his family and, being a wise and good old black, had sent Warren out into the world to learn the ways of his own kind.

But always the youth had come back to the jungle, hoping always to hear word of his family. And thus it was that the veneer of civilization covered a man who was equally at

home in the jungle haunts of the natives.

But little word, and none of it more than the most vague or the wildest kind of rumors, had ever drifted to him despite a lifetime of search. But hope still lived in him, and he had been recently rewarded when the black trader, Cut-face, had told him a story.

The yarn the good black trader brought was one that would have been laughed down by every white man on the coast and it was for that reason Cut-face had told only him—so he thought. But the black in spite of all his virtues would drink.

Cut-face came to him one night and made the customary gesture. He broke a fruit into two parts and ate one half, passing the other to Hardy.

"Only the truth passes the mouth of Cut-face," he said. "Cut-face has words for Baas Hardy."

The story the native trader told did not cause Hardy to laugh outright. Instead it sent a thrill of hope through him such as he had never felt before. The story was wild, improbable, and it sounded like a dream of a hashish fiend.

But Baas Hardy believed. For Cut-face had spoken, and even though he had not executed the sign of truth Hardy would have believed him.

**CUT-FACE** was something of a free-lance medicine man among the tribes as well as a trader. There was no other like him, and no matter who might be making war upon his neighbor Cut-face came and went where he would. For Cut-face's medicine was the strongest magic of all the medicine men.

The wise old trader had learned his magic in a dispensary while he was a slave down on the coast. It was the magic of pills and a sharp knife and a rude knowledge of first aid.

But he did not allow it to become prosaic. He knew what his people wanted, and he dispensed his magic with all the pomp and ceremony of the most superstitious witch doctor in the jungle. And thus was old Cut-face as great a psychologist as he was a witch doctor.

**O**N his last trip, he told Hardy, he had penetrated farther into the jungle than ever before, led on by fresh rumors among the tribes of a new supply of ivory which was trickling out of the mountains.

He had worked his way inland for three moons. The jungle had climbed upward into the mountains. He had crossed almost impenetrable tangles, scaled dizzy mountain peaks where the soft white ice covered the ground, had found fertile lands in the uplands.

He had seen pygmies who would trade gold for salt, he had seen things with his own eyes he would not tell even Baas Hardy, for, after all, he said, a man can believe only so much of the impossible. And besides, it may be that there are curses that do have a potency after all. Who knows?

But this Baas Hardy must believe. Beside a lake, high up in a bowl of the mountain called the Stairway to the Stars dwelt a strange tribe of blacks, and they had a civilization that surpassed anything previously known to the blacks.

These people worshiped the elephant and their queen was the Keeper of the Souls of the Elephants.

Their queen was a young and beautiful white woman!

There was nothing more to tell!

Warren Hardy gripped the arms of the camp stool until the knuckles of his hands were white. The blood fled from his face and the muscles



in his jaws protruded in the strange emotion that gripped him.

"Baas Hardy will go?" Cut-face asked simply.

"Yes. I will go soon," Hardy answered.

Then later. "Cut-face," he said, placing his hand on the shoulder of that strange black philosopher-doctor-trader, "you are a friend of Hardy. I don't forget. But do one thing for me. Don't tell another soul what you have told me.

"It is not the ivory I want, and I'll bring out all I can for you, but I don't want the jungle to swarm with traders who'll come blustering through like so many bulls, tearing up the jungle till it boils in their greedy race for this ivory.

"If they find it out there will be blood spilled in the jungle—lots of it."

But for some reason Cut-face had told.

Cut-face would drink occasionally when he reached civilization. But that needed looking into, later, when Hardy returned.

AND now this Peabody was the first of the fortune hunters into the jungle.

Hardy sat on his camp cot and nursed his broken ribs and debated whether to join with him.

Although he could go without Peabody and his men and gear, the equipment and carriers would make his trip easier. He cared little about the ivory, but he wanted speed—speed in his race to this white queen of the tribe that worshiped elephants. His own parents—and his baby sister had been carried into the jungle. That was eighteen years ago.

Who was this white queen? Hardy hoped his sister still lived.

He accepted Peabody's offer.

## CHAPTER III

### *Jungle Hell*

HARDY was not long in finding out that even if Peabody was a jungle man his experience had done him little good. And Dennis was an entire stranger to the forest, an added burden to the safari.

Peabody was overconfident, overbearing and brutal. His men hated and feared him and Hardy and Dennis had all they could do to restrain themselves from coming to open blows with him.

But Hardy had only one thing on his mind, and the expedition had made good time since he had been with it. The men were showing the effects of the terrible days and fearful nights and their hatred of Peabody, but under Hardy's advice, given in such a way that Peabody thought he was the author of the ideas, they were now in the very heart of the jungle.

Traveling became slow and torturous. Clinging vines and creepers pulled and clawed at them with tentacled arms that had to be hacked away strand by strand by the sweating natives. Peabody stood over them driving them forward with loud curses and lashes from his whip.

Still they pushed onward, and as they went the grumbling of the natives became louder, the threatened revolt showing itself in every gesture of the blacks. The situation gave Hardy considerable worry. The rainy season was due to break in all its fury soon and traveling would be almost impossible. And the situation in the camp would become impossible.

Peabody was becoming jealous of Hardy. The natives had not been long in realizing that the latter was

the master of the jungle while Peabody knew much less about it than he claimed. And instinctively they looked to Hardy for orders.

It was about noon one day when they were cutting their way, foot at a time, through a particularly dense undergrowth that Hardy decided he had better take a hand. He called Peabody aside.

"This is your *safari*," he said, "and I don't like to say anything, but you're headed for trouble. These natives can do only so much and you're driving them too hard. Better take it easy."

Peabody's short temper gave way.

"I'm handling these men, and I know how to do it," he said shortly.

"They're in a bad mood," Hardy reminded him.

"Let them be in a bad mood. I'll take care of 'em. You've got to drive 'em or they'll run over you."

"Better they run over you a little than run away from you," Hardy answered. "Especially at this time."

Peabody started an angry retort when there was a sudden interruption. Kali came rushing to Hardy shouting excitedly. The black led Hardy backtrail and then darted off to the left.

A FEW yards from the trail they halted abruptly before a slight clearing. Kali's eyes were wide with fear at the sight that greeted them.

On the ground before them lay the broken parts of a black still-camera and near them a rifle. A shaggy lion stood over the gun, sniffing it, his tail moving slowly from side to side and his red tongue licking his chops.

In the top of a small tree sat Terry Dennis, his clothes torn and perspiration streaming from his face. He was trying to hold on to the branches of the tree with one hand

and adjust his horn-rimmed glasses with the other.

Hardy brought out his Webley automatic and with a careful aim sent a bullet that did not kill the lion but clipped him across the back of the neck. The old animal let out a roar that echoed through the woods and bounded away. Hardy pouched his gun as Dennis slid out of the tree with a heavy sigh of relief.

"Better not stray too far from the bunch," Hardy said. "That old boy was too aged to do you much harm, but he's a sign we're in lion territory, and there'll be bigger and younger ones around."

DENNIS salvaged the lens of his camera and his gun. "He made such a good picture I couldn't resist the opportunity," he said apologetically. "I almost stumbled over him before I saw him. I guess the picture's spoiled." With only this regret he dismissed the subject.

Terry Dennis was a revelation to Hardy. The man knew no more of the dangers of the jungle than a trusting babe, and he seemed absolutely without fear. He would have entered the mouth of an exploding volcano for a picture. Hardy wondered how he could have become friends with Peabody.

Hardy and Dennis took a hand at cutting the underbrush, but their example did not have the effect of suggesting to Peabody that he do the same. Hardy would have spoken a word of caution to Peabody about the absence of trails, a clear indication that they were unlikely to find water before night.

But Peabody, in his present frame of mind, would not have taken the advice, so Hardy concluded to let him discover his error for himself.

Hardy and Dennis were both sweating under the labor of hacking away at the underbrush, and the sit-

uation seemed to draw them closer together. Neither mentioned Peabody's failure to lend a hand, nor intimated his thoughts to the other by so much as a look, but that afternoon sealed some kind of a bond between them in their sweat.

They pitched camp late that night, and there was an atmosphere of vague uneasiness that hung over it like a heavy mantle.

Peabody's nerves and self-control were completely gone. He went to pieces altogether when one of the blacks, nervous as the others, dropped a piece of monkey meat he was serving Peabody. The dish fell in Peabody's lap and the grease burned his leg.

Peabody's gray face burned with rage. He jumped up with a roar and set the plate hurtling at the frightened black. The missile caught the man in the head and knocked him senseless to the ground with his scalp laid open. Peabody took three running steps and kicked him in the ribs with a vicious blow that left the black writhing in agony.

Hardy gripped the arm of his camp stool in white-hot anger, and it was only on account of a great self-control that he did not arise and choke Peabody almost to death.

**B**UT long experience had taught Hardy that no matter how unjust the white man is, it is an unwritten rule that no other white shall interfere in his handling of his own blacks. This is because of the peculiar psychology of the blacks that would react to the detriment of all whites.

Terrified, the other blacks squatted about and dared not even talk among themselves. Peabody turned to his headman and roared an order for them to bring in wood for the beast-fires. He followed his order with a string of oaths at all blacks

in general and his own in particular.

His headman understood English well enough to make out what he said, to understand the threats of what he intended doing to them.

The black spoke to his men in an undertone and the men slunk into the woods singly and in pairs. Peabody grumbly flung himself into his tent.

**S**OON it was sundown and black shadows were beginning to point long straight fingers through the underbrush. Hardy and Dennis sat silently before their tents, depressed, and neither spoke. Kali was in Hardy's tent, arranging his insect net. Silence settled down on the camp.

It grew darker, time for the beast-fires to be lighted. Yet the natives had not returned with the wood. Kali stepped out of the tent and looked about, then cast a significant glance at Hardy. Then, without a word, the good black took his heavy knife and went into the brush by himself, returning presently with an armful of dead brush.

Hardy knew, and the thought gave him no comfort. He turned to Dennis. "Would you give me a hand?" he asked. "I think we'd better get in some wood in a hurry."

"Of course, old man," Dennis answered. "But why didn't the blacks bring it in?"

"I'm afraid they won't be back," Hardy said quietly.

Dennis looked at him for a moment in puzzlement, then understood. They made two trips for wood, but the little pile that the two whites and Kali gathered would hardly last until midnight. And it was now dark and unsafe to leave the small fire over which the meal had been prepared.

Peabody came out and looked



about. He seemed at a loss to understand, yet he knew something was wrong. He bellowed out the name of his headman—but he was answered by silence.

HE looked at Hardy, then at Dennis, and his eyes framed a question. Both men looked the other way.

"Where are those blacks?" he asked.

"They did not come back with the wood," Dennis answered.

Peabody let out a string of oaths and his gray face turned white.

"Wait till I get my hands on those black baboons," he roared. "I'll teach them to run out on me."

"I don't think you'll get your hands on them," Hardy said. "You've already put your hands on them too often."

Peabody whirled on Hardy. "I know how to run my men," he barked. "And I don't need your advice."

His eyes fell on Kali, who was again in Hardy's tent. "Here, you black ape," he shouted. "Go see if you can find my men. Hurry now, and bring them back."

Kali stepped out of the tent and looked curiously at Peabody, but made no answer nor move to obey.

"Do you hear me?" Peabody roared. "I said go find those black boys. Move when I tell you."

"It's dangerous to go out there in the dark," Hardy spoke up. "Besides, it wouldn't be any use—your men are gone."

"He can find 'em," Peabody answered. Then again to Kali: "Get on out there like I told you." He approached the black threateningly.

Hardy got to his feet easily. "That's enough, Peabody," he said quietly. "Kali is not going out there. We're in this mess, and there's nothing can be done about it. Better get out the carbide lamps.

They're pretty feeble to make much light, but they'll last a while."

Peabody whirled on Hardy.

"I said for that black to go look for those boys. I'm still running this camp. Tell him to go."

It was a showdown. Peabody intended to establish himself as leader once for all, and this matter was one which would have to be settled his way if he were to keep command.

Hardy recognized the crisis.

"Kali is my man," he said to Peabody. "And I say he is not going into the jungle. It is your own fault that your men have left you."

"And while we're on the subject—I might as well say that I no longer feel obligated to continue our bargain. You claim to be a jungle man, but I've never seen one so incompetent. The trade included the use of your men, and now you have no men, so the bargain's off. I'll stay until morning and then I leave you."

"Leave and be damned to you," Peabody roared. "I don't need you anyway. You're always butting into my affairs. I'm competent to run my own show."

Hardy did not dispute this assertion, ridiculous as it was. He got out his express rifle and looked to its conditions, and Dennis, not realizing what the night might bring, but feeling safe in following Hardy's example, got out his own gun. Peabody mumbled something under his breath and returned to his tent.

The little camp settled down to an attitude of uneasy waiting.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Life Or Death?*

WHILE Dennis and Peabody sat alone around the fire that threw its light hardly ten feet around the deserted camp Hardy called Kali.

In his tent he dug out a small carbide lamp, a little brass cup and burner that held hardly a handful of carbide lumps and a mouthful of water. He filled his mouth with water from the canteen and squirted it into the upper chamber of the lamp, then rubbed his hand swiftly across the flint lighter.

The lamp shot out a flame smaller than a pencil and less than two inches long, but the brass reflector on the lamp returned the glow into a ray that would penetrate the darkness for a distance of fifty feet.

**H**ARDY handed Kali his rifle, stuffing its magazine to capacity and giving the black additional shells while he checked his own Webley hand-gun and stuffed his own pockets with shells.

All this with hardly more than half a dozen words to the native, for between them there was an understanding such as exists between few white men and black, an understanding born of the recognition by each that the other was all man, and now particularly because even without words each knew and comprehended the danger before them, knew the responsibility that they must shoulder alone.

Even as though they had talked about it in detail, they set out from the camp without words to the other two men who sat hugging the fire, set out on the errand that each knew must be accomplished if the four men were to live until morning.

In this part of the jungle there is one scrubby tree and one only that has peculiar characteristics. The Flaming Bush, the natives call it, and it is scarce. But this dwarfed tree is resinous, and a torch made of its green, knotty branch will give a long and brilliant light. A dozen or more of these torches would light the camp until daylight, would surround it

with a glow of fire that might act as a barricade between the four men and the hungry denizens of this particular part of the jungle.

And they would be hungry, both Hardy and Kali knew this. They were far from water and the bowl was being prowled by lions. And it was breeding season, the time when they threw their natural caution to the winds, when they fought, when they left off their slinking tactics and raged through the forest with almost maniacal fury—when even the insects became silent before their ravaging onslaught.

This was the night the camp shuddered in silence in the pale red of the supper fire. This was the night Hardy and Kali set out wordlessly to find the scarce Flaming Bush, that those ill-assorted men in the camp might live until morning.

Kali led the way, the little brass lamp shooting its lance of white light ahead of him while a few steps behind him Hardy with one hand never far from his automatic covered the back trail.

Nor was this caution unjustified, for even before they left the camp they had seen in the darkness little glows, little pairs of yellow, shining, phosphorescent lights just outside the circle of the campfire. Hardy had not mentioned this, fearing his warning would panic the two men.

**B**UT the camp was already surrounded. Silent jungle creatures had closed in on it as fast as the darkness had fallen, quiet, slinking creatures, staving always just outside the circle of light, but creeping closer as the fire died away, backing outward as new wood was thrown on from the scanty supply.

Always a menace, they were, a silent menace like a tide of water, creeping inward and outward, but ever present.

When Hardy and Kali went out among them they retreated before the glow of the little brass lamp, making the circle bigger on the one side until they were out of the circle of the camp light, then closing in behind them, making a second circling menace around the pair, a smaller circle because the little brass lamp shed so little light.

**T**HIS Hardy and Kali knew, but they went on, while the circle of yellow eyes closed tighter about them.

Then while they searched, the blackness about them began to give way to a strange red-gold light, dim and soft, but flooding the jungle around them. The yellow pairs of eyes around them retreated just a little; now they seemed an arm's length farther away, now closer, now backing away again.

The wood was dead silent, so still that Hardy heard the soft pad of feet around him, the padding feet of furry animals, the great cats that had him surrounded. Minutes dragged into hours while they searched. One of those cats would be more hungry than the others, would lose his caution and attack, suddenly, without warning, heedless of all danger.

Now the gold-yellow light was growing—the moon was rising, and its pale yellow glow outlined the trees and brush of the jungle and built great clumps of black shadows beneath them. And yet they had not seen the tree they were looking for.

Then they came to an open space, and in the middle of it they found what they sought, a torch tree large enough to supply them with blazes for the rest of the night.

Then a scratching sound. Hardy whirled, but not in time. Out of a patch of darkness a great hairy form hurtled toward him. Sharp claws sank into his flesh, the weight of a

great body bore him down and the fetid breath of a leopard choked his lungs as the animal's saber teeth sought his throat.

Kali cried out as his master fell. The animal's body whipped around as it carried Hardy to the ground and the force of it caught the black and hurled him away. The lamp flew from his hands and his rifle clattered to the ground.

In the moonlight they fought, man and slinking leopard. A tangle of arms and legs and claws, the bared fangs of a mighty cat hungry and vicious, snapping, groping for the throat of the man.

Hardy's civilization dropped away from him in the flash of an eye. He was of the jungle. He was a creature fighting tooth and nail for his life. Primitive, animal like his antagonist, a thing of muscle and sinew, fighting for life there under the jungle moon.

Hot breath, heavy odor of decayed flesh from the mouth of the beast, the panting of living things gasping for breath. Clawing, scratching, snapping, muscle against muscle, brawn against brawn, the death struggle of life against life. . . .

The forest reverberated with the low growls of the animal, the grunts, growls of agony. Now Hardy's fingers found the nostrils of the animal, and steel muscles tore until the nose was a lacerated piece of bloody flesh. Now his hands found the animal's throat and fingers like steel marlin spikes sank into the wind-pipe and cut off the animal's breath.

**N**OW the beast gave a convulsive jerk and planted extended claws into Hardy's belly, tearing through shreds of cloth and flesh, ripping until the man-front was a series of bloody lanes where the claws had ploughed from chest to groin.

Hardy's hands were working in-



stinctively. Fast as he was able to think all thought was driven from his mind in the primitive battle for life. The loss of one second's time devoted to any sort of systematic campaign would have cost him an advantage. He fought with an instinctive knowledge come down from his ancestors, for which he could not account, for which he did not try to account.

FROM some dim distant past came his control, that control that guided his hands as they groped for a point of vantage. Now his fingers found the sides of the leopard's jaws at the very back of his hairy lips.

Slowly the fingers pried their way inward, back of the jaw-teeth on either side, one hand above and one below. Back of the animal's teeth Hardy's one hand got a grip on the lower jaw, his other on the upper.

Then the muscles of his shoulders became as forged steel springs, bulging in the moonlight under his skin as he pried outward and upward.

His hands slipped forward in the leopard's mouth as he got the animal's teeth separated. Now one hand gripped the animal about the nose and front upper teeth, his other the lower teeth and jawbone.

The animal's forelegs and hind legs worked spasmodically, tearing at the flesh of the man, ripping his skin to ribbons that dripped with blood.

Hardy's hands, now gripping the animal's upper and lower jaws, began tearing at them. Slowly he forced the animal's mouth open, farther and farther. The muscles in his arms ached until they almost burst with the strain of it.

The animal's throat poured out a gurgling sound as his jaws were forced wider and wider apart. The breath came from Hardy's lungs in heavy bursts like the puffing of a

steam engine, and was met by the fetid breath of the beast.

Hardy tore at the animal's open jaws, forcing them wider and wider apart.

Now there was a cracking sound and a torrent of blood shot from the animal's throat to douché Hardy's face in its red bath.

The jaws of the animal slowly separated.

With his two hands Warren Hardy tore the leopard's jaws asunder. The bones cracked as they separated and Hardy threw the animal form writhing in its agony where it lay quivering its life away in the red light of the jungle moon.

Now Kali recovered from the stunning blow he had received. He relit the lamp.

Hardy leaned against a tree, a bloody thing, panting and mopping the blood from his lacerated body.

"Cut down that tree," he said to Kali, "and let's take it back to camp. Those poor fools back there must be pretty well frightened."

They returned to the camp and were met by silence. Hardy looked about him, then called, but there was no answer. The emptiness of the camp filled him with apprehension, for he did not trust even Peabody to be able to care for himself alone in the jungle, and as for Dennis, he was as helpless as a baby.

LIGHTING several of the flames they had made by trimming down limbs of the Flaming Bush shrub they searched the ground surrounding the camp. They continued to call, but got no answer.

Even now, unknown to Hardy, Peabody and Dennis were being prodded forward through the darkness. Around them and behind them were naked blacks armed with blow-guns and spears.

The little cavalcade traveled

through a tangle that would have stopped almost any denizen of the jungle had he not known every foot of the path but, led by Obagi, chief of the Obagis, the procession went onward at a swift pace, silently conducting their prisoners to the northwest.

They came to a stockade built of green saplings and at a word from the chief the gates were thrown open and the men filed in, in a long procession with the two whites in their center.

**T**HE village was lit by a huge fire in a central square, around which were thatched huts out of which poured a motley assembly of women and children.

Peabody and Dennis caught glimpses of their shiny black faces looking hideous in the red glow of the campfire.

"Looks like the end of us," Dennis said. "I'd like to get a picture of this place. It would go big."

"You damned fool," Peabody growled.

The warriors tied the two whites to posts in the square, binding their hands securely behind them. They paid little attention to the commotion aroused by their entry, but it was evident that the old chief was basking in some kind of glory, as though he had accomplished some great deed.

The village buzzed with excitement and voices, as the crowd gathered around the two captives and inspected them minutely. The women were particularly curious, ripping the men's shirts off to see if their bodies were white all over.

"They haven't any modesty at all," Dennis said, but Peabody cursed.

The warriors left their prisoners to the rest of the village while they filled themselves with some liquid they drank from large hollow gourds

and stood about talking to admirers who questioned them about the exploit. They were heroes of the first water, for they had defied almost all tradition in going outside their guarded village at night, risking death at the teeth of the animals that lurked about them.

The mob was gathering around the prisoners again, and Obagi emerged from it to face the two captives.

Peabody tried again to address him, this time in the dialect of the blacks at the edge of the jungle, a language he could use slightly.

"I demand that you release us at once," he said, "or there will be trouble."

The chief called on one of his men who understood the language and that man acted as interpreter. He repeated Peabody's demands.

"The white magic man demands that he be turned loose," he repeated to the chief. "He threatens trouble."

"He has made trouble before," the chief answered. "He brought the thunder that destroyed half our men. Now we have him here to make amends for his deed. I think he cannot control the lightning while there are no clouds in the sky."

**I**NSTANTLY there came to Peabody's cunning mind the idea that the chief believed him to be Hardy.

"Tell your chief that it was not I who commanded the lightning to strike his men. Tell him it was another—that I am a peaceful trader and mean no harm."

"Where is that other man?" the chief asked. "And what name does he carry?"

Dennis spoke.

"Don't tell the black skunk," he said. "Hardy's probably in a tough spot. Don't let them know how to get him."

"The hell I won't, Peabody said. "I'm not risking my life for him."

"He risked his to get torches," Dennis answered.

"That makes him the fool," Peabody snapped. Then turning his head to the interpreter he spoke.

"Tell your chief that the man who killed your warriors is alone in the jungle and that I can tell him where he can be found. But I will not speak until the chief gives me his promise he will release me."

DENNIS noted that Peabody did not include him in the bargain.

The chief laughed when the words were explained to him. A promise to an enemy meant nothing to him, it was easy to give and might save his men much marching.

"The white man shall have my promise," he said. "But that does not include his friend at the other post."

When the the words were repeated to Peabody he smiled with relief, then turned to Dennis.

"Sorry, old man," he said. "But I could only save myself."

"Don't mention it," Dennis answered coldly. "I'd prefer staying and taking my chances with the blacks to going any farther with you."

Peabody did not understand how the blacks managed to take him and Dennis prisoners without discovering the presence of Hardy in the vicinity, but just now that problem concerned him very little.

"Release me, and I will draw a map showing you where your man is," he said.

"And who did you say this man was?" the chief asked.

"His name is Hardy," Peabody answered readily.

"Baas Hardy!" The chief scowled. "Ask him if he is sure it was Baas Hardy. Ask him if it was not somebody else?"

Perplexed at the effect the name

had on the natives, Peabody nonetheless assured the interpreter the man was Hardy. He watched in bewilderment as the name ran from mouth to mouth among the blacks, and he saw that their general tone of rejoicing suddenly changed to one of worry. Even the chief was affected.

A young buck stepped up to the chief. It was his younger brother Mboga, his side patched with a plaster of ground leaves to cure the wound Hardy's gun had inflicted in him.

"Surely you are not afraid to go out after Hardy, are you?" he asked sneeringly. "His reputation does not cause you fear?"

The chief was very obviously ill at ease. He spoke to several of the leading warriors who were about him.

"If I had known from the first the white we saw was Baas Hardy I would not have molested him. This thing has grave consequences."

An old warrior shook his head.

"Your words are wise," he said. "Baas Hardy is known to be the adopted son of the Bangoonis who have more warriors than we. We could not fight them, yet when they learn what we have done they will avenge him."

THE chief called to several of his other warriors and consulted with them in a low tone of voice. And at the same time Mboga was among a few of his younger friends, and the words they said would not have set well on the ears of the chief.

Both Peabody and Dennis stood in the center of the square, their hands securely lashed to posts behind them, unable to escape, forced to look on while groups of the blacks decided upon their fate.

It was apparent to them that the name of Hardy had a strange effect

on the natives, but what it was it was difficult for them to know exactly. It was apparent, too, that the things the chief had learned was causing him much worry, and from that they deduced that there had been some error in their efforts to bring Hardy in.

**THEY** guessed that natives had no desire for Hardy, that on the contrary, their attack on him had brought about this predicament they didn't understand.

Dennis took heart. He had been filled with loathing for Peabody, his boss, when he had betrayed Hardy's name to the natives in return for his freedom. And he was pleased now to see that the transaction had not been so simple as that.

At the chief's command, the interpreter again approached Peabody.

"Are you a friend of Baas Hardy?" he asked.

Peabody guessed shrewdly, and took a long chance.

"Yes," he answered. "And I am under his protection. If you don't turn me loose immediately Hardy will scour this jungle for you and wipe you off the face of the earth. I am his brother."

The effect of the speech on the natives was to cause them greater excitement, and Peabody felt his guess had been a profitable one. He seemed very much pleased with himself. Then he turned with astonishment when he heard Dennis shouting and gesticulating at the chief.

"No," Dennis said. "He is not a friend of Hardy. He is his enemy and would kill him. Do you understand? He is not a friend of the Baas."

Dennis continued in this vein with many shakes of his head and indications such as he could make until the chief and the warriors who stood

watching him wonderingly finally grasped the idea.

Peabody turned to Dennis wrathfully.

"You damned fool," he roared. "Do you know what you're doing? You're shouting us to death. They'll kill us. Stop that raving."

"To hell with you!" Dennis returned wrathfully. "You dirty skunk, you'd betray your brother to save your own dirty hide. I'd rather die a half dozen times than to be a party to such treachery. Let these blacks shoot their works, and be damned to them—and to you, too."

"But you don't understand what they said," Peabody explained. "Hardy's a son of one of the black tribes—just a worthless white gone native. What does it matter about him?"

"A son of the blacks or not," Dennis said, "he's a damned lot whiter than you are."

**I**N a little group off to the side Mboga was talking with his clique of young warriors. Long had they grumbled at the rule of Obagi, for the chief had grown cautious with his years and was not so eager to kill and plunder as the younger warriors. And there were maidens that were fair in the eyes of these warriors, maidens belonging to other tribes, and they could be had if Obagi would but consent to war.

"We have waited long," Mboga said to Umi, "but I think our day has come. See how my brother, the chief, fears the very name of Hardy. I think we can use that to our advantage."

"You are always wise," answered the ambitious Umi. "Will you make it clear to my poor understanding how this is to be done?"

"You are a man who recognizes genius," Mboga said, "and I shall explain to you."



"You are good as you are wise," answered Umi.

"I know that," Mboga answered modestly. "But listen. It is clear that this white knows Hardy, so it must follow that Hardy is near hereabouts.

"My brother, the estimable chief, is afraid to bring Hardy in because he does not want war with the Bangooni. Neither do I want war with them. Therefore, we shall bring Hardy in and kill him, and the Bangooni shall be very angry when they hear he is dead.

"And it shall be I who tells them he is dead, saying my brother killed him in spite of the advice of myself and all our warriors. Thus will the Bangooni come to our village and demand the life of Obagi, and I shall be the new Obagi, much braver and wiser than he."

"Yours is the wisdom of the serpent," answered Umi, "but I wonder if we could find him, perhaps tomorrow—"

"No, tonight," said Mboga.

"But, the lions—"

"Is your backbone of water? Have I been mistaken in my friend?"

"No, no. But—"

"We go now."

So saying, Mboga started toward the village gate, and his friends dared not refuse to follow.

## CHAPTER V

### *Medicine Man.*

**W**HEN Hardy failed to find Peabody and Dennis he returned to the camp and made it safe by placing a circle of the flares around it. The animals would not dare cross the line into the circle of light.

With Kali's aid he dressed his wounds. Together they found a bed of leaf-cutting ants, those creatures

of the ant family whose jaws are proportionately large to their bodies as the claws of a lobster.

Kali located it by backtrailing a path of the workers who labor day and night cutting leaves which they do not even eat, but use for building beds for tiny mushrooms on which they feed.

**D**EEP in the hole, they knew, would be larger ones of these ants, soldiers who guarded the mushroom beds against intruders.

Kali disturbed the nest and in a moment these big brown soldiers came pouring out, to be scooped up by the men. Back at the camp, the two men performed the operation they had learned in their youth when their hunters had come in with bloody wounds.

Hardy pressed his flesh together where the leopard had ripped through the skin, bringing the two edges of the wound together. Then Kali applied the ants, held them against Hardy's body until the insects dug in with their strong jaws and clamped them together.

Thus a whole row of the insects marked the wounds of the leopard's claws, their jaws clamping the two edges of the wounds together even as a surgeon uses silver clips for the same purpose.

The jaws of the insects stay locked even in death, and when the operation was completed Kali broke off the bodies of the insects, leaving rows of clamps which would not fall off until the wounds were healed.

When it was morning Hardy and Kali dug holes and buried their camp equipment against the ravages of animals, and concealed the cache with leaves against prowling natives.

Then they started out on the trail, for by the light of day the story of the disappearance of the two men

was as plain to them as if they had seen the capture by the blacks.

Hardy felt no more obligation to Peabody and Dennis than that they were white men, and he had plenty of reason for having dismissed them from his thoughts. The time was growing short before the constant heavy rains would be upon him, and he had a long trip over unknown ground before him, and at the end of the trip was the answer to a question he had puzzled over ever since he could remember.

**B**UT Dennis was a decent fellow, and after all even Peabody was a white man. So, carrying only guns and ammunition, they set out on the trail of the natives.

It was noon when they reached the stockade of the blacks' village and Hardy shouted for admittance. Kali stood behind him, worried that his master should go alone into the stronghold of the men who had tried to capture him and whose soldiers he had killed.

Hardy was admitted and brought immediately to the chief.

"You have two white men that you captured last night," Hardy said without waiting for the usual formal salutations. "I want them. I am Baas Hardy."

The chief stood before his hut and his warriors formed a circle around him and Hardy and Kali. Kali looked at them disdainfully, and they eyed him with curiosity, not unmixed with envy, for Kali carried Hardy's shiny rifle, and was conscious of his superiority.

"Obagi did not know that the men were with Baas Hardy," the chief said with dignity. "He was looking for other parties." He did not explain who the other parties were.

"The men are friends of Hardy. Bring them to me at once."

The chief did not move to obey.

"They are not friends of the Baas," he answered. "The man with hair on his face would offer your life in exchange for his own. Those were his words last night."

This did not surprise Hardy, but neither did it deter him from his purpose. He still felt some responsibility to the man, even though the latter would have betrayed him.

"Baas Hardy will be responsible for his own safety," he said. "Bring me the men."

It was not necessary that Hardy remind Obagi that he would bring the whole Bangooni tribe down on the old chief's ears if he disobeyed.

"They shall be brought," the chief said. "And Baas Hardy shall have many presents of ivory."

"Never mind the gifts," Hardy said impatiently.

Two warriors were sent to a nearby hut, but presently they returned without the white men. They gesticulated excitedly as they explained to the chief that the two whites had disappeared.

The chief led the group to the hut and examined it, but there was no sign of the whites. He turned to his men.

"Bring my young brother," he ordered.

**P**RESENTLY a man returned.

"No one has seen Mboga since last night," he reported. "And with him are Umi and others."

The chief's countenance was expressionless as he received the news.

"Find my brother," he ordered half a dozen men. Then, turning to Hardy, he spoke to him.

"I hope Baas Hardy is never inflicted with a treacherous brother—yet it seems that quality is shared by some whites. Obagi speaks the truth when he says he is not responsible for the disappearance of Hardy's friends."

It was true that the chief did not know of the disappearance of Peabody and Dennis. For Mboga's heart had failed him after he had started through the jungle in his effort to capture Hardy, and he had let his followers persuade him to return, but not until after he had convinced them it was on account of their cowardice instead of his own that they were returning.

But Mboga was now knee-deep in revolution, and he did not intend to let this unusual opportunity for mischief go without his availing himself of it.

So it was that he and his followers stayed outside the stockade until the village was quiet, and then stealthily slipped in and brought Peabody and Dennis out. With his captives, he started toward the village of the Bangooni which lay in a direction that was not so heavily wooded and not so dangerous by night. And when Hardy arrived in the village of the Obagis, Mboga was half a day's march away, leading his captives before him.

"Where do you intend taking us?" Peabody asked.

HE had been silently scheming for a long time, ever since his threats and curses had been ignored by Mboga. Dennis had gone along quietly, saying nothing and caring little what happened. He had seen no chance of escape, nor would he have taken it if it were offered, for he knew his own ignorance of the forest would have invited a death perhaps more hideous than the one he now expected.

Mboga was bent on stirring up trouble and then profiting by it in a way he had not yet determined exactly. His plans were vague and many lies were on his lips.

"I am taking you to the Bangooni people who are friends of Hardy,

the Baas. You will surely see your friend there." He watched Peabody to see the effect of his words, for he was as yet unsure of the relationship between this man and Baas Hardy.

DENNIS felt a ray of hope at these words but they had the opposite effect on Peabody. The latter had learned enough about Hardy by observing the effect of the mention of his name to realize that this white man was something of great account in the jungle, a force with which he dared not cope. But in his mind was a plan.

"Is it that your brother, the chief, does not recognize your merit that you have plans of your own?" Peabody asked shrewdly.

"My brother is old and water runs in his veins," Mboga said. "My people need a younger leader."

Then realizing that he was telling this to a white man, he was silent. But Peabody had seen the youth's weakness and played on it.

"The tribe of Obagi does not have as much ivory to trade as it did in the years before," Peabody observed. "When I was in Africa years before, your fathers brought me much ivory. Do you not still hunt the elephant?"

Again Mboga could not restrain his complaint against his brother.

"My brother is a fool," he answered. "He believes that trading ivory with your people is not good for us."

"I imagine if you were chief things would be different," Peabody observed. "You would bring your tribe back to its former glory."

"I would," the youth said.

"I was just thinking," Peabody said, "that I could help you. I have a secret that no other living person knows. I know where there is ivory—lots of it. More than you and all your warriors could carry away be-

fore you are old men. It would buy lots of women and would make you powerful again."

Mboga's eyes shone with greed and there were murmurs from his half-dozen warriors.

"Where is this place you name?" he asked Peabody.

"It is the graveyard of the elephants," Peabody said solemnly. "The fabled place for which your people have searched for hundreds of years, and have failed to find. I have seen it with my own eyes."

"You lie," answered Mboga, but his voice was one of hope. "No one has seen it."

"I speak the truth," Peabody said. "And I will lead you to it. That is, if you can keep it secret—and if you do not let the Bangooni know I am here. For the Bangooni are friends of Hardy and Hardy knows I have the secret. He would have it from me and kill me if he could find me."

**P**EABODY did not mention that he had been with Hardy up to the time of his own capture, for the wound in the youth's side told him only too well what would happen to him if Mboga started playing with the idea of getting revenge for it.

"You know," Peabody said, "if you led your men to the ivory all your people would recognize you as a great chief. And you would be rich. At a spot in the mountains lies a deep valley surrounded by sharp walls. It is reached only with difficulty, but I trailed a wounded elephant there. Let me tell you what I saw.

"The valley is broad and long, and there are no trees in it as there are here in the jungle. A stream of water runs through it and cascades down the mountain-side. There is only one entrance to the place and that is almost hidden from view. No-

body could find it unless I led them there.

"But the valley is covered with bones, skeletons of elephants who have come there to die. Everybody knows that when an elephant gets sick or is wounded he disappears, but nobody has ever known where they went. It is to this place where they can die with the others who have lived before them.

"The floor of the valley is literally covered with ivory and bones, great tusks, some of which are twice the length of man's body. Some of it is gray with the moss of age, but it is solid inside. If your warriors carried it away every day they could not take it all before every man now living was dead.

**I**T means riches for you—riches and power. And I am the only man who can show you the entrance to the valley. Will you go?"

Peabody watched the greedy look on the youth's black face as he chatted with his men, who gesticulated excitedly as they talked. This fairy tale of his, this half-truth he had woven into such a glowing picture, was having its effect, for what ambitious young buck did not want ivory, did not dream of the elephants' graveyard, even as his ancestors had done before him?

It was true that Peabody knew the general location of this fabled place, he had got it from that strange medicine-man trader after plying him with liquor. And then he had shot him to insure the secret not leaking out. But it was not true that he had seen the place. This part of the story was improvised to fit in with his scheme.

He intended that these blacks should lead him there and bring out as much ivory as they could. They might also manage to capture a few slaves en route and load them down.



At any rate, Peabody intended that they all should be slaves once he had his hands on the ivory, and this included the brother of the chief along with the rest of the blacks.

Mboga addressed Peabody.

"We will go with you," he announced. "But think well before we start. If you do not lead us to this place you will wish your forefathers had killed you at birth. The Obagi tribe have ways of punishing. Where is this place?"

A pleased look, one of exultation, passed over the face of Peabody. At last he would have men who knew the country, natives to guide him who were at home here in the jungle.

"The place is among the smaller mountains that lie at the foot of the mountain known as the Stairway to the Stars. You are not afraid to go into that country?"

A look of apprehension passed over the faces of the blacks, but greed supplanted it.

"It is said," Mboga answered, "that the mountains of the Stairway to the Stars are peopled with strange folks whose magic is great, but Mboga is of the new generation and has little faith in such magic. We will go."

THUS Peabody and Dennis, accompanied by the handful of blacks set out through the jungle with Peabody intent on beating Hardy to the treasure valley.

Dennis had said nothing and there was nothing he could do. To have even succeeded in escaping the party would have meant death to him alone in the jungle. As it was, he could only go along, awaiting some event that might turn the tide of affairs.

Warren Hardy watched old Obagi closely when the chief denied knowledge of the escaped prisoners. He was accustomed to reading the faces of the blacks, knew them far better

than any white man who had ever come among them, and now he recognized the fact that the chief was as surprised as he at the disappearance of Peabody and Dennis.

"I believe that Obagi speaks the truth," he answered.

"My men are now looking for my brother," the chief said. "And if Baas Hardy will stay with us only a short time I believe they will bring him and the white men back."

THE day passed and the searchers did not return with the missing youth and the whites. Night settled over the barricaded village and the chief retired to his hut. His black face was grave, and he held many whispered conversations with the older warriors.

An atmosphere of suspense hovered over the village and it seemed that even the black babies were quieter than usual. It was a public secret that the time had come when Mboga was going to try his strength, when Obagi's power over his people was to be tested.

Obagi was old and he did not lead his people on to as much mischief as he had in his youth, but he was still a dangerous man to cross, and he wielded his authority with an iron hand, except in the case of his brother, upon whom he looked as still a boy, and thus had not taken him as seriously as he might.

As darkness fell about the stockade and the fires were lighted there came a voice from outside the gate. The guards at the portal recognized it instantly, and threw the gate wide.

A strange black man entered.

Hardy and Kali were standing outside the hut assigned to them when the figure came into the light of the central fire. A strange figure of a man it was, one that would have caught attention anywhere.

The black was fully six and a half

feet tall, and, contrary to the custom of the blacks, wore a long beard which was lightly streaked with gray. On his head was a tall black silk hat, battered and worn, the crown almost torn away. It sat squarely on the top of his head, and standing upright in front of it was the bright red plumage of a cockatoo.

Around the man's neck were hung strings of beads, each bead a gleaming white crocodile tooth, and the dozen strands rattled as the man walked. Around his loins was a breech cloth of bright yellow muslin, knotted in front and with the ends decorated with the feet and claws of leopards.

In one hand he carried a staff made of the joints of the backbone of a shark and topped off with a knob which was the skeleton head of a monkey, which differed not at all from the skull of a new-born babe. In his other hand he carried a tattered black valise.

A livid gray scar ran down the side of his face and was lost in his beard at his neck.

Hardy felt a surge of pleasure at the sight of the weird black medicine man who came into the stockade. Some way, old Cut-face had not been killed by Peabody after all. Yet Hardy noticed that he leaned a little more heavily on that strange staff of his than usual.

CUT-FACE walked into the village with all the dignity befitting one of his great reputation, and behind him walked his two carriers, proud to serve this mighty man. The medicine man's bright eyes saw everything, saw Hardy and Kali standing near him as he passed. But wise old man as he was, there was not so much as a shadow of recognition on his face as he saw the pair.

There would be plenty of time for that after he had talked with the

chief. It would not be the first time he had been able to befriend Hardy by holding his tongue and not appearing friendly on the surface.

As Cut-face passed on into the hut of the chief Hardy returned to his own and threw himself down on the grass that had been brought for him. Kali curled up across the opening of the door. Both slept with more ease than they had for many nights. Cut-face was in the village and they could catch some much needed rest, for he would surely come to them when the time was right.

The stars were high when there was a slight shuffling sound at the entrance to his hut, and Kali moved his body out of the way to permit the entrance of the big figure that had appeared noiselessly.

Cut-face dropped into a squatting position beside where Hardy lay. And now his affected dignity was gone and he was the wise old colored friend of Hardy.

"There is trouble here," he told Hardy after they had passed a few words of greeting. "It might be well to leave the place with the rise of the sun. Obagi has told me of his unworthy brother, and he doubts if we will see Peabody and the other man alive—which I very much want to do—if we don't find them ourselves. And we might be too late already."

## CHAPTER VI

### *The City of Elephants*

IT WAS the day of the great festival in El-filada, the white city of the elephants. The straight rows of streets which were lined with huts built of pure white stone from the mountain-side were blazing with colored flags and banners.

In the central square of the city

rose a great mausoleum of blinding white, a sparkling lace dome that thrust its white spires and minarets a hundred feet in the clear air. Topping the central dome was the life-sized figure of an elephant, carved bit by bit and assembled out of virgin ivory.

BROAD steps led upward into the interior of the mausoleum; steps of white marble, and at the four corners of the court stood sparkling minarets, miniatures of the central dome.

In patterns of arabesque and in mosaics and inlaid work ran bands of relief around the round structure, a picture history of the civilization of El-filada, the new city.

The whole city was clad for the festival and the court around the dome was crowded with people, blacks of large stature, with sharp aquiline noses and patrician foreheads. Men and women alike wore gaily colored tunics woven from the wool of the mountain sheep and dyed their brilliant colors with dyes from vegetable coloring found in the woods.

A few of the blacks led their pets on chains of gold; here and there a chattering monkey was perched on his master's shoulder, now a man led a shiny pet leopard that trotted before him, to the envy of the others who stopped to pat his head.

Mountain goats pulled queer little carts, hand-made vehicles that looked more like perambulators than carriages for grown people, but decorated with lavish pride.

But the elephants had the streets, ruled the dense traffic as, gaily caprisoned with heavy cloths tapes-tried with gold and silver threads, they were led toward the palace which covered the whole western side of the great square.

The crowd surged toward this cen-

ter of the celebration, the veranda of the palace where in the shade of snow-white awnings the priests and the court were assembled.

The perspiring black faces of the dignitaries were wreathed in smiles as the men and women jostled about and tried to get the ceremony started, for the Festival of El-filada was one of rejoicing and was not a solemn occasion, for all its pomp and splendor.

The court of blacks was gathered about the throne which was the pride of the whole civilization. It rose from its dais, a thing of shining splendor, a great throne carved of pure white ivory, designed to look as though it were a web spun of the finest silk. Piece by piece it had been carved by the finest craftsmen the city afforded and had taken years in its completion.

It looked fragile, giving the appearance of a shimmery white shawl draped over a framework of white filigree lace over which had been scattered handfuls of rubies and emeralds. It was awe-inspiring in its splendid beauty and delicacy.

SEATED on the throne was the queen, clad in a robe of brilliant purple. On her head rested a light crown of gold filigree, setting off flowing hair of midnight black.

The queen of El-filada was young—and she was a white girl.

Regal in her solitary splendor, beautiful beyond compare, there was solemnity about her that did not befit a girl so young. An occasional fleeting look from her eyes, one that vanished as quickly as it came, suggested some unvoiced unhappiness, and a never voiced hope awaiting fulfillment.

Now she turned to the high priest. "Let the Festival of El-filada proceed."

The high priest was an impressive black, whose green robes, set off by

a white turban, gave out an air of authority. At his order, two pages sounded clear bugle notes on rams' horns banded with gold.

The queen looked down a little wearily upon the sea of black faces, her subjects who now hushed their noises and prepared to listen to the long harangues of the priests. The ceremony was just a little boring to these hard-working people, but it was expected that they should listen enthusiastically and applaud loudly, and thus these blacks were like similar ones the world over.

**S**UDDENLY a commotion waved over the crowd and it separated into lanes. Down the open space in the square marched half a dozen armed blacks.

And between them marched a group of men strange to this town and in turn looking in wonderment at the people and city about them. The little group consisted of two bedraggled white men and four blacks.

The guards marched these intruders directly up the steps to the presence of the queen.

The guards spoke in English!

"These prisoners were found hiding outside the gates of the city," explained the captain of the guard when the queen had recognized him.

A strange transformation came over the face of the white girl as some kind of emotion gripped her. Her hands clutched the ivory arms of the throne as she gazed long at the first whites she had seen since she was a mere child. Her bosom heaved and it was several moments before she could speak.

"Who are you?" she asked in a voice that was low and choked with emotion.

The older of the two whites stepped forward.

"My name is Peabody and my

friend is Dennis," he said. "We were lost when your guards captured us. May we ask that we be released?"

The queen gave an order to the guards and they returned to their stations. Then she called the high priest to her side.

"You will go on with the festivities," she said. "I will interview these strangers in the palace."

The excitement caused by the entrance of the little party gradually subsided after Peabody and Dennis were taken into the queen's reception room, where they were given food.

After they were made comfortable the queen asked them for their story. Peabody's mind had been working fast since his arrival in this strange city. He had noted the wealth of ivory in their decorations and he had seen that the people held their elephants in some kind of reverence.

So he decided that this was not the time to tell the truth. He knew he was near the goal he was searching for. And he was certain, now, that these strange people must have access to it. Thus as a matter of caution he would not tell of his own search for the place.

**W**E are peaceful traders who were attacked by the blacks," he answered her. "All our party was killed except the four men who accompany us. We have been wandering for days, not knowing where we were nor how to get out of the jungle, and it was purely by accident that we stumbled upon your city."

Dennis listened to this falsehood with mixed emotions. His natural honesty prompted him to denounce the man, but still there was nothing to be gained by such a step. So he elected to wait before telling the queen the truth which he would do before he would allow Peabody to



effect any plans to the detriment of the people.

The queen was pleased and excited at the appearance of the whites and accepted Peabody's tale with full belief. She asked them many questions about the outside which Peabody answered according to his plan of not letting the woman know too much about anything until he could decide upon his next move.

The queen's acceptance of them was so warm that Peabody became bolder.

"How does it come that a white woman rules over these people?" he asked her.

"My father and mother were adopted by the tribe," the girl answered readily. "I was only a baby at the time. My father taught the natives all their handicrafts and raised them from a state of savagery to their present state.

THEY were peaceful people and because of my father's goodness they made him their kind. He and my mother lie buried in that tomb in the square, and when they died I succeeded them to the throne."

"That is a strange story," Peabody said. "Who were your people, and what were their names?"

"My father was a scientist. His name was Hardy."

The answer filled Peabody with an emotion of surprise not unmixed with resentment. That this queen of these rich people should be the sister of Warren Hardy was indeed irony. He had hated and was jealous of the man ever since he had met him and now he was doubly jealous, but he did not let his countenance betray him.

Dennis heard the girl with a feeling of pleasant surprise. It seemed to him this strange story explained Hardy's taciturnity, his strange silent and at times morose attitude. Hardy's

mysterious errand into the jungle must have been to find his sister.

After they had talked a long while the queen said.

"Today is the festival of the elephants. My subjects believe that they were descended from them and that the elephant has all the virtues that man aspires to have, such as complete loyalty to its kind, great wisdom and above all serenity of soul.

"In none of these virtues, of course, can man ever hope to rival the elephant. He can only copy him to the best of his ability. Thus we pay our respects to the elephant.

"You should go with me on the Grand Parade. We go as a body to the graves of the elephants, for it is near-by that all elephants come to breathe their last. The valley is sacred to their souls.

Peabody heard this with a feeling of exultation. They were going to take him in state to the Graveyard! It was an unhopèd-for break of luck, and he thanked his stars he had not told the queen his real purpose.

There was one point he impressed on his own mind. He would have to work fast, for somewhere back there in the jungle was Hardy, if something hadn't happened to him, and it was far from his desire that he meet the man again. Now there was one thing to be done, get as much ivory as he could manage to have conveyed and get out of the jungle.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Revolution*

GUIDED by the old medicine man, Hardy made good time through the jungle toward the strange city of El-filada. The black picked up the trail he had blazed on his return from the place and they traveled from sun up until dark every day.

Hardy had sent a messenger from the village of the Obagi to his old friends the Bangoonis, trying to get some word of the missing Peabody and Dennis. This messenger was waiting at a water hole named by Cut-face.

The messenger slipped into Hardy's camp at dusk, weary and showing marks of his extraordinary trip. He spoke to Cut-face and Hardy excitedly.

"There is trouble with the Bangoonis," he said. "The people have arisen and overthrown their chief."

"Why?" Hardy asked.

"Two of their hunters had wandered far and came back to their village with strange tales of a rich city deep in the jungle, a city full of ivory and gold. The hunters wanted to lead an expedition to it, but the chief said no, he did not believe them, and besides, it would be too dangerous.

"But the young men have been in peace too long and they wanted adventure. They inflamed the rest of the young men into revolt. They killed their chief and are already marching toward the city."

**H**ARDY'S face took on a worried expression. "Were there two white men in the party?" he asked.

"No," the messenger answered. "They had not seen the white men nor Mboga."

"That means trouble," answered the old medicine man. "We had better go faster."

It was five nights later when Hardy, accompanied by Cut-face and Kali and the black messenger came to the foot of the Stairway to the Stars.

"I think we had better wait until night to go in," advised Cut-face. "I have a feeling that we will meet with Peabody, and he may be prepared for

us. He thinks he has killed me, but he knows you will get here."

At dark Cut-face led the little party through a narrow passage between two tall rocks, then down a well-worn lane.

Hardy uttered an exclamation of awe when he first got a glimpse of the city, a vision of whiteness beneath the moon. It was strange, mysterious, and the sight of the tall mausoleum in the square filled him with wonder. Somewhere in this sleeping town lay the mystery of the disappearance of his family.

**T**HE little party followed silently while Cut-face led them to the side door of one of their temples, where he knocked. The door was opened by a black in the robes of a priest of the lower order, whom Cut-face addressed in English.

"These are friends," he said, when the party was admitted. "The white man is Baas Warren Hardy, a friend of the jungle people. We have many questions to ask."

The priest was a tall man and his clean-cut black face and clear eyes looked at the group wonderingly.

"It is strange," he said. "Another man named Hardy came to the palace two days ago, bringing another white with him. The man named Hardy is a brother to the queen."

Hardy felt his heart pounding with suspense.

"Tell me," he asked, controlling his voice as best he could. "What name do you call your queen?"

"She is Queen Lila," answered the priest.

"And this man who says he is Hardy, claims to be her brother?"

"Yes," the priest said. "But it is strange. She did not announce it at the festival of the elephants, and after the pilgrimage she has not been seen at the palace. Her brother announces that she is ill—but the queen

was never known to have been ill before."

Hardy and Cut-face exchanged glances.

"And the other man accompanying Hardy—has he been seen, too?"

"I believe not," the priest answered.

Hardy studied the priest and decided the man was reliable.

"I have grave news for you," he said. "Will you take us to your high priest? My friend Cut-face will assure you the man is not the brother to your queen, but that I am. He has formulated some plot that promises no good to your people."

The man led them through passages of white stone. The procession filed through the building and came at last to the temple proper. At a portal before which hung a purple drape the priest called.

There was a shuffling noise inside, but no answer. The priest threw back the drape.

Standing in the room, his face filled with apprehension, was a man garbed in a green robe, but the man was Mboga.

Lying in a pool of blood on a couch was the nude body of an older man. A knife thrust had laid his neck open from ear to ear.

The party dashed into the room just as Mboga recovered from his surprise and darted toward an open window.

**H**ARDY was after him. Half a dozen quick steps and he grabbed the brother of the Obagi chief just as that worthy made a leap for the opening. He caught the black's leg and pulled him back into the room.

The black snarled and his long fingers reached out and jerked up the bloody knife that lay beside the murdered man. He heaved the blade and it ripped into Hardy's flesh.

Like a flash Kali threw himself at the murderer and bore him down.

Half a dozen blows from his fist brought the youth into submission.

The fight had been quiet and hardly a sound had left the apartment to attract others who might be in the building. Hardy was thankful that they had come in as soon as they did.

He spoke in a low voice to the priest. "Is this your high priest?"

The man nodded.

"Don't let anybody come in here for a while," Hardy cautioned. "This fellow Mboga is going to tell us what all this means. We'll see why he was impersonating your high priest."

Despite the pain of the wound in his side Hardy knelt by the black whom Kali was holding on the floor.

"You have just committed murder," he said sharply. "Before we turn you over to these people to let them torture you for killing their high priest I'm going to let you have a chance to talk. Why did you do this?"

Hardy's suggestion of torture worked on the black's mind for a moment, and his cowardice prompted him to talk in the hope of saving himself.

"It was your friend Peabody," he said. "I was to be made the high priest. He is now the king of El-filada."

"When and how did he become king?" Hardy asked impatiently.

"He is the brother of the queen. She is ill and has turned the government over to him. It is to be publicly proclaimed tomorrow."

Hardy felt apprehension, now. Was his sister still alive or had Peabody killed her? He was inclined to the belief that she was a prisoner somewhere.

**A**ND the other white man?" he asked.

"Peabody will take care of him," Mboga answered. "The man would not help Peabody, so he was of no use to us."

"Where is Peabody now?"

"He occupies the rooms next to those of the queen," Mboga answered. "But you will not, please, turn me over to the people. I did what the king ordered me to do."

"What was to be your reward for this act?"

"All the ivory I could use."

Hardy called the priest and Cut-face to him. The king was much more serious than he had expected, and Peabody's greed had led him into this ambitious stunt. It must have been easy for him, single-handedly, to outwit these peace-loving people who had never experienced the white man's treachery.

"You were wise, Cut-face, to come in at night. Peabody would have been prepared if we had come up boldly in the daytime. As it is, I think we can stand a chance to nip his one-man revolution in the bud. We are going to the palace to pay him a surprise call."

Leaving the messenger to guard the young brother of his chief, Hardy led the other two men down the dark ways and into a side door of the big palace building. Guided in its dark interior by the priest who knew the layout of the rooms they came to the door he indicated would be the guest room.

They heard voices inside and listened silently. It was Peabody talking.

"I'M going to give you one more chance to help me," he was saying. "And you're a fool if you don't take it. It will make you rich for life."

The voice that answered was that of Dennis. "I told you I was not taking any part in this. You are a thief and murderer and if I'd known what kind of a man you were I wouldn't have come with you in the first place."

Peabody's voice rose in anger.

"Never mind what you think of me. I'm king of this place now and it's your life I'm offering you."

"To hell with you—and that's final. I'm leaving this place right now—alone. Jungle or no jungle."

Peabody reminded him, "You won't get very far with that kind of talk. I'm running things here and I'll make you change your mind. You're getting romantic because you're falling in love with that girl. It's merely because she's the first white woman you've seen for a while."

"Where have you got her?" Dennis demanded.

"She's safe," Peabody answered with a sneer. "And you won't find her."

IN the darkness of the hall Hardy was restraining himself with impatience. He wanted to burst into the room and throttle Peabody then and there, but caution held him back, hoping he would hear more of the man's plot. It would be through him that he would have to find where his sister was being hidden.

Then something bumped into Hardy, and for the first time he heard the padding feet in the darkness near him. A man grunted in surprise, then long arms encircled him.

Hardy scuffled silently with the figure in the darkness and knew by the sounds that Cut-face and Kali were also in the grip of somebody. His antagonist was almost naked, clad only in a breech-clout, and his strength was even greater than Hardy's.

Hardy's fingers found the man's throat and sank in. The two men were panting and heaving now, and Hardy saw that his opponent was fast overcoming him.

Then suddenly they both fell to



the floor, and in the fall they came against the curtain of the apartment door and pulled it down with them, flooding the dark hallway with a gleam of light from the inside of the room.

As Hardy and his antagonist untangled themselves from the curtain Peabody rushed out, gun in hand, and saw them. His gun covered Hardy threateningly.

In the light from the room Hardy could see that the attackers were of the Obagi tribe, the friends of the young Mboga. Under the muzzle of Peabody's gun the fight subsided and the three tribesmen awaited Peabody's orders.

The elderly man recognized Hardy and his face drew into a frown of anger, which changed to one of fear and amazement when he saw Cut-face. The medicine man returned his look with one of malignant hatred and in it there was the promise of death.

Peabody ordered them into the room, and all the time his eyes returned to the medicine man. Cut-face spoke.

"You tried to kill me after you got me drunk and got me to talk about this city," he said. "But I told you I would put a curse on you if you betrayed the things I told you. I have lived to do it."

PEABODY snarled. "To hell with your curses. Nothing's happened to me yet. The curse is likely to end on your own shoulders."

Then turning to Hardy, he said: "Things have changed since we last met. I am now in charge here—king of the city, and you can consider that you are my prisoners."

"I'm not anybody's prisoner," Hardy snapped. "I overheard your proposition to Dennis and so I know how you got to be king."

"You are as big a fool as Dennis,"

Peabody answered. "It was lucky I sent for my men to handle him. They caught you at a very convenient time. Now none of the natives in the city need know you were ever here."

FOR the first time Hardy looked about him, and he saw Dennis sitting on a low couch in the room, his hands and feet bound.

The three blacks with Peabody stood surrounding Cut-face and himself. Then Hardy noted something else. His man Kali was not in the room. The man had disappeared some time after they had entered the palace hall. But Hardy gave no indication that one of his party was missing. He spoke to Dennis.

"I want to thank you," he said, "for deciding not to fall in with Peabody's plans. I had always thought you were a friend of his."

"No," Dennis answered. "I met him for the first time just before I joined his expedition. I certainly wouldn't have come if I had known what kind of a rat he was."

Peabody was in no mood to talk to his prisoners further, and he ordered the blacks to bring them with him. He took a strange lamp from the wall and led them under the point of his gun.

They passed down the hall and into a room in the basement, walled with stone, as was the rest of the palace, and thrust them all into a room which was closed with a massive door of hand-carved hardwood.

When they were alone Hardy turned to Dennis, who was near him in the darkness, and asked:

"Just what are Peabody's plans? What has happened so far?"

Dennis told him how Peabody had got Mboga to lead him to the city under the promise of giving him all the ivory he needed to establish himself as chief.

"Then when your sister received us so cordially she took us to the valley of the elephants for the ceremony. It lies just at the farther edge of the city.

"When we returned to the palace after the ceremony your sister established us here and Peabody immediately took charge. Your sister was too trusting because he was a white man. He's got her locked up here somewhere and has announced that he is her brother and that she is ill.

"He and Mboga will make the natives load up with ivory and start back immediately. Mboga will be high priest and handle the blacks."

Hardy and Dennis had talked for half an hour when they heard stealthy footsteps outside the heavy door. They sat silent, listening, as they heard the bolt being withdrawn.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Battle*

**I**T WAS Kali, good, faithful old Kali, who let himself into the darkened dungeon. He groped about and whispered Hardy's name.

"Right here," Hardy answered softly. "Cut these lashes."

Kali used his knife swiftly and soon the whole group were free of their bonds.

"There is much trouble," Kali whispered. "Follow me."

Silently the little file of men made their way out of the dungeon and through the shadows until they were safe from the ears of the palace.

"I got away when the Obagi first jumped on you," Kali explained. "I thought I could do better that way."

"It was good that you did," Hardy answered. "Have you learned anything?"

"I find the queen," Kali answered. "I think she is safer where she is until I tell you this. The Bangooni

are near and I think they will attack just before daylight."

"How did you find this out?"

**T**HEY are in two parties, one on each side of the city. I saw their signal fires." It was amazing to Hardy how his loyal black could have covered so much territory and learned so much in such little time, but Hardy had ceased wondering at the man's ability to get around.

Dennis spoke.

"The chief of the guards seems to be a pretty good man," he said. "A kind of minister of war who lives in the palace. I think we ought to tell him about this. Something has to be done for defense and we can't do it alone."

"I find him," Kali said quickly.

"All right," Hardy agreed. "But first tell me how to find the queen. I'll be getting her to safety while you find the general."

After Kali told him how to find the other dungeon in which his sister was held, Hardy sent him to warn the captain of the guards and, with Dennis, started back toward the palace.

He looked around to speak to Cut-face, but the medicine man had disappeared. Hardy remembered the words that had passed between the man and Peabody and shrugged his shoulders. That might take care of another angle of the trouble.

Hardy groped his way through the basement of the palace and came at last to the door Kali had described. It took both his and Dennis' strength to throw it open.

"Lila," he called softly.

He heard a stirring across the room and made his way across it, where he found a woman lying on a rude palette, her arms and legs bound and a gag of cloth in her mouth. He quickly slashed the cords that held her and, warning her to

silence, led her out leaning on him and Dennis.

"The town is going to be attacked," he said. "I am Warren, your brother, but don't talk now. Hurry."

THE girl's mind was in a state of confusion from the unexpected treachery of the first white man she had seen since her parents had died, but at Warren's mention of the danger of attack she became alert.

"If we are in danger," she said, "I must warn the guards. We must return to the palace."

"My man has gone to warn them," Warren assured her.

But the girl was adamant. "It is my duty," she said.

Warren told her hastily what he had heard of the renegade faction of Bangooni. "It may be," he said without much hope, "that I can handle them. I know them very well."

But Hardy's words were hardly finished when things began to happen suddenly.

A tumult of shouts was heard and strange blacks were already within the city.

It was more like the attack of a mob than an organized war party. Without an experienced leader, the blacks had merely borne down on the town hoping to surprise it and carry out their plans by force of numbers, and the din of their surprise attack.

"We're cut off from the palace," Hardy shouted. "We'll have to get into one of the houses."

"I'll show you where to go," Lila said. "To the elephant temple."

She led them running down the street to a great building, which they entered. It was lighted inside and had the appearance of a menagerie. Fully a hundred sacred elephants were awaking and becoming

restless at the sound of the noises that were now filling the city.

The natives of El-filada were a peaceful tribe and had had no contact with the more hostile of the jungle blacks, so they were not at all prepared to defend themselves.

Now the renegade Bangoonis were sacking the city, their shouts adding to the confusion of the helpless natives. Their black forms were everywhere, in and out of houses, tearing out the ivory carvings and piling them into the streets.

Their knives and spears cut down every figure that tried to block their way and the weaponless natives were powerless against them.

It was the most pitiful thing Hardy had seen, the very gentleness of the natives contributing to their annihilation. Hardy had lost his gun long since and was as helpless against them as were his sister's subjects.

It was only a matter of time until the blacks would find them, and Hardy shuddered at the thought of what would happen to them.

NOW there was a new sound apparent to their ears. The guards were assembled and were making some show of resistance, but their small number made them almost helpless, and they were being mowed down like so many weeds.

"The elephants," Lila exclaimed suddenly. "Let's stampede them through the town."

Hardy was not sure this move would have results, but it was better than doing nothing.

"Let's go!" he shouted to Dennis. "Throw open the doors."

The building was of heavy construction and the doors were ponderous. Lila took one of the lamps from the brackets on the wall and held the light while Hardy and Den-

nis threw back the portals along one side of the building.

Then a shout came from the invaders as they saw the great building open. They made a concerted rush for it.

"This way," Lila shouted, and led them back of the great herd of beasts. She handed the lamp to her brother. "Throw this among them," she said.

Hardy hurled the lamp into the middle of the herd. Burning oil spilled out and covered the backs of two of the beasts. The burned elephants trumpeted out a great roar and charged in their agony. Then the panic spread through the rest of the herd like a tidal wave.

The herd moved thunderingly toward the open door, gaining in momentum at every step.

**T**HEY were free of the building and their burning angry eyes caught sight of the renegade blacks who brought up to a sudden halt at the sight of the unexpected charge.

The blacks screamed in terror as the elephants bore down on them, stamping them into the dust like so much chaff. Cries of fear and agony only served to madden them more.

The destruction was terrible and deadly. Their thundering hooves and their wild trumpeting shook the night with hideous noise.

Penned up in the valley city, the animals could not escape, but ranged the streets like so many juggernauts of death until their fury cooled.

It seemed hours before the streets began to be quiet again, but when Hardy and Dennis ventured out there was no sign of the Bangooni living. Crushed bodies mangled and bleeding accounted for many of them, and those who had escaped had disappeared into the jungle.

"We'd better go back to the palace."

Hardy decided. "There's still Peabody to account for."

Daylight was suddenly bursting over the mountain when they mounted the palace steps. Lila saw the captain of the guard with his little handful of men who had escaped the blades of the Bangooni, and she called to him.

**W**ITH the blacks preceding them they went directly to the chamber that had been the headquarters of Peabody. The room was quiet.

Peabody lay on the couch still, and with a look of agony on his face. Buried in his forehead was the gleaming white tooth of a crocodile. Hardy recognized that as a message to him, with the signature of Cut-face, the jungle medicine man.

He knew that it would not be necessary to look for the strange black; somewhere, some time he would see him again. But this man's name would never be mentioned.

"It looks like it's about all over," Hardy said to Dennis. "We'll have to get somebody to lead you back to civilization as soon as we can, however. My sister and I have many things to talk about, and have to clean up the city after this fracas, so I don't think I'll be going back soon, if ever."

Dennis cast a hasty glance at Lila Hardy, then spoke to Warren. "If you think I could ever become a jungle man," he said, "I'd like to stay with you—both. Maybe I could be some help to you some time. I can take good pictures."

There was no mistaking the man's eagerness, nor did Hardy forget how fearless he was.

"Surely," he said. "We'll all stay."

Dennis showed his happiness.

Hardy saw an equal look of happiness on his sister's face, and knew the three would never leave El-filada.



# The DUMB BUNNY



*A Gripping Story of American Soldiers Posted in a Siberian Village Where Danger Lurked*

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

*Author of "Fire and Sword," "The Fame of Albert Muggins," etc.*

I'M TELLIN' you bo, we're so far out of the line of travel that the War Department has plumb forgot us!"

Snyder threw a peeled potato into a tubful of water and vengefully attacked another one. "Yes, sir, we're so far away it ud take ten dollars' worth of stamps to send us a post-card."

Snyder stared with unfriendly eye at the Siberian village and the mountains and the forests beyond it, mile after mile of trees which marched resistlessly until at last

they were defeated by the Arctic Circle and dissolved into the Siberian tundra.

"What are we here for anyways?" growled the other cook's police.

"What are we here for! Ain't nobody knows, not even the President hisself. All I know is we're goin' to be in pretty much of a jam if these Bolshies decide to act nasty."

"Oh, you're always crepe hangin'," retorted the other man crossly, "we got fifty doughboys here an' a good many thousand rounds of ammuni-

tion. Ain't nobody goin' to bother us none."

"Yeah!" Snyder was heavily sarcastic, "that's what you say. You're like all the rest of these war babies. If you'd put in as many hitches as I have you'd know somethin' about soldierin'. . . ."

ARE you tryin' to say that Lieutenant Jennings don't know nothin' about soldierin'?"

"I'm sayin' jest that!" retorted Snyder emphatically, "jest because he wears a couple of pieces of tin on his shoulders ain't no sign he knows how to be an officer. Where'd he learn his soldierin', answer me that!"

"I'll tell you where he learned it. He learned it sittin' on the quarter deck of a four-line escort wagon. He spent all his time manicurin' a set of Missouri jar heads. Jennings was swingin' the business end of a shovel cleanin' up after a team of mules when I was workin' the bolt of a rifle against Goo-goos an' Moros an' Greasers. . . ."

"But he sure knows how to razz a bunch of men," interposed the other man.

"Sure he does, no man can be a mule skinner that ain't got a good line of cuss words. But when you said that you said everything. Why look at this here camp," and he pointed out of the door of the shed down the village street to the far end where a row of brown khaki tents showed near the church, "here we are with our kitchens down at this end of the village and all our spare ammunition stored in the Y. M. C. A. hut in the next room. And what happens?"

"Three times a day the hull outfit comes down here armed with nothin' better than mess kits leavin' all the rifles at the other end of town in the tents guarded by a couple

of men. What's to prevent a gang of Bolshies gettin' next to that and jumpin' us while we're at chow? Didja ever hear of Balanguiga? No? I thought not. If Lieutenant Jennings had been in the Army instead of the Quartermaster Corps he'd a heard about it.

"Yeah, Balanguiga was the name of a town in the Philippines. An' there was an outfit of doughboys there like we are here. An' what happened to them? I'll tell ya what happens to them, their cook shack, like our'n was on the other side of the *barrio*. And they leaves their rifles behind 'em an' goes to chow jest once too often. An' a swarm of Bolo men hacks 'em to pieces."

The other man stared down the length of the village street.

"Yeah," he answered doubtfully, "but these here Bolshies ain't so much."

"No? Maybe you ain't been usin' your eyes like I have lately, an' maybe you ain't noticed that there's jest about twict as many Bolshies here in this town as there was when we come."

YEAH, they do seem to be thicker than they was," agreed the other man slowly.

"An' more'n that, they got a real leader, too, a guy that don't miss nothin'. It's that fellow Kusmitsky I mean. You know what I found out about that baby? I found out he ain't no more a coal miner than I am. That guy was an officer in the Tsar's old army and turned Bolshevik after the revolution. Believe me he ain't missin' many tricks.

"And it's him that's bringin' in these men all the time. I heard this mornin' that there's forty or fifty more of 'em comin' over from Vladimora tomorrow night. An' when them babies gets here that means we're outnumbered about four to

one. An' believe me, there'll be hell poppin'."

First call for retreat sounded from the other end of the village and both men glanced up from their labors as the soldiers began to pile out of their tents and line up preparatory to retreat inspection.

"Why don't you say somethin' to Jennings about it?" asked the other man, a worried frown on his face.

"Fat chance!" Snyder's tone was scornful, "when you been in this army as long as I have you'll learn that it don't pay to shoot off your face with a gratuitous issue of advice. I know jest about what'd happen if I sound off to Jennings. He'd have me doin' kitchen police the rest of my natural life.

"Here he comes now lookin' all pleased with hisself. He'll go in now an' get slicked up an' go callin' on that Natasha woman. The blame lunkhead don't know that she's Kusmitsky's sweetie an' is just playin' him for a sucker for what information she can get out of him."

Both men watched as Jennings, having finished his retreat inspection, came striding down the village street, paying no attention to the sullen glances from the hairy, bearded Russian miners who lounged about, hands in pockets.

THE air still quivered to the exceeding pungency of his remarks as he upbraided his outfit for the state of their equipment and their manner of executing "Present Arms." He swaggered into the quarters he shared with "Doc" Evans, the little Y. M. C. A. man, and threw his belt and pistol holster on the table with the air of a man who has done a good day's work and is satisfied therewith.

"Doc, I never seen such a bunch of dumb-heads as I got in this out-

fit. But believe me I sure read 'em the riot act tonight!"

Doc Evans glanced up from the book he was reading and peered with near-sighted eyes at the officer before him.

"Yes, yes," agreed the little man absently and a worried frown appeared above his horn-rimmed glasses. "They're not such bad boys," he said lamely, "they're nothing to worry about, but there is something that is worrying me, Lieutenant."

"Yeah?" returned Jennings sarcastically, "you're always in a stew about something, Doc. What's on your mind this time?"

THE little Y. M. C. A. man, his oversized uniform hanging on him in awkward folds, carefully marked his place in the book he had been reading, then rose and went to the door where he stared down the length of the village street.

As usual its muddy width was darkened here and there by idle groups of rough-looking miners and peasants who moved aimlessly in and out of the various log izbas and gathered in little, low-voiced, gesticulating knots.

Doc Evans' eyes rested on them indifferently for a moment and then he glanced aloft at the sky and sniffed the air.

"Lieutenant, I'm worried about all these soldier boys," he said. "There are all the signs of a cold snap coming on and they've got nothing but those thin cotton tents and no stoves or anything to keep them warm."

Jennings in the meantime had filled his canvas wash basin with water and was vigorously scrubbing his face. He looked up, his face dripping, and grunted in disgust.

"Too bad about them poor soldier boys," he commiserated ironically. "I ain't their dry nurse. A little

cold ain't goin' to hurt 'em none. Besides, what kin I do about it? There ain't no stoves to heat them tents and that's all there is to it."

"I was thinking . . . perhaps . . . you could set them to work building some kind of huts and they could make fireplaces out of rocks and clay and maybe keep themselves warm."

"Yeah, an' let's buy 'em some gold-plated foot warmers an' some solid ermine pajamas an' some eiderdown quilts," jeered Lieutenant Jennings.

"Ye-e-s, but . . ." expostulated Doc Evans weakly.

"Yes, but," mimicked Jennings, rubbing his face with a towel. "They'd ought to put you in the army nurse corps where you coulda tucked the boys into bed every night 'stead of makin' you a Y. M. C. A. secretary! You're all right, Doc, so long as you 'tend to your knittin', you jest keep on runnin' your weekly vaudeville show an' dolin' out your cigarettes an' chocolate an' leave it to me to look after the soldiers. That bunch of lunk-heads ain't worth worryin' about."

**W**HATEVER else the little Y. M. C. A. man had to say he kept to himself and went back to his reading with a sigh, only glancing up when Jennings at last finished his toilette by putting on a clean blouse and was ready to set forth.

"Where are you going, Lieutenant? It's nearly supper time," he reminded.

"Where am I going, he asks," marveled Jennings, "where the blazes do you s'pose I'd be goin' all slicked up like this? I'm goin' where I'll get a good bellyful of chow an' a good drink or two an' a chance to talk with a good-lookin' girl."

Doc Evans' brow became a little clouded. He shook his head.

"Better look out for these Russian women," he advised.

"Yeah," jeered the lieutenant; "listen to what's givin' advice about women. Doc, all you learned about women you studied from books. Me, I been learnin' 'em first hand for thirty years an' I'll go on learnin' 'em that way."

**T**HEN seeing the little man sitting there rather forlornly alone Jennings had a qualm of conscience.

"Why don't you mosey along down to Natasha's house after dinner an' sit there an' chin a while? There'll be some singin' an' it'll do you good to get away from these here poor neglected soldier boys for a while."

"I may do that," said Doc Evans surprisingly enough.

He watched Jennings set his hat at a jaunty angle on his head and depart down the village street. From the open doorway Doc Evans saw the tall figure of the lieutenant swinging through the groups of miners who gave way at his approach and grew silent until he passed by.

But many more eyes than those of the Y. M. C. A. man were upon the American officer as he stopped at a small log *izba* set back from the road and strode to the gate of the house to where Natasha lived with her father, the school teacher. The door opened to Jennings' knock and for a second the girl's figure showed against the candle light. Then Jennings passed in and the door was shut.

Doc Evans stood in the doorway of the log building and continued to gaze into the fast gathering dusk. In the darkening shadows there was much quiet going to and fro of dim figures and much furtive gathering of small knots of men whose voices came subdued in the silence of the evening.



Something soft and damp fell on Evans' hand and he looked up to see the first snow flakes of the season drifting silently down in the night. From the far end of the village came an occasional burst of laughter where the soldiers were getting out mess kits preparatory to coming the length of the village for their evening meal.

From the far end of the building where Evans stood came the clatter of pots and pans where the cook and cook's police were even now ladeling out the supper.

Doc Evans turned away from the door and went into the large hall which occupied the center of the building. The former storeroom converted into a Y. M. C. A. hut was a cheerless looking place in spite of his attempt to brighten it up. Four or five rickety tables stood about the center, a rough stage occupied one end and a decrepit pool table stood disconsolate near one wall, flanked near at hand by an equally battered and decrepit looking piano.

Back of a small counter were the shelves on which reposed tobacco and cigarettes and chocolate and such other articles as were dispensed by the Y. M. C. A. A few dog-eared and ancient magazines completed the amusement facilities for the soldiers in this far-off place.

IT was Doc Evans' kingdom, the place he ruled—but its sight brought no joy to him. He stared somberly over its bare cheerlessness and a sigh escaped from him.

The truth of the matter was that Doc Evans, as old as he was, had been among the first to heed the call to arms. But a firm but kindly medico, after examining his teeth and general physical get-up, and after determining his age, had shaken his head.

Doc's earnest desire to get into the war had finally landed him in the Y. M. C. A. And now he found himself out in the farthest flung outpost, doling out cigarettes and chocolate and arranging a weekly entertainment, treated with faint contempt by the officers in command and with easy tolerance by the soldiers.

"He ain't the preachin' kind and don't run the holy Joe stuff on us," was their kindest word of praise. Other than that the men treated him as part of the system and let it go at that.

BUT Doc Evans was discontented in the narrow confines of his kingdom. The fact that he was a learned man and had been a professor of history in a leading college would have made no difference to the men around him, even had they known it, which they did not.

Among these brawny, husky fighting men Doc Evans' meager frame and near-sighted eyes ranked him as a non-combatant. And the knowledge was as gall and wormwood to his soul.

The still of evening was broken in upon by the gay voices of the soldiers, who, with much clatter of tin cups and mess kits, were surging down the street on their way to supper. The clatter was quickly succeeded by a grim and purposeful silence as the hungry soldiers attacked the heaped-up provender.

Again Doc Evans sighed and turned to his task of lighting up the oil lamps which did their best each evening to dispel the gloom of this somber hall. He completed this task as the first of the soldiers hurried in.

"It's colder than all blazes!" announced the newcomer, starting a cry which was taken up by suc-

ceeding men as they came in shivering.

"How about a fire, Doc?" they demanded.

And, assent having been given, they carried in armloads of wood and built up a roaring blaze in the sheet-iron stove which Evans had managed to salvage from somewhere.

**M**ORE and more men came into the cheerful glow until the hall resounded to their talk and laughter. Doc sought out his own supper and ate it in lonely silence in his room, thereafter staring out into the village again.

The snow was now falling in great, soft flakes and its blanket was laying an eerie silence over the hills and fields and woods. And through the silence he heard the distant tinkle of a *balaliaka* from the schoolmaster's house where Lieutenant Jennings was taking his ease even now.

Some qualm of conscience made Evans look into his amusement room but it was plain to be seen that he was not needed there. The pool table was occupied, the phonograph was going, a group of men were singing by the stove, two or three card games were in progress and the evening was well started. Without a single backward look he strode toward Natasha's house.

He received a warm and typically Russian welcome. Jennings' confident face and capable figure was next to Natasha at the table and they both smiled a cheerful greeting, the pretty Russian girl dimpling at him in hospitable fashion. Her father, the old schoolmaster, poured him a stiff measure of vodka and Natasha resumed her playing on the *balaliaka*, interrupting her music to make an occasional remark in broken English.

Scarcely ten minutes had passed

when there came a knock at the door, and they all looked up as a tall, bearded Russian strode in.

"Hello, Kusmitsky," greeted Jennings—while Doc Evans bowed formally.

Kusmitsky was an arrogant sort of a man with something masterful about him at the same time. Bending low, he kissed Natasha's hand, greeted her father and then turned to Jennings.

"Eet is moutch snow tonight," he remarked as he vigorously pumped Jennings' hand.

"You said it, bo," returned Jennings easily. "How's tricks?"

This last was beyond Kusmitsky, but he smiled amiably enough, and then sat on the other side of Natasha, who eyed him with keen interest. Under the flurry caused by her father's refilling the vodka glasses, she shot a single low-voiced question to Kusmitsky, speaking in Russian.

"Is everything ready, Serge Ivanovitch?"

"Da, yes," nodded Kusmitsky, "the comrades have arrived from Vladimera this evening and are hiding at the church all armed and waiting."

"And they will first seize the rifles from the camp and then attack the soldiers in their clubhouse?" she asked.

"Careful," he warned. "They may understand us."

**O**H, the big ox doesn't understand a word of Russian and the little dumb bunny is too hopeless to understand his own language." She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously and went on: "And it is agreed that I am to invite the big ox to meet me at the dance at the inn at nine o'clock?"

"Yes, we want him out of the way so that the soldiers shall be

leaderless," answered Kusmitsky. Then, lifting his glass, he turned smilingly to Jennings and Doc Evans. "Your verree good health," he toasted in English, and drank down the fiery liquor.

"How," said Jennings, and gulped his down with equal celerity.

**B**UT Doc Evans' thoughts were far away and he sipped his drink slowly and then, while Serge Kusmitsky engaged the little Y. M. C. A. man in labored conversation, Natasha turned to Jennings.

"Is eet that you would like to dance tonight?" she asked very prettily.

"Sure," responded Jennings heartily, "when it comes to dancin' I'm there like a rubber duck!"

"A rubair duke?" She looked slightly puzzled, but then went on: "Eef it ees that you like to dance tonight I go to the little inn—you know the one verree close to the railroad. You will come there at nine o'clock and dance with me, yes?" she smiled deeply into his eyes.

"Will I? Try to keep me away!" said Jennings emphatically. "Is Serge goin' to take you down there?"

"Yes, we go verree queek now. You will coom later at nine o'clock? Yes?"

"Sure," responded Jennings, hiding his slight chagrin at not being invited to accompany her, but making the best of it in any case. Glancing at his watch he saw it was already a quarter to eight. "Guess we'd better be moochin' along then, if you an' Serge is headin' out."

He rose. Doc Evans, seeing that he was departing, also made his excuses and the two headed out together.

Doc Evans shivered a little as the chill of the outer air struck his

spare figure. It had grown much colder. The snow was still falling, however, and effectually blanketed the village and half concealed the houses. Behind them the church loomed up dark and silent and gave no sign that it housed some fifty or sixty men, all armed and waiting.

To one side of it lay the American camp deserted save for a single sentry and the corporal of the guard and his two or three men. Even Jennings noticed the cold as the two of them headed for the Y. M. C. A. hut at the farther end of the town.

The village lay dark and sinister behind them as the two entered into the warmth of the hut, its heavy log walls retaining the heat of the single large stove. The men were singing, oblivious of any danger that might threaten them.

"Lieutenant," said Doc Evans wistfully as he eyed the busy amusement room packed with men all warm and comfortable, "I certainly don't like to see these boys go back to those cold tents tonight. As far as I can see there's a blizzard coming on. And you know, when it gets cold in Siberia it gets cold and those men are going to suffer in those unheated tents."

**T**HAT'S their hard luck," grunted Jennings. "What are you gonna do about it? We ain't got the stoves to heat 'em up."

"Why, I was thinking," said Doc Evans diffidently, and in his nervousness he took off his horn-rimmed glasses and polished them with his handkerchief as he blinked nearsightedly at the officer. "I was wondering if we couldn't use this big hall of ours for a sort of barracks. There's room enough for all of the men with their cots and belongings, and they could keep warm and dry in here."

Jennings paused in his labor of changing into a cleaner shirt and glanced through his open doorway at the lighted hall, studying the problem.

"I dunno as that's such a dumb idea after all, Doc," he said after a while. And this was a great concession from Jennings, for in his mind soldiers and tents went together as naturally as ham went with eggs. "Yeah, Doc, that ain't such a dumb idea after all. I'll think it over tonight and look into it in the mornin'."

"But it's going to be cold tonight, Lieutenant," persisted Doc Evans.

"Aw, another night won't hurt that bunch of bums none." Jennings' tone was easy as he finished his changing and drew on his overcoat preparatory to setting forth for the dance. "I'll look into it in the mornin', Doc," he repeated. "Don't sit up for me. I'm liable to be late." And with that he was gone.

Evans stared after him, his eyes brooding. He was in for a lonely evening, but that did not depress him so much as the thought of those men in the cold damp tents at the other end of town. He thought a little bitterly of his dreams of war and glory and compared them with the actuality. Why! He was unable even to secure the removal of a handful of men from one end of town to the other!

**T**HE bitterness of his own helplessness struck him anew and his shoulders sagged wearily as he turned into the amusement room and moved listlessly through its crowded confines. It was time to issue any last calls for cigarettes and tobacco and chocolate.

As he went toward his counter he barked his shins against a row of long, heavy boxes that were piled in the shadow, and cursed out the

thoughtlessness of the men who had piled the reserve ammunition in the exact spot where he stumbled over it almost daily.

**A**S for Lieutenant Jennings, he had long since found himself a horse and was on his way to keep the date with Natasha. The snow had stopped falling and the full moon had risen, flooding the fields and woods with silvery light so that Jennings' horse picked his way easily as he pursued the narrow road that led toward that small house near the foot of the hill which happened to be the Russian equivalent of a roadhouse.

The soldiers had long since discovered that vodka was to be had there, and they gave it their patronage on pay days in spite of the unsavory reputation of the place. To Jennings' credit, be it said, that he had never before entered the inn. Therefore, he studied it curiously as he approached, finding it a dark, low building half concealed under the shadow of a hill.

The road wound around, crossing a cleared space from whence he had a good view of the house, and then plunged into the woods again before it circled up toward the building. Arrived there, he saw no one about but dismounted, nevertheless, tethering his horse to the post, meanwhile glancing back from whence he had come, noting that open space where the road was in view for a few yards.

He turned then toward the building.

It was a cold night as only nights can be cold in Siberia. He knocked at the door and waited. Then, as there was no response, he tried the handle, but the door would not give to his efforts. Knocking again, more sharply, he heard this time the sound of footsteps drag-



ging slowly and grudgingly toward the door from inside.

At the same moment he thought he saw a shadow detach itself from the corner of the house and disappear toward the rear, but could not be sure as he turned his attention to the person inside. Whoever it was was slowly taking down several bars.

And then the door opened, disclosing a gnarled and twisted figure of a man whose head was sunk so low on his shoulders that he seemed in truth to have no neck at all. The fellow's huge hands and arms nearly swept to the floor, they were so long, and he seemed to rest like an ape on his knuckle bones as he stood there, a sinister figure in the faint glow of the candle which illumined the room behind him.

Jennings' hand dropped down towards his pistol holster and he stood there a second undecided whether to enter or not. But the cold was growing more penetrating and the man inside had opened the door wider and invited him to enter.

Jennings had another shock when he heard the fellow's voice. Its notes were shrill and querulous, like the tones of a peevish child or a woman in pain, and created a most extraordinary effect upon him, so disproportionate was the reedy voice to the bulky body of its possessor.

JENNINGS entered, glancing about him for a trace of the girl he had come to meet. But there was no one else in the long, low-roofed room as far as he could see. Well, he reasoned, the Russians had no idea of time anyway.

The place was crude enough, its floor nothing more than hard packed clay. At one end was a large brick stove of the regular Russian peasant type, upon whose broad top the entire family could sleep with comfort

in the extremely cold weather of the Siberian winter.

Several rough pallets, a crudely hewn table and chairs and the presence of many soiled tin plates and cups showed that a fairly large number of people frequented the place. At either end of the large room two doors led into the rear.

JENNINGS looking about, wondering where the musicians were and the other guests at the dance, but figured that Russian-like, they would be late, too.

Jennings looked around at the cluttered dirt and disorder with distaste, finally turning to the ape-like man who stood watching him from little, reddish, pig-like eyes.

"Well," said Jennings irritably, "snap into it. Fetch me some vodka. Savvy?"

The Russian understood the one Russian word and hurried out to the rear somewhere, returning with a bottle and a none too cleanly glass, accompanying it with a large round loaf of the heavy, slightly sour tasting black bread of the Russian peasant, the famous *tchorni kleb*.

Conquering his repugnance for the dirty glass, Jennings poured himself a good three fingers of the colorless fluid and tossed it off. The warm glow of the vodka induced him to a more cheerful frame of mind. He half rose as a knock came at the door, and straightened out his belt and smoothed back his hair.

But the person admitted by the ape-like creature was very far from being Natasha. The newcomer was a stocky, gray-haired Russian in peasant dress who had very bright red cheeks and extremely bright eyes. He carried a broad bladed axe in his belt.

It was not until he came within the radius of the candle-light that Jennings noted that the fellow's forehead was branded deeply with a Rus-

sian letter. It came to the American suddenly that he had heard of Russian murderers at the prison island of Sakhalin being branded by the jailers.

And this fellow certainly looked like a murderer. Jennings didn't like a bit the way the fellow fingered his axe. But the newcomer bowed first to the *ikon* corner in Russian fashion and then to the ape-like man and finally to Jennings.

Thereafter he seated himself inconspicuously against the wall and sat there silent, his hands in his belt. But Jennings felt the man's bright eyes fixed on him and it made him vaguely uncomfortable.

He poured himself a fresh drink of vodka, but scarcely had he tossed it down when there came another knock at the door and this time it opened to admit a half dozen men, an even worse looking lot than the one already present. They were shaggy-haired, long-bearded fellows, dressed in rags and tatters of clothing and very evidently long strangers to anything faintly approaching soap and water.

They came in silently, their eyes taking swift appraisal of the room and the lone American officer. They bowed as the first man had done and like him said no word as they squatted here and there on the floor and against the wall. Like the first man who had entered they each carried a sharp, broad bladed axe.

THE vodka was beginning to take effect on Jennings and he scowled at the silent men who sat around staring at him from the shadows. There was something uncanny about their fixed regard and he had the feeling somehow that they would spring on him if he so much as turned his back.

"You're a pretty tough-looking bunch of babies," he addressed them

scornfully, "but here's somethin' that'll tame you if you start anything funny."

He pulled his .45 Colt from his holster and laid it on the table in front of him. The silent Russians watched him gravely, but they made no movement. He called for more vodka and as the fiery stuff began to work in him he more or less forgot the passage of time. He also ceased to bother about the Russians lined against the wall.

NEARLY an hour passed and he had lost count of the drinks. He pushed his pistol to one side to make room for another glass. Then as he filled it and started to raise it to his lips, the ape-like man jostled him, spilling half the contents of the glass.

It was at that precise moment that things began to happen. The candle was suddenly knocked out, leaving the cabin in darkness. Powerful arms settled in a strangling hold around his throat. Other arms pulled his feet out from under him. He kicked and bit and tried to strike out.

The table went over with a crash and a heavy weight of smelly bodies bore him to the earth. In a second his hands were jerked behind him and tied, and his feet knotted together.

A voice shouted something in Russian above him. A match spluttered in the gloom and the wavering light from the candle again illumined the room. The disreputable looking men who had entered the cabin were grouped about him, but a new figure had joined them.

Jennings blinked his eyes as he stared up into the face of Serge Kusmitsky, who gazed down upon him coldly.

"What the hell are they tryin' to pull on me, Serge?" Jennings growled, trying to heave himself up

to a sitting position. But a firm hand pressed him back to the earth again. Serge Kusmitsky rubbed his hands together.

"I am verr-ee sorr-ee, my friend," he said, "but I had to use, how do you say it—harsh measures." Jennings suddenly lay still.

"What's your game?" he demanded.

"Oh, it ees nothing. It ees very simple. Come, I will explain it to you," said the Russian.

He growled some order to the men standing about. They immediately lifted Jennings' bound form up into a chair, handling him as lightly as though he were a child. From this position he glowered around at his captors noting that one of the axe men had his pistol.

"Well, go on!" snarled Jennings, "Shoot!"

"No, it ees not a question yet of shooting," replied Serge Kusmitsky. "It ees that I have had to use—how do you say?—a ruse. This evening everything it was so beautifully prepared. All the comrades were concealed in the church waiting until nine o'clock when your men would all be at their club, as they were every day. But you, my friend, you were too cleveair for old Serge. What did you do? At half past eight o'clock you ordered them into the big, strong building with the heavy log walls. And what do we find—nothing but empty tents. So-so, you were too cleveair and Serge and his comrades could not go up against that strong building with your men inside with all their so deadly guns and all their ammunition. . . ."

JENNINGS stared amazed at the Russian. A great light began to dawn upon the lieutenant.

"Why that lousy little bum of a Doc Evans," he muttered under his breath, "blamed if he didn't slip one over after all!"

" . . . and so, my friend," continued Serge Kusmitsky, "it is necessary that I coom down here with my comrades, away from your men and secure their surrender by other means less dangerous," here Serge interrupted himself to issue an order and then continued:

"And so, my friend, I have you here and all my men are here. . . ."

JENNINGS raised his head and listened to a sound that had puzzled him before, a sound which had resolved itself into the stamp of many booted feet and the mutter of many voices and he realized that the Russian spoke the truth.

"Yeah, I get you, you blankety-blank double-crossing son of a son," retorted Jennings with considerable asperity, "but now that you've got me here what's the next move?"

"It ees nothing, my friend, it ees nothing except that you will write a little order to your sergeant telling him to bring the soldiers immediately, leaving their guns behind. . . ."

"And your plug-uglies will shoot them down like dogs when they arrive!" snorted Jennings. "You can go plumb to hell!"

"No, no, they will not be shot, I promise you that. Maybe we will take them prisoners, but they will not be shot. I'm sure you will be verr-ee reasonable."

The Russian called something over his shoulder. There was a stir and movement by the stove and Jennings saw the most villainous looking of the Russian axe men doing something with a bellows and a slender piece of red hot steel.

Jennings stared at the man uncomprehending until the fellow approached with the steel gleaming wickedly. At the same minute heavy hands tightened on his arms and a rope was slipped around his shoulders while his head was forced back.

"You see, my friend, we are desperate men ready to do anything for the cause," purred Serge Kusmitsky's voice, "and while I re-ee-gret to hurt you, you must be reasonable."

JENNINGS felt the glow of the hot steel approaching his face.

"At first it ees only the right eye we will burn out," said the remorseless voice of the Russian.

Something like an electric shock went through Jennings as he listened to the purring, growling words of the Russian. Nearer and nearer came that devilish steel. He had a vision of himself going through life blinded and a vast horror surged through him.

In another second the damage would be done and he would be blinded for life. His brain was working frantically. The Russian had promised not to shoot his men. Maybe the men would get wise. Perhaps he could warn them in the note.

"Stop! I'll do it!" he yelled, as he tried to avert his head from that deadly red-hot, steel bar.

"So-oo," came the Russian's voice and the steel was suddenly removed from its uncomfortable proximity of his right eye, "you will be sensible. *Ochin chorashaw*. Verree good."

And suddenly Jennings found his right hand being released and a pen and ink placed before him and a square of paper. He glanced around desperately, but saw only a glittering axe poised above him and Serge's revolver leveled at him.

"There," he said as he signed his name and sunk back dejectedly as the paper was taken up and examined by Serge who then folded it and gave it to a messenger.

Jennings sat there under guard as the slow minutes dragged by. He was sunk in the deepest of dejection, but his ears were strained for a sound of his approaching men.

The full horror and enormity of what he had done smote him like a wave and he would have given his right hand to undo the cowardly thing he had done.

From the sounds outside he knew that Serge's followers were already in position, hiding in ambush ready to pour their murderous fire into the unsuspecting ranks of his men.

A half hour passed and then another—while he strained for every sound. When at last he began to believe that his letter had been interpreted correctly and that his men had saved themselves he heard a shout from outside and a stir as of many men.

Suddenly the door was flung open and in strode Serge Kusmitsky. Behind him shambled a familiar figure and Jennings looked up to see the meager form and heavy horn-rimmed glasses of Doc Evans.

It gave him quite a start, but Jennings managed to find his voice.

"Where the hell did you come from?" he blurted out, glancing at Serge Kusmitsky.

Two husky Bolsheviki guards were behind the little Y. M. C. A. man and Jennings noted that they kept him covered with their rifles.

OH, I just rambled on down ahead of the outfit," said Doc Evans quietly, "Sergeant Wilkins received your note, but he'll be a little slow about getting here. . . ."

"Why ees that? Why does he not coom?" broke in Serge.

"Well, you see it's like this," explained Doc Evans in his dry, matter-of-fact voice, "just as he was about to start, some reinforcements came, a company of two hundred and fifty men with three officers. . . ."

"What!" shrieked the Russian, "and where are they now?"

"Oh, they're coming behind. . . ."



"It ees a lie!" yelled Serge Kusmitsky, his eyes blazing.

"All right, if you don't believe me keep an eye out on the road."

Serge Kusmitsky whirled about and flung himself at the door followed pell-mell by the other Russians. Unseen and unnoticed Doc Evans slipped out his knife and cut the cords that bound Jennings. The tall lieutenant staggered to his feet, followed to the door and stared out.

Gazing down the hill he saw first many groups of Bolsheviki scrambling up towards the building, streaming out of the woods and glancing fearfully behind them. As his eyes traveled along they came to rest on that small section of road across the clearing.

AND then his heart bounded as he saw good solid olive drab figures sweeping along, rifles on shoulder in column of twos. They were moving down the road in a steady stream crossing that open space, man after man of them, squad after squad and platoon after platoon.

Serge Kusmitsky turned about, panic on his features, and shouted something in Russian. The men about the building began to race towards the rear. Just as Serge prepared to follow them, little Doc Evans ran out with upraised hands.

"You run into certain death that way," he said jerking his head back up the hill. "The whole crest is lined with soldiers. You are surrounded, you and your force. Best thing you can do is surrender, Serge Kusmitsky."

And Serge Kusmitsky decided that this was the best thing he could do after hearing the rattle of several rifles barking from the hilltop and seeing his fleeing men stream back.

They were all docile enough now, those Bolsheviki and willingly and anxiously threw down their arms.

But Jennings blinked his eyes as he saw Sergeant Wilkins leading the American force with no more than some forty men behind him.

BUT those forty men swiftly and efficiently surrounded the disarmed Bolsheviki and herded them down the hill while Serge Kusmitsky was bound and retained as prisoner.

"But—but where in blazes is that company of reinforcements," inquired Jennings staring about him. Serge Kusmitsky peeked down through the trees, endeavoring to locate them, as well.

"There's isn't any company," responded Doc Evans, and grinned over to where Sergeant Wilkins stood, superintending the herding of the prisoners into column. "You see that stretch of open road there between the trees?" he continued, "well, I asked Sergeant Wilkins to march his men across that in column of twos and then run them back out of sight behind the trees to march over it again so that they just passed and repassed. And then we sent a few men up on top of the hill to chase the Bolshies back in case they started up there."

Jennings stared at him unbelievably for a moment. Finally he nodded his head.

"You ain't so dumb after all, Doc," he admitted, "but where in hell did you dope out such a scheme as that?"

"Oh, I read it in a book," responded Doc Evans and then without exchanging further words with Jennings, the little Y. M. C. A. man strode over to Serge Kusmitsky.

Doc Evans reached up and caught hold of the Russian's beard.

"Look here, you renegade, when you see Natasha again, you tell her that funny little dumb bunny isn't so dumb as he looks!"

The queer part of it was that Doc Evans was speaking perfect Russian!

# Famous SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE



**GENERAL  
WILLIAM  
WALKER—**

① —WAS BORN AT NASHVILLE, TENN., IN 1824. TRAINED FOR THE MINISTRY, HE STUDIED MEDICINE AND BECAME A DOCTOR INSTEAD.

HE SWITCHED TO THE STUDY OF LAW, AND FINALLY TURNED TO NEWSPAPER WORK.



②

AT ONLY 28 HE WAS EDITOR OF THE SAN FRANCISCO HERALD. BUT WALKER'S RESTLESS SPIRIT COULD NOT BE CHAINED TO A DESK.

HE WENT AMONG THE "FORTY-NINERS" DURING THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH SEEKING RECRUITS TO GO WITH HIM TO MEXICO ON AN EXPEDITION TO PROTECT AMERICAN WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM THE INDIANS ON THE SONORA FRONTIER.



③ HE RAIDED THE TOWN OF LA PAZ AND PUT UP A FLAG, ESTABLISHING A REPUBLIC WITH HIMSELF AS PRESIDENT. AFTER SEVERAL DAYS' FIGHTING HE AND HIS 45 FOLLOWERS WERE OVERWHELMED.

HE PUSHED HIS WAY THROUGH TO THE AMERICAN BORDER UNDER HEAVY FIRE FROM ENEMY SNIPERS. ONLY TWO OTHERS OF HIS LITTLE BAND SURVIVED.

④

NOT DISCOURAGED IN THE LEAST, WALKER PLANNED AN EXPEDITION TO NICARAGUA, A SCENE OF REVOLUTION.

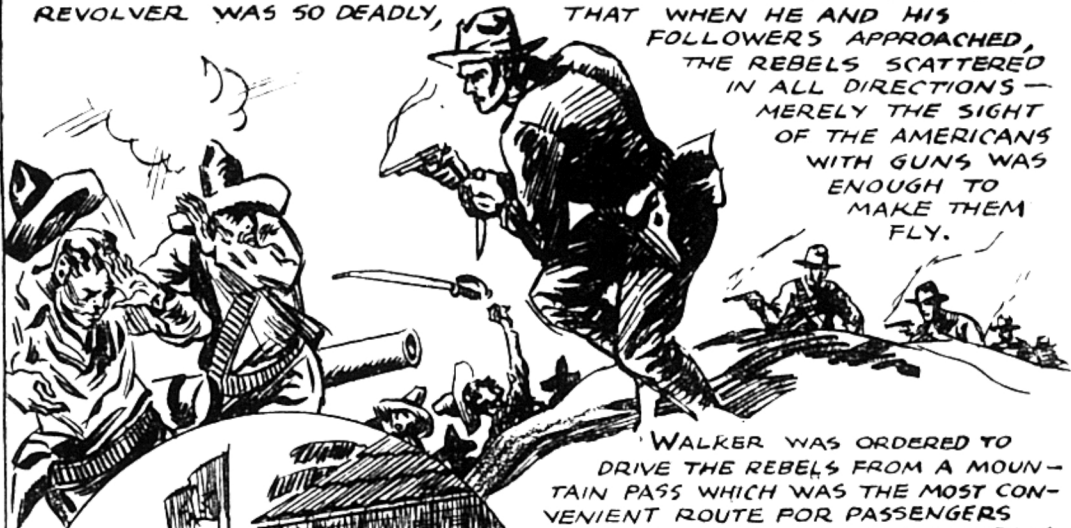
HE RECRUITED 300 MEN, MANY FAMOUS SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE AMONG THEM.

THESE MEN USED REVOLVERS AND BOWIE KNIVES RATHER THAN RIFLES.



*This is the Original Illustrated Adventure*

⑤ WITHIN FOUR MONTHS THE NICARAGUAN NATIONALISTS MADE WALKER THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF A LARGE ARMY. HIS AIM WITH A REVOLVER WAS SO DEADLY, THAT WHEN HE AND HIS FOLLOWERS APPROACHED, THE REBELS SCATTERED IN ALL DIRECTIONS—MERELY THE SIGHT OF THE AMERICANS WITH GUNS WAS ENOUGH TO MAKE THEM FLY.



WALKER WAS ORDERED TO DRIVE THE REBELS FROM A MOUNTAIN PASS WHICH WAS THE MOST CONVENIENT ROUTE FOR PASSENGERS FROM NEW YORK TO THE CALIFORNIA GOLD FIELDS.

AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS' FIGHTING HE SUCCEEDED ALTHOUGH OUTNUMBERED 5 TO 1.



⑥ DURING ONE OF THE BATTLES HE GLORIFIED HIMSELF BY SAVING THE LIFE OF A NICARAGUAN OFFICER AT THE RISK OF HIS OWN, SNATCHING HIM FROM THE VERY HANDS OF THE ENEMY. HIS POPULARITY AND POWER LED TO HIS ELECTION AS PRESIDENT OF NICARAGUA.

FOLLOWING COMMERCIAL COMPLICATIONS HE WAS REQUESTED TO COME TO WASHINGTON FOR A CONFERENCE. ARRIVING IN NEW YORK, HE WAS SURPRISED AT HIS WELCOME. STREETS WERE BEDECKED WITH FLAGS AND FLOWERS AND THE CELEBRATION LASTED FOR DAYS.



WHEN HE WENT TO THE OPERA HE WAS CHEERED AND APPLAUDED FOR 10 MINUTES WHILE THE AUDIENCE STOOD SALUTING HIM.

VISUALIZING A GREATER REPUBLIC BY UNITING FIVE SMALL COUNTRIES, HIS SLOGAN WAS "FIVE OR NONE." HE WENT TO HONDURAS PLANNING TO FIGHT HIS WAY THROUGH, BUT AFTER CONQUERING ONE CITY HE WAS CAPTURED. RATHER THAN RELINQUISH HIS TITLE AS THE PRESIDENT OF NICARAGUA HE FACED A FIRING SQUAD AND WAS EXECUTED.

*Feature—the First to Appear in Any Magazine*

# The Feathered Serpent



*A Stirring Story of the Land of the Ancient Aztecs and  
a Bold Plan to Loot Priceless Temple  
Treasure via Airplane*

## *A Complete Novelette*

By THOMSON BURTIS

*Author of "The Circus Flyers," "The Air Rangers," etc.*

**R**AN HALLOWELL sat motionless in the throbbing airplane which was his only important earthly possession. Below him unrolled the Sierra Madre Mountains and the land of the ancient Aztecs.

As he gazed down he had the feeling that before he got back to civili-

zation he would find the surprising summons he'd received from Professor Lopez well worth while, even according to his adventurous lights.

Randolph Hallowell was considered a black sheep by his blue-blooded Boston family, but the color of his fleece seemed only to intensify the reckless blood inherited from his

early New England forebears. Only one thing he feared very greatly, and that was boredom.

Five thousand feet below him, plainly discernable below a thick blanketing of monte, were rising tiers of terranes, hundreds of feet long. Winding staircases snaked upward to the mountain-top in graceful curves, the whole crowned by a group of truncated pyramids of assorted sizes.

On top of the largest one, which was crumbling into a shapeless mound of earth and lava bricks, was the remains of what must have been an ancient temple. There were great monoliths, some of which had fallen down, and once upon a time they had supported a roof, which had completely disappeared.

A feeling of unreality possessed the huge blond flyer as he strained his eyes against the red of the sunset in search of a little stream which was his only landmark. The luxuriant monte, purple in the shadows of late afternoon, seemed to be brooding darkly.

Those magnificent crumbling ruins gave Ran a feeling that he had flown four hundred years back into time, rather than five hundred miles into the heart of an ancient land.

**S**UDDENLY he leaped forward, the sun-crinkles deepening around his narrowed eyes.

"That must be it," he thought.

A tiny stream wound its way through the thinning monte, its banks bordered by occasional fields of maize. After roaring along for five minutes more, nestling among low rolling hills which merged gradually into the towering range, appeared a settlement. That would be the place.

He could not remember the long, unpronounceable name of it. With their conical thatched roofs, the

primitive *jacales* set haphazardly, looked like a cluster of giant toadstools.

Then, as though to snatch him back into the twentieth century, he saw a rude landing tee on a large field of recently cut maize on the edge of the village. Ran spiraled downward in wide sweeps as the population coagulated like a mass of ants a hundred yards or so from the field.

**A**S he circled to take a careful look at his prospective landing place he noticed two figures aloof from the crowd at the edge of the field. One of them Ran guessed was Professor Lopez, who certainly knew more about the ancient Aztec and Mayan civilization than any layman had a right to know.

There was absolutely no breeze, but the big flyer stalled his two-seated plane five feet above the soft earth and dropped it on three points with so little forward speed that he avoided nosing up in the soft earth which clung to his wheels.

As he cut the gas flow to run out the radial motor, he gazed at the two men who were approaching him with such interest that he had no eyes for the copper-hued crowd massed a hundred yards away in fearful silence.

Professor Alfred Lopez's appearance had undergone a startling change in the six months since Ran had seen him in Mexico City. His neat gray hair was now white as snow and, uncut and uncombed, waved on his head like a mane.

He had grown a beard, too, and that was also white. Dressed in a white mantle, his legs and ankles wrapped in white cloth and his feet in sandals, he looked curiously impressive despite his slight stature.

Alongside him a tall gaunt man, dressed in a tattered brown mantle,



strode with slow dignity. His hair was black and straight and stringy, partially covered by a black cotton cap. He, too, wore a beard.

"Welcome," came Lopez's liquid tones as the motor died. Ran climbed awkwardly out of the cockpit, his seat-pack parachute flopping at his thighs.

PROFESSOR LOPEZ'S thin intense face seemed to have been burned to an even darker color by the tropical sun and his black eyes glowed as though all the smouldering vitality of the lean white-haired little savant was concentrated in them.

His companion watched silently as Lopez and Ran shook hands.

"Listen closely," Professor Lopez said rapidly. "This village still lives according to a great many of the tenets and customs of their ancestors. My companion is a high priest—a priest of Quetzacoatl—the Aztec God of the Air. He is also the secular ruler—the Jefe—of this lost village, and my friend. He is most important to us."

"Okay with me," Ran said sunnily.

Showing great respect to the high priest, Professor Lopez introduced them in Spanish. The tattered pontiff inclined his head gravely. He had the flat nose and copper skin of the Indian, but his black eyes were not beady—they were large and luminous.

His face, despite lips that were a little thick, was ascetic and there was real dignity and pride in him. He welcomed Ran gravely as the friend of his learned friend, speaking in excellent Spanish.

Now there was a murmur from the crowd of Indians, and Ran, although he spoke Spanish fluently, could not understand a word they said. Furthermore, it was a dialect which he had never heard, though he knew his

way around from the Amazon to the Rio Grande.

"Now, if it meets with your favor," Lopez said to the Indian, "my friend and I will see to certain matters and then we will call upon you."

The high priest nodded gravely and walked away.

"You have the three parachutes?" the bird-like Lopez asked swiftly.

"Uh-huh," said Ran. "Although why you want them I can't figure out."

Lopez's fleshless face, criss-crossed by a thousand fine lines, was flushed, his eyes like two black jewels.

"Señor Hallowell, you will understand tonight. You will see with your own eyes. Never in my wildest dreams had I thought it possible to stumble across what I have here. You will have to see with your own eyes. My life-long quest is ended, my life crowned with success!"

THE flyer's wide-set gray eyes smiled quizzically into those of the glowing Lopez. Behind the twinkle in them, however, there was cool appraisal. Ran Hallowell had not followed the trail that has no end for twelve of his thirty years without being a lot of places, and meeting a lot of people, and knowing a lot of answers.

"Why the white hair and beard and the sheet effect in dressing?" he inquired.

"Because of an ancient legend," Lopez told him. "I will tell you later. We must not stay here too long. We must offend no one." He turned quickly and gazed into the rear cockpit as though to make sure the parachutes were there.

As Ran looked about him for something with which to stake down his plane, he was thinking of the first and only time he had met the now white-haired, white-bearded Lopez. A casual introduction in a

Mexico City café—and then for five hours the flyer had listened enthralled to stories of Lopez's trips of exploration in Central America and Mexico.

Strange, horrible customs, rites still performed by descendants of those ancient civilizations, lost tribes, magnificent ruins, buried treasure—all had held him enthralled as they dropped from the lips of a spare, intense little man dressed in baggy white linen.

The memory of that night was responsible for the adventurer's answer to the written summons which had come without warning from the depths of the jungle. Ran had obtained the money according to the instructions from the amazing professor, secured the parachutes, and here he was in the velvet darkness of the tropical night awaiting he knew not what.

All of which was entirely all right with Mr. Randolph Hallowell, formerly captain in the United States Army Air Service.

"Sit down, you must be tired," smiled Lopez when he had brought Ran to his *'dobe jacale* a hundred yards from the village proper.

There were four low couch-like settees, covered with the skins of mountain lions, evenly spaced around the walls. The earthen floors had been packed hard, and there were three or four crude chairs.

"Well, why am I here complete with airplane?" Ran inquired.

THE noises of the village washed through the walls in a continuous drone broken by an occasional laugh or shout.

"I will explain." Lopez walked up and down as though unable to control his burning restlessness. "The reason I appeared here looking as I do now is because Quetzacoatl, which means 'Serpent-bedecked-with-

feathers,' and who is the God of the Air, is supposed by ancient legend to look about as I do.

"Tlapallan, the high priest, and myself have so manipulated matters that these people are fairly certain that I am the Feathered Serpent come back to earth again.

THE high priest is a very intelligent man. To what degree he is really sincere in his belief in the mummery he goes through as high priest of Quetzacoatl, I have not decided. I believe that the charlatan is uppermost and that his position is merely a means to an end."

"And what might that end be?" inquired Ran, lighting a cigarette. He was tired, and relaxed blissfully, on the hard couch. "Just being a big toad in this small puddle?"

Lopez shook his head. "More than that. As a result of my dealings with him I believe that eventually he plans to go back into the outside world again, a wealthy man!"

For a minute there was silence as Lopez stared at Ran. Then he relaxed a little.

"My private opinion," Lopez continued, "is that he is an ordinary Indian, although much more intelligent than the average, who by various kinds of hocus-pocus has obtained his present position, and enjoys it. But you will understand all tonight. It is a considerable journey, at least five miles, up to the mountains, and we will have to walk."

"In that case," stated Ran, "I would like to have something to eat and take a nap. I not only had five hours in the air, but I have been up since dawn and it's been a tough day."

After eating a substantial meal, without apology he rolled over on the couch and slept. His bronzed face was tranquil as a baby's and

with his eyelids screening eyes which had seen so much that they could not help but belie his otherwise youthful appearance, he looked more like a tired college football player than he did a thirty-year-old soldier of fortune.

HE awakened to find Lopez's dark face close above his own as the professor shook him.

"It's time to start," Lopez smiled.

"Okay," said the wide awake and refreshed Hallowell. "Is the high priest going?"

Lopez shook his head.

"No," he said. "Tonight he maintains the ancient ritual of the followers of the Feathered Serpent. He immerses himself in water and prays most of the night. Not that I think Tlapallan will go through with it completely, but the people will think that he does."

"I see," said Ran as he got to his feet. "Let me say that the high priest seems to know his onions."

"I have talked to him since you have been resting," Lopez said. "He is the servant of the God of the Air. He wishes you to take him up in the airplane tomorrow at high noon and fly him out of sight of the people, and finally bring him back."

"It will give him much merit in their eyes and doubtless the legend will grow of how an aerial chariot came and whisked the high priest to some rendezvous high in the air."

Lopez smiled slyly as he continued. "And a day later the white-bearded man, who was undoubtedly Quetzacoatl, the Feathered Serpent himself, flew away from his faithful subjects—forever."

Ran laughed. "They really think you're the Feathered Serpent?"

"Just a racket, my friend," said Lopez, his thin lips curling sarcastically.

And certain elements of the racket

were to be concealed, Ran noticed as he ducked out of the *jacale* with Lopez, who motioned him to silence. Lopez was most careful, Ran noticed, that their leave-taking be unobserved. Ran shrugged his shoulders. Somehow he was beginning not to like this deal.

Up and up they toiled without breath enough to talk, the torches they carried unlit as the rays of the rising moon silvered their path.

The grunts of peccaries, the far-away yowls of an occasional mountain lion, the rustle of animals slithering through the ever-thickening monte—all combined to deepen the feeling of breathless anticipation which had been growing within the flyer.

An hour and a half of stern climbing had passed when Lopez turned and pointed to a vague white line that curved gracefully up the mountainside.

"These are steps to the temple," he said abruptly. "I will light a torch."

A MOMENT later they were ascending a vast curved stone stairway. Finally Lopez stopped at a square opening framed in stone, just to one side of the stairway. There had once been a door, but now it was a gaping entrance.

"Now be very careful," Lopez warned. They groped their way down the stone-floored passage for perhaps a hundred feet. Then the stone walls of the passage changed to earth and the roof disappeared. Perhaps fifteen feet above him Ran could see a narrow strip of star-hung sky. Beneath his feet there was still stone. Lopez gripped his arm.

"We are now standing in a temple," he said in a tense whisper which Ran could see no reason for. "The roof of it rotted away hun-

dreds of years ago and a landslide from the slopes above inundated it. I dug the passage which we will follow now, through the very center of the temple. See here."

HE walked a few steps forward and set the torch next to a semicircle of brilliant black marble.

"This is teotetl, 'the divine stone,'" Lopez said eagerly. "Look—it's the half of a huge pillar—one of the many that once supported the roof of the temple."

As they went down the roofless passage the stone floor of the temple was under their feet and here and there sections of great monoliths protruded from the vine-clad walls.

"Now here," whispered Lopez, "the roof stood up—remained as though to protect the treasures for me."

For a few feet the passage remained just a passage, but now it was roofed. Then Ran, his face a study and his eyes unwinking, was in a large room, gazing at three hideous images, the center one set on a huge pedestal which supported it high above the other two.

The walls, made of stones fitted together so perfectly that the interstices were barely discernible, were carved in a geometric design and painted in colors which once must have been bright and given an effect of barbaric splendor to the hall. The images were carved from teotetl, as was the one monolith which rose to the terra cotta ceiling.

"And now, look," hissed Lopez, holding his torch high as he walked toward the center image. "Look at the treasure I have found—the treasure which will enable me to complete the excavation of these fabulous ruins and which will make me rich—a modern Croesus."

He walked toward the images, torch high in hand as though going through some ritual of worship.

"Here, Señor Hallowell, I have found, I am sure, the temple of all temples, the crowning achievement of the kings of old, the place where they lavished their treasures and their workmanship to make a place of worship such as never had been known before!"

He turned, holding the sputtering torch so that its flaming end pointed toward the center image and threw his dark aquiline profile into high relief.

"Climb up on this sacrificial altar so that you can see more closely," he said, his voice vibrant.

The silent Ran climbed up on the convex stone set before the image and Lopez scrambled up beside him with the agility of a boy.

Set in the breast of the idol was a circular slab of pure gold, three feet in diameter. Its border was a feathered serpent beautifully wrought in the precious metal. One coil at each of the four points of the compass marked them. In the center was a blazing sun, wrought from the gold.

BUT it was the circular border within the serpentine rim of the golden slab which held Ran speechless with awe.

"See, it is the Aztec cycle," whispered Lopez intensely. "Fifty-two years divided into four periods of thirteen years each. You read from right to left. Tochli, the rabbit; this second one is Acatl, the reed; the third, Tecpatl, the flint; the fourth, Calli, the house. The fifth, taking these objects up on the same order, is the second rabbit; the sixth the second reed, and so forth."

Ran made no sign that he had heard. Set in fifty-two little compartments around the edge of the circle, and divided from each other by lines of rubies, were representa-

tions of the objects the transfigured Lopez had pointed out.

Each one was eight or nine inches high and each one was fashioned of flashing jewels, many of them larger than Ran had ever seen. Never had the stunned flyer seen such workmanship, never in his wildest dreams had he thought that he would ever be gazing at such a collection of precious stones.

"It is priceless, priceless!" Lopez was hissing into his ear. "This is Tonathiu, God of the Sun. He is facing east so that the first rays of the rising sun will strike his golden breast.

"Señor Hallowell, you are looking at the most magnificent expression of Aztec art that has ever been discovered—priceless in its workmanship and antiquity alone, without even considering its intrinsic value!"

Ran nodded and drew in his breath slowly.

"Whatever you say," he stated, "won't be half enough."

"And look!" crowed Lopez. "See what I have done with my own hands—with tools not even Tlapallan knows that I have."

HE placed the torch close to the breast of the idol, and with a dirty finger traced a circular crack which ran all the way around the bejeweled golden slab.

"It is but the work of a few minutes to lift the whole thing out," he said proudly. "We get it to the plane on the back of a burro. And a few hours later the world will be ringing with the discovery of the finest and most valuable specimen of Aztec art in the world! We must do it at night, in secret—"

"The tribe might not like it, eh?" Ran suggested quietly.

"No, although I do not believe that they know it is here."

"How about the high priest?" the

flyer inquired as a feeling of uneasiness started yeasting within him.

"Tlapallan knows all. He plans to join me outside," Lopez said smiling. "I excavated this with my own hands, but I had his co-operation in the entire work. The fortune this will bring will allow wonderful work in research to be done among his people.

I SUPPOSE the extra parachutes are for this?" Ran asked slowly.

"Of course," Lopez said. "Should anything go wrong with the airplane this must float to earth before I do. But look—just a few other samples of what may be discovered after I am rich and powerful through the sale of the Cycle."

They jumped down from the convex altar on which they had been standing and Ran turned his gaze to the statue on the right.

"Huitzilipochtli, the God of War," Lopez told him. "Most of their human sacrifices were to him."

It was the most hideous of the three idols, but like them was studded with jewels. It bore on its body numerous images of animals carved from gold or precious stones. Each one of them, Lopez told him, had their significance. The trio of gods was completed by a representation of Quetzacoatl.

Within the quiet, outwardly unmoved flyer, that feeling of unreality as though he were in the presence of things with which no knowledge or experience of his could cope, was growing, complicated by a curious uneasiness. Lopez, torch in hand, was gloating like a miser over his gold; pointing out the meaning of the symbols on the wall; giving little guttural cries of admiration and triumph as some particularly dazzling jewel glinted in the light of the torch.

"See," he said, putting the torch



close to the carved top of the altar which stood before Huitzilipochtli. "Those are blood stains, probably hundreds of years old. They held the person to be sacrificed on this convex top, cut the breast open and tore out the still beating heart as an offering to the god."

"Pleasant little rite," Ran observed quietly, but the gooseflesh rose all over his body. "I take it that Tlapallan and his followers don't go quite that far in maintaining the ancient customs."

"God alone knows," Lopez said absently, his beady eyes shifting to the Sun-God as though drawn there by magnetic attraction. Finally they left and made their tortuous way down the trail to the sleeping village.

The next morning flooding sunlight and his familiar plane made the midnight excursion seem like the recollection of a dream, but the towering mountains, the half-naked savages, the primitive *jacales*, and, finally, the ceremonial approach of the high priest were proofs that it had happened.

Both the high priest and the white-robed Lopez harangued the silent crowd in words which Ran could not understand. Then, attended by six women and six men in white mantles, Tlapallan approached the plane.

LOPEZ, with a practical skill which surprised Ran, adjusted the parachutes. Ran scrutinized Lopez unobtrusively, but nevertheless thoroughly. He could not forget his reaction of the night before to the swarthy savant crouched above his treasures like a buzzard over a new-found corpse.

As the motor roared on the warm-up, the high priest already ensconced in the back cockpit, the entire tribe seemed to be going through some ritual of worship,

their hands raised high in the air and then their bodies bending in unison.

RAN smiled reassuringly at the imperturbable high priest and gave his ship the gun. He rocked it off the ground without trouble and circled ever higher above the field. He looked back at the high priest occasionally, but never did he succeed in meeting Tlapallan's begoggled eyes. The pontiff was gazing steadily over the side of the cockpit with absorbed interest.

Finally at ten thousand feet, the enervating air now comfortably cool, Ran set out on the forty-mile trip to the ruins which he had passed the day before.

His passenger evidently had no desire for any social intercourse with his pilot, and needed no attention, so Ran settled down to think things out.

The value of the temple relics meant little to him, though it seemed strange that Lopez hadn't discussed any basis of split with him.

The plain fact was that to assist Lopez and the high priest in the theft of them was instinctively repugnant to him, science or no science. And Ran was convinced that devotion to learning played but little part in the thoughts of the swarthy explorer—or the high priest either.

On the other hand, those relics were doing no one any good buried there—

The flyer was scarcely aware of the passage of time as he hunched down in the cockpit and wrestled with his problem. The fact that he needed money desperately himself had no influence whatever on his thinking.

He flew automatically, compensating for the terrific bumps which

tossed the ship around even at ten thousand feet, by a thousand minute movements of the stick. Finally he glanced back of him to see how the aerial view of the ruins affected the high priest.

Then his eyes widened, and his mouth tightened. The back cockpit was empty.

Quickly he unsnapped his belt, released the stick and leaned over the cowlings between the cockpits. Perhaps the high priest had collapsed. But that wild hope was quashed immediately. Save for the two extra parachutes wedged under the seat, the rear seat was absolutely empty.

But one of two explanations was possible. By some accident Tlapallan's chute might have been accidentally released and the old man dragged from the plane. In that event his body would almost certainly have hit the tail surfaces with force sufficient to apprise the absorbed flyer of what had happened.

The other possibility was that the high priest was really a fanatic, and in obedience to some weird idea of serving the God of the Air had deliberately leaped over the side.

Motionless as a statue in his cockpit, his bronzed face an emotionless mask, but his eyes clouded with bewildered thought, the pilot searched every foot of the way back to the village. It was as though Tlapallan had disappeared into thin air.

**I**F by some miracle he had used the chute the great white silk umbrella would have been easily discernible against the dark green monte or the occasional creeper-covered clearings.

It became a certainty that the high priest's body had torn through the roof of the jungle somewhere, and was now hidden beneath its tangled blanket.

Not until he was winging his puz-

zled way downward over the village and saw the savages still going through their ritual did the thought flash through his mind:

"Where am I going to be sitting now?"

**A**S he landed and taxied slowly up the soft field, the ship rocking from side to side as it crossed the furrows, Lopez detached himself from the crowd and stood all alone twenty-five feet in front of them. Ran, his face a bit pale and his wide mouth tight, taxied close alongside him.

He cut the switches abruptly and the sudden silence was like a blow. Even the Indian children were ominously quiet. There was unutterable menace in the absolute lack of movement or sound from the waiting throng.

"What's happened?" Lopez burst forth in a sibilant stage whisper.

Ran descended slowly from the cockpit.

"I think Tlapallan deliberately committed suicide," he said simply.

"Great God Almighty!" Lopez said slowly, the words prayerful but his face drawn and cruel. It was flushed, as though with fever, and his eyes glittered for an instant with a light that Ran could have sworn was joy.

The flat-nosed crowd was waiting in silence more pregnant with meaning than any outcry could have been.

"Do not say a word! Do not be surprised! Depend on me!" Lopez said in staccato sentences, and then turned to the crowd.

Immediately he burst into a flood of indistinguishable speech. He waved his arms and his eyes flashed as he harangued them. A low murmur grew into a roar.

The taut flyer, standing immobile a few feet back of Lopez, saw the

copper-hued faces before him contort into twisted masks, as barbaric shouts fairly shattered the air.

Twice Lopez shouted for silence and twice he got it, only to have the savage roar of the mob rise uncontrollably again after he had uttered a few sentences.

THE flyer's hand dropped instinctively to the .45 thrust into the waistband of his breeches. Lopez seemed to be doing a poor job of controlling the natives.

Then suddenly it seemed that all the men of the village were bounding forward. Lopez turned his back to them, and leaped toward Ran as though leading the onslaught.

"Give me that gun," snapped Lopez. "Make no resistance. This is desperate, but I'll do all I can."

Not fully trusting Lopez, nevertheless Ran turned over his gun. It would have done small good against the mob.

Hundreds of Indians surrounded him, their red-shot eyes gleaming and their shouts merging into a sort of chant which made his blood run cold.

The white-bearded Lopez had drawn himself to his full height, eyes flashing and right arm extended imperiously. Apparently he gave the orders to bind the unresisting giant, and he walked at the head of the procession formed of Ran, carried by six chanting savages, and all the rest of the tribe.

Ran thought of the sacrificial altars in the bowels of the mountain and his body turned to ice in the cruel grip of the men who were carrying him.

Lopez stood over him as the men who had carried him placed him roughly on the stone floor of a small temple. From outside the building the madness of the mob was growing. Lopez thrust out his arm and he

spoke in ringing tones as though laying a curse upon the helpless flyer.

"I will do all I can," he said fiercely in Spanish. "I cannot communicate with you until tonight."

He spat upon the prone flyer, and then ordering the Indians out, he followed them. Sounds which reached Ran at intervals from all sides of the incense laden temple indicated that he was being heavily guarded.

Hour after hour passed and the flyer, tortured by his bonds, stared at the temple roof and wondered. Somehow he had a feeling that the end of the trail had come. He was curiously calm, his mind working with methodical deliberation.

As the evening merged into night one thought that he could not down burned ever brighter in his mind. Why could not Lopez have convinced the tribe that a miracle had taken place and that the high priest would be returned by the god he served? Did Lopez want to convince them—even to save Ran's life?

WITH the darkness came increased noise from the village. Gradually it took form as sort of a dirge that made his flesh creep. He could understand the undesirability of Lopez communicating with him.

They must not seem to be allies—he understood that—and yet he found himself wishing that someone—anyone—would come; that the Indians would do whatever they were going to do and have it over with. For a few seconds he fought like a madman, twisting and turning as he heaved against the bonds that held him.

Then he got a grip on himself again. And ever that chanting dirge went on.

A whisper in the darkness transformed him to fearful wakefulness.

"It is I, Lopez," came the hissing

words. "Wait but a moment—I will release you. Do not say a word."

Ran's heart gave a great bound. It was a reprieve from death. He had perhaps done Lopez an injustice. The man was here to help him.

AS Lopez fumbled over the tightly-knotted thongs at Ran's wrists and ankles, he went on rapidly:

"Tonight they wanted to punish you by sacrificing you to Quetzacoatl. I persuaded them to postpone it until tomorrow—that Tlapallan might return. They think you killed him deliberately. I forced them into a feast, and an orgy of drinking and dancing. We will get our treasure and be gone."

Ran was so weak that he fell back when he tried to sit up.

"It is two hours until dawn—just time enough," Lopez told him, his eyes glowing in the darkness. "Ah, your legs and arms are numb, eh? I will help."

He massaged the half paralyzed flyer furiously. Gradually the circulation returned and Ran staggered to his feet. Only muted cries and scurrying whispers from the monte broke the silence as they crept into the open.

Outside the temple two guards, their machetes by their side, were snoring stertorously, empty wine gourds beside them. Lopez led him down the path and then turned into the faintest trace of a trail.

They toiled up the path, Lopez leading a burro. Some of the doubts which had tortured Ran during those endless hours had receded from the forefront of his mind.

Nevertheless, he was silent and distraught as they removed the magnificent work of art from the breast of the image, working in the light of a torch which Lopez had provided, along with the various tools on the burro's back.

This mixture of age-old charlatan-ism, medieval superstition and the tools of the machine age to remind him that five hundred miles away there were trolley cars and factories, formed a bizzare background in which anything could happen.

There was an airplane ten miles away, and yet he had barely escaped—if he had yet escaped—being a human sacrifice on the altar he was standing on, alongside a man who was considered half a god.

Dawn was creeping wanly into the eastern sky as they circled toward the plane a safe distance from the sleeping village. Working with silent swiftness they lifted their treasure into the rear cockpit, from which the stick had been removed.

"Now," the transfigured Lopez said triumphantly, "in but a minute we are absolutely safe. You crank the motor and I will use the self-starter immediately afterward. We must take every precaution that the motor catches quickly—"

"You seem to know a lot about it," Ran said slowly. "I noticed you handled a parachute today, too—"

"I overlook nothing," Lopez smiled complacently. "After I had visited here the first time the plan we are now carrying out came to my mind, so I learned a little of airplanes in Mexico City to impress Tlapallan and the people if necessary.

AND when I talked to you, Amigo, for hour after hour it was because I knew some day I would perhaps need a man like you. If you were still in Mexico, I had a feeling you would be the man!"

"I see," said Ran. "Well, let's go."

He primed the motor himself leaning over the side of the front cockpit in which Lopez had seated himself. He set the prop and then came around to contact the ignition himself.

"A second after I swing the prop, you press this," he directed, pointing to the starting button.

Lopez nodded.

"I will even work the throttle," he smiled. "Is that not correct?"

"Right," nodded Ran. "Then hustle over into the back cockpit as fast as you can."

THE motor caught on the first try. As Ran raced backward and to one side it rose to a roar and the plane got under way.

For a second Ran stood transfixed. The motor was wide open, and Lopez was keeping it so. Then, as the ship trundled past him, he met Lopez's blazing triumphant eyes, and it was as though they had set the flyer afire.

Lopez could fly, and had planned to leave him to the mercy of the Indians! He had needed and used Ran to help start the plane and to get his treasure down from the mountain. All Ran's recent distrust was suddenly crystallized into overwhelming fury that dragged the color from his face and made a revengeful demon of the big flyer.

He threw himself forward desperately and caught the fuselage of the fast-going plane. He clutched grimly a snarling hot-eyed panther of a man whose fingers tore through the linen covering of the turtle-backed fuselage and gripped the cross struts like steel tentacles.

The ship was in full career now, and Lopez had all he could do to handle it as it tore and bounced its way across the roughened field.

Ran drew up his body until he was lying prone, and then as the ship took the air he hauled himself forward. He was gripping the rear cowl of the back seat when Lopez turned. The ship was nearly a hundred feet high.

The explorer's Oriental eyes narrowed to vicious slits and as Ran

hauled himself forward the ship lurched suddenly into a bank which almost unseated the blazing-eyed pilot.

Ran tumbled head-first into the rear cockpit. Subconsciously he realized that his only chance lay in the possibility that Lopez was a very inexperienced pilot and that he would dare not take his attention from the ship while it was still so low.

He gathered his feet under him, still crouched on the cockpit floor, facing the golden circle which was standing on its rim leaning against the seat. He looked frantically for some weapon, but could find none. The tool kit was in the front seat.

Suddenly a bullet tore through the partition between the cockpit and whined within an inch of his ear. As though a spring had been released Ran came up, his right arm over his head like a jack in the box.

The propeller blast hit him like a blow. As he came upright he groaned with pain as a bullet tore through the fleshy part of his right leg. Lopez, half turned in his seat, was shooting diagonally downward through the back of it.

AS Ran came upright he moved with the speed of light. His right elbow crooked around Lopez's neck and his left hand caught the explorer's right wrist just in time to send the bullet whistling harmlessly over his shoulder. Ran released his grip on Lopez's neck and with both hands tore the gun loose from Lopez's hand. Blood was filling his boot.

Then, with the gun pressed against his would-be murderer's back, he leaned forward and grasped the stick himself, leveling out the almost stalled ship. Lopez licked his thin lips, a glitter that was almost that of madness, in his eyes.

Without warning, Ran raised the



gun and smashed it down on Lopez's head with all his strength. The man tried to duck so that it hit him just over the ear, and he went limp.

The raging Hallowell dropped the gun on the front seat and lifted the venomous little archaeologist's body as though it weighed nothing at all.

He dropped it on the seat of the rear cockpit, caught the stick again, and steadied the plane. Then he climbed over in the front seat. The altimeter read two hundred feet. Swiftly his eyes ran over his instruments. As they came to the gasoline gauge, they stopped and he stared stupidly at the damning evidence of the dial. He had filled the tanks the day before and flown eighty miles, but there was only enough gas for less than half an hour in the air.

His over-stimulated mind raced along like a machine out of control. There had been no sign of a leak—someone must have partially drained the tank. Certainly not Lopez.

Unconsciously the course of the ship had been a wide circle and for the first time Hallowell looked down at the ground. He was weakening fast—the wound in his leg was bleeding profusely. His face, growing slowly pale, set at what he saw.

**T**HE tribe, awakened by the roar of the motor, had flocked to the field. Not that he had ever dreamed of going back there, of course.

He could fly half an hour—come down in the jungle—but they would track and overtake him with absurd ease even were he not wounded, and could make his way to civilization and safety. That plane was all he had in the world, too, and he had a feeling that he would soon faint if his wound were not staunched. If only he could speak their language!

He was flying unconsciously toward the village, and suddenly he leaned forward, tense and wide-

eyed. A figure had detached itself from the mob clad in a long mantle and unless he was sadly mistaken it was Tlapallan. It was.

"He must have come down in a parachute, got back to the village, and ten to one he's the one who drained the tank!" Ran thought swiftly. "What is he up to?"

The priest was gesturing as the ship came closer. Ran drew a long breath. He had to take the chance.

For a moment his mind darted off in a thousand different directions. He reached for the heavy pencil which he carried to mark maps with and scribbled a note in Spanish:

To the High Priest Tlapallan:

I wish to return to you the treasure stolen by Professor Lopez from the image of the Sun God. I will land if I am assured that the tribe's desire for vengeance has disappeared because of your safe return. Professor Lopez has deceived you, the tribe and myself. Signal me to land by throwing your arms wide.

**H**E tied the note around a wrench and then swooped low over the field and dropped it almost at the high priest's feet. A moment later the tall pontiff had thrown his arms wide and Ran was dropping into the field. In the rear seat, Lopez was still unconscious.

The flyer had landed warily at a point as far as he could get from the waiting crowd and he was relieved that the high priest walked toward him unattended.

"Have you the Cycle?" asked Tlapallan gravely in Spanish, his usually luminous eyes now like curious agates, hard and blank as they rested on the head of Lopez rather than on Ran.

"It's here," said Ran, eyeing the quiet crowd nervously.

"My plan to see what Signor Lopez had in mind almost miscarried," the priest said quietly. "It took me

longer to get back than I'd planned."

"But Lopez said—that you knew," the astounded Hallowell said.

THE priest's hard eyes were still on Lopez. Ran shivered in spite of himself. Tlapallan shrugged his shoulders. "He lied," he said flatly. "But I guessed—and caught him in the act."

"No harm will have come to you," the priest went on gravely. "You were persuaded by the professor to assist in the rape of our gods. I had no knowledge of the fact that he would inflame my people against you under the guise of rescuing you."

"And then he tried to beat it away and leave me here to be killed, so that no one would share his secret," Ran said savagely. "You drained my fuel tank, I suppose?"

The priest inclined his head.

"Yesterday—or rather last night," he said. "Stay but a little while and the fuel will be returned to you and you may leave when you wish. But one condition shall be laid upon you. You will not seek to take Professor Lopez from us."

"You will forget you ever saw him. Now, Señor, be so kind as to go to the professor's *jacale* where breakfast will be served you. You will not be harmed upon my word of honor."

Before Ran could answer, he had quietly fainted from loss of blood.

It was three days, during which he was attended devotedly by members of the tribe and visited frequently by Tlapallan, before he was able to be about. Once he had asked about Lopez, only to be told sternly by Tlapallan that no further inquiry should be made.

It was two days after he first walked when he felt strong enough to go, and so informed the high priest. Tlapallan nodded his head.

"Before you go," he said, "I would esteem it an honor, Signor, to show you one or two of our treasures which you have not yet seen. You feel equal to going up on the mountain with me?"

For a second Ran hesitated. Then he thought:

"If there's any trick in it they've got me anyway." Nevertheless, the feel of the gun in his pocket was comforting. And so for the third time he went up the side of the mountain with the silent priest and through the same passageway. Tlapallan led the way with his torch.

"Take it and look for yourself," he said.

RAN entered the excavated part of the temple with a premonition of what he would find. The golden Cycle had been restored to the breast of Tonothiu, but for once Ran had no eyes for that.

On the altar before it was a white-clothed figure in a curiously awkward position. And resting in the crook of one of Tonothiu's arms was a dried and withered human heart.

Tlapallan was awaiting him at the entrance to the passage. Ran was pale but said nothing because there was nothing he could say. The priest's eyes had again that curious blank stare in them.

"It will be well for you, Signor, to remember that the Feathered Serpent has fangs," he said levelly.

"I will remember," Ran said quietly.

An hour later, at the side of the idling ship, the grave priest presented him with the largest ruby Ran had ever seen.

"This remembrance will remind you to forget," he said quietly.

Ten minutes later the last vestige of the village dropped out of sight behind the plane as its pilot sent it northward over the trackless monte.

# BLACK DRAGON



## *A Serpent Endowed With Mysterious Powers by an Oriental Superstition—and a Daring American's Perilous Task*

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

*Author of "Bare Fists," "The Cowled Cobra," etc.*

THE commanding general of the brigade banged his fist on his desk with extreme exasperation.

"It's not a thing you can take direct action about," he said, "it's just one of those things Oriental which the Westerner finds hard to comprehend. We simply must do something!"

Standing stiffly at attention before the Old Man was First Lieutenant Larry Galbraith, in uniform for the first time in months. Larry was an

Intelligence officer *par excellence*. He'd just returned from Mukden, where he had succeeded in gathering valuable information for his corps relative to the improved Sutton gun, and the projectiles fired in the 3" and 6" models.

Now, back in Tientsin one day only, still weary from his long, nervous sojourn in civilian's clothing, he was about to be ordered out on another hazardous undertaking.

The general continued:

"We are here to protect American

lives and property," he said. "Yet we can't take action before the fact. When Chin Low makes a break we can move, but not before; yet if we don't beat him to the punch, a lot of foreigners may be slaughtered before we can get under way."

"Just what, sir," asked Larry quietly, "is the trouble now, and what do you want me to do?"

"Well, Galbraith," said the general after a moment of hesitation, "it's a strange case. First of all, the Chinese general who now holds Tientsin is one of the old school. He is very superstitious.

**T**HERE is an old belief that the Dragon of Heaven, which is a sort of Chinese Deity, will one day come to earth and reveal himself to his people. The belief is that when he does come, he will come in the form of a black serpent!

"Now, Chin Low had a dream a few weeks ago, in which he held converse with the Dragon of Heaven, who informed him that he, the Dragon, was intending to come to earth in the form of a black serpent, according to the old belief.

"Chin Low firmly believed that his dream was a real promise on the part of the Dragon of Heaven, and immediately issued a mandate to the countryside to the effect that no serpent, especially a black serpent, should be slain until further orders!

"His idea was, of course, that if a black serpent were slain, it might, just possibly, turn out to be the Dragon. Then, to make matters worse, some superstitious fool captured a black snake along the banks of the Pei Ho, somewhere between Tientsin and Tangku, took the reptile to His Excellency. The old dotard, believing this part of the working out of his dream, kowtowed to the serpent as though it had been the Dragon, and put it in a glass jar,

which never leaves the home of Chin Low!

"And everybody who visits the old cuss is compelled to kowtow to that damned black snake!

"All of this has filled Chin Low with the idea that he has been especially chosen by the Dragon of Heaven for a certain mission. He has decided, according to the meager reports we have received, to organize his soldiers carefully and quietly, and, at a concerted signal, emulate Prince Tuan of Boxer fame and endeavor to drive out, or slay, all the foreigners in China!"

Galbraith gasped in astonishment. It sounded like a mad nightmare, but Larry had been long enough in China to look upon such oddities as this one as something to be thoroughly investigated.

"What do you wish me to do, sir?" he asked after a moment.

"That's just the trouble!" exploded the general. "We can't do anything until Chin Low actually makes a break, and the foreign men, women and children are in jeopardy until the break comes. Somebody is bound to be killed before we can stem the yellow tide!

"What I want you to do is this: get into the home of Chin Low, kill or steal the black snake, and get away without anyone discovering your identity. If we thus prove that the snake is just an ordinary snake, Chin Low may lose faith in the belief that he is invincible through a special dispensation of the Dragon of Heaven."

**L**ARRY let his breath out gently, lest the general understand the fear that suddenly possessed him.

Enter the home of Chin Low, through veritable cordons of soldiers who had been inspired to fanatical zeal in the belief that whatever they did, under orders from Chin Low,

would prosper because Chin Low was backed by the strongest power in heaven or earth, the Dragon of Heaven.

Larry might get in and kill the snake; but he hadn't a ghost of a show getting away.

Rumor said that Chin Low slept with his arm around the jar holding the black snake, and that he kowtowed to the thing so many times during the course of the day that he was getting chronic rheumatism in his aged joints. Believed implicitly in his dreams, and in the black snake. Since he had imbued his followers with this belief, they would be hard, devilish hard, to manage.

But Larry would have to try, and it promised to be the hardest mission he had ever tackled. Larry's success as an agent was due to the fact that, having been born in China, Chinese had been the first language he had ever learned—mandarin, that is—and it had never left him.

Moreover, he knew China, and Chinese, and realized just exactly what he was up against.

He clicked his heels and addressed the general.

"Leave it to me, sir," he said. "I'll break Chin Low's juju if it's the last thing I do!"

"Which," said the Old Man, "is just about the last thing you *will* do! The hell of it is, I can't have you do this officially.

**I**F you get caught, tortured and killed you are simply scratched off the rolls as dead from your own misconduct! It's too much to ask, yet—there are the women and children of foreigners to think about!"

"I'm thinking of them, and of myself, sir," retorted Larry, and faced about, quitting the Headquarters office with his head held high.

Larry Galbraith needed one Chinese to help him, according to his

tentative plans. A Chinese, moreover, who could join up with Chin Low without arousing the old boy's suspicions. He thought he had the right man in the interpreter hired by Headquarters, though there was a possibility that Chin Low would know the man, and his connection with the Marines.

A chance they would have to take and the interpreter was eager to help out.

**M**OREOVER, he got away with it so easily that Larry was surprised, and filled with a rankling doubt.

The interpreter might have been in the pay of Chin Low from the start, spying on the Marines!

However, Larry managed, by making his approach via housetops, to drop inside the outer wall of Chin Low's *yamen* and, by utilizing every shadow, gain the rear door at exactly midnight on the night he and the interpreter had decided as the best for their task.

The interpreter, with never a sound, let Larry in. With the door closed behind him, Larry fell into a crouch, hands on the butts of the automatics which were tucked into the waistbands of his civilian clothing.

Noiselessly the interpreter slipped away from him in the darkness. He had already managed to get a penciled layout of the living quarters of Chin Low to Larry, so that the Intelligence officer knew, in a general way, just where to locate the sleeping quarters of Chin Low.

The interpreter, however, was taking no chances. He slipped away, and would be in bed asleep when trouble broke loose, if Larry's foot slipped.

Knowing Chinese methods of torture, Larry didn't blame him in the least and, though he was tempted to



go on the assumption that the interpreter had been a spy all along for Chin Low, and make him go on ahead, with the muzzle of an automatic against his backbone, he didn't do it. He allowed him to go his way unmolested.

Fifteen minutes later Larry let himself stealthily into the sleeping quarters of Chin Low, where he crouched down in the darkest corner and waited to accustom himself to the darkness and the strangeness of his surroundings.

A GASP of repulsion almost escaped him as a flood of moonlight poured through a window beside the bed in which Chin Low seemed peacefully sleeping. Rumor had not erred.

Chin Low slept on his back, snored lustily, and the big glass jar, covered by a top which perhaps had tiny holes in it for breathing purposes, was on his chest, rising and falling as the old boy snored. And in the jar, coiling and uncoiling nervously, was a black snake!

Larry could see it plainly in the moonlight. A bullet-head, that explored restlessly the interior of its prison. And this repulsive thing might be the cause of untold bloodshed in North China.

But how to get it. Chin Low held the jar in a death grip. If Larry so much as touched it, Chin Low would waken, and his yell, which would surely come, would fill the house with soldiers in two seconds.

And if he raised his weapon and fired, as for a wild moment he considered doing, he would be in as bad a case as before, and might miss the reptile entirely. Might even kill old Chin Low, which he did not wish to do.

Larry calculated his chances.

He would grab the jar and run. If he got caught he would kill the

snake before the soldiers killed him. It seemed his only chance.

Out of the corner he came, like a shot from a gun, swooped down on Chin Low, wrenched the jar from his arm, and made for the door.

Instantly a shrieking fury was on his back, yelling shrilly in mandarin, calling the soldiers. Chin Low didn't seem in the least afraid of Larry, and all his own efforts were to get back the jar which held his "dragon." Bright steel flashed in the moonlight, and Larry crashed a stiff right-hander to the paunch of Chin Low.

Outside in the courtyard he could hear the shouts, excited and alarmed, of Chin's soldiers. They would fill the house in a moment, and he wouldn't have a chance of winning free.

Chin Low went back on his posterior, both hands clasped to his paunch, and yelled bloody murder.

Larry made the door of the bedroom, and started toward the series of doors which led to the *yamen* courtyard, running at top speed, the jar tightly held in the crook of his left arm. His right fist was clenched and ready to give a good account of itself in the struggle that seemed inevitable.

Into the inner chamber poured a half dozen soldiers. Larry dove at them, yelling at the top of his lungs. He smashed out to right and left with a murderous right fist, and the soldiers, taken by surprise, fell away before him.

IN the doorway which Larry had just crossed, now stood Chin Low bellowing to his men to take the American alive.

As he raced ahead of the pursuing soldiers, through the darkness, Larry stole a look at the jar. He could make out the reptile but faintly, but he could tell that the creature was

fairly mad with rage, that it struck repeatedly at the side of the jar, furiously striking out because Larry was giving him such a terrible shaking up.

"Black Dragon, old boy," said Larry, "the shape of that head of yours spells 'fangs.' And when I smash this jar my right foot lands upon your conk if it's the last thing I do!"

For answer the black snake writhed and twisted inside the jar, and battered his head futilely against the glass.

Larry dashed madly through a patch of shadow that was deeper than any he had yet encountered.

Out of that shadow, as though shot from a catapult, came a heavy body to land upon his back. So furious and unexpected was the attack that Larry was taken aback, and borne to the floor before he could get himself set.

He struck out where he thought the face would be, and felt his fist crash into flesh and bone. With a thin cry the figure fell away from him, and for just a moment was visible in a thin shaft of moonlight. It was the face of the interpreter!

Back came the spy, lunging at Larry, both hands extended. Larry could already feel the fingers clasped about his throat, and he tried to raise both hands to protect himself, forgetting that one held the jar. Next instant the jar was wrenched from him, and the interpreter vanished swiftly into the darkness.

LARRY gave chase, but he might as well have tried to follow a whirlwind.

And the soldiers were now closing on him from every angle, drawn by the sound of the scuffle.

Larry darted to one side, until he found himself against a wall, a wall

into which a huge pillar was set snugly. He got this pillar at his feet and, thus protected against attack, partially, from the rear, he waited in the darkness, scarcely breathing for fear the enemy would find him.

Through all the *yamen* now rang the excited shouts of the soldiery. Back in the direction whence he had come, he could still hear the frantic shouts of Chin Low, commanding his men to capture the foreigner.

LARRY thought of the interpreter. It was just possible that the interpreter was playing a game, and might himself get away with the important reptile. Yet, if so, why had he attacked Larry, and returned to the attack after he had recognized and been recognized? No, the interpreter was on the side of Chin Low.

Yet why had he furnished Larry with a layout of the house, and why had he helped him enter?

The answer to these questions came easily: a trap. Chin Low had wakened too easily. He had expected this visit. Larry had penetrated the *yamen* without interference, because Chin Low and the treacherous spy had intended for him to enter. Or else the interpreter had undergone a sudden change of heart—had been convinced that the black snake was the Dragon of Heaven.

Larry shuddered. The interpreter knew that Larry was without his country's protection in this matter, and that he could be tortured with impunity. Moreover, the interpreter was giving Chin Low an opportunity to make away with an Intelligence officer who was quite too much of a thorn in the side of foreigner-hating Chinese generals.

No, Larry would pay a stiff price if he were caught.

The American did not realize the presence of the shadowy form until the man suddenly stumbled and fell over him, feeling his way in the darkness with his feet.

Instantly Larry caught him by the throat, before he could scream an alarm, dragged him down, kept his hold until the body relaxed, and then possessed himself of the man's bayoneted rifle. He removed the bayonet, for he had no desire to slay these men who were merely obeying orders.

Other shapes were now creeping through the darkness, quietly and diligently seeking the mad foreigner. Larry quickly snatched the soldier's cap from off his head and jammed it down upon his own. In the darkness he might get away with it . . . for the time being at least.

LARRY changed position with the speed of a fleeing cat, crossing to the opposite wall, passing right among the soldiers, so close he could smell them, and feel the rough texture of their clothing. He had practically gained the deep shadow of another pillar when a dark shape collided heavily with him—knocking the borrowed cap somewhere into the darkness.

The Chinese muttered something and grabbed at the American to regain his balance. A vague suspicion must have welled up within him, for he peered closely into the Yank's face.

Larry held his breath, praying that the enshrouding darkness would prove deep enough. But he held tightly grasped in his left fist an automatic, in case it didn't.

Suddenly the soldier let out a shrill cry. It was quickly smothered as Larry crashed down his gun on the man's skull. But the damage had been done.

His discoverer had gone limp and

Larry let him slide to the flooring as he whirled to escape the rapidly advancing Chinese soldiers.

He tucked his automatic into his waistband, and clubbed his rifle—a savage, murderous weapon—with which he cut a wide swath for his own passage.

CRIES of pain and terror resounded through the darkness as his rifle butt smacked home indiscriminately on heads, torsos, legs and arms. The soldiers, who must have thought themselves facing a fury incarnate, gave back from Larry, who dashed madly through them, hugging his rifle now, making for the rectangle of light which he knew to be a door giving on the inner wall of the *yamen*.

Behind him the soldiers opened fire, sending volley after volley after him. He zig-zagged wildly, hoping against hope to win free without being killed or so badly wounded he would be captured. Above the sound of firing came the screams of Chin Low to his men, bidding them fire low in order that the foreigner might be taken prisoner.

Then came the soldiers, running, firing as they ran, from the hip. Larry grinned ruefully. Chin Low's orders to fire low were having but little effect. Larry had scattered such fear among the yellow soldiers that they didn't care much how they got him, as long as they did a good job of it.

A white-hot iron passed along the right side of Larry Galbraith, and he knew that a bullet had plowed a furrow along his ribs.

He still clutched his rifle, following a hunch. He might need it, for a purpose for which, as yet, it had never been used.

A bullet neatly clipped the tip off his right ear, and in one second his face was covered with blood.

He ran desperately on, faster . . . faster. In a quick glance over his shoulder he saw that the domicile of Chin Low was now a blaze of light.

Outside the outer wall of the *yamen* Larry could hear the wild shouts of men, and knew that Chin Low had probably telephoned the Tientsin police for reinforcements, and that he was now between two fires.

HE guessed right, for he now heard someone calling to the police to surround the walls and keep him from scaling them to freedom.

Larry was now running along a winding path, which zig-zagged enough of itself to materially aid him to dodge the wild shooting of Chin's soldiers. He passed a deep pond, choked with lotus, where a fountain played merrily in the center. He knew that goldfish lived, loved and had their being in the depths. No Chinese garden was complete without its lotus ponds, and the ponds their goldfish.

Larry's right hand now grasped his automatic.

He dashed madly for the wall.

Two heads appeared above the wall suddenly, like Jacks in the box, and Larry's weapon spoke twice. He aimed below the heads, and heard his bullets go zinging off into space. The heads dropped from sight as quickly as they had appeared.

Larry gained the wall, placed his rifle in the angle of ground and wall, and went up like an acrobat.

Bullets pounded into the wall on both sides of him. Bullets thudded into the wall after going through his clothing, but save for a few flesh wounds, Larry had so far escaped death by a miracle.

He gained the wall, sat astride it.

Below him, outside, one policeman stood with his back against the wall, while another mounted to his shoul-

ders, hands reaching up for the top of the wall. Larry dropped bodily upon the two, crashed the muzzle of his weapon to their heads savagely, using all his strength.

And even as some of Chin's soldiers gained the wall, Larry was twenty-five yards away, running like mad, following the deep shadow under the wall.

One man was running directly away from the wall, out into the darkness, seemingly pursued by a second man. Larry knew them to be the two whose heads had disappeared so suddenly from the top of the wall when he had fired. But the soldiers evidently thought the leader of the two to be Larry himself, for they opened on him wildly, aiming over the head of the pursuer.

THE man fell with a wild scream, and the soldiers piled over the barrier, and went dashing after him. Larry himself dashed down the wall, rounded the first corner, found the broad expanse of the wall free of police at this point, and in a trice was once more atop the wall, whence he dropped back inside the *yamen* courtyard!

"Old Man gave me a job," he explained to himself, "and I haven't done it yet!"

All of which goes to show why Larry Galbraith was a good Intelligence Officer.

The soldiers had now divided. Some were over the wall, running toward the fallen man whom the soldiers believed to be the mysterious visitant to the *yamen*, while the others were dashing to open the gates, through which "Larry" was presently to be dragged before Chin Low.

It was Larry's opportunity. He darted from shadow to shadow, crossed a patch of moonlight at last, moving with all speed, and slipped

into the cold waters of the lotus pond. He slipped in without a splash, so that no water be found on the concrete border during the search which must inevitably follow the discovery by Chin's men that the man shot down by them was a policeman and not the foreign visitant.

Larry moved across the pond, the water almost to his neck, feeling his way through the lotus, to the deep shadow of the fountain.

Here he crouched down, head bent backward until only his nostrils were above water.

Little mouths explored his hands under the water. Larry shivered. He never had liked goldfish, anyway.

Then shouts of chagrin rose from soldiers and police alike. They had discovered their mistake.

They would begin the search.

From the domicile of Chin Low came the high-pitched voice of the old Dragon devotee, Chin himself.

"Search every nook and cranny of the garden!" commanded Chin Low.

AND the soldiers separated and began to search. They beat furiously among the trees and shrubbery, fired at shadows, fought with one another in the darkness, cursed when they found they fought with friends instead of the mysterious visitant.

Then, after fifteen minutes of it, soldiers began to examine the lotus pond. They poked among the lotus, all around the edges of the pond.

Then one of the soldiers looked directly at Larry, who had raised his face just enough to look down his nose and see what was going on.

"Come out of that!" shouted the soldier. "I see you!"

Larry didn't believe it, though his heart went down into his boots. He was in darkness, the soldier in moonlight. He thought the fellow bluffing, and played his hunch out.

"Come out, I say, or I fire!" barked the soldier in the Tientsin dialect.

Still no move from Larry.

THE soldier raised his weapon and fired point-blank at Larry. The bullet flung up a geyser of water all about Larry's face, and he almost strangled as wavelets tried to dash up his nostrils.

It required a lot of will power to keep from crying out. The soldier might fire again, with better effect next time. It was possible that he saw the splotch of white which was Larry's face.

But still Larry played out his string. He made no move, no sound, and the fellow raised his rifle again.

"Enough," snapped the other soldier, evidently a noncommissioned officer, "we've been firing at shadows for a quarter hour. The foreign devil has escaped, I tell you!"

He could tell by the sounds, as he raised his ears above water, that the soldiers were trooping doubtfully back to the domicile of Chin Low. They hated to go back to report failure to capture one lone Yank.

Chin Low, moreover, was calling them back.

Larry listened to the shouted words of Chin Low in astonishment. It seemed, from what the old boy shouted to his soldiers, that the "dragon god" was highly displeased in that careless soldiers had allowed his august person to be placed in jeopardy, and that Chin Low was desirous of propitiating His Heavenly Majesty with all speed.

Chin Chow himself, for having allowed the jar to be taken from his person, and the soldiers who had permitted the escape of the despoiler, were to enter the domicile of Chin, perform nine kowtows each before the dragon, and beg his forgiveness.

In a few minutes the garden was deserted. Larry could hear the voice



of Chin Low again, the moaning supplications of the soldiers. Cautiously he quitted the lotus pond, flitted from shadow to shadow until he could look through a high, narrow window—into a great room.

There, upon a table, still writhing angrily, and striking at the sides of the jar, the black snake fought against enforced imprisonment.

LARRY could see him plainly, for the simple reason that right beside him was a great native lantern, whose gleam lighted up the yellow faces of kneeling, kowtowing soldiery, lined up all around the table.

Behind the soldiers were the police, kowtowing, too. Larry grinned.

This ceremony would require at least five more minutes. Chin Low himself was nearest the jar.

Larry looked around him.

Off to his right, twenty yards away, was the wall of the *yamen*. His way of escape!

The plan, futile as it might yet develop to be, was the best of which he could think at the moment. He ran back to the wall over which he had climbed but a few minutes before. He grabbed the stolen rifle he had left there, and dashed back.

He reached the point opposite the window, lined up the jar and the lantern, and ran straight away to the wall, which he mounted with agility he did not know he possessed.

Atop the wall, astride, he twisted around and looked into the room with its kowtowing soldiers. His Heavenly Majesty, the Dragon God, did not seem one whit appeased by the kowtows and the supplications of the devotees. In point of sober fact, he seemed more peeved than ever.

Larry flung the rifle to his shoulder, aimed as carefully as he could, striving to align his sights, praying

that he had lost none of his skill with a rifle, and pulled the trigger.

He saw the jar smash into a thousand fragments, and uttered a shout of satisfaction.

Just as the light went out he saw Chin Low, his face a mask of religious terror, extend both hands toward the jar. Then the room was in darkness, and was a bedlam of sound, while, outside the wall, the rifle flung aside because it had served its purpose, Larry Gailbraith ran for dear life.

An hour later Larry was telling the sleepy Commanding General, unceremoniously routed out of bed by an excited aide, what had occurred in the *yamen*. When he had finished, he insisted that Larry use one of his own extra bedrooms, for some much needed rest.

Long before Larry was ready to get up next morning, the general had him down in his living room, to read a report which his own Chief of Intelligence had dispatched to him.

LARRY gasped as he read. The report was, in effect, as follows: Chin Low had been found, early that morning, beside a table, grasping a dead black snake in his hand. Upon that hand appeared several punctures in the skin, punctures which had turned black and blue.

Chin Low had been quite dead when found. Save that Chin had himself squeezed the snake to death in his fright, there was no mark upon it. Despite those punctures on Chin Low's hand, an examination of the snake disclosed the fact that it was absolutely non-poisonous.

Chin Low had gone to his fathers through fright! And in killing his pet snake in this absurd manner, he had definitely proved to his followers that the reptile was not endowed with god-like powers.

# Fang the Terrible



*The Fighting Fool Goes Forth Single-Handed to  
Vanquish Fang Ku, an Enemy of Man*

## *Another Captain Trouble Story*

By PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

*Author of "The Leopard Man," "Spider Tong," etc.*

I

**N**O Chinaman will willingly risk battle in either the rain or the dark. They are funny that way. And Shattuck, familiar with the fact, decided to make his attack on Fang Ku, the bandit chief, a one man affair. General Fang, better known as "Fang the Terrible." It was a name that Fang had won for himself—and well deserved, God

knew; a title that Fang was proud of. And Shattuck, because of this, had decided to kill the general in any case.

But why waste good men?

Besides, there were various phases of the situation that Shattuck was eager to learn at first hand; and only the general himself would be able to furnish the low-down on the affair.

Here of late, the general—Fang the Terrible—had been promenading

up and down all this part of China, over the Tibetan passes and back again, taking a blue-eyed, fair-haired corpse along with him, claiming that this was the corpse of none other than Shadak Khan—of Captain Trouble, that is—successor of Kubla Khan, the great War Lord, subject of a thousand prophecies, predestined ruler of the world, he who would prepare the way for the coming of the great World Savior, the Maitreya.

SHATTUCK wasn't the first man who'd been confronted by a report of his own death. He knew that. And, ordinarily, he would have let it pass. But the situation called for action. Fang was using the report to bolster his own claims to power. He was recruiting men by the hundreds, the thousands. On the strength of the report, Shattuck found that his own strength was being undermined.

Having swam down stream for a mile in the dark and the rain, Shattuck pulled himself to the muddy bank. He'd been helped in his swim by an airtight bag, made of the skin of a young camel. So far, he'd been naked except for a belt with a knife in it. He now used the knife to slit the bag.

He was cold and shivering, but his movements were careful.

From the bag he drew a bundle, mostly composed of a long coarse cloak with a wind-hood, such as camel-men use. It would be warm, and the hood would be useful for disguise.

Wrapped up in the cloak were a sword, an automatic with several extra cartridge clips, and a pair of sandals. The sword was the authentic sword of the great Kubla.

There in the dark he touched the hilt of the sword to his forehead, then his heart. Call it superstition,

if you want to. Well, in that case, he was superstitious.

And he'd barely done this, before a stream of light jumped out of the dark, flickered around unsteadily for a couple of seconds—shining on the pouring rain as it did so—then fastened itself upon him like a long, cold finger.

No use to dodge—not much!—but he did. At the same second, a rifle banged and a bullet came so close to his temple that he felt a sting of heat.

As he dodged, he jumped—forward, sword on, striking right and left.

There'd been only that one shot. But he found out, after a little groping, that he'd struck two men. One of them was still moving. The fellow started to yell. Shattuck found his throat.

"Shut up!" he ordered briefly.

The man was silent.

For a few seconds, Shattuck was doing a number of things at once. With a hand still on the wounded man as a guard against treachery, his senses quested out for news.

There had been no answering shots. There'd been no general alarm. Dimly he could see a small shelter near, where the two men had been sitting, probably, when he came out of the river. It had been his white skin that had betrayed him. At the same time, some finer sense, perhaps, was telling him that the other man he'd struck—with the second blow, to which he'd given a fraction of a second longer—would trouble him no more.

THE man he held was the one who'd flashed the light. It was the other who'd fired.

Shattuck backed his man into the shelter, guardedly but without loss of time, then took the light from him.

The shelter was a mean hut of brush and mud with a thatched roof. But it was fairly dry and sufficient to stop light.

"Face to the ground," Shattuck commanded briefly, and the fellow wilted to obey.

It was several seconds before Shattuck returned to the hut with such things as he had dropped. With him he also brought the rifle of the man who was dead—a good modern weapon of Japanese make, he noticed. Such weapons were almost as common in China now as Russian arms, it seemed. The wounded man still lay on the ground face down, uttering no sound—not even a moan—although there was a slit on his side from which the blood flowed.

Shattuck examined this cut. It was, he saw, a mere scratch, where the edge of his sword had swerved from the fellow's cartridge belt.

As a matter of fact, the fellow had two cartridge belts, like most of Fang's men—so Shattuck had been given to understand. Fang had recently been lucky in a raid on a Japanese troop train that previously had been dynamited. He had, before that, deserted from his own government and entered the service of the Russians, whom he'd betrayed in turn.

"Your name," whispered Shattuck, after an interval of thought.

"Ah Chi."

"And have you ever heard of Chi Tsu?"

THE fellow himself had suggested the question by that name of his—Ah Chi. For Chi Tsu was the Chinese name of Kubla Khan.

"My lord," Ah Chi chattered, still face downward on the floor of the hut, "have I not been following the corpse of the Great One these past four unhappy moons?"

## II

NO ONE but Shadak Khan—Captain Trouble, that is; otherwise, the Fighting Fool—would have willingly put himself into a trap like the one that lay ahead of him now. But Shattuck—Pelham Rutledge Shattuck, sometimes of New York, but mostly of China, where he'd been born and brought up—seemed to be under the spell of that name of his. Shattuck, in its Chinese form, Shadak, meant "trouble." To trouble he was fated. Shadak Khan! Captain Trouble! Heir of Kubla, whose sword had come his way!

"Ah Chi," he said softly, "the corpse you speak about is walking again. Turn and look at me."

There are as many ways of handling men as there are men in the world. Shattuck had won a slave.

If it hadn't been for Ah Chi, Shattuck might never have found his way—certainly not without great trouble—through the network of ditches and dikes that surrounded the headquarters of General Fang.

The bandit chief had established himself in all that remained of a mud-walled village, now mostly demolished. Around this village for a mile in each direction, his troops were scattered under various "banners" or fighting units. It was such a horde as Genghis Khan, grandfather of Kubla, had led to the conquest of Asia and half of Europe almost a thousand years ago.

A hum—and a stench—of life went up from the scattered camp that covered the plain. A glow like a phosphorescence shone through the rainy dark from a thousand shielded fires and peanut-oil lanterns.

It was evident that Fang Ku—Fang the Terrible—was going strong. From hovel and tent, and from the stray snatches of speech that came

his way, even from the variety of smells, Shattuck, from the fullness of his experience, was taking note of the various races that Fang had already gathered about him: Chinese, of course, from North and South—from both inside and outside the Wall; Manchus and Mongols, Tartars and Russians, Tibetans, wild Tungus.

It was a Tungus sentry who snatched at Shattuck's cloak—a tall man with a cloak of his own, and he looked coal black in the murky dark—and him Shattuck knifed so swiftly that he was down with barely a grunt.

"Take his cloak, Ah Chi," Shattuck whispered.

ALL that Ah Chi had worn so far, apart from his cartridge belts, was a pair of pajamas rolled up to the thighs. Ah Chi jerked the cloak from under the Tungus, leaving him naked.

They were challenged fifty times—in almost as many dialects, it seemed. The answer was always the same:

*"Chao jen!"*

It meant, "Looking for a man." This was a time when half of China was on the move, "looking for a man." It was as good a password as any.

They came to a temple gate, and here two sentries, in good khaki uniforms, this time, evidently of Japanese make, were at them like a pair of terriers. Even before Shattuck could have given a command, Ah Chi, inspired by that walking corpse of the Great One at his side, had leaped at one of the men and had him by the throat.

Shattuck had run the other through with his quick knife, then turned to Ah Chi's relief before the first man dropped.

The whole affair had transpired

so quietly that they'd slipped through the gate and up the temple steps without further alarm. In a corner of the temple, a squad of men sat awake but somnolent around a fire they'd built on the stone floor.

One stirred and moved, then started up and stared. But the fire-light was in his eyes. Before he could see what it was that had aroused him, Ah Chi and Shattuck were in the shadows and altogether out of sight.

For a brief interval, they were in a dark corridor. Here they came to a door against which a tall Manchu lounged. Shattuck held Ah Chi with a touch, then rushed the man and had the knife at his throat.

"Silence!" he ordered. All along he had used the Mandarin dialect.

The Manchu had understood the gesture if not the word. He was silent—ready to fall, but rigid, leaning like a chopped tree.

Shattuck turned the Manchu with his face to the wall, then blindfolded him by pulling his blouse over his head.

They took him along to the inner room of the temple where, as Ah Chi had told Shattuck, the corpse would be found. There Shattuck left the Manchu in Ah Chi's care and went the rest of the way alone.

It wasn't far.

THERE, in front of a huge painting of Mi Leh Fu, was a covered litter. Mi Leh Fu! The Buddha of the Future! Rigden-jyepo, in Tibetan. The Maitreya, Savior of the World! Curious how all the nations of the world were expecting some great world revolution that would bring, at last, the Taiping, the Eternal Peace, after this reign of trouble.

But before the Maitreya could come, a Shadak Khan, a Captain



Trouble, would have to clear the way.

"I'm Captain Trouble," Shattuck told himself with a catching of the breath.

He saluted the great banner of Mi Leh Fu, then picked up a smoky, scented lamp of sesame oil and came close to the covered litter. He drew aside the curtain and looked in.

He stifled a cry.

He'd been expecting to see the body of an American, perhaps—of a white man, at any rate. But a man. Instead, his first glance, even in that wan and shaking flame of sesame oil, told him that he was looking at the face of a woman—a white woman—dead, but with her blue eyes open.

### III

**D**ETAILS of what else he saw came slowly to Shattuck in the seconds that followed. As a matter of fact, his perceptions were racing so fast that he was seeing all, divining all, even in that first startled glance of his.

The victim, whoever she was, had been shrouded in a long cloak.

The cloak had fallen aside, revealing a simple white dress, such as any girl might have worn. She looked so lifelike, lying there in this remote Chinese temple—looked so much like any girl from back home—that Shattuck caught his breath. There was a word of apology on his lips. But the word was frozen. This wasn't life; this was death lying there.

And this, in that moment of rushing perception.

The cult of the dead had always been powerful in China. There were secrets of the old empire in the care of the dead that the rest of the world never suspected.

In the flickering light the expres-

sion of the girl on the litter changed. Her look of peace had become one almost of recognition, then of appeal.

Shattuck started to turn away. A force stronger than his will brought him back to his contemplation of the dead. This was part of the drama that was unrolling in China, unrolling in the world.

At the same time there was flooding through his thought a memory of that vast camp through which he had just passed, other memories of what he had done thus far in fighting his way toward power—power to bring order into China, into the world.

**H**IS own camp he'd left five miles up the river—seven hundred selected men. Most of them Agharti, those mysterious dwellers of the Gobi, of the Kara Kugen, the Black Hills. Juma, the old Kirghiz robber chief, who'd become his chief lieutenant, was headed down from the hills with a picked regiment of Tibetans. They were to converge on Minchow, that ancient Chinese city which was the gate to the Gobi. And in Kinchow he, Shadak Khan, Captain Trouble, American, citizen of the world, was to be proclaimed heir and reincarnation of Kubla Khan.

Now this! And he was noticing other details about the dead girl.

A mask of one of the ten thousand devil-gods who survived in Chinese mythology had ordinarily hidden her face. An antique war helmet had been placed on her head. The mask had fallen aside. The helmet had been displaced, allowing to escape a strand of dark hair—it was shaded with gold in the light of the lamp.

Shattuck read her story. An unhappy refugee. A White Russian, perhaps. There were many such in

the North. Fang the Terrible would have made her his own. She had killed herself. Fang had been unwilling to release her even as a hostage to death. He had carried her along under this masquerade as Shadakh Khan.

It was like a page from the legends of the Golden Horde!

Shattuck moved swiftly.

He lifted the still figure from the litter. As he did so, a breath of air stirred the great painting of Mi Leh Fu. It was like a word of invitation from the Buddha of the Future. In a moment the body of the fair stranger was hidden behind the painting.

TO put an end to this sort of thing was worth the life's best effort of any man, Shattuck was telling himself as he turned away. It was a thought that was to nerve him for what was to follow.

He returned to the vacant litter, and there stood staring at it for a moment. Then he quietly seated himself on that bed of death. The coarse cloak he'd been wearing he cast aside. Without a shudder he drew that other cloak that had served as a shroud about him.

A mandarin cloak, of embroidered satin. He lifted the helmet and fitted it to his head. It was a helmet that might have been of hand-wrought steel chased with gold, such as the great Kubla Khan himself might have worn in the days of his glory.

He picked up the mask.

Just as he did this he heard a sudden cry of warning, then a gurgling cry of pain.

A moment later two figures, locked in a writhing tangle like fighting leopards, whirled into the place. It was the Chinese, Ah Chi, and the Manchu he'd been left to guard.

Before Shattuck could do more

than draw the automatic from the holster strapped around his naked waist, Ah Chi was falling backward with blood spurting from a wound in his throat. Shattuck fired and the Manchu pivoted.

It would have been hard to tell which brought the Manchu closer to death just then—the bullet that had gone through his cheeks or the thing he saw there sitting on the couch of death. He let out a coughing howl and spun away.

Curiously, there was a moment almost of silence—a moment during which Shattuck could hear the rain thudding softly on the temple roof, a soft chirp of temple crickets; and then, instantly an explosion of other sounds.

The cry of the man he'd shot had started a chorus of other cries. There was a rushing sound of swift movement, as footless as a river and yet with the same suggestion of overwhelming force.

#### IV

GENERAL FANG, surnamed the Terrible, was a smoker of opium; yet his sleep was light. It was possibly this opium habit of his that had given him the curious idea of carrying a dead victim of his whims about with him and claiming that it was the body of that foreign devil, Shadakh Khan.

He had been sleeping now, in another part of the temple where he'd established his temporary headquarters. For the night, he'd taken off his boots and his sidearms, but not much else.

There was more than one reason why he should be forever on his guard. Any of these several reasons was sufficient.

He had gathered an army about him. It was an army that would be faithful to him only so long as it

was fed and paid, only so long as his own star was in the ascendant. If he stumbled and fell, the army itself would be on him like a pack of hungry wolves.

He had betrayed friend and foe. They were all foes now. They were not the sort of enemy, either, who were apt to forget.

His chief betrayal had to do with that curious treasure he'd carried about him in all his wayfarings as a sort of ghastly fetish.

For a while General Fang had been in negotiation with a Colonel Adrianoff, in a plot to bring Siberia and even Mongolia under White Russian control. Even then, Fang was growing in power. He was a man of unlimited ambition. In this he had, moreover, been abetted, it seemed, by both education and nature. He spoke Russian like a Russian. It was why he had so many Russians in his army now. And good-looking—he was almost white.

Almost white, but wholly Mongolian otherwise. He showed it now as he sat there on the edge of the kang—the oven-like sleeping platform where his mattress had been placed. He was a large man, immensely powerful; but not well built, according to Caucasian standards, for he was almost as broad as he was tall. His face was, if anything, broader than it was long. His eyes, set far apart, were of a glittering black.

**W**ELL, all the time that Fang, since known as the Terrible, was negotiating with Colonel Adrianoff, Fang's only thought was for the colonel's daughter, Rya.

Finally, Fang told the colonel so. But the colonel put him off. Then Fang had sold out the colonel to the Reds and stolen the girl.

A strange wild element in Fang Ku's makeup. When Rya had killed

herself, Fang the Terrible had clung to her anyhow.

Fang, in spite of his opium, was instantly awake and ready for action like any wild animal.

Two of the general's bodyguard were standing near the kang where he'd slept. They also were awake and alert, fully dressed in neat khaki uniforms and boots, armed with automatics.

The three men in the sleeping apartment—the general and his guards—cast up their heads. They'd heard a complex, hundred-voiced cry:

*"It's the corpse! It walks! It walks!"*

## V

**S**HATTUCK was quick to catch that cry. He recognized the nature of it. There was an ancient magic that had come down from Tibet. All Asia was saturated with it more or less in one form or other. "Rollang," they called it—a particularly vicious form of tantrik sorcery, practiced by the Red Sect of lamas—whereby the dead can be called back to life for all sorts of evil purposes, chiefly murder.

This was the "rollang" cry that was going up. General Fang's dead captive had been restored to life.

The corpse walks.

There was a growing stampede. But it was a stampede with a double current, of those who would get away and of those who would behold the wonder.

Fang had the nucleus of a regiment of life guards—five hundred men, perhaps, all of them selected and highly trained. Many of these were educated. Many were not. It was the educated among the guardsmen who now pressed toward the inner temple.

A thin young officer with a hard

face was one of the first to appear. He had a revolver in one hand and a flashlight in the other. He used light and gun almost simultaneously.

Shattuck himself was so quick to fire that, as the two guns crashed, it sounded like a single report; and the flashlight fell to the floor as the guardsman lurched aside.

Shattuck came to his feet, mask and all. In the scramble of shouting he'd heard words he'd learned in the deserts. There were Chahars out there, one of the most war-like tribes of Inner Mongolia.

"Om!" he intoned. "Om! Chahars. Come to the Agharti chief!"

HE'D used the Vatannen, the old sacred language of the Gobi, language of the Agharti!

In the confusion of shouting he heard answering shouts.

"Who calls himself the Agharti chief?"

"Shadak Khan!" he shouted.

There was a rush in his direction. These were not Chahars but Manchus, Hunhuts, Buriats. There were three or four more shots fired in his direction. The light was dim. One shot scraped him. These men never would be marksmen anyway—not with small arms.

Shadak fired swiftly but carefully into the thick of the squad that had started toward him. He'd fired with his left hand. His sword was in his right.

Again he heard the voices of Chahars, the fighting Mongols from the Great Wall. Then there was a conflict of shouting—shrieks and protests.

For a while Shattuck was caught in a struggling mob, so dense and swirling that he dared neither to shoot nor cut his way clear.

"*Ma-lai!*" he shouted. "Make way for Shadak Khan!"

Someone struck at him with a rifle

butt. That was old practice. He lurched aside and countered with his sword.

He heard a cry:

"*Chiang-chun!*"

"The general!"

At the same instant, as if the cry had been a signal prearranged, there was a clash of gongs. The gongs pounded out like a preliminary to an earthquake. Small gongs and large! They shrilled and clattered. There was a shaking low vibration like the thud of heavy artillery. Then a flare of green light.

Fang Ku was a modern fighter in some respects. But he was still the believer in the old-time magic of noise and fireworks.

It was in that blaze of light and the mixed thunder of the gongs that Shattuck and Fang first saw each other.

## VI

FANG KU, with a pistol in his right hand, made a gesture with his left. He had an arm like the leg of any ordinary man. In some way his order must have been understood. There was a gradual falling off of the gong-thunder. But the green flares still burned.

They brought out every detail of the temple room, raftered with heavy beams that had been lacquered in red. There were banners hanging from the walls inscribed with Buddhist prayers in Chinese characters.

All in a single glance, Shattuck saw the characters for such words as "kindliness," "mildness," and then the dead and wounded men on the temple floor. This, although not once did he let his eyes knowingly waver from the squat and powerful figure of Fang Ku, the man he'd started out this night to kill.

Fang Ku himself was staring at Shattuck like one hypnotized—like

a man who sees the impossible and yet forces himself to believe his eyes.

Shattuck was conscious of something else. Even now, he could tell, there was some sort of a division going on in the crowd about them—some for Fang Ku, some for himself.

The crowd had pushed back. The only ones left between Fang and Shattuck were the dead and the dying.

"Who are you?" Fang asked.

Shattuck was in no hurry to answer.

SOMEHOW he'd managed to keep that embroidered robe about him. He'd lost the mask, but his face had been freshly shaved before he left his camp up the river. He remembered the helmet on his head.

"I am the Walking Corpse," he replied.

And he wondered if there was a shot left in his magazine. Both he and Fang the Terrible were holding their weapons at a "ready," although without quite covering each other.

Some sixth sense was telling Shattuck that the fighting Chahars were over there somewhere in back of him. Would they take his side if it came to a fresh mix-up? He believed they would. Perhaps Fang was thinking the same thing. His beady eyes flicked about him; so swiftly, though, that no one could have sworn that he'd looked away.

At Shattuck's answer there had been a slight movement in the crowd, a shift in breathing rather than a shift of feet. Shattuck took a slow step forward.

At that, there was a visible twitching of revolvers on Fang Ku's side. But the general snapped an order, then paused to shove his own weapon into the holster at his belt.

"My honored friend," he began, bringing his flashing, opaque eyes back to Shattuck, "what you say—"

He made a two-handed gesture, as if in supplication. But as he did so, he stepped quickly back.

"Kill him!" he barked.

The words were still on his lips when a number of things happened.

Fang himself had jerked a couple of those nearest him between himself and Shattuck. Shattuck himself had plunged aside. In an instant the place was filled with explosions and flashes, shouts and a turmoil of panic. Then darkness!

Shattuck had fired once in the direction of Fang—whether to hit one of those living shields Fang had selected or to hit Fang himself he couldn't know.

Was this to be the end?

The thought that sparked in his brain was scarcely faster than his movement, as now, in the sudden darkness, with a passionate concentration on his sense of direction he plunged again, stooping low, in an effort to reach Fang in the dark.

Once more he pulled the trigger as a pistol blazed just over his head. But, this time, the hammer clicked without response. He dropped the gun and thrust with his sword.

As he did so, a powerful body lurched against him from one side. All in the same fraction of time he was gripped by powerful arms.

## VII

ALL that saved Shattuck as he and his unseen antagonist went to the floor was that, even as his left hand dropped the gun it instinctively reached for the knife in his belt. He stabbed twice, across his body, at the weight that held his sword-arm paralyzed. Then he was pushing himself free



of the hot surge of blood against his side.

He came up staggering, but sound.

All the lights of the temple were out. The fight was over as swiftly as it had begun.

Shattuck found himself in a clear space. Without premeditation he let out a shout:

"Om! Om! I am Shadak Khan!"

There was a responsive shout to that.

"And a price," he shouted, "for the head of Fang Ku!"

There was a jibbing note in the cheers that followed the offer.

So far, Shattuck had spoken in the Mandarin dialect. Now he shifted to the Mongol speech he'd learned in the desert.

"Chahars, Soyots, Buriats, Tartars—all you free people! Henceforth, I tell you, Fang Ku is dead and Shadak Khan, heir to the spirit and the sword of Kubla Khan, is your leader. Are you going to follow where I lead?"

There was a vocal explosion of assent.

Almost at his ear, there in the dark, Shattuck heard a whisper.

"Tovarish—comrade! Who, in the name of God, are you?"

THE whisper was in Russian, the language Shattuck had learned before he made his way into Asia, the land of his birth.

"Tovarish," Shattuck replied, as he moved a little aside and made ready for any treachery, "first tell me, who are you?"

"An unhappy father," came the reply, "in search of a daughter. I also will follow you if you are an enemy of Fang Ku. For him I also came here to kill this night?"

"Alone?"

"With five hundred men. But what could we do against his ten thousand?"

Shattuck remembered the girl in the litter. Was she the daughter this man was looking for?

"Perhaps," he said, "I can give you news of her. Let us go where there is light. Let us go quietly. There will be assassins about—for you, I imagine, as well as for myself."

OUTSIDE the temple there was a rising tide of sound. It was as if the entire camp were assembling there. Then a dozen torches were flaring down a corridor. There was no need to leave just yet.

At the first flicker of light in the temple hall, Shattuck ran to the litter where the dead girl had lain. There he cast aside the torn and bloody garment that had served the girl as a shroud. Instead, he slipped once more into that rough robe of a camel-puller of the Gobi desert. The helmet also he cast aside. He pulled the hood over his face.

"Tovarish!" he called softly. "Comrade!"

Shattuck saw a white man, a Russian manifestly from the way he'd spoken the language. He was a middle-aged man with a pale and intellectual face which showed signs of suffering.

The man was Adrianoff, and in those few crowded seconds he told Shattuck enough to make him regret more than ever that he hadn't killed Fang Ku when he had the opportunity to do so, even if it had been at the expense of his own life.

Shattuck looked at Adrianoff. "I've already taken one vow," he said.

"May I know what it is?" Adrianoff asked, looking curiously at the cowed figure.

"To prepare the way for the Maitreya," Shattuck replied. "To spread the empire of Shamballah, the Taiping, the reign of Eternal Peace."

"Of the Belavodye, the White

Waters," Adrianoff answered. "The legend, and the hope, also exists in Russia." He reflected with a kindling eye. "I'll take the vow to join your cause—as soon as I have settled the affair of my daughter."

"We are fighting men," said Shattuck. "And now I am taking another vow."

"Which is?"

"To keep my head covered with this cowl until Fang Ku is dead."

He took a torch from a passing Mongol and beckoned Adrianoff to follow. Together they passed behind the great painting of the Maitreya.

### VIII

**N**OT even if practically an entire army of ten thousand men had surrendered to him single-handed could Shattuck be relieved of the unrest in his heart at having allowed Fang the Terrible to escape.

There were too many Fangs in the China of today. Super-bandits all. Selling out to the highest bidder. Existing for and by loot. Indifferent to murder. All this in a land that had produced Loa-Tse and Confucius.

Added to what remained of the forces of Fang Ku was the irregular force of White Russians that Adrianoff had raised. Added to these again were the Agharti, those strange dwellers in the secret places of the Gobi where, generation after generation, they had awaited the coming of the new Kubla Khan.

Caravan men the Agharti were, breeders of white camels and white dogs, masters of the forgotten magic that had once made Egypt and Babylon great, now putting their occult forces and their acute worldly wisdom at the service of the new War Lord.

Li Ko-liang, the elder of the Agharti, the high priest and chief keeper of the arcane teaching, seated himself on the sand not far from the temple where Shattuck had fought and won and lost this night.

The old seer smoothed the sand with his hand, then held a long and crooked finger before him resting lightly on the smooth space. A haze gathered over the old man's eyes, then the finger began to draw symbols in the sand, which, afterward, only Li Ko-liang could read.

"Lo," he said, when he began to scan the symbols his "guided" hand had written while the film was over his eyes; "lo, he whom thou seekest has fled to a city with an evil heart. There he conspires with the leaders of the city to declare war against thee, O Shadak Khan, heir to the spirit and the sword of Kubla, whose grandsire was Genghis."

"Father of Wisdom," said Shattuck, "canst thou tell me the name of that city?"

"The one thou knowest," the old man answered dreamily.

"Minchow!"—and as soon as Shattuck pronounced the name, he knew that he was right.

**A**LREADY he had decided to take Minchow and submit it to discipline. He would make it one of the capitals under the new dispensation. Twice already it had turned against him—once, long ago, when he'd fought another so-called "general" there; again, later yet, when he'd run down the head of the Spider Tong and had almost got himself murdered for his pains.

Minchow had once been the capital city of the Li Pun Yu, the Cloudy Garden. But long ago, Li Pun Yu had become the Feng Ti Yu—the Cloudy Garden had become the Garden of Hell.

It was with a mind to returning

the Garden of Hell and its main city, Minchow, to their former happy condition that Shattuck had sent old Juma, the old Kirghiz ex-robber over the Nan Shan into Tibet to bring down some of his seasoned fighters from the Kokonor—the Blue Lake district—where another center of empire was building, or, rather being brought back to life again.

IT was about time that Juma would be at the end of his return march, over there in the Gorge of the Grasping Fist. He would be resting and waiting for a sign at the Fur Girl Cave.

Throughout the major part of the day the Agharti, under Shattuck's eye, passed on the banners and the men of what had been Fang Ku's army. From the vast treasure-store of their temple in the Black Hills of the Gobi—heart of the new and the old Shamballah, the Empire of Peace, the Agharti had brought five hundred camel-loads of coin in copper and silver.

Shattuck alone passed on such men as he judged would suit his purpose as warriors.

To each of the others, captains or rank and file alike, the Agharti deftly, without question on one side or the other, dealt out the sums that would send the men back to the land with means for a fresh start.

To all such, it was like a reprieve from Heaven. They were Chinese and Mongol peasants for the most part. All they wanted was a chance to work.

But Shattuck had an eye for the fighting tribes—the old robber fraternities, like the Lo-lao Hui, from the Yellow River, the Hoang-Ho; the Goloks, another ungodly robber tribe from the Mongol-Tibetan frontiers; Chi-jen, the so-called Banner Men, from Manchuria; the *liumin* generally, the wandering people, from "Be-

yond the Passes," that is, outside the Great Wall; the wild Tungus of the North; the Hunhuts, otherwise "the Red Beards"—fighters all, destined to die with their boots on and, generally speaking, the sooner the better.

The world was getting ready for a fresh deal, for Shamballah, the Reign of Peace.

The long caravan started back in the direction of the Nan Shan and the valley that had once been the Cloudy Garden.

There were many banners in the caravan, representing different fighting groups, tongs, and tribal associations.

But the banner of banners was at the head of the long procession, there where Shattuck rode on his own great white camel.

Her name was Shen Lung, meaning "Dragon of the Winds"; and although she ran like the wind at times, merely to show the ordinary camels what she could do, her gait was so soft and regular that Shattuck dozed and dozed again.

How long, he wondered, would he have to wear this cowl over his head?—how long before he could look into the face of Fang Ku, dead, as he'd looked into the face of Rya, the daughter of Colonel Adrianoff?

## IX

GENERAL FANG KU had come riding into the walled city of Minchow with no more than fifty followers not long after the city gates were opened for another day.

There was no mistaking it, Minchow had fallen on evil times; but in doing so had settled into a sort of satisfaction in turning from work to ideas of luxury and crime. It always had been a center for the clandestine opium trade—a convenient place of

exchange for the opium and hashish runners of the desert.

Here of late, moreover, it had gone in rather heavily for the old slave trade. The slaves were children. They could be bought up in droves, and there was a constant demand for them not only in the outlying parts of the old empire, but in distant ports of the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean, in Turkestan, and the Northern deserts and mountains.

GENERAL FANG announced to Minchow that he had come as a savior. As proof of this he pointed to the small number of his men. He had, he said, dismissed the great bulk of his army simply in order not to alarm the good people of Minchow.

But had they ever heard of a certain hairy foreigner—a *kato-jin*—who called himself Shadak Khan?

Had they?

Hadn't he come into their town and smashed the Spider Tong?

He had, and he'd told them he would be coming again. His advent was what Fang Ku was there to announce. There was just enough time to prepare a hot welcome for him.

Minchow, besides its other illicit business, always had been an outfitting center for robber bands and illicit gun-runners. It had been one of the principal arsenal depots for Fang Ku himself when receiving shipments from Russia and elsewhere.

All that day and night the citizens of Minchow were strengthening their walls and mounting ordinance with more or less technical knowledge.

At the same time, tax-collectors and volunteer raiders were out scouring the country for extra supplies of all sorts of food-stuffs.

The next morning at dawn, Minchow was treated to a spectacle. They saw gathered into the great plain that surrounded the town, one of the

greatest armies that even Minchow, in all its long history, had ever seen.

At a prominent place in the center of this army was a tall white camel with a rider on it who held up a long shafted pennant. The pennant floated out lazily in the breeze, and those with binoculars could read on it the symbols that meant:

*La Gyal Lo!*

Which being translated means: "Victory to the Gods!"

Shattuck had binoculars, as he sat on his white camel and studied the walls of the old town. He could recognize that square figure that came to the parapet nearest him and there took long aim with a high powered rifle.

It was General Fang Ku, and once more he felt an urge to try once again to go out against the Terrible One single-handed.

He knew a way.

X

ONE munition of war Minchow seriously lacked, and that was a modern searchlight. It lacked much light of any kind. And no sooner had darkness settled down than Shattuck, alone in his camel-puller's cloak with its windhood drawn over his head and no arms, but the sword of Kubla Khan to keep him company was through the wall by a long forgotten water-drain.

It was a secret that the Agharti had taught him on a former occasion. They were adepts in that sort of knowledge—facts that had been handed down in their tribal archives sometimes for centuries.

Minchow was so old that it had probably tilted three or four feet since this particular drain had been of any use.

Unnoticed, Shattuck, stooping slightly in his cloak, wandered about the streets until he recognized one who undoubtedly was a follower of Fang Ku.

Him Shattuck cornered in a back street at the point of his sword.

But the man let out a call before Shattuck could throttle him, and it was a case of run or be hunted down like a rat. It looked as if it would be the latter fate at that, for the whole city was on edge, ready to fly into a panic on the slightest notice.

Shattuck ran.

The man who had let out the first alarm now started in pursuit, shouting again. Shattuck turned on him now without thought of mercy and ran him through.

AS he turned from the job, two others were on him.

One fired a blunderbuss—a Tibetan gingal—at a range that burned him, yet the slug actually missed. Perhaps it had fallen from the barrel before the hammer fell.

Shattuck spotted the gingal-fighter and let the other run.

But the explosion of the blunderbuss had completed the alarm of the town, and now it looked as if there would be no getting away by the wall. The wall was exactly where most of the able-bodied citizens were, to fight off a possible night attack.

But no Chinaman will risk his neck in the dark—or the rain—if he can help it.

Had the natives of Minchow forgotten that all the besiegers out there were not Chinamen?

It looked that way.

Their attention, after all, was for what was going on inside the city, not beyond the walls.

Suddenly there was a terrific explosion at the main gate, and a swarm of armed men rushed in—mostly white, but headed this time by an old

Kirghiz looking like one of his own hunting eagles. Close at his side was a tall Russian.

Minchow would know him later—and honor him—as Colonel Adrianoff. There was desultory firing. A few men fell. There were signs of an early peace.

Shattuck had heard the sound of that great explosion and had correctly guessed the nature and the cause of it. That wouldn't be the citizens who were blowing up their gate. Juma, the old ex-robber, had said he'd come to the attack if there was any sound of disturbance. What Juma had meant was that he was coming anyhow.

But Shattuck was no longer in a hurry to get away.

He had an idea that Fang Ku would have taken charge of the defense of the city; and there was only one place in the city where Fang Ku would deign to reside.

Shattuck's judgment proved sound.

He was just entering the public square in front of the yamen, the old palace of the Minchow governors, when he saw the square figure of Fang Ku headed in his direction.

Fang Ku was the center of an excited and apparently somewhat exhilarated group. There may have been a dozen in the group—regular followers of the war-lord, citizens of the town.

THE only one that Shattuck clearly saw at all was the general himself. In an instant, it seemed that the world had gone out also for General Fang Ku, all except for that cloaked figure running toward him with a bared sword in his hand.

The spectacle was so curious—that one cowed man rushing a crowd and all of that crowd armed—that, like many a curious spectacle, it brought with it a whiff of madness, of panic.

It was a panic that touched Fang



the Terrible himself. He was quick enough on the draw. But his aim was frightful. Or a touch of steel had found him too quickly.

The sword instead of coming straight on, had described an arc through the air—an arc that glittered and shivered like lightning, although there had been so little other light for the steel to reflect.

Then Fang Ku's head had strangely left his shoulders.

The body, headless, stood there for a while—a long time it seemed to Shattuck—in an attitude of surprise; and then, as if finally convinced that a headless body had no business to remain standing, it curved and collapsed and fell, yet not too swiftly, even now. As for the head, that had rolled away, like a fallen melon, over and over and into a drain, where it lay, staring up with its eyes open.

Shattuck went over and looked into that face, with certain thoughts and memories.

It wasn't until he'd completed that look—at his leisure—that he became aware that those who'd been with the general had fled and that he was quite alone.

But he wasn't to be alone for long.

Not even when he strolled on across the yamen square and entered

the outer gate of the palace where he'd once fought and killed another enemy of man.

Would he have to go on doing this forever?—until he himself was killed?

But Juma, then Colonel Adrianoff, then other friends had found him.

Then, best of all, that curious Tibetan mystic, the half-American, half-Kashmiri, Champela, otherwise John Day; he who might have grown up to be an ordinary American boy and have turned out to be, perhaps, a bond salesman, but who had preferred, instead, to lead the contemplative life in the remote Monastery of the Soaring Meditation.

Champela, as Shadak Khan's prime minister and ghostly advisor in general, insisted on confirming Shadak Khan, then and there, in that title of his:

"Shadak Khan, Captain Trouble, Smoother of the Way to Shamballah, Heir to the Sword and the Spirit of Kubla Khan, etc."

After which, Shattuck and most of his friends turned in for a good night's sleep in the Governor's Palace of Minchow.

Shattuck hoped he hadn't drawn the bed of Fang the Terrible. But it didn't worry him very much.

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## PART THREE

### SYNOPSIS

Joe Bardeen, crazed with jealousy, prepares to blow up a gold prospect owned by Kerry Lassiter, his successful rival for the hand of Belle Bennett. But accident, in the guise of a snooping gray pack rat, sends the dynamite off too soon and Joe Bardeen is deformed for life.

After surgical treatment he assumes various names, finally calling himself Rufe Anderson.

Kerry hears of the accident at the mine, but bravely looks elsewhere for what he can find; and returning once from a three-week prospecting trip, finds his wife, Belle, gone, the elder Bennetts stabbed in bed. All that is left is his three-year old, frail son, Jimmy.

Five years later he goes with Jimmy—and Jimmy's uncle Ding—to the Armargosa desert. Here he meets Rufe Anderson, who is starving. They feed him and make him a partner in a new prospecting venture, not connecting him in the least with Joe Bardeen. The thirst for revenge is alive in Rufe Anderson, but he waits patiently. . . .

Years later Jimmy, who is a mechani-



cally inclined student, is working in Illinois on a new model automobile. One day he finds his model and tools dynamited, and connects the calamity with several mysterious messages he has received.

He shows these messages to his friend, Corns Kemble, whose life he saved during the World War. They read: Poverty, Disillusionment, Failure, Death. Each message is mailed from a different place and in each another word is ringed.

Jimmy tells Corns all he knows of his past history and that of his father. He shows a letter from Uncle Ding about the disappearance of Rufe Anderson, whom they call Frozen Face. The letter also says that Kerry has left the mine and cannot be traced.

As Corns Kemble and Jimmy speak about all this, at the boarding house where Jimmy lives, and plan to get to the bottom of it, a bomb suddenly comes into the window. Jimmy luckily catches it and flings it away. The downstairs windows of the house are shattered to fragments.

The thrower of the bomb lies injured, a victim of his own explosive. He dies later in the hospital—a hard criminal with many convictions in his record. Corns feels sure

# Breath-Taking Adventure Among Outlaws



he is in some way connected with the mob that is after Jimmy's family.

Corns and Jimmy take a train to Nevada. A stranger on the train observes them, and sends a wire. Jimmy discovers the wording of this wire, and Corns interprets the queer code as a check-up on their activities.

While Corns and Kemble are hastening toward Nevada, Kerry and Ding are both prisoners there, chained in a hide-out of Frozen Face Rufe Anderson. Ding has been married, under another name than Lassiter, to shield his bride from any trouble accruing to that name.

The prisoners are undergoing ruthless torture, carefully planned.

Jimmy and Corns change their route, getting off the train and going to Clear Creek Valley. This place is Corns' home grounds.

En route, they come across the bones of an unknown dead man, a victim of foul play. Then they meet a group of cowboys, all of whom know Corns. Bert Long, in the vicinity, has disappeared weeks ago, the cowboys tell Corns, and Corns' kid sister is staying at the Longs' to help out. Corns has never met Long, but knows his wife who used to be Kate Sommers.

Jimmy and Corns go to the Long house-

hold. He becomes attracted to Corns' sister, Luce. At the Longs, Jimmy finds a banjo-mandolin and looking at it closely, sees the initials: B. D. L. The initials of his uncle, Ding!

He plays the instrument and sings, a song Ding had sung. Bert Long's wife screams from another room: "Bert! Oh, Bert! He's back!"

Jimmy now knows Bert Long is his uncle Ding.

Corns looks at Jimmy. "Fella, we start right now!" he exclaims, his black eyes flashing.

*(Now go on with the story)*

## CHAPTER IX

### *The Gray Lariat*

**I**T developed quickly that this statement was too impulsive. Harkins and the men who rode out with him would have to be seen; they might have new knowledge. And then Corns himself wanted to go over the whole matter with Apache Tup-

per. That old Indian fighter knew far more about the deserts and their possibilities than any other white man for many miles.

SO it came about that the start was delayed. And during the waning afternoon, and the night that followed, a grim yet admirable tragedy took place in the cavern of the Belted Range where Kerry Lassiter and Ding were confined.

Frozen Face had one servant and helper always with him while he stayed in the caves. This creature, probably of Mexican and Papago Indian ancestry, was known as Alicante the Dwarf.

He was an ungainly, horrible hunchback, little more than four feet in height, with hairy arms that trailed, knuckles forward, as he drew himself along or waddled on twisted legs. Those arms were thick, knotted with muscle far beyond the requirements of any man who walked always upright.

His kinky hair, and a suspicious slate color which underlay the greasy brown of his skin, might have made an anthropologist wonder if there were not some pygmy blood in him, as well.

Most of the daylight hours, Alicante spent on a sort of shelf of rock. From this perch, looking across the wastes of desert, he could see the little huddle of shacks that was Ajo, on the railway. The dwarf had learned to read the heliograph signals flashed from that point by Bildad Claey's; though when any messages, either heliograph or smoke, were sent from the caves to Ajo, Frozen Face himself attended to the matter.

From far down below, where Frozen Face made his headquarters, a bronze gong boomed. The humped figure of the dwarf suddenly awakened. A marijuana cigarette was thrown away. At a waddling run the

creature made for the blowhole man-way which led down into the interior of the mountain.

He seized the top rung of a fixed iron ladder, and scrambled downward, with the agility of an obese baboon.

Seconds later he came out of the shadows of a smaller chamber than the great burial catacomb. Here a long, narrow flake of polished slate was suspended by wires from the rock arch above, and guyed to the floor by other wires.

This was the work table of Frozen Face Rufe Anderson. Here he sat, with a glaring acetylene lamp burning high over his left shoulder, and worked with the concentration of a devil upon a problem which he never would solve.

Books, books, books. He studied them. They dealt with ancient inscriptions, glyphs, picture writings of ancient peoples. There is no need to dwell upon this hobby of the insane man. He had no need of money.

Yet goaded, lured by a small find of emeralds in this cavern, he had imagined a tremendous hoard remaining—and also imagined that the queer figures drawn or cut at many places of the walls, told of the location of this treasure.

DURING the years of his study and search he actually had managed to decipher hints that made him believe more strongly in this obsession. So when he was not engaged either with his one legitimate business—the Yellow Eye mine—or with the planning of an abduction for ransom of some rich man or rich man's child, this pursuit filled his hours.

Instructions to the dwarf were brief. There had been no further message from Claey's? No? And no sign as yet of the lazy *Indios* who came with the burro train of sup-

plies once each week—and who might have news? No?

Well then, Alicante should make preparations to entertain two more guests in the dungeon. An unknown man, referred to as a razorback hog, would accompany the little guinea pig.

Without a word the dwarf waddled away. Clinkings of metal, brought clearly through the layers of solid rock, told soon that he was fixing the shackles in two more of the burial niches.

**A**WAKENED to hideous dread that their boy, Jimmy, already had been captured, Kerry Lassiter and Ding clanked their chains and screamed questions at Alicante. He no more then peered at them, grimacing in the light of his work lantern.

These men were as good as dead; and because he was denied the pleasure of slitting their throats and watching the blood run, the dwarf had no interest in them whatsoever.

Through his long telescope, Frozen Face saw the pack train approaching, still twenty slow miles distant. The scar-faced man snarled with impatience. He never wore the vici-kid mask, except on what might be called dress occasions: and it was to be seen that his countenance had grown more repellant with the years.

From a box hidden in a fissure back of the ledge, he drew several cylinders covered with different-colored paper labels. From these he spilled out small heaps of powder along the flat of the ledge. Then, replacing the containers in the box, he lit a short length of fuse. He touched the glowing end to one of the piles of powder.

Puff!

Up went an inwardly-boiling mushroom of smoke, colored green. Then another puff, another, another. . . .

A quick code message, demanding news of white men coming. Then, with the powder burned, he grabbed his long brass telescope, watching the crawling pack train.

It stopped. A thin line of smoke arose—stopped. Then a single big puff of black came up.

The answer was NO.

Frozen Face made a ghastly sound in his throat. He swung about, snarling in a fit of senseless anger. At that moment the head of Alicante appeared at the top of the ladder. He was returning to his post innocently enough, his work done.

The white man's yellow eyes dilated. With a gritted noise of ferocity, he yanked at a vest pocket, bringing out a double-barreled derringer pistol.

But he did not fire. At the first glance Alicante had seen those gleaming eyes, with senseless murder in them. With a screech he had scurried down the ladder, and run to crouch in a black corner, where he would quake away, his terror undiscovered.

Just as soon as the dwarf had finished his work with the shackles, Kerry had bestirred himself again. He called to Ding. There had come the germ of a desperate plan. It held out a slim hope.

"My pants are all rotted off—no good. I want your pants, Ding!" he whispered imperatively. "What are they made of? Will it unravel?"

**I**T was chilly in the cave, and at first Ding was loath to part with his gray woolen trousers. But then he heard the sketch of a plan, and acquiesced. Hurriedly he started to take off the garment, but then came up against an obstacle. The trousers would not slip off over the leg iron and chain attached to his left ankle!

That was bad. There is no way known even to contortionists, that



pants can be removed over the wearer's head.

"Then you'll have to do it yourself!" cried Kerry hoarsely. "Get to work! Hurry! You'll have to unravel it all, then braid a length so it will be strong enough. You're a cowman, though. Do it!"

DING'S experience with cows had been short, but now he made only a grunted answer. He was already chewing at the seam, where the unraveling would have to start.

Hours passed. The dwarf came with food and water, to find Ding huddled down in his shred of blanket, apparently asleep. The moment Alicante left, however, he went back to work with fingers trembling in eagerness. It all had to be done by sense of touch, so it was a slow process.

By Ding's wrist watch it was past midnight, and the loop all laid, when there came the sound of the lifted trap, and a light showed in the corridor.

"Here he comes!" choked Kerry in a barely audible whisper. "Keep your head, old man! It's up to you!"

Then immediately Kerry started to draw attention to himself. He begged for more drinking water. He shook his chains. He gabbled. Anything at all, so the man with the lantern would not look down at that braided loop of gray. . .

Some of the ferocity of his disappointment at not getting news of young Lassiter, still lingered with Frozen Face Anderson. He did not reveal its true reason, however. Approaching with the lantern, scanning the pitiable wreck he had made of the proud Kerry Lassiter, he began taunting the prisoner with the assertion that his son now was a captive, and would occupy one of these niches shortly. It delighted him to see Kerry shrink and cower.

Frozen Face was so interested in

the effect of his words upon Kerry, that he did not look down. His feet came at last squarely within the braided loop. . .

With a yell Ding whipped up his end of the crude rope, jerking it toward himself. About the feet of Frozen Face the cord tightened with a snap. The man's balance was overcome. He dropped the lantern, which fell and smashed, leaving them all in darkness!

Frozen Face yelped, as he felt himself dragged quickly, inexorably toward one of these men, who would rend him limb from limb—justifiably! He kicked in frenzy. One jerk—two jerks—and then the slender cord parted!

Madly the scar-faced man scrambled erect, staggering back three steps as the clawing hands of Ding Lassiter scratched across his shoulder. Just out of reach! A yell of taunting triumph came from Frozen Face. But then—

He had staggered too far away. The thin arms of another captive closed around him! The wreck of a man who once had been a giant in strength, strove to throw him, to throttle him! Frozen Face yelped in terror, and thrashed out blindly. He went to the floor, Kerry Lassiter on top of him.

"Get him, Kerry! Get him!" yelled Ding, out at the extremity of his chain. Tears of frenzied helplessness streamed from his eyes. "Push him over to me!"

"Alicante!" screamed Frozen Face in terror of his life.

THERE came a scrambling along the corridor, as the dwarf came running to his master's assistance, attracted by the noises which carried clearly through the rock.

He was no more than in time. Kerry, despite his weakness, had

found the strength of supreme effort, and was throttling his enemy.

But now there came some quick motions in the darkness. A grunt. A despairing cry. And then Frozen Face rolled away, clutching at the derringer pistol in his vest pocket.

There came two flashes and thunderous reports. Bullets fired squarely into the chest of old Kerry Lassiter, who subsided with a moan and lay still. . . .

"Kerry!" shrieked Ding, beside himself.

But the elder brother had left—gone to the Master of all Workmen, with the tally of his work. He would be spared the supreme agony of seeing his only son tortured.

## CHAPTER X

### *Between Dark and Daylight*

**C**LEAR CREEK VALLEY lay twenty-eight miles from the cave of Frozen Face, in a straight line. Making almost an isosceles triangle, to southwestward, lay Ajo, where Bildad Claeys dwelt and pursued his furtive, greasy brand of trickery.

Before this day, Bildad had become vastly worried by the non-arrival of Jimmy Lassiter and his friend. Worse, Bildad had smashed his heliograph, and could not send messages satisfactorily to his chief with any common mirror. He therefore sent agents here and there, after making sure Jimmy had been on the train, to ascertain where the two young men had gone.

One of these agents penetrated Clear Creek Valley, on the same night that Ding was snaring the feet of Frozen Face, in the cave dungeon. But before we come to this agent and the spectacular result of his spying, it is well to note happenings of that same afternoon.

About four o'clock, while Corns, Jimmy, Stan Kemble and Apache Tupper were holding conference over a large-scale Geological Survey map, Harkins and the other riders came back. They had the dismal certainty of the death of Arizony to report—and just one thing more.

On the face of it there did not seem to be much importance in it—not enough to make Harkins and the others ride more than twenty miles to investigate—but it brought a snort and an immensely quickened interest from old Apache Tupper.

From a low cliff in the Belted Range, colored smoke signals had been seen! And more. From down on the flat over toward Ajo, the colored smokes had been answered!

"C'd yuh read 'em?" queried Apache. "Naw? Well, what was they?"

When Harkins explained as well as he remembered, though, the old Indian fighter shook his white mane. They meant nothing to him—except the negative sent as answer, of course. Colored smoke was used only by white men, though.

It cost too much for the purses of aborigines. And besides, there were only a few Shoshones left in this part of Nevada. Indians who never were warlike or up to worse tricks than petty thievery.

"We'll be on our way at dawn. Them smokes got to be investigated," said Apache. "Now Harkins, mark right down here on the map where 'twas yuh seen 'em. . . ."

A little later Apache and Stan rode away, and the other visitors dispersed. Corns and Jimmy were left at the Long ranch, where they would remain the night.

**K**ATE, wife of Ding, wanted to talk with Jimmy. So with his uncle's banjo-mandolin, Jimmy went

in to the bed chamber of the worried woman.

Outside the half-open door, Luce Kemble and her brother tiptoed back and forth, occasionally whispering to the doctor. The latter, assured of excellent payment for his time, was perfectly willing to stay here at the ranch. Rosewell did not need him, as far as he knew.

**B**UT this time with Ding's wife was a tactful masterpiece on Jimmy's part. He told her a little about his uncle, assuring the woman that the assumption of another identity had been just because of some threatening business trouble. It would all come out clean in the wash. There was no finer man than her husband. . . .

Then, smiling as if he had no worries, Jimmy sang a few of the old ballads he remembered Ding had loved. The woman listened in wrapt attention, tears glistening in her eyes.

Outside the door Corns poked his sister in the ribs. "I tell you, the kid's good!" he whispered. Luce just smiled.

"Oh, you are so like him!" said Kate with a deep breath. She did not know it, but she could not have said anything that would have pleased the rather wistful Jimmy anywhere near as much.

"Come here and kiss me, and then I'll let you go to bed. I know you're tired. . . ."

When Jimmy closed the door behind him he saw Corns and Luce looking at him peculiarly.

"You got a real voice—guinea pig!" said Corns.

"Wha-at did you call him?" This from the startled girl. She looked quite indignant.

But Jimmy grinned quietly and shook his head. "That wasn't me," he said ungrammatically. "That was Ding Lassiter singing."

Jimmy had too much to think of, for easy sleep. He wrestled with the problems for an hour, and then smiled up into the darkness when a girl's face appeared before his mind. Luce! Corns was a darned fool and unappreciative; but of course a brother always would be blind.

Jimmy took a deep breath, and got out of bed. He walked to the open window, smelling the cool fragrance from the valley grass.

Something small and fiery looped across his vision. A cigarette! Jimmy frowned. Corns and the others had retired. Who else was abroad at this hour?

Drawing back, he dressed hurriedly, got his gun, and slipped out of the window. It was not totally dark, but there was no moon. He still could see the smoldering cigarette, but there was no sign at first of anyone up and around.

Then from another chamber on the ground floor, a girl who lay as sleepless as Jimmy himself, suddenly screamed aloud! There was the bulk of a strange man climbing in her bedroom window! She screamed again, then turned to bury her head in the pillow. Even a girl with as good nerves as Luce Kemble was frightened at this.

Jimmy was just around the jutting corner. He swung about and ran headlong, horror congealing his blood. He guessed this was the voice of Luce. Now, as he turned the corner, he glimpsed the legs of a man projecting from the low window!

**S**HOVING the gun in his belt, he pounced upon those booted legs jerking backward with every ounce of his strength!

"*Valgame Dios!*" sounded a snarled imprecation.

The intruder came out of the window, all right, twisting as he bumped to the bare ground, and grappling

with Jimmy. Then he kicked, and was lucky enough to break Jimmy's hold for a second.

He drew a knife from a spine sheath, slashing murderously as Jimmy threw his legs, striving for a neck-lock. The keen steel sliced through Jimmy's trousers, biting into the flesh of his thigh in a long, burning gash.

**A** CRY came from Jimmy. The steel made him feel suddenly sick. But then he dove again at the man, missed as the Mexican side-stepped lightly, and managed somehow to get to his feet again as the second knife thrust missed.

Now the boxer in Jimmy came uppermost. Completely forgetting his own revolver, he feinted at the dark shape. It lunged forward to finish him.

He ducked away, then back. His right fist, shot home through a short arc, crunched convincingly against what till then had been a flashing array of white teeth.

With a gurgling sound, the Mexican pitched face forward to the ground. And Jimmy was on top of him in a trice, wrestling away the knife, hammering the fellow into complete insensibility.

Then as Corns, Luce and even Kate came, Jimmy was lifted from his victim. A flashlight shone. Corns took charge. Jimmy was glad. He felt very sick. He swayed on his feet.

"Oh-h, he's hurt," came a cry from Luce. She was too late to catch Jimmy as he slumped to the ground.

\* \* \*

It had been the sensation of the knife, slicing through flesh, which had brought on that faint. Jimmy was not badly hurt. As soon as the doctor bound up the wound, in which he took twelve stitches, Jimmy was able to walk—a trifle stiffly, of course.

He was sheepish about his momentary weakness, but none of the others seemed to think it strange at all. Particularly, a young woman with very round hazel eyes, seemed to make a business of patting him reassuringly—quite as if he had been a pet guinea pig, as Corns remarked with refreshing sarcasm. That brought Luce Kemble to herself, and she blushed.

"I don't care! I like him! You're one hell of a friend to call him a name like that!" she said privately and with emphasis, to her beloved big brother.

Corns merely arched his eyebrows and went away whistling. Worse things could happen to his sister than getting a man like Jimmy Lasiter. And Corns Kemble had the magnificent good sense to pretend complete obtuseness.

Summoned from the neighboring ranch just a couple of hours after he had got sound asleep, Apache Tupper was in no mood for trifling when he came to see the prisoner. A couple of snorts of whisky made the old man wide awake, though.

As soon as he heard of the fight and capture, and took a look at the bound, defiant prisoner—who had refused to say anything about his purpose in coming—Apache's face grew grim.

"Tie him on a mule," he bade. "Him an' me'll take a leetle pasear out together. I got a lot of perlite questions to ask this hyar coyote. Aw, I know him—nemmind introductions. He hangs 'round with Bildad Claeys, in Ajo. I'm betting he knows a lot we'd like to know. An' ef he does—"

**B**ECAUSE of that linking up with the name, Corns and Jimmy had seen on the telegram sent from the train, they let Apache Tupper have his way. The bound prisoner was

loaded on a mule and taken away in the darkness.

Even Corns shook his head and shivered a little at thought of what the old Indian fighter would do if necessary. But in this moment of extremity none of them could afford to be too particular.

It was perhaps half an hour later, when faint but distinct to their ears, came a long-drawn howl of anguish.

Enrico Belden, the Mexican spy from Ajo, apparently was not enjoying the privilege of answering the "perlite questions" put by Apache Tupper. . .

## CHAPTER XI

### Attack

**S**TAN KEMBLE, Harkins and three other men had assembled at the Long ranch, before Apache put in an appearance. He came then from the direction of the creek, nodding curtly to Corns, Jimmy and the others.

"Yuh had the right dope, Lassiter," he said. "That skunk spilled considerable. A fella with a scar-face has a place some'ers in them mountains." He gestured in the general direction of the Belted Range.

"Enrico hadn't never been there hisself—an' I reckon he won't go now! But Stan, you an' Harkins an' these men ride to Ajo. Take Bildad Claeyes a prisoner, 'cause he knows all about it. Yuh may have a fight on yore hands, as Bildad keeps two—three killers around most of the time.

"Get him anyway, an' bring him out to thet place we marked on the map. He ought to tell yuh plenty on the way."

"All right, Tupper," nodded Stan Kemble thoughtfully. "It isn't a job for the sheriff?"

"Naw!" disgustedly. "Jest us. Me'n Lassiter an' Corns 'll hustle

along, an' see what we can find. I got a strong hunch there's no time to be lost."

"Well, you're the chief. What'd you do with the Mex?"

Apache glared at the questioner.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Outside all this funny business of helpin' a crook capture an' mebbe murder his pardners, Enrico made a mistake. Yeah, a plumb bad mistake!

"He clumb in the windy of a pretty gal, round about midnight. I'm tellin' yuh that jest *ain't done* by Mexes or anybody else, in *this* man's state of Nevada!"

And with that cryptic utterance, blood-chilling enough if one did not remember the stern code by which men like Apache lived and died, he led the way to Corns and Jimmy, who followed him on their mules. All the outfit they carried, traveling light, was on the back of a single led pack-mule.

There was no further speech until they were clear of the pass, and out on the flat of the desert. Many miles to southward the first foothills of the Belted Range began; and toward these Apache Tupper pointed.

"It's in one of them," he said, "where that Frozen Face devil's got yore daddy. Didn't tell yuh I knowed Kerry, did I? Yep. He done me a good turn onct. We'll get him!"

**C**ORNS' black eyes narrowed. "Any good with a rifle, Jimmy?" he asked. "This ahead looks to me like maybe it'd be a fort."

"Oh, fair," said Jimmy soberly, touching the stock of the .30-30 with which he had been provided. In the war he had attained a sharpshooter's badge, but had hoped that the grim business of notching sights on human beings had passed out of his life forever.

Apache had different ideas.

"We ain't goin' blunderin' up



against that place by daylight," he stated positively. "It's a long ways yet, so we're goin' to keep pluggin' along.

"But by-an'-by we'll try a leetle strategy. There's one good thing I learnt long while back. Out on the desert I'm plumb invisible, when I want to be. Learnt that from Big Chief Geronimo, hisself!"

\* \* \*

**A**PACHE TUPPER, of course, had not reckoned with a powerful telescope. But for that matter, Frozen Face Anderson had no idea of friends or enemies approaching him from the north. When he glanced through the long brass telescope it was toward the town of Ajo, whence ought to come a message from Bildad Claeys. So the chances remained even through the forenoon.

Then it was that Apache, keeping his washed-out eyes steadily on that far distant group of hills, suddenly saw a flash of light from one of them.

"Thar!" he cried triumphantly. "Didja see?"

Neither Corns nor Jimmy had noticed. So Apache explained. That flash, part way up a hillside, must have been caused by human agency. Here was where strategy would have to start.

He led the way into a shallow dry wash, and directed his two companions to dismount and stake out the mules. They would be of no more use until all was over. The three ate a sketchy meal without fire.

"You two come, soon's its dark—not afore!" he directed. "Make it to that first hill thar by eight o'clock or so. I'll be some'ers round—an' mebbe I'll know somep'n sides m' last name an' the alphybet!"

"All right," answered Corns. "He knows this kind of work," he said in a lower tone as Jimmy moved impatiently.

So together they watched the old

man, rifle under one arm and six-shooter sagging low at his side, trudge off to southward.

Then was the last chance for Frozen Face, who actually was up on the ledge with his telescope—but frowning as he stared at the blank distance. Funny there was no word from Claeys!

Down close, drawing near the cliff, were the two Indios and the pack burros they brought. After sending the smoke message answer yesterday evening they might have completed the journey that day. But like Indios, having made camp once, it had not occurred to them to break it until well along into the next day.

They would pay for that, Frozen Face said to himself with a snarl. Preoccupied with thoughts of them, he did not sweep the other directions, and therefore missed Apache Tupper. A little later when he did look, the old scout was not to be seen.

Two other men were visible, however! They appeared as moving black dots in the telescope, for oddly enough just their heads showed above the sides of the shallow wash where their guide had left them presumably concealed. But just then Jimmy climbed out, exclaiming over the fact that Tupper was no longer in sight.

And just then Frozen Face had the telescope trained squarely in that direction.

An oath burst from the man's lips. Two strangers! A tall one and a short one! He recalled the relayed message from Grant, the news concerning a guinea pig and a razor-back. . .

Could these two be Jimmy Lassiter and his unknown friend—coming *unaccompanied*? That was almost too good to be true!

**T**HE fact that they stayed right there, was even more suspicious. Frozen Face wearied, and delegated

the dwarf to watch. But there was no alarm.

When shadows of dusk began to fall Frozen Face sent Alicante to care for the wants of the two burros and the single prisoner down in the cavern. For himself he took up the vigil with night glasses.

Corns and Jimmy made the remaining four miles on foot. They saw absolutely nothing to make them fear they had been detected. Coming up to the hills in the vague quarter-light of the early stars, they were worried only by fear they might choose the wrong one of this group of hills, and thereby miss Tupper.

"Shall we call to him?" asked Jimmy, oppressed by the heavy silence, in which there was nothing save the faint whisper of shifting sand grains in a light wind.

"No," said Corns. "Let's skirt this hill. It's got a cliff face on along there. See it against the sky. I'm pretty sure it's right. Anyhow, Apache's running this show."

They came to the abrupt cliff face. From immediately below it was impossible to see the ledge above in the darkness; but ten feet above their heads waited the two Indios who had come with the pack burros. With them was Alicante the Dwarf. And, revolver in hand, there also was Frozen Face Anderson.

*Whish! Whish!*

THE nooses had been dropped silently; the twin noises came as they were snapped tight about the arms and torsos of Jimmy Lassiter and Corns Kemble.

"Look out!" yelled Corns, struggling against the bite of the sash cord, which was jerked, then pulled heavily, throwing him sideways against the cliff.

But no warnings mattered now. Jimmy was in even a worse fix, as both his arms were tightly pinioned, while

Corns freed his left and tried awkwardly to reach his six-shooter. Both youths were yanked from their feet, and drawn upward a short distance against the scratchy face of the cliff. Then they stopped.

"I've got guns trained on you both," came a calm, sneering voice from above. Then a bright searchlight, pointed downward, flashed into sudden brilliance, effectually blinding them.

"Drop your weapons!" commanded the sneering voice. "One wrong move and I'll blow your heads off!"

"Look here!" cried Jimmy, beside himself with helpless fury. What idiots they had been to walk into this trap!

"I'll count three—then shoot," said the man on the ledge. "One—"

*Crack!* A spurt of orange flame came from the desert flat. Apache Tupper had not forgotten his comrades. He had been nearly one hundred yards further along the cliff, though, opposite a place where a fissure gave access to the ledge above and the manway leading down into the caverns.

AT the first alarm he had leaped to his feet and hurried. His great handicap, however, was the powerful searchlight. He had not been able to see the man who spoke; but one of the figures straining on a rope showed clearly enough. He fired, boring one of the Indios straight through the side.

With a screech that subordinate loosed the rope, dropping Jimmy Lassiter, and forthwith diving straight outward to alight on his head. That Indio would not figure further in the trouble.

*Crack!*

This second shot came coincidentally with a snap shot from the revolver of Frozen Face Anderson. The revolver bullet streaked through the

space just vacated by Apache Tupper; while the scout's bullet smashed the searchlight, leaving them again in darkness blacker than before.

Startled, the Indio holding Corns suspended, loosed his hold. Corns, wriggling desperately, managed to free himself and dodge sidewise, as two heavy bodies leaped down.

One was Alicante the Dwarf, and other was the Indio who just had dropped the rope and picked up a long knife, his natural weapon. He slashed as Corns stumbled out of the way.

The latter had no chance to fire. He just had gripped his revolver. Drawing it he swiped at the head of the dark figure, hitting only a glancing blow. Then the Indio crashed into him. The arm with the knife upraised—

Beside Jimmy a heavy body struck the sand. A hairy arm like the terrible machine of bunched sinews belonging to an old man gorilla, clutched at the little man, held. In a second Jimmy found himself fighting for breath against an overpowering enemy, a chunky dwarf whose strength of arm and shoulder was absolutely incredible!

The monstrosity not only embraced crushingly, but its fingers seemed to sink deep into flesh and bone. With a shudder Jimmy actually felt its feet, trying to grab other holds, like an extra pair of hands!

Only a memory of clinches in the ring saved Jimmy from horrible mutilation. Sobbing for breath, he crouched, butted, jammed two short uppercuts to the chin of Alicante. The blows did not even daze the dwarf, but they threw his large head backward.

**T**HEN Jimmy butted again, brought up his knee, and with a wriggling squirm—the first clean ring fighting of that desperate clinch—managed to

break all but one talon-hold on his shoulder.

He dived for his gun, shot at quarters so close the gargoyle countenance of Alicante was lighted by the flash. And shot again as fast as he could press the trigger of his double-action weapon.

With a queer, animal-like whimper the dwarf charged in again, dying on his feet, yet faithful to the last to his instinct for destruction—one almost as vindictive as that of Frozen Face Anderson himself.

His arms no longer would obey his will, however Jimmy did not fire again, but slammed across a left hook. The dwarf tottered and sank to the ground, seeming to shake and quiver there in the darkness like an unwholesome mass of jelly.

At that instant two struggling bodies barged into Jimmy. Corns had managed to grip the wrist of his antagonist, holding the knife away. But he had not succeeded in doing anything to the slippery Indio on his own account.

**T**HE smelly back of the aborigine smashed into Jimmy. He knew this was an enemy. Cutting down vertically with his revolver muzzle in a powerful blow, he struck the Indio on top of the head.

The latter's knees sagged a little. That was enough for Corns. Yanking up his fist, from which he had been forced to drop the pistol, he smashed one blow, two, squarely into the knife-fighter's countenance. Then he wrested away the knife, and with no lost motion, plunged it deep into his antagonist's abdomen.

The horrid scream that sounded told that this corner of the fight was over—though the crux of it all was yet to come.

From above on the ledge came a flash of lurid red light. Out and to the ground arched one of the paper

cylinders of tint powder used for smoke signals. It burned like a warning flare, crimsoning the sand and the bleak walls of belted rock.

With a cry like that of a caged and raging beast, Frozen Face Anderson leaned over, a double-barreled derringer in one hand, and a six-shooter in the other. His first shot with the derringer snipped away cloth and skin on Corns' left shoulder, after touching his hair on its downward course.

Then it was that Apache Tupper fired. Apache had been delayed in reaching this place by the unfamiliarity of the fissure and the steps leading up to the ledge.

But he arrived in time to see the crouching form of Frozen Face silhouetted against the lurid red glare of the burning powder. He fired once, and yelling hoarsely, Frozen Face Anderson leaped upright and fell over the brink of the short cliff.

Almost instantly Jimmy Lassiter was upon him, disarming him, battering away at him with trained fists.

But there was no more battle in this chief of outlaws. The bullet of Apache Tupper had plowed through his right kidney, blowing his liver to fragments inside him.

## CHAPTER XII

*Look Out, Henry Ford!*

THEY had to discover the secret of the caverns for themselves. Frozen Face Rufe Anderson—the man who long ago had been known as Joe Bardeen the stage guard with Cussemout Crandall—was hideous and defiant in dying. Out of his snarls and imprecations at failure they made out enough of the horror that had been his life, however.

It had been he who had exploded the prospect hole of Kerry Lassiter,

near Hartnett. He—and a pack rat which remained unsuspected.

It had been he who abducted Kerry's wife, the mother of Jimmy Lassiter, as the first of his victims. That the woman had killed herself only added fuel to his hatred of the family at whose door he placed the blame for his own disfigurement.

THE meeting out at the Yellow Eye Mine water tank had been sheer chance—one lucky chance, as he saw it, after years of crime which had paid few dividends even of satisfaction. Only the fact that great fortune was coming slowly to him, kept him from beginning his vengeance—as he thought it—upon Kerry Lassiter, his brother, and Jimmy.

He had got around to it at last. Now Kerry was dead; and Frozen Face, writhing in mortal pain, could only curse that he had not taken more sudden means with the others.

Agents of Frozen Face had balked Jimmy's automobile projects. They had presented forged proof of a marriage contracted by Jimmy abroad—and thus had queered him with the girl he once had cared a lot about.

Frozen Face himself had intended to torture and kill Jimmy and his unknown companion, saving this tidbit as a final fillip to the torture being meted out to Kerry and Ding Lassiter.

That was about all. When morning came, bringing Stan Kemble, Harkins, and others with a trembling wretch known as Bildad Claey's from Ajo, the ramifications of the abduction-and-ransom scheme, and the general outlines of the organization captured by Frozen Face, would be known. And the organization would be blasted to the roots.

So, cursing in death agony, Frozen Face died. Apache had left, looking at once for Kerry's body and the living Ding Lassiter. He found Ding,

but had to hurry back to look for keys on the body of Frozen Face.

Then Jimmy and Corns ran down the ladders, and brought lights to the weeping, half-hysterical prisoner. Ding's unkempt hair had white streaks in it now—streaks that had not been there nine days before.

"That's your daddy, Jimmy," he said brokenly, holding the little man by the shoulders as both looked down upon the stiffened figure of Kerry Lassiter.

They buried Kerry right there in the desert, as he would have wished. Then Ding, almost crazy with anxiety about his wife, took a mule and rode away. The rest waited until the coming of the party from Ajo. With this party was the sheriff of Nye, hastily summoned by Stan Kemble after hearing the ghastly story babbled by the prisoner.

Bildad Claeys and three other main cogs in the criminal machine, later paid the extreme penalty of the law—it being considered necessary to keep Bildad alive for the other trials. And thus the crime ring engineered by an insane monster, was broken and ended.

TWO days later there still was hushed silence about the yard of the Long ranch. The men out near the corral talked in whispers. Luce was not in evidence, and neither the doctor nor Ding was in the little group. Stan Kemble, Apache Tupper, Jimmy and Corns waited there, with Harkins and two cowboys who did not seem to be able to settle down to work.

They all were going to have to ride into Ajo to give evidence, but they were delaying their departure as long as possible. The front door of the ranch-house banged open. Out dashed a rather delirious-looking individual—Ding Lassiter.

"Whoopee!" he cried in a carefully subdued yell, waving his arms. "Give us a silent cheer, boys!" he demanded "It's the best ever!"

"A boy, huh?" questioned Apache. "Or mebbe a girl?"

"A-1 Mixture—both! Twins!" yelled Ding, suddenly unable to restrain his exuberance. But inside the house a pale woman only smiled. She was nervously upset no longer.

JIMMY seemed to know Luce Kemble was coming out right then. He met her at the door. She was all in white, but roses of excitement bloomed in her cheeks. He took her arm, and walked around the corner of the house with her, neither speaking.

"I—I wanted to say something, Luce," began Jimmy with a dry, queerly strangulated throat interfering with speech. "I'm g-going to Ajo, then to the mine. I—I reckon I'm rich."

Hell, that wasn't what he meant to say!

"Yes?" she questioned demurely. "I'm glad—for you, Jimmy."

"Then I'm going back east—to Chicago, or maybe Detroit. And I'm going to build an automobile! When I've g-got my factory going, I—I'm coming back in an eight-cylinder—for you!"

There it was. Right then Jimmy knew what an awful fool he was even to imagine! Why, this girl hadn't seen him enough to notice him, hardly!

There was just the quirk of a smile in her hazel eyes as she looked up at him.

"Will that take awful long, Jimmy?" she asked. "I—I don't believe I can wait!" And with that she smiled, lifting her arms with an invitation to him.

THE END.



# The Mounty Killer



*A Gripping Story of a Hunted Outlaw's Bitter Tussle  
with the Canadian Mounted Police*

By WAYNE ROGERS

*Author of "Conquest," "The Eye of Bel-Ra-Anu," etc.*

THE sign hanging behind the bar at the Trading Post Saloon read:

## DEAD OR ALIVE

The Northwest Mounted Police will pay the sum of \$5,000 for information leading to the capture, dead or alive, of George (Sandy) Barker. This culprit, on the night of March 12th, 1928, shot and killed Corporal Donald McIntyre in the Arcadia saloon, Arcadia, Northwestern Territory. Address all communications to . . . .

George (Sandy) Barker threw a drink of raw, burning whisky down his throat.

It was a great joke.

"A stranger around here, pardner?" asked the barkeeper.

Barker nodded.

"First trip to civ'lization in yars," he said.

Still he stared at that handbill that offered a reward for his own capture—*dead or alive!* And although it bore a picture of him, he had no fear. Four years in the tractless wildernesses of the Northwest had left their mark upon him. The sun had eaten his skin to bronze. Privation had furrowed his features beyond recognition. Want and fear had

driven all character from his face.

He was glad that he had finally come to this last outpost of civilization. It had taken courage. For months and months he had pondered the idea. Twice he had crept over the snow wastes, only to lose courage when within sight of the friendly lights of the outpost.

**B**UT now he was glad that, after all, he had come.

He picked up the whisky glass and was about to throw the whisky into him when the door of the saloon swung open. Barker peered into the glass and—paralysis struck him. He stood rigid, glass poised, every muscle in his body held in an agonizing vise. His dim eyes saw nothing but a blur of color in the dirty glass behind the bar.

But that color brought back to him, multiplied a thousand times, all the fears of the past four years.

It was scarlet—the royal scarlet of the Northwest Mounted Police. Barker knew that a Mounty had come into the saloon.

He let the glass drop from his hand and swiftly he reached beneath his coat for his revolver. His hand had just touched the gun when he was stayed by sound of the Mounty in conversation with the barkeeper.

He stood poised, listening, never turning but staring at the blurred image of the hated scarlet in the mirror.

"Stranger hereabouts, Corporal," said the barkeep.

"Yeah." The voice of the Mounty was harsh. "I'm on the trail for a killer named Monayhan—killed a corporal down Manitoba way three weeks ago."

Barker breathed a sigh of relief. Again he realized that many years had passed—that his ancient crime was not a matter of the moment.

He was aware that the eyes of the

Mounty and the barkeeper were upon him. He felt relieved as the door swung behind him, and he faced the icy blasts that swept down from the Northland.

Quickly Barker ran across the ground to where he had hidden his rifle. He ran down a grade to a clump of trees, grabbed the weapon, and then continued to run until he was on the trail that led to the Pass.

"I guess," he said bitterly to himself, "that civ'lization ain't for me. I just can't stomach the sight of that uniform."

Wearily he started the long miles that led to the wilderness. Within half an hour he was in the hills and an hour's more steady climbing around a winding, tortuous path brought him to the trail proper. There he paused for rest and turned and looked down at the white wastes that he had just traversed.

**P**LAINLY visible, even to his dimmed eyes, against the snow was a spot of color. And the color was the hated scarlet!

Barker's lips twisted into a snarl of hate and his hand went instinctively toward his rifle, resting at his side. He lifted the gun, rested it in the crook of his hand, and tentatively sighted toward the distant speck. Then he lowered it again. The Mounted Policeman was too far away.

Quickly Barker arose, slung the gun over his shoulder and hit the trail.

Strangely, there was no panic in his mind. He realized that for years he had been planning for such an emergency as this. What he had expected had happened. He had been recognized. The Mounty was on his trail.

Barker's slouching walk did not quicken. It was the easy movement of the man who knew the North-

land—a pace which absorbed the miles in amazing fashion.

Caribou Pass lay only a few miles ahead. Snow lay in a thick mantle upon the mountains around it at all seasons.

Beyond the pass lay the wilderness. Barker felt that he could make it. Once he was across, he would be safe in the uncharted wastes. He felt that he would come there that night. As for the policeman, when dusk came—he laughed. He could toast his bread in hell!

Halfway to the top, Barker paused. The pathway at that spot was a mere dark tunnel between overhanging cliffs. He knew the spot well. He fell to work, using all his woodsman's skill, in setting a trap that he had previously prepared for such an emergency.

It took him more than ten minutes to extend a wire noose to a proper position so that the man behind him would stumble into it.

The wire noose was cleverly attached overhead to a spring-pole, a strong sapling which Barker, months before had bent by almost superhuman effort until he had it fastened nearly horizontal.

A SLIGHT push against the wire noose, the trap would spring and the noose hurtle into the air. Barker had hopes that it would carry the neck of the Mounted Policeman.

Satisfied with his work, Barker trudged ahead up the winding path until he came to a cliff, overlooking his trap. He sat down, quietly lit his pipe and waited for his victim.

It was a half-hour later when the scarlet-jacketed one swung up the path below and pushed forward into the darkened ravine.

Barker waited breathlessly. Suddenly there was a snap as the trap sprang, and the sapling jerked violently erect. Barker watched in fas-

cination as a scarlet streak of color jerked skyward.

He had caught the Mounty.

BUT his elation suddenly left him as he realized that the Mounty was caught by the left arm, and he hung dangling—twenty feet from the ground.

The policeman had not met instant death. But still, Barker realized, his position was unenviable. His left arm, caught in the noose, was entirely helpless. Vainly, he was trying with his other arm to loosen the tight-clinging noose. There was an expression of terror on his face.

Barker realized that the scarlet-clad one was probably doomed to dangle there by one arm, helpless—doomed to die a slow, lingering death.

Barker watched, motionless, as the Mounty pawed at the air and cried out, helplessly, for aid. But suddenly the cries stopped. His weaving right hand grasped a near-by sapling and, hooking his feet into the crotch of a third, he had swiftly pulled his body upwards.

It was an almost inhuman feat. But the Mounted Policeman succeeded. He pulled himself steadily upwards, after the manner of a man on a horizontal bar. He was standing with his feet in the crotch of the tree. Slowly he began to work his trapped arm free of the noose.

Barker quickly raised his rifle, took aim. But then he put it down again.

"Later," he murmured. "If it must be an ambush—later—in the Pass."

He swung around and began the weary trek upward. If the Mounty were a fool, and should continue to follow, he must meet his certain doom. Maybe he would take warning from that trap. Maybe he would realize that the cards were stacked against him—that he must die.

An hour later, chancing to look back from another vantage point, Barker discovered him again. The killer stared in amazement, almost in superstitious terror. It seemed unbelievable that the other would follow—that he would escape from that noose and still carry on.

Barker realized that the scarlet-clad one would haunt him until one or the other would meet death.

With a curse on his lips, he turned and continued the climb. He was up in the deep snow now, and, under the rays of the sun, the snow melted constantly, making the earth and the rocks a constant slippery hazard.

Barker constantly stumbled and fell. He tore the flesh from his limbs. At times he felt an urge to run in panic-stricken flight. But he remembered that he must hold himself, that he held the upper hand in this game of life and death—that he would soon be able to rid himself of the scarlet curse behind.

**N**OW and again the trail skirted cliffs, which fell away to dizzy distances. A slip here would have meant death. Then he was almost in the pass.

Ahead of him was a fairly flat, partially-wooded upland plateau, mostly swept bare of snow by wind and sun. A fair-sized mountain torrent poured across the way, plunged down the slopes beyond.

Barker halted and turned behind a tangle of scrubby trees beside the plunging creek. It was not his code to give the other man a chance. He was able, with his eyes, to sweep the plateau to right and left. To keep on the trail toward the Pass at all, the Mounty had to come this way, must pass under the sights of his gun.

Presently he saw his victim approaching. He was striving to go warily, to keep to cover, to judge if

his enemy should be hiding ahead. Barker, with a grim grin, waited until his victim was less than a hundred yards distance.

**T**HEN, as calmly as if he were shooting a grouse, he pressed the trigger. The sound of the shot was practically smothered by the roaring torrent beside him. He doubted if his victim could have heard the shot, even if he had missed.

But he didn't miss.

Leisurely, his lips set in a grin, Barker came out from behind the tree, walked up the trail and stood over the body of the fallen Mounty. The scarlet-clad policeman lay face downwards in a little pool of his own blood.

Barker laughed, gazed back down the trail.

Then suddenly his body stiffened.

Down the trail, over a mile away, he saw the Scarlet Red of the North-West Mounted Police. Barker's lips curled in a snarl—the snarl of an animal. His rifle went up; then it fell to his side.

His eyes narrowed; he wet his lips. An idea was forming in his mind. For a second he studied the red moving form coming down the trail. The man moved slowly and stealth-like.

"Had a partner with him," Barker growled to himself. "Cocky he was because he figured he had help. Now it will be two Mounties instead of one—the simple fools."

Barker moved quickly. He went back to the dead man lying on his face, turned him over and took the red coat from the lifeless body and laid it aside. A few moments later he had the uniform stripped off the dead man.

The more he thought about his daring plan, the more it pleased his reckless mind. He would pose as a Mounty. He would play with that

boob in red that had been sent after him, play with him like a cat played with a mouse, and then at his pleasure kill the man and do it safely and without any danger.

His nervous fingers tore the clothes from his body. Safety! That word raced through his mind. For four years he had hidden out from the law, a hunted man. This uniform would give him his golden chance to get out of the country.

Barker was smart enough to pose as a Mounty for a little while. There would be questions, embarrassing ones, but he could handle them. Quickly he changed into the red-coated uniform. It fitted him perfectly. He had noticed the size of the dead man before he had permitted the plan to flash through his mind.

The question of disposing of the body came next. The red-coated Mounty was still far away. Barker was working behind a rock where he couldn't be seen.

He picked the body up and rolled him down the little hill. At the bottom of the ravine he piled rocks over the body until no sign of the dead man could be seen.

**T**HEN Sandy Barker, dressed in the uniform of the organization he hated so much, walked back up the trail and smiled, his cruel face distorted with the smile.

"Sandy Barker a Mounty," he laughed to himself.

Then he turned quickly and went the opposite direction from the approaching man. He would meet up with him later. His plan had to be done carefully. It was still daylight. It would be easier to play with the Mounty when darkness fell.

He pushed on down the trail rapidly, keeping out of sight.

Dusk came a half hour later. Barker searched for a sheltered spot,

found it, and made a camp for the night.

He built a fire, taking care that it could be seen from afar, and then threw some slices of bacon in his skillet and sat down to watch it fry.

Ten minutes later the man following him came in sight.

He was a tall, full-faced man, with powerful shoulders and a face that was cold and without expression.

**B**ARKER winced a little at the sight of the man.

The man stood in the shadow of the fire. His face remained cold and hard.

Barker stood up. He wet his lips.

"Hull-lo," he said. "I'm Corporal Cargill, special officer, Company A, Winnipeg. Been out here looking for my man and not having any luck."

The tall man smiled in a friendly way. Barker felt better.

"I'm Sergeant Snyder from the Wakita Post," the man announced. "Trailed my man up to ten miles back and then lost him."

"Tough luck," Barker said quietly. "A little tea?"

Sergeant Snyder sat down by the fire and threw his gun aside. No sign of any suspicion came to his face. Barker sat down and poured some tea and studied Sergeant Snyder closely.

It all seemed too easy for him. The man didn't suspect.

"A killer murdered one of our men up at the Post last month," Sergeant Snyder said. "A man named Mon-ayhan did the job, a bad worker."

"Killed a Mounty?" Barker asked as he poured the tea. "Funny my man did the same thing."

Sergeant Snyder nodded. The smile left his face.

Barker's hand rested near his gun. His eyes watched every move of Sergeant Snyder.

*(Continued on page 118)*



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A smile played around his lips. The joke amused him.

"My man killed a Mounty four years ago in the Arcadia Saloon," he announced boldly. "A gambler named Barker, Sandy Barker. Ever hear of him?"

Sergeant Snyder nodded slowly. "Seems that I have," he said. "Barker went north, up in the snow and died there."

Barker got serious and shook his head violently.

"No, he never died, that killer," he answered. "I was sent out here to get him, and I'm on his trail."

Talking to a sergeant of the Mounted Police, talking to him about his own crime and enjoying it! This amused Sandy Barker. His old overwhelming fear of the Red Coat of the Mounted Police fled. He was confident, cocky and sure.

There wasn't a chance in a thousand that Sergeant Snyder would recognize him in the darkness; but if he did, it wouldn't matter. Barker's hand was on his gun, and he could pump lead into the Sergeant before he moved. It was a great joke, the whole thing, and a great moment in his life.

One Mounty lay dead under the rocks. The other was at his side, as good as dead.

"I remember your man now," Sergeant Snyder said. "They called him the Mounty Killer. I remember him now."

"Yeah—the Mounty Killer," Barker grinned as he repeated that name.

He was a Mounty Killer now. He had killed two, and in a little while it would be three.

**S**ILENTLY he and Sergeant Snyder ate the bacon and drank more tea. The great silence of the North had settled over everything.

Barker's eyes wandered up the

trail that led to the great Caribou pass. Beyond it lay civilization—and freedom. Far to the North lay the wilderness Barker had known those four terrible years.

The meal was finished.

Barker kicked the fire out and unrolled his blanket. Sergeant Snyder stood up and stretched and looked around slowly.

His eyes fell on Barker. Barker felt something of the old terror grip him.

"I'll take the lower trail in the morning," he said. "I got a hunch my man is going that way."

These words chased all fear from Barker's mind, but that one little twitch of terror caused him to bite his lip and decide that no time would be lost in killing this second Mounty.

Sergeant Snyder unrolled his blanket and lay down, drew the blanket up over his head, twisted his body a little, and then lay still.

Sandy Barker lay down and pulled his blanket up to his face, but didn't cover it. Neither was his blanket wrapped tightly around his body. His feet were loose; so were his fingers. His hand rested on his revolver.

Not three feet from him lay the man he was to murder.

The man lay still and helpless.

**B**ARKER watched him. He didn't know why he hesitated to kill his victim. One shot and his way to freedom would be complete.

But he didn't fire the shot.

Something gripped him and made him feel helpless and numb. Perhaps, the long waiting in the grim, terrifying wilderness, waiting for this moment made his body and mind numb when the chance came. Killing the other Mounty had been different. There had been a fight,

plenty of action to stir his body and brain.

How different this was! For many moments Barker lay still and looked at the form wrapped up in the blanket. Sergeant Snyder moved. Barker's hand went to his gun. Snyder lay still again and his body relaxed.

Barker's hand came out from under the blanket. His aim had to be perfect. A miss would mean death.

His hand was trembling. He put the gun down and tried to collect his nerves. After a while he was calm and collected.

The time had come.

He raised his body on his left elbow. Sergeant Snyder's body was less than three feet from him.

He raised his body a little higher, and the barrel of his gun moved close to the sleeping Mounty.

His finger started to press the trigger.

His gun roared.

**S**ANDY BARKER had no time to realize fully just what happened in the next moment. The body under the blanket came through the air, hit him with a terrific force, and the two men rolled over and over on the white-surfaced ground.

It was a silent, grim struggle of death.

(Continued on page 120)

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Barker knew that he had missed. He knew that freedom, life and everything depended on this one final struggle.

Slowly and relentlessly Sergeant Snyder bore Barker to the ground. His powerful arms went around Barker's body, crushed him until the breath was forced from his lungs.

But Barker struggled on. His right went up and caught Sergeant Snyder on the chin. Snyder's head jerked back. His grip relaxed a little and with one final, supreme effort Barker struggled out of the grip and jumped to his feet.

Snyder remained on his knees for a second; then his body shot up and his right caught Barker in the stomach.

The killer sank to the ground with a groan.

He knew the struggle was over. He waited on the ground for the shot that would end his life.

But it didn't come. Sergeant Snyder stood over him, his big body tense and ready for action.

Sergeant Snyder laughed coldly and reached down and pulled the helpless man up. Handcuffs clicked on his wrists.

"Mounty Killer?" Snyder laughed. "And wearing Corporal Dinkin's uniform—"

Barker was weak but he managed to gasp. "Corporal Dinkin? Who is he?"

"Killed down Manitoba way three weeks ago."

"Down Manitoba way," Barker repeated helplessly.

HE remembered the conversation of the Mounty in the saloon. He was out looking for that man.

"Dinkin was a buddy of mine," Snyder went on. "I recognized his uniform the minute I saw you, but I wanted to see what your game

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was. You're not the man that killed Dinkin. Monayhan was the man."

A ray of hope came to Barker's numbed brain.

"I didn't kill Dinkin," he stammered. "I ain't the man you're looking for."

"No, not for that murder," Snyder laughed. "Where did you get that uniform?"

Barker told everything. There was no use holding back. The sickening realization came over him slowly that the man he had killed as a Mounty in the pass was a murderer—a fugitive from justice.

And he lied to the best of his ability, trying to save himself.

"He—he tried to kill me," he pleaded. "I had to do it, and I was afraid when I killed him; so I took this uniform to escape. I didn't know he was a murderer—"

"There's a big reward for his death," Snyder said.

"His body is under the rocks," Barker suggested quickly.

"Yeah?" Snyder laughed. "We'll find his body. And we don't need your help, Sandy Barker."

Barker felt the darkness of the night whirl around. His brain got beyond control. He heard Snyder saying in a voice that seemed far, far away: "It took me a long time to place you, Barker. It's been a long time since I have seen you, and those four years have changed you—"

His words died away in Barker's ears. Then Barker heard them again.

"So you tried to make a break from the wilderness," Snyder said. "Got afraid of a Red Coat and started to shoot. We'd figured you dead, and you could have made your break—if you could have resisted the temptation of killing a Mounty. But this time it wasn't a Mounty—but a fellow murderer."

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# THE GLOBE TROTTER



**C**OME, ye, gather 'round the hearthstones. That was a swell fiction feast, wasn't it?—this Christmas issue. And with the New Year a resolution that will prove a positive fact—to make your favorite magazine the greatest of its kind in magazinedom.

And are we going about it the right way? Just listen to what we plan to give you in the big first-of-the-year number. And believe me—the number'll be a grand one. Packed full of surprises. Adventures? Certainly! And it'll take you all over the world, too. With great writers as your guides.

It is appropriate that we start the new year with the novel you've all been waiting impatiently for—a sequel to **KWA OF THE JUNGLE**. Since we published that great novel we have been literally flooded with letters that are wildly enthusiastic and demand another KWA story.

Therefore, another great jungle novel by Paul Regard—this time **KWA AND THE APE PEOPLE**. It's a complete book-length novel of Africa today, but of life as it was lived a million years ago, with all the fears, superstitions, magic and glamor of the past.

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And among these few is Paul Regard, creator of KWA—already becoming one of the favorite characters in American adventure fiction.

Then there'll be the real big fiction treat of the year—served to you in three generous installments—the answer to thousands of requests for a pseudo-scientific story. A most interesting letter on the subject was received from Mr. Julius Schwartz, managing editor of **THE TIME TRAVELER**, a magazine devoted to science-fiction fans. He says in part:

I happened to pick up a copy of your September issue recently. In your department, "The Globe Trotter," I notice that you ask your readers if they favor a certain type of fiction—the pseudo-scientific.

I'm almost certain that a majority of your readers would enthusiastically greet such a type of fiction in your periodical. Pseudo-scientific fiction is, without doubt, the most thrilling, breath-taking, and "different" fiction that is being written today. What is more exciting than a trip through unknown space, to the moon, even to Mars, fighting weird and uncanny monstrosities that may inhabit the solar system? What is more entrancing than a story of our earth in the far distant future, or a story that has for its locale the center of the earth, the fourth dimension, or the "lost" Atlantis? What is more enticing than the story of a super-scientific genius that attempts to rule the earth with unheard-of means of scientific warfare?

It is only fair to yourself that you give pseudo-scientification a try. And if you do publish one, try to have the story by a famous author of this type of fiction. Any story by one of these would do: Arthur J. Burks, Victor Rousseau, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Otis Adelbert Kline, A. Merritt, Charles Willard Diffin, R. F. Starzl, Edmond Hamilton, Sewell Peaslee Wright, and a host of others.

*(Continued on page 126)*

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(Continued on page 128)

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We like that next issue—and wish you'd all drop us a line telling us what you think. Meanwhile, don't fail to let us know what you think of this number.

And a very Happy New Year, adventurers. —J. S. WILLIAMS.

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Get the real inside story on many famous scandals—this book teems with startling facts never before divulged! Fascinating, shocking reading! For the low-down on feminine racketeers, read—

## "GIRL RACKETS"

By Virginia Hudson Brightman

This Book Includes an Up-to-Date Dictionary of Broadway Slang Used by Girl Racketeers.

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