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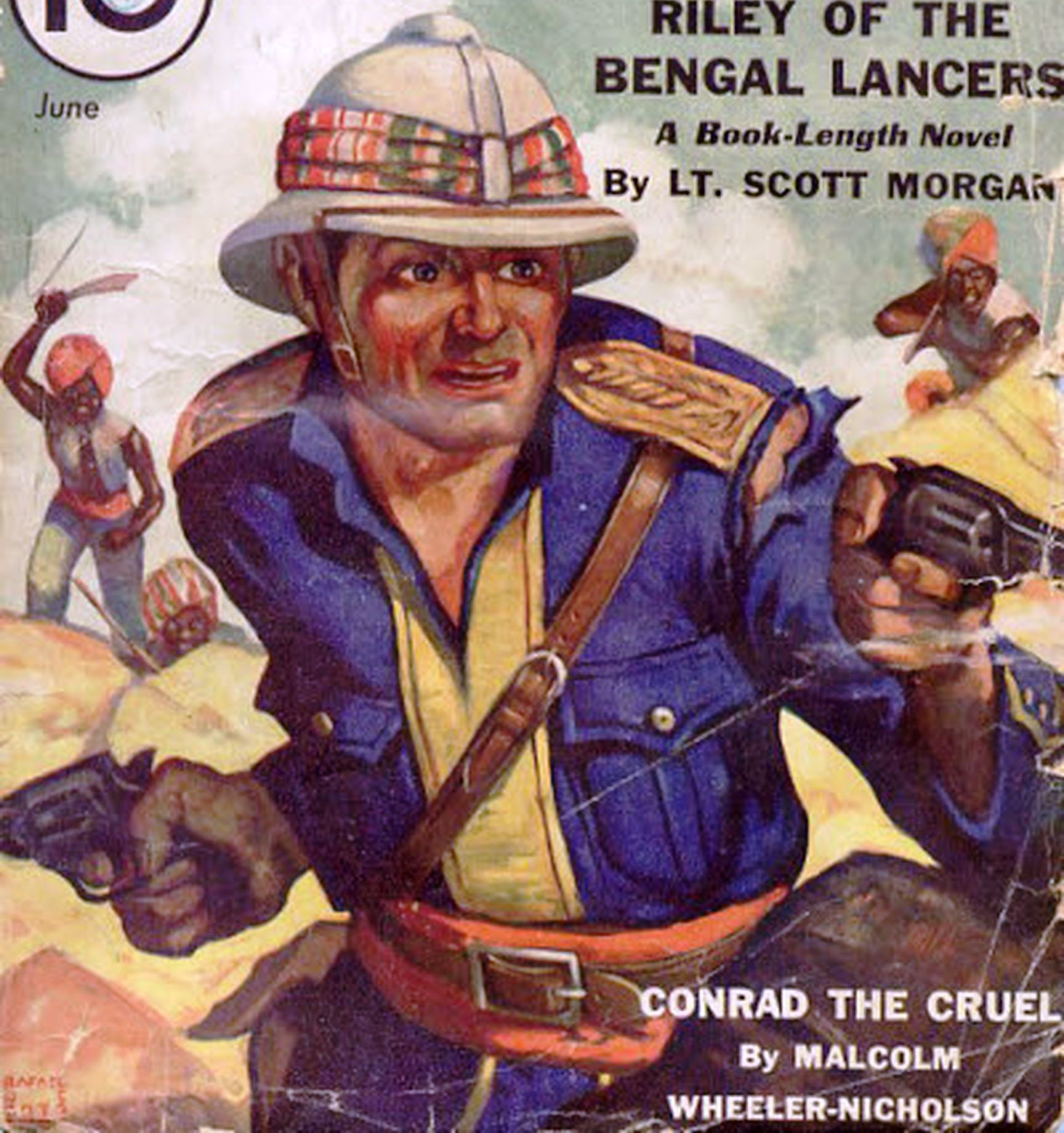
June

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By LT. SCOTT MORGAN



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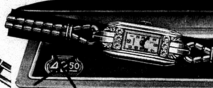
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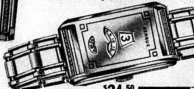


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Vol. VI, No. 1

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

June, 1933

COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

- RILEY OF THE BENGAL LANCERS.....Lieut. Scott Morgan 8
*A Thrill-Packed Novel of Native Fighting Men in Wild Charges,
With Plunging Steeds and Zipping Bullets*

COMPLETE NOVELETTE

- CONRAD THE CRUEL.....Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson 43
*Colorful, Breathless Adventure and Malicious Treachery in
the Glamorous Era of the Crusades*

THRILLING SHORT STORIES

- WHILE CHAPEL BURNED.....Arthur J. Burks 60
A Boxing Match That Had To Be won—in a Hurry!
THE COILED RAJA.....Perley Poore Sheehan 71
It Could Have Happened Only in India!
THE MAFFIA DOOM.....Rex Sherrick 83
An American's Peril in Feud-Torn Sicily
THE YELLOW CAT.....Jack D'Arcy 87
The Light-Hearted Adventures of a Resourceful Refugee
STOLEN BATTLESHIPS.....Allan K. Echols 111
A Startling Pseudo-Scientific Fiction Story

THREE-PART SERIAL

- THE PROWLING CREATURE [Part III].....Capt. Kerry McRoberts 98
*Conclude This Weird and Exciting Serial of Breathless
Adventure on an English Animal Farm*

THRILLING FEATURES

- FAMOUS SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE.....Illustration 58
Alexander the Great, Gen. G. B. Crittenden and Others
THE GLOBE TROTTER.....A Department 126
Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet

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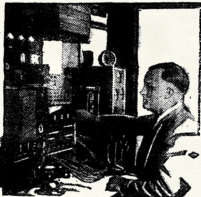
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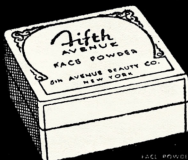
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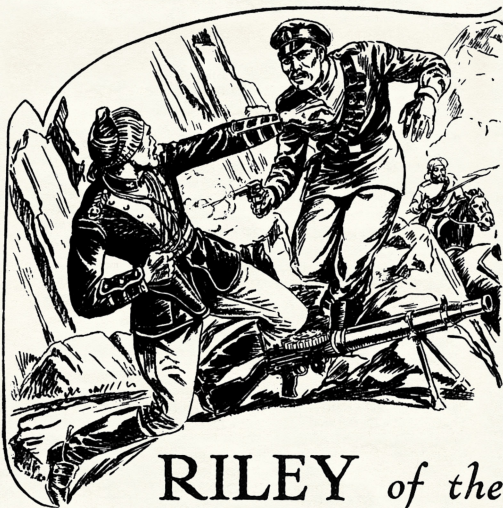
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RILEY of the

CHAPTER I

Borrowing Trouble

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Author of "Along the Border,"

CAPTAIN RILEY of the Bengal Lancers lounged easily against the table and calmly flicked the ashes from the tip of his cigarette.

But, despite his casual manner, there was a stubborn set to his determined jaw, and his voice was dangerously cool when he spoke.

"We are hardly well enough acquainted," he drawled, "to allow me the privilege of calling you—a liar. But I *did* hear a woman crying in

that room which you have just left."

The tall, swarthy individual to whom the remark had been addressed, glared at the indolent, red-haired officer who blocked his path. Fierce black eyes bored into bold ones of remarkable blue. The dark visage scowled.

"I told you—you are mistaken," he grated.

"Not when a woman is in question," replied Riley, with an irritat-

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"Tiger Men," etc.

ing smile. "My friend, I advise you to learn the wisdom of the gurus. Permit me to quote from the Holy Scriptures: 'A lie, when it is un-called for, is a double-edged sword.' There is a white girl in that room, and she is crying. We heard her. We thought, my friend and I—" he indicated the uniformed figure at the table beside him—"we thought that perhaps we could be of some assist-ance."

Riley's voice was too suave, too polite. There was a biting lash to his honied words and glinting devils of anger darted from his eyes. The other, however, refused to back water. He appraised Riley, coolly, from head to foot, then his lips curled in scorn.

"I fling the lesson back in your teeth, sir," he said insolently. "Surely the excellent captain also knows the proverb that 'he who borrows trouble shall receive more than he can re-pay.'"

Riley smiled and bowed. "The point is well taken, sir. But tem-

Charges, With Plunging Steeds and Zipping Bullets!

peramentally, trouble is meat and drink to me. I die without it."

The swarthy man looked at him for a long moment without answering. His eyes narrowed to venomous slits. "Did you ever stop to consider that some day you might die of it, my friend? I advise you not to interfere with me or with any of my doings!"

"Ah, you warn!"

Riley bowed ironically, reached inside his tunic and extracted a card. He presented it to the other with a flourish.

"Captain Francis X. Riley, 17th Cavalry, Bengal Lancers, at your service."

THE dark-visaged man snapped himself erect to sharp military attention.

"Honored! Alexis Petroff will not forget the name or the captain. We shall meet again."

Though they had met and spoken but a scant two minutes, a burning animosity already existed between the men. There in the cloistered interior of the tavern run by that Prince of Thieves, Jamadar Hazrat Gul, they faced each other, arrogant and proud.

An electric tension strained the silence of the room; a silence broken only by the raucous buzz of a fly as it battered its wings against the *jalousie* that hung at the window and the faint swish of a *punkah* that essayed to dissipate the enervating heat of Bannu. Then the two men bowed stiffly to each other.

With a sharp click of his heels, Petroff turned and marched for the door. Riley gazed after his retreating back till it was lost in the bustle of the inn's courtyard. Then he seated himself once more beside his companion in arms.

"Nice fellow," he said easily.

"Nice like a snake," answered

Lieutenant Jeffery Moore. He scowled thoughtfully at the tall frosted glass before him. "You've made yourself an enemy who won't forget."

"An enemy," mused Riley. "Do you know, Jeff, I love them almost as well as my friends. They make life interesting, Jeff. If it weren't for a few enemies, a few raids, and a little blood-letting, this country would get the best of us."

MOORE shook his head sadly as he surveyed his companion. The sunlight sifting through the *jalousie* glinted on a thatch of flaming red hair. Riley's large and aggressive nose, now buried in a tinkling glass, was set above a wide and humorous mouth.

Temperamentally, he was endowed with all the volatile qualities of his Irish ancestors. He loved a fight almost as well as a friend, and next to those a bottle of good Irish whiskey stood high in his estimation.

Moore surveyed his rugged, fighting face and shook his head again.

"The Scriptures say something about loving one's enemies, I'll admit," he stated, "but they say nothing about trusting them. Beware the Russian!"

Riley grinned broadly and with an airy gesture waved the counsel aside. For the next few minutes they discussed the Russian in animated tones, speculated vainly on the identity of the white girl and the reason for her crying.

Jamadar Hazrat Gul replenished their glasses, and as he was leaving, Riley flung a rupee at him.

"Yes, *Hazoor*?"

"The Russian, Jamadar—and the girl. Why does she cry?"

Jamadar Hazrat Gul shrugged expressive shoulders. "Why ask a low-caste Indian to explain why a white girl cries?" he replied evasively.

"Where are they bound for?"

"Peshawar and beyond that?"

"And from where do they come?"

Jamadar tried to hide the smirk on his face. "*Hazoor*, it is not fitting that an inn-keeper know too much about the comings and goings of his guests. The Russian has honored my house several times in the past six months. He pays well, and I see nothing and hear nothing."

"And does he always bring the woman with him?" persisted Riley.

"And does she always cry?" put in Moore.

"A woman travels with him—yes," replied Jamadar with an oily smile. "Only Allah knows whether it is the same one. Even now my boys are preparing the *tonga*. The Russian sahib leaves in a few minutes."

FURTHER conversation was made impossible by a din and commotion in the courtyard. Jamadar Hazrat Gul shuffled over to the door, looked out, and an evil curse rolled off his lips. Riley and Moore pushed back their chairs and followed after him.

A sudden wave of hot color mantled Riley's cheeks. The breath whistled sharply from his nostrils, and his teeth clicked together, accenting the hard outline of his jaw.

There, in the center of the courtyard, surrounded by a group of sullen Afghans stood the Russian, Petroff. He was holding a racy-looking Kathiawari mare by the halter, while he beat her unmercifully across her velvety muzzle with a heavy leather quirt.

The mare reared and plunged. Her eyes rolled back wildly in her head. Her dainty forelegs struck out viciously in a mad attempt to strike down her tormentor. But the more she struggled, the heavier became the hand on the stinging lash.

Riley stiffened. "A man who would

beat a horse like that would beat a woman," he spat out.

Moore laid a restraining hand on his arm, but Riley shook it off impatiently. The lazy inertia of a few minutes before was gone. He leaped through the inn door and in three long strides crossed the courtyard.

Just in time he caught the up-raised arm of Petroff as it was about to descend in another blow. He wrenched it down, yanked the Russian about to face him.

"Stop beating that horse, you swine," he grated.

Riley's face was red with anger. In turn, Petroff's turned a livid white. Riley's fists were clenched into hard knots at his side; the Russian's hands trembled slightly. But not from fear. He was struggling violently to keep control of his voice and nerves. He succeeded at last.

"So you interfere again, eh?"

"Hit that mare again, and I won't borrow trouble—I'll make it!" shot back Riley.

THE horse ceased its frantic plunging. All activity in the courtyard stopped as the two men faced each other. There was a long silence, ominous, pregnant with explosive danger. Twin devils looked out of Petroff's eyes and bored into Riley. Thin flecks of foam collected at the corners of his thin lips.

Suddenly the iron restraint he had willed upon himself was shattered. He tore his whip hand free from Riley's clutch, flung it back and lashed out viciously with the quirt for Riley's head.

Riley ducked, side-stepped and caught the stinging lash across his shoulder. With a bellow, he closed in, rushed Petroff, grabbed the lash and tore it from the Russian's hand. With one convulsive movement of his fingers, he snapped it to bits and flung it from him.

The Russian was on him. They closed in a clinch, fought savagely out of it. Riley bore in again. All his explosive anger of a moment before was dissipated. He was cool, calm, efficient—a perfect fighting machine.

The light of battle was in his eye and a happy smile on his lips as he blocked the Russian's blows. His own were short, swift, traveling no more than six inches. But so perfectly timed were they, so perfectly co-ordinated with the bulging muscles of his back that they carried dynamite.

He feinted with his left, got inside Petroff's guard, and then crossed his right. An iron fist collided with an iron jaw. Petroff staggered back on his heels, clawed wildly at the empty air for support, then his knees buckled, and he pitched headlong to the offal littered dirt of the courtyard.

Back at his table in the tavern, Riley had many tall rickys before he succeeded in drowning the lust for battle within him. Lieutenant Moore, with wisdom beyond his years, called a halt at last.

"For," said he, "if ever a man had the look of a killer in his eye, it was Petroff. And it's a much more simple matter to kill a drunken man than a sober one."

CHAPTER II

The Ambush

THE sun was setting at last behind the Kush Mountains. A half hour after the departure of Petroff, with his handful of armed Sikhs surrounding the closed tonga, Moore convinced Riley that it was time to start for quarters—if they intended to get there in time for mess.

The regiment was quartered some

half mile from the walled city on a grassy upland and after giving their mounts a quart of barley water, they mounted and cantered slowly out of the inn's courtyard.

Few words were said between them as they threaded their way through the narrow streets of Bannu. But each knew of what the other was thinking. Petroff and the crying girl!

WHAT could he be doing with the girl?" said Riley abruptly, when the city's walls were behind him.

Moore had heard that eager note in his companion's voice before, and he knew what it usually portended. Trouble, nine times out of ten. It wasn't anything new for Riley to be overcome by a Quixotic urge and go on a one-man crusade for the rescue of a fair damsel in distress.

So he answered soberly, "His wife, probably."

"No," replied Riley with conviction. "I don't know why, but I'd swear it wasn't his wife. Something in the way she cried. Did you notice, Jeff—a weary, helpless, despairing cry. I wonder—"

The statement was never finished. Riley's horse suddenly snorted, shied to one side on four mincing feet, then reared up. A split second behind this action the staccato crack of a rifle rent the still air.

Something whined venomously past Riley's ear. He clapped spurs to his mount, gave him free rein, urged him off the trail up a short embankment. Moore came charging after him.

The embankment was topped by a lush growth of wild sugar cane. It afforded perfect cover for an ambush. And such being the case, Riley preferred by far to charge into death than to sit supinely and wait for it.

There was no question in his mind

but that the bullet had been intended for him. If it hadn't been for the keen instincts of his horse, it would have drilled him.

Riley patted his charger affectionately and drove her through the rank tangle and came out onto the grassy plateau beyond.

A horse's hooves thundered to his left. Riley wheeled, spurred again and took up the pursuit of the cloud of dust that marked the escape of his attacker.

His revolver was out, and he rode high on his horse's neck, urging her on to greater and even greater speed. The imminent death of a moment before was gone clean from his mind. It was a game now—a match—his horse against the other's.

Little did it matter to him that if his gallant four-legs closed up the intervening distance, the death of himself or his quarry would end the chase.

He whooped joyously, flung a hasty glance back over his shoulder and grinned appreciatively as he saw Moore cut off at right angles to prevent their quarry from taking the trail again.

He was charging now in the dust cloud of his foe. Twin explosions rent the air above the thunder of the horses' hooves. Lead whined over his head. Riley only grinned and saved his fire.

"Keep it up, laddie," he urged in his horse's ears. "The more lead he wastes, the more time he loses."

A HUNDRED yards, eighty, seventy! The earth leaped back into the distance in great lunging strides. The distance between the two riders narrowed but mighty four-legs never once shortened his stride.

A frantic burst of fire from ahead! Riley crouched low in his saddle, leveled his revolver, took careful aim and squeezed the trigger once.

The figure ahead lurched in the saddle, the hand loosened on the reins. The horse faltered, stumbled. Riley's finger constricted on the trigger twice and suddenly the horse was free, its rider a limp and still figure in the dust.

RILEY pulled up his mount, descended. With the revolver thrust before him, ready for instant action, he warily approached the crumpled figure in the dirt. Moore reigned up a moment later and together they rolled the body over.

Death had been sudden, swift and sure. Both men had seen it many times before, in many guises, and it left them unmoved. From his dress and his features, the man was a Sikh. Riley stared for a long moment at the bloodless face, and a faint memory stirred in the back of his brain.

"I've seen our friend before," he said to Moore.

"Yes," replied the other dryly, "an hour ago in the courtyard of Jama-dar's Inn. He's one of the Russian's men."

A low whistle escaped Riley's lips. "Petroff, eh? So he means business. I'm sorry I didn't use the whip on him."

Riley stooped down and went through the Sikh's pockets. In one he found a little chamois bag, heavy and full. He shook it—and it clinked.

"The price of my murder," he grinned up at Moore. Then he turned back to the dead man. "Never mind, old fellow. I'll repay the money to Petroff with interest." He went through the other pockets. There was the usual miscellany of articles, a few prayer papers, an odd coin or two, a cracked mirror.

Riley was about to give up the search when a bit of feminine lace attracted his attention. He pulled it

out from the Sikh's darkest pocket, shook it and held it up for the inspection of Lieutenant Moore.

It was a woman's handkerchief, a fragile bit of flimsy lace. And both Riley and Moore knew that Indian women had no use for such finery.

"Now what in the devil was he doing with this?" demanded Riley of the world in general.

He examined the handkerchief carefully. In one corner twin initials were neatly embroidered. He studied them for a moment.

"C. W." he said to Moore. "That explodes your wife theory, Jeff."

"You mean it belongs to the girl with Petroff?"

"I do that," answered Riley solemnly. He sniffed the delicate perfume emanating from the lace, then stowed it away carefully in his *cum-merbund*. "And I mean more than that," he went on. "Unless I miss my guess our lady fair gave her kerchief to the Sikh on purpose."

"On purpose of what?"

"So it would fall into our hands. It's a cry for help!"

"Rot!" snorted Lieutenant Moore.

RILEY was not perturbed by this blunt statement. He grinned at his companion. "Where's your sentiment, your romance?" he demanded. "C. W.," he mused. "Cathleen, maybe, or Carmen or Carroll—"

"Forget it," broke in Moore. "Before you know it, you'll be saying that Petroff kidnapped her with the intention of selling her into bondage to one of the Mad Mullahs of the Powindahs."

"That's just what I do believe," answered Riley soberly, and there was no smile to his words, no laughter in his voice when he said them.

For the next two days Riley thought of little else but three things: namely, Petroff the Russian,

the mysterious crying girl and the scented handkerchief bearing the initials, C. W.

Amidst the litter and offal of stable inspection, the delicate scent tickled his nostrils. At Company Inspection on parade, the sound of that low and persistent weeping he had heard at the inn drowned out the bellowed orders of his colonel. At night in his cot, beneath a faintly stirring *punkah*, the wind breathed the twin initials over and over again.

Riley became a man of destiny; a man with an obsession. He felt that he had received the call, that the mantle had fallen upon him to rescue the unknown owner of the kerchief from whatever dire peril hung over her.

In his romantic soul he knew that she was fair; knew that she looked to him for succor and salvage. And Riley was Irish, if nothing else. He couldn't resist the call.

By the time a weary dawn had arrived on the third day, he had made up his mind. He would apply to the colonel for leave. Any reason but the real one would do. Then he would go on a little private free-booting expedition of his own. And if he didn't find Petroff and the girl at the end of the trail, he wasn't the man he thought he was.

He rolled out of bed, kicked into slippers, clapped his hands and called: "*Quai Hai*."

As if he had been awaiting the order, Amin Khan, his orderly, appeared.

"A bucket of hot water," said Riley. "*Pushtu!*"

"*Yez, Hazoor*," replied Amin Khan, bowing low.

FIVE minutes later, when Riley had his face nicely lathered and was in the midst of his shave, Amin Khan brought word that the colonel

wished to speak to him at the earliest possible moment.

Riley damned the C. O. and his windy speeches. Undoubtedly the Old Man wanted to detail him on some tour of sanitary inspection within the walls of Bannu. And that meant the leave he was going to ask for would be out.

He shaved the last of his stubble from his chin, had Amin Khan douse a bucket of cold water over him, then dressed swiftly. He selected his blue and gold regimental dress with the chain-mail epaulettes, and with the assistance of his orderly twirled himself into a resplendent *cummerbund* and cocked a blue and gold turban jauntily over one ear.

THE C. O.'s office was in a dilapidated mud hut at the north end of the parade grounds. A fierce looking Indian with a bright red beard stood on guard at the door. He saluted smartly on Riley's approach, stepped aside, and the Irishman stepped into the dim interior.

Colonel Clayborne was deeply immersed in a letter on Riley's entrance. Without looking up, he indicated a chair.

"Sit down, captain," he said tersely.

Riley took the proffered chair. From the crisp tone of the Old Man's voice he knew that something more serious than a sanitary inspection was on foot. He waited with ill-concealed patience for orders.

Colonel Clayborne finished the letter at last and tossed it across the table to Riley.

"Read that."

Riley picked up the missive and read:

Colonel Grayson P. Clayborne,
Commanding 17th Cavalry,
Bannu, Northwest Frontier Province.

Sir:

I wish to inform you of a series of

disturbances that have done much to hinder the progress of our work here in the past week.

The trouble began with the murder of two of my drillers. With that beginning, the men became sullen, restless, insubordinate. I tried to ferret out the seat of the trouble, but did not succeed. I increased rations, posted guards and tried to continue with our work.

The men did not respond. A dozen have disappeared—deserted—for they have taken rifles and ammunition with them.

Pronounced trouble is breeding. Who or what is stirring up the men, I cannot ascertain.

Since you realize the importance of our work and the conditions under which we are handicapped, I respectfully request your assistance to the extent of a detachment of men.

Respectfully yours,

ROY T. GATES, *Engineer*
Anglo-Indian Oil Concession.

The letter was dated three days before from Naushara. Riley took in the pungent statement of facts and passed the letter back to the colonel. Though he didn't understand the reference made by Gates, as to the conditions by which he was handicapped, he knew that the engineer was in charge of drilling operations for the Anglo-Indian Oil Company, under a concession granted by the Asmar Rukan Din Khan.

He asked no questions, however, and waited for the Colonel to continue.

"Gates' work is important. It has to go on. It's our job to give him adequate protection."

"My especial job," put in Riley with a grin.

"Yes," replied the colonel. "Probably nothing to it; more than likely some Afridi has a belly-ache, and wants to go home."

He was lying, and deceiving nobody, not even himself. Both Riley and the Colonel knew that when murder begins to stalk and a band of Afridis get moody and sul-

len, all hell is apt to pop loose at any minute.

"A platoon and a lieutenant ought to be sufficient," continued the C.O.

"Yes, sir," replied Riley. "Lieutenant Moore would be fine."

"Suit yourself. Start at once. I'll have your papers ready by the time mess is over."

Riley rose from his chair, saluted casually and started for the door. The colonel looked quizzically after his retreating back.

"And remember, Riley, this is a serious business. No hell raising on the way."

CHAPTER III

The Raid

UNDER forced march, Riley Moore and a hand-picked platoon of fighting Pathans made Peshawar in the early forenoon of the following day. Riley had spared neither his men nor their horses, but now he called a much-needed halt. Naushara lay some eight hours' march to the eastward and if they started in the cool of the evening, after a well deserved rest, they would arrive fit and fresh for any emergency.

The horses were stabled and quartered. Riley saw that they were rubbed well down and given sparingly of barley water and clean hay. Then, after a bath in a couple of buckets of tepid water, he ate sparingly, pitched his tent under the walls of the City and tried for an hour's sleep.

His slumber was troubled by dreams of marauding Afridis, crying maidens and the scowling face of Petroff. He awoke with a start and his hand slipped down to the revolver strapped to his belt.

Then he threw his feet over the edge of the cot and grinned up into Moore's face.

"Why so jumpy?" asked the lieutenant.

"Sorry, old man," replied Riley. "I was dreaming. Thought you were Petroff." He threw back the flap of the tent, saw that the sun was descending in a long arc in the west. "Better rouse the men. Light rations, and then we'll be off."

THEY were off again with the first blessed breath of air that stirred with the sinking of the sun behind the Karakorum Range. Decked in all his finery, Riley rode at the head of his slender column, a gay whistle on his lips.

They jostled their way through the crooked streets of Peshawar, and created quite a stir in the bazaars and market places. But for once Riley had no eyes for the alluring nautch girls behind their veils; he didn't respond to the bangles, the colors, the lilting note of the reeds in the market places.

It was with a grunt of relief that they sallied forth from the Eastern Gate and picked up the rocky trail that led to Naushara.

Riley issued a terse order to Amin Khan, who promptly relayed it to the platoon. The ranks closed up, moved forward at a fast trot.

An hour passed. The trail wound slowly upward, became rock-strewn, barren. The lush fields of flowering bamboo in the *baghs* surrounding Peshawar, gave place to an arid upland, as barren of life as of vegetation.

It was wild country, the traditional battle ground for raiding expeditions from the north. But though it had been well watered with blood—the blood of Englishmen as well as of Pathan, Afridi and Afghan, nothing grew there.

Riley gave the order for double time, turned his horse and circled his men, offering them a word or

two of encouragement. He loosened the revolver hanging from his *cum-burbund* and his dark eyes searched in the dark shadows by the side of the trail.

AN hour out from their destination a thin, sickly moon showed above the ridge towards which they were advancing. A pale, unearthly light flooded the stark uplands. Though the visibility had been increased a hundred percent, lessening the chance of an ambushed attack, Riley didn't relax his vigilance.

There was an uncanny presentment stirring in his heart, a feeling of hovering menace and danger. A league further on he suddenly drew rein, held up his hand, and brought the platoon to a halt. He listened sharply, but heard nothing. No sound save the muffled thud of the horses' hooves and the clank of a bit broke the unnatural silence of the night.

"What's up?" questioned Moore sharply, reining up beside him.

"Hear anything?" asked Riley.

"No—what?"

"Listen!"

They listened. Standing in their stirrups, they strained their ears to catch some alien sound in the awful void of silence about them. A faint wind stirred from dead ahead. And then carried on that slightest stirring of air they heard.

It was faint with distance, but clear, distinct, unmistakable, none the less. Gun fire! Rifle fire! Both Riley and Moore had heard that sound before.

Riley wheeled his charger about; shouted the order of advance to the platoon, then roweled his spurs deep into his horse's flanks. The horse leaped ahead and under free rein lunged powerfully up the rocky trail.

The platoon charged up after him. A half a mile on, they thundered single file through a narrow pass. On the other side of the cut lay the plains of Naushara.

The sounds of the firing came to them clearly, now, distinctly. They could even see the lurid streaks of flame in the night.

A mile below him in the valley, under the ghostly light of the moon, three trellised derricks pointed their shafts heavenward. A few squat buildings loomed up vaguely in the foreground. Riley knew the site for the base of operations of the Anglo-Indian Oil Company.

It was his destination. And as the fates would have it, he and his platoon had arrived just in time! Or had he?

He spurred the foam-flecked flanks of his horse, brandished his revolver in the air and with a lusty cry on his lips led the charge into battle.

FROM the rocky pass the ground swept sharply downward to the level stretch of terrain occupied by the oil camp. Under heel and spur the platoon swept forward. The thunder of their juggernaut charge echoed and re-echoed between the hills that hemmed in the tiny valley.

For their part, the men of the 17th Cavalry held their fire. But as they swept down into battle like an irresistible tidal wave, their coming was heralded by a sudden furious outburst of firing.

Two hundred yards away from the actual scene of conflict, a tall column of flame shot skyward. One of the raiders had applied the torch to one of the derricks. In the lurid glow that painted the sky a crimson red, Riley made out the attacking force. They were mounted, and from the way they rode they were native Afridis.

All but one! He sat his horse

in true military fashion. And it was this individual who led the attack. Riley had but a moment to consider this strange fact. Ten yards in advance of his men, he was the first to close with the enemy.

A black stallion bore down suddenly on his left. A glinting sword circled his head. Riley wheeled his charger back on two legs, felt the crimson steel lift the turban from his head, then as the two horses plunged together fired his revolver at point blank range.

THE Afridi crumpled in the saddle, and the heavy sword clattered to the dust. The black stallion reared, wheeled, and with the roaring flames striking terror to his heart, plunged madly for the open fields, dragging his dead master by the stirrup.

Riley was suddenly engulfed in a swirl of swearing, fighting, blood-hungry men. Steel flashed before his eyes; guns exploded in his ears; venomous lead sang a song of death over his head. He steadied his horse with his knees, took careful aim and made every bullet count.

Moore and the platoon swept on. The fighting rose to a fierce crescendo. Then Riley saw that he was free, no longer hemmed relentlessly in by a half dozen fanatical madmen.

He shouted to Moore to follow him, but the words were lost in the din of battle. Riley pressed forward. The horseman who rode like a white army officer was still leading the attack on one of the buildings.

Unquestionably, Gates and his faithful followers had managed to barricade themselves in the administration building. It was the focal point of the battle.

Men fell before the lethal death that belched from Riley's gun. When

it was empty he snatched a double-bladed sword from one of the conquered foe, and, swinging it in a savage arc before him, spurred his steed through the milling press.

His hungry blade made a feast of bone and blood. He cleared a path before him and at his foolhardy example his men rallied and closed in.

Though the rescuing party was outnumbered two to one by the raiders, slowly the tide of battle went in their favor. Riley alone did the work of five men. In a veritable frenzy he fought his way forward.

The bullet that clipped his arm was but the sting of a bee. The saber cut across his cheek that sent the blood coursing to his mouth was but tonic wine.

The raiders were retreating! Riley swore viciously. He had to drive through! He had a mad desire to come to grips with that tall, lean figure who led the attack astride the Kathiawari mare.

Both rider and horse were familiar. He had seen them both a few days ago at Bannu in the courtyard of the inn owned by the rascally Jamadar Hazrat Gul.

CHAOS! Confusion! The night was rent asunder by the staccato crack of rifles and the clash of steel. Battling forward, foot by foot through a seething wall of horses and men, Riley ever kept one eye on his particular quarry.

Suddenly he saw him lurch forward in his saddle, saw the smoking revolver drop from his limp fingers. Riley cursed. A bullet had reached the foe, and he would have much preferred to have ended the matter with steel.

But the mysterious white rider was not down. Wounded and with the tide of battle going against him, he shouted the signal for retreat. His men fell back in wild confu-

sion, spurred their horses and charged for the rocky uplands.

Lieutenant Moore, bespattered with blood and with the fanatical light of battle in his eye, galloped up beside Riley.

"Shall we give chase?" he shouted.

But for once the Irishman refused to continue a battle.

"Not now," he called back. "Later, when we know what this is all about."

CHAPTER IV

The Sting of the Lash

DEATH had claimed seven of Riley's men in the engagement, but there was not one man there who had not tasted blood. Of the workers at the oil field, some twenty had been wounded and a half dozen killed.

When the dead had been buried and the wounded made comfortable, Riley and Moore went into secret conference with Gates, the engineer in charge of the operations.

In swift detail he elaborated on the meager details he had given in his letter to Colonel Clayborne, culminating with the story of the raid that night.

Riley heard the story through in silence, then asked the question uppermost in his mind.

"The man who led the attack—do you know him?"

Gates shook his head. "No. The fighting was so thick and fast I didn't have much opportunity to observe him closely. But this I know: He was an European."

"You saw that, too, eh?"

Gates nodded.

"Any reason for the trouble you've been having; any reason you know of for this raid?" asked Moore.

"There can be only one reason," replied Gates. "My company is

operating under a concession granted by the Asmar Rukan Din Khan. Under the terms of the agreement we must produce oil by the twentieth of this month. If we fail, the concession is retracted; it reverts back to the Asmar."

Riley nodded his head. "Then you think someone is trying to prevent you from fulfilling the agreement."

"Exactly!"

"It's a valuable concession, eh?"

"To England it is very valuable," answered Gates simply.

"And you don't know who is back of the trouble, eh?"

"No; I haven't the slightest idea."

Riley growled something deep down in his throat. "Well, I have," he muttered. Moore and the engineer plied him with questions, tried to get him to elaborate on his suspicions, but Riley turned a deaf ear to all their pleas.

He paced up and down the room for a few minutes in deep thought. A heavy frown furrowed his usually placid brow and the laughter had died out of his eyes.

HE turned at last to face Lieutenant Moore. There was a crisp note of decision in his voice.

"Steve," he began, "I'm leaving you here in command of the platoon. The safety of Mr. Gates and his men is in your hands. It's up to you to see that nothing further delays operations here."

Lieutenant Moore snapped to attention. He would have given a month's pay to have known what Riley intended to do, but he was too good a soldier to ask.

"Yes, sir," he said tersely, and started for the door.

Riley gazed after him with a fond eye, then called him back. He extended his fist with a smile and the two men shook hands with a fervid clasp.

"Good luck," said Lieutenant Moore simply.

"Thanks. Same to you, Jeff. I'm going to trail back to Peshawar. I think I can pick up some valuable information there."

His gaudy uniform of a Bengal Lancer discarded, and disguised as an Afghan horse trader, Riley lost himself in the welter of humanity that swarmed in the streets of Peshawar. He spoke Pushtu like a native, and it was easy to lose his identity in the bazaars and streets that were crowded with the men of a score of different tribes, different races, different religions.

THERE were Brahmins, Mohammedans, Animists. There were warlike Sikhs, savage Afridis, bearded Pathans.

Riley drifted slowly through the streets from canteen to bazaar, to public house. His eyes were ever alert for a certain tall figure with glowing eyes over a hawked nose. His ears were ever attuned to catch the slightest whisper of a word that would put him on the trail of his quarry.

It was late on the evening of his second day that success crowned his efforts. Entering the bar of the Oriental House, a tavern frequented by Europeans, his eye immediately focused on the tall figure of Alexis Petroff, seated at a table at the far end of the room.

The Russian was in whispered consultation with a small and withered Kahar. The heads of the two men were bowed close together. Petroff was speaking now, rapidly into the Kahar's ear. The native's lips pulled back in an avaricious grin, revealing a row of broken, yellow teeth.

Riley watched the two men from the corner of his eye as he sidled up to the bar. He ordered a

drink, but instead of drinking it at the mahogany, turned and started for the table adjoining the one at which sat the Russian.

Riley was full of suspicions, but he had no definite proof that Petroff was the leader of the raid on the oil field. Before he proceeded further, he had to know definitely. There was one sure way of finding out. And he decided to put his theory to the test immediately.

The Russian and the Kahar were too engrossed in their secret conversation to notice his approach. Riley grinned to himself with anticipation under his false beard.

Just as he was passing Petroff's table, he conveniently stumbled. The glass tumbled from his hand, his arm shot out and innocently, as if he were trying to regain his balance, his fingers grasped the Russian's shoulders. They dug in, biting deep.

Petroff bellowed with pain, wrenched his shoulder free and glared fiercely at the bowing figure of Riley. A lurid string of profanity rolled off his working lips.

"A thousand pardons, Sahib," murmured Riley in Pushtu, still bowing low so that his face was concealed.

"Go, clumsy dog!" snarled Petroff.

BUT Riley didn't go.

"Did the Sahib Petroff by any chance receive the wound while leading the raid on the oil works?"

The breath whistled sharply from between Petroff's teeth. His eyes narrowed dangerously. His right shot out and imprisoned Riley by the wrist. Riley straightened up and confronted him squarely across the table.

Swift recognition dawned in Petroff's eyes. They turned a smoky red with hate. His lips twitched

convulsively and his long fingers clenched and reclinched at his sides.

"So it's the interfering Captain Riley again, eh?" said Petroff in a strained voice.

"And as ever at your service," replied Riley with irony.

Without waiting for an invitation he kicked out a chair and sat down.

PETROFF fought hard to control his mounting anger. He became hot under the collar, and tiny beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. The eyes of the two men clashed audibly.

"I warn you again—" began Petroff.

"Save your warnings!" snapped Riley. "And listen to this one. There was a raid on the Anglo-Indian oil field two nights ago. It was led by a European"—Riley surveyed the Russian from head to foot—"a man just about your build, Petroff."

The Russian snarled. "Are you accusing me of—"

"I'm not accusing you of anything. I'm just wondering how you got that bullet hole in your left shoulder."

The blow was a telling one. Petroff chewed at his under lip, tried to think of some excuse to make, but words failed him. Riley followed up his advantage. "Next time, Petroff, let us hope that we come to grips personally. Cold steel, hand to hand, is much more satisfying than bullets at a hundred yards."

The Russian bowed mockingly across the table, but said no word. Riley kicked back his chair and rose slowly to his feet.

"Just one more thing, Petroff," he said easily. "How is C. W.?"

The question broke like a bomb-shell on the Russian's ears. His lips pulled back in a savage snarl and the devils of murder leaped out of his eyes.

"I see," said Riley with a contemptuous sneer. "She still resists your tender advances. Take good care of her, Petroff. I'm going to claim her from you one of these days. And if one hair of her head is harmed—"

He left the threat unfinished, turned on his heel, and stalked out of the room.

But Riley wasn't finished with Alexis Petroff so soon that night. On leaving the Oriental House he crossed the street and lost himself in the dark shadows of a sheltered doorway. Secluded in the heavy gloom, he kept his eyes fastened on the hostlery across the way.

He hadn't long to wait. Ten minutes after taking up his vigil, Riley stiffened and crowded back against the stone archway that concealed him.

Petroff and the Kahar had emerged from the bar of the Oriental. Riley saw the Russian cast a hurried glance up and down the street, then urge the wizened Indian on by his side.

RILEY permitted them to take a lead of a hundred feet before he came out of his place of concealment. Keeping close to the grimy walls of the buildings, he followed them.

Petroff's movements were swift and sure. Though he followed an erratic course, turned many corners and doubled back on his trail, he seemed to know exactly where he was going. Though Riley managed to evade detection, he had great difficulty in following the trail.

Petroff and the Kahar suddenly made a right-handed turn and disappeared down the mouth of a dark alley. Riley increased his stride, but when he in turn made the corner, the alley was deserted. The Rus-

sian and the Indian had disappeared into thin air.

Riley stood irresolute for a moment cursing his luck. Then from between the chinks of the shutters of a house half way down the alley, a faint light seeped out. That light had just been made. It hadn't been there a moment before when Riley had turned the corner.

There could be only one answer. Petroff and the Indian had entered the house.

RILEY came to a quick decision. One glance assured him that the alley was deserted. Swiftly he stalked down the street, crouched low at the door of the house from which the faint light glowed.

No sound came to his ears. He was stumped for a moment. What if he were wrong? What if Petroff had not entered here and he broke in, only to be caught as a thief? A wry grimace twitched at his lips as he thought of the consequences.

There were cruel deaths for white thieves in the Northwest frontier.

But after a moment's indecision Riley knew he had to risk it. Nine chances out of ten he had run his quarry down and it would have been ridiculous to let him escape.

Another hurried glance up and down the alley told him it was still empty of all life. Riley withdrew a long, keen-bladed knife from his sash and tried the door. It was latched from the inside.

Fortunately, the battered door was warped with age. It sagged an inch or two away from the jamb, and, inserting the blade of his knife in this opening, Riley slowly lifted up the latch.

As silently he dropped it and then with cautious fingers pushed the portal inward. The grate of the rusted hinges screamed in his ears. He froze to immobility, and his

fingers tightened around the haft of the knife.

Riley expected the noise of his entrance to bring the Russian and the Indian down on him at any minute. He crouched there in the gloom of the doorway, tense, waiting expectant. But no sound came to him. Only the steady pounding of his heart throbbed in his ears.

He closed the door behind him, latched it again. It took a few moments for his eyes to accustom themselves to the stygian gloom. Riley found himself in a vile and smelly hallway. Feeling his way along the greasy wall, he moved stealthily forward.

He negotiated a right-angled turn on tiptoe, then his pulses raced with elation. At the far end of the passageway, a thin sliver of light shone out from beneath a door. He advanced cautiously forward.

The low indistinct murmur of voices came to him. Pressing his ear to the jamb, he recognized them as belonging to Petroff and the Kahar. The Russian was speaking.

"So the rifles have gone forward, eh, Hamzullah Khan?"

YES, *hazoor*. Two cases and a third case of ammunition. And the gun that speaks with a thousand tongues of death, I entrusted especially to Ahmed Abdullah."

Riley's eyes narrowed dangerously as he listened. Hamzullah Khan could be referring to but one thing—a machine-gun. The Russian, after all, was a man to be reckoned with.

Petroff was speaking again. "Have your men in readiness. Give them liberally of gold and drink, but breathe no word of their mission. When my plans are ripe I will give you the word for action."

"Yes, *hazoor*."

There was an oily, obsequious note in the voice of Hamzullah

Khan. Listening at the door, Riley could almost see him rub his dirty hands together at the mention of gold.

"And the whip, Hamzullah Khan—you have secured one for me?"

RILEY'S brow drew down in a frown. What did the Russian want with a whip? He was soon to find out.

"Yes, *hazoor*," came the voice of the Indian. "A light and supple one as you directed. See for yourself."

Riley heard the faint swish of a lash from behind the locked door.

"Perhaps for an unruly horse, Sahib?" whined Hamzullah's voice.

"No, not for a horse," replied the Russian. "It's for a little white bird in a cage who eats not, sings not, but only cries."

The hot blood pounded in Riley's veins. He realized full well the subtle meaning behind the cryptic words. Petroff had secured the whip to use on his captive—the mysterious girl whom he knew only by the initials C. W.

Riley's jaws shut. His muscles tensed. His fingers constricted around the haft of his knife. He was just on the point of barging through the door, when something sharp and cold pricked him in the throat.

Without turning around, without a word having been said, Riley knew that a blade of steel was pricking at his jugular.

A soft voice whispered in his ear.

"The Sahib could hear much better if he stepped inside the door."

Riley was trapped. So intent had he been on hearing the words of the Russian that he had failed entirely to hear the opening of the outer door, had been altogether unaware of the approach of the man who now held the point of an evil knife against his throat.

He had been in tight spots before, but never one quite as ticklish as this. He cursed himself bitterly for a fool. He had to escape somehow, some way, and preferably before his captor discovered his real identity.

Half the advantage he had gained from his spying maneuvers on the Russian would be lost if it was known that he had eavesdropped.

Riley's nerves and muscles tensed preparatory to going into action. His captor, however, evidently read his thoughts. The knife pricked a little deeper into his throat, and the low voice continued with significant inflection:

"It would be foolish for the Sahib to struggle. The knife is sharp and my fingers steady."

There was a dire threat in the soft words. Riley knew that it was suicide to disregard them.

"The trick is yours, friend. Take the knife away from my throat. Maybe we can discuss this over a bottle of *ghiz*."

THE captain takes me for a fool," replied the other with scorn. Riley started at the words. So his identity was known after all!

At the risk of feeling the blade slit his gullet, he squirmed about and faced his captor. Unfortunately, however, he didn't recognize the tall Afridi who confronted him. With a swift movement the Indian snatched the blade from his fingers, then with a mocking smile playing about his thin lips, he hammered on the door with the butt of the knife.

The summons was answered by a sudden tramp of heavy feet behind the barrier. Riley shrugged his shoulders helplessly. There was no other way out of the situation but to face the music.

The door was yanked open in his face. Petroff stood glaring on the

threshold, an automatic clutched in his hand, ready for instant use. His eyes narrowed sharply, then opened wide with gloating triumph.

SWIFTLY he took in the little tableau, understood its grim significance.

"We meet once again, Petroff," purred Riley.

"And sooner than I had any right to hope for," smirked the Russian. "Very obliging of you, Captain. Your looking me up this way has saved me a lot of trouble and inconvenience. Very thoughtful of you."

His honeyed words dripped with a deadly venom. Riley knew that he could expect no mercy at the hands of the Russian.

His captor explained rapidly in Pushtu, how he had caught Riley listening at the door. Petroff grinned evilly at the recitation, barked out an order, and the knife was lowered from Riley's throat.

Under the prodding impulse of the automatic in the Russian's hand, Riley was marched into the room. The door was immediately closed and bolted behind him.

"*Quai Hai!*" snapped Petroff to Hamzullah. "A rope to tie this dog!"

Petroff ground the nozzle of the automatic into his spine while the Indian rummaged in a corner for the necessary twine. Riley took advantage of the momentary respite and swiftly surveyed his surroundings.

There was only one window to the room, but the first glance told him that it was heavily barred. No escape that way. The door behind him was locked and bolted. Odd pieces of furniture cluttered up the floor, but none of them offered a likely weapon.

To his right a dusty curtain hung in an arched opening, which prob-

ably led to a bedroom. It stirred faintly, persistently. Riley was about to dismiss the swaying drape when he suddenly realized that there was no breath of moving air in the room.

Someone was behind that curtain. Someone was moving it purposely to attract his attention. If there was any escape for him from the trap into which he had fallen, it lay that way.

The Kahar bustled up with a long length of rope. Grinning evilly, he lashed Riley's hands behind him under the direction of the Russian. When the process had been completed, Petroff stuffed the automatic into his belt, juttied his chin aggressively to within an inch of Riley's and spit into his face.

Riley felt the blood in his veins turn to molten acid at the insult. All he asked then of the Fates was twenty seconds alone with Petroff, free and unhampered. He would make the Russian pig pay for that insult.

PETROFF read the thought as it marked itself indelibly on his face. "You'll never get the chance, my Captain," he gloated.

"I only need half a chance," replied Riley defiantly.

Petroff sneered.

"A braggard! A boaster!"

"Anything but a renegade," shot back Riley.

A tide of crimson slowly mantled the Russian's face.

"You will eat your words before you die, my Captain."

"I may die," answered Riley coolly, "but when I do I'll curse you with my dying breath."

Petroff's face was convulsed with fury. From the table he snatched up the whip that Hamzullah had secured for him. He shook it wrathfully under Riley's nose.

"A few days ago you were pleased to break one of my whips. Now it is my turn to break one. Only I'll break it over your head."

SUITS action to the word, he threw back his arm, snapped it forward and sent the long, raw-hide coil snaking across Riley's face. The lash ate at the flesh like a tongue of fire. Blood spurted from Riley's cheek, ran crazily down into his mouth.

After the first instinctive cringing of the flesh, he did not move. He stood there, silent, motionless.

His stoic calm under the lash of the whip drove Petroff to a frenzy. He drew back his arm. Again and again he sent the raw-hide writhing across the prisoner's face.

Riley's left eye was closed. Long livid welts stood out in ridges on his throat. With each stroke of the lash ribbons of flesh were gouged from his face.

His heart was pounding against his ribs like a sledge hammer. Twin pulses vibrated crazily in his throat. The muscles of his shoulders, arms and hands constricted violently. But he had been cunningly tied. His bonds held.

A living, searing hate surged through Riley's veins and concentrated in his eyes. With the terrible eyes of the killer he confronted the Russian. Petroff quailed beneath that baleful glare, his whip arm stayed in mid-air.

Then a new paroxysm seized him. He flung the lash from him, stepped close to Riley and drove his fist flush into the bloody face. Riley staggered back under the blow, stumbled against a chair and went crashing to the floor. His head and shoulders came to rest with a sickening thud against the wall by the hanging draperies.

Riley was out. How long he re-

mained in that condition he never knew. Slowly he crawled back to consciousness out of a deep abyss. A brass gong was beating violently inside his skull. Mad devils of light danced before his eyes.

He could not see at first. But the vague, indistinct murmur of voices came faintly to his ears as if from a great distance. He puzzled over them. Then came recognition. It was the Russian's voice. Slowly, grisly detail after grisly detail, he recalled the terrible beating he had taken and the incidents leading up to it.

Then a peculiar scratching on his hands, which were still tied behind him, occupied all of his still puzzled wits. He relaxed. Something soft touched his fingers, traveled to his wrists. The contact filled Riley with a strange elation. New blood pounded through his veins; new strength tensed his shattered nerves and muscles.

SLOWLY with returning strength his brain cleared. The Russian was still speaking. His voice was louder now. Riley kept his eyes closed and listened. The soft thing was about his wrists again. Suddenly the bonds that held him relaxed, gave a notch.

And then with a sudden burst of inspiration he understood. Someone was untying the rope that held his hands! He didn't stop to question who or why. It was sufficient that with each passing second his bonds became looser.

And with this new hope came new strength. A savage flame of hatred coursed through Riley's body. The last rope was off. His hands were free.

He lay there, still, inert, eyes closed, waiting for further developments. If only he had a weapon now! And then, as if in

answer to the unspoken prayer, he felt something hard and smooth pressed into his hand. His fingers wrapped around it lovingly. Instinctively he knew it for the haft of a knife.

Riley asked for no more. Free again and armed he was perfectly willing to go up against the Russian and his two native allies. Once more the unseen fingers touched his own and a crumpled ball of paper was pressed into the palm of his left hand.

There was nothing else. The faint stirring of the air told of the furtive departure of his benefactor.

For a brief minute Riley puzzled over the identity of the mysterious unknown who had come to his aid in his hour of direst need. Then he put the thought from his mind. Time for that later. He had more important work to do.

Moving inch by inch he slowly worked his arms from behind his back. The knife was gripped in his hand, concealed under the folds of his robe. After stuffing the wad of paper in his belt, he opened his eyes a slit and surveyed the room.

PETROFF was seated at the table in the center of the floor. He was issuing orders to the man who had captured Riley. The Kahar was busy in the far corner over a large brass-bound case.

From the last of the Russian's words, it was evident to Riley that Hamzullah was about to leave the room. When that moment arrived, he determined to strike.

With a fighting chance for freedom in the offing, his strength returned to him in pulsating waves. From the corner of his half-closed eyes he watched the Kahar. Hamzullah finished with the brass-bound case at last, straightened and crossed the room to the door.

Riley's nerves became as tight as steel wires; his muscles tensed. Slowly he gathered his body together, drew his legs up under him.

Hamzullah's hand was on the latch of the door. The portal swung inward. In that instant, Riley catapulted to his feet. With the bellowing roar of a Bashan bull he charged across the floor straight for Petroff.

He caught the Russian with a jolting left as the latter spun around in his chair. Table, chair and Russian collapsed with a crescendo roar to the floor.

Riley cleared the barrier of splintered wood and kicking legs in full stride. A gun exploded on his left and a streak of acid fire pierced his shoulder. It was the Pathan going into action.

RILEY ignored the wound. For once discretion was the better part of valor. If he tarried to battle it out to the finish, all was lost. He grunted, crouched low and zigzagged towards the door.

A fusilade of shots behind him marked Petroff's entrance into the fray. And before him in the doorway, blocking his way to freedom, crouched Hamzullah, a ten-inch blade of steel swinging before him.

There was no getting past that blade this side of hell. Riley knew that he could never cover the intervening few feet between him and liberty, without feeling steel in his heart. He had less than a second to act.

In a single swift movement he swung his right arm forward. His tense fingers released the knife in his hand and at the same time he threw himself forward at Hamzullah's feet.

A gun exploded violently behind him. Bullets whined angrily over his head. But the Kahar no longer blocked the doorway. Riley's knife

had caught him clean in the throat.

Without waiting to say a last prayer over the dear departed, Riley rocketed down the narrow passageway, lurched around the corner and without checking his speed assaulted the outer door in a flying charge.

His shoulders connected with the rotting wood with the force of a battering ram. Hinges ripped from their screws, the rusted lock shattered to bits. In full stride Riley cleared the wreckage to the accompaniment of a final fusilade from Petroff's automatic.

On the other side of the city, in the native quarter, he found peace and surcease from his wounds. Here for the first time he extracted the crumpled ball of paper thrust into his hand by the good samaritan who had untied his bonds.

He unrolled it carefully, smoothed it out, focused his eyes on the few words written there in a delicate, feminine hand.

Tonight. The Palace of Abdel Khan. Help.

Riley read the terse message twice over, but his eyes were not on the words. A faint elusive perfume arose from the scrap of paper—the same perfume that had clung to the handkerchief bearing the initials C. W.

CHAPTER V

The Palace of Abdel Khan.

SO IT was the girl who had saved him! With an oath Riley staggered to his feet. A fine man, a fine officer he had proved himself. The girl had unquestionably saved his life and like a coward he had fled, leaving her to her fate.

He read the note again. *Tonight. The Palace of Abdel Khan. Help.*

It was a piteous appeal in its stark simplicity. Riley determined on immediate action.

Showering a handful of gold on his host, he negotiated for the loan of a keen ten-inch blade of steel, an automatic and a Kathiawari charger.

Then leaping into the high saddle, he thundered off into the night. A short half hour ago he had fled from the rendezvous of the Russian. Now, the spurs roweling and flanks of his horse, he retraced the distance.

HIS heart was heavy within him. Somehow, he felt that a stain was on the bright shield of his honor as a gentleman and an officer. There was little chance of his finding the girl and Petroff, still in the house from which he had escaped. But he had to make sure.

He thundered up to the door through which he had barged a short half hour before. He leaped from his horse, and with gun advanced threateningly before him, plunged through the shattered portal.

But no burst of lead stayed his progress. No warning cry announced his precipitous arrival. It was but the work of a minute to verify his suspicions. The place was deserted. Petroff had flown, taking the girl with him.

Riley leaped into the saddle again, clapped spurs to his mount. Like a shadow of avenging doom he thundered through the cobbled streets of Peshawar.

He cleared the city's walls, set his horse into a long, lopping gallop. The Palace of Abdel Khan was some twenty miles distant, secluded in the rugged hills of the border. He should reach there a little before dawn. He *had* to reach there before dawn!

His thoughts were bitter and dark. He gave little consideration to how he would accomplish the rescue when he arrived. He was armed with a knife and a gun. He would use them both if need be. No one was going to stop him that night.

The horse's hooves pounded hollowly in his ears. The weary miles seemed never ending. Riley winced and groaned in his saddle. But it was not his wounds that wrung the anguish from his heart. He thought of the Russian and his whip. *For a little white bird in a cage!*

A savage oath spewed off his lips and his spurs dug deep into the heaving flanks of his horse.

Riley reined his sweating mount to a halt on the crest of a small, rocky knoll. Below him loomed the vague, shadowy outlines of the stronghold of Abdel Khan. He slid from his horse, tied the reins around an outcropping boulder.

THE mood was sinking fast behind the ridge of the Kahalan Mountains. A blanket of dark shadow moved slowly across the valley. He grunted to himself with satisfaction, thrust the automatic into his belt and, with the knife clutched in his hand, began a stealthy advance toward the stronghold.

It was surrounded by a wall, he knew. There would be a guard at the gate. His first and immediate problem was to get past that guard without raising an alarm.

Creeping warily along from boulder and gully to outcropping ledge of rock, he managed to make the high wall unobserved. The darker shadow in the night, some twenty feet to his left marked the gate. Slowly on tiptoe he crept toward it.

He paused, tense, breathless, listening. The rhythmic beat of feet

behind the wall marked the progress of the sentry before the portal. How to get that massive, iron-ribbed gate to open. That was the question. Riley considered the proposition a moment, then stooped down and scooped up a handful of pebbles.

He tossed one into the night, heard it rattle against the ponderous door. Another and another followed in quick succession. There came a pause in the steady tread of the guard.

Riley slithered up close to the portal, flattened himself against the wall. The keen point of his knife was thrust forward ready for the lunge.

He threw another pebble. And then, with pounding heart he heard the rusty creak of a bolt. His muscles tensed; his fingers ached around the haft of the knife. His narrowed eyes strained into the darkness ahead. The black oblong that marked the gate was slowly limmed out by a narrow strip of light as the portal swung inward.

Still Riley did not move. The breath died in his nostrils. A head appeared in the opening, shoulders. Then Riley lunged forward.

With a massive left arm he smothered the cry that sprang to the guard's lips. The knife in his right described a short, vicious arc through the air. Blood spurted from the Indian's throat. The body leaped once convulsively in Riley's arms, then lay still.

It was all over. Death had come suddenly, swiftly, silently.

RILEY lowered the body silently to the ground, stepped through the half-opened gate, closed and bolted it behind him. Before him stretched the cobbled courtyard of the palace. To his right the ornate entrance of the palace itself loomed up.

He had succeeded so far, but only in the most simple feature of the venture he proposed. How was he to locate the girl? In which of the hundred rooms of the palace was she being held prisoner?

Like a darker shadow in the dark night, Riley streaked across the courtyard and darted down the side of the building. A dim light shone out into the darkness from a trellised window on the floor above.

He watched it intently for a moment. Then his pulses leaped as he saw a shadow pass across the latticed *jalousies*. Riley came to a swift decision. Someone was in that room. Either the girl, the Russian, or one of his men, as they had but lately arrived some half hour before him.

No matter who it was, it was the only starting point he had in his search for the girl. Whoever it was, with the point of his knife at his throat, he would talk.

GRIPPING the knife between his teeth, he began to climb toward the balcony above him. The rough joints of the stones gave him treacherous footholds, but he persisted. Two minutes later he threw a leg over the ledge of the balcony and crawled to momentary safety.

He lay still and quiet in the shadows for a long moment. Then the thought that the dead guard might be discovered at any minute spurred him to action. He whipped the automatic from his belt and crept stealthily toward the long window.

It was locked from the inside. He could not see through the drawn blinds. Yet the light still burned from within.

He was on the point of attacking the lock of the window and a peculiar sound froze him to immobility. He listened, tense, rigid. It came from the room beyond.

Then in a burst of illumination he understood. It was the sound of weeping. The fickle fates had favored him at last, had led him straight to the girl.

With the haft of his knife he knocked discreetly on the window. The crying stopped instantly. He knocked again. Light footsteps hurried across the floor of the room beyond the barrier. For some inexplicable reason Riley felt his heart pounding against his ribs.

THE shade was pulled back a crack and in the narrow opening Riley made out a pair of startled, tear-stained eyes. Then swiftly a bolt was thrown, and the long window opened silently.

Riley stepped across the threshold. The girl tried to stifle the inarticulate cry of thankfulness that leaped to her throat. Her hands went out instinctively to the big Irishman.

"Thank God! Thank God!" she murmured fervently.

Riley gripped her tiny hands in his two massive ones, and for the first time in his life felt foolish. No words came to his lips. With eager, hungry eyes he devoured the slim form of the girl, trembling in his arms.

A strange elation was in his heart. He felt strong, mighty, the equal of fifty men. He had come to rescue this girl from the hands of the Russian, from a fate worse than death and rescue her he would, though the heavens fell.

"S-h-h! Don't cry. Stop trembling, child," he urged.

"You've come," she said with tears in her voice. "Oh, I knew you would!"

Riley smiled at such faith.

"And how did you know?"

"Because I saw you in Bannu and in that house in Peshawar—and then I prayed."

"Good girl," encouraged Riley. "How did you fall into the hands of Petroff?"

THE girl covered her eyes with her hands. "He tricked me. I'm a nurse, you see. Said he had a patient for me—his wife—" Her voice broke off in a sob. "I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't come. I would have killed myself."

Riley comforted her with awkward words.

"What's your name?"

"Coleen."

"Sure, and I should have known it," grinned Riley. Then he was all seriousness again. "Listen, Coleen. We must get away from here. It will be dangerous. Men may be killed—but we will escape for all that. You must be brave and you must trust me."

"I do," answered the girl simply.

"Fine," whispered Riley. "Where does the Russian sleep?"

"At the end of the corridor."

"And the guards?"

"I heard Petroff station the men at their posts after he put me in here," answered the girl. "There's one at the head of the stairs. Another at the gate to the palace."

Riley swore under his breath. Two men to get past and at any moment the body of the sentry he had killed might be discovered. The girl noted the look of concern on his face, and her hands went out to him appealingly.

"Can—can we do it?" she pleaded tearfully.

Riley forced a smile to his lips and lied cheerfully.

"Sure, my child."

But despite the arrogant confidence in his voice and words he knew that it would not be as easy as all that. He glanced back at the balcony and considered the way he

had entered the room. No, that was out. The girl would never be able to negotiate the descent down that steep wall.

They had to risk getting by the guards. After all, he was armed and the factor of surprise was in his favor. Speed was essential.

He slid back the safety on the automatic and thrust it into the girl's hand. He was pleasantly surprised to find her fingers cool and steady. The knife he kept for himself.

"Follow me. Keep close behind me," he whispered, as he started for the door. He opened it a crack and peered up and down the dimly-lit corridor outside. It was deserted. He turned back to the girl.

"If there is to be any fighting, let me do it," he warned. He indicated the knife in his hand. "This is more quiet than the gun. Use it only if you have to. Understand?"

The girl nodded her head silently. Twin spots of color leaped to her pale cheeks, and her eyes were bright with excitement. She showed her pluck, however, for when Riley pushed open the door and crept out into the corridor, she followed hard on his heels.

Silently they crept down the passageway. The palace was as still as the tomb. No one stayed their progress, and inch by inch they crept up on the broad flight of marble stairs that led to the floor below.

Riley was prepared for a swift, silent struggle to be terminated by the flash of his knife. But to his utter surprise no guard stood at the head of the stairs.

COLEEN'S hand gripped his in a swift, impulsive movement. Riley returned the pressure of her fingers, but there was a doubt in his heart. Why wasn't the guard on post where he had been placed? A sharp, tin-

gling sensation that raced down his spine warned him of danger.

However, he had no recourse now but to press on. Swiftly and silently they negotiated the broad flight of stairs. Fifty feet before them across the large, marble hallway, was the doorway to freedom.

They paused and crouched low by the balustrade. No sound in the corridors of the palace but the faint tramp of the sentry by the door.

Riley nudged Coleen and gave her the signal for the advance. He descended the last step, came out from behind the protection of the marble balustrade, the girl behind him.

A sudden, shrill scream from over his shoulder whirled him about in his tracks. But Riley's movement was too late. He came up short on the points of two long sabers held in the hands of a pair of natives. A third had just succeeded in wrenching the automatic from Coleen's hand.

AND there, five feet away, watching the scene with sardonic humor, grinning evilly like a demon from hell, stood Petroff.

Riley raged at himself, though he said not a word. He was a fool, a colossal ass. He should have expected a trap when he had missed the guard on the floor above. He turned to the white-faced girl, and tried to reassure her with a smile.

Petroff stalked over to him with an arrogant swagger. With the two natives still digging the points of their sabers into Riley's ribs, the Russian raised his hand, and with a vicious swipe snapped his open palm across Riley's face.

"Fool! Swine!" he spat out.

"Anything but a beater of women," grated Riley.

A cruel leer came to the Russian's face. His lips bared back from yellowed teeth. "And you, by your med-

dling, my Captain, have made her hell just a little bit hotter."

Riley lurched forward instinctively, only to feel the sabers cut into his flesh. He looked at the girl and anguish wreathed at his heart. But the smile on her face was proud, disdainful.

"I die first," she said simply.

Though he knew before he started that it was a forlorn hope, Riley decided to appeal to the Russian's sense of honor.

"Why not let the girl go, Petroff?" he asked. "You have me. Do what you want with me, but let the girl go."

The Russian smiled evilly. "A gallant offer Captain, but I must refuse it. I fail to see I gain anything by the bargain. You seem to forget that I have you both in my power. Why should I release the little bird before I have heard her sing?"

"Because I will kill you if you lay your filthy hands on her."

"Forever warning, eh, Captain Riley. You seem never to learn. You seem determined to throw your life away foolishly. You have been lucky so far—"

"My luck hasn't changed yet," replied Riley. "It's in the cards that there's at least one more thing I do before I go to the happy hunting grounds."

"Yes?" mocked Petroff, pulling at the lobe of his left ear. "And pray, what is that?"

"To beat you with a horse whip before I kill you."

THE color drained from the Russian's face; his nostrils dilated and his hands trembled.

"You will regret those words, Riley," he said with an ominous quiet in his voice. "Yes, my friend, you will regret those words."

Twin devils leaped out of his eyes

and seared Riley's face. Then he turned to the girl, still standing on the stairs. He stepped close to her, placed his arm around her cringing shoulders in a lecherous caress.

She shrank from the foul embrace. Petroff placed one heavy hand beneath her chin and tilted her face up to his.

"You and I, my pretty one," he gloated. "We shall see him die, eh. A slow death, and a long one."

Coleen's eyes blazed anger and scorn. Her lips found the torrent of words that welled to her lips but only two words came.

"You beast!"

Petroff laughed.

"I like my women to have spirit. And while your gallant captain dies inch by inch, maybe you will sing for him, eh. Sing for him from your cage."

"Never!"

"Or maybe the captain would prefer to hear you wail under the sting of the little present I bought for you?"

FOR answer, Coleen's dainty hand swung sharply forward and caught the Russian across his mocking lips. Petroff was taken back by the sudden blow, snarled viciously, then his thin lips parted in a cruel laugh.

He stepped in close to the girl, placed his two hands on either side of her face and turned her lips up to his. Ruthlessly he kissed her full on the lips, then flung her from him.

"For every blow a kiss, my dear," he taunted. "Bear that in mind. Just my way of showing you that I am equally as gallant as the captain."

Riley could stand no more. Something exploded inside him. Despite the bayonets pressing into his ribs he lunged forward. An automatic sprouted suddenly in Petroff's hand.

"One step more and I fire."

If there had been no one but him-

self to have considered, Riley would have risked it. But he had the girl to think of. Snarling his defiance, he pulled up short.

Petroff whipped a small silver whistle from his tunic and blew three sharp blasts upon it. Instantly there was a stir throughout the palace. Guards appeared as if by magic from the dark corridors and with sullen eyes surrounded the two captives.

A moment later, preceded by two tall Indians, Abdel Khan appeared at the head of the marble stairs. He was dressed in a long, flowing robe of purple, and in his jeweled right hand a shining knife was clutched.

From the head of the stairs he took in the grim tableau below him, then with regal tread began to descend.

Riley had never met the Khan before, but he knew him by reputation as a prince both arrogant and cruel. The mere fact alone that he had formed an allegiance with the Russians, spoke volumes against him. He and the girl could hope for little mercy at his hands.

"What is the meaning of this, Alexis?" he asked in perfect English.

Petroff bowed ironically. "Let me present to your Excellency Captain Riley of the Lancers. You have already made the acquaintance of the lady."

Watching his face closely, Riley saw a dark shadow of hate spread over the Khan's sharp features.

"And when did I extend an invitation to the captain?" he demanded frigidly.

"That's just the point, Excellency," replied Petroff. "You didn't. The fool has delivered himself into our hands." Abruptly the suave cruelty left the Russian's voice. His accent became frigid, sharp with death.

Captain Riley took it upon himself to effect the rescue of our esteemed lady guest. In attempting to do so he murdered the guard at the outer gate. Justice is justice, Abdel Khan, and the blood of one of your followers cries out for vengeance."

"And he shall have vengeance," replied the Khan.

Petroff bowed low.

"There is just one favor I would ask of you, Abdel Khan," he said in an ingratiating voice.

"And what is that?"

"It was I who discovered the murdered body of the guard. It was I who captured the captain and the lady as they were making their escape. Turn him over to me to devise the manner of his death."

A cruel light sprang up in the Khan's eyes.

"Your wish is granted, just so long as his death shall be slow and long."

"Never fear," grated Petroff. "He should die hard, your Excellency. He should give us good sport before the ants eat out his eyes."

PETROFF turned and issued a series of sharp orders to the native soldiers. Coleen was roughly grabbed and dragged up the marble stairs to some new prison. A half dozen men surrounded Riley and, prodding him forward, forced him across the broad hallway and through a narrow door at the far end.

Through tortuous narrow passages, down, ever down, Riley was pushed along at the points of the sabers. The walls became damp, fetid. Rats squealed and scurried underfoot. At last the little party stopped before a heavy, impenetrable stone door.

Petroff himself lifted back the heavy iron bar that sealed it and swung the portal open. A dozen

eager hands propelled Riley violently forward into the stygian gloom of the dungeon.

"Just a temporary precaution, Captain," taunted Petroff, as he slammed the door shut. "By sun-up my cunning brain will have devised the manner of your death."

CHAPTER VI

The Iron Cage

WITH heavy feet and bitter heart, Riley tramped up and down the length of his narrow cell. He never doubted for a moment but that the Russian would devise some particularly cruel death for him. But it was not the anticipation of this that brought the lines of anguish to his face.

He had faced death before unafraid. It held no terrors for him. But the girl—the girl with the lilting Irish name! He had to do something! He had to save her! The barren walls flung back his impotent curses in hollow mockery. How? How?

There was no answer. Slow, never ending minutes dragged by into hours that brought the weight of centuries. Riley paced his cell relentlessly. He was not aware that his limbs ached, that his throat was parched and dry.

The iron bar that held him in was lifted at last. A squad of men marshaled him out of the dungeon and led him up to the broad hallway of the palace. But they did not tarry there. As he was roughly jostled out of the building, Riley tried in vain to catch a glimpse of the girl. To see, by some sign at least, in which room she was being held prisoner.

Out in the courtyard, Petroff was awaiting his arrival. He saluted mockingly and then led the little procession down the front façade of

the palace, turned the corner in the full face of the sun.

With keen eyes, Riley quickly perceived the trap that had been made ready for him. Against the white-washed walls of the palace stood an iron cage. It was some ten feet square by twenty high. The bars were thick and strong; a heavy lock guarded the narrow iron door.

There was no roof to the cage. The top was open to the sun. The sun! That was it! That devil of a sun! Riley knew it of old. A half hour's exposure to it in the heart of the day and demons crawled in one's brain.

That was the hellish death Petroff had devised for him!

The door to the iron cage was flung open. Roughly he was thrown into the interior and the lock snapped shut behind him. A hoot of derision swelled from the throats of the onlookers.

Riley knew the hellish torture he would go through. His first impulse was to fling himself at the iron bars in a mad effort to break the confining cage. Then came sanity. If he would survive, he must keep his head, keep cool at all costs.

HE knew without trying that there was no escape through those iron bars by mere brute strength alone. His only salvation lay in matching his wits with the Russian's.

Slowly, calmly, as if he hadn't a care in the world he strolled to the far end of the cage and lay himself down against the wall.

The sun rose, beat down unmercifully like a ball of molten fire. No matter where he lay, where he turned, it discovered Riley, filtered insidiously into his fevered brain.

His mouth was dry as dust. His tongue became swollen and puffed. It was an agony of pain to swallow.

And this was only the beginning. There were hours yet—long, never ending hours, till the sun went down.

And then there was the morrow! How long could he hold out? He had to hold out for the girl!

In a window high up in a wing of the palace that projected at right angles to Riley's cage, something white attracted his attention. He stared at it a moment, uncomprehendingly. Then he understood. It was the girl standing there in the enclosure, looking down on him.

Riley couldn't face the unseen anguish in her face. He turned away. Another fevered hour passed. He had to think. Had to think despite the brass gong beating in his brain.

Late in the afternoon Petroff and the Khan strolled by. An awning was raised for them and there seated under the shade, sipping nectar from tall, frosted glasses, they watched the fevered anguish of their victim.

Riley lay stretched full length in the sun. He didn't stir. No muscle moved. He was fighting the tongues of flame leaping in his brain. And he was thinking, thinking, thinking, torturing his already overwrecked brain in a vain search for a solution to a problem to which there was no answer.

And so passed the first day.

THE coolness of the night gave Riley a respite. He still suffered the agony of the damned from thirst, the licking fires that had consumed his brain during the day subsided.

He rarely moved, save for an occasional turn of his head toward the barred window where Coleen stood. He knew that the only hope he had—and it was so slender that it cast no shadow—was in conserving his fast ebbing strength to the last degree.

The cage was strong. There was

no breaking through it. No help could he expect from the outside. He had to match his wits against the Russian's and he had to win, despite the overwhelming odds he fought against.

The sun rose the following day and with the first burning rays of the fiery orb, Petroff sallied forth from the palace. He was freshly bathed, dressed in cool white linens.

A comfortable breakfast beneath his belt, a cigarette dangling from his thin lips, he took his place under the canopy and amused himself watching the faint, convulsive jerkings of Riley's seared body.

BUT holding on to his sanity with the last of his strength, Riley determined to rob him of half his pleasure. He made no outcry. No word of prayer or plea was wrung from his tortured lips. If the Russian thought he would grovel in the dust, he would show him how an officer of the Bengal Lancers met his death.

Petroff taunted him with vile curses and epithets. Riley received them in stony silence. The Russian swallowed tremendous beakers of cool, fresh water. Riley refused to hear. And then as a final thrust, the Russian emptied a tall demijohn of water on the dusty ground.

The cool liquid laughed and gurgled as it spilled from the neck of the bottle. The bubbling sound insinuated itself into Riley's smoldering brain until he thought he would go mad.

God alone knew what effort and will power it took to keep from crying out for just one drop of water—just one drop!

Petroff gave up the futile game at last. With a cruel leer on his face he stepped up close to the bars. Riley wasn't dying as hard as he had anticipated. Too bad; half his

amusement was gone. He had expected the Irishman to survive for at least three days and now it appeared he would die on the second.

"Dog!" snarled Petroff. "There is less fight in you than I thought. Before the ants claim you, and I throw you to the dogs, you might be interested in hearing the little plan I have arranged for your men."

Riley was very interested, but by the movement of no muscle did he show it. He lay full length on his back in the broiling sun, eyes closed, apparently insensible. But his ears were keen and sharp and he listened avidly to Petroff's words.

"Tomorrow," continued the Russian, "tomorrow early I lead forth a hundred of Abdel Khan's men. We shall proceed swiftly to the Lybia Pass and from there sweep down in a surprise attack on your men at the oil field. We shall wipe them out, exterminate them to the last man. But the gallant captain will have been dead before then, and he will not care."

Every devilish word of the Russian sank into Riley's fevered brain. However, he made no sign that he had heard. Petroff glared at him savagely for a moment, then with a bitter curse turned away in disgust.

HE dies like a jackal," he muttered to himself. "No fight in him despite his boasting words. No spirit!"

Lybia Pass! Lybia Pass! Lybia Pass! The words echoed and re-echoed in Riley's tortured brain. Something stirred in his failing consciousness. Those words had a pregnant significance for him, besides the geographical name, if he could only put his finger on it.

Lybia Pass . . . surprise attack . . . his men wiped out!

And then something clicked in Riley's brain. He saw it all

now, vividly, clearly! For just such an emergency, the Bengal Lancers had secretly cached in every pass on the frontier arms and munitions.

Marshaling the faculties of his throbbing brain he mentally visualized the physical characteristics of the Lybia Pass. He saw it all in his mind's eye. There was a machine-gun hidden there—with a hundred rounds of ammunition.

If he could escape—if he could beat Petroff to the pass—he could hold him off till reinforcements came up. He had to escape!

The blazing sun rose high in the heavens. Riley's flesh became scorched and livid. But the torment of his body was nothing compared to the anguish of his brain as he forced it on, ever seeking to discover some way of escape.

High noon. Early afternoon and the sun slowly arched across the dome of heaven to settle in the west.

Riley was an inert heap of livid flesh in the far corner of his cage. But in his brain a strange fire burned. And the flames that consumed his spirit were not caused by the scorching sun.

CHAPTER VII

Death at Lybia Pass

THE INDIAN night fled across the snow-capped hills in the distance. From the east, a live flaming thing, the red sun thrust itself over the horizon and hurled its merciless rays down upon the arid earth. The jungle sighed as the coolness of the night left it, and once again the terrific heat of the day descended furiously upon the country.

Alexis Petroff, having breakfasted well, strode into the palace courtyard and barked a crisp order at the waiting Hamzoolah. The latter sa-

luted, disappeared, and a few moments later in response to the relayed orders, the men of Petroff and Abdel Khan lined themselves up before their chief, armed and ready for whatever expedition he might order.

PETROFF surveyed them with a keen all-seeing eye. Then satisfied that his little army was prepared for the mission upon which he was sending them, he turned again to Hamzoolah.

"March them off to the Lybia Pass. Before you have covered much distance I shall have joined you. In the meantime I have a duty to perform."

Hamzoolah saluted, shouted three brisk commands to his men. Smartly the group left-turned and started off on their journey. Petroff stood watching their lithe brown figures disappear in a cloud of dust on the road, then with a smile of satisfaction, he strode from the courtyard toward the spot where his enemy was dying.

As he approached the cage, he was aware of a sense of misgiving tugging at his heart. For in the distance he could see a prone, motionless figure lying inert on the bottom of the iron prison. Was it possible that Riley was dead? Petroff frowned, as he realized that perhaps he had been deprived of the sadistic pleasure of watching his enemy die. He increased his pace slightly.

A moment later he stood before the hot iron of the cage peering in through the bars. Some few feet from the rear wall lay Riley. He was not a pleasant sight. His head was thrown back. His mouth was open, and his tongue lolled out like that of a thirsting animal. His eyes were closed. And beneath the filth and sweat of his tunic, his muscles were inert.

Petroff grunted. He then thrust his stick through the steel bars and prodded the helpless man within. Again he rammed the stick forcefully into the prone figure. There was no movement. Again Petroff grunted. And for the moment the fact that Riley was dead compensated for the fact that Petroff had not seen him die.

Then as the Russian raised his eyes from his victim, his brows lowered. A puzzled expression crossed his face. Then it was gone and furious rage replaced it. He swore under his breath in his native tongue. Then for the second time he read the words that were written in crimson upon the wall at the back of the cage.

Abdel:

Petroff feeds his men cow flesh. Is THIS, then, your ally?

PETROFF glanced about hastily. No one was in sight, and for that fact he breathed a sigh of relief. Even in his dying moment this dog, Riley, had attempted to thrust trouble into Petroff's life.

Of course, the statement written in Riley's blood upon the wall, was untrue. But the Russian was well aware of the sensitivity of the Mohammedan prince on religious ritual. If he even suspected that Petroff rationed his men with the flesh of the sacred animals—kine—it would certainly do the Russian no good.

Grudgingly, Petroff admitted to himself, the resourcefulness of his enemy. Impotent and dying, Riley had yet evolved and executed a plan which would nettle his adversary. Writing in his own blood a message calculated to cause bad feeling between Petroff and his Indian ally.

Well, the Russian reflected, it was fortunate for him that no one else had read the message first. Now

that the Irishman was dead, Petroff could safely enter the cage and erase those damning words ere the prince himself could read them.

He took a bunch of keys from his pocket, selected one and twisted it in the padlock which held the cage door fast. Then he entered.

He paused for a moment as he came close to the corpse, and a triumphant, exultant gleam came into his eyes as he regarded the inert heap that lay at his feet. Then, with a smile on his lips, he stepped across the body to the wall. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and commenced to obliterate the offending words from the whitewashed stone.

Exactly what occurred in the ensuing twenty seconds, Alexis Petroff never quite knew. He was dimly aware of a sudden movement behind him. The corpse of Francis Riley beat all existing records for swift resurrection. It sprang to sudden and vivid life. A grimy hand snatched the stick from Petroff's hand.

The Russian whirled on his heel, stark amazement stamped in his eyes. He caught a secondary glimpse of his own stick hurtling through the air above his head. A shooting pain bit into his temple. A red and yellow cyclorama flashed before his eyes. Then an infinite blackness transcended all sight, all sensation. His knees buckled and he fell.

Riley permitted himself to enjoy a moment of triumph. He gazed down at the fallen Russian, smiled grimly and muttered softly:

"So, my friend, virtue again overpowers the machinations of evil."

THEN he turned and fled through the open door of the cage a free man once more—free to frustrate the deep-laid plans of Petroff and his Mohammedan ally, the prince.

He paused for a moment just outside the palace courtyard and strained his eyes peering up the arid road that ran out toward the hills. There in the distance he saw a faint cloud of dust. It seemed to be moving away from him. He nodded his head in satisfaction. Apparently Petroff's men had already left for the pass. That should simplify matters for him.

Just across the threshold of the courtyard he saw a single sentry. In a holster at his side he wore a heavy .45. Riley approached on stealthy feet.

When he was less than five feet away from the Indian, when he was preparing the spring, the man suddenly turned.

His mouth opened to cry out. His right hand fell to the black butt of the revolver at his side. But neither of these things was ever executed. Again that flailing stick of Petroff's was lifted high in the air. Again it descended viciously upon a man's skull, and for the second time within as many minutes, again it claimed a victim.

SILENTLY the Indian fell to the flagstones of the courtyard. His revolver clattered out of his holster to the ground.

Riley stooped swiftly and retrieved it. He thrust the stick through his belt, and boldly entered the palace, his weapon held steadily before him, ready to mow down anyone who should offer resistance.

He raced up a broad flight of marble stairs without encountering anyone. Then as he sped down the hall toward the door which held Coleen prisoner, he came suddenly face to face with two servants of Abdel's household. They were unarmed, and apparently scared out of their wits at the sight of this berserk apparition who appeared from no-

where and pointed a sinister black .45 at their fluttering hearts.

"Come with me," he snapped in native dialect. "Do as I tell you and you shall not be harmed."

Docilely, not daring to parley with this madman, the pair obeyed. Riley halted before the door. Then he took a chance. He turned to one of the trembling servants before him. The muzzle of the .45 was brandished ominously.

"Unlock that door," he commanded.

The pair of them exchanged glances. The .45 dug into the nearest man's heart.

"Unlock that door," said Riley again, and in his tone was an unspoken hint of death.

One of the Indians hastily concluded that the wrath of their master, the prince, was a more merciful thing than the sudden death which this white man had offered them.

With trembling fingers he took a bunch of keys from his robe, and inserted it into the door. Riley drove the pair of them into the room before him.

He slammed the door shut behind him, and turned to confront Coleen. Her blue eyes were lighted up with fresh hope. Her lips wore a smile of gratitude.

"I saw what you did in the cage," she said. "Thank God, you're alive. I, as well as Petroff, thought it was all over."

"Hush," he said. "There is little time for words. We must be off at once. God, what's that?"

HIS eyes had suddenly perceived an earthen pitcher of water standing on a small table. Water! The element that every fiber in his parched being was crying out for. Hastily he approached the table and held the pitcher to his lips. But despite his terrible thirst he dared not

drink too much. Carefully he rinsed out his mouth, sipped a little of the precious fluid and then turned again to the girl.

"Come," he said. "We need horse. Good fresh horses, and even yet we may outwit these cutthroats."

He walked to the door, paused upon the threshold and addressed the two Indians in Pushtu.

"You two shall remain here locked in. You will make no outcry for at least five minutes. If you do, I shall return and slay you."

He scowled ferociously. The two utterly cowed natives bowed in acquiescence. Riley slammed the door, locked it, and, with Coleen holding his hand tightly, beat a hasty retreat down the stairway from which he had come.

This time he did not leave the courtyard. Instead he led the way through a small door to the left. Twenty feet to the rear of a large enclosure were the prince's stables. It was in that direction that he headed.

THE brutal swinging muzzle of his gun disposed of the pair of startled grooms who attempted to bar his way at the entrance to the stables. Then in an instant he had untethered two of the best looking pieces of horseflesh in the place. A moment later he and Coleen were riding hell bent for leather over the flagstones of the courtyard.

But the getaway was not to be as easy as he had anticipated. Someone, evidently, had discovered the unconscious form of the sentry at the entrance to the court. As they emerged, urging their horses, half a dozen of the prince's retainers bore down upon them shrieking imprecations.

A pair of brown arms clutched at the neck of Coleen's horse. Riley's gun spoke once. The brown arms

ran wet with crimson. A hoarse scream ripped through the air. Riley's horse shied violently, sprung in the air, and landed with heavy hoofs upon a writhing piece of humanity below.

A Ghurka knife whizzed through the air, neatly detaching a piece of cloth from the Irishman's tunic, and drawing blood from a flesh wound.

With one hand steadily gripping the bridle of the girl's horse, Riley urged the mounts on, through the wall of human flesh that barred their way. The metal-shod hoofs of the horses struck heavily against the brown skins of the Indians. Riley's .45 took the toll of half the enemy.

Then, at last, they were clear.

Down the dusty road, through the terrible heat the two horses galloped like Bucephalus and Pegasus off to keep a tryst with the gods. On and on they went.

No word was spoken between them as they rode madly on their way. Riley knew that in order to put his plans into execution he must conserve every ounce of strength that he possessed. His body ached with a weary, maddening pain. His lungs breathed with difficulty and every nerve of his being thirsted for water.

Then he pulled back on the reins, and waved a signal to the girl to halt. For a moment they took a brief respite at the side of the road.

"We'll cut off the trail here," he said. "It's our only chance. We can save twenty minutes, and with luck we should reach Lybia Pass before Petroff's men. There's a Lewis gun cached there. I can hold them off while you go down and get reinforcements from the oil settlement."

SHE nodded and flashed him a smile. Then she turned her steed's head toward the rocky uplands.

"Then," she said courageously, "come on."

His own mount swerved and the pair of them set off through an arid waste of boulders. Some few feet in from the road they picked up the broken trail that Riley had estimated was at this point. Then at a steady lope, the girl riding behind, they pressed forward, silent and grim, driven onward through peril and pain by a terrible resolution, by an all-consuming desire to foil the machinations of the Russian.

It was high noon when their spent horses came wearily into Lybia Pass. High up on the plateau the pass was a jagged cut through the mountain which looked down on the flat plain beneath. Some miles to the rear lay the oil fields. While before them down on the plain, Riley saw Petroff's little army marching through the terrible heat toward Lybia, little aware that the enemy already held that vantage point.

Riley climbed down from his horse. He walked over to Coleen and took her hand in his.

"You go down to the oil fields," he said. "Tell the men not to come here, but to flank the enemy and attack them from the rear. In that way we'll have them between two fires which should compensate for their superior numbers. Fast now, and good luck."

For a moment their eyes met, and Riley felt an alien sensation of warmth flood his heart. The pressure of their hands grew stronger. Then the girl said: "And good luck to you, Francis Riley. You'll need it more than I will."

She stooped suddenly in the saddle and before he could divine her motive, kissed him full on the lips. Then she whirled her mount about, and galloped at express train speed down the other side of the mountain.

For a long moment Riley gazed after her, a strange, unaccustomed tenderness in his eyes.

"My dear," he muttered to himself. "I've got to be lucky now. Never before has Francis Riley had such an excellent reason for escaping with his life."

Then as he turned his head and gazed at the marching troops below, he brought his sentimental interlude to an abrupt conclusion. The brown marching men were bearing down, concentrating at the bottom of the hill. He saw them fall out, recline at the side of the road and pull their water bottles.

Then as he gazed beyond them he saw the figure of a lone horseman approaching in the distance. Without distinguishing the rider's features, Riley knew who it was. Petroff, having recovered from his blow on the head, was now hastening to the pass to lead his men on to victory.

Riley turned away from his contemplation of the scene below and prepared to get down to the grim business of war. At the side of the jagged rocky cut in which he found himself was a small cave. Into this he wormed himself.

HE reappeared a moment later dragging a Lewis gun with him. Three drums of ammunition were hung around his neck. He set the gun at the mouth of the pass, lay comfortably on his stomach behind it, and resumed his contemplation of the enemy's movements below.

The horseman had come up with his men by now. Apparently he had no idea that his escaped prisoner had gained the pass before him. For now his troops resumed marching order again and slowly filed up the narrow path that crawled up the side of the mountain.

Riley shut one eye, and with the

other stared through the sights of the Lewis gun. He was in no hurry. There was plenty of time, and he had no desire to waste ammunition. He was going to have enough trouble holding out until aid arrived.

Then when the toiling troop was plainly silhouetted against his sights, Francis X. Riley sighed wearily and pressed his finger against the trigger.

The sun dipped in the west. The molten copper ball had run its torturous journey through the heavens spreading a day of arid heat in its wake. Now wearily it made for the haven of the horizon. A purple haze fell over the baked plain.

RILEY wearily placed his last magazine on the post of the Lewis and stared over his sights down on to the plain, regarding the havoc he had wrought.

Blurred and indistinct in the distance he saw prone turbaned figures lying on the ground, mute testimonials to accuracy of his aim. Riding back and forth shrieking orders from his twisted mouth was Petroff, rallying his men to another charge against the single man who had held the pass for four long, weary hours.

Petroff's force had been decimated by the chattering Lewis gun, but yet enough men remained to outnumber the small platoon from the oil fields. Riley cast an anxious eye at the sun, and another at the single magazine which remained between him and destruction.

Below, he saw the Russian's force preparing for another foray against him. This time instead of storming en masse up the trail on the mountainside, they spread out and clambered over the craggy rocks in open order.

At once Riley's military mind divined their intention. While part of the force attacked him from the

front, the other would climb the rocky crags and drop down on him in the pass from above.

He had feared that Petroff would think of this device, and now he could only thank the Fates that it had taken four long hours to do it.

Half a dozen steel messengers of death pinged against the rocks at his side as the fresh offensive began. Riley drew back the cocking handle with a click and pressed the trigger. The return spring leaped forward, the magazine rotated on its posts and a streaking thread of doom hurtled through the air into the approaching men.

Three of them fell, but under the lash of Petroff's tongue the others struggled forward. It was their last desperate attempt. The Russian was staking all on this final frantic throw of the dice. Riley realized that by now his magazine was half empty.

Well, he reflected grimly, it was all over now. In a moment Petroff's men would spring on him from above and that would be the end. He was aware of a terrible desire to live within his breaths.

True, the Reaper himself held no terrors for Riley, but now just when he had achieved something for which to live, life itself was to be snatched away from him. He grinned at the irony of it.

THEN his heart picked up a beat. His keen eyes peering through the sights of the Lewis suddenly perceived a drab khaki figure in the distance. His gaze swept the landscape in a semicircle. Advancing fanwise on the plain below were the Bengal Lancers. Now he could make out the forms of their pure-bred horses.

Swiftly the figures became larger as they galloped to the charge. The clear lucid notes of a bugle ripped

through the air. A wild yell was heard. They charged!

The air was suddenly alive with steel. The men of Petroff's troop surprised by this attack in the rear, paused a moment in their tracks and stared stupidly behind them. Riley's finger again crooked about the trigger of the machine-gun. A stinging hail of lead ate its way into the human targets before him.

Up the slope, firing as they came, raced the Lancers of Bengal to the rescue. Riley sighed. He stood up over his empty gun stretching his weary muscles for a moment. Then abruptly he became aware of something above him.

He sidestepped swiftly, and not a second too soon. A shadowy figure dropped into the pass from the rocks above, stumbled, then came to its feet to be revealed as Petroff, an ugly snarl on his lips, and a .38 in his hand.

"All right," he said bitterly. "You win again, Riley. But death shall beat us both."

The revolver's muzzle was bearing directly on Riley's heart.

Even as the Russian's finger tightened on the trigger, Riley sprang. Something ate into his shoulder and a thousand devils of agony crawled through his muscles. His ears rang with the reverberations of the Russian's pistol.

Yet when his hands met around Petroff's knees and brought him down, the Irishman was still alive.

Desperately they struggled there for possession of the weapon. Riley's hands were taut over Petroff's, on the butt of the gun. Sweating and swearing they fought, fought to the death in the lonely Lybia Pass.

Suddenly, a deafening explosion

burst in Riley's ears. Cordite stung his eyes. The body with which he grappled became inert in his grasp—supine. Blood was on his hands. But it was not his own blood.

He stood up and regarded the dead figure of Petroff at his feet. In the struggle the revolver had been somehow discharged and the steel death that lurked in its chamber had sped swift and true into the Russian's brain.

Below him, the enemy was in full flight, pursued whole-heartedly by the wild riding Lancers. Francis X. Riley placed his hands on his hips and sighed. He turned suddenly as he heard a horse's hoofs behind him.

Coleen Wright smiled at him from her saddle, then hastily she dismounted, put her arm around him and placed a canteen of water at his lips. He gulped the fluid thirstily. He was aware of a terrible weariness assailing him.

"Thank God, you got through," he said. "I couldn't have held out much longer."

"I'm glad," she said simply. "glad that we got here in time." Then she regarded him anxiously. His face was pale and wan. Blood stained his tunic. "Oh, Francis," she said, concern marring her pretty features, "you're all right, aren't you? You're not going to die."

Francis X. Riley gazed squarely in her eyes. "Die?" he said, uttering what he meant to be a laugh, but what emerged from his lips a horrible parched gasp. "Die? Why, I've only just started to live."

Tenderly she helped him toward the horse, who with an equine discretion had turned his face from them and moodily contemplated the sinking Indian sun.

Next Month: VALLEY OF GIANTS, by Jackson Cole, a Complete Book-Length Novel of Stirring Adventure on a Strange Expedition Beset with Exciting Perils.

A Colorful Story of Breathless Adventure and Malicious Treachery in the Glamorous Era of the Crusaders



Conrad *the* Cruel

A Complete Novelette

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

Author of "The Scarlet Killer," "The Dumb Bunny," etc.

IT WAS the rear-most man-at-arms who saw the flash of sun on steel far on their right flank on the sea shore road from Constantinople.

"There be armed men there!" he pointed it out to Godfrey, who stared from under his helmet and gave swift order for his clump of spears to close in against the danger.

All unaware of the treachery brewing before and behind him, Godfrey had ridden through the heat of that day, his escort of armed men riding behind him.

They were a compact and war-like group, from the young knight himself in his conical steel helmet with its nose piece, and the chain mail covering his well knit frame and his

great sword and heavy lance and battle mace; to the no less well armed Nigel of Bardo, the seneschal, and the men-at-arms with their steel helmets, stout leather jerkins, heavy swords and lances.

They rode well closed in and keeping an eye at the front and flanks, for the country was full of marauding bandits, of Seljukian Turks, Arabs and lawless Europeans who had clung to the flanks of the Crusaders.

RIGHT glad was Godfrey to have Constantinople behind him with its old and weary court, its scarlet-clad Varangian guard, its gem diademed emperor with his shifty eyes, and the Princess Dorothea Comnenus, the emperor's niece.

Godfrey's face flushed in anger as he remembered her—a spitting, angry little wild cat, trying to force her eunuchs on to kill him when he had saved the young Turk from their curved swords.

Royally angry had she been as he bespoke the hawk-faced Turkish youth courteously, finding that he had saved the life of no less a personage than Magra bin al Jabar, nephew of Kilidj Arslan, the Lion of the Turks, the scourge of the crusaders in Palestine.

"An unruly hussy!" Godfrey designated her in his thoughts and stared at the dusty road ahead, leading on to Jerusalem, that road fraught with so many dangers to the Crusader barons.

He had left the emperor that morning, bidding him farewell, although he trusted not this ruler of Constantinople, this emperor of Byzantium, who sat there in the Augustian courtyard surrounded by his purple-clad patricians of this ancient and weary court.

The emperor had asked him what route he had proposed taking.

"I go by Nicea and to Doryleum," Godfrey had returned, "from thence I avoid Malabruma by going eastward, and thence through the Taurus Mountains to Syria."

"Why do you avoid Malabruma?" the emperor had asked quickly.

"I have heard evil report of Conrad the Cruel, and my force is not great enough to cope with him," answered Godfrey.

The emperor's face retained its expressionless mask as he bade his guest a suave farewell, not even suggesting that Godfrey take the oath of allegiance to him as most of the other Crusaders had done. For Alexis was no fool and realized that this stern-eyed and indifferent Crusader would refuse him point blank, and take care not to bind himself in any way.

AS Godfrey strode from the court, the emperor gazed after him reflectively, noting the confident swing to the stride of the knight and the air of leadership that rested upon him like a cloak, so that all men could recognize him. Then Alexis leaned his head against the diadem of his throne chair and set his brain to plotting.

An hour later Godfrey, astride a mettlesome Artois stallion, his lance in rest, had ridden out of the gates of Constantinople, followed by his seneschal, his two servants and his six men-at-arms, well mounted and well armed, and leading four sumpter mules laden with baggage. He took a ship across to the shores of Asia and set forth for that distant goal which was the Holy Land.

Nor did he know that half an hour after his departure a guard boat, its oars flashing in swift unison, came dashing up the Bosphorus from the guard castle of Hieron. A messenger demanded admission at the water gate, and passed into the pal-

acc, coming at last to Alexis and handing him a parchment sealed with a red seal.

ALEXIS broke the seal as the messenger waited, kneeling before him. As he read, his brown eyes narrowed and his fingers clenched themselves on the arms of the chair. For long he sat there tapping the parchment against his knee and gazing into space so that no man durst disturb him.

At last he dismissed the almost forgotten messenger and called a servant to him.

"Bid the Princess Dorothea Comnenus attend me immediately," he commanded.

Silent he waited while the courtiers moved on tiptoe through the vast halls and spoke in undertones, fearful of disturbing the thoughts of their lord and master.

At last she came and knelt before him. Raising her to a stool at his feet, Alexis plunged directly into his subject.

"I am calling upon you to sacrifice yourself for the Holy Roman Empire," he said in measured tones, and with words that had a ring of finality about them. She paled and her hands went to her throat as she stared at him wide-eyed.

Reflectively Alexis tapped the parchment and its fateful message against his knee.

"You are to pack a few necessary things immediately," he went on, "to take a horse litter and the escort which I have provided for you, and follow after that young knight who flouted you yesterday."

She half rose from her stool and repressed a faint exclamation before the training of the court mastered her, and she sank back pale and more than startled and amazed.

"He will have several hours start on you, but you must press on, pass-

ing by his camp so that he will meet you on the road beyond the Byzantine borders. I will instruct your escort to watch for him and at his approach to disappear except for one or two men. You will then tell him that your escort has been killed by the Turks and that you must press on to the castle of Conrad the Cruel, demanding Godfrey's protection. It is absolutely essential that you lure him into the power of Conrad the Cruel."

THE girl stared sombrely at the emperor.

"Your Majesty desires that Conrad shall kill Godfrey?" she asked in a faint voice.

"Reasons of State demand it," returned the emperor imperturbably. "It is important."

"Pardon my questioning, but could not Your Majesty send a force after him strong enough to overcome his men and accomplish the same purpose?"

"No, my dear, for then the Pope and all Christendom would know that I had been responsible for his death. Reasons of State demand that I shall not appear to have had anything to do with it, that the world will think he has been killed by one of his own people."

The girl still looked puzzled. The emperor placed his hand on her head in kindly fashion and with the other hand waved the parchment before her.

"This must go no further," he said, lowering his voice and leaning towards her, "but I have just received news of the death of King Baldwin of Jerusalem!" The girl's eyes widened in comprehension, then she nodded slowly.

"It is a hard task that your Majesty sets me, but in all things I am obedient to your wishes," she said, but the keen glance of Alexis noticed

a strange light in her eyes and he studied her thoughtfully.

"You will not fail me?" he asked.

"I will not fail you, your Majesty," she answered.

"It is well. Prepare to go in half an hour, I will have the horse litter and escort ready for you."

AS for Godfrey, he continued on his way until afternoon deepened into dusk—nor did anyone molest his force for the time being.

Nigel of Bardo, the seneschal-at-arms, sought and found a camping place for the night—a slight knoll above a stream.

Horses were quickly unsaddled and tethered out in the lush grass, while Godfrey's pavilion was erected and the lesser tents for Nigel and the men-at-arms.

Godfrey sat silent while supper was being prepared and served, rousing himself only once to chide a man-at-arms who threw an arm-load of dry wood on the fire which sent a shower of sparks aloft.

Nigel of Bardo arranged for the guard, while Godfrey prepared for slumber. It was after he had composed himself to rest that he heard the call of a wolf from the mountainside above.

The cry was picked up and repeated from down the valley. A second later it came echoing from in front of them, and a last call from far in the rear, in the direction from whence they had come.

"The wolves are talking again," said the men-at-arms, casting nervous glances in the dark.

"Aye, I mind me how they talked thus before the massacres under St. Gilles in the parched country to the east," said a battle-scarred old soldier. "And owls hooted in the day-time when no owl should be heard. Before nightfall the next day our force was cut to pieces."

"You believe it a portent then?" asked a younger soldier, wide-eyed.

"Portent? Nonsense!" growled the gray-haired man-at-arms, "those be no real wolves."

"What else then?" asked the young soldier fearfully.

"Much worse than wolves," growled the old man as he pulled his saddle over to act as a pillow, "those be Turks!"

During each hour of the night the wolf howls rose around them in the darkness, but Godfrey slept regardless, as did the older men. But the young man-at-arms poked up the dying embers of the fire and sat up all night, staring fearfully into the darkness.

They were up at dawn and there was little time wasted by those seasoned campaigners as they ate breakfast, broke camp, and packed the sumpter mules.

Godfrey swung into the saddle and was handed lance and sword by his esquire who retained possession of the great shield himself.

The chill mists of dawn were soon succeeded by the first heat of the sun and the sun disclosed something else as well, for it glittered on steel which showed for a moment or two far out on their flanks. And then the steel disappeared. But those hardened soldiers drew in more closely together, and loosened sword in scabbard while Godfrey's esquire thrust up more closely to his shield side.

PASSING through a forest, they heard owls hoot, which was a strange thing in daylight, but no man said anything. Save that they rode tight-lipped and grim, and that the young man-at-arms glanced about him nervously, there was no sign in that little clump of spears that aught was amiss.

But none molested them that day

nor the next, and at last they came to the river Sangarius, the boundary of the Byzantine Empire.

This they crossed on a Roman bridge of heavy stone worn deep by the passage of men and horses for a thousand years, and passing it, they left behind the last Byzantine guard tower, nor did they know that the news of their passing was flashed by sun telegraph to distant Constantinople.

Around them were rolling hills with a ruined palace and a deserted village on the sky line, and desolate fields stretching out beyond the gray willows and oaks that bordered the dusty track.

Godfrey could close his eyes and visualize those thousands of Crusaders who had swept along this trail spreading out on the green fields in either side, men-at-arms with clanking shields and spears speeding by at the trot; and plodding foot soldiers, and the black robed men and peasants, and sturdy pilgrims, and the rabble of cut-throats and snatch-purses from the slums of European cities, over four hundred thousand all told, a full half of whom had left their bones to bleach in the forbidding land ahead.

BUT he kept his eyes closed not long, for the apprehensive younger man-at-arms called out again in excitement, and men followed the direction of his glance seeing the glitter of steel far off on the right and seemingly moving to the rear.

Puzzled, Godfrey rose in his stirrups and studied it with hand shading his eyes, nor could he know that it was a solid clump of Alexis' cavalry, some fifty men, Greek Cataphracts, splendid mailed lancers modeled after the ancient Roman cavalry, circling around the approaching clump of Frankish lances to remain out of sight, and to return

to Constantinople, their task completed.

Two miles farther on they came upon a horse litter in disarray with but two men guarding it, and those two seemingly wounded, their armor broken and their saddle housings dusty.

Seated on a log near-by was the Princess Dorothea Comnenus simulating very naturally a woman sore distressed and affrighted.

GODFREY rode up, towering above her, and showing by no flicker of a muscle of his face any feeling that the meeting might have caused him.

"And how come you here, my lady?" he asked gravely, only to meet a torrent of excited explanation accompanied with many nervous gestures as she told him the story she had rehearsed, of how she had set forth for the castle of Conrad the Cruel, of how she had been beset by marauding Turks and her escort slaughtered.

The men-at-arms crowded up curiously during the recital, all save the gray-haired old soldier who looked about him, seeking for signs of blood and killed and wounded.

Finding none, he gave up the quest and returned in time to hear the lady explaining how her escort had fled at the first onset, and how in turn the marauders had fled at the sight of the threatening lances of the Frank party.

The old sergeant sniffed suspiciously, but Godfrey considered her story and saw naught amiss, the country being what it was, and the cowardice of Byzantine soldiers, a by-word with the Crusaders.

"And now, my lady, what are your plans?" he asked gazing down upon her.

She wrung her hands helplessly.

"It is dangerous to go back," she

cried, "and I must go forward to the castle of Conrad the Cruel."

"And why go you there, the place has an ill repute?" asked Godfrey.

"Nay," the girl shook her head, "but my cousin Helene is wed to one of Conrad's knights, and it is her that I am on my way to visit. Could I not accompany you and journey under the protection of your strength, my lord?" she asked humbly with downcast eyes.

"But my route lies not that way," returned Godfrey, "I would fain avoid that country."

BUT what chance has a man against a woman's wiles? By dint of downcast eyes and cajoling looks and all manner of womanly pleading, she swayed that stern knight to her way of thinking, and he gave orders that her horse litter should join his force.

There was much muttering among the men in rear when his decision became known.

"We will ne'er pass unscathed through the domain of Conrad the Cruel," said one of the men, shaking his head forebodingly.

"Wherefor?" asked the young soldier anxiously.

"For the very good reason that he rageth like a fiend incarnate," growled the first man, "and men say that he hath communion with the Evil One, having long foresworn his knightly vows and showing mercy to neither man, woman nor child."

"Cease the idle chatter!" commanded the old sergeant sharply, "Our Lord commands that we go by that route and that is sufficient! Although," muttered the old man under his breath, "God and the Saints alone know what will come of us!"

So it was that the clump of lances changed direction and bore off to the right, its strength hampered by the addition of a horse litter and a wo-

man and two sick-looking retainers. The old sergeant studied these latter narrowly.

At the halt that night, he voiced his suspicions to Nigel of Bardo, the seneschal.

"Never saw I such strangely wounded men," he growled, "who carry neither blood stain nor scratch upon their stout bodies, but none-the-less continue to groan and complain of their hurt. And saw you aught of blood stains or broken weapons at the place where we encountered the horse litter? Nay, my master, there were none. I think myself the woman is a sorceress, sent by the Evil One to lead our master astray."

But Nigel of Bardo, fearing neither man nor devil, laughed at the old man's suspicions and sent him back to his duties grumbling under his breath.

TIME and again that day they saw the flash of steel on the far horizon and to all of them, save Godfrey, there came the feeling that they were encompassed about with enemies who simply awaited the best opportunity to strike. Even Nigel of Bardo began to be oppressed by the heavy weight of foreboding, and said as much to his liege lord, but received naught in reply except a disgusted grunt.

Nigel glanced sideways at his lord the master and memory of the sergeant's words came to him, and Nigel wondered if there might not be after all some truth in the old man's theory of bewitchment. For certainly his erstwhile energetic and alert lord rode silent, his head sunk on his chest and his eyes vacant and unseeing.

Towards dusk they crossed a range of low hills, but naught was visible in the wide and long plain that stretched out before them. They

made camp that night by a small river. From their camp site no sign of human habitation could be seen except an ancient Roman ruin which occupied the pinnacle of a hilltop near-by.

THE two retainers brought up from their horses a pavilion for the young girl and erected it not far from Godfrey's tent. She retired into her quarters immediately that they were ready and came not forth again that night, having her supper served to her out of sight.

Again the melancholy howls of the wolves came echoing across the plain before and behind them, and on either side, as had happened previously. Instead of growing accustomed to this nightly sound even the more hardened of the men-at-arms found themselves listening apprehensively.

Someone among them recognized the place they were encamped as the site of that bitter battle of Doryleum, wherein the first great body of Crusaders had suffered grievous losses against the hordes of Turks. Others among them told of that long and cruel day when the flower of European chivalry was cut down, and the Crusaders camp entered, and the priests and women slaughtered mercilessly by the infidels, and it was only in late afternoon that the standards of Godfrey of Vermandois appeared in time to save the day.

"Mayhap the ghosts of the slain still wander disconsolate about this cursed spot," spoke up the nervous young man-at-arms, staring down a forest glade. "Methought I saw but now the sheen of silvered armor catching the reflection of our fire light," he added, his voice troubled.

The old sergeant looked up sharply and then rose suddenly to his feet. "B'r Lady!" he growled, "that

armor belongs to no ghost!" and he pointed down the forest glade.

"There is another one—and another—and another!" came the low voiced, tense, exclamations from the others.

One ran to warn Nigel of Bardo, who came stumbling out of his tent, sword in hand, his eyes drowsy with sleep. But by the time he cleared his eyes and stared all sign of the strange men in armor had disappeared.

Cursing the men-at-arms for a gang of skittish fools he returned to his couch.

But there was little sleep among the men-at-arms that night. They had seen what they had seen, and waited in dread of an attack at dawn. The night wore through, however, without further alarms and morning came at last, and with it new courage.

THE Princess Dorothea was astir and dressed early, and her retainers quickly had her horse litter triced up by the time the rest of the men were in the saddle. Godfrey rode by the litter, not deigning to glance aside at its drawn curtains, nor noted that the lady Dorothea opened them a hand's breadth and stared after him, her eyes enigmatical.

They had been but an hour on their way when the flash of sun on steel sparkled from the low-lying hills on their left, and they saw a cloud of dust bearing down upon them.

So heavy was the dust that they could see naught save that they were to be beset by many horsemen.

Godfrey waked quickly from his lethargy and ranged his men in order, facing the on-coming horsemen. They came on at a trot, and now the Crusaders saw the forms of men above the dust, stalwart men with dark faces under helmets that gleamed like silver.

Nearer they came and nearer, their small active horses fretting at the bits as though anxious to be in the combat. They carried no lances, these marauders, but heavy bows ready strung and round shields, while the curved blades of their swords flashed in the sun.

THE Crusader force, a scant dozen men all told, set their horses in grim silence, nor moved when a trumpet pealed from among the savage Arabs. There was the wild clangor of cymbals and the flutter of a green banner suddenly upraised.

"At the green banner!" commanded Godfrey, and laid his lance in rest. On a sudden he put spurs to his horse and followed by his handful of men, charged straight at the center of the fifty or sixty Arabs who bore down upon him. At sight of their charge a wild yell went up from the Moslems and waving scimitars flashed defiance.

"*Dieu le vult!*" roared Godfrey, shouting the Crusaders' battle cry. And "*Dieu le vult!*", "God wills it," shouted his men after him.

Arrows began to whip into them and a horse went down and then another as the charging line struck the Arabs. The center of the Moslem line bent inwards at the smash of those heavy armed men, and their lances, but the flanks drew around the small force. Dropping their lances, the Crusaders drew swords and there began the flash of steel against steel.

Godfrey, shouting aloud the Crusader battle cry, whirled his great weapon about his head, and slashed through the light armor of his nearest antagonist. Arab after Arab went down before him, one dropping from the saddle with his head nearly severed, another with his right arm sheared off, another cut nearly in two at the waist as that long slash-

ing blade wreaked fearful havoc among the close-pressed Moslems.

Clearing a space about him as the Arabs gave back fearfully, Godfrey saw that the fight had split into groups with one Crusader in each case fighting like a cornered wolf against crowds of lighter armed Nomads.

Swinging his horse about, he cast a glance backward to where the palanquin and the horse litter stood alone and saw a group of Arabs galloping towards it.

At this sight, he became raging. Setting spurs to his horse, he knocked down the men who impeded him, slashing with his great blade, and paying no heed to the arrows that rattled against the chain mail of his own body and his horse's flanks. Cutting and hacking, he drew away from the main group and charged full into the smaller group that was attempting to lead the horse litter away.

They scattered like chaff before the smash of his onslaught, three of them dropping from the saddle as his sword bit into them. Turning at bay he saw the main force coming towards him and his heart sank as among them he looked in vain for signs of his men.

They had been swallowed up as by the sea, and he was left alone to defend the horse litter, and his own life from this horde of blood-thirsty Arabs who were not only galloping straight for him but whose flankers were circling about to come in at his sides and rear.

THERE was naught to do but to die as bravely as might be, and a strange calm descended upon him as he rose in the stirrups, his great sword poised and ready. His eye fell on the leader of the Moslem force, a man whose fine silvered armor and whose aigret held by a

single great ruby in his turban proclaimed him an Emir or Atabeg.

It was never Godfrey's habit to wait for attack. His horse was rearing with pain and fright for an arrow had pierced the muscles of its foreleg, but the Crusader sat the maddened beast easily and lightly, giving to its every motion.

There was a strange light in his eyes and something akin to a grim smile on his lips as the Moslems checked a few yards from him, no one daring to be first to face the slashing terror of that great blade. Nor did Godfrey know that the curtains behind him had parted and that the lady Dorothea was gazing forth, staring at him with lips half-parted and something akin to a fierce admiration in her eyes.

WITH a shout he put spurs to his horse, and rode at the Emir, his long, straight Crusader blade flashing as he struck. The heavy sword cut down through chain mail, and wadded cotton and silk and bit deep into the Arab's shoulder and chest so that the man rolled sideways out of the saddle, his mouth foaming with blood as his horse reared and screamed with fright.

The death of their leader maddened the Arabs and they drove in, slashing viciously with their curved swords until all about Godfrey became a glittering nightmare of thirsty steel.

The lady Dorothea watched breathless as the great sword rose and fell but her heart sank as she saw the Arabs pressing in from all sides and she saw that it was only a matter of seconds until a treacherous blow would finish the unequal combat.

Closing her eyes to avoid seeing the finish of that splendid knight, she opened them on a sudden as a high shrill trumpet call burst on her ears.

There was a sudden surge and flurry of new horsemen, Seljukian Turks these, who came driving in, in a compact wedge from the flank, scattering the original marauders in all directions. The newcomers were led by a tall, slim youth with a hawklike face, who played about him with his scimitar like an avenging fate.

On a sudden the combat ceased. There was something vaguely familiar about this slim youth who had arrived so opportunely and suddenly the girl recognized him. It was that youth who had been attacked by her eunuch and her palanquin slaves in Constantinople.

Before her dazed eyes the marauding Arabs were driven headlong from the field and the place cleared, leaving Godfrey sitting there on his horse, his great sword dripping while the animal he bestrode lowered its head and panted, its sides heaving with the strain.

The Turkish youth rode up to the Crusader, his hand raised in friendship.

"Ho! Magra bin al Jabar, you have come in good time," said Godfrey.

"I told the Iron Man," returned the Turk, "that it might be that we should meet again. Great is Allah that he hath allowed me to be of service to thee."

BUT Godfrey was staring off to where he had last seen his men. Beckoning Magra to follow him, he trotted out and gazed sombrely at the bodies of his slain retainers, each of them with a ring of death woven about him but each of them with his body filled with arrows and slashed to an almost unrecognizable state.

Nigel of Bardo being the best armed, had created the greatest havoc, and there were no less than seven bodies of slain Arabs about his own.

Without a word said, Magra called to his followers.

They dismounted and began to collect the bodies of the slain Crusaders, and to dig a pit wherein to bury them.

By now the Lady Dorothea had slipped out of her litter and with face half-veiled came up to where Godfrey sat in the saddle.

Of a sudden he saw her standing by his stirrup.

"I have seen great bravery this day," she said, "and my lord, I would crave your pardon for having mis-called you," and she looked up at him with admiration glowing in her eyes.

"Yes?" returned Godfrey with a faint shade of contempt in his tone, "It was better my lady, did you return to your horse litter. This is no place for women." And with that he turned away to speak again to Magra while she bit her lip and went back towards the horse litter with lagging footsteps.

"And now," announced Magra bin al Jabar, "I and my followers escort you safely on your way by any route you choose, save that going through the territories of Conrad the Cruel!" Godfrey shook his head.

"That is unfortunate," he said, "for it is by that route that I must go."

The face of the Turk fell.

"And why do you choose that ill-omened route of all routes?" he cried.

GODFREY shrugged his shoulders, "I have given my word," and he jerked his head towards the horse litter, "to accompany that kinswoman of the Emperor Alexis to her destination."

"Save that the route you intended taking is fraught with danger, that Conrad the Cruel is not to be trusted and that it is the custom of the Emperor Alexis to pay for service

with treachery, you stand in very good case my friend," returned Magra, ironically. Then a heavy frown settled on his forehead. "But at that I would accompany you did not my entering the territories of Conrad the Cruel involve the death of two of my kinsmen whom he holds as hostage."

Godfrey nodded.

And so it was that they rode the rest of that day together until night-fall found them on the borders of Malabruma.

FOR greater protection Magra camped with his friend and they feasted together that night as men feast who never expect again to see each other in the flesh, while Lady Dorothea in her tent sat alone and forlorn.

At the dawn Godfrey came to her and informed her that it would be impossible to carry the horse litter further and that she must ride like a man. Strangely enough, Lady Dorothea, that daintily nurtured daughter of the Byzantine court, made no objection to this, but she pleaded with Godfrey to turn back, stating that there was no need for her to go further and that enough sorrow had been caused by her journeying.

"But that cannot be," returned Godfrey simply, "I have given my word."

Against that adamant stubbornness the Lady Dorothea gave back, defeated, and listlessly allowed the horse to be picked for herself and sat her saddle in skilled fashion as Godfrey noted. With a led horse carrying water bags and food to follow behind them they were prepared to start.

Lady Dorothea noted that Godfrey talked long and earnestly with the young Turkish chief and that the Turk assented to whatever was pro-

posed as she could tell by his nods of approval.

They departed at last with many expressions of sorrow on the part of Magra bin al Jabar.

From here they entered a more barren country, riding along silently side by side. To Lady Dorothea's attempts at conversation Godfrey returned only monosyllables, but in all else he was courteous to her beyond all imagining, taking every opportunity to allow her to rest, caring for the horses and making camp each night, preparing her food and carrying water for her.

ALL this was done in grave and dignified and silent fashion so that, from time to time, she glanced at the man strangely. So perfect was his gentle courtesy that her heart warmed to him more and more and her brain began to work nimbly in an attempt to find some means of saving this man from the fate which awaited him.

It seemed to her that she could, by using the influence of her high estate, dissuade Conrad the Cruel from doing any harm to him, nor was she aware that Alexis had already sent a messenger to Conrad the Cruel promising that avaricious individual fifty thousand gold coins upon safe delivery of Godfrey's severed head to Constantinople.

Nor did she know that even now Conrad's marauders were ranging the hills and valleys seeking for this valuable captive.

Day merged into night and night into day and still they rode onward until, as Godfrey saddled the horses early one morning, some thirty hard-faced and silent men rode down a dry water course and surrounded him before he could reach his sword.

Lady Dorothea covered her eyes and turned white with fear of what might happen to Godfrey, but he was

bound and placed in the saddle while she was commanded in curt tones to accompany them.

All that day they rode, the Lady Dorothea looking like some stricken thing as she glanced ever and anon at the grim profile of Godfrey riding at her side.

Towards evening they came to a narrow valley where watchers challenged them from a tower and allowed them to pass after words had been exchanged.

They came out with the last rays of the setting sun on to a treeless plateau in the center of which, crouched like some predatory animal, were the high walls and the towers of the castle of Conrad the Cruel.

The drawbridge was lowered and the deep rumble of hoofs reverberated in the dry moat as they overpassed it and entered into the courtyard where the flare of many cresets glittered from lance point and helmet and coat of mail.

CONRAD the Cruel lolled on a dais at the end of a great hall, a huge misshapen lump of a man, dewlapped like an ox, staring out at his captive from small, bloodshot piggy eyes. It was during some brawl in his youth that a sword cut and deformed his mouth so that one side of it was split open in a bestial leer, adding still further to the sinister aspect of an already hardened-enough looking type.

"By the body and liver of Satan!" his voice rumbled down the hall, "so you've caught our valuable prize!" and he clapped his hands and shouted for wine while Godfrey stood, tight-lipped and grim before him, his hands bound, and Lady Dorothea sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands like some wounded thing.

"Ho! So this is the lady!" rumbled Conrad's deep voice as his

small pig's eyes took in the daintiness of her, and the beauty. "It was kind of Alexis to send such a sweet bit to grace our barren hall!" and he laughed hugely, but there was something chilling and fear inspiring in that laughter. "So, my lady, you cozened the fly into entering the spider's web! Good for you! Good for you!"

Lady Dorothea shrank back into her chair, her eyes wide with horror as Godfrey turned his head towards her and stared at her gravely without a change of expression.

"So it was treachery you intended from the start," he said contemptuously, and turned away as she moaned and flung up her hands.

"And as for you, young fellow," Conrad turned to the stern-faced young knight below him, "tomorrow your head goes back to the Emperor Alexis who requires it, for what purpose I know not," and Conrad shrugged his fat shoulders, "but tonight you may feast and fill your belly so it shall not be said that Conrad struck off the head of a hungry man. Unbind me this fellow!" commanded Conrad.

Obedient vassals leaped to do his bidding, and Godfrey chafed his wrists, stiff from their long constriction and said naught. His glance rested again upon Lady Dorothea and he found her sitting, chin cupped in hand, staring to the front with some resolution forming in her mind.

GODFREY was given a seat like any guest at the table of the man who was to encompass his death in the morning, but noted that two men-at-arms with drawn swords stood ever near him. He noted also that his own great sword had been flung on a bench near the wall not ten paces away and glanced ever and anon at it to assure himself of its well being.

Wine was brought and great trenchers of steaming meat and loaves of bread, and the long table containing some forty men-at-arms resounded with the sounds of hungry and thirsty men appeasing their needs.

CONRAD the Cruel had a great silver flagon before him which was kept ever filled by a Moslem slave and Conrad drank steadily as did the men around that board, so that some burst into song, and some hammered on the table with their daggers. Lady Dorothea sat close to the gross master of this evil place, and smiled at him and sipped her wine while Godfrey watched her, his eyes harsh and brooding.

Certainly there could be no doubt that Lady Dorothea, throwing all restraint aside—birth, breeding and tradition—was deliberately setting herself to arouse the passions of this huge robber baron. Even now he was fumbling for her in clumsy fashion, but she managed cleverly to evade his pawing hands.

While the feast went on, a squat, powerfully built man with long apelike arms came in and seated himself at the board.

"Ho! Bartholomew," boomed Conrad, "I hope thine axe is keen and bright, and thine arm is sure for I have work for thee on the morrow," and Conrad pointed drunkenly at Godfrey. "He is a skilled workman, is Bartholomew, and thou'lt feel practically nothing, young man, when he brings his axe down across thy neck!"

Lady Dorothea flinched in horror and stared at the huge shoulders and apelike arms of the executioner while Godfrey, glancing up, found the fellow studying him from opaque, light blue eyes, surrounded by light eyelashes.

There was something impersonal

and disinterested about the man's appraisal of him and Godfrey felt a faint chill go through him as he found the man's glance resting on his own junction of neck and shoulder as though to plan his work for the morrow.

BUT a flush was stealing into Lady Dorothea's cheeks and she turned towards the ungainly figure of Conrad the Cruel, and rested her hand lightly on his arm.

"Do you find me beautiful, my lord?" she asked, and there was a lure in her eyes, and the sound of her voice, so that the drunken Conrad lurched towards her. "Nay, nay," she laughed, fending him off, "all things have their price."

"And thy price?" hiccupped Conrad, his eyes shining with desire.

"The life of yonder knight," and she nodded towards the Crusader.

Godfrey, hearing everything, sat silent and amazed.

Conrad stared at the beautiful girl at his side, and then a deep laugh shook his fat frame until it quivered like jelly.

"Ho! Ho! Why should I pay a price for that which is mine for the seizing?"

And he lurched towards her, his heavy arms attempting to grasp the girl's slender form. Of a sudden he let out a bellow of pain and rage and drew back from the needle pointed dagger she drew from somewhere about her person and held point outward. A roar of anger went up from Conrad and he leaped to his feet.

"Disarm me this wench!" he shouted, and men leaped to do his bidding.

The girl fought like a veritable wildcat. Godfrey rose from his seat and on a sudden felt a sword point at his throat, and was pushed back into place again, sitting helpless

while the dagger was jerked out of the girl's hand and flung against the wall where it tinkled against the stones.

Conrad the Cruel was aroused now and dangerous. He stood there like some huge bull, his head weaving from side to side as he glared down at the helpless girl, held on either side by burly vassals. Then wiping off his mouth on his sleeve he reached down to kiss her.

What happened then Godfrey could not tell, but he gathered that the girl must have lashed out with her foot and kicked the huge man in the groin, for Conrad let out a bellow of rage and pain, stumbling backwards and dragging at his dagger.

In the excitement caused by this sudden, swift action, Godfrey found his guards careless for a second. Leaping backwards off the three-legged stool on which he sat, he raised it overhead and brought it down with a crash on the head of the nearest swordsman.

THE fellow dropped like a slaughtered ox.

The second man raised his sword to strike, but Godfrey caught the blow on the upraised stool and leaped across the ten paces that separated him from his sword.

So startled were the men nearest him, and so befuddled with drink that he was unmolested and found himself, weapon in hand, his back to a narrow stone staircase that led above somewhere.

"To me, Dorothea!" he shouted.

In a trice the girl had twisted from her captors and sped to his side. With his free arm he pushed her around and behind him, and felt for a second her soft lips against the palm of his hand. The touch of her lips sent a thrill through him that seemed to set his blood on fire and

he shouted aloud as the first of the men-at-arms rushed at him.

His great blade leaped out and cut down the first attacker as though he had been made of butter instead of flesh and blood. Then three men rushed him, their swords poised, but he dashed their blades aside and slashed, catching the first above the knee, and nigh severing his leg, while the second stumbled backward with a great gaping wound in his chest and a third pitched forward, cut nearly from shoulder to breast bone.

The hall became a pandemonium of shouting men with Conrad, half-sobered now, by the danger, bellowing orders. Behind him Godfrey felt the girl, who clung to him for a second in the lull, and then gave back as a new rush of men, this time armed with bill hooks and pikes, came at him flailed on by the bellowing notes of Conrad's voice.

Some one threw a battle axe from the other side, and it flashed past Godfrey, crashing against a stone and missing him by no more than a hand's breadth. He waved to Lady Dorothea to go farther up the staircase out of harm's way as he saw that ring of steel closing in upon him.

THE long, cruel blades of the pikes thrust at him viciously again and again, but he beat them down with his great sword, shifting about as new spear points sought out joints in his armor. And then an arrow whirred past him and splintered against the stones of the steps where Dorothea had been standing but a second previously, and he thanked God that he had driven her up out of danger.

Meanwhile the bowman was putting another arrow to his string, and Godfrey crouched low, swinging the great sword out in front of him un-

der the pikes and crowding up on his antagonists until the steel bit home in the nearest and they gave back to howls of pain.

By now the entire castle was aroused. Men were pouring into the hall from other portions. Up above he heard the tramp of feet and knew that but a few seconds more would find men assailing him from the rear. Backward he went stubbornly, the ring of steel growing ever stronger about him until he heard a scream from behind and running footsteps and Lady Dorothea was at his back.

"My dear, my dear, they are coming from above!" she cried, a sob in her voice and he heaved a great sigh and fought on, waiting for the end to come.

BUT now there was a commotion at the door of the hall. Conrad the Cruel, standing on the table directing operations, turned aside to see what might be taking place. The men about Godfrey gave back a pace, and he slashed into them. A great voice roared through the hall, and the silver notes of a trumpet rose high above the turmoil.

Godfrey grasped the girl in his free arm and moved past the staircase where armed men were now bearing down behind him.

Again that silver trumpet rang through the hall, and all men stood silent as though frozen. Then there came two knights in silvered armor and wearing silken *khalats*. Following them came two heralds-at-arms, their silken tabards glowing beneath the light of the cressets. Behind them, pouring through the doorway, came more knights and men-at-arms. Suddenly the voice of the foremost knight rang through the hall.

"We seek Godfrey of Jerusalem!" he cried, and there was the ring of authority and power in his voice.

"Here am I," came Godfrey's voice

in the silence. And the nearly spent knight lowered his sword and leaned panting upon it, watching with steady eyes as way was made for the two knights in shining armor and the heralds and the men who followed.

AND then a strange thing happened.

For the two knights knelt humbly before Godfrey.

"We are first to hail thee, O King!" they cried, and reaching forward with their hands, each one in turn placed them within the hands of Godfrey and intoned the feudal oath of fealty.

"What means this, messires?" asked Godfrey.

"Know you not," said the first knight, "that the barons and prelates of Jerusalem in council assembled have chosen you as King?"

"But what of Baldwin of Boulogne, my cousin who hath held the crown and hath made me Prince of Edessa?"

"The King is dead," said the two knights with bowed head, and then, leaping to their feet they flung their arms out wide and, turning to the multitude. "Long live the King!" they shouted.

A vast deep-throated roar shook the hall of that castle.

"Long live the king!" and the echo

of it traveled out beyond the outer walls and into the hills where marauding tribesmen gazed at each other in amaze.

"So be it," returned Godfrey composedly.

"But first there is an act of justice to be performed." His eye ranged over the crowd to the farther wall where the gross form of Conrad the Cruel was attempting to slink away.

"Seize me that man!" commanded King Godfrey, and there was the ring of majesty in his tones, and men hurried to do his bidding. From among the henchmen of the fat knight the King's eye picked out the heavily thewed shoulders of Bartholomew the executioner.

"Strike off thy master's head!" he commanded that one, and then, turning to one near him, he gave order that the head should be sent to the Emperor Alexis.

AND the Lady Dorothea Comnenus rode to Jerusalem and became the humble and devoted wife of this Godfrey who entered into his kingdom in such strange manner, nor did he in after years ever abate his friendship for that hawk-faced Turk, Magra bin al Jabar, who had sent word to Jerusalem and warned the knights of the danger that threatened their future king.

A Glamorous Story of a Famous Nineteenth Century American Highwayman!

The Raid of Captain Lightfoot

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

Author of "The Butterfly of Death," "High Carnival," etc.

In Next Month's THRILLING ADVENTURES—at All Stands



"ALEXANDER
THE GREAT"

Famous SOLDIERS of FORTUNE

"THE WORLD'S FIRST GREAT
ADVENTURER -"

BORN IN 356 B.C. ALEXANDER, THE SON OF PHILIP II, OF MACEDON - A SELF-MADE KING - FROM WHOM HE INHERITED THE LOVE OF CONFLICT.

WHEN A BOY, ALEXANDER STUDIED THE TACTICS OF HIS FATHER, WHO HAD ORGANIZED THE MOST PERFECT FIGHTING FORCE OF ANCIENT DAYS. BEFORE HE WAS TEN HE COMPLAINED THAT HIS FATHER WOULD CONQUER EVERY PLACE AND WOULD LEAVE NOTHING FOR HIM TO FIGHT FOR OR TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST.

HIS CONQUERING SPIRIT WAS DEVELOPED AT AN EARLY AGE.

WHEN 17 YEARS OLD HE WAS WATCHING HIS FATHER'S AIDES MAKE UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS TO TAME A WILD HORSE.

BOLDLY HE CALLED OUT THAT HE BELIEVED THAT HE COULD RIDE THE HORSE. HIS FATHER AGREED TO LET HIM TRY. YOUNG ALEXANDER HAD NOTICED THAT THE ANIMAL HAD SHIED AT ITS SHADOW SO HE GENTLY TURNED ITS HEAD TOWARDS THE SUN AND MOUNTED. HE SOON MASTERED THE HORSE AND THE KING NAMED IT BOUCEPHALIA AND GAVE IT TO HIM.

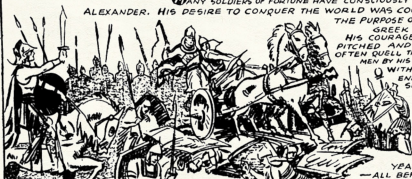
AT 18 HIS FIRST EXPERIENCE IN A PITCHED BATTLE WAS HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL. HIS COMMAND DEFEATED THE "INVINCIBLE THEBANS." AT 21 ALEXANDER SUCCEEDED HIS FATHER AS MONARCH AND SOON INTRODUCED NEW METHODS OF WARFARE WHICH CONQUERED ONE ENEMY AFTER ANOTHER. HE ORIGINATED THE CATAPULT - THEN THE EQUIVALENT OF MODERN ARTILLERY. HIS TROOPS WERE HIGHLY TRAINED AND SO WELL DISCIPLINED THAT OFTEN TO EFFECT QUICK RETREATS FOR THE FRONT LINES THE REAR TROOPS WOULD LAY DOWN, COVERED BY THEIR SHIELDS, AND PERMIT THE HEAVY CHARIOTS TO RUMBLE OVER THEM.

MANY SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE HAVE CONSCIOUSLY IMITATED ALEXANDER. HIS DESIRE TO CONQUER THE WORLD WAS COUPLED WITH THE PURPOSE OF FURTHERING GREEK CIVILIZATION.

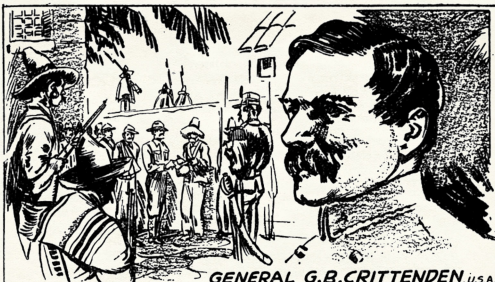
HIS COURAGE WAS HIGH-PITCHED AND HE WOULD OFTEN QUELL THE FEARS OF HIS MEN BY HIS FEARLESSNESS.

WITH MARVELOUS ENDURANCE AND SKILL HE COMPLETED THE CONQUEST OF THE ENTIRE THEN KNOWN WORLD, MARCHING OVER 19000 MILES IN HIS ELEVEN YEARS' CAMPAIGNS

- ALL BEFORE HE WAS 32.



This is the Original Illustrated Adventure



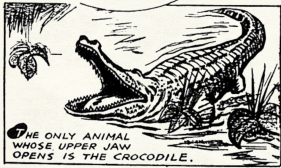
GENERAL G.B. CRITTENDEN, U.S.A.

- ONE OF THE "FIGHTING KENTUCKIANS" WHO JOINED THE TEXANS TO FIGHT THE MEXICANS IN 1842. WHEN ON A FILIBUSTERING TRIP ACROSS THE RIO GRANDE, NEAR MEIR, HE AND HIS COMPANY OF 200 WERE CAPTURED BY THE MEXICANS. THEY WERE THEN TAKEN TO MEXICO CITY WHERE THEY WERE CONFINED IN PRISON. AFTER AN UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE PRESIDENT SANTA ANA DECIDED TO SHOOT A CERTAIN NUMBER OF PRISONERS AS A MEASURE OF RETALIATION SO HE COMMANDED THEM TO DRAW FROM A BAG OF BEANS AND THOSE WHO GOT BLACK BEANS WERE TO BE SHOT.



WHEN THE AMERICAN ARMY INVADDED MEXICO IN 1846 A FAVORITE SONG WAS BURNS' "GREEN GROW THE RUSHES O'." MEXICANS HEARING IT REPEATED IT OVER AND OVER, AND CAME TO CALL EVERY AMERICAN "GRINGO."

CRITTENDEN, BEING AN OFFICER, WAS ONE OF THE FIRST TO DRAW AND DREW A WHITE BEAN, BUT GAVE IT TO A COMRADE, SAYING "YOU HAVE A WIFE AND CHILDREN, I HAVEN'T AND CAN AFFORD TO RISK ANOTHER CHANCE." THEN, DRAWING AGAIN IN THE PLACE OF THE MAN TO WHOM HE HAD GIVEN HIS BEAN, HE DREW ANOTHER WHITE ONE AND LIVED TO BE A FAMOUS GENERAL IN THE CIVIL WAR.



THE ONLY ANIMAL WHOSE UPPER JAW OPENS IS THE CROCODILE.



FOO CHANG

- THE HORNED MAN OF CHINA, WHO WAS RECENTLY FOUND BY A GERMAN EXPLORER-ADVENTURER. CHANG IS EIGHTY YEARS OLD AND HAS TWO HORNS GROWING FROM THE BACK OF HIS HEAD.

Feature—the First to Appear in Any Magazine

While Chapei Burned



The Rattling of Machine-Guns Formed a Grim Accompaniment to the Drumming of Lannon's Fists as He Strove for Speedy Victory

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Author of "Bare Fists," "The Crimson Blight," etc.

THE latest contingent of marines, arriving from Cavite and Olongapo, island of Luzon, marched into the International Settlements.

Shanghai was a beleaguered city, and the Chinese, peaceful people who had never learned to fight, were astonishing the world by holding out against the might of Dai Nippon, which was one of the world's greatest powers.

There was no attempt on the part of enlisted men to be diplomatic. They disliked Japanese for their assumed superiority, their sneering

assumption of personal grandeur above all their fellows.

They liked the grinning Chinese because they seemed for the most part to be "regular." They were "pulling" for the Chinese. Outnumbering the Japs though they did, the Chinese had poor equipment—yet were holding. That was the miracle of it, that the Chinese were holding.

Private Steve Lannon reported to Colonel Crooker as soon as he could shed his equipment in the temporary barracks set aside for the marines.

The colonel's face was thin and

white and drawn. He was an old-timer who had chased brown, black and yellow men across continents and islands for twenty-five years. His greatest work had been against the cacos in Haiti in 1915. Lannon faced him at stiff attention.

"Private Steven Lannon reporting, sir!" he snapped.

A HALF smile came to the lips of the old-timer.

"Hello, Lannon," he said quietly. "I've got something for you to do."

There was never any question that Lannon would do it, whatever it was. Marines always did what they were told.

"I'm ready, sir."

"The International Settlements are like a madhouse, Lannon. Everybody in them, including us, is scared to death. Not for any personal fear, but because such a little thing may embroil a dozen countries in a ghastly war. There are thousands of civilians in the place, foreign and Chinese—the latter starving refugees from Chapei.

"They have nothing to do but listen to the roaring of shells downriver, to the shrieking of shells being dropped into Chapei, to the rattling of machine-gun fire and musketry. It's enough to drive even an old-timer to drink, and I've heard plenty of lead in my time. Almost anything may happen. And we've got to do something about it. We've got to take their minds off themselves. People like you can help a lot—but it will be the queerest thing you ever did."

"Yes, sir? What is it, sir?"

"I've already matched you to fight three different lightweights for the championship of the International Settlements. And yours will be a job. The papers may say that we allies are all friendly and get along fine, but it's all rot. As units we

cooperate, but as individuals, well there's always chance for an argument.

"I'm giving our allies a chance, through you, to settle their arguments in a sportsman-like manner instead of with bullets fired on the spur of an angry moment or a bayonet jammed into somebody's guts without thinking."

Lannon, the Far East's crack lightweight fighter, stiffened. Here was everything being offered him on a silver salver: glamour, fame, attention. He would be a sort of Nero, fiddling while Chapei burned.

All eyes would be turned on him—and with several great war correspondents already in Shanghai, his feats, if he could win against the best of them, would be hurled out over the air to every civilized land. He'd be *known*!

And later, when it was all over, with all his fame, and with Canzoneri's lightweight title stacked against him, he could fill one of America's greatest fight arenas. A great opportunity, no doubt of that.

AND he saw only his own side of things. He had come to Shanghai to be hurled back into oblivion; and the way was being paved to stardom for him, if he could deliver.

He scarcely heard the guns as he raced from the colonel's office to tell it all to Herman Moscowvitz. A Japanese bomber, in open defiance of allied protests, flew low over the Settlements, and dropped a mighty load of death and destruction on Chapei. Stones and rubble, debris, mixed with horrible things which had once been men, women and children, geysered skyward as the bombs struck. Then the Japanese plane went on, while bullets slanted upward at it from Chinese machine-guns.

Lannon was brought back to him-

self by a surprising thing: The bomber suddenly nosed over and plunged into Chapei under full power, where the rest of her bombs let go. Bits of the bomber, among which must have been bits of the aviator, roared upward in a horrid belching at the sky.

It was a real war, and it sobered Lannon, for he just now realized the great importance of the thing he had to do.

But his eagerness came back when he spoke to Moscowvitz. His blue eyes sparkled with joy and laughter. A big shell dropped in Chapei, shrieking as it fell, shivering the earth when it struck and exploded. Lannon's blond hair was all awry from the swift passage of enthusiastic fingers, which paused as the roar of the explosion rolled across Shanghai.

"You'll be famous, Steve," said Moscowvitz in an awed whisper. "You'll be famous, like telephone girls who stick to their boards in floods and fires, like the Dutch kid who blocked the hole in the dyke. You're being asked to do a great thing—and Canzoneri will ask for the privilege to fight you when you get home. The people will come to see you in action for the lightweight crown, and whether you take Canzoneri or he takes you, the United States will always remember you."

It was rather frightening.

THERE came a scribbled note from the colonel. It seemed that custom and usage was going into the discard in this crisis. A colonel sending notes to a private! It said:

"How many rounds can you fight at top speed? Important. Your reputation here ahead of you. Much expected of you. The Japanese admiral wishes to match the lightweight champion of the fleet against you. But we can have but one fight

night and it all has to be done at once."

"Tell the colonel," Lannon gravely told the orderly, "that this makes four men I'm to fight. I can travel at top speed for twelve rounds. I'll fight each opponent three rounds to a decision, provided each successive opponent is ready when I've finished with the one ahead, so that I won't have to wait and get cold."

BACK came the penciled scrawl. "The athletic officer will send for you. You will report to the place where the ring will be set up. You will fight four opponents tonight. Joe Scarpi from the Italian forces, Etoine Morin from the French, Laurence Hayden from the British, and Little Nako of the Japanese forces. Nako's the toughest. He's decided the other three at various times and he'll be last on the list."

Moscowvitz and Lannon looked at each other. Here was fame. Lannon was being set a task that wasn't impossible, though extremely tough—and by tomorrow morning the world would know.

They were very grave as they entered the barn-like building where Lannon would have a chance to don the gloves for a light workout. There was no question of training for any of the fighters. All nationalities stood-by for eventualities and there wasn't time.

Lannon's heart bled as he saw the gaunt faces of Chinese women and children and old men who had been allowed to enter the Settlements to escape burning Chapei. They were ragged and hungry, and Shanghai in midwinter was a cold hell. Some were barefooted and their feet were blue—but they smiled at the leather-necks!

"There's courage," said Lannon softly. "Win or lose from now on, the Chinese have won the respect

of the world. Say, didn't Nako once fight those two Filipino opponents of mine?"

"Yeah. He whipped Dado, but Vidal knocked him out. That was two years ago, though, and he must have improved since. He won't be soft, I can tell you. The Japs are tough. They can climb out of a Turkish bath and jump into water covered with floating ice without even shivering. Their *women* can do that; what can the men stand?"

"I'll find out tonight," said Lannon softly. "Herman, this thing is growing on me. It grips me by the throat. I'm scared, I think, but not of Scarpi, Hayden, Morin or Nako—just scared of something I can't seem to find a name for."

Moscowvitz was in Lannon's corner when the young lightweight stepped through the ropes to battle the Italian Scarpi. Every person who could be spared from duty, the foreign civilian inhabitants, including even women, were in attendance. Hundreds of Chinese of both sexes and all ages hung shivering on the outskirts of the crowd.

THIS place, in the heart of the International Settlement, was as safe as any other place in it.

But that strange fear, which he tried to understand, tore at Lannon's heartstrings. If he could only know why he was afraid! But he wasn't to know for some little time.

At ringside Colonel Crooker told him that his opponents would each be ready on time, so that Lannon, perspiring as he must from fighting at top speed, wouldn't get cold and slow up.

It seemed to be the consensus of opinion that Lannon was taking on a hard task—that of subduing four men in one evening, of the caliber as were his opponents. Any one of

them would have given him a tough fight over the full twelve rounds.

BUT when the referee, acting as announcer, raised his hand for silence, Lannon understood things better. And it was funny, lifting his hand for silence—for from Chapei, close enough to touch, came the roaring of flames, and the smashing into rubbish of buildings as roaring destruction stalked through the stricken sector. Heavy shells shrieked over, express-train-ing out of the darkness from the guns in the river.

It was a horrible feeling, to engage in sports when people were dying. Out there among the Chinese were people whose close kin were dying in Chapei. Even some of the foreign residents had once lived in Chapei.

Lannon had heard that a mother had fled from Chapei, only to discover that a daughter had somehow got lost in the confusion. She hadn't been able to return or get word of her daughter. Lannon wondered if the mother were here tonight, to watch him in order to in some measure forget her sorrow and anxiety. People went to strange lengths in the hysteria created by war.

Electric lights showered down upon the ring and upon the head of the naval officer who acted as referee and announcer. Flickering lights of orange and yellow wrought strange figures on the roofs and walls of houses in the Settlements—echoes of the flames which roared in Chapei.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" said the announcer, pausing in his announcement for a moment as a plane flew low over the Settlements, on its sides the insignia of the Rising Sun. "The fights tonight are for the lightweight championship of the Allied forces guarding the International

Settlements. The first bout is between Scarpi of Italy and Lannon of the United States. Whichever wins will fight the next fight against Morin of France; the winner of that will fight Hayden, and so on, the ultimate winner to be declared champion."

SO they were not sure that he would win! For a moment Lannon felt slighted somehow, until he realized that to match him outright against four men, thus assuming that he would take each in his stride, would be almost an insult to the other fighters, and so to the "nationals" they represented.

Lannon was introduced. Some marines started applauding, but it was somehow as though they clapped hands in a cathedral and the applause died away. Death was too close for merriment or even a suggestion of it.

Then Scarpi was introduced. His countrymen, inspired by the cold reception applause for Lannon had caused, kept silent. But in their eyes Lannon could see the unmistakable glow of fight fans who have chosen a champion and are silently "rooting" him home.

They were called to the center of the ring. Scarpi was dark, had teeth like pearls and a smile that warmed the heart. That he was a true fighting man Lannon knew at once—

From Chapei came a horrible detonation—and when it died away moans of agony came to the audience on the wings of the night wind. The Chinese in the foreign crowd or on its outskirts, steadfastly refused to look toward Chapei. They cowered down in their padded, ragged garments, but the mere fact of their cowering told that they felt the whole horror of Chapei to the bottom of their hearts.

"Shake hands now and come out fighting," said the referee.

Lannon exercised for a moment on the ropes. He had warmed up a little in the "gymnasium" before entering the ring, but the cold had nullified that and he was shivering. He needed the warmth of action. And, cold as he was, he knew that a blow on the jaw might easily defeat him. His cue was to land the first punch to the jaw, for Scarpi's jaw would be cold, too. A decision was to be rendered at the end of three rounds if both fighters survived, upright.

A gong had been rigged up, and now it clanged.

Lannon, the old fire of battle in his eyes and the glow of it in his heart, whirled from his corner to meet the black-browed tiger from Italy. Scarpi was still grinning, but his grin was like the snarl of a fighting animal. Scarpi probably also realized that the winner of tonight's fights would be famous tomorrow before the world. Somehow, though, Lannon was forgetting that.

It was easy to forget oneself when so many who were hungry and ragged and homeless cowered beyond the circle of light, shivering with fear, numbed with catastrophe.

SCARPI charged like a wildcat. Even for a lightweight he was fast on his feet. He was like smooth flowing oil, like a dancer, a smooth beam of light. His hairy arms, ridged with muscle which yet was flexible as whipcord, moved in and out with the surety of the master.

Scarpi landed the first blow, a stinging right hander after a left lead, high on Lannon's forehead. The blow spun the leatherneck around and something like a moan rose from the lips of the leathernecks in the crowd. Lannon knew this man was dangerous. He became in his turn as elusive as light—more elusive

than the glowing, evil lights which played over the crowd from Chapei.

His fists worked a swift tattoo on the face and body of Scarpi. He discovered that fast though Scarpi was, he was faster. He could beat Scarpi to the punch. He was an excellent "timer." The first round ended with the fighters on about even terms—and now not even the brooding terror could stop the ripple of applause. The applause became a roar, as though the audience had suddenly discovered that by applauding they could shut out the sounds of war.

Lannon looked at the colonel, and his heart sank. The colonel nodded to him—but the colonel's face was as white as a sheet! Why? Lannon asked himself the question, studying his commanding officer. Crooker looked at the sky, then off across in the direction of the Woosung forts, miles away, then into the glow of flames in near Chapei.

Then Lannon thought he understood why the colonel's face was white.

When the gong rang he went out of his corner faster than he had ever before gone to meet an opponent. Scarpi came out confidently, savage as before. Lannon had his chin tucked into his shoulder. His left arm was out, his right cocked at his side. His eyes were blazing—and his face, too, was white. Something had entered into him since he had seen the ashen face of the colonel, but only Lannon knew what that something was.

FROM Chapei came the rattling of machine-guns—they seemed to sound a grim accompaniment to the drumming of Lannon's fists and Scarpi's fist. But Scarpi's fists, in the middle of the second round, suddenly were no longer capable of drumming sounds. His arms went lax as Lan-

non's right hand smashed full and true to the point of Scarpi's jaw.

From the crowd went up a strange inhuman, "Ahhhh!" as Scarpi spun, ever so slowly, in his tracks. He measured his length on the canvas, rooting his face into it, rubbing off the skin. He sprawled out limply. There was really no need to count over him, but the referee did—and his count seemed ages long.

AND his seconds had scarcely carried Scarpi from the ring than a new figure bounded in, another laughing fighter, a tense nervous one, too, who couldn't sit still, but stood up in his corner, scorning the stool, and did stationary double-time as though to keep warm. Lannon looked at the colonel. The officer's face still was white, but—

Did the "Old Man" understand what Lannon intended doing? Maybe, for the white face lowered a little as the colonel almost imperceptibly nodded.

Something of the tenseness of it all must have entered into the referee, for he hurried the introductions and instructions in the center of the ring. Morin was obviously heavier than Lannon, but somehow none of that mattered. It came to Lannon that tonight he couldn't be beaten. No, not even Canzoneri could beat him tonight.

But at the same time he had a stranger feeling still, almost as though he could see into the future: he'd never fight Canzoneri! And the thought did not hurt him, seemed instead to calm him, as though he had made a great resolve inside him.

The gong rang.

The same murderous Lannon who had flashed out to meet Scarpi in the second round of the first fight flashed out to meet Morin. Morin was perspiring and Lannon knew

that the Frenchman had sparred a bit with somebody before coming in, so that his jaw wouldn't be "cold" and set for a knockout. A wise fighter, this Morin, but he wouldn't stop Lannon, unless he did it with a punch.

FOR the first—and last—time in his life, Lannon thought of "throwing" a fight, of plunging down as though knocked out when hit on the chin—in order to make the fight end quickly. But if he did that, would Morin understand and let the next fight end quickly?

Or would he make a fight of it? Maybe the next two fights would go the full six rounds for which they were scheduled—and inside Lannon a still small voice whispered that that would be too long.

No, he couldn't throw the fight to Morin, for Morin hadn't seen the white face of the colonel, and wouldn't have understood it if he had.

They met in the center of the ring. Lannon's eyes fastened on the chin of Morin with deadly concentration. He fought away all consciousness of burning Chapei, of dying Shanghai, of the mutilated corpses which even now must dot Woosung and the bosom of the Whangpoo. He forgot everything save the urgent need of knocking out Morin with a punch. He fought as he had never fought before.

And Morin, too, must have risen to great heights, borne on the hysteria which accompanies war, for never before nor afterward, perhaps, had he, or would he, fight such a first round against any opponent. He was the Gorgeous Georges Carpentier at his best, whittled down to lightweight size. Yet Lannon *must* take him.

But the first round ended with both men on their feet.

When the gong rang for the second round Lannon seemed to feel a voiceless beseeching come out to him from the marines in the crowd. And the voiceless voice spoke just one word:

"Now!"

Again the deadly concentration on Morin's "button."

A savage left to the stomach almost doubled Lannon up, but he scarcely realized it himself. Morin was fighting like a man inspired. He was making Lannon reel all about the ring. But Lannon's eyes never left the chin of Morin, while his own fists worked their havoc automatically. He protected his chin automatically, fought automatically, like a well oiled, highly efficient machine.

Stories were already being written about him, but he never thought of that, but only of the chin of Morin.

Lannon staggered before a right over the heart—and Morin, volatile Frenchman, visioning victory by the knockout route before the end of the round, grinned, smiled openly.

HE should have remembered that the knockout blow need not be a heavy one when the mouth of the recipient is open. For Lannon was watching. The lips of Morin widened—then the teeth parted a little—and Lannon's fist crashed to Morin's jaw, and Morin went down and did not move until counted out. Then he moved only because the seconds moved him.

"Any night but tonight," thought Lannon, "he would stay with me for twelve rounds and might even beat me. He's tough, but tonight—not tough enough."

And Lannon looked at the colonel. The Old Man was standing up. His face was still white. He was plainly nervous. His eyes roved over all the embattled skies. Crooker was

like a man waiting with impatience to get away somewhere, or to meet someone who had kept him waiting beyond endurance.

Then Hayden, obviously nearer a welterweight than a lightweight, crawled through the ropes—and Lannon looked at the colonel. The Old Man shook his head almost imperceptibly, and to Lannon it seemed that the white face was suddenly a mask of hopeless despair.

"One punch in the first round has to do it!" he thought. "If I let him get warmed up he'll not only carry it to three rounds but may beat me."

Strategy must play its part. He knew exactly what to do. Another shell fell in Chapei, and this one seemed closer than the last. All Shanghai seemed to moan, but with that human moan which, while it suffers, suffers with high courage which yet cannot hold back the normal expression of pain under torture.

Lannon moved cautiously out from the corner. Hayden the Britisher grinned a little. Lannon grinned back. Thus two fighters paid mutual tribute. Then their grins faded. The referee spoke to them:

"Make it fast—a fight—"

Did the referee feel it, too? Lannon wondered.

LANNON seemed unusually cautious. He looked worried, as though realizing that he was outweighed, that Hayden was taller, had longer arms and perhaps more strength. That he was fresher meant little. Lannon was not only fresh but warmed up for his work. He was in the better condition—and he had read the meaning of the white face of the colonel.

So, Lannon was cautious, eh? So must the Britisher have thought—for while they were trying to feint each other out, his guard dropped

for a single instant. Lannon moved with the speed of light. The right fist which had cracked to the jaw of Scarpi and the jaw of Morin, crashed again for a knockout, to the jaw of Hayden. A look of surprise crossed the face of Hayden as he fell.

THE count was superfluous. Lannon looked at the colonel. He realized that the Old Man hadn't sat down since he had last looked—and nobody yelled at a colonel to sit down. Was there dawning hope in the Old Man's eyes?

Moscowvitz was delirious with excitement as he ministered to Lannon in his corner.

"Three in a row. It's never been done before. You'll be the world's most famous lightweight because you'll be mentioned in stories from the place all the world is waiting to hear from. You—"

But Lannon didn't even catch the words. One fight left, and that against the toughest opponent yet. Lannon's eyes peered out at the ghostly white and yellow faces of the crowd. So eerie were the shapes drawn on the faces by the glow from burning Chapei, it was hard to tell what face was yellow, what face white. One looked at clothes and uniforms to know which nationality was which.

A guard of soldiers, twenty strong, in the brown of Dai Nippon came close to the ring, thrusting their way forward almost contemptuously. They carried rifles with bayonets fixed. They glared at the yellow faces of the Chinese refugees, who glared back at them with interest.

There was no fear in the faces of the Chinese for the Japanese invaders. In fleeing from Chapei they were not cowards, but only people who knew better than to fight with

bare hands against the best modern equipment of war.

A feeling of dislike came to Lannon for the men in brown, and for Little Nako, the splendidly proportioned Japanese who crawled through the ropes now with his gloves already on. But for these people there would be no war. They were not like the Chinese. They were domineering, unsmiling, thought themselves lords of the earth.

Lannon did not realize that he regarded the Japanese as *they* regarded everybody else, and if anybody had told him that he was as guilty of behaving as he hated the Japanese for behaving, he would have said, "What of it?"

He needed that hatred to help him through. He was beginning, ever so little, to feel the result of the last three fights. He knew that this Little Nako, in his place, would have knocked out Morin, Scarpi and Hayden as easily as he had done, perhaps with greater speed.

Nako was a great little fighter—but he represented something. He was the flames which burned the homes and scorched the quivering body of Chapei. He was the bombs which his people dropped upon the heads of unarmed Chinese. He was the guns which roared on Woosung, the bayonets which herded Chinese snipers together to await the firing squad, the bullets which mowed those snipers down when a drumhead court-martial found them guilty of trying to protect their own against aggression!

LITTLE Nako, whom at any other time he would have felt it an honor to fight, represented all those things to Lannon—and so he thought he hated him, forgetting that Little Nako, and those men out there in brown with their fixed bayonets, merely did what Lannon himself

did: obeyed the commands of his superiors according to the rules and discipline of his homeland.

But the hate was good.

By destroying Nako, Lannon might extinguish the flames of Chapei, roll back the brown hordes from Woosung, still the propellers of bombing planes, render the big guns silent. So he felt as he awaited the gong.

THE gong rang—and the International Settlements saw the greatest fight ever staged by lightweights anywhere—the greatest, the gamest, and the bloodiest.

The Japanese never surrenders—so says a legend of the Far East. Lannon would prove the legend untrue, but he didn't. A Japanese might be killed or beaten into the dust, but he never surrendered or quit on his own accord.

He feared neither death nor hell nor the fists of any man of his own size or bigger—no matter how much bigger.

And Little Nako, his face twisted into a polite smile which was yet a grin of contempt, charged at Lannon and literally smothered him under a barrage of fists that were hard as iron. Lannon staggered and weaved, his jaws tight clinched, his fists working like flails to protect himself and still fight back at Little Nako.

For a full round, even the shivering Chinese on the outskirts of the crowd must have forgotten Chapei, close as it was, to watch the greatest fight between lightweights. The Chinese, ragged and hungry, raised a faint cheer which Lannon knew was for himself.

He sensed, rather than felt, the shifting, silent and significant, of those bayoneted rifles carried by the men in brown—for the Chinese fell silent as though a vast hand had

been placed over the mouths of all of them at once.

"I've got to down him! Got to!" thought Lannon.

HE took Little Nako's blows from all angles. He rocked and shook like a reed in a storm; but he wouldn't go down, not while Little Nako stood. A vast respect for Little Nako grew within him.

And the face of the little brown man, filled at the beginning of the round with sneering contempt, was filling now with respect. Somehow it made Lannon hate him less—until he heard fresh hell roar across the night out of grim and dreadful Chapei.

Then he killed the respect, the growing liking, and through the wall of defense lifted by the hands and arms of Little Nako, Lannon hurled his most effective thunderbolt. It struck Nako's jaw like a rock hurled by a cannon.

Little Nako went backward across the ring, trying to keep his feet, his arms flung wide as though to balance himself. He struck the ropes and slid down them backward, as though they had been stairs.

Lannon went to his corner while the referee counted. But Little Nako was up with a short count, rushing in upon Lannon with the fury of a leopard. His grin was a grin of enjoyment, the grin of the man who loves to fight.

And Lannon went to meet him, mustering everything he had for a final blow. There couldn't be many seconds left of the round. He must land before less than ten seconds remained. Little Nako must be counted out.

Lannon fought with the fury of despair—and shot through his fist when the opening showed, fleetingly, like a flash of light through a lattice—and Little Nako, his smile a

set mask on his face, went down this time—and stayed down.

But even as the referee counted, the game little Japanese, out of his head, still tried to get up. But he fell on his face before he could make it, and Steve Lannon was lightweight champion of the International Settlements, including all the Allied Forces.

But nobody seemed to care about that. Marines were scattering the crowd with their best speed. People were being ordered to move swiftly, to scatter to their homes, and Colonel Crooker was urging all of them, lifting his voice high, to get back to their quarters—to hurry—hurry—hurry—

Colonel Crooker came to the corner while Lannon was getting ready to leave the ring.

"Thanks, Lannon!" he said.

The Old Man knew!

"That does it," chortled Moscowvitz. "You're a more famous lightweight right now than Canzoneri! And you'll beat him when you meet. You'll be the world's greatest."

Lannon was silent.

"What's bitin' you?" asked Moscowvitz. "You did something tonight that's never been done before. You knocked out four major opponents in less'n three rounds each. You gotta be lightweight champion."

Then Lannon spoke.

HERMAN, I'm sorry," he said. "But never as long as I live shall I fight again. Why? Because never again will I reach the heights I took tonight. Because I've looked into the mouth of hell, and fought my way back from it to look at the Face of God."

"You dippy? Punch drunk already? What do you mean?"

"You know why I got those four so fast? I thought of something when I saw the colonel's white face.

I thought what it would mean if a stray shell happened to fall in that crowd we'd so thoughtlessly got together. It would have meant—a!—most any horror you might imagine. The colonel suddenly realized what everybody should have realized, but he couldn't stop things and explain without causing a panic—and if he didn't explain it would be worse. The only thing to do was to end it all as fast as possible.

"I did it, but Something or Somebody—Lady Luck maybe—maybe Something Higher—rode on my shoulder, whispered in my ear—and I won as fast as I could. I could never do it again, and no matter who I might fight afterward, I'd never forget tonight—"

"But money," muttered Moscowvitz, "money—riches—fame."

I WANT to be remembered for tonight," said Lannon. "Life can give me no greater experience. There are things far more important than money and fame. I kept seeing the hopeless faces of the Chinese—thinking of their suffering, hearing and seeing the flames in Chapei—seeing people floating down the Whangpoo

to the sea. And I feel I kept others from following them, perhaps. How can I think of money, after all that? I couldn't even begin to tell you why I said I had looked into hell, and fought to look into the Face of God—"

THEY were hurrying to their quarters. At a turn of the street, as though by mutual consent, they turned to look back at the ring where Lannon had made lightweight history. The whole area was deserted now. A glow spread like an evil mantle over the ring and where the audience had been—and out of the night came a shrieking sound.

A mighty explosion—and where the ring had been there was nothing, except bits of rope and board and canvas, drifting down like the feathers of night-birds. Broken cobblestones, bullet swift and deadly, rained over the area which just now had been crowded with human beings. It didn't matter whence the shell had come or who had fired it—

The faces of the friends were white as they looked at each other—then turned their backs on the horror that might have been.

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THE COILED RAJA



*It Happened in India—and Could Have Happened No
Other Place on Earth!*

By PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

Author of "Captain Trouble," "The Bugler of Algiers," etc.

IT WAS only when he saw the cobra there, reared high in the middle of his room, that Manton guessed the truth. His servants had seen the horror first and run away. They'd left him all alone. At a time when he was still so weak with fever that he could barely lift a hand.

He looked at the snake. He could feel that it was looking at him. It was the biggest cobra he had ever seen. And he'd seen some pretty big ones since coming to this part of India. For an interval it went into a misty bright shimmer before his eyes. But by an effort of his will

he brought his eyes back to focus.

The cobra was there, all right—reared almost to the height of a man; but slender, graceful, and now so steady that it might have been an image carved from jade. It had crawled through the open door, no doubt. The door was screened with nothing more than a mat of loosely woven grass—the sort of grass the natives called "khus-khus," fragrant when it was wet. Dena, the principal houseman, had but recently thrown a jar of water over the screen to cool the air. The still air was heavy now with the fragrance of it;

and the silence was such that Manton could hear the faint rustle of the woven grass as it dried.

Manton summoned his wits and his scattered memories of the vernacular.

"*Jao!*" he said. "*Jao!*"

That meant "Get out!" And he made a shooing motion with his hand.

IT was during the heat of the late afternoon—at a time when the servants, six of them in all, and each of them of some different caste—would have been lying about in the shade of the veranda that surrounded the bungalow. No wonder they'd run if they'd been awakened by a thing like this—crawling, perhaps, over their bare feet.

Town Hindus, all of them. That might have been a mistake. This was a district of wild natives and wild animals. Less than a hundred yards from the bungalow in any direction the solid jungle reared its secretive mass of green—the last great stand of the Gohra forest. A country that had, it seemed, had a curse put on it by some god or other, who'd walked these parts a few centuries ago.

Anyway, in the meantime, the mahogany and the ebony, the teak and sandalwood had kept on growing; the wild elephants and tigers had moved in; deer—all sorts, from stags with a weight of beef like oxen, on down to pygmies; all sorts of cats; all sorts of snakes.

"*Jao! Jao!*"

But you couldn't order a snake like this about like a beggar.

Manton closed his eyes and dove through a hot wave of fever that threatened to swamp him.

He'd been out in the forest one day with a Gohra wild man. An old man, of a stock such as had lived in this part of the world before the

Arians—"the noble race"—came down from the North. The old Gohra was as naked as the day he was born except for a curious gold necklace he wore. And in ways that he couldn't now recall, Manton had learned that the old man's name was Koa and that he was some sort of a prophet among his kind.

While Koa was with him, they'd met a cobra—reared high like this one but smaller—and Koa had addressed the serpent with soft words, whereupon the snake had disappeared.

Manton made an effort to rise. He'd also address the cobra.

The only response the cobra made to this effort was to spread its hood and sway. The spreading of the hood was gradual. The swaying movement was slow and slight. From time to time the black tongue flickered—with something about it strangely to recall to Manton sultry nights at home, back in the United States, when he was a boy and he'd watched the heat-lightning in some black quarter of the sky. The same speed and silence and hint of mystery were there.

The cobra's hood continued to expand until it was almost the width of a soup-plate—a concave width of silvered bronze which tapered gradually down into the strong and graceful body.

Then it was as if the cobra also spoke.

IT had expelled its breath with a sound that wasn't very loud and yet which filled the room. The sound wasn't a hiss. It was more like the "Sh-h-h!" of a nurse when trying to quiet a restless patient.

At the first sight of the serpent, Manton had felt a surge of fear. It was like the rise of a swift cold tide. But he was steady now. He listened to that voice of the cobra—

the first he had ever heard. Even when he knew that he could be hearing it no longer, he seemed to hear it. Like a vibration it was lingering in his nerves, lulling him a little.

He remembered now.

SEVERAL days ago, when the fever was just getting its first good hold on him, a saddhu, or, at any rate, some sort of a holy beggar, had been hanging about the bungalow. He'd heard the fellow telling the servants about a "darshan."

Now, a "darshan" meant the appearance of a god. The servants had been jumpy ever since. Wasn't the cobra the god whose coming the saddhu had foretold? All over this part of India were Naga temples. Nagas. Cobras. And their king, their raja, was Sesha.

"Sesha!" Manton whispered.

Whether the serpent had advanced or not, Manton couldn't tell.

But there, for an instant, it seemed to be leaning over him. As the cobra rocked, so rocked the room.

When you've been lying down in a furnace of fever in the midst of a world which itself is like a Turkish bath, your nerves play strange tricks. Your eyes see strange things, and strange things come to your ears. Stranger still are the imaginings that come and go through periods of sleeping and waking that have no sharp borders. Asleep, you wake; awake, you sleep. In either case the world is a distorted dream.

Why shouldn't this cobra lean over him and look down into his face if it wanted to? This was Sesha.

For a flighty second, it seemed to Manton that this wasn't a cobra leaning over him but the old Gohra prophet, Koa. He saw that this couldn't be. Koa was black—or almost. The cobra was more the color of tarnished silver. He could see the

design of the scales that covered the cobra's thin lips. By raising his eyes a little he found himself able to look into the cobra's eyes.

Once, down in Arizona, he'd tried to charm a rattlesnake by looking steadily into the rattlesnake's eyes. But the experiment had failed, because the rattler had escaped from the short forked stick with which he'd been holding its head in place, and it had struck at him.

It hadn't hit him, but he'd been taught a lesson—in good manners—he hoped. Since then he had never molested a snake of any kind. Not even a rattler. Still less a cobra.

There was something about a cobra—its power to bestow death at will, its aloofness most of the time, its indifference to danger, its careless beauty, its utter indifference to human emotion, to suggest a god.

No wonder the cobra had always been worshiped more or less.

Sesha was the sacred cobra of the great god Vishnu. Hence, Sesha was a god himself, and all the lesser cobras of the Hindu jungles and grasslands were but smaller editions, so to speak, of Sesha. Cobras, generally, were therefore sacred. They were not to be killed or annoyed. They were not even to be mentioned by name. They were "my lord," or "the prince in the grass," "the coiled raja."

THIS was just a glancing thought through Manton's fevered brain—like a surviving whiff of nightmare. He'd have to get rid of such thoughts.

Yet, he'd long been a supporter of the idea that animals were able to reason. All his life he'd been brought into close contact with animals. All sorts—snakes, mountain lions, coyotes, bear and deer. His father had been an oil prospector in the West. As such he'd cruised from Alaska

down to Guatamala and Venezuela. And Manton, from boyhood on up, had been his father's pretty constant companion.

THAT was how Manton happened to be here now, in Central India. Jungle country. Something like sixteen hundred square miles of it untouched by railroads or modern roads of any kind. Practically unknown until Manton himself, at his company's behest, had hacked his way through it from east to west and north to south. Timber, of course. Then oil, iron and coal; perhaps some gold; more than a hint of various gem formations. An empire awaiting development. It had been rough going from the start; but he'd felt like Christopher Columbus.

He lay there propped on his pillows. The snake curved away a bit.

Only a few seconds had elapsed since the appearance of the snake. He still had to fight a little to keep his eyes in focus. Also his brain. He'd been flighty—and conscious of it—ever since the fever had knocked him flat.

But the idea persisted that this was the visitation of a god.

"Sesha!" Manton now spoke aloud. And it was curious—to his own ears it was strange—how his pronunciation of the name resembled that sound that the cobra itself had made.

You would have said that the cobra also had remarked the resemblance—or that it had recognized the name. It was holding still again. And now, gradually, the sinister hood was losing something of its width and plate-like rigidity.

"Sesha!" Manton repeated. "I'm a friend of Koa. You know Koa."

The snake advanced again.

The room was large—twenty feet by twenty, just about; and seeming even larger because of the absence of furniture. Apart from the cot on

which Manton lay, a washstand in a corner and a couple of chairs, there was nothing else.

But under his cot, Manton sharply remembered, there was—or, at least, there ought to be—a teakwood chest containing some fifteen thousand silver rupees. The chest had been freighted in by bullock-cart almost a month ago. There'd been three other white men with him then. They'd gone—two of them in litters, bound for the Coast, so knocked out by the fever that it was doubtful if they'd ever get there; the other, Palmer, who'd waited too long, had gone in a box—to the top of the nearest hill, where the Gohra axmen had chopped out a clearing in the jungle and dug the grave.

A good sort, the Gohras, once you get to know them. The Gohras were worshipers of the great Raj Shestra, the cobra king. At least, so Manton had cause to believe. Old Koa talked to snakes.

THINKING of this and thinking of that, and still with a good deal of the fever in his head, Manton made a mighty effort and was able to sit up and get his feet to the floor. The effort was so great that Manton was as startled now at sight of the cobra as if he hadn't seen it before. But there it was, not more than six or seven feet in front of him, reared high, loosely coiled.

What he saw confirmed that first impression of his. The cobra was one of the largest of its kind. It was unbelievably big—perhaps seventeen, eighteen, feet in length. Yet slender, built for speed. In that compact, silvery head with its slit of a mouth and watchful, unwinking eyes, there would be, he judged, enough venom to stop the heart of an elephant.

A "darshan," Manton told himself. The visitation of a god. The snake was the living image of a thousand

Naga gods he'd seen carved in stone—in all parts of India, in Burma, in Siam, in Indo-China. Here in the Gohra forest, less than a dozen miles away, he'd come upon a square mile or so of marble ruins smothered by the jungle. It fairly squirmed with marble Nagas. And—now that he came to think of it—with the living sort as well. Old Koa had somehow impressed that upon him.

BUT never had he seen a cobra so big as this. Nor had any man, perhaps. No living white man. The thought occurred to him that he was the only living white man now within a radius of forty miles.

He sat very still, here on the edge of his cot, trying to think—forcing himself to think clearly. It wasn't merely that his life was at stake. So he told himself. There was his responsibility to the company and—to the shy, wild Gohras.

"Gohra," meaning savage, terrible—a name that had been applied to these forest tribesmen by the pundits of the North. He hadn't found them either savage or terrible, once he'd gained their confidence. About two thousand of them, all told, men and women, had been working for him now, practically on credit, for seven months. Most of this silver was theirs.

Three hundred pounds of it, avoir-du-pois, and over. Of minted silver. Enough to bring all the criminal tribes of India on the run—should they happen to get the scent of it.

The snake held steady. So did he.

You would have said that it was the big snake that was holding him steady, that it was having some sort of a cooling effect on his fever-cooked nerves. Over him at this present moment—a fact which he recognized—this snake held an absolute power of life and death.

Under the open window just back

of him—the only window in the room with glass in it—was a club he'd cut in the jungle. Under his pillow was a sheathed knife. As for firearms, he hadn't quite trusted himself even to handle them while the fever was on him.

Armed to the teeth, yet helpless now. This cobra had been armed as by some higher power.

The cobra seemed to be conscious of this superiority yet unwilling to abuse its advantage. Manton found it easy to sit in the presence of the god, and think.

He'd been armed to the teeth not because he was afraid that the Gohras would rob him. The Gohras had been out of touch with civilization so long that they'd forgotten how to steal. Yet from here and there hints had been coming in that he'd better be keeping an eye on things.

The bankers in Jeypore, who'd seen to the bullion shipment; the Forester at Haiderabad; even old Koa, of the Gohras, who'd been teaching him off and on the essentials of the Gohra language—all these had been hinting that he'd better be keeping an eye on things.

IF snakes were gods to some several millions in India, silver to still more millions was a greater god. Yet day after day, night after night, the silver had lain there under his cot. Fifteen thousand silver minted rupees. Money not meant to be spent. But what necklaces! How many necklaces would that many rupees make for how many girls with the eyes of suffering animals?

The snake showed a sign of restlessness. Instantly, Manton had lost his train of thought.

Just what had happened to divert the snake's attention, Manton didn't know. But suddenly—with a speed that it was impossible for him to follow with his eyes—the cobra had

dropped to the floor and whipped over toward the door. The movement had suggested the coil and jump of a long whiplash; but there'd been no sound.

At the door the snake had reared again. Hood expanded, swaying again, the cobra was looking out through the woven grass of the screen.

MANTON caught a glance of the dark markings on the back of the slowly swaying hood—two circles joined above by an arc. It was like one of those mysterious characters that doctors used to write on their prescriptions. In this case, it was the mark of a deadly poison. Every year in India poisonous serpents—cobras mostly—killed upward of a hundred thousand persons.

Manton had a revolver. It hung in its holster against the wall at the head of his cot. How he managed it he couldn't have told—seeing how weak he was—but his movements were but little slower than those of the cobra itself as he flung himself toward the holster and secured the weapon.

He was seated again, and his revolver ready, when he brought his eyes again to the door. The day was still blazing out there. Even the light that came in strained through the "chatti," the grass-woven door-screen, was blinding. And at first he thought that his eyes must be deceiving him.

About the screen there was a suggestion of movement. The snake was gone.

He'd just got this clear in his mind when he heard the slide and pause of a cautious footstep—the scrape of a bare and calloused foot on the matting of the veranda. A moment later he saw the silhouette of a human form through the semi-transparency of the screen.

There for a pair of seconds, it seemed almost as if the cobra had undergone some sort of transmigration. It was as if the snake had become a man. The native who had appeared out there had been tall and slender. That was enough to show that he wasn't a Gohra. The Gohras were short and broad, long-armed. Like so many other forest-dwellers—dwellers in the deep jungle, that is—the Gohras had taken on the physical qualities of some of the better-built monkeys.

Nor was the native who'd stood there just now silhouetted against the screen, one of the runaway servants. He was someone whom Manton had never seen before.

Or had he seen him?

Almost as quickly as he'd appeared he was gone. He'd gone without a sound—limber and swift, with a movement that might have been a cobra's, had a cobra suddenly acquired the body of a man.

Yet, as Manton listened, with those fever-sharpened senses of his, he heard again that slow tread of calloused feet.

In a little while another figure had appeared before the door.

What was this, a parade?

THEN a suspicion jumped through Manton's mind. Maybe this was the hour of that danger those who were wiser than himself in the ways of India had foreseen. India, a continent in itself. A world in itself. With about as many varieties of human types as all the rest of the world together—from saints to unimaginable blackguards. After the visitation of the god was there now to be a visitation of sinners?

He sat there with his revolver in his hand expecting almost anything. There was something in this second figure that had appeared out there that was similar to the one that had

passed—snaky, thin. It made a gesture as of command.

Then it approached the screen, stood there peering in.

He recognized it at once—lean, naked, hairy about the head and face—as that of the saddhu who'd foretold the coming of a god.

Manton hauled himself together.

"*Kosha-moodi!*" he called out softly. "Welcome with blessings!"

The holy man slowly pushed the screen aside and entered. He must have seen the revolver in Manton's hand, but he gave no sign of either alarm or surprise.

He didn't appear to be as old now as Manton had believed him to be. His skin appeared to be very dark under its hair and grime. There was very little else to cover him—a dirty loin-cloth, the rag of a "chudder," or shawl, equally dirty, over one shoulder. He may have been holy, Manton was telling himself, but there was something undoubtedly evil—something that was both cunning and brutal—in his small, black deep-sunken eyes.

WITHOUT a word he'd seated himself cross-legged on the matting just inside the door.

At the same instant, Manton felt as if the cobra had struck him from behind. There'd come a shiver of pain in his right shoulder—so thrilling, so heart-piercing—that he'd squirmed and jerked aside, as a worm might when touched with a hot needle. Yet, swift as the reaction had been, he felt the sear of the pain that had touched him score on down from shoulder to backbone.

He'd flung himself back and around, firing as he twisted. Finger and eye had acted simultaneously. His mind was still so filled with the cobra image that he had an impression that he was firing at the head of the cobra now, magnified and trans-

formed into a grotesquely human head, all in the same moment that he'd seen the jet of fire—while ears and brain were still shocked at the report of his weapon.

THE truth belched in upon him like an echo.

He'd just killed a man. The man had taken the bullet through his head. He hung there now across the window-sill just over the cot. He'd slit the netting that covered the window and had leaned half-through. Life wasn't altogether out of him. The fingers of one of his hands were still twitching at the handle of a long-bladed knife, as hand and knife still lay on the cot. It was the knife that had jerked Manton around the moment it had touched his skin.

In the fraction of a second you can see moon and stars. It's as if that fraction of a second expands to take in interstellar space.

It was like that with Manton now. Fever-nerves. And the nerves already taut with the fever screwed tighter yet by that interview of his with the cobra.

To Manton, it seemed that he was seeing all things at once, doing all things at once.

Even while he'd taken in that spectacle at the window and was judging the purport of it, he'd heard the lisp of a movement there somewhere in the opposite direction.

He'd pitched to the cot and was there on his side. It seemed as if the mere kick of the revolver had cast him there. But his right hand was free as he writhed again and saw the supposed saddhu—the holy man who'd been seated just inside the door—sliding toward him also with a knife.

Just as Manton fired again, he wondered what sort of an impossible world this was into which the fever had dumped him.

The saddhu threw the knife he held, then dropped.

Over the chaos of smoke, flame, explosion, and murderous action, Manton heard a remote cry of pain. But he couldn't tell whether this cry had been his own or that of someone else as consciousness slipped from him.

* * *

The light in the room was silver and green when he opened his eyes.

He didn't have any sense of a lapse of time, but he knew—from the lay of the moonlight across the room—that this was early night. It wasn't, in fact, much after sunset. For many days and nights now the only consecutive events in his world had been the succession of suns and moons reduced to shafts of slanting light.

HE wondered if it was an apparition.

On waking, it had seemed to him that he'd seen the cobra again, reared there at the side of his cot as if it had been watching him—or watching whatever it was—just over him—that cobras can see and men cannot.

It was curious, but the presence of the big snake didn't frighten him at all any more. It would have been different, he realized, if this had been a python lowering over him. Pythons had been known not only to kill but to swallow human beings. A python would swallow anything it could kill and crush and then slime over.

He'd seen a gorged python. It was no image of a god. It looked more like a rotten gunnysack, overcharged with rough junk. It would have looked rottener still if the ants had happened to discover it in a condition like that.

Here in India, even ants were gods. One of the commonest sights in the

world was to see Hindu natives kowtowing to ants, offering them a bit of rice and sugar. Why not? Ants knew the earth.

The sun had gone down. The moon shone strong. There was no twilight in this part of India.

Manton heard a drip, drip, drip—as if, Dena, the head houseman—had just thrown more water over the "chatti" at the door. But this couldn't be. Dena had run away. Now even the cobra was gone. . . .

Drip! Drip!

Suddenly, he was wide awake—listening, remembering.

He felt dazed and seared with pain. He'd had one terrific bout with the fever. He was sure of that. But he felt that he'd slept. He became sure of something else. The fever had left him. His brain was clear. He was weak as a rag, but he'd get his strength back.

He had the swift recollection of what he took even now to have been a dream—cobra, a fight with robbers.

He lay there for moments trying to piece the dream together.

But here was the revolver in his hand. He heard the dripping sound. He turned his head. He saw the body of a man, manifestly dead, hanging over the window-sill. The dead man lay there in the full glare of the moonlight pouring into the room through the window from which the screen had been slit.

Manton pulled away. He was almost in contact with the dead man.

MANTON sat up. He saw the knife in the dead man's fingers there on the cot. The cot was blood-stained. He felt the wrench of pain in his shoulder as he moved. That was his own blood he'd heard dripping. He shifted his position still further—not quite trusting himself as yet to stand.

The dead robber also had bled, he

saw. In the white glare of the moonlight the cot showed clotted and black saturations.

He steadied himself and touched the man on the window-sill with his fingertips. Dead, all right; And, at that, Manton steadied himself further and gave a lifting push.

It didn't take much of an effort. The body had been ready to fall anyway. But the crunching thud of it on the back veranda was unpleasant.

Where in the hell were the servants?

MANTON recalled. They'd run away. They'd been frightened off by the cobra—if there'd really been a cobra; or something else.

Manton came heavily around. He saw that second figure sprawled on the floor. It was the saddhu. He recognized him at once. He put up a hand—as he remembered that thrown knife—and felt of a wound on his head. The supposed saddhu had also been an assassin.

So that was it!

There were a number of criminal tribes in India—so Inspector Hastings, of the Criminal Investigation Department, had told him—who went about disguised as holy men. Whole tribes of them—Doms, Badaks, Baurias. Tribes with a history as old as that of India itself. And from generation to generation they'd been passing on their criminal lore and inherited talent.

They earned their living as religious mendicants. But at the same time they were matchless assassins and finger men. They could point out the rich, locate the treasure that was simply hidden or not well enough guarded. In their wanderings they learned things that made marvelous leads for blackmail.

Baurias, probably—Manton reflected. The Baurias covered most of Central India. Their false saddhus,

sanyasins, fakirs, pilgrims, hermits and mystics generally, were in every village. They even circulated to some extent among the wild tribes. They'd probably been circulating among the Gohras even, and so had learned about this shipment of rupees.

Manton got to his feet and stood there crouched, his revolver ready. Just now he'd heard the faint, snarling yelp and bark of a wild dog—the red hunting dog of India—off somewhere to the south. The yelp was repeated by a call around to the east.

He was dizzy as he stood, and his feet were as tender as if they'd been newly flayed. That would pass. He crept over to a window and peered out.

The clearing about the bungalow, cut into the primitive forest for a space of fifty or sixty yards here at the back, was silver white under the moon. It gave an illusion of snow. Beyond this the jungle reared from a jet-black shadow to a ragged green and silver fringe high up against the pale green sky.

From the dark forest in all directions from the bungalow, now, it seemed, the wild dogs were barking—yelping, whining, in short, chopped calls, widely spaced with intervals of silence between.

THE voices of the creatures recalled to Manton the calls of coyotes he had heard in New Mexico and Arizona—erie complaints, weird laughter. More, the sounds recalled the stories that old-timers had told him out there of the days when hostile Indians on the Western plains surrounded wagon-trains and communicated their signals to each other by coyote yelps and the hooting of owls.

It occurred to him, anyway, that the red dogs of India wouldn't be

wasting their time on a night like this by surrounding a bungalow.

Baurias, maybe. Two of them he'd killed. Were others of the criminal tribe now closing in?

He was about to turn from the window when he saw the crouched figure of a man close up under the veranda. The face of the man—turned back and staring—was daubed with the white paint of a religious beggar. Yet another Bauria. Dead. Who—or what—had killed this one?

He remembered that cry of pain he'd heard just as he himself was losing consciousness after killing the false saddhu. It was this third dead man out there who'd uttered that cry. He was sure of that. And he was sure that somehow, somewhere, he'd found an ally.

He stood now with his back to the window—he stood there reading—in what he saw the answer to at least one of the questions in his dizzy brain. The cobra was there again. It was facing him—reared high and rocking slightly—in the strong white slant of moonlight that came through the window by which he stood.

The dance of the cobra became a little faster. This, he could see, was no demonstration of anger. Rather, this was some sort of sacred, ancient dance, like that of King David before the Ark of the Covenant—a dance of triumph.

MANTON felt no slightest fear of the cobra now. He may have been too far gone for fear. Fear, after all, for animals as well as men, is a sort of dooryard fence built around the ordinary things of life. Once outside that fence, animals and men both became, in a way, heroic. The hunted fox will claim sanctuary in a kitchen. The hunted stag will swim out to sea. Now Manton, with the spectacle of three dead men and a

dancing cobra in his eyes and the yelping of the wild dogs in his ears, felt a dash of supremacy over fear—of mastery over fate, almost.

"Sesha," he spoke aloud to the serpent—or, at least, he felt that he said it—"whether you killed that other fellow or not out there, you've got to help me now."

He dropped into the nearest chair. He was burning up with thirst. He was weak with loss of blood and the exhaustion of his fevers. Yet he must not—so he set his will—let himself go again. He must keep his wits—keep himself ready for action. Yet, also, he must rest a little.

HE wondered if he had slept again or was still asleep. No, he knew that he hadn't slept.

But, suddenly, he was aware that there was someone else in the room—some other living presence besides himself and the cobra.

"Ak Koa?" he demanded—"Who art thou?"

Instinctively, he had spoken in the language that old Koa, the Gohra, had begun to teach him.

"Koa ak!"—"Koa I am."

And there was old Koa himself standing before him in the moonlight. Only it seemed as if Koa had not spoken to him but to the cobra. There stood Koa before him but facing the reared and hooded serpent.

Koa was speaking again, but still to the snake—unmistakably now.

Koa spoke softly. Manton saw Koa advance toward the serpent; and as Koa did so, Manton saw Koa remove that curious gold necklace from his neck, then hold it out like a votive offering. The snake steadied, with its hood expanded. Swiftly, deftly, with a weaving movement of his black hands in the moonlight, Koa had wound the necklace about the cobra's throat. He then made a

sweeping movement with both hands and the snake, still reared, slanted away like an apparition into the shadows.

Koa turned to Manton.

"'Lo, friend," said Koa, in a whisper like a breeze, "I had word that the wicked tribe was about to beset you, and I prayed my lord of the grass to come to your assistance. He came."

"He came," said Manton.

"They be members of the wicked tribe that bark like red dogs now," said Koa. "Soon they will enter the bungalow. Our lord will help us again. Come let us hide in the shadows, as the prince has shown us. And there I will give you water and attend your wounds."

HE slipped a naked arm, strong as the branch of a teak, under Manton's knees, then another back of him; and lifting Manton bodily as easily as if Manton had been a child, he carried him back into the shadows of another room.

* * *

Inspector Hastings, of the C. I. D. (Criminal Investigating Department), with his headquarters somewhere fifty miles back of him and all rough going between, arrived at Manton's bungalow at dawn.

Much of the way, thank God!—he'd been able to cover by motorcycle. But the rest had been made by a rather young and rough-gaited elephant, which hadn't been so good.

But, here he was. And not too late, he hoped.

One of the first things he'd seen as the mahout brought the elephant into the bungalow clearing was the body of a dead Bauria lying close up to the veranda. Curious! The fellow looked more as if he'd been hit by a cobra rather than by a bullet. They generally twisted up that way.

Inspector Hastings jerked out an order to his mahout but was on the ground before the elephant had a chance to kneel.

There were no servants about. The bungalow had an unhealthy quiet about it. The inspector was across the veranda and in the main room of the bungalow by the time he'd got his pistol unholstered.

There a strange sight met him.

He took it all in at a glance, as highly trained inspectors of the C. I. D. in India learn to do, even when the scene is most extraordinary.

There was another dead Bauria lying on the floor—a false Saddhu whom the inspector recognized, with a certain joy, as an old acquaintance. A bullet had ended him. There was the bloodstained cot, and from under the cot a heavy bullion chest had been pulled about halfway out. Then, there in the corner of the bungalow near the cot, cowering and evidently caught in the act, were a dozen other Baurias, live ones, this time; and seated in a chair and guarding this group, Manton Sahib, with his pistol pointed, though Manton Sahib himself was manifestly asleep.

Inspector Hastings spoke softly:

"I say, old chap!"

FROM the howdah of the elephant, the mahout brought chains and manacles sufficient to link the prisoners together in a manner that was safe, yet which gave them sufficient liberty to do the work of burying their dead. Then, before this was accomplished, Manton's servants came drifting back—ready to take a beating, if that should be in the sahib's mind, which it wasn't. They'd spent the night at the nearest Gohra village and there had got news—at dawn—that their sahib was safe.

In short, Manton and Hastings were finally able to have tea and toast together, decently and at leisure, with servants about, as sahibs in India should.

"But you tell me first," said Manton, "how the deuce you knew you'd be needed here."

"That's easy," Inspector Hastings replied. "I merely got a hint from native sources—we're always doing that—and acted on it. Quite simple, you see."

"Sure," said Manton. "About as simple as why the moon comes up. But, all right; I'll go into details, even if you won't."

AND he did—telling Inspector Hastings everything, from start to finish; how, at last, after old Koa, the wild Gohra, had got him doctored and refreshed, they'd seen the remaining Baurias come gliding in. And how Koa had waited until they'd got the chest pulled out before he'd said something to the cobra that had sent it slithering out into

the moonlit room and how the Baurias thereupon had suddenly been paralyzed with fright—

"After that, of course," and Manton waved a hand.

"Quite so," the inspector said.

"But what I can't understand," said Manton, "was why Koa and his cobra should have slipped away so fast when they heard you coming."

I FANCY," Inspector Hastings replied, "it was because they thought your story might not wash. There are some people—white people, you know—who might not have believed it, even here in India. They'd explain it, you know, by saying you'd been touched with fever—"

"Don't you believe my story, Inspector?"

"My dear chap! Don't be silly!" Inspector Hastings produced his flask and neatly pegged both teacups. "Some day when we're both less frightfully busy," he said, "I'll tell you an experience or two of my own."

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The MAFFIA DOOM



A Dramatic Story of a Daring American's Courageous Struggle in Feud-Torn Sicily

By REX SHERRICK

Author of "Fate's Winning Hand," "Sea Pelf," etc.

TYLER slipped back into the shadows. The Mafia, scourge of law and order, was restive in feud-torn Sicily. It was wise for an American adventurer, in Sicily as a newsreel man for an American movie company, to keep out of adventures with the Mafia. That was why Harley Tyler crept back into the shadows beside the road. The Mafia was armed and sinister violence against rule—and Tyler had no interests to line him up either for or against the government in Sicily.

It was bad enough that a business call brought him out at this late hour, to see an official.

But he did have curiosity, and he could put two and two together. He had seen his man, and was now on his way home, at a little after midnight; the road was lonely and tortuous—and somebody was coming along on horseback. Tyler waited, concealed, to see who the traveler was. It was Arnoldo, young Lieutenant Arnoldo.

Tyler smiled at his own precautions, and was about to step out to the road, when he heard another horseman approaching, this time from the other direction.

Again cautious, Tyler decided to remain where he was. Arnoldo, too,

had heard the oncoming rider, and had stopped. A few moments later a horseman drew up quickly beside Lieutenant Arnoldo. Tyler could not recognize the newcomer at once, but when the horse reared, the American recognized Passi. Passi was the man who was trying to set up a new press at Corleone.

ALL of the conversation was not audible to Tyler, but he did hear Passi say, in Italian: "It is good you are so late tonight," and then something about a killing up the road, near-by.

Lieutenant Arnoldo wanted to investigate at once, but Passi seemed reluctant. Tyler did not blame him. Where the Mafia were concerned, investigation of a murder was unhealthy.

Passi, evidently, had not stopped to examine the situation on his way, but had continued on without checking his speed.

"Then dismount—I'll go with you," Passi agreed, probably ashamed to give an impression of cowardice, while nevertheless demanding the utmost caution. "No use setting yourself high up on a horse, as a target!"

Lieutenant Arnoldo dismounted with Passi, and the two men proceeded up the road, leading their horses. Tyler hesitated, uncertain whether to follow them behind the shelter of the roadside trees, or to mind his own business and be on his way. Curiosity got the better of him. Well concealed, he followed.

There was a turn hardly twenty yards ahead, and sixty yards farther on there was another turn. When they came within a few more paces of the second turn, Passi halted, and pointed toward a small ditch. Arnoldo went to it. The crescent moon revealed the body of a man, the upper part at the side of the road, and

the legs dangling over the depression in the earth.

Even the brave Arnoldo now grew cautious. He looked to the right and left before taking the last few steps. Then he strode boldly toward the body. He leaned over it, to look into the upturned face.

Tyler, somewhat too far removed to see the face, saw only the motion of the hand. For, hardly had the young lieutenant bent forward, when the recumbent body suddenly moved, a knife flashed upward, and disappeared in the breast of Lieutenant Arnoldo.

TYLER had all he could do to keep from gasping. He saw the young lieutenant lurch over, strike the dirt road with a thud of his head, and roll into the ditch. A dark form rose hastily, assumed a crouch, and disappeared like a black cat behind a hedge at the farther edge of the ditch.

Passi, whose arms had jerked with nervous shock at the stroke of the blade, lingered no longer on the scene. He leaped astride his mount and galloped off to town, in the direction he had been riding before meeting the unfortunate Arnoldo. Harley Tyler looked after him enviously.

He had seen Passi's nervous reaction to the crime—similar to his own—and now wished that, similar to Passi, he had a horse to gallop back to town. Passi, lucky fellow, had doubtlessly escaped poor Arnoldo's fate by discreetly continuing on his way the first time that he had passed the death-feigning assassin.

Arnoldo's body would be found at dawn, by passers-by. Harley Tyler, considering it a duty to his country to avoid dangerous errands in the Mafia country, turned to tread the shadows back toward town.

If an American happened to come

to harm here, there might be some international unpleasantness caused by consular demands for official investigations. The correct thing to do was to avoid trouble now. Later, after the discovery of Arnoldo's fate, there would be plenty of time for an American witness of the crime to relate what he had seen. Passi would corroborate the testimony.

HARDLY had he turned to leave, when Tyler's eye caught a beam of light directly on a level with his shoulders, and not more than two paces ahead. Tyler stopped in his tracks. Distinctly, there was a man's darkened form outlined in jagged relief by the rays of moonlight that filtered through the foliage. The man was behind a tree barely thick enough to conceal him.

Tyler had no weapons. He knew that a knife awaited him for having witnessed a murder. Barehanded, against one of the skillful knife-wielders so numerous in this country, he would have not a chance in the world. It flashed across his mind that in ancient times there had been barbarous entertainments featuring men with knives fighting men without any weapon, but equipped with nets.

In an instant Tyler peeled his suit-coat off his back—and even as he did it, he had to leap aside, for the impatient ambusher suddenly jumped from behind the tree and lunged at him.

The lunge missed, but the wily attacker was no less a cat on his feet than he was a butcher with his arm. It seemed that without touching ground he turned and lunged again. Tyler was not used to this form of battle. He could turn and run—but maybe the assailant could throw a blade with effect as deadly as a thrust? Tyler jumped aside once more.

The third time, the blade found Tyler's outstretched coat. And now, it appeared, the unknown assailant was unused to Tyler's style of defense. He quickly drew his arm back for another thrust. But as he did so, Tyler risked everything on one gamble.

He threw his coat directly in the face of his armed antagonist, momentarily blinding him, and in an instant leaped and closed with him. For dear life, Tyler's left hand clung to the right wrist of the murderous assailant—while the other hands were engaged in the same manner, to keep the man from changing the knife to his left hand.

The Sicilian, still possessing the blade, had by this time succeeded in shaking off the coat. And now he was at a distinct advantage. He curved his wrist downward, to cut the American's forearm with the blade. Understanding the motion, Tyler took one more long chance. He knew that his forearm would be sliced to ribbons in a matter of moments.

Suddenly he snapped back his right hand, doubled his fist and crashed it into his adversary's head—connecting with the skull instead of the jaw, for the attempt had been guessed.

Tyler, however, did not bother to strike again. Instead, he bored in, shoved hard, and in a moment pushed the Sicilian to the ground. Now he applied both arms to the knife-hand and with a deft jerk succeeded in forcing the blade into the earth to the height of the hilt.

NOW the Sicilian did the surprising thing. Throwing his legs wide, he rolled over, let go the knife, and jerked away his right hand. He was free. In another instant he was on his feet. As he crouched there, for only a moment,

Tyler saw for the first time that he had been fighting a masked man—so intent had the American's eyes been on following the deadly blade.

"*Che sara, sara*," the Sicilian exclaimed—and vanished.

"*Che sara, sara*," repeated Tyler to himself, straightening up. "What will be, will be. Yes, my butcher friend, just as you say—what will be, will be!"

He got up late next morning, much later than usual. The town was agog with the news of Arnoldo's death at the roadside. Nobody knew what to make of it. Of course, it must have been the Mafia—but who? Which member? And how? They did not have to ask why. It was enough that Arnoldo was a lieutenant.

But why was it all such a mystery? Harley Tyler wondered. Surely, Passi's account of the assassination should be on everybody's lips. But it was not!

Tyler went to the authorities and spoke to Raimondi, who was in charge of the case. He explained his part as a witness, and produced the captured knife. But one important fact he did not disclose to Raimondi—the identity of the man who had returned to the ditch with Lieutenant Arnoldo.

Tyler, understanding that Passi had not spoken, decided to see Passi first. The poor fellow, intending to go into business in the neighborhood, was probably in deadly fear.

I COULD identify the man if I saw him," Tyler said to Raimondi, to keep his iron in the fire without giving Passi away.

Then he went to Passi.

"Why haven't you talked?" he asked Passi.

Passi colored. He denied all knowledge, and offered to prove that he had not been out of the house all last night.

"You Sicilians are fond of epigrams," said Tyler. "One of them is *che sara, sara*. I heard that one last night." He looked keenly at Passi. This time Passi colored still more deeply.

"Well, my good Passi," declared Tyler, "now I'll give you another one of the sayings that you people know well. Maybe it will have an application at law. '*Chi tace acconsente*,' Passi—and don't forget it! In my language, it translates into, 'He who is silent consents.' It's just as good an idea in my language as in yours. And it gives me other ideas. I'm going right back to Raimondi with them!"

Passi gave up all pretense.

"*Che sara, sara*," he cried, and leaped at Tyler with a knife that seemed to be drawn out of nowhere.

BUT Tyler was ready. He was not without a weapon this time. There was a flash and a roar, and Passi's arm spurted blood. The blade fell and stuck in the floor.

"Now you can come and help me put over my ideas with Raimondi," declared Tyler.

Passi had no choice.

He cut a sorry figure when Tyler completed the story.

"Passi must have seen me last night," explained Tyler, "but I didn't know it then. He galloped away—and fooled me. Sent his horse ahead riderless, I suppose, and came to ambush me. He was masked. It's all clear to me now. It was a plot. You don't expect a dead man to jump up and plunge a knife into your heart. Lieutenant Arnoldo didn't expect it. That was what made him so easy to get. You'll find the other man through Passi, Raimondi."

Tyler turned to Passi with a sardonic smile. Then, for the last time, he threw Passi's threat back into his face. "*Che sara, sara!*"

The YELLOW CAT



*An Unusual Story of the Light-Hearted Adventures of
a Resourceful Refugee*

By JACK D'ARCY

Author of "Danger Island," "The Lake of Flaming Death," etc.

WHEN the Japanese at last drove the Chinese out of Chapei, Hugo Lemaire was left behind by the Chinese, and the Japanese refused to accept him. With other refugees, Hugo attempted to cross the sand-bag barriers to the Foreign Settlement quarter of Shanghai, but was held up by a United States Marine, while a lieutenant conferred with an officer of the British Legation guards who were also on duty at the barrier.

The result of the conference was to the effect that Hugo would have to go back. He explained that the

Chinese, who were saving their ammunition, had promised to bayonet him, and that the Japanese, being better supplied with powder, unquestionably would shoot him.

"Good!" the lieutenant of marines said blandly. "Either way will do nicely."

"Then," said Hugo, whose mother was a Malay woman and whose father a French sailor, "I am like pickle in bottle with the top screwed on?"

"Screwed on tight," the officer agreed succinctly.

Hugo elbowed backward through the dense human mass of refugees

scurrying with their babies and household goods from the battle-torn area of Chapei.

"It becomes object of pickle," he said to himself, "to escape through top of bottle."

The predicament of the big Eurasian—his crossed blood had performed the trick of turning him into little less than a giant—was not without justification. For while the argument between the Chinese and the Japanese raged, he had conducted the affairs of his shop in the Street of Many Smells with his accustomed diligence.

In the front room of the shop an old woman sold dried fish, snails and musk.

Lemaire waited in the back room with marked cards which he handled dexterously at fan-tan or any other game his patrons should prefer. For those who chose dice, he had several loaded sets.

From his forebears he had inherited a canny acquisitive sense, and from his white sailor patrons who wandered out from Shanghai he had acquired a vocabulary that was fearfully and wonderfully made—Occidental slang with pithy Oriental *mots* as polyglot as himself, mixed with happy disregard for miscellany, and an appropriateness of its own. It appealed to the sailors.

THE shop in the Street of Many Smells was exceedingly profitable to its industrious proprietor. If all of his dealings had not endeared him to the authorities to the point of wishing to extricate him from his difficulties when danger threatened.

Hugo accepted his situation now with accustomed philosophy.

"Escaping from pickle bottle," he reflected, "is exercise for brain. Brain will now take exercise."

By means of his rare knowledge of alleys and underground passages

through the native districts of Shanghai, Hugo managed to avoid prowling Japanese patrols and by nightfall had made his way to a nest of sampans anchored in Ningpo Bay on the Shanghai waterfront.

FOR a set of his loaded dice he persuaded a sampan owner to sail him across the Bay to Hangchow where, occasionally, a boat puts in from the Indo-China ports or the Gulf of Siam. Being in full exercise, his brain warned him that any shorter destination would be unwise.

"When Chinese soldiers run," he told himself, "they have habit of running fast and far. If they catch up with escaping pickle, top goes back on bottle."

The only boat due to sail from Hangchow was bound for George Town, above Singapore—a destination not altogether to Hugo's liking, for, arrived there, he had to go into seclusion at once. He must avoid a certain government official to whom he had once sold a jade vase which, the official shortly discovered, had been stolen from the palace of his nearest neighbor.

"Top is screwed off bottle," the Eurasian observed, "but pickle flavor still offends nose. It is cramping of styles to be close to jade vase of bad memory, not to say where is next monies arriving from."

In the gambling house of Meng Fu on Malacca Street behind the Temple of Kras, he obtained a pocket full of silver coins for his only remaining pair of crooked dice and some promising information. Thirty miles up the Malay Peninsula, Meng Fu told him, there was a vast labor camp in the heart of the rubber tree country where an irrigation system was being installed, and where there were three or four thousand coolies who had

monthly pay and squandering dispositions.

HUGO lost no time in setting out for the labor camp. The monthly payment was close at hand.

"Surplus cash is wearisome burden to simple coolies," he argued, "and in all religions there is promise of reward for taking burdens off weary shoulders."

He bought some ordinary cards and dice before he left George Town. He would be traveling afoot, with occasional lifts from bullock carts, and there would be plenty of moonlit nights to provide time to mark the cards and shave the dice. It would be a make-shift job, but a coolie was a simple soul.

While he walked blithely along the Peninsula trails it occurred that the camp officials, British or American most likely, would have to be hoodwinked before he could circulate among the coolies and gain their confidence.

Accordingly, at Madura, a straggling settlement of thatched houses clinging to a hillside, he visited the only bazaar and with the remainder of his silver coins purchased a small stock of combs, brushes, mirrors and miscellaneous toys which would appeal to coolies with money and a stomach full of copra juice.

He anticipated no trouble with the camp officials when he should ask for the authority to hawk his "wares" within the camp precincts. And by the time pay-day arrived he would be of sufficient standing among the natives to introduce his cards and dice with confidence.

When he sought the administration shanty, though, Hugo was not received by the superintendent, but by a clerk named Esteban who was, like himself, an Eurasian, a small bespeckled young man whose eyes had enough slant to disclose a Chinese

mother, and whose skin bespoke a white father.

It was quickly apparent to Hugo that he was pompous, weighed down with a sense of his responsibilities and like all his half-breed race, inclined to be particularly imperious in his dealings with any other Eurasian who came under his jurisdiction.

ESTEBAN looked up from his account books at the towering Eurasian visitor, and his lips curled.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked sharply.

Hugo put both his hands in his pockets to keep them from tweaking the little fellow's nose. Almost at once, however, he took one hand out humbly to doff his hat. Diplomacy, he decided, was indicated.

"I am of decision to be benefactor to isolated coolies," he said. "I am very honest and give important bargains."

Esteban frowned. He resented this fellow-Eurasian.

"Certainly not!" he snapped. "We have enough vagrants and cheaters hanging around the camp already."

"But I am not vagrant," Hugo explained promptly. "I am pickle out of bottle and wish not to re-enter same. What is objection to letting coolies have necessities to brighten toiling lives?"

Esteban could not resist grasping his opportunity to show that the few pounds he weighed were of more account than the bulk carried around by Hugo.

"I shall not argue with you," he announced. "Let me see what you've got to sell. I will then decide if I should change my mind."

Hugo unwrapped his package of trinkets. Esteban curled his lips into a scornful smile.

"Junk," he said. "Useless junk. We have a good canteen here at the

camp where the coolies can get good stuff."

He did not mention that he had a working arrangement to his own advantage with the canteen contractor. Hugo, however, being a business man himself, quite understood. He knew it would be useless to argue further with the clerk. But he would at least take the satisfaction of speaking his mind to this pint-sized Eurasian. He heaved a great sigh.

"Well, I am not sad person for shedding tears in spilled milks," he said. "So if you are not giving permit for honorable and much wanted trading, you can go take leaping jump and be drowned in very dirty mud. There is near-by stream into which I would throw you with esteemed satisfaction and laugh up and down sleeves, but said actions would poison innocent fishes which same do not deserve."

An ugly note had come into Hugo's voice. Esteban shivered a little. The undertone of threat had also another effect.

From under the clerk's desk, where it had been curled at his feet, a huge yellow cat appeared. It looked up at the giant with inscrutable amber eyes.

"For first time I discover yellow cat," Hugo said, "that is content to be owned by yellow dog."

ESTEBAN sprang from his stool. After all, he had four thousand coolies he could call upon, and besides he had the backing of the camp's white officials.

"You will leave this vicinity at once," he threatened, "or I shall have you driven away!"

Hugo's big shoulders shrugged. "I now make movements of departure," he announced. "You are giving me stomach-aches, but pretty soon you will have stomach-aches on other

foot, for if you are thinking you now seeing last of me you are counting chicken which are hatching up wrong tree."

Having had the last word, Hugo bowed profoundly, waved his hat at the cat, and strode through the door. Esteban watched with narrowed eyes as the big fellow walked away whistling. The cat also came to the door, stood between his master's heels and watched the retreating giant.

WHEN the visitor was out of sight, the little clerk, frowning, suddenly sat down in a camp chair. The cat sat on its haunches in front of him and looked into his face. There was nothing of affection in the cat's gaze, only a cat's serenity of curiosity.

"I've got it!" Esteban said into the animal's expressionless face. "I have just discovered how to make use of that low half-breed."

Seizing his sun-helmet, he hurried across to the bungalow occupied by the superintendent, an American engineer.

"I thought I ought to report a matter of importance, sir," the clerk announced.

"Well?" said the other shortly.

"I have just had to refuse a trading permit to an ugly looking rascal who had designs upon the coolies' pay, Mr. Whitman. I had to order him out of camp."

"What of it?" the superintendent asked curtly. "Do you have to come bothering me with a trifling matter like that?"

"I have not reached the point, sir. The fellow threatened my life if he should come across me alone. I am not afraid of him, certainly not, but I thought I would speak about the incident so that you might have it in mind if anything should happen to me."

The superintendent was not particularly concerned.

"Well, don't let him catch you alone," he said dryly. "And get back to your accounts."

ON his return across the camp square, the clerk seemed remarkably complacent upon the certainty of his own disappearance.

"When I disappear," he nodded, "they will remember that report of mine."

The appearance of Hugo and his good-natured threatening had solved for Esteban a problem which had occupied much of his thought and planning for a long time. It concerned the forty-thousand rupees monthly pay roll which Esteban himself brought from the bank at Madura each month which, in its turn, received it by special messenger from George Town.

Much of the success of the little clerk's clever plan, however, was dependent upon Hugo's promptly leaving the neighborhood. The plan received a severe jolt the next day when Esteban missed his cat and asked a coolie boss if he had seen it.

"Animal sits at feet of big vagabond," the coolie boss informed, "in prison hut."

"What the devil do you mean?" snapped Esteban. "What vagabond?"

"He was discovered by the Whitman-sahib while he taught a gathering of coolies a new game with obedient dice," the boss explained. "The Whitman-sahib gave the locking-up orders."

Esteban was furious. It was not to his planning that Hugo should be detained. And the next day was pay day. But he had to swallow his wrath.

"Oh, very well," he muttered. "Go get my cat."

The clerk paced his office until the coolie boss returned.

"Animal cat sits on big vagabond's knee and refuses to respond to coaxings through opening in locked door," the boss reported. "I request of prisoner that he pass animal through opening and prisoner responds get hell out and send cat's owner for animal."

Esteban stared at the boss a minute, then his lean face lighted under the shadows of his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Oh, he said I was to come for it, did he? Very good. When I am ready I will fetch the cat myself." He went on with his duties with revived cheerfulness.

IT was an hour after night mess, and the rubber jungle night had settled black and mysterious, when Esteban slipped a strong screwdriver into his jacket pocket and stole furtively across the camp square, dodging the ray of lamp light that reached out from the windows of the superintendent's bungalow. The coolie guards at the prison hut admitted him without question when he announced that he had come to get his cat.

Hugo had slept most of the afternoon, seemingly without troublesome meditation upon his fate at the hands of the irate superintendent who had disliked his dice. The yellow cat had stretched out by his side while he slept, and sat on his broad knees looking into his face while he was awake.

The big Eurasian was asleep when Esteban walked into his prison room. When he sat up, the cat got up also, but made no move to rub against the feet of its rightful master.

"Double salaams with knobs on!" Hugo genially greeted his visitor. When he observed that Esteban, who had growled at him the day before, was smiling, he added: "Are you

coming to make haha over unfortunate victim of erroneous camp official who can see joke no better than blind mule?"

ESTEBAN laid a finger significantly upon his lips.

"I am not here to gloat over you," he said in low tones. "I came to give you good advice."

"You can keep good advice like monkey keeps fleas for rainy day," Hugo stated emphatically.

"Now, don't misunderstand me," Esteban urged softly. "I only want to suggest that you would be much better off if you tell the camp superintendent that you came up from George Town to trade, instead of refusing to answer his questions. Tell him I know that."

"Oh!" said Hugo. "You pretty near blow up and burst with kindness like balloon full of toys! Yesterday you are hot wildcat on bricks and calling me vagrant. If you think now soft words are buttering parsnips you are barking up wrong shin."

"When you came yesterday," Esteban whispered, "I was busy and upset. I am sorry I did not give you a trading pass. Perhaps I am to blame for your being here. I came to tell you so."

The big man made no answer, so with a resigned sigh Esteban motioned to the cat, which had remained close to Hugo, and, apparently taking for granted that the animal would follow him, passed out of the room, closing the door and slipping the outer bolts.

The cat turned back before the door closed, went over to the puzzled prisoner and stretched out at his feet.

Hugo heard Esteban speak in coolie Chinese to the guards and pricked up his ears.

"I don't think the fellow will

make any effort to escape," Esteban said, "so you may as well go to sleep."

Hugo addressed the cat: "What do you suppose is merry game? Why does white-livered half-Chink change front like weather cock on steeple?"

The yellow cat got up languidly, gave him a glint from phosphorescent eyes, then walked slowly and majestically towards the door through which his master had just passed. The animal stopped short, however, turned around and in the opaque darkness of the room Hugo saw its luminous eyes become two motionless points of yellow fire.

"Feeling descends like brick on head," Hugo said aloud, "that animal is up to what is not clear from this distance."

HE went over to where the cat stood. His toe touched a hard object on the floor close to the animal's front paws. He stooped and picked up the sturdy screwdriver Esteban had carried in his pocket.

He whistled. "So this is way winds are blowing! Now we are seeing daylights blindfolded, thanks to intelligent help of wise cat. Little White-liver is wanting me to escape! I will employ screwdriver as ticket for departing herefrom, but I will not walk around with eyes shut like uneducated jackass!"

Esteban, watching from the shadow of an adjoining storehouse, was well satisfied when alien sounds in the night proclaimed the screwdriver at work. After a short interval he made out the huge bulk of the whilom prisoner disappearing in the dense blackness of the forest. He went to his bunk eminently pleased with himself and his prospects for the morrow.

Hugo paused when he was well within the surrounding jungle.

"There are three ways to go

ahead," he mused, "and each is more conundrum than other."

He became conscious at that moment that Esteban's cat which had followed him from the prison hut was acting curiously. It left him, went a little way off, and turned around. Hugo could see its luminous eyes, motionless dots. Suddenly the fire dots returned until the cat was at his feet again, but immediately it went off in the same direction, a little farther this time, again turned around and waited.

"The intelligent animal indicates knowledge of somewhere," Hugo decided, "and is willing to be guide. If successful I will remove head covering to cat."

The sure-footed animal led him through the matted undergrowth to the banks of a jungle stream. It turned sharply and proceeded along the crest of the overhanging bank until it came to a broad stone bridge that spanned the stream with a single arch. It halted just short of the floor of the bridge and, after a glance back at the interested Hugo, disappeared in a thick clump of undergrowth that reached to the stream's edge.

"It begins," Hugo thought, "to look like wild chase of goose."

BUT the shining eyes of the cat reappeared beyond the undergrowth thicket. At first it seemed as if the animal must be suspended in mid-air over the narrow ribbon of water which shimmered mistily in the bright moonlight.

Making his way through the undergrowth, Hugo discovered that the cat was perched on an impost under the arch of the bridge which provided a stone ledge two or three yards wide. This ledge, it was readily seen, would be completely hidden from anyone crossing over the bridge, since it was under the

arch, and screening undergrowth reached out at its sides over the narrow stream.

"Thoughtful animal has brought new found friend," Hugo chuckled, "to hiding place where bored cats may sometimes escape white-livered masters. All is now peaceful except emptiness of stomach that gnaws bigger hole every minute."

Guided by the cat's shining eyes he clambered onto the ledge. The bridge arch swept overhead closely, yet there was room at the inner edge of the ledge for one even so huge as Hugo to sit upright with his legs swinging over the water. The moonlight outlined a bulk opposite which would be a companion ledge, little more than an arm's reach away.

THE cat appeared to be content and stretched out under the rise of the arch. Hugo prepared to do likewise, letting stomach gnaw holes larger and larger. In the process of stretching out his arms came into contact with tiers of cans neatly piled along the ledge.

There was enough moonlight reflected by the water to permit Hugo to decide at once that the cans had been stolen from the food stores of the irrigation camp. And whoever had stolen them and brought them to the hiding place under the bridge had made not one haul, but many. There was every kind of canned food, and to his amazement, the Eurasian discovered a small oil stove and a complete cooking outfit neatly laid out.

"Here is guilt on gingerbreads," he informed the murmuring stream below. "If can when opened by handy pocketknife contains meat substance, cat's stomach shall receive grateful attention."

When morning lay down upon the jungle with the suddenness of the

hill country's dawn Hugo sat up alertly and looked about the ledge. The cat had been astir for some time and was perched on the opposite ledge looking across the short intervening space.

In the daylight the cache of provisions was more interesting than it had been at night. There was enough food stores, including sugar and tea, comfortably to support a hider on the ledge for a full two weeks. A fishing pole and tackle explained the use to which the portable oil stove might be put.

There would be plenty of fish in the stream to provide a change of diet. In a neat pile between the food cans were a number of magazines. Hugo examined them and pursed his lips.

"Brain having much exercise these late days," he murmured. "Brain says readings in English are not employed by dishonest coolie bosses. Brain asks who reads English letterings and ears hear answer. Little White-liver. Which is why scholarly cat knows trail to this refuge."

He brewed tea on the oil stove and opened a can of sardines. He proffered a sardine to the cat, but the animal refused to jump back from the opposite ledge.

"Additional sign of cat wisdoms," Hugo commented. "This person will watch from opposite ledge to see what happens on this one. Such is cat's sage advice."

HE took the fishing pole and tackle, a choice assortment of cans, clambered down from the ledge, waded the stream, and climbed up to join the cat. The animal received a sardine with a welcome tempered only by its grave dignity.

Hugo settled down to casting his line and to a running sequence of addresses to his yellow companion who alternately basked in the sin-

gle sun ray that crept under the bridge, and preened. Towards noon Hugo's quick ears detected a splashing of water down stream, and saw that the cat was standing on all-fours, its back hunched.

"Person who desires to leave no trail behind for unfriendly pursuers approaches on wet toes," Hugo muttered, and drew in his line. He stretched prone and rolled close to the arch where, from below, he would be invisible.

The stream wader came into view. "Proprietor of useful screwdriver," Hugo identified him. "Same carries satchel with money looks. Happenings arrive toward commencings."

ESTEBAN left the stream at the edge of the overhanging undergrowth, plunged into the thicket and reappeared on the ledge in the midst of his food cache. A chance glance across the stream discovered the yellow cat watching him through glinting eyes and, immediately after, the elbow-propped head of the giant Eurasian whose hearty voice floated across.

"Welcome to happy home! Excuse not standing up, but consider double salaams with extra plenty knobs."

The little clerk displayed a spasm of anguished panic. His eyes bulged behind his spectacles.

"What are you doing here?" he exclaimed angrily. "How did you find this place?"

"One breath makes two questions," said Hugo. "Am doing here same like you, taking pleasant rest for idle contemplation while angry officials are out hunting with guns. Obliging cat with friendly disposition brought me here."

"I'll wring the damned thing's neck!" Esteban declared.

"After one wringing fortunate cat has eight lives remaining. After your neck has one wringing by this

person's fingers you are like toes turned up."

"But—but just what do you want here?" Esteban stammered. "What are you going to do?"

HUGO was obscure behind his grin.

"This corpulent person with no bad conscience where you are now having stomach-ache is reclining pretty," he announced expansively. "Will continue to occupy same position while you fall off high horse and bump on earth."

Esteban squirmed on his ledge, his tinted face drained pale. He looked away from the genial grin across the stream but he could not long avoid it.

"Look here," he said, "I did you a good turn last night. But the police will be looking through the jungle for you this morning, and I tell you frankly I don't want them to find you here. I came to fish in peace."

"This place not good for findings by agitated hunters," Hugo returned complacently. "So, too, your pole has changed hands like money in satchel out of bank, and this contented person will himself conduct bargainings with small fishes."

Hugo cast the line of Esteban's pole and the yellow cat moved close to him and stretched out majestically. Esteban cursed, and now and again Hugo glanced at him, his eyes twinkling. At last he said, as he reached out a big hand and stroked the cat:

"I will hear myself tell a story to cat of much wisdom—all about a white-livered half-Chink who desires to steal hard-earned rupees of over-worked coolies so make hiding place close-near where hunters won't have brain storm to look. Wait there till steam blows off explosion over money-bag, then go out of jungle

with many rupees of sweat-dripping coolies."

Esteban half screamed across the water: "You ungrateful blackmailer! Are you planning to hold me up?"

"This peaceful and honorable person would not hold you up," said Hugo wonderingly. "He would drop you like bumble bee in hot soup."

A HUE and cry on the bridge overhead interrupted them. Esteban shook violently and pleaded with eyes and pantomime for silence. Voices of camp officials echoed down, curt, ominous voices.

"No use going further along this trail," said the voice of the superintendent. "Esteban's horse came in from the Madura road. The big fellow must have waylaid him down close to the settlement and probably is on his way to George Town by now."

When the voices and footsteps had withdrawn Esteban hurried to a hoarsely whispered proposal.

"See here! I'll give you a share of the money if you will get away from here. You can go along the bridge trail and you won't be caught."

"I am not wise on neighborhood geography," Hugo returned blandly, "but suspicions are telling me that bridge trail leads to alligator swamps where large persons make good meal for reptiles with much appetites. No, we will employ idleness in having a little, game, White-liver." He swung his feet over the edge of the cliff.

"Don't you come over here!" Esteban screamed.

"Orders from little person to big one are like sneeze which is wasted wind from head," Hugo remarked as he finished winding the uncoiled fish-line about his wrist and clambered down.

Esteban shrank back as far as he

could, his whole body quivering as the big Eurasian climbed up beside him, calmly sat on the edge of the stone and produced from a pocket his deck of cards, on which he had toiled industriously.

"Contents of black satchel are invisible," he said, as he dealt the cards, "but gambling is like apple in eye. We will play little game for coolies' rupees—fan-tan, one deal."

"Play with you for such a stake?" Esteban scoffed. "What could you put up against forty thousand rupees?"

"If I lose, I will give you back respectable and clever cat. Also I will duck you in stream once."

THERE was a note of grimness in the big man's voice that frightened Esteban. Trembling and fighting desperately to think of some plan to outwit his tormentor, the clerk reached for the cards that had been dealt him. He could do nothing else.

He was a shrewd player of fan-tan, but his every play was futile. Disaster mounted as the piles of laid-out cards rose.

"These cards are marked!" he exclaimed in disgust as he dropped his hand.

"Wise gambler is like pretty girl who marries ugly husband to get sure thing," Hugo explained, as he replaced the deck in his pocket and began to unwind the fish-line from his wrist. Esteban's eyes bulged as Hugo arose.

"Busy coolies," the winner remarked coolly, "have no time for catching fishes with string. This person now does fishings for coolies' sake and catch money that almost swim away."

Esteban scrambled to his feet, looking wildly for a weapon. There was nothing but the small stove. He clutched it and swung at the big Eurasian's head. Hugo bent his head

lower and took the blow on his neck and back. It did not sway him.

"Little fish make big fuss when they bite big fish," he observed.

He reached one paw for the trembling clerk, caught him by the throat and with a twist of his wrist laid him, struggling wildly, on the stone floor. He proceeded leisurely to tie him up with the fish-line.

"I'll get you for this!" Esteban screamed. "I'll tell them you waylaid me and planted me here."

HUGO chuckled. "This one's saving habits keeps for him the screwdriver to tell where it came from. Also there is here much company's food."

Esteban began to plead, but unnoticed the squirming, helpless clerk, Hugo opened the satchel and counted the rupees with which it bulged.

"I suppose you'll give it back to the officials," Esteban snarled scornfully.

"Supposings are pastimes that hit nails on top," Hugo agreed. Yet he hesitated before he replaced the money. He looked across the stream and saw the yellow cat quietly watching. "Intelligent cat!" he murmured under his breath.

He stuffed the rupees into the bag and climbed down from the ledge. Only one other thing did he take with him. A fresh can of sardines, the largest he could find. When he had reached the opposite ledge and rejoined the cat he squatted with his back contemptuously turned to the helpless man on the other side as he opened the sardine box, extracted a number of the sardines and divided them impartially between himself and the cat.

When the can was half empty, the cat reached greedily for another fish, but Hugo shook his head as he carefully pressed the lid back into place.

"Repast is not finished, but sus-

pended," he said aloud. "Stomachs are now full, but grow more holes after time is past. Remaining sardines will patch holes."

Then, without a glance at Esteban, but holding cat and satchel, he climbed down and disappeared in the undergrowth.

WHEN, with the cat at his heels, he reached the floor of the bridge above, he studied the sardine box a moment, and apparently changed his mind about carrying it, but decided the cat deserved one more fish. When that had disappeared, he reclosed the lid and with a full swing flung the half-emptied box into the dense growth that bordered the bridge trail.

Then, whistling gaily, with the satchel under his arm and the cat by his side, he turned his steps towards the camp.

His approach to the camp square was heralded by excited shouting. Men surrounded him, menacing him, but Hugo grinned at them and kept whistling his monotonous chant until the superintendent ran from his bungalow, gun in hand.

"Hands up!" the superintendent barked.

"Salaams without knobs," Hugo greeted the official. "This person is already tall enough to reach whatever is wanted and money bag is heavy."

With a gasp of astonishment, the superintendent saw and grabbed for the bag. Hugo handed it over with a bow. The official snapped it open, looked from its bulging contents to the big fellow in amaze.

"Where did you get this bag?" he demanded.

"From too-trusted miscolored half-Chink with swelled head and designs upon coolies' pocket-books."

To a rapid fire of questions, Hugo explained, beginning with his escape

from the prison hut with Esteban's screwdriver.

"We'll check your story," the official said.

Hugo chuckled. "If person with big spectacles is not on ledge, he is taking wiggling bath in stream."

Esteban was safe and sound on the ledge all right, though. When, handcuffed, the absconder had been prodded up to the bridge floor, the superintendent demanded:

"There are a thousand rupees missing! Where are they?"

Esteban stammered a frenzy of denials and accusations of Hugo. Hugo shrugged a copious shoulder at the official.

"This person's pockets extremely empty before finding money bag," he said mournfully. "The sahib discovered them in same sad condition when searched."

The superintendent was dubious, but inclined to believe the big fellow. He had returned the money after taking it from the thief.

"We'll find ways of making this fellow Esteban cough up the missing thousand," he threatened ominously. Paying no heed as the clerk was unceremoniously dragged off, he said to Hugo: "I'll make amends to you for locking you up, providing you get back to where you came from. What reward would be right?"

HUGO looked hurt. "Good deeds begin at home," he said virtuously, "and Heaven is its own reward. To those who give fishes, bread shall return a thousand-fold. For kindness to slaving coolies this person shall harvest much wild oats. Will you permit me to take yellow cat?"

The superintendent was bewildered. "Is that all the reward you want. Why—"

"Yellow cat will be better com-
(Concluded on Page 128)

Conclude this Weird and Exciting Serial of

The Prowling Creature

A Three-Part Serial

By CAPT. KERRY McROBERTS

Author of "Legion of the Frontier,"
"White Sands," etc.



CONCLUSION

SYNOPSIS

London looked strange to James B. Ryder, or "Buck," famous adventurer, after years of thick green forest paths and miles of white and blue beach. But in London he was, being feted by his friend Chester Sanford, an American theatrical producer, and two beautiful, successful actresses, Alice Grannis and Diana Carleton. From a night club, the party decided to drive out to an animal farm owned by Joe Colletti. Sanford has promised Alice a leopard kitten to match her fur coat, and they set out in gay spirits.

They arrive at the desolate animal farm, filled with all the sights and smells of the jungle, to be confronted with grim tragedy. Joe Colletti has been murdered—beaten to death. His helper, the mute Dummy Harlow, tries vainly to give them information about the crime, or so it seems to them. But all he can do is utter incomprehensible sounds. Meanwhile the animals are restless. The smell of fresh blood is in the air. It is maddening them. Ryder and Sanford try to call Scotland Yard. It is impossible, for the wires have been cut and there is no method of communication.

From Joe Colletti's office there suddenly

come strains of music. Buck and Sanford go to investigate, leaving the girls outside the office on the grounds. The men hear footsteps, but see none. Gunga, a huge gorilla, savagely pounds at his cage, and the detonations are terrifying. Suddenly, from outside the building, comes a piercing scream—the voices of the girls joined together in a wail of agony. Ryder makes a leap for the door and the stairs.

A great python is free! Ryder kills it by running it over with his car. He wonders whether its getting out was an accident. Hearing screams in Colletti's office, Buck runs in and sees that Dummy Harlow has been strangled. He observes that the window, formerly shut, is now open.

A newcomer appears: a private detective, Brodie, from Oregon. For two years he has been trailing a murderer called Piavsiok, once a wrestler in California, and better known as "Ivan the Ox."

On returning to the house, it is discovered that Dummy Harlow's body has been removed from the office to the ground, outside. A half naked, mysterious stranger appears outside, carrying a club. Swinging it, he falls unconscious. When the mysterious stranger comes to, he says he is an old circus man, and that Colletti

Breathless Adventure on an English Animal Farm



wanted him on the farm. He arrived the previous evening. He remembers overhearing a man talking to Colletti about "five grand." During the night he was aroused from his sleep by fingers at his throat. The men go with the stranger, Beckett, to see the place where he remembers being attacked.

Alice and Diana are alone. Diana goes inside to get some water for her friend. She screams as two great arms envelope her. Ryder hears her and in a single jump he flies clear through the open door.

Now Go On With the story

CHAPTER IX

A Ghost at Bay

RYDER did not even pause. He knew Diana was not in that room and ahead of him was the swift sound of padding feet. He threw himself toward the bedroom door with a fury that knew no caution. A flaming red rage carried him forward until at his right, just past the door, he caught a flashing

glimpse of a huge black shape. It made his flesh creep.

A swift racing train of events swept through his brain. Ghost, phantom, man—but never the beast. And here it was. The trained gorilla, Gunga, the beast with the human brain. Buck Ryder was close on the heels of the big brute, sucking his wind through clenched teeth as he plunged into the shadow of the passage before the cage.

And there—Buck saw the thing that had puzzled him, had puzzled them all. And now he was once more the fighter, a primitive cave man going to pit his strength, his courage and his wits against the wild thing. There was no time now to wait, to figure and to plan, no time to think of caution or the chance he was taking. There was the opening in the bars—the trick sliding section through which the

strange creature was even now crawling. And in his arms he held the inert body of unconscious Diana Carleton.

Buck felt the heritage of his tusked ancestors beating within him at the sight. Her gorgeous blonde beauty was crushed against the great hairy body, and without a sound, without a thought for himself, he dove through the opening after the gorilla, growling like an animal himself.

IT was then, and then only, that the beast seemed aware of his coming. As Buck landed sprawling in the cage, he heard the clanking slam of the bar section dropping back into place. He gasped for breath. And Gunga turned, his beady eyes afire with fright and hatred. With a bestial snarl he sprang back away from the man and drew the girl's body tightly to him, his slathering fangs clamping.

Ryder was climbing to his feet, his eyes fixed on the animal. They were alone, just Buck Ryder and the jungle brute.

There was no audience, but somehow, back from the years that had gone, back from the night under a glaring arc bank came the instinct that clenched the hard, red knuckled fists of the man. The same instinct that had brought Jimmy "Buck" Ryder off the floor, begging for more, when the ringside clamored for the blood of his foe.

He was holding the hideous stare of Gunga now as he felt the floor with the soles of his feet, as he felt the wall with one hand at a time, like a fighter reaching for the ropes, measuring the distance behind him. That left fist of his was reaching out in front now. For an instant he poised himself to charge, to hurl himself at the powerful killer—for it was the killer, a thing that killed

its master, and—would probably kill Buck Ryder.

But not before the fighting Irish Jimmy boy could save the girl from a horrible death. The thought struck Ryder like a blow. Save her. How? With the beast clutching her. If he attacked the thing who knows what it might do to the girl?

Slowly, an inch at a time, Buck shuffled toward the gorilla. He marveled at his own courage, at his utter recklessness, for Buck Ryder was no fool. He knew the giant strength of the jungle monsters. He'd hunted them in the forests of Africa, seen them rip branches from trees.

The creature crouched now gradually as Ryder approached. His cunning beady eyes never left Buck's face, but the man knew that it was listening the same as he was. He seemed to have no fear of Ryder, seemed to know that he was unarmed and must fight with his bare hands in a battle that the books have preached for years means only death to the human.

Man against gorilla. The thoughts snapped like firecrackers in Ryder's brain. He was but five feet from the animal now. The girl was slipping from its grip. Her arms and head hung limp, like those of a doll from which the sawdust has been spilled.

THEN, suddenly, with a maniacal sound blurring from its fang-filled jaws, Gunga flung Diana Carleton into a pile of hay in the corner and reached a long hairy claw toward Ryder.

Buck leaped and smashed out with his left, feeling it strike the tree trunk of an arm and move it slightly. Then his right came over, with a crash that struck the beast high on the side of the head. The gorilla bellowed with rage and threw an arm out as it lunged toward Ryder.

The sound of feet came to Buck's hot, roaring ears, and in a foul-smelling flurry of flinging fists and snorting ape, Buck was half aware that Brodie had come tearing in on the loop with Sanford and Beckett close behind him. They were melted in a fear-fused mass in the doorway as the tree trunk arms of the beast threatened to lock themselves around his body.

Smash! Bash! Thud! Buck's bare fists flew like shrapnel bursts against the animal's body. He could feel it grunt with the shock of the blows. He could hear its blood-curdling snarls flooding his ears. With a grip like the bite of a blacksnake whip, one of the claws fastened on his arm, and he ripped punches like a madman, tearing himself free and dodging around. Somebody was yelling.

"Stay clear!" he heard the voice. Must be Brodie shouting for him to keep away from the beast so Brodie could get a clean shot at him.

THAT'S what the animal seemed to sense, to know it before even Buck or Brodie realized it. And he was moving around, closing in, keeping Buck Ryder between him and the men who stared with horror at the battle through the bars.

"Kill him! Oh, shoot him, can't you?" Alice Grannis was crying bitterly, her words breaking out between sobs as she huddled between Brodie and Chet Sanford. "Why can't you do something? Look! He'll kill Buck!"

Ryder's face was streaming sweat, and smeared with dust stirred up by the struggle in the shifting hay. Over in that corner lay the still form of Diana Carleton, but Buck was only conscious of it there. He could not take his eyes away from Gunga. The thing was crouched low, watching, waiting for a mo-

ment to spring, to down the man and throttle him, to choke the life's breath out of him as he had strangled Dummy Harlow.

Panting hoarsely now, Buck clawed for air, but the fighting blood was boiling hot in his veins. He felt no fear. He wanted now to smash this brute with a solid punch, to settle the age-old question of man or gorilla, to test his brine-hardened knuckles with a crusher punch to the animal's grinning jaw.

"Buck!" screamed Chet Sanford. "Get back. Move away from him."

It was like the old days, those ring days of long ago. They were yelling at him to show him how to fight. Ducking and weaving, he was stabbing swift blows at the ugly animal's head and body. Now and then he got one home, and brought a snort of throbbing, thundering anger. Fast as light they moved around in the cage. The floor trembled with the rush of their feet and their weight.

Brodie gripped his gun close to the bars and cursed the fear that held his finger on the trigger. He was afraid for Ryder and afraid to shoot for fear of hitting Buck. With frantic haste the three men on the outside tried to find the entrance, to see how Buck got in there. But the cage bars were a solid wall to them. And now the gorilla was stalking warily with Ryder backing. Buck's arms were like leaden weights, and his legs were stumbling, weakening with the pace of the battle.

SUDDENLY, like the strike of a rattler, the gorilla's claw reached out and Sanford shouted in horror. It was the end. They saw the beast's grip clamp around Buck's neck. The man's arms flayed bravely, throwing punches from all angles, vicious, desperate blows.

But he was slowly being pressed

close. His head went down. And, when Brodie tensed himself, bringing the barrel of the automatic to bear on the animal's throat, Buck Ryder dug his feet into the floor like a fullback smashing at the line, and with a mighty thundering rush he flung the animal backward, the two of them catapulting across the cage to the wall.

As the body of the beast slammed against it Buck made his dying bid for victory. The shock had almost broken him free, and with his last right-hand punch he drove a sizzling blow to the beast's jaw.

A HORRIFYING, choking cough exploded from Gunga's throat, and a wild yell went up from the three men and the girl outside the bars. Buck tore himself free and drew back, his own teeth bared and his eyes gone white with fighting fury. His knuckles were bleeding, and he struggled to stand erect.

But it was the gorilla that held him, held them all, fascinated. For an instant it leaned there against the wall. Its face was awry, crushed, like a putty image smashed with a hammer, and from down in its throat there came a stifled, desperate gasp.

A long hairy arm came slowly upward. The beast's chest rose as if in the pain of death. Then the hand swept across the strangely hideous face and yanked at—a mask. The whole head was torn off, face and crown and animal ears. The figures in the weird drama of the marshes stood, rigid, soundless for almost a minute. Brodie's eyes popped from their sockets. But Ryder was the first to regain control of his faculties.

"The OX!" croaked Buck, his throat raw and strained. "Piavsiok it is. Ivan, the Ox."

The Ox stood with his back against the wall. His face and his

shaven head were drenched with sweat; the face almost as fierce and hideous as the mask he had just torn off.

"Throw up your hands, you!" commanded Brodie, pushing his gun through the bars. "Open up this thing, and walk out careful."

For answer Piavsiok reached a hairy hand to his mouth and yanked out the theatre fangs that were fixed over his own snaggy teeth like a plate. He threw them into a pile of hay and his tiny black eyes gleamed with the savage thoughts that must have filled his brain.

Buck Ryder had moved a half step nearer to him now, and the Ox shifted furtive eyes toward the fighting Yank. His lips curled back in a bloody leer, that was both refusal and challenge. They had run him down, stripped his disguise from him, but he knew that the man outside the cage would never dare to shoot. Five grand was too much money to toss away for satisfaction. And they'd have to take him back to the states alive to collect the reward.

IM gonna crack you in two, smarty," growled the Ox, dropping into the regulation wrestler's crouch. "You had the edge on me wearing the mask, but I'm callin' you right now. Come on. Your pal won't shoot. He wants to take me back to Oregon and draw his blood money."

Buck Ryder made no reply. He heard the gasps from his friends outside the cage, and he thought he heard a stir in the corner where Diana lay.

Then clear and distinct he heard the click of metal and knew that Detective Brodie had thrown off the safety on his automatic. Would Brodie shoot?

"No," barked Buck with a swift

motion of his left hand toward Brodie.

That motion of his hand was the signal for the Ox. With a roar he dived for Ryder's legs. Hay flew in a cloud as Buck smashed a vicious uppercut into the neck of the Ox and leapt aside, firing swift punches at the man's head as he went past. But the Ox was tough; a thick-necked, rugged cruiser who knew the tricks of the mat and the bar-room brawl. He spun almost in mid-air, and flipped his feet from the floor, catching Ryder fiercely across the shins.

AND Buck's feet flew from under him. Down to his knees he fell, and the jar shook him to his vitals. Wild shouting rose from the watchers as the Ox came to his feet like a snapping bear trap. Lust blazed in his cunning eyes, and with a snarl he made a flying dive for Ryder.

Quicker than it takes to tell, quick as a pit terrier leaps for a foe's throat, Buck Ryder came off the floor. His head was drawn deep between his shoulders and his red fists were bunched. His body arched, and his left fist hooked with an audible crack against the Ox's jaw. Then came the right. Blam! Blam!

The punches lifted the wrestler-killer half erect, straightened him up, and then Ryder closed in with a volley of punches that smothered the heavier man, blows that thundered about his face and tinny ears, smashes that echoed against his ribs.

Fists, slamming him right and left, bending him, driving him, battering down the thick slower arms. Desperately the Ox flung his own ham-like maulers, but the wrestler was never yet known who could learn to punch. His blows were heavy cuffs, bear-like, awkward. They carried no sting. And the

two were rammed against the wall with Ryder fainting, weaving, his teeth clamped tight, his breath whistling through distended nostrils.

Brodie groaned with the agony of suspense, with the delirium of the battle. What a fighter this Buck Ryder! What a— My God! Look!

Everybody was shouting at the same time. The Ox had played the weasel, started to stagger, then his arms lashed out and those killer muscles wrapped around the surprised and unsuspecting Ryder like the tentacles of a devilfish, Crashing heavily to the floor, the Ox bore Buck beneath him.

Buck was gasping for air in the grip of a vicious body hold. It seemed that his very life was being crushed out of him. His fists hammered the thick body without result, and Brodie's voice rose in a fiery curse.

"Steady, Buck!" he cried. "Lay still, I'm going to shoot him."

NEITHER the Ox nor Buck heeded his warning. Ryder's fists continued to fly, but his blows were getting weaker with every passing second. Buck could feel the nausea coming over him. Struggling with might and main he tossed and rolled, jerking, throwing himself from side to side, until with a supreme effort he got his left hand under the Ox's chin and began pushing.

Little by little, calling up every ounce of his reserve strength, he pushed backward, upward, fiercely, grunting with the strain. Inches spread, but still the Ox held his hand-locked grip. His head was bending backward. It was almost ready.

With a lurch Buck wrenched himself a little to the left. The two bodies swung, poised there a second, and up came Ryder's right fist

with a crash that sounded like the splintering of a plank. Flush on the jaw.

It was a terrific punch and Ivan Piavsiok's arms loosened. Then both of them drew quick spasms of breath, and Ryder brought over his right once more. This time it struck the Ox behind the ear, and over he went, a low groan oozing from his clamped jaws.

RYDER was half up, resting on one knee, staring around him. In a corner of the cage he became gradually aware that Diana was in a similar position. Her eyes were riveted on his face, staring, as though hypnotized. Her lips were parted and she breathed in short, jerky sobs. Somebody was talking. Buck staggered to his feet and put a hand against the wall.

"Thattaboy Buck," cheered Chet Sanford. "Quick now, open this up and get out of there. Look at Diana."

Diana Carleton was crawling toward him on her hand and knees. It did not strike Ryder as funny. His hands were still working, making knotty fists, and Brodie, who had nothing to say, as yet held by the fury of the fight he had just witnessed, noticed that Ryder's hand were smeared with blood. Only then did he realize that the brutal face of the Ox was also daubed with crimson.

At the bars Buck reached down and yanked a narrow section. Brodie whistled with admiration as he saw it slide upward leaving a good-sized opening.

"Hold it up," ordered Ryder, and Beckett stretched an arm up under the sliding trick gate.

Buck picked Diana up, tottering a little under her slight weight, and passed her out to Sanford.

"Here," said Brodie, shoving a

pair of handcuffs through the bars, "put these on him, will yuh. I wanna bring him back alive."

Ryder rolled the Ox over, snapped a bracelet on each wrist. Then he rubbed the cauliflower ears roughly and applied a half dozen brick slaps to the murderer's jaws. The Ox opened his eyes narrowly.

"Come alive," said Buck. "On your dogs, you low-brow. You're going for a long ride."

Piavsiok did not answer. His ugly face remained expressionless now, though his tiny eyes shifted from face to face as he got slowly to his feet. He followed Buck's directions and went through the hole in the cage front where Brodie pressed the pistol against the small of his back. Sanford had taken the girls out of the way and was waiting with them in the office.

WHEN they stood in the late Colletti's bedroom, Buck threw himself on a chair and stared dully at the floor. Brodie glared at his prisoner. He had first call, though there were two more deaths now for which Piavsiok could be convicted. Getting a confession would be a simple matter. What still rankled in the Oregon dick's mind was the simple cleverness of the deception that Joe Colletti and Ivan Piavsiok had been practicing for a long while. It was a brand new one for the record books. For the newspapers. Murderer poses in the costume of a gorilla, then kills his master.

"When are you going?" asked Buck casually as he walked into the office to get a much needed drink of water.

"Right now," advised Brodie. "Say, Sanford—wonder if I could use your car? I walked out here from Ben-fleet Station."

"Yer don't 'arve to," cut in Beckett. "I'll drive yer. There's two

machines in the garage. Whenever you say."

"You comin', Buck?" asked Brodie. "I don't like to move out like this. I wouldn't mind workin' with a guy like you for a regular thing. You don't even need a gun."

"Thanks," grinned Ryder. "Yes, I guess we're all glad to cut the dust out of here."

Brodie pushed the automatic at the Ox. "Get a move on," he told him. "We've got your tree all picked out back home in Oregon."

The Ox sneered in Brodie's face, and began walking toward the front door. "You'll never see me hang, wise guy," he declared, shifting suddenly as he stood in the doorway. His cuffed hand snaked out and with a laugh he jerked the door shut behind him.

Brodie tore at the knob and Buck was right behind him as they flung the door open and looked toward the big gate. The Ox was nowhere in sight.

CHAPTER X

Pathway to Hell

FOR A single instant Buck had thought of Sanford's car. But it stood there, silent, a dumb witness to whatever the Ox was doing at the moment. Where he had secreted himself, none had the least idea.

Then Ryder swung around the house to the right toward the garage. Brodie pulled the doors open, and peered inside. Meanwhile Buck Ryder had started on a run down the narrow alley-like space that edged the high wall behind the buildings. Far ahead of him he had caught a fleeting glimpse of something that was jerked from his sight as he looked.

"The gate!" he shouted, as he ran

like the wind in pursuit of the figure that was now out of sight.

Brodie had jumped at his warning and returned to the front of the house. Buck heard someone shout. It was Chet Sanford. He yelled something about "the gate." And then they heard the bark of a gun as Brodie fired. The sharp, squeaking sound of the sliding gate followed close on the heels of the gun echo, and two jumps behind it Buck swept around the corner of the feed house to see the narrow gap where the main gate stood open.

Gone! The Ox had escaped. And as Ryder, first to reach the gate, plunged through the space, he heard the others coming; Brodie, and Beckett. But Beckett had stopped suddenly as he neared the entrance. There was Sanford shouting for him to swing the gate full open.

Buck threw a quick look along the built-up road that bore off on an angle toward the south, toward the highway. He hardly needed to look there, and he knew it. There was nothing stirring there. No sign of movement. And he turned his face toward the vast swamp. The Ox must have thrown himself on the mercy of the marshes. But Ryder could not see him, though the view was clear for miles.

"I think I hit him," said Brodie, adding a lurid curse on the killer's head. "He'll never make it, Buck. He'll have to come out of there."

RYDER had run to the corner of the fence, hugging the built-up earth foundation. His shout brought Brodie with a rush. Pointing out across the swamp, Buck had started to run before Brodie got there. The Oregon detective caught a swift picture of Ryder's back as he careened around the corner of the wall.

Buck was racing like a schoolboy along a narrow, faint footpath that

led away from the animal farm. It was on this path that the murderer must have found or known of a safe getaway, for he was moving swiftly ahead, throwing a look over his shoulder with every few yards that he ran.

MUD and slime oozed across Ryder's path as he plunged along, and the tall rushes whistled against his body. Far ahead, beyond the bobbing figure of the murderer, he could see a clump of willows, and he ran stumbling, slipping, leaping soft gummy blots of stinking black mud. The willow meant possibly a road; or a larger stream. The place was full of water. It would hold the fugitive up, stop him perhaps.

Still the Ox ran. Buck's eyes kept him in sight, saw him disappear now and then, as if he fell in the slippery path. Then, suddenly, for no reason whatever, Ryder felt himself plunging through the tall rank growth. He had left the path. It had ended. That was why the Ox was running like a crazy man, zigzagging ahead of him, running from left to right, like a wild creature seeking an outlet to freedom.

Behind Ryder somewhere among the reeds he could hear the swearing, panting man from Oregon. But he dared not look behind him for fear he would lose track of Piavsiok. Brodie was much shorter and he was out of sight frequently as he fought and clawed his way through the spongy swamp.

The going was getting softer with every few yards. Buck tried leaping from hummock to hummock, catching desperately at the waving thick grass bunches. His feet were plastered with wads of black slimy mud and he slipped every few steps. The trail was getting wetter, softer. He plowed through water that reached his knees, and fell with a

splash into a black pit that yawned suddenly, without warning, before him.

Unconsciously he shouted and his mouth filled with the filthy scum. He dragged himself out with the aid of the reeds close by and scrambled to his feet to go on.

Marsh rats were scampering from his trail and he heard the "plump" of giant frogs as they plunged off hummocks into almost invisible pools of green-veiled water.

Far behind him now he heard a shot, and he plunged on until he reached a stretch of lower grass where he could once more see the Ox wallowing before him. The man was mad, clean out of his head. Look—he waved a hand in derision and Buck caught a flash of light on his wrist. The idea sank suddenly into Ryder's brain. A handcuff! The burly brute had snapped the links.

Where was Brodie? Had he fallen into one of the pits that were strewn like pock marks across the swamp? Or was he still fighting his way through? After that last shot he had heard nothing more.

BUCK RYDER fell often now, sprawling head-first into the treacherous holes and spongy masses of creeping roots and muck. The place was alive, infested, with crawling, slippery things; snakes, lizards, snarling hairy brown rats that splashed around him as he floundered.

His sense of direction changed a dozen times. He lost all track of the Ox. He wondered how far away he was, how far Brodie; if either of them had slipped and fallen into some great bottomless pit to be sucked under, dragged below the surface. It was like a fierce nightmare. Though it was broad day.

"Help! Help!" The shout came

suddenly out of nowhere. A smothered, spluttering cry for help. Help from whom? Buck Ryder? Then it came again. One mad bull-bellow of misery. Buck's grimy mud-smeared face turned toward the sound. Off to his right. Not far. He heard the dread clamor of some one splashing.

With strength born of desperation he tore his way through the clinging, choking mass of cutting, slashing rushes, reeling dizzily. And with a great gasping breath he felt himself emerge onto the gray-black mud bank of a broad green glassy stream. Motionless water. Dead water. Except there by the sagging bank where the man fought fiercely up to his arm-pits in its grip.

"The Ox!" Buck Ryder snapped the words out of mud-blackened lips.

PIAVSIOK was beating the water to a fury. His hideous face was distorted in fear of death and his great mouth worked, twitching in a slobbering, crazy way, as if he would cry out again.

Ryder stumbled along the bank, half crouched, staring at the frantic struggles of the murderer. The Ox was reaching, like a dying man for a buoy, stretching out his huge paws toward the tall reeds that clung to the soft clay shore. And as Buck saw him the Ox had succeeded in grabbing the waving frond, only to feel it break from its hold on the bank.

For a moment he looked on, a moment filled with conflict, with a fight inside himself. He shot a swift glance behind him over his shoulder. There was no sign of Brodie. Brodie was lost in the swamp. A shudder riddled Ryder's body. He could let the Ox go down. See—the soft clinging, sucking bottom of the dead stream is dragging the killer slowly under. With every move Piavsiok settles even further down.

A hand, clawed like a vulture's talons, was reaching out toward Ryder. The Ox was pleading, silently, begging to be rescued. There was the badge of his murder guilt on the upraised wrist. The water was rising like an iron collar around his throat. Piavsiok could not swim. Buck fought the impulse down. The law was the law, and Brodie had come a long way for his prisoner.

Flinging himself out through the reeds, Ryder jumped into the green water.

"Don't try to fight it," he shouted, blubbing at the Ox. "Let yourself go. I'll get you out."

The killer reached a hand out and Buck Ryder swam up to him, grabbing the heavier man under the arm-pits. Piavsiok laughed and slid around like an eel. He had Buck Ryder's neck in the famous strangle hold, and was slowly but surely pushing him beneath the surface. The killer's trick had worked.

Deep in the middle of the swamp Detective Joe Brodie stopped and looked about him. His eyes were bloodshot and red-rimmed, and his mouth was set in a grim bull-dog snarl.

All about him were the reeds, thick, green, walling him in.

Wherever he turned they were higher than his head. Buck Ryder was gone. So was the Ox. He could no longer hear the crashing of Ryder's body ahead of him. He must not lose his head now, and he knew it.

STANDING on a hummock, gripping a fistful of saw-edged rushes, he listened sharply, stretching his neck to look above the waving, whispering green sword points. Cat-tails swayed before his roaming vision, and he heard the million sounds of the scurrying things that

lived in the shadows among the roots around him.

THE gun, still in his right hand, was plastered in his fist like a half-worked figure on a sculptor's table, welded to his flesh with drying, mottled mud and slime. His feet were cold and the water "squooshed" from his shoes as from two sponges.

"It's funny," said Brodie to himself. But he did not laugh, for it was more strange than humorous. He had had the Ox in his grasp and now he was gone, and instead the lawman was trapped in a trackless mire. "The trees," he went on mumbling. He was searching for those willows that had disappeared so suddenly.

At last he drove himself to part the rushes and go on. He kept muttering to himself as he knifed a jagged wandering path through the dismal solitude, his eyes shifting continually from the morass beneath him to the fringe of giant grasses that hid him from the world.

"The trees!" he said again. This time it was fairly a shout. He saw them over the tall stalks to his left, and with an eagerness that cost him a plunge into a scum-screened slough, he swung toward the welcome trees.

Stumbling wildly, falling, dragging himself unsteadily to his feet, he battled his way through the marsh. Slowly, surely, the trees loomed larger, sprang up like beckoning fingers against the sky. And Brodie broke out into a narrow wind-trampled stretch of marshland that ended under the mossy drooping branches.

A lark fluttered up out of his plunging course as he ran. He saw the water. Spots of bare black wet earth lay like mats under the trees. Brodie came to a halt.

"Ryder! Hey, Ryder!" He shouted at the top of his voice. In the vastness of the seeming endless swamp the cry sounded weak, feeble. He heard himself and wondered how far a tiny voice like that would carry.

But he had not long to wait. As he listened he caught the unmistakable splash of water, then an answer. "Brodie!"

The dread horror of the place left him. He shot a swift, searching look along the faint matted trail beside the bank of the stream. He saw the movement in the reeds some distance up the bank. And with a shout he began running, flat-footed, digging in his heels to keep from falling in the slippery, silt-drenched path.

BUCK RYDER lay like a dead man half in the water, half out of it, his head buried in the roots of the treacherous marsh reeds.

Beside him on the matted black mud slope lay the Ox, Ivan Pivsiok, the killer who had squirmed to life in this world somewhere on the continent; a cross-breed of beasts. Some said he was a Russian, others a Tartar mongrel whelped in a war-ridden gray desolation of the Steppes. Fighting the heavy death stupor, plastered like a water rat with scum and sticky muck, Buck Ryder shoved himself an inch at a time until, the cool air forced itself into his spent lungs. That cry of his, the single name of "Brodie," had taken his last gasp. Now he raised his head and looked into the dull, lusterless eyes of Pivsiok. Even in his weakened state Ryder recalled those last moments, and the fighting grin came back to his gray features.

Two could play at the murderer's game. Only a few moments behind him he had drawn his last breath, gulped it down with sudden fierce resolve and given up his strug-

gle with the beast. That counter trick had saved his life, as he let the Ox push him below the water and then dragged the unwary killer down with him.

It was there under the scum-blotted surface that Buck had made his Yankee fight, felt the struggle of the surprised Ox, the pain in his own lungs as he ground his teeth and bore the misery of death to hold his breath.

THE Ox had fought like a demon. But Ryder held him down until quiet came, until the wrinkles in the water, like folds of funeral crepe, had smoothed. Then he rose, lifting the Ox to hurl him with a bitter oath onto the bank.

Footsteps, swift and soggy, beat on Ryder's ears. Brodie!

His eyes swerved from the face of the Ox and he saw the man from Oregon.

Buck reached upward with an unsteady hand.

"Give me a pull, Brodie," he blurted.

"He's dead?" cried Brodie. "You hada croak him?"

"Almost," panted Ryder, staggering to his feet. "He tried to drown me, the dirty hound. I just gave him a taste of the river."

Brodie looked in awe from Buck to the Ox. He saw the severed bracelet links and his consciousness was slowly recognizing the fact that the man-killer had broken them, like a child would break a necklace.

"What are we goin' to do with him away out here?" Brodie's question was tinged with bitterness, with resentment toward the brute who killed like a jackal.

Buck stamped and shook himself, pounding his ears with his fists, drawing great gobs of air into his lungs. His clothes were stuck to his body and he shivered in the

breeze that swept over the marshes, hissing among the swaying reeds.

"He'll walk out, Brodie," said Ryder savagely. "Here, get your tie off."

He was drawing his own tie from around his neck. Taking Brodie's he fastened the two together tightly, then he walked over to the Ox, and flung the arms together behind his back.

"Not in front this time," he said. "He just twists those steel links apart."

Wrapping the ties around and around the thick handcuffed wrists, Ryder bound the Ox securely.

"The next door he goes through," chuckled Ryder, "will be his last."

Together they dragged the heavy ex-wrestler onto the path. Buck Ryder kneaded him and rolled him over, until the Ox groaned with pain. Brodie held his automatic menacingly as the prisoner shuddered and turned over, out of Buck's hands.

"We've gotta fight our way back through there?" he asked. "Ain't there some way outa here?"

Ryder looked around, saw a rotting willow trunk near them, and climbed on it so he could see further. He pointed far away westward toward the animal farm.

"There's where we came from," he said, and he saw the chagrin in Brodie's eyes.

THE Ox was on his knees scowling nastily. Brodie looked out across the waving marsh reeds and spat resignedly.

"Get up," ordered Buck, and stood silent, waiting. He was worn and weary, and he wiped the mud from one side of his face to the other as he rubbed with nervous hands.

Slowly, as the Ox wobbled to his feet, both Ryder and Brodie searched with quick side glances for the new

sound that came to their ears. It was persistent, demanding. Sounded like some one shouting, then like an auto horn. Buck Ryder squinted and moved back from the reach of the Ox.

THROUGH slitted lids he searched the horizon, then he started. Far away on the rim of the swamp he made out two cars, and little dots that moved near them. He watched them, mumbling meanwhile to Brodie, saw one of the figures waving. He raised his arm full height and wig-wagged. And he saw the other swing an arm in the gradually narrowing circle. Old army assembly signal. Form. Get together.

"It's Sanford," shouted Buck eagerly. "They're out there on some road with two cars. Let's go. Come on, Ox, my old buddy from Vinny Ridge will take you this time to a place where they'll wean you away from your bloodthirsty habits."

Brodie pointed to the slippery path along the water's edge, and

Buck nodded, motioning to Piavsiok.

Indian fashion they began the march. The Ox, with three known murders to his record; Brodie, the man-hunter from Oregon with his gun a yard from Piavsiok's spine. Then Buck Ryder, who had gambled with the phantom of Death and won.

HALF way across the swamp Brodie spoke. He had been thinking.

"I'll have to split the reward with you, Buck," he called back.

"I'll trade my split for a cigarette right now," answered Buck. "There they are. Over there. See the cars?"

The hideous mud-caked specter who walked ahead of them said nothing. His arms were lashed with triple knots behind his ape-like back. He was going back to pay the penalty for murder. It was the end of a haunted trail.

And just another red adventure in the life of Jimmy "Buck" Ryder.

THE END

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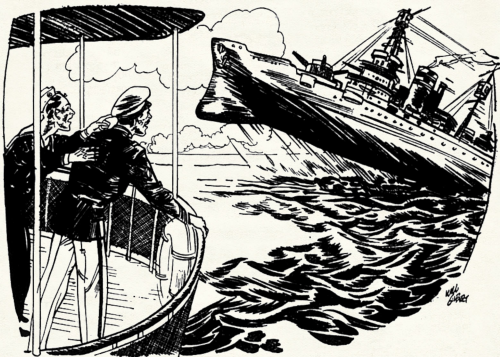
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Stolen Battleships



A Gripping Pseudo-Scientific Fiction Story of a Diabolic Plot to Terrorize a Nation

By ALLAN K. ECHOLS

Author of "White Ivory," "Murder Hotel," etc.

DARREL KINGSLEY'S new Japanese man-servant opened the door to admit Police Commissioner Delaney and a slight man with a worried look and a shock of prematurely gray hair. Delaney shoved his derby to the back of his head and flicked cigar ashes on the luxurious Oriental rug in the living-room of the noted scientist's home.

"Darrel," he said excitedly, "meet Mr. Dale Nearing of Washington. Department of Justice man. He wants to tell you the wildest story I ever

heard outside the ravings of a lunatic. Fix us a drink—you'll need it when you hear this yarn."

The Japanese servant made the drinks while the Department of Justice man glanced about nervously. Eager to get through with his business, he dashed off his cocktail hurriedly, and bit off the end of a cigar.

"I know this sounds improbable," he said, "but I've been directed to tell it to you as it happened.

"We have been called in by the Navy Department to find a lost bat-

tieship. The superdreadnaught *Empire State* has suddenly vanished into thin air!"

Kingsley sat up, smiling incredulously. "Come now," he interrupted, "battleships don't do that—they're too heavy to go up into 'thin air.'"

"Well, figuratively that is just what this one has done," answered Nearing. "And it disappeared almost in front of the very eyes of a responsible Navy captain and six sailors. They were ashore while the ship was out in the Narrows. When they set out for the ship it was about two miles off shore and all of them saw it.

"A sudden rain squall blotted it from sight as the captain's launch kept moving toward where it lay. The squall passed in about ten minutes and the ship was not in sight! It had absolutely vanished!"

Kingsley interrupted. "Perhaps it sailed away for some unexpected reason."

"Impossible! The captain was in the launch with the sailors. It couldn't have sailed without him under any circumstances. *Nor could it have got completely out of sight in ten minutes if it had sailed!* At top speed it would have taken at least a half an hour if not more."

"Sank," Kingsley suggested.

"Impossible again. I tell you it disappeared—evaporated!"

KINGSLEY sat up. "Interesting case," he admitted. "But there'll be an answer some time—or else it will be another *Cyclops* mystery."

The Department of Justice agent squirmed.

"But don't you see," he insisted, sitting forward on the edge of his chair, "we can't wait for any ordinary solution of the problem. There's too much depends on it.

"Today is Navy Day. This afternoon there's to be the big marine

parade in New York Harbor and the Government has invited a lot of foreign diplomats to be its guests on board the *Empire State*.

"It's the newest ship, has all the new-fangled guns and airplanes and all that stuff. And here's something else that might have a bearing on the case—"

The new butler entered silently and glided about the room on noiseless feet while he refilled the cocktail glasses.

Nearing looked at him and did not attempt to continue his broken sentence.

Kingsley noted the hesitancy. "That'll be all, thanks, Kari," he said in dismissal.

KARI glided out of the room and Nearing continued.

"I am instructed to tell you this. We decode messages received by all foreign representatives. In that way we have learned of their curiosity regarding the *Empire State*, and in fact, this reception aboard is a gesture to make them think we have nothing to conceal."

Nearing became more tense. "This is the important, vital thing. Japan is the only major government that is not giving any cable instructions to its ambassador to try to get the secrets of the ship. Therefore *Japan must have some other means of getting its information!* What better way than to steal the ship itself? Washington knows *it is only a matter of days until Japan intends to declare war on us!*"

Kingsley tapped the arm of his chair with a nervous gesture. "And in the light of this information, the government comes to me, a private citizen, in the hope that I, single-handedly, can solve such a riddle as this disappearance and save this country from war? That's a big order."

Nearing clutched at the cut velvet arm of his chair.

"We know it's a big order. There is no doubt this disappearance is some kind of gesture intended either to warn or cripple us. Undoubtedly it involves some advanced scientific principle of which we are not aware. It is a simple statement of fact to say that you have at your finger tips more knowledge of the sciences than any man in America today, that you are at least fifty years ahead of the times.

"Now, with Japan able to destroy or capture our ships, able to make them disappear like this, America faces utter disaster, complete annihilation. They will make our defenses as worthless as egg shells. Hordes of Japanese will roll over the country, sweeping everything before them and we will be helpless. It will be the end—"

The harsh jangling of the telephone interrupted Nearing and the men relaxed the tension of their strained nerves.

Delaney mopped the perspiration off his corrugated forehead and answered the phone. "For you, Nearing," he said, then dropped into his chair as though exhausted from too much exercise.

NEARING'S excitement boiled over at the telephone, and his talk resolved into unintelligible grunts. Finished, he turned to Kingsley frantically. "They've done it," he agreed. "They've struck again!" His hands jerked through his gray hair and his eyes took on a haunted look. "A whole bunch of 'em—all gone!" he blurted senselessly.

"Calm down," Kingsley said. "Take it easy. What now?"

"What is it?" Nearing repeated excitedly. "A whole destroyer fleet! Gone! Just disappeared into thin air!" He dropped into his chair and

nested his head in his hands. "Oh Lord. What next?" he groaned.

KINGSLEY crossed the room and slapped the man on the back. "Brace up," he said. "Don't go to pieces now. What happened?"

The government man drained his cocktail glass at a gulp. "Six destroyers were steaming toward New York to join the maneuvers this afternoon. They were about twenty miles off Fire Island when they last reported their position at sunrise this morning. Suddenly they were silent—all of them—and no other word has been heard from them. Arlington wireless station can't contact them—can't get a single one of them!"

"But listen to this!" An almost insane light blazed in the man's eyes and he regarded Kingsley closely, looking for signs of doubt.

"The captain of the *Oceatania* reports that he and his passengers saw the destroyers which were near his position. His message said that they suddenly increased their speed to what he estimates as fully a hundred miles an hour.

"The captain said they darted straight ahead and out of sight before anybody could realize what was happening. Now, no destroyer could ever go that fast. Some of his passengers swear they saw the ships leave the water and take to the air just before they got out of sight—just like a bunch of ducks rising from a lake. What made them do that, and what suddenly silenced their wireless? I tell you, there's something dreadful happening. I admit I'm afraid!"

Commissioner Delaney joined in. "You've got to do something, Darrel," he said. "We're facing war, and there's nobody else to tackle the problem. It's not a matter of appealing to your patriotism, it's a

question of thousands and millions of lives, women and children, millions of soldiers slaughtered, swept off the earth in stinking clouds of poisoned gas, whole cities blasted out of their foundations, reduced to gray piles of broken stones and mangled bodies. Boy, you've got to do something!"

KINGSLEY pressed the lighted end of his cigarette into the ash tray thoughtfully. "I'm willing to do what I can," he said. "But I hardly know what I can do. I have only the vaguest notion, could only hazard a guess as to what is back of this ship-stealing business, and even if I were right, I wouldn't know how to go about recovering the ships or saving any others."

He got to his feet. "However, I'll do what I can. We'll visit a Japanese scientist who is indebted to me for a favor. Perhaps—"

A voice from the dining room door interrupted him. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Kingsley, but I can't permit you to call upon Dr. Tasumuri alone. It will be necessary for me to escort you."

Three faces turned to stare surprisedly at the figure in the doorway. Kari, the new butler, stood between the portieres, dressed in street clothes. Peering from his hand was a black automatic pistol, its nose looming threateningly toward Kingsley and his guests. Behind it two black eyes peered calmly from immobile features.

"What the hell!" Delaney exploded.

Kingsley rubbed his chin with his forefinger and returned the Oriental's gaze sternly. "What does this mean?" he asked.

"As you already suspect," explained the Japanese, "there are important things happening today and there will be others—much more important. And in the meantime I

must ask that you prepare to miss them. I regret if it inconveniences you, but it is necessary."

"Who are you?"

THE young Jap's body visibly straightened with pride. "Prince Kari Turigi," he answered. "I have the honor to be the most unworthy son of my revered father, the Emperor of Japan."

Delaney dug his teeth into his cigar and scattered more ashes on his vest. "What kind of a damn-fool trick is this, you yellow scum?" he snorted, lumbering to his feet threateningly.

The Jap's gun described an arc and its black muzzle covered a spot between the Commissioner's eyes. "I advise you to take me seriously," the man said.

Suddenly the form of Nearing hurtled toward the Jap like a football player in a flying tackle. The threatening gun whizzed about in a blur and spat out a roar and a yellow dagger of flame. The flying form of the Department of Justice man fell at the feet of the Oriental in a huddled and shapeless form, and a trickle of blood drained out over his right ear and painted a crimson stain on his silver hair. He lay still.

The Jap spoke calmly to Kingsley. "I am sorry. Perhaps you will be cautious now. Please elevate your hands." Then with an easy movement he was at the side of the Police Commissioner and had transferred the officer's gun to his own pocket. Finding no weapon on Kingsley, he allowed the men to drop their hands.

Still covering the two with his gun, the Jap picked up the receiver of the French phone, laid it on the table and dialed a number. Getting his connection, he snapped out a torrent of words, unintelligible to the two men.

"You might as well sit down, gentlemen," he said when he had finished. "I have ordered a car to take you to Dr. Tasmuri."

THE man showed no personal animosity toward Kingsley and Delaney. Rather, he was the essence of politeness. "I am sorry we have met under such circumstances," he said to Kingsley with sincerity. "I have great respect for you as a scientist and as a man, but the force of events greater than either of us has made this necessary. I hope you can understand it that way."

Kingsley said nothing.

"You at least deserve an explanation," spoke the man again. "A state of war will exist between my country and America within a few hours, and I must therefore ask you to consider yourselves prisoners of war—you, Inspector Delaney, simply because I can't turn you loose, and you, Mr. Kingsley, because we need you."

"We know that you have been consulted about the ships that we have found necessary to convert to our own purposes. And you, knowing these things, perhaps suspect our methods. Your suspicions are no doubt correct."

"We are taking the vessels by literally lifting them out of the water. This we do, as you probably have guessed, by the application of the power that you and Dr. Tasmuri have already done such excellent research work on. Needless to say, we have a plant in the vicinity where we generate enormous quantities of gyroscopic energy which we in turn broadcast to any point where needed."

"Dr. Tasmuri is in charge of this work and he needs you to help him in some necessary refinements of his apparatus. Therefore, I must take you to the generating plant, and I caution you that it will be to your

ultimate best interests to do as you are instructed. Otherwise—" He shrugged his shoulders suggestively. "Do you agree?"

Kingsley, hands in his pockets, paced the floor, strolled to the window and looked down on Park Avenue. While his mind raced over the problem searching for some means of escape which he might grasp, his eyes played on the street below. Parked at the curb was the Police Commissioner's black limousine with a uniformed officer at the wheel.

He turned back into the room to see Delaney hidden behind a massive cloud of smoke pumped out of the butt of his cigar. The officer sat in a brooding silence, his eyes half closed. Almost as an unconscious gesture, but with a significant glance at Kingsley, Delaney started toying with a fountain pen with one hand. His other hand gripped his nose in a thoughtless gesture. Kingsley understood the movement and casually mopped his face with his handkerchief as he returned to give the Jap his answer.

DELANEY'S thumb pressed the clip of the fountain pen as the instrument was pointed at the prince. A sudden click broke the silent tension and a six-foot ball of fluffy white clouds of tear gas enveloped them. Left hand still holding his nose, Delaney hurled his heavy form into the fog and his massive right arm encircled the body of the Japanese.

Kingsley, with a lightning swift movement, locked the Prince's neck in the crook of his elbow, the bone of his forearm clamping the man's Adam's apple with the pressure of a vise. The man emitted a gargling sound like a baby choking on his own tongue, while Kingsley dragged him to the window. The gas spread throughout the room.

"Out the fire-escape, away from the gas," Kingsley shouted to Delaney. They dragged the man over the sill of the French window and out of range of the milky tear gas which permeated every corner of the room.

Delaney's hands dug into the prisoner's pocket and retrieved his own gun and the Jap's automatic he passed over to Kingsley. "All right, you yellow devil," he barked. "Start climbing down. And don't make a crooked move or you'll get a bullet between your shoulders. We'll just postpone your and your dad's game o' 'soldier.'"

PEOPLE on the avenue below stopped to stare upward and a crowd began to accumulate. The fast-growing groups gazed at the tenth floor, where on the fragile iron gratings the three human flies started their torturous descent down the blank face of the high wall.

Delaney saw the Jap glance quickly at the window opening onto the ninth landing. Quickly he called a halt and asked Kingsley to take the lead and guard the windows at each floor. Thus they continued their way downward, Delaney puffing, sweating and cursing, the others silent, grim.

They reached the first floor and Kingsley dropped the ladder which had been drawn up from the street. He stood on the ground, looking up at the prisoner.

Suddenly the Jap acted desperately. His arms encircled the legs of Delaney who had descended too closely within his reach. Gripping hard, the prisoner swung himself outward, jerking the Commissioner's feet and hands from the ladder. As Delaney fell, his body landed across Kingsley's shoulders and the two went to the sidewalk in a heap, the latter underneath.

The crowd milled in, surrounding the entangled figures so closely that there was little room for movement. While the Commissioner and Kingsley scrambled to their feet, the active little Jap darted toward the building and jumped into an open basement window. His form disappeared behind the building's furnace, headed toward the freedom of the alleyway back of the house.

Kingsley picked himself up from the sidewalk and was helping Delaney to his feet when the uniformed patrolman on the beat edged his way through the crowd. "What's all this trouble?" he demanded loudly. "You guys scatter. Git going!"

Kingsley caught Delaney's arm. Hurry up! That Jap will make for his headquarters and start his deviltry right now. Minutes are precious."

Delaney looked at Kingsley helplessly. "What'll we do?" he asked. "We don't know where he went and we couldn't find him for days."

"Yes, we do know. When that fellow dialed that telephone number he gave away the location of their headquarters. I have learned just how long it takes the dial to return to its normal position after each digit, and in that way I can hear a number being dialed and tell you what it is. He called Bancroft 9710. That exchange is just outside of Flushing.

YOU have your department get in touch with the telephone company, find the location of that number and throw a heavy cordon of men around the building. It's likely to be the plant where their gyroscopic power is generated. I'll tell you more later. Get busy, now. We've got to get to the fleet before that fellow gets to work or it'll be too late."

Delaney called the officer and re-

peated Kingsley's instructions. "Call Headquarters and tell 'em what I said. And if you make a mistake I'll put you in the chair at Sing Sing and burn you myself," he finished. "Now beat it."

Kingsley and Delaney made a dash across the street and crawled into the commissioner's limousine. "Down to the Battery as fast as you can make it," Delaney shouted. "Take the speedway."

The officer shoved the car into gear and the powerful machine leaped from the curb with a roar. Gears clashed into high and the siren burst into an ear-splitting roar as the heavy Cadillac took the corner on two wheels and headed west toward Fifth Avenue.

The driver jammed his foot on the accelerator and opened a path for the careening vehicle with the screeching horn.

The machine screamed down to Forty-second Street, and on west through scurrying traffic. He hardly slowed down as he took the corner and turned down Tenth Avenue. He shot up the incline to the elevated pavement which stretched before him like a long gray ribbon on bridge trestling.

The super-powered car relieved of all necessity for caution, took a deep breath and roared forward at a speed so terrific that passing cars became only blurs.

The ribbon of road unrolled before them and the lower end of it became lost in a maze of buildings. Brakes screamed in agony and the machine shot down the incline to the street level, speeding past ferry docks and passenger ships that lined the waterfront.

It came to a skidding stop beside the Aquarium. Delaney and Kingsley piled out breathlessly and lost themselves in a milling crowd of holiday people.

The lower end of Manhattan was gay with brilliant flashes of color. Flags and bunting floated aloft brightly. Music poured out of the bandstand and overflowed into shouting and laughing mobs. Over the water the sun smiled on ships and tugboats all laden with color.

It was Navy Day, and the greatest Navy Day in history. Something special. The guests of honor were out in the Narrows. Uncle Sam's great battle fleet let down some of her grim dignity and rode in majestic splendor in New York Bay, the gray masses of her hulks topped with myriads of smart white uniforms and rainbows of flashing flags and pennants laced to her stays.

SMALL craft, smartly trim in their snowy awnings, darted here and there like white rabbits in a field of many-colored flowers. Music and national pride hung in the air like an intoxicating scent.

Darrel Kingsley and Commissioner Delaney hurriedly threaded their way to the city landing dock just as the *Macom* pulled away from her moorings to the accompanying clang and blare of the Marine Band. Lining the rail were smiling faces topped with silk hats, the formally attired cream of the representatives of all the major foreign nations.

"Good Lord," Delaney said. "There goes them high hats. If anything happens to them there won't be any peace till the whole world is drenched with blood. I hope to God we aren't too late. And these people—all celebrating when maybe in a few minutes they'll see the most awful catastrophe that ever happened to a civilized nation."

"Poor unfortunates, if we fail to do something," Kingsley replied: "Perhaps there's a chance in a million to do something! Let's go."

Delaney saw a trim police boat and hailed it. The officer in charge saluted when he recognized his superior and pulled the rocking craft to the dock. "To the battleship *Transylvania!*" Delaney ordered.

Aboard the flagship the two men were ushered into the quarters of the admiral commanding the fleet, and Kingsley briefly explained his business, and his 'suspicions. "I think the idea is utterly insane," answered the admiral, "but I have no objection to your seeing our wireless room. We are receiving visitors today anyway." The very wildness of the story he had heard prompted the navy man to direct them himself.

As they entered the radio room a voice halted them. "You will raise your hands carefully!"

The three men whirled about and stared into the muzzle of a navy automatic held by a Philippino mess attendant in navy uniform. "Don't move," he ordered, "or I shoot!"

HOLY smoking jellyfish!" exploded Delaney.

"Put up your hands!" the messman repeated, weaving the weapon.

The admiral gave one grunt and dived toward the captor. His massive bulk caught the man from the side and threw him to the deck, the gun sailing through the air and bringing up against the bulkhead.

As the boy came up Delaney's weapon struck the man's skull with a resounding whack and sent him to the floor in a heap.

Kingsley raced to the maze of wireless apparatus. "Here it is!" he said. "Here's the ground wire that charges the ship."

Delaney and the puffing admiral were on his heels, as the scientist stopped before a device to which was attached a heavy copper cable which had been bolted to a floor

plate. "This is it," he explained. "They are using this attached to the ship's own transformer for their purposes."

"Good Lord!" bellowed Delaney.

"Look here." He pointed to a foot protruding from under a switch panel. Reaching down, he dragged out the dead body of a sailor with a radio emblem on his sleeve. "That *goo-goo* killed him and took charge."

The admiral swore and picked up the speaking tube to call the master-at-arms.

"Have 'em send up another operator on the double," snapped Kingsley. "In the meantime prepare a message for all other ships. Better have a signalman send a duplicate with your flags, Admiral. The Japs may already have captured all other radio rooms."

The admiral directed the search on all ships and reported that the mysterious cables had been uprooted. Even before this was finished a boat whistle sounded and the *Macom* pulled up alongside.

"For God's sake, don't let them come aboard," warned Kingsley. "If anything happens and that bunch of men are lost there will be trouble such as was never dreamed of in this world. Every nation would be involved in this. Have your captain keep 'em off."

The admiral gave his orders and the boat was turned away.

"What the devil is this?" the navy man demanded, his eyes bulging.

Six Philipinos had appeared unnoticed. They had managed their way into the admiral's quarters. Kingsley looked and found himself and his party covered with guns.

One of the men stepped forward. "You will do well to try nothing rash," he said menacingly.

Suddenly there came a grinding roar from forward, and at the same time the men felt the ship pulsating.

The engines were turning over and the ship was moving.

The admiral let out a string of oaths and strode toward the Philippino in charge. The man coldly sent a bullet into his brain. "I hope no more of you start that," he said.

The ship picked up speed, the motor racing faster and faster. Kingsley felt the deck under his feet change from a level position to a slanting one. Delaney looked out a porthole near him and his face blanched. "Good Lord," he stammered, "*we're going up in the air!*"

Kingsley followed his gaze. He saw the water falling away beneath them as though they were in some gigantic seaplane which had just taken off. The whole bay was below them now. The ships and people lining Battery Park, all of these were getting smaller and the waves of the water appeared from their altitude to be flattened out like softly-ridged corduroy.

THE ship, like a great steel bird out of a nightmare, circled around over the park. Its propellers were now driving it through the air even as those of the *Los Angeles* drive that massive dirigible at a hundred miles an hour.

Kingsley turned to Delaney who was still staring out the porthole. "This is all my fault," he said. "In the excitement of your finding the dead body of the radio operator I simply forgot to disconnect that cable. Fortunately the other ships saved themselves. We have succeeded in stopping them from stealing the whole fleet, but it looks like this ship and everybody on it is doomed."

Dropping into a chair, he sat racking his brain for a way out of their hopeless predicament. The ship, suspended in air and in control of the Japs, was sure to be lost, and

with it all on board. Even if they could make themselves a chance to get to the cable and destroy it, the ship would be dashed to pieces on the ground below the instant the lifting power were removed.

DELANEY paced the room nervously. His hands groped for a cigar and he trimmed the end off carefully with his penknife.

Then as though a strong current of electricity were suddenly shot into his body, he flung forward, his massive arms locking around the neck of the Philippino leader from behind and his knife digging into the man's neck.

Kingsley saw the movement out of the corner of his eye and acted. His arms encircled another, his fingers twisting the gun from the man's hand and planting its muzzle in at the base of the fellow's brain.

The action was so sudden and unexpected that the other four men in the room stared in bewilderment.

Delaney barked at the man in his grasp. "Tell your men to drop those guns or I'll cut your head off. Quick!" He emphasized his command by digging the knife blade into the man's flesh as if to sever the vein in his neck. "Talk, I said!" he snapped again.

The Philippino felt the blade of the knife digging at his throat and the agony of the wound drained his resistance. Guns fell on the floor and Kingsley retrieved them.

"How'd you get control of this ship?" demanded Kingsley.

"We have a man at the wheel and others in the engine room," he explained. "We poisoned the food and most of the crew is helpless."

Kingsley and Delaney tied up the men and went to the pilot house with drawn guns. The men in control showed no fight in the face of the weapons.

"The men in the engine room don't know we have control, and we won't tell them," Kingsley said. Then with a gesture of determination he outlined a scheme. "I'll steer while you do this."

Kingsley kept the engine room telegraph at "Slow ahead," and took the wheel. The ship took a new course, sailing majestically over the spires of Manhattan's skyscrapers, a threatening forecast of the dreaded war instrument of the future.

Delaney, in response to Kingsley's instructions, hastened back to the radio room with ropes he had found on deck. He tied one of the heaving lines to the recently discovered cable connection, securing it with a loop that would not slip, but was large enough to come off the cable when it became free.

Then he ran the rope out the door and along the outside deck of the ship, piecing other ropes to it until it ran like a hose line to the side of the ship beside the pilot house.

Next he brought parachutes from the two scout airplanes lashed to the deck. One of these he donned when he was back in the pilot house, then took the wheel while Kingsley donned the other.

A MILE below the buildings of the city had drifted under them, then the East River as Kingsley guided the craft toward Long Island. They floated in a steady course over Long Island City, then Flushing slipped below them.

"Keep an eye out, now," Kingsley cautioned.

Delaney studied the terrain with a pair of binoculars. "There they are," he shouted. "Turn a little to your left."

Kingsley left the wheel and looked over the side of the ship. He saw the square black tops of police patrol cars parked at intervals com-

pletely encircling a concrete loft building that nestled flat in the low swamps. Between the cars were men in blue keeping well away from the building, however. "Watch her close," Kingsley said. "Tell me when we're exactly over it."

"Now!" Delaney shouted.

The engine room telegraph clanked and the propellers came to a halt. Kingsley maneuvered the giant craft to a dead stop directly over the building. He inspected his parachute as he reached the rail.

THEN solemnly he said to Delaney: "It is better this way than the destruction of the whole nation. Let's go."

They took the end of the rope that Delaney had laid and tied it securely around the officer's body. "That ought to do the trick," Delaney grunted. He took a cigar from his pocket and lighted it. "I'll see you on the ground," he said. Kingsley saluted the ship, and the crew helpless in its bowels, then with calm, set faces the two mounted the rail and jumped.

The rope around the heavy body of the commissioner became taut, the weight jerked on the cable in the radio room, pulled it from its connection and broke the circuit of the foreign device.

Instantly, relieved of that strange force which had kept it aloft, the battleship plunged straight down like a gigantic meteor, the air screaming behind its mad flight.

Even as the men pulled the ripcord rings and the supporting silk of their parachutes blossomed out to leave them suspended from great white mushrooms there was a deafening crash as the great vessel plunged headlong into the roof of the building below.

The landscape became chaos. Rending, twisting steel and masonry

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PARTIAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

RACKET IS AS OLD AS HISTORY AND ALWAYS GETS THEM.

CHAPTER IV
THE GOLD-DIGGER—THE BROADWAY BUTTERFLY—GIRLS WHO "NEVER GIVE A SUCKER AN EVEN BREAK."

CHAPTER V
GIRL AUTOMOBILE GYPS—GIRLS WHO ASK FOR A HITCH—WITH STRANGE CONSEQUENCES—AND THE GAMBLING RACKET

CHAPTER VI
THE NOBILITY RACKET—THE BIGGEST MONEY PRIZES GO TO THE BRAINY TYPES—THE MOST DANGEROUS OF ALL

CHAPTER VII
CREEP JANE'S PROGRESS—WHAT HAPPENS TO THE GIRLS WHOSE RACKETEERING IS AT FIRST CONFINED TO BAGGING FREE MEALS.

CHAPTER VIII
SWINDLING AND BLACKMAIL—SENATIONAL STORIES OF VULTURES IN HUMAN FORM WHO PREY ON THE EMOTIONS OF INNOCENT VICTIMS.

CHAPTER IX
JUST DOWN FROM COLLEGE—A COLLEGIATE MANNER, AN AIR OF NON-CHALANCE AND PLenty OF NERVE ARE THE STOCK-IN-TRADE OF CERTAIN UNSCRUPULOUS RACKETEERS

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scrambled into shapeless, tumbling masses of debris. Deafening boiler explosions hurled masses of steel and stone high into the air. The fuel oil from the torn tanks of the ship and the factory burst into great tongues of flame.

The breeze drifted the two parachutes away from the heat and smoke that was already choking them, carried them aside not an instant too soon, for the living flame had hungrily eaten its way to the ammunition scattered by the wreckage of the fallen ship.

Suddenly the earth trembled to its very foundations and the heavens rocked with thunder as roar after roar of the explosives wiped out the last trace of the tangled mass below, leaving only smoldering ruins and a gaping black hole where once had been the power plant.

Kingsley and Delaney were in conference with the officials of the War Department in Washington.

"My clue to the whole thing," the scientist explained at their request, "was given me by the prince himself. When I said that I intended talking with a Japanese scientist, he told me that Doctor Tasmuri was in charge of their activities from the scientific end.

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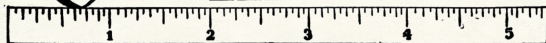
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28x5.25-20	\$1.75	28x5.25-20	\$1.75
28x5.50-20	\$1.85	28x5.50-20	\$1.85
28x5.75-20	\$1.95	28x5.75-20	\$1.95
28x6.00-20	\$2.05	28x6.00-20	\$2.05
28x6.25-20	\$2.15	28x6.25-20	\$2.15
28x6.50-20	\$2.25	28x6.50-20	\$2.25
28x6.75-20	\$2.35	28x6.75-20	\$2.35
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not. This nonconformity sets up the force which Doctor Tasmuri had succeeded in harnessing and converting to his own uses, sending it out on ether waves even as ordinary electricity is conveyed.

"That is demonstrated even in the case of those little toy tops with flywheels which may be suspended from the loop of a string and will hang jutting out over nothing but will not fall. It is again demonstrated in the case of gyroscopic compasses for ships and airplanes. They will cause retention of equilibrium no matter how much a vessel rolls and tosses.

"The problems of applying this force after it was under control were only minor ones. I might remind you that in the time of Benjamin Franklin electricity itself was just as unconquerable as gyroscopic force has been until now.

"That is the substance of my report, the details of which you will find in this written copy."

The Secretary of War addressed Kingsley. "On behalf of the Government, I want to thank you. Of course we have now located the missing ships and have arrested all those suspected of playing a part in the conspiracy.

"As soon as the ships were no longer under this strange power their captains regained control and communicated with us. We owe it to you that no more lives were lost than those of the brave men it was necessary for you to sacrifice in order to destroy the Japanese power house."

Delaney dusted fresh cigar ashes off his new blue serge suit and spoke up. "That's very fine, Mr. Secretary, but what's more important, is whether you have any pre-war stock in your office."

The Secretary ordered the glasses and the bottles.

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Here's rooting for **BLACK MAMBA**, by Ferdinand Berthoud. That boy can write!—*J. Hunt, Boise, Idaho.*

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CHICAGO

THE YELLOW CAT

(Concluded from Page 97)

panion when old age comes than expensive young woman," said Hugo.

The official shook his head and also Hugo's big paw. Then he retired with his followers and left Hugo and the cat on the bridge. The Eurasian watched them disappear, then regarded the cat soberly.

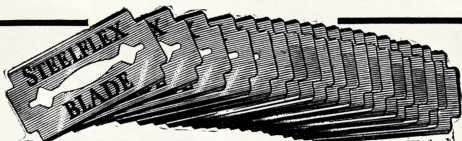
"You are wise cat," he said. "Maybe you can find repast of sardines for use on road to George Town." He struck off towards the undergrowth where the half-empty box must have fallen. The cat followed at his heels. Suddenly it slid into the brush. Hugo followed until he came upon the cat with its tail twisting contentedly on the ground. Under the cat's probing nose was the discarded sardine box.

Kneeling, Hugo took the box and gave the animal an affectionate stroke. He pried up the lid and dug out the sardines one by one, handing each to the cat.

At last there were no more sardines. But there did remain a thick folded layer of greasy bank notes. Unfolded, they counted up to one thousand rupees. Hugo picked up the cat and held it close to his face.

"A thousand birds in the bush," he addressed it softly, "are better than a hundred insects in the hand."





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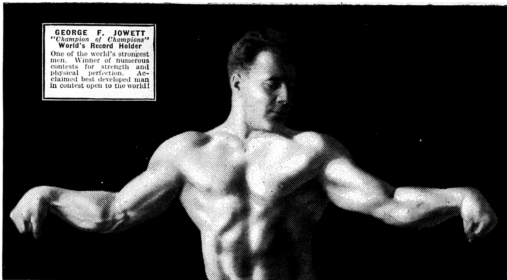


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