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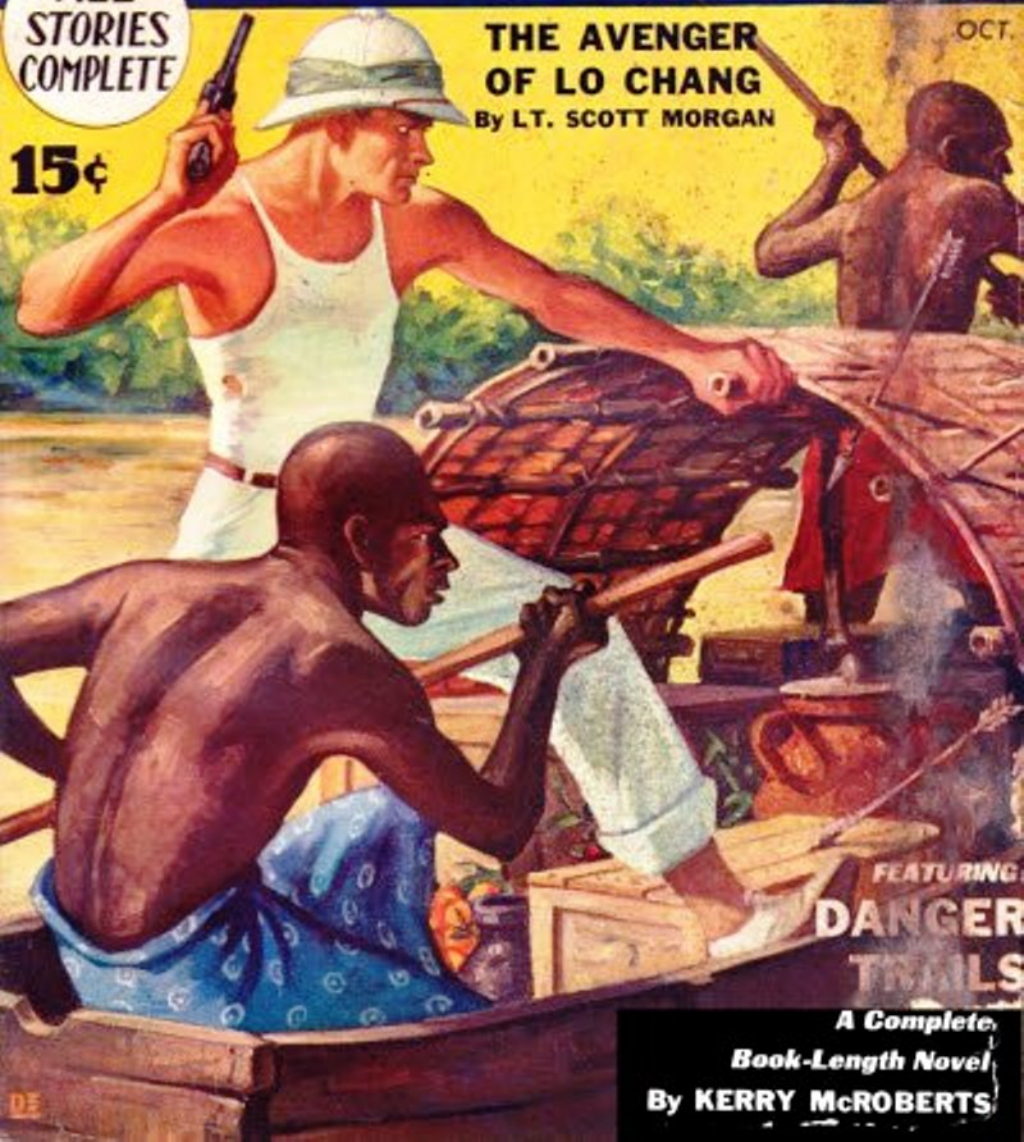
ALL
STORIES
COMPLETE

THE AVENGER
OF LO CHANG

By LT. SCOTT MORGAN

OCT.

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FEATURING
DANGER
TRAILS

A Complete
Book-Length Novel
By KERRY McROBERTS

Now 160 Big Pages!

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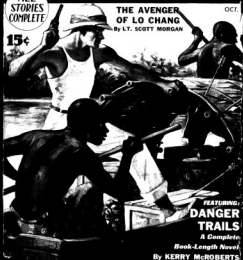
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THE AVENGER OF LO CHANG

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FEATURING:
**DANGER
TRAILS**

A Complete

Book-Length Novel

By KERRY McROBERTS

FROM A FAT MAN... to a HE-MAN... in 10 MINUTES!

"I REDUCED My WAIST 8 INCHES"

WRITES
GEORGE BAILEY



1. "I was just a fat man with a protruding stomach... ill at ease and clumsy—no pep to do anything!"

Actual Photos
Show Immediate
Improvement In
YOUR
Appearance!



2. "I was ashamed to undress in the locker room—my friends poked fun at me and I had no answer!"

YES SIR: I too, promised myself that I would exercise but it was too much like work—and it's darn hard to diet when you like to eat. The Weil Belt was just the answer—no diets, no drugs—I feel like a new man and I lost 8 inches of fat in less than 6 months!

GREATLY IMPROVES YOUR APPEARANCE!

The Weil Reducing Belt will make you appear many inches slimmer at once, and in 10 short days your waistline will actually be 3 inches smaller—three inches of fat gone—or it won't cost you one cent!

It supports the sagging muscles of the abdomen and quickly gives an erect, athletic carriage.

Don't be embarrassed any longer with that "corporation" for in a short time, only the admiring comments of your friends will remind you that you once had a bulging waistline.

THE MESSAGE-LIKE ACTION THAT DOES IT!

You will be completely comfortable and entirely unaware that its constant gentle pressure is working constantly while you walk, work or sit... its massage-like action gently but persistently eliminating fat with every move you make.

Many enthusiastic wearers write that it not only reduces fat but it also supports the abdominal walls and keeps the digestive organs in place—that they are no longer fatigued—and that it greatly increases their endurance and vigor!

DON'T WAIT—FAT IS DANGEROUS!

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Send for our 10 day free trial offer. We repeat—either you take off 3 inches of fat in ten days, or it won't cost you one penny!

"I lost 50 pounds" says W. T. Anderson. "My waist is 8 inches smaller" writes W. L. McGinnis. "Felt like a new man" claims Fred Wolf. "Wouldn't sell my belt for \$100" writes C. W. Higbee. So many of our customers are delighted with the wonderful results obtained with the Weil Belt that we want you to—

TRY IT FOR 10 DAYS AT OUR EXPENSE!

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REDUCE your **WAIST**
3 INCHES IN
TEN DAYS!



3. "Then I slipped on a Weil Belt... a transformation took place... what a difference—pounds seemed to have fallen away!"

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NO DIETS
NO DRUGS**

"REDUCED from 44 to 36 INCHES"

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George Bailey
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... or it won't
cost you one cent.

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Indianapolis, Ind.

Clip the coupon and mail it. I'm so sure I can train you at home in your spare time for a big-pay job in Radio that I'll send you a sample lesson free. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand. Then you will know why many men with less than a grammar school education and no technical experience have become Radio Experts and are earning two to three times their former pay as a result of my training.

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J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

October, 1933

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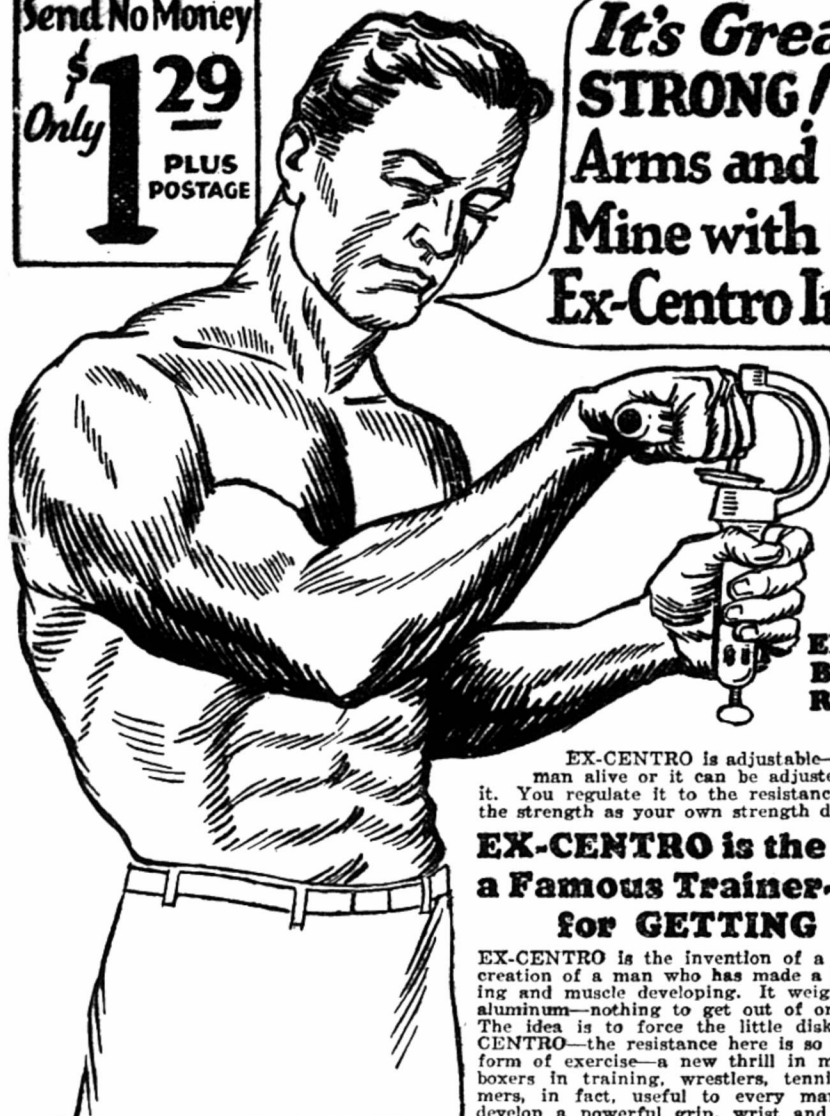
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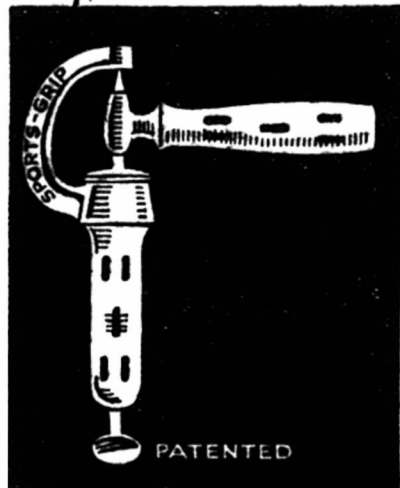
- ☐ Send 1 EX-CENTRO, with full instructions, by return mail. I will pay postman \$1.29, plus postage on arrival. It is understood if I am not fully satisfied I may return after 5 days trial and you will refund my \$1.29.
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22x4.00-18	2.10	1.45	30x3.50-26	2.75	1.45
22x4.00-17	2.10	1.30	30x3.50-25	2.75	1.30
22x4.00-16	2.10	1.15	30x3.50-24	2.75	1.15
22x4.00-15	2.10	1.00	30x3.50-23	2.75	1.00
22x4.00-14	2.10	.85	30x3.50-22	2.75	.85
22x4.00-13	2.10	.70	30x3.50-21	2.75	.70
22x4.00-12	2.10	.55	30x3.50-20	2.75	.55
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22x4.00-4	2.10	.00	30x3.50-12	2.75	.00
22x4.00-3	2.10	.00	30x3.50-11	2.75	.00
22x4.00-2	2.10	.00	30x3.50-10	2.75	.00
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The Editor



DANGER

CHAPTER I

Gleaming Knives

A Complete Book-

By CAPT. KERRY

Author of "Devil Fish,"

LEGIONNAIRE Bill Stivers saw the menacing, gleaming knife leave the hand of the dark-faced Mohammedan sitting three tables away from him!

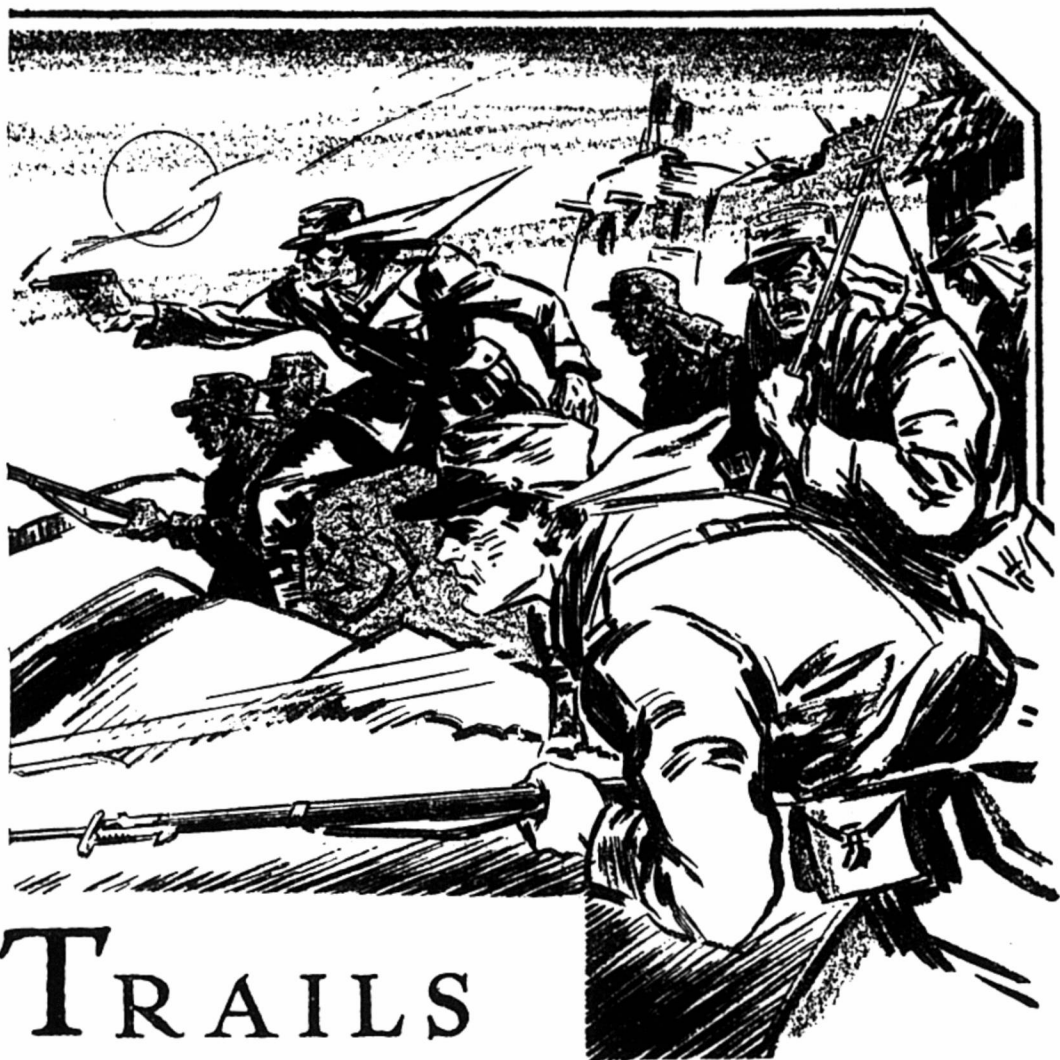
He saw the knife coming through the filthy-laden air toward him.

Then, before Stivers could duck or dodge the weapon, he saw a drunken Algerian stagger across his view and crumple to the floor with a dull groan as the knife buried itself in

his flesh. And then when the dull groan of the stricken man died away, a silence—oppressive, dangerous and sinister—settled over the filthy and stuffy room that housed Har Monken's dive.

The sweating, colorful jam of unholy humanity—Arabs, Mohammedans, Riffs, Moors, and every nationality that infested such places in

Charging Arabs and Fighting Legionnaires in an



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"Legion of the Frontier," etc.

Northern Africa—seemed to tense and rise slowly from their seats. The heat was stifling under the hot and gaseous haze of smoke that clung to the low ceiling.

The clamoring and clinking of glasses ceased: the roar of subdued conversation stopped, and the tenuous nasal whine of the flutists, chanting in a sing-song voice to the accom-

paniment of the squirming dance girls, died away weirdly.

Stivers was on his feet, his hands gripping the edges of the table. There was no doubt in his mind that the knife had been intended for him, and there was little doubt in his mind but that his body would be cut to ribbons before he got out of the dive.

The dark-faced Mohammedan that had hurled the knife through the air was gone, but three tall, powerfully-built Riffs had risen from their chairs and were moving slowly,

Exciting, Thrill-Packed Novel of the African Desert



in a half circle, toward Stivers' table.

Bill Stivers silently and mercilessly cursed himself for his stupidity in entering Har Mon-

ken's den alone. His eyes searched the crowd for the kepi of some brother Legionnaire, but there was none. He was alone in this hole of murder and death.

Hands gripping the table, Stivers watched the three powerful Riffs closing in on him in a narrowing half circle. It flashed through his mind that the whole scene was grotesque and crazy, this tableau of death. Why would anyone want to murder him? He was a stranger, an unknown recruit in the Legion. He only had two sous left in his pocket—two days' pay given him by the French Republic for the hell and the suffering he had to go through. It couldn't be robbery, but what could it be?

ANOTHER knife gleamed and flashed in the hazy light of the room, but this time Bill Stivers ducked. The knife grazed the edge of his neck. Blood spurted out from the flesh wound and dropped down on his newly laundered canvas whites. The blood dripped on the black cummerbund around his waist.

Stivers was down on his hands and knees behind the table. The narrowing circle had closed in on him. On his right and on his left was a crouching Riff; in front of him was the Riff that had hurled the knife. The muscles in Stivers' face contracted in thin ridges around his mouth: his steel gray eyes darted swiftly over the room.

The eerie, deadly silence of death continued to pervade the place. The

crowd had risen from their seats and had backed away, watching the murder drama with a savage interest. The dancing girls had fled, and through the smoke-filled air Stivers caught a glance of the fat, slinking form of Har Monken standing near the door.

But Stivers wasted no time looking at the motley mob. One against three was odds he couldn't hope to overcome, especially since the three against him were armed with knives and, because of the regulations of the Legion, he had to enter the dive unarmed. Legionnaires when they went foraging in the night were not permitted to carry pistols or knives, a regulation that had long been followed at Sidi-bel-Abbes.

But Stivers, though he could not understand the insane desire to murder him, grimly vowed that he would sell his life as dearly as possible. The man in front of him took two steps nearer. With a mighty heave Stivers brought the table up and hurled it at the man. He wasted no time to see if his aim had been good. He swerved with the swiftness of a tiger and was on the Riff at his right.

And in that moment bedlam broke loose. He was not only fighting the three Riffs now. He was fighting a sea of black faces, black arms, black legs. Knives flew and men yelled in twenty different languages.

AIMING his blows carefully, from his crouching position on the floor, Stivers shot out right and left. Dark faces bobbed up in front of him and then went down to the floor with sickening groans. Backward Stivers moved, still in the crouching position. He came to the wall. His face was set and hard. A grim smile played on his lips. He knew it all would be over in a few brief seconds. It would have been over

sooner if the fight had been left to the three Riffs encircling him. A knife thrust would have ended it.

But the surging mob bearing down on him in their insane fury against a white man had spoiled the cleverly planned attack of the three Riffs. It threw Stivers into a *mélée* of human forms and bodies and a well-aimed knife thrust was out of the question in that snarling mass of human flesh. Sheer weight of bodies, though, would soon overwhelm Stivers, crush him to the floor where a knife would end it all.

But until then—

Smack! Smack! Stivers threw his right and left out with a deadly, paralyzing precision. His blows connected with the grimy, greasy black faces in front of him. But the surging mob came on relentlessly, and with a fury that had been aroused to an insane pitch by the sight of blood and the hope of murder.

STIVERS knew that the three Riffs had approached him with a clearly defined plan of murder. The knife hurled by the Mohammedan had been the first part of this plan. There was nothing frenzied or hurried. It had been coldly calculated.

But the attack of the surging mob was different. They knew nothing behind any plan to kill this lone white man. They were driven on by their lust for blood and murderous hatred for the white heathen that had come and conquered them. In front of them was a white man, alone and unarmed. Someone had started the attack and they would finish it.

On and on the surging men pressed against Stivers. His arms ached. The smell and the stifling heat, made a hundred times worse by the bodies that closed around him, caused a feeling of sickness to come over him. But his right and left

continued to drive out.

In a minute—perhaps, in the matter of a few seconds, it would be over. There was no chance for him to es-

cape. His arms were heavy and tired now. His blows had lost their sting.

A glorious end to his career in the Legion! Murdered in a cheap dive by a sinister hand that moved in the dark, a hand that had sought him out among the thousands of Legionnaires—

His thoughts began to reel. What was it all about? His arms went dead. The snarling hiss of savage faces near him closed in relentlessly. Something hit him alongside the head. He felt himself falling forward to the floor. He heard a wild yell. Someone was pulling at his arm and his body was being dragged across the floor.

Slowly darkness—the Stygian overwhelming darkness of unconsciousness—closed down upon him. He tried to raise his arms. He couldn't.

Then he fell forward on his face and remembered nothing more.



CHAPTER II

The Goddess of Ill Luck

STIVERS came to with a jerk of the body and a feeling that a thousand tons of rock had suddenly descended on his head. Every muscle and bone in his body ached and his head was filled with sharp shooting pains. He opened his eyes, but all he could see was jet black darkness.

For a moment his mind seemed numbed. He tried to think, to remember what had happened and where he was. But his mind was a

windmill of jumbled thoughts—crazy, bewildering thoughts that raced through his brain wildly. He had left the barracks that evening. He had come to Har Monken's dive.

And then suddenly the memory of the fight in the dive flashed back to him. He tried to struggle to his feet. There were the black bodies that had descended over him like a cloud. The last thing he had remembered was the sickening blow on the side of his head and the feeling that his body was being pulled across a floor. But where was he now?

HE tried to sit up, but the muscles in his body didn't respond to his attempt to rise. He laid back again and closed his eyes. Was he dead? The thought struck him as silly—childish. He wasn't dead, but what had happened?

"*Vite, fool of an American,*" he heard a voice close to him, a voice that spoke pure French. "*Mon Dieu, I saved you from those black dogs, but if we don't get out of here in a hurry, they'll cut us to ribbons. Move! Get up and move!*"

Dazed and stunned by the sudden sound of a human voice, a voice that was that of a white man, Stivers struggled to get on his feet. Two strong arms helped him and the arms continued to assist him as he staggered through the wall of darkness in front of him. He could not see the man at his side; he could see nothing in that dungeon-like blackness.

"We are in a rear room of Monken's dive," the man at his side said. "Don't ask me how I got you in here. There is a door to our right that leads out into an alley. If we get there safely—"

The words were drowned out by the roar of voices behind them. Savage fists were pounding frantically on the wall. The roar increased.

"*Saint Suplice,*" the man whispered. "If they knock the wall down—"

There was a crash of wood behind them. Stivers was running now, with his new-found friend's arms around his waist, giving him support. He was running blindly in the darkness. Suddenly they crashed against a wall. Men were yelling a few feet behind them.

"*Vite, mon ami,*" his friend cried. "Here is a door."

Stivers stumbled and staggered after the man. His senses reeled again, but he kept on. How he ever got out of the door and into the night air was something he never remembered. But he got there. The night air cleared his brain in a flash and brought strength to his body. Ahead of him he saw the familiar kepi, the white canvas trousers, and black cummerbund of the Legion.

His newly-found friend was a Legionnaire! Stivers dashed after the Legionnaire, down the narrow half-darkened alley. Behind them he heard shouts, savage and wild, but as they raced through the night the shouts died away. Suddenly Stivers turned sharply to the right and the man ahead of him stopped running and leaned against the mud wall of a building, breathing hard, and looked at Stivers with a grin on his sharply featured face.

THE little pig of a recruit," the man said with a laugh. "The little recruit goes into Har Monken's place for the great honor of being murdered. But name of a name, *mon enfant*, look at the rent in your elbow. Five nights in the *salle de police* for that. But ordinary arrests are nothing. *Sacré mon nom*, it will be better than death at the hands of those dogs."

Stivers looked at the Legionnaire addressing him. His mind was still



The drunken Algerian crumpled with a dull groan.

a little dazed and befuddled. He was still wondering how the Legionnaire saved him from the wall of knives that had flashed over his head just before unconsciousness had come over him.

He recognized the face of the man before him. It was a face that once seen would never completely be forgotten. The man had come to the company that day. There had been a buzz of excitement when he appeared. He was no recruit. Everything about him—his bearing, his face, his calloused hands, told the story of years spent in the Legion.

But Stivers had been unable to learn the cause of the subdued ex-

citement that had spread among the men when this man arrived.

The man's face was striking and a little ghastly. A shock of jet black hair stuck out from underneath the jaunty kepi, sweeping a high, intelligent forehead covered with white scars. The face was gaunt and grim, with the same white scars of the forehead running down his leather bronzed cheeks. The features of the face were strongly chiseled—the features of a man who had suffered much, of a man of steel courage and a will that defied death and misery with a jaunty laugh.

But it was the eyes that caught Stivers' attention. Even in the

shadowy darkness of the narrow alley-like street, he could see that they were blue—a bright, liquid blue, flashing a gleam that was startling and piercing. The man's body was tall and thin, with not an ounce of surplus flesh on it, the body of a man whom the merciless sun of Africa and the cruel, bitter punishment the desert meted out to human beings had molded into fibers of cold, hard steel.

STIVERS grinned back at him and extended his hand. The other man took it with a grip that was powerful and friendly.

"You saved my life," Stivers said quietly. "I don't know how you did it. I really don't know just what happened back in that dive. I wandered in there to get a drink and a Mohammedan tried to kill me and when he failed three Riffs tried it, and before they got through the whole dump was after me. I passed out, thinking that I was starting for the pearly gates, but when I opened my eyes I was in that rear room and you were near me."

"La Tour is my name," the man said quietly. "That is, it is my name in the Legion, and other names don't count much here. I am in your company, but you had no occasion to meet me. You were pointed out as the new recruit, the first one in several weeks, but recruits are usually weak-kneed fools, who haven't been molded into men yet by the Legion. *Mon Dieu*, I say they usually are. But you! Name of names! Such courage! Such blows you struck in there! Superb—wonderful, and when I saw that—I decided to save you."

Stivers shook his head slowly.

"You saved me," he said, "and I'll never forget it, but how did you come to save me and how did you get me out of that cursed room?

The whole damn thing is a mystery to me."

La Tour laughed easily. There was something contagious, reckless and daring in that clear laugh. Stivers felt this and liked the man fully and completely, regardless of who he was or what was the mystery about his return to the company.

"You have not heard about me?" La Tour said with a laugh. "You have not heard about the *enfant terrible*; the Legionnaire La Tour? Only this morning I returned from Oujda, the Legionnaire's hell. *Saint Marie*, what a living hell, those penal stone quarries. Two years, *mon ami*, in those stone quarries. Few men live one month. But *l'enfant terrible* lived there for two years."

La Tour laughed carelessly, recklessly. Stivers had heard enough about the hell of Oujda to gasp in wonderment at the face of La Tour. Two years in that hell hole! There was only one hell the members of the French Foreign Legion feared. That was Oujda.

"Yes," La Tour added, laughing. "It was for planning desertion that I was sent there. A friend betrayed me, but that is another story. What concerns you is this: There will be a rumpus about that dead Algerian in Har Monken's dive. You can rest assured that the treacherous-handed Mohammedan will not suffer for it. Because I have a very interesting story to tell you. It was planned to murder *you* there and because a certain person failed once, is no reason why it will not be tried again—with a little greater success."

TO murder me?" Stivers gasped.

"*Mon ami*," La Tour replied, "was it for a little exercise that that knife was hurled at you? You Americans have the brains of fools. Name of a name. A man tries to kill *you* and *you* gasp in wonder

that such a thing is possible. I do not know why a certain man, or men, wish to kill you, but I know they do. I heard it with my own ears. That is why I followed you to Har Monken's place and pulled you through that rear door, out of reach of the dogs. Oh, yes, I know Har Monken's place very well.

BUT mark this: Today I returned to the regiment and tonight I was strolling near the concert square. It is getting dark. I saw an officer of the Legion and a tall, dark-faced man talking together. Their backs were to me as they were standing on the other side of the tree. I could hear their voices. They were saying that it would be well for them if a certain American was murdered. If the tall, dark man could locate this soldier and see that he was killed, the officer would see that the matter was hushed up and the murderer would receive money to pay those that helped him and a good price for himself.

"I must tell you that I have found it dull back here and I was looking for excitement. A murder is usually interesting—and exciting. So I follow him around the town for a little while and then a Riff native comes running up to the man and talks to him, and pretty soon two more Riffs come and the four go to Har Monken's place, and I follow. I knew if I appeared on the floor, it might interfere with the fun, so I hide in a doorway, wondering how our little recruit will act when he sees a knife.

"And name of a thousand pigs, how he fought! Once I could have fought that way—with my fists and like a gentleman. And so, *mon ami*, because you are not a dog and because I do not love the man that sent the Riff against you, I butted in to spoil his little game. You backed

up to the wall, near a doorway. You didn't notice that in the fight. It was nothing. I rushed to the room behind you and opened the door and pulled you out of reach of those cowardly dogs. But 'aunt of the devil, you were saved this time, but the next—"

Stivers grabbed La Tour's arm.

"La Tour," he said quickly, "was the officer tall and heavy, and did he have a red scar down the right cheek? Black hair and a reddish, waxed mustache, thick lips and a hooked nose?"

La Tour smiled and nodded.

"You have described the fiend of the Foreign Legion," he said. "Captain Pierre Forteau. If he is your enemy, my little recruit, you had best start running now. He came to the company late this afternoon, and tomorrow or next day he is to lead us into the desert to Fort Deron, dubbed by the Legion—Hell's Mouth."

Bill Stivers smiled grimly and kicked the dirt at his feet.

"There is, La Tour," he said hoarsely, "a nice woman called the Goddess of Ill Luck. This dame has been following me for several years, and it looks like she is still on my heels. My life story and the reason why I landed in the Legion won't interest you, but I'll give you a few details. For a number of years I have lived in France, interested in aviation. My ability to speak French has likely told you I am not a stranger to your country.

I HAD a good job in Paris, but one night there was a murder in the Palais Blanc Hotel. It was a nasty affair, and I was mixed up in it. A woman was killed. I didn't murder her, but I know who did, and because I knew my life wasn't safe in France. There were a lot of family complications back in the States that

caused me to want to disappear until the whole thing was forgotten.

"I could have remained in France, but if I had, I would either have been killed or have had to kill someone. So I came to the Legion to escape being forced to talk and get myself all mixed up in the affair. The man that committed the murder was an officer in the French army, an officer called Pierre Forteau."

La Tour looked at Stivers and shook his head sadly.

"I am afraid, *mon ami*," he said dryly, "that all my efforts to drag you through that door were wasted. It would have been far better that you died by the knives of those dogs than to be taken by Forteau to Fort Deron. He is brutal and cruel. The death he plans for you there will be a death that will be as certain as the rising sun and as terrible as the inquisition of old Spain."

CHAPTER III

Death in the Desert

BILL STIVERS staggered blindly along the desert trail. To his right and left and in front of him men staggered and plodded on. For three days the column of Legionnaires had marched, sullen, blinded, choked and miserable, like scourged cattle, over the trail.

Before that there had been a train ride into the desert, with the company crammed in a stifling, suffocating old box car. After that came this forced march through the terrifying heat, with the sun blinding them and the sand filling their throats and choking back the breath that came painfully through parched and swollen throats.

Stivers, even before the train ride, had spent two days in ordinary arrest for tearing his uniform the

night before in Har Monken's place. This had exhausted him and left him weak. The train ride had given him no rest or strength. And now the forced march under the savage sun that peeled the skin from the cheeks; shoulder straps that moved back and forth over the shoulders, tearing the raw blisters deeper and deeper with every step. The torturing thirst at times seemed to drive him mad. When he tried to talk only a rattling chuckle stirred his swollen tongue.

La Tour marched alongside him, but this seasoned Legionnaire marched as if he were out for an evening's stroll. He was caked with dust and his eyes were red-rimmed and his face covered with the perspiration that poured out of every pore; but his two years of slavery in the stone quarry had made his muscles like steel fiber and a mere three days' forced march across the desert a playful jaunt. His body did not drag nor bend back like the others; he walked easily, leaning forward a little.

"They make you tough, like leather, in the stone quarries," he said with a laugh, patting Stivers on the shoulder. "But you are a good Legionnaire yourself, *mon ami*. Not many little pigs of recruits could be going even as you are now. But look, your friend is coming back to take a look at his little victim again. He can very easily have you killed at Fort Deron and no one will know the difference."

STIVERS looked up and through the blinding light that came off the desert, through the flood of perspiration that covered his eyes, he saw a tall, heavy-set officer on horseback coming to the rear of the column.

Captain Forteau, his face hard and brutal, was lashing the men in the

column on with a bitter, abusive tongue. He passed La Tour and Stivers and his face leered greedily as he saw Stivers, but he said nothing and rode on; but Stivers caught the look in his red eyes and saw the heavy lips curl in hatred. Forteau was playing a waiting game—a safe game now.

On and on the column moved. Even the non-coms felt the pace and sagged under their loads. They took their feelings out on the men and the men took it out on each other. But Stivers took no part in the brawling that went on around him. His mind was working rapidly, trying to figure out some escape from the death hole he had fallen into.

THE fact that Captain Forteau, who had been out of the Legion for years, should have been sent back to command the very company Stivers was in, seemed like a trick of fate that made any effort against it foolish and futile.

The events of that night in the Palais Blanc Hotel, when the strange exotic woman was murdered, came back to him. It had been foolish—stupid of him to get mixed up in it. It had been one of those questionable parties, organized in the questionable night clubs on a night when all cares are forgotten. Stivers was young and reckless. The woman was with Forteau, an army officer. She was young and beautiful and it was obvious from the first that she was looking at him pleadingly—as if she wanted him to help her.

The party ended in the hotel. Stivers never knew exactly what had happened there before the murder. He was slightly intoxicated or he would not, even then, have interfered, but he had staggered into Forteau's room just as the captain stabbed the woman. Stivers had sense enough to get out of the place

and the hotel, knowing the mess that would follow.

But he knew that Forteau had seen him. The murder stirred Paris, Stivers, sober the next morning, realized the position he was in. Family connections at home made it impossible for him to get mixed up in the sordid scandal. So he kept silent.

But that night an attempt was made on his life.

He wasn't a coward and he did not fear death. He knew that the power behind Forteau was great, greater than would be behind the ordinary army captain. And there was something sinister and mysterious about this power, just as there had been something strange and mysterious about the exotic murdered woman.

Rather than be hauled in on the scandal, Stivers took the route of complete disappearance and joined the Foreign Legion. And now a month later, he was hiking across the desert, blinded by heat and choked with thirst, and riding alongside the column was the man he had seen commit a murder, the man that had tried twice to have him killed.

AND he was going into the mouth of hell with this man as his captain—into that hell hole of Fort Deron where Stivers knew there would be far less than one chance in a thousand that he would come out alive.

The question of desertion had come to him, but back at Sidi-bel-Abbes that was out of the question, and out here on the desert, escape would mean nothing more than a terrifying death from thirst and starvation on the great sea of white sand that spread in every direction.

He staggered on blindly, the raw blisters on his shoulders sending pain to every part of his body. The

men at his side growled and cursed at each other like crazed men. The piercing, sharp tongue of Captain Forteau lashed the men on and on. Non-coms staggering along at the side of the column cursed the men savagely.

"Plenty of trouble ahead," La Tour said, coughing sand from his throat. "Maybe your friend Forteau will not have to kill you after all. There will be plenty of bullets to kill us all. Last month the entire garrison of Fort Deron was killed, their eyelids cut off, and the men buried in the sand. A nice little burial these cursed Arabs have for white heathen. They think that pleases Allah or something like that."

STIVERS said nothing. His throat was too parched and his tongue too swollen for conversation.

"We are going into the district of a devil called Said-el-Trijia. This chap is a shrewd old warrior and he hates the white heathens and has killed more than his share. But the brain behind his dogs is a chap named Tun Hammond. Name of pigs. This Tun Hammond has brains and is a fighter. Rumor has it that he was once in the Greek army. Anyway, his men have made Deron a hell hole. Something of a mystery, this Tun Hammond. No one has ever seen him, but everyone knows about him."

Captain Forteau came riding up on his horse and La Tour stopped talking. Stivers looked up into the heavy face of the captain—at the red scar down his cheek, at the heavy lips, at the cold and brutal eyes. The captain had not changed since that night in Paris.

It suddenly occurred to Stivers that Captain Forteau, hearing that he had joined the Foreign Legion, had pulled strings to get transferred to

the Legion and in command of his company. It was possible—but now it didn't make much difference how it all happened. It had happened and that was that to Stivers.

"You American *cochon*," the captain cried shrilly. "Move faster and don't let the men behind you walk on your heels. Move on or you'll get a whip across your back."

Stivers staggered on a little faster, every part of his body boiling with rage.

"A fine pair of *lezards* you two make," he continued in his biting, shrill voice, looking at La Tour. "One a deserter that I know too well and the other a pig of an American that landed in arrest the first two weeks in the Legion. *Alors*, you two troublesome *cochons*, out here we have ways of taking care of you and they aren't pleasant."

The captain rode on, swearing and cursing at the men. Stivers plunged on blindly.

"Your friend," La Tour laughed, "doesn't like either you or me, and when we get to Fort Deron, things are going to be interesting. But before we get there, we'll taste some of Tun Hammond's bullets. He has a way of striking when you don't expect it."

THE men moved on slowly and painfully, stopping every fifty minutes to rest ten and to wash their dry throats with the dirty, vile water in their canteens. The sun continued to beat down relentlessly. All around them, like a great sea of gray, spread the unfathomable desert, dazzling bright in the sun—elusive and deathlike. Noon came and then three o'clock. The curses of the men had died down. They were too weak, too utterly exhausted now to curse each other. They were stumbling and staggering forward.

The broad endless sea of sand

dunes gave way to a rocky, hilly country, where the sand and the winds had polished the rocks to a glistening white. Deep gorges and endless ravines ran off the narrow trail the Legion column was following, and over them loomed the steep desert hills, bare of any vegetation or grass or life.

"I passed this same place once before," La Tour said to Stivers. "It was on my first trip to Fort Deron, and—"

LA TOUR never had a chance to finish his sentence. The shiny hills suddenly burst forth with life and death. Bullets rained down on the helpless column of staggering Legionnaires. Captain Forteau had blundered his column into an Arab ambush.

Only the well-known bad marksmanship of the Arabs prevented the whole column from being wiped out before the men could dive face forward to the shelter of the rocks along the trail. As it was, ten of the Legionnaires lay wounded and dead along the trail when the column, not waiting for any orders from the captain, had plunged for cover.

Captain Forteau's horse was shot out from under him, but he was on his feet, yelling orders to his men. Cruel and brutal and a murderer, Captain Forteau was, in a pinch, every inch a soldier—cool and brave and in full command of the situation, even though his men had been so suddenly ambushed.

With machine-gun bullets raining down from the hills, he managed to deploy his men, after the first headlong plunge they took for the rocks, in positions where they could return the fire of the Arabs with a remarkably small loss of men, considering the death trap they had walked into.

But with the men deployed in ravines and behind rocks, it was soon obvious to all that the column had fallen into a death trap that no deploying, no fighting, could hope to get them out of. The hills swarmed with the white-cloaked Arabs. The rifles of the Legionnaires brought many of them down, but for every one brought down, five others appeared.

Stivers and La Tour lay in a deep ravine, protected from the bullets by jagged rocks. With them was Sandow, the big Russian Legionnaire, and Schmidt, the German.

"Tun Hammond," La Tour remarked dryly, "isn't taking any chances of this column getting to Fort Deron. I know this damned death hole too well. I was in it once before and only five of us got out alive."

Stivers lay with his heavy pack thrown off his shoulders and the muscles of his body stretched and at ease. He had washed his throat with a good drink of water. His tongue was no longer swollen. The heat of the sun burned down on him unmercifully, but it no longer bothered him.

THE sudden attack had brought a strange relief to his mind. Here was action, action against a legitimate enemy, an enemy that he had a chance against, and for the time being it caused him to forget the sinister presence of Captain Forteau and his leering, brutal eyes and his heavy lips and red waxed moustache.

The knowledge that the column had walked into a death trap brought no terror to him. Since that night at Har Monken's he had been staring at a death trap, a death trap far more sinister and terrifying than the bullets of Arabs, and this present situation came as a relief to him.

The bullets continued to rake the rocks and cut down into the deep ravines that hid the men. There was something deadly—nerve-racking in the monotony of the bullets. The Legionnaires were seasoned veterans—hard and used to death. But the exhaustion of the forced march and the heat and the thirst of those three days had weakened them. They were fighters, all of them, but lying behind the rocks and waiting—with no chance to fight out of the trap, produced a sense of utter futility among them.

"This is the terror of fighting these Arabs," La Tour growled. "Always squatting behind a rock or a sand dune and waiting—and never a chance to get out and fight in the open."

SANDOW, the big Russian, growled: "The dogs! They are afraid to fight."

The muttering among the men increased as the weary minutes dragged on. There was no chance to make a break for it. The trail ran up to the top of the hill and wound through a narrow pass, and behind the column the trail entered the valley through a similar pass. Stationed at both ends of the basin were Arabs, with machine-guns, and scattered among the rocks above the Legionnaires other Arabs poured a deadly fire into them with rifles. Night might bring hope, but it was hours off and in those hours only a few of the Legion column would be left.

A bullet cracked against the rock Stivers was hiding behind. La Tour raised up a little and his rifle spat fire. Far above them the grotesque form of an Arab, clothed in the long, white robe, lurched forward and came rolling down the hill. A cheer went up from the Legionnaires. Their nerves were on edge

and they were ready to cheer anything.

Slowly the minutes dragged on. Stivers lay behind the rock, taking such pot shots as he could at the white forms above him. Behind them Captain Forteau lay in a deep ravine, with two of his non-coms with him. He was talking excitedly to them, pointing to the narrow pass at the top of the trail, where the Arabs had a machine-gun hidden.

Suddenly he crawled forward, his automatic in his right hand and his face covered with a leering, brutal smile. He came up behind Stivers and La Tour.

"You pig of an American!" he shouted at Stivers. "You and your deserting friend are going to clear that pass up there. You are going to crawl up and take that machine-gun. We'll see how brave you are now. Forward, or I'll shoot."

Stivers turned slowly. He had forgotten all about Forteau. He saw the cruel face of the captain, distorted with a hatred that made him look insane. Then Stivers looked up at the head of the trail, far up in the rocks. He might get three feet or he might get ten feet up that trail, but no further. A weary smile came to his lips.

THE captain was making sure that he and La Tour would die in the death trap. It was his best chance and if he and the remains of the column got out safely when night came, he would be rid of the one enemy in the world that knew the truth about the murder of the beautiful girl in that Paris hotel room.

"Name of a name," La Tour muttered. "He wants us to die as heroes."

"Move," the captain bellowed. "Move, you dogs, or I shoot."

Stivers looked at La Tour and smiled grimly. La Tour shook his

heavy head of black hair and grinned back.

"Come on, my little recruit," he laughed. "The Legion never retreats, they say, and I prefer a bullet from the Arabs than from the cur behind us."

The big Russian, Sandow, and the German, Schmidt, stared at Stivers and La Tour with amazement in their faces. This was deliberately sending men to their deaths and not knowing what was behind it, they were puzzled and startled as if they believed the captain had gone *cafard* all of a sudden.

La Tour raised his body up a little and went over the side of the rock with a leap, landing flat on his stomach out on the narrow trail. Stivers, grim-faced and tense, followed after him, hitting the ground a little to La Tour's right.

A hail of bullets greeted them. The bullets cut the ground around their bodies and two cut through Stivers' clothes.

"Come on, you fool of an American," La Tour shouted with a reckless laugh. "We're going to die great heroes."

La Tour squirmed a little forward and Stivers followed after him.

But he didn't get far. There was a stinging, piercing pain on the side of his head and darkness descended over him like a huge cloud of black vapor.

CHAPTER IV

A Losing Battle

THE GREAT vapor of blackness that descended over Stivers lifted slowly and in its place came a hazy light of yellow gray. For a moment this haze played in front of his eyes. He could hear the roar of the guns around him and over him; he could

hear the snapping crack of bullets as they cut the ground near him. Then suddenly he heard a great cheer around him.

He opened his eyes wider, and as he did the gray haze that clung to him lifted and he could see some feet ahead of him the crawling, squirming form of La Tour, moving like an eel behind jagged rocks toward the top of the pass where the Arabs waited with a machine-gun.

THE Legionnaires suddenly realized what was transpiring; that two of their members were out there risking their lives to open the pass. Cheer after cheer went up. The Arabs on the hill saw what was happening and they redoubled their fire.

For a moment Stivers lay flat on his stomach. He could feel the warm blood trickling down the side of his head. He knew now what had happened. A bullet had creased his temple. The fire of the Arabs, however, was not directed at him now. Their bullets were clipping the rocks where La Tour, his shaggy head of black hair waving in the sun and his lithe body moving with a surprising swiftness, was crawling up toward the top of the pass.

With a spring Stivers was on his hands and knees and making for the row of jagged rocks along the trail, rocks that stuck up from the ground like teeth and gave protection from the bullets coming from both sides. He got behind them before the Arab rifles were directed at him. La Tour stopped in a deep gully between two large rocks and was lying on his side, watching Stivers. With a plunge and a shout Stivers landed in the gully alongside him.

"*Alors*, little recruit," La Tour said with his usual reckless laugh, "we are still alive, but we are not up at the pass and we haven't captured the machine-gun."

Stivers looked up the long narrow trail. They were hardly half-way up. They had passed the last of the Legionnaires hiding behind the rocks. The rest of the way was a steep incline and there would be few Arabs shooting at them from the sides, but the rocking fire of the machine-gun made any possibility of getting up there alive seem almost absurd.

"We have disappointed Forteau this far," Stivers said grimly. "It would be a joke on him if we didn't get killed."

"Name of a name," La Tour retorted, "it would be a joke on the whole world if we didn't get killed, but we better start moving or we'll be getting a bullet from the rear. It's a bullet any way we turn. Behind us is Captain Forteau and in front of us is a machine-gun."

"I prefer the machine-gun," Stivers said.

LA TOUR patted him on the shoulder and raised his body up slowly. Bullets were cutting around the edge of the small crater-like gully. Beyond the gully the side of the hill was pock-marked with deep ravines and white rocks that glistened with a dazzling brightness in the sun.

With a leap, disregarding bullets, La Tour was out in the open, dashing madly for the side of the hill. He made a headlong dive for the rocks when he got within a few feet of them and lay on the ground so still that Stivers thought, for a moment, that he had been hit. But then he saw La Tour turn and motion for him to follow.

Cheer after cheer came from the Legionnaires behind them. No longer were the Arab bullets nipping the rocks about the Legionnaires. The death-trap had suddenly turned into a two-man show for the Legionnaires

and the Arabs. The Arabs, unable to grasp the meaning of the insane rush of the two men up the hill, were bewildered and dazed, but they kept firing, a steady flood of bullets.

DARTING and crouching and zig-zagging, Stivers made a dash for La Tour. He landed at the side of his friend as a bullet clipped through his coat under his shoulder and sent a shooting pain up over his neck. He moved his arm and found that there were no bones broken and then he forgot about the stinging pain.

"We are going to be heroes," La Tour said to him. "There are only four Arabs manning the machine-gun and the rest of the Arabs are scattered along the hills far away from these men. If we can get that machine-gun, we can rake their flanks and give the column a covering fire while they follow after us out of that death-trap."

Stivers wet his lips and looked up at the machine-gunners squatting behind the gun at the top of the trail now only thirty yards away. The machine-gun was spitting fire and the bullets were breaking the rocks around La Tour and Stivers, but doing no harm.

La Tour's long rifle went out from the rocks. It belched fire. One of the machine-gunners plunged down the hill. Stiver's gun roared three times. Another white-clothed Arab crumpled to the earth. The other two dropped on their stomachs, their bodies hidden by the rocks. The machine-gun still belched fire, but the bullets were going wild now.

With a loud yell that sounded like an Indian war whoop, La Tour started up to the gun. The bullets from the Arab rifles to the rear cut the earth around him, but he moved on. Stivers followed. Slowly they made their way up the hill to the narrow pass the trail passed through. The

bullets from the Arabs in the rear stopped.

The machine-gun was spitting fire, but the bullets snapped above their heads harmlessly.

"They're coming to help the machine-gunners," La Tour yelled. "Quick, or we will be surrounded."

Stivers saw what was happening. White-robed Arabs were racing across the top of the hill toward the machine-gun, but now the Legionnaires, seeing what was really happening, had opened fire on the running Arabs and the white-robed figures crumpled and fell to the ground from the blistering fire of the Legionnaires. The spirit of victory suddenly came over the column far below among the rocks. With yells, they were on their feet, dashing up toward Stivers and La Tour.

THE Arabs, taken by surprise and unable to stand the blistering fire the Legionnaires were pouring into them, fell down among the rocks and tried to mow down the charging Legionnaires.

Stivers and La Tour came to the top of the trail at the same time. La Tour's bayonet took care of one of the machine-gunners and a bullet from Stivers' rifle sent the last one to the dust. On behind them came the charging Legionnaires, darting in and around the rocks. A few of them fell from Arab bullets, but La Tour and Stivers had the machine-gun working in a moment and its bullets were raking the tops of the two hills that loomed over the basin-like valley that had proved such a death trap to the Legion column.

And then suddenly, like all the battles with the Arabs, it was over as abruptly as it had started. Arabs were fleeing down the side of the hills away from the death trap. They were fleeing in safety because the hill protected them from the wither-

ing fire of the machine-gun manned by Stivers and La Tour.

Stivers and La Tour sent several bursts of fire after them and then stood up to receive the Legionnaires as they piled over the rocks with cheers for the two men who had gone through a wall of lead to save them from the slow, brutal death that was inevitable in the trap.

CAPTAIN FORTEAU was leading the men. His eyes blazed an anger that he could not express in the presence of his men. He was smart enough to know that what Stivers and La Tour had done made them heroes in the eyes of his men, and that any show of his true feelings would react against him.

A cunning, treacherous look came into his eyes as he looked at Stivers and La Tour.

"Here is the machine-gun, captain," Stivers said dryly, "that you ordered us to take."

"Excellent work, my men," Captain Forteau said loudly. "It is worthy of as fine a citation as can be secured for you, and you can be assured that I will do all I can to get it."

Stivers smiled thin-lipped at the captain and said nothing. Captain Forteau flushed a little and a look flashed in his eyes that was murderous, but he kept control of himself and turned his attention to getting the column together and attending to the wounded.

Two hours later they were moving on toward Fort Deron.

"It will be different tactics when we get to the fort," Stivers said to La Tour.

"When we get to that hell-hole," La Tour replied, "anything can happen. A knife in the back or a bullet from a wall. There are too many ways to kill a man there for comfort."

CHAPTER V

Forteau Strikes Again

SITTING on the top of a little ridge that jutted out over a long, narrow gully, was perched the little adobe outpost called in official records of the French Republic, Fort Deron, but in the parlance of the Legion it was known as Hell's Mouth. All day long it baked in the torrid Sahara sun, its roof giving little protection from the penetrating rays that seared human flesh and sent men insane with the dreaded *cafard*, the desert insanity.

It was a small fort, capable of housing a detachment of several hundred Legionnaires and black Colonial troops. Located in the center of a hot-bed of fanatic Islams, the fort was subject to almost daily attacks—sniping, dilatory attacks that wore the nerves of the men to the breaking point.

It was devastating to the morale of the troops and few remained there long until the dreaded *cafard* got them and sent them raving mad out on the desert, to die from thirst and heat and starvation.

Near the fort was the ancient city of Islam, Barkai. From time beyond the records of any historian this quaint old city had sat in that wild, desolate waste of sand and heat, a mecca for the followers of the Prophet from every corner of the Mohammedan world. Few Christians had ever entered the walls of the old city and the few who did rarely got out alive.

The ruler of the city was the Caid, Tirisi-el-Lizai. Old and fat and shrewd, Tirisi-el-Lizai recognized the rule of the French, but never fully accepted it as far as the city itself was concerned. And because the city was a tribal stronghold that commanded the Arabs and Moham-

medans for hundreds of miles around, the French were very careful never to bother the city of Barkai.

The troops of Tirisi-el-Lizai were in command of a brilliant military leader, Tun Hammond, and this gentleman, having learned the art of warfare from the Europeans and in the Balkan States, made life miserable and very uncertain for the garrison of the little fort of Deron.

TUN HAMMOND adopted the wearing policy of sniping attacks, taking a chunk out of the fort one day and another chunk the next day and by doing so, kept the Legion pretty much within the walls of the fort and of no bother to the Caid, Tirisi-el-Lizai.

The column of Legionnaires commanded by Captain Forteau reached the little fort late in the afternoon of the day following the attack in the hills. They relieved a detachment of Legionnaires that had been in the fort two months and in that time had suffered the loss of half their men through the sniping tactics of Tun Hammond and through the *cafard* that hit the men. A detachment of black Colonials remained at the fort.

All during the march from the hills, where Stivers and La Tour had captured the machine-gun, these two were conscious that the eyes of Forteau were constantly on Bill Stivers. The captain said nothing to him, but suddenly Bill Stivers had changed from a raw recruit to a hero of the Legion. Sandow, the big Russian, beamed on him with envious eyes and Schmidt jabbered loudly of the courage of the American. In the face of these words and this condition, Captain Forteau kept silent.

When the column was safely quartered in the fort, and Stivers was alone with La Tour, he said: "I may

have peace for a few days, but after that anything is liable to happen."

La Tour smiled grimly and shook his head.

"It isn't hard to put a man on the firing step and have a bullet get him in the head," he answered. "Name of a dog, you can't fight him long out here. There isn't such a thing as murder in this fort and I see that Sergeant Dufont, an old friend of his, is staying on at the fort, which looks queer to me, because no one would ever want to stay here."

STIVERS shrugged and shook his head slowly and said nothing. There was nothing for him to say, nothing for him to do but to keep his silence and watch the next move Captain Forteau made.

The following morning this move was obvious. Sergeant Dufont, a huge, overbearing, dark-faced man, with little pig eyes and a brutality that was noted through the Legion, took over the work of Forteau in a way that brought things to a head in short order.

Stivers was never able to account for his actions on that following morning, actions that caused him to play so completely into the hands of Captain Forteau. La Tour said it was a touch of *cafard*; Stivers said it was a feeling of getting in one good blow before some form of hidden death struck him. The reaction of the three day march and the fight in the death trap left him nervous and unstrung after he had had a chance to relax and rest.

His nerves were taut and strained the next morning. The sense of utter futility, the feeling that the few days that were to come before Forteau struck successfully would be days of utter misery—these two elements played a great factor in his actions toward Sergeant Dufont.

The reputation Sergeant Dufont had in the Legion for brutality and cruelty was a reputation well earned. Big and powerful, with a dark face creased with lines of hate, he drove the men on relentlessly, looking on them as so many cattle. His tongue was bitter and cutting and no man ever heard of the big sergeant saying a kind word to any Legionnaire.

From the start he signaled out Legionnaire Bill Stivers to vent his hate upon. La Tour informed Stivers that Dufont was close to Captain Forteau, his henchman in the Legion. So when Dufont approached Stivers, it was taken for granted by Stivers that Dufont was following out special orders from the captain. In view of the work of Stivers in capturing the machine-gun and the feeling of the men toward him, Captain Forteau could hardly start his tongue lashing on the hero.

BUT Dufont took over the job lustily and with malicious pleasure. At the morning formation Dufont let go his bitterest tongue on Stivers.

"The pig of an American," he sneered. "The great big hero and you think you're running this company. *Sacré Bleu*, a pig of an American trying to stir up the men against the non-coms. We have a way to handle such dogs out here. One step forward."

Bill Stivers' face went a deathly pale. Blood came from his lower lip where he had bitten it to hold back the wave of anger that surged over him. The brutal face of Sergeant Dufont was only a few inches from his as he stepped forward. The little eyes in that big brutal face gleamed a hot red mixed with a gleam of triumphancy.

The company looked on in awe. Such outbursts from Sergeant Du-

font were daily occurrences and the men took them with the best grace possible.

But suddenly something seemed to snap in Bill Stivers' mind. He was too new to the Legion to have developed that mental discipline that makes members of that fighting unit mere machine-like atoms, atoms that jumped when they were spoken to, that walked into battle and faced death because they had been trained to move when ordered; human beings whose minds had long ceased to function for themselves and who lived and fought and ate under the hypnotism of the world's greatest discipline.

A veteran would have listened to that harangue without a word, but Bill Stivers, every nerve in his body at the breaking point, did what a normal human being would have done.

HIS right hand shot out like the piston of a steam engine, in a short, vicious uppercut to the chin of Sergeant Dufont, driving behind that blow every ounce of strength and weight there was in his body. The blow landed with a dull smack, a smack that could be heard by every man in the company. Sergeant Dufont stared, for one passing second, with glassy eyes at Stivers, and then his huge form plunged headfirst to the ground and lay there inert and still.

A muffled cry rose from the ranks of the Legionnaires. They looked at Bill Stivers and gasped again. The man had struck a non-com, had struck Sergeant Dufont and knocked him down. Never in the history of the Legion had such a thing been done. It was unbelievable—impossible. A touch of *cafard*, the men muttered to themselves.

But Bill Stivers neither gasped nor looked startled at what he had done.

He knew he was not suffering from *cafard*; he knew at that moment he was perfectly sane, sane enough to do what a normal, healthy man would do. He had struck back at his enemy: no longer was he fighting helplessly in the dark. And because of that a great wave of relief passed over him.

"Fool," he heard La Tour mutter at his side. "Step back in the ranks and keep your head. Forteau could have wished for nothing better than this."

ACROSS the little square came Captain Forteau, strutting with his head back and his dark eyes flashing anger. But Stivers knew that behind those flashing eyes was a feeling of joy in the mind of the captain, a feeling that Stivers had forced his hand and now it would be only a matter of a few days until he would be stark crazy.

First would come the *crapouillage*, the world-famed Foreign Legion form of torture to rebellious soldiers and after that would come the *pas gymnastic* and then the lashes across the naked back until the skin was raw and the back mutilated, for the flies and the insects and the sand to play their havoc of pain and misery.

"*Cochon*," the captain said with a snarl to Stivers as he walked up to him. "Dog of an American. So you are greater than the Legion. Bah, we can break such pigs as you."

And with that Captain Forteau's hand went out and cut Stivers across the eyes, a blinding, vicious slap. Stivers' body doubled up. With a howl of rage, he flung himself at the captain, but the powerful arms of his friend La Tour were around him, holding him back.

Captain Forteau backed away several steps, his right hand falling to his automatic. A leering, cold smile

of murder spread over the cruel features of his face.

"Let him go," he shouted to La Tour. "Let him strike me and I'll blow his dirty brains all over the fort. Let him go and let him strike me. I should kill him now, but I want him for an example to all other pigs that think they can strike a sergeant of the Legion."

Stivers struggled to free himself from La Tour's arms. Captain Forteau drew his automatic and his fingers played on the trigger. But Stivers never got loose from La Tour. Other non-coms came running up and grabbed Stivers and threw him to the ground in front of the captain and held him down.

"For this act," Captain Forteau spoke slowly, as if enjoying every word that fell from his mouth, "the pig of an American will receive a sentence of five hours *crapouillaude* for striking a non-commissioned officer. And for threatening to strike an officer, he will receive seventy lashes across a bare back and tied to a pole for the sun to heal his lashes."

CAPTAIN FORTEAU stopped and let his tongue play over his heavy lips lazily. His eyes indicated the feeling that lay back of them.

"And this punishment," he continued, "will be administered every day for two weeks. Fourteen days. Seventy hours of *crapouillaude*, and nine hundred and eighty lashes across the bare back. By that time, let us hope this American will know something of the discipline of the Legion."

The venomous gleam in his eyes turned slowly to La Tour. "And the person," Forteau continued, "who will administer these nine hundred and eighty lashes across the bare back will be his tall, pig-faced friend, with scars down his face,

scars from punishment for desertion himself. Seventy lashes a day for fourteen days. That should make this beautiful friendship a lasting one."

CHAPTER VI

The Attack

HIS back bent double, his hands strapped to his ankles, Bill Stivers lay in the sand and groveled and writhed and struggled against the pains that shot through every part of his body.

His first hour of *crapouillaude*! Stivers moaned, pushing every ounce of his strength against the ropes that cramped his muscles and set his brain reeling. His fingers clawed helplessly and scooped up handfuls of the hot sand. Sweat made a plaster of caked dust on his face. His lips were dry and cracked and flies crawled slowly, torturingly over them.

His first hour of that soul breaking punishment! And there were four more hours ahead for this day and fourteen days after that.

As his brain reeled and his senses verged on *cafard*, he wondered if he could stand even the five hours of the first day. Captain Forteau would soon be rid of him, rid of him in a way that would leave his record absolutely clear.

Stivers had struck a non-com. Even the men who had cheered him when he captured a machine-gun with La Tour, shook their heads sadly. Striking a sergeant was a crime inexcusable in the Legion. Only a man touched with *cafard* would do such a thing. The punishment Forteau had prescribed for Stivers was harsh and brutal, but the offense merited even that harsh punishment and he got no sympathy from the men.

Slowly he turned his body a little. Standing over him was Sergeant Dufont, his face wreathed in a smile that bespoke the utter cruelty of the man. Stivers blinked helplessly through the fog of sweat that ran down his face. The sergeant was holding a canteen of water in his hand.

"God!" Stivers gasped. "Water. Some water—for God's sake, water."

DUFONT smiled and waved the canteen in front of the tortured man's face, letting a few drops fall on the parched, cracked lips.

"So, you are thirsty," the sergeant sneered. "I was wondering when you would get thirsty. So you want water to trickle down your throat. *Sacré nom.* The American strikes a sergeant and then wants water. Here is a drop. Feel it on your lips. Fourteen days of this. Fourteen days. Tomorrow you will go *cafard* and we will turn you loose to run out on the desert. We will take your clothes off so the sun will bake you quickly. You might find water out there on the desert. Yes, water. Fool. You will be a raving maniac and you will scream and yell and try to run from the sun that will roast your body and you will reach to the skies for the water. And then in a little while you will die. So you would strike a non-com."

Dufont's words died away in a guttural laugh. He let another drop of water fall on the fevered lips of the tortured man and suddenly he turned and walked away. The touch of water on his lips drove Stivers into a frenzy of madness. He screamed and pulled at the ropes, but his screams remained unanswered and after a while he stopped tugging at his ropes and lay in the sun, gasping for breath.

And only one hour of that dread punishment had passed!

The sand bit into his eyes, caking itself into hot baked mud from the sweat and he could no longer see. He tried to raise his head from the sand, but by now every muscle in his body cried out in a pain that was fast setting him mad. He tried to open his mouth. Caked sand had formed there. He squirmed a little and then lay still.

How long he lay in the stupor of pain he did not know. Somewhere in the darkness his half-crazed mind recorded the sound of a shot. It sounded vague and far away, but suddenly other shots came. The air above him was filled with the rattle of machine-gun bullets. Men were yelling some distance away from him. And then suddenly the ropes which tied him were released and he was pulled to his feet and the caked sand over his eyes wiped away with a rough hand.

"*Vite,*" he heard La Tour say. "It is an attack. The Arabs are attacking in great numbers. Here, take this water and get your mind working."

A CANTEEN was pressed to Stivers' lips and water—cool, delicious water cooled his swollen tongue and caressed his burning throat. A wet rag was wiping off his face.

"Now you look more like a man," La Tour announced. "*Vite,* the Arabs are over us like fleas and it will be a real battle because they are well armed. Here, take this gun. Already several of our men have been killed and the fat one who owned this rifle has a bullet through his head and he is sitting on the firing step looking like a fat old fool."

Stivers looked at his friend and grinned weakly. He moved his arms and kicked his legs to get circulation back. La Tour had turned and was going toward the wall near the gate. Stivers followed, his brain

still dazed and his body weak. Quietly and without attracting any attention, they took their places on the firing steps. Around them lay a group of wounded men and on the firing step below three bodies, with bullets in their heads, squatted in grotesque positions. Bullets rained against the mud fort and above the sounds of the bullets could be heard the wailings and groans of the wounded.

"Keep your head down," La Tour cautioned Stivers. "The Arabs are holding high ground and they can pick us off too easily."

Carefully Stivers raised his head up and looked over the parapet. Against the gray-white sea of sand beyond the fort, a wraith-like line of Arabs could be seen creeping down the slope of the dune. The sun, now setting in the west, played a red, glimmering light on the steel in the Arabs' hands. Smoke rose up in front of their exploding guns and through this haze flashing bursts of red fire danced and waved.

CLAD in the gray woolen *djeella*-bas that seemed to be a part of the gray sea of sand, the Arabs made a difficult target: only the red bursts of flame that danced in the haze of smoke afforded a mark for the Legion to shoot at. There was something phantom-like—ghostly, in that slowly advancing line of gray. It seemed to be a part of the great desert that was rolling up and onward to engulf the little fort.

Stivers stared at it fascinated, but a bullet clipped the parapet close to his head and the fascination fled and he ducked quickly.

"Fool," La Tour laughed. "But listen! The Arabs have machine-guns. Hear that tat-tat-tat. These guns cost the Arabs a small fortune for each of them and the French would pay a bigger fortune to find out who is selling these guns to the

Caid, Tirisi-el-Lizai. That fat old pig sits in the city of Barkai and spends his time planning how he can capture and torture the white heathen. But these machine-guns. Never before have they appeared so far south. The Berbers were able to buy them from Spanish smugglers, but down here they have been unknown."

The blistering fire from the machine-guns in that gray line increased and hammered against the gates of the fort. Wood and splinters flew in all directions and it seemed that it was only a matter of minutes until the gate would be blasted to little splinters.

Loading and firing with the frenzy of doomed men, the Legionnaires kept a rifle fire pouring into that line of gray creeping forward, that came on with a weird, inhuman, relentless movement. It seemed that the moving forms were there by the thousands and the little fort of Deron, with its small detachment of Legionnaires, seemed but a mere dot in the gray sea of sand, a dot that would be passed over and totally destroyed by the ghost-like gray lines that came on, unmindful of the stream of lead poured into them from the parapets of the little fort.

STIVERS' rifle had gotten into action. With the gun butt pounding his shoulder, his rifle poured out a continuous stream of lead across the sand. The heat from the gun barrel scorched his fingers and his face was covered with sweat that ran from his chin and nose. At his elbow La Tour kept up a steady fire, his gun jumping and barking with a rapidity that was amazing.

Far up in the officers' observation tower Captain Forteau was watching the on-moving lines of Arabs. At his side was Sergeant Dufont. Stivers gave no thought as to whether

the captain saw him or not. There was no time now to waste, giving a member of the Legion punishment. It was a matter of life or death for the little fort and every man was needed. After the battle! Stivers smiled grimly as he thought of that time.

The pounding of the rifle against his shoulder continued. His arms ached and his legs felt weak and dead. He had to lean against the parapet to keep his knees from wobbling. The stench of blood and powder was overwhelming in the heat. It sickened him, but he kept his stream of lead going out into that line of gray ghosts, the line that was now close to the fort.

Slowly, relentlessly, the lines closed in. There was no hurry to the movement of those lines. Only certainty—deathly certainty that in a little while they would pass over the fort and it would be no more.

SUDDENLY down in the square a man was shouting orders. It was a thin-faced sergeant, his face black from gunpowder and his right arm hanging limply at his side and covered with blood. He came running from the officers' observation post.

A charge! Captain Forteau had ordered a charge into those advancing lines. The Legionnaires cheered. It was a desperate, last minute attempt to stave off destruction. There was little hope of its succeeding, but charging out there would be an easier death than waiting on the firing step for a death that was certain—a death that would mean inhuman torture if taken alive.

The gates of the little fort were thrown wide open. A squad of black Colonial troops dashed out, while with wild yells the Legionnaires dropped over the ramparts and rushed over the sand toward the ad-

vancing lines, with their guns spouting white flames.

It seemed that the very daring of the attack caused the gray lines to waver and then to fall back a little. The Legionnaires, shouting like wild Indians, dashed on, their guns taking a terrible toll of the Arabs. The lines fell back before the mad rush. The machine-guns sputtered, stuttered, and then went silent.

Stivers and La Tour were well in the lead of the dashing Legionnaires. All the aches and pains had left Stivers' body; the frenzied excitement of the mad charge gave him a renewed strength that carried him on wildly. Bullets snapped over his head as he rushed, with La Tour at his side, up the slope of gray sand toward the wavering lines.

Then suddenly a miracle happened, a miracle to the charging Legionnaires. The Arab lines broke and retreated. Like phantoms in the haze of coming night, the gray-cloaked enemy fell behind the ridge of sand, and melted into the mist of the coming evening like ghosts.

THE Legionnaires rushed on to the top of the ridge.

"*Sacré nom de nom!*" La Tour gasped. "This is a weird battle. The tribesmen flee in front of us, but no order comes from Forteau to give chase. The whole thing seems crazy to me."

"They ran out of ammunition for the guns," he said. "That is why these guns sputtered and stopped. Queer, isn't it, that just as we charged their ammunition gave out!"

Suddenly Stivers and La Tour were alone on the edge of the ridge. The other Legionnaires had left. The sun had sank beneath the horizon and the shades of night were falling rapidly, cloaking the gray sands with a bewitching light.

Stivers grabbed La Tour's arm and his voice was husky.

"I know it's death," he said, "but I'm not going back to that damned *crapouillaude*. That means even a worse death for me. Forteau will get me. I can't fight against him. I'm going to run for it, and—"

"And run out on the desert to die," La Tour interrupted with a dry laugh. "Little nut of a recruit, you will die of thirst or the devils of Tun Hammond will get you and toast your head over a slow fire. But you are brave, *mon ami*. Brave and foolish."

"It will be death on the desert anyway," Stivers replied. "I can fall over this ridge and melt away into the night like the Arabs did. I will die tomorrow or next day, but I prefer that death than to go back to a living hell."

"Name of a name," La Tour said with a reckless laugh. "If you go, I go with you. Never would that whipping take place if I had to lay those lashes across your back, and I think Forteau won't be satisfied until I am also killed or sent out on the desert raving mad. Come, we can disappear over this ridge. Tomorrow we die in the sun—unless the Arabs catch us before that time. Come!"

CHAPTER VII

Desert Justice

NIGHT—cold and black and impenetrable, dropped over the gray sand of the desert like a shroud of death. The thin sliver of a crescent moon rode down the sky, shedding a shaft of light that broke feebly through the darkness.

A star clung to the crescent tip of the moon, making that thin silver curve resemble an evil knife

hanging from the star in the sky that was jet black.

There were stars overhead—little dots of light that bobbed and waved and danced grotesquely in and out of the great haze of black that tried vainly to hide them from the baked, merciless sands below. And far to the right and left, lonely and ominous and sinister, spread the black desert. Great sand dunes and sloping hills of white pulverized sand that, from the beginning of time, had moved and changed, loomed up in the darkness in faint outlines of black.

SILENCE—the ineffable silence of that great waste of shifting sands, clothed the night with that gloom, that unutterable sombreness of death. And in that silence no form moved, no sound came to break its deadly stillness.

For hours Bill Stivers had staggered on, following La Tour through the series of dunes outlined faintly in the darkness. Cold, penetrating and paralyzing, chilled every bone of his body. On the desert there is no respite in the implacable fight against life! In the daytime the sun beats down with a heat that roasts and bakes human flesh, and at night, as if tired of that form of punishment, the desert sends out a cold that is as deadly as the heat.

Stivers had no idea where La Tour was going, but the Frenchman, guided by his knowledge of the region, seemed to be following a straight line, guiding his steps by the star that hung at the point of the knife-shaped silver moon. The two Legionnaires hurried along as fast as they could to keep their bodies moving in their fight against the deadly chill. The pace had tired their exhausted frames and Stivers could only stumble blindly forward.

Suddenly before them appeared a

flickering light, coming from the base of a great sand dune that loomed up ahead of them like some ogre of old. The fire gleamed and flickered feebly in the darkness. La Tour stopped and Stivers stumbled against him and stood swaying on his feet. His muscles cried out in pain against the punishment they had received in the last terrifying hour; cramps tortured his neck and back, and every breath he took seemed that it would be the last to come from the lungs that were a mass of stabbing pains.

He dropped slowly to the ground, gasping painfully and loudly. The sand was cold, colder than the night itself, but he didn't notice the chill that stung his body. He was gasping for breath. La Tour squatted beside him and for the first time in hours, he spoke.

"That fire can either come from the camp of a lone man," he said, "or it may come from a camp of fifty Arabs. *Saint Marie*. If we only had automatics instead of these long rifles, we might do something at close quarters. But there is food and water at that fire and that is what we want, so we will have to risk it."

I'M ready to risk anything for food and water," Stivers said with a weak, hollow laugh. "Without food and water we can't keep going long."

"We are safe from pursuit from the fort," La Tour replied. "They will never be able to follow us and Forteau wouldn't bother. He knows there is about one chance in a million of our reaching Morocco. It never has been done and it has been tried a hundred times. Thirst usually gets the poor devils, but often the Arabs get to them first."

Stivers bit his lip and pulled his body to a sitting position. The memory of those pictures in

the barracks back at Sidi-bel-Abbes came to him, pictures of the mutilated bodies of deserting Legionnaires found on the desert after the Arabs had cut their eyes out and buried the bloody bodies, minus the head, in the sand.

"If it is the camp of a Holy man, we are safe," La Tour said. "Only the Holy man is safe on the desert. The Arabs are afraid to kill them. But Holy man or a camp of Ali Baba and his Forty Thieves, we will have to find out. Come on."

CRAWLING on their stomachs, they wormed their way down the slope of sand toward the little flame of fire that cut through the darkness. They came to the shelter of a wash and stopped and got to their feet, their long rifles in position for ready use. Slowly they advanced toward the fire.

Suddenly La Tour stopped and whispered: "Fine! It is a *hadji* making his pilgrimage, and he is cooking something over the fire. He is a saint of Islam and he carries no weapons."

Stivers peered through the darkness. He could see the queer figure of an old man squatting near the fire, his long robes spread out from his body, making him look like a funny balloon in the darkness which was broken a little by the fire.

They walked up to the fire boldly. The old man sprang to his feet with a startled cry. He was a withered old creature, with taut brown skin stretched tightly over the bones of his face. His face looked like a human skull, from which all the flesh had not rotted away and which had an after-death growth of beard sticking out from the brown, lifeless skin. His legs were stiff, stick-like bones under the dirty white robe of a Holy man, his arms were shriveled skin and bones.

Shaking the bony fist at his visitors, he hurled a flow of language at them that indicated they were not welcome. Stivers looked at the shriveled old body with distaste. La Tour jabbered back at the Holy man and pointed down at the mess of food that was cooking in a clay pit over the fire.

The *hadji* spat oaths at La Tour and continued to shake his fists. La Tour silenced him by bringing his rifle up quickly. The old *hadji* screamed and then grew meek, drawing away from the fire, and squatted beside a bunch of rags in the sand. Stivers wondered if that bunch of dirty rags and the food were the only possessions the wretched creature owned.

"He says," La Tour explained, "that he used his last water to make this stew. He plans on reaching Barkai in the morning. That is fine. We will eat some of his food and take his white robe. A Holy man's robe sometimes is invaluable in the desert."

The two Legionnaires dipped their fingers in the stew, but when it reached Stivers' mouth, he spit it out with disgust. In all his life he had never tasted anything quite so terrible as that stew. The meat was vile, like the meat of an aged goat, and it had been cooked in an olive oil that was rancid and foul. But he managed to get a little of it down his throat. La Tour managed to eat his share, but cursed like a fiend as he did.

THEN the Legionnaires walked over to the old *hadji* and took his *djeellaba* from his back. The Holy man cursed and screamed, calling on Allah, as La Tour afterwards explained, to rot the souls of these infidels in Gehenna for the millions of years to come. They left the old man, hurling his vile curses into the

night, and plunged on into the desert, glad to be away from the holy presence and out into the night again.

"The mountains in the south of Morocco are many miles to the north," La Tour explained. "Name of a pig, we might fool the world and reach them, but we must hurry. We are not far from the fort and we must be fifteen kilometers away when dawn comes. There will be searching parties, but these parties will not wander far looking for us. We must push on until daylight and then find a place to hide, and then tomorrow night we can push on again."

"Okay," Stivers said with a dry laugh. "We will start again tomorrow night if we find food and water in that hiding place. But what the hell? We'll have to trust in Allah."

THEY stumbled on. The hours passed slowly — like centuries to Stivers. It seemed to him by this time that he had been stumbling over that sand since the beginning of Eve. All memory of any other life was blotted out of his mind. Sand. Sand. Sand. That was all he had ever known or seen. His senses reeled. His feet burned. His throat seemed to be a hard knot somewhere far up in his neck. But he stumbled on, offering no complaint and somehow keeping to his feet.

Dawn came with a reddening glow that burst like a great fire through the blackness of the night. It came suddenly to Stivers as he stumbled along. He knew that there had been darkness—cold and black and silent: then came a red glow dancing in that blackness and then slowly, as if mocking his misery and his fate, the great expanse of gray rolling sands that seemed to stretch into eternity in all directions, appeared

before his eyes—a vast, impenetrable stretch of death and utter desolation, shifting slowly with the winds and rolling back and forth in the restless blanket of gray death.

La Tour climbed to the crest of a crescent-shaped dune that lay at the base of a low line of sand hills. He stood, silhouetted against the gray of the desert like a phantom being, his body moving slowly as his eyes stretched out across the desolate waste in all directions.

Suddenly he pointed to a tumble of polished white boulders that stuck out of the sand beyond the dune and faced a smooth fan of level, barren ground.

"Look," he cried. "There is a mouth of a cave. I remember now there is a cave fifteen kilometers from the fort and that is what I want to find."

HE ran down off the dune and Stivers started after him. Yawning and black, the mouth of the cave, hidden in the center of the jagged white boulders, appeared to them. They slowed down to a walk as they neared the entrance.

La Tour suddenly stopped. His eyes were riveted on the ground. On the fan of level ground he saw were numberless footprints. At a point where the footprints came out of the desert a dirty old rag was tied to a pole in a little mound of pebbles.

"Uncle of Satan!" La Tour cried. "Someone has been coming to this cave."

Stivers had dropped to his knees, his eyes searching the ground. Brown blots were spread over the sand. The brown blots were made from machine oil.

"Oil," Stivers gasped. "See that rag on the pole. See those long tracks leading past the pole. Listen, a plane has landed here and landed

within the last few days, for the oil is still fresh. See that track. It was scratched by the tail skid."

But La Tour had no time to look at the tracks or answer. He made a headlong dive behind a boulder and Stivers followed him as fast as his weary body would permit.

For coming over a dune to their right, was a large detachment of Arabs, headed directly for the cave.

CHAPTER VIII

The Mystery of the Cave

THE line of gray-robed Arabs swept down over the slope of the dune rapidly. Stivers' long rifle darted out from behind the rock, but La Tour's arm shot out and pulled Stivers' arm back.

"Fool!" he whispered. "One shot and we are having our eyelids cut off and our heads taken back to Barkai. We must lie here and hide, hoping they may pass us."

But the line came straight for the mouth of the cave, and as it approached Stivers counted ten white-robed figures. They came forward silently, ghostlike. Stivers and La Tour crouched low behind the rock, their bodies hugging the sand.

Then suddenly Stivers felt a shudder pass through his body. Leading the Arabs was a tall, dark-faced Mohammedan, with a face that was brutal and intelligent.

It was the Mohammedan that had thrown the knife at him in Har Monken's dive.

The Arabs came to the mouth of the cave. They were moving silently and quickly. Five of the Arabs disappeared in the cave with the Mohammedan. The others stood at the entrance of the cave, their long rifles gleaming ominously in the sun.

The Mohammedan and the five

Arabs that entered the cave came out in a minute. They were lugging three machine-guns. Quickly the other five Arabs grabbed the machine-guns and silently, without a word, eight of the white-robed figures started up the sand slope with the guns. In a few minutes their gray *djeellabas* had melted away in the glimmering brilliancy of the desert sun.

Remaining at the mouth of the cave was the dark-faced Mohammedan and one Arab.

"That is the man," Stivers whispered to La Tour, "that threw the knife at me in Har Monken's place."

"And the man I saw talking to Captain Forteau," La Tour answered in a low whisper. "But name of a name. What is that? What interests me are those machine-guns. They could only come from the Legion commissary depot."

THOSE men," Stivers said, "have water and I have a grudge against that cutthroat, and it's only two against two. Let's get them."

"We'll wait here," La Tour whispered. "Something very interesting is going to happen and the mystery might be cleared up."

"God, look!" Stivers gasped, turning his head around in the direction of the fort. "A Legion detachment."

Bobbing up and down in the shimmering light of the desert could be seen the red kepis of the Legionnaires, coming directly for the cave. The red kepis approached, and as they neared, Stivers could see that there were only three men in the detachment.

"Searching for us," he said to La Tour.

La Tour shook his head.

"Look a little closer," he said. "*Mon Dieu*, it is Captain Forteau and Sergeant Dufont and a black

Colonial. Keep still. We are going to find out something."

Captain Forteau and his two companions walked quickly up to the mouth of the cave and the Mohammedan greeted them in short, nervous sentences.

I HAVE brought the gold," he said. "My men have already taken the guns. But we must be careful, for Caid, Tirisi-el-Lizai does not like to pay so much gold for machine-guns. And what about the American? The Caid is having that murder investigated."

Forteau laughed dryly.

"His bones are somewhere on the desert now," he said. "After the attack he deserted with another Legionnaire. Fear not, *Mon ami*, that he will ever talk. He was near death from exhaustion when he escaped. We have nothing to worry from that source, Tun Hammond."

Tun Hammond! That name caused Stivers to gasp in surprise. Tun Hammond, the leader of the Caid's soldiers, the famous general of the Arabs. Forteau was selling Tun Hammond machine-guns and the Mohammedan was extorting a huge price out of the Caid.

"Tomorrow at noon," he heard Forteau say to Tun Hammond. "The plane will come again and will bring more machine-guns. We will sell the Caid six tomorrow."

"*Vite*," Tun Hammond cried. "My men are coming. I do not know the reason, but hurry before they see you."

The crest of a sand dune far away was suddenly dotted with white moving figures. From the distance they looked like specks of white in the sea of the shimmering light. Forteau and Dufont and the black Colonial grabbed the bags of gold handed them by Tun Hammond and disappeared around the wash of the

dune behind the pile of boulders that surrounded the mouth of the cave.

AS the white dots became larger, Stivers could see that the Arabs were mounted on horses, and in less than a minute the horsemen came charging down to the mouth of the cave. The leader dismounted and bowed in front of Tun Hammond and then jabbered something to the general.

"Name of the devil," La Tour gasped. "Our old friend the Holy man is after us. That Arab just told Tun Hammond of our theft of the holy robe and our treatment of him. The Caid has ordered the desert searched for us, and if they catch us—well, if you touch a Holy man you are honored with a trip to Barkai for a public torture and death."

While the leader of the Arabs was talking to Tun Hammond, the other Arabs dismounted and spread fan-shape over the boulders.

And in the next minute five of them gave loud yells and were on Stivers and La Tour, who had little chance to get their rifles in action. The yells brought the other Arabs to the spot.

Fighting madly, hopelessly, Stivers struck out with his right and left. The viciousness of his attack caused the Arabs to back away slowly, but no attempt was made to use their guns. Stivers saw that they were to be taken alive. Grimly he set himself. It was the end now, but he would go out with a blaze of fighting and if they took him alive, it would be when he was unconscious.

La Tour had scrambled to his feet, grabbed his rifle, and dodged back behind a rock. Three times his rifle roared and three Arabs plunged forward on their faces. Stivers had

grabbed his gun and was behind another rock. His gun jumped in his hands as it roared. Two Arabs crumpled to the ground.

But it was a hopeless struggle, this struggle of two men against a hundred. Tun Hammond took command of the situation at once. The Arabs scattered among the rocks, surrounding the two Legionnaires. Desperately Stivers and La Tour sent out a stream of lead toward the Arabs, but suddenly Stivers' gun clicked ominously. He had run out of ammunition. La Tour's gun roared twice more and then was silent.

The Arabs, sensing what had happened, came over the rocks like flies and crushed the two men to the sand.

Stivers kicked against his attackers, but after a while he ceased resisting. His hands and feet were tied and he was being carried to a horse.

CHAPTER IX

The City of the Dead

THE CITY of Barkai sprawled across a shallow desert gully and ran up the ridges of the two low hills that formed the gully. It baked wearily and lazily in the torrid sun, as it had baked for thousands of years, even on the day when Mohammed dashed to Medina; and in those thousands of years nothing about the city had changed. The odorous, stifling narrow streets, the flat-roofed houses, the noisy bazaars, the squalid courts and the vermin-infested costumes—all these passed on through the years as they were in the beginning. Even the minds of the citizens—a motley gathering of brown and black and yellow faces—thought and acted as their ancestors had acted the day Mohammed took flight to Medina.

Long before that day a desert tribe of Farikitas, a powerful, cruel tribe, had come somewhere out of the east and captured the city. They accepted the prophet Mohammed and their city was the stronghold of that religion from then on. The Farikitas were not famed for tolerance or good fellowship, even among the races of their own belief; and to the infidel whites they had carried through the centuries a hatred that never relented.

High walls inclosed the city, walls that had protected it for centuries. A few white men had entered those walls, but they never came out; and at the end of a long narrow street, near the mosque, their heads rotted away in the blistering sun, always with the eyebrows cut off.

IN the little square near the mosque a great crowd had gathered some hours after the capture of Stivers and La Tour. In the narrow and filthy streets, white-robed men dashed eagerly toward the square and the bazaars were empty, and somewhere inside the great mosque a bell was ringing.

Two infidels had been captured, two white infidels that had defiled a Holy man of Islam. The walls of the city were closed and no one was allowed to enter. The eyes of the infidels would have to be plucked of their eyebrows and other forms of torture would have to take place before the heads would be cut off and stuck on the poles, alongside the bleached bones of other infidels.

Bill Stivers lay on his back on the dirty, sun-baked ground of the square, his arms lashed behind him and his ankles securely tied. La Tour lay close to him, bound in the same manner. Around them milled hundreds of fanatical Arabs, murmuring strange and weird prayers.

An old man, short and fat, with

a greasy face, came out of the mosque. He wobbled up to them, guards on both sides of him. He spoke a few sharp words and out of the crowd came the wizened-faced Holy man the two Legionnaires had met on the desert. The old man was cursing and screaming, and when he looked at the two men on the ground, his screams rose to an insane pitch.

"Grandpa seems to be angry," Stivers said grimly to La Tour. "That was a bright idea of yours to steal his holy robe."

La Tour grinned weakly.

"The fat man is the Caid, Tirisi-el-Lizai," he whispered. "We'll be thrown in dungeon cells to wait for evening, when the act of cutting our eyebrows off takes place."

The Caid barked out sharp orders to the guards and the two men were pulled to their feet and carried inside the dark, mosque-like building to the right of the square. They were borne down wet and worn stairs far underground and thrown in a damp cell, where a wall of darkness enshrouded them.

THE door of the cell closed with a creaking sound and the rusty old lock turned, and then silence, eerie and black and oppressive, settled over the dungeon. Stivers twisted and squirmed against the ropes around his ankles and wrists, but they did not give.

"Take it easy," La Tour said. "We have several hours and in that time something may happen."

Stivers laughed dryly. In that ancient city of Barkai, where no Christian was allowed to set foot and the fanaticism of Islam rose to insane heights, there was little chance for anything to happen in those few hours before the evening prayers, after which the ceremony of torture would take place.

"The pig of Forteau," La Tour growled, "will have all his wishes carried out. We will be dead and he will have plenty of gold. The traitor! The beast! To send the Legion—"

"He hasn't won yet," Stivers said bitterly, "but he will win if we lie here and wait for the Arabs to cut our eyebrows off."

He lurched forward with his body and then rolled over. He hit a cold rock wall. Hunching his knees up under him, he threw his body forward, landing full on his face on a sharp rock. A sharp pain shot through his forehead, but with a cry he squirmed and twisted and crawled until his body was close to the sharp rock.

THEN through endless minutes of pain he twisted his body over the sharp rock. Back and forth he moved his tied wrists, the rocks cutting gashes in the flesh. His breathing came heavy and labored. La Tour called out to him, but he didn't hear.

Again and again his wrists moved over that rock, with muffled cries of pain coming from his mouth as the rock cut deeper into his flesh. Then suddenly he fell on his side and lay still.

His arms were free!

He rested several moments and then he was sitting up, tugging away at the ropes around his ankles. With a cry he was on his feet, calling to La Tour.

La Tour answered him, and it took Stivers only a few moments to unloosen the ropes around the Frenchman's ankles and wrists.

"We're free," Stivers said grimly, "though we are still in a cell in a city filled with fanatical Mohammedans, but at least we can now die fighting."

La Tour stretched his arms and

legs. Stivers was feeling for the door with his hands out in front of him. He found the door, tugged on the rusty old iron, but his tugging brought no results.

"We can wait until someone opens the door," he said. "Then we can get into action. I don't know how far underground we are, but that doesn't make much difference."

"If we could get to Caid, Tirisi-el-Lizai," La Tour suggested, "and tell him about Forteau and Tun Hammond—"

"We'd get our heads cut off just the same," Stivers broke in. "Squealing on that beast Forteau isn't going to save our lives now. We can take care of him—if and when we get out of this city alive."

"The girl that was murdered in Paris," La Tour answered. "She is connected with the Caid in some way and Tun Hammond was very anxious to know whether you were dead or not."

"That won't save us, either," Stivers answered. "The only way we can save ourselves is by fighting. Tirisi-el-Lizai can take care of his enemies as he wishes."

"We'll have to wait until they come for us," La Tour said. "And we might as well sit down."

They sat down on the cold, damp floor and waited. Stivers rubbed the blood off his mutilated wrists. His arms and hands felt numb from pain, but his body and his mind were alert. It seemed that a second reserve of nervous energy had come to him and every nerve was tense and ready for action.

BUT the minutes passed slowly in that deadly silence of the dungeon. They stretched wearily into hours. Stivers and La Tour sat on the floor and said little. Their ears were strained for the sound of a footstep outside the cell.

Another hour passed and it seemed to Stivers that he had been in that dark dungeon, with its dank and ill-smelling air, for days and weeks. La Tour got up and walked nervously around in the darkness, but Stivers remained on the floor, his face grim and set.

He knew there was little hope of getting out of the city alive. All he hoped was for death while fighting. They must not take him alive. The thought passed through his mind grimly and monotonously. They must not take him alive!

Suddenly Stivers' body stiffened and with a leap he was on his feet. A key was being turned in the rusty old lock of the door. In that tense moment, Stivers had no plan of action, no idea what he was going to do, other than to overcome whoever came in and try to get out of the dungeon hole.

AND when the door creaked and opened, and two white-robed Arabs carrying burning torches entered the cell he still had no plan of action.

But he wasted no time trying to figure one out. With the spring of a tiger, his body hurled itself against the leading Arab. Taken utterly by surprise, the Arab went to the ground in a white heap, his torch falling to the floor, the flame dying out in a haze of smoke.

La Tour was on the other Arab in the same manner. Stivers brought his right down with a smashing blow to the Arab's face under him and the man quivered a little and lay still.

La Tour was having a little difficulty with his man. This Arab, in the matter of a split second, had seen the hurtling body of Stivers and he had started to yell.

But the sound never left his mouth. La Tour's hand was over it

and his free arm was trying to grapple with the Arab. But it took Stivers only the matter of a moment to hurl the man to the ground and gag him. Then he tied his wrists and ankles with the ropes taken from La Tour's body. The Arab that had been knocked cold by Stivers was tied and gagged.

"And now," La Tour said with a laugh, "we are free men, and where are we going. *Sacré Nom de Pitié*. While there is life there is hope—but we should have a plan."

"Our plan is simple," Stivers said. "We are going to be Arabs. It's a shame you didn't hide that robe of the Holy man on you."

"There is no shame to that," La Tour said. "Here it is under my *cummehund*. I told you the holy robe is a good thing to have on the desert."

Stivers had picked up one of the torches and was holding it above his head.

La Tour was unwinding his black *cummehund*, the waist sash worn by the Legion, and wrapped under this was the dirty holy robe taken from the *hadji* on the desert.

"You will be the Holy man," Stivers said. "I will take the robe of one of these Arabs and a Holy man and his follower will try to walk out under the nose of these religious maniacs."

"And about the time we get upstairs," La Tour said with a laugh, "we'll meet someone coming down the stairs to find out why the infidels haven't been brought up to the mob."

"And then," Stivers said grimly, "you and I are going to have to do some tough fighting."

LA TOUR donned the robe of the Holy man and Stivers stripped one of the Arabs of his white robe. A minute later, with the torch high

over his head, Stivers led the way out of the dungeon cell to a flight of ancient stone steps, that wound upward, each step worn thin by the treading footsteps of countless generations.

Slowly they wound their way upward, the white robes around them making them look weird and ghost-like in the flickering light of the burning torch. Up and up they went slowly, with every nerve tense and every muscle bunched for quick action.

They came to the top of the stairs, came out in a wide hallway, the stone floor of which was worn deep by the thousands of feet that had walked over it. They found more winding stairs, and up these they went on.

They got near the top, when suddenly there was a yell behind them. The darkened underground passageway suddenly seemed to spring to life. White-robed figures darted ahead of them. There was more yelling.

LETTING the torch drop to the stone stairs, Stivers went up them two at a time, with La Tour following close behind. The yelling below them increased.

"*Nom de Pitié,*" La Tour yelled. "They have discovered the Arabs in the cell."

Stivers did not stop to listen to La Tour. He was at the top of the stairs, dashing toward a door that opened out on the square, where the crowd was assembled for the torture of the two infidels. Evening had fallen. It was not yet dark, but the first shades of twilight were filtering through the narrow, winding streets.

Stivers stopped suddenly.

In the doorway before him were five Arabs, armed with rifles and kris knives.

CHAPTER X

The Robe of Islam

STIVERS' body lunged forward and a little to the left. A kris knife came hurtling through the air and hit the rock wall far behind, the twang of the fine steel blade echoing throughout the dark hallway.

And in the next second Stivers had dived forward, grabbed one of the Arabs around the legs and pulled him to the floor, throwing the Arab's body over his to act as a shield. La Tour had caught another Arab around the waist and had thrown him to the floor.

Rising to his feet, with the body of the kicking Arab in his arms, Stivers heaved the body at the other Arabs, and they crashed against the wall in a sprawling heap. With a leap Stivers was out of the door and dashing around the corner of the building. He heard someone running behind him, but he did not stop or look around.

As he dashed out of the mosque-like building, he saw, from the corners of his eyes, the crowd milling around the square, waiting for the infidels to be brought out for the torture. Other Arabs were rushing for the door, but because Stivers was clothed in the long white robe, none of them paid any attention to him.

The shouting around the door of the mosque building increased, but Stivers turned a corner and dashed down a side street. The running behind him increased and the next moment a white-robed figure was racing alongside him.

Stivers saw that it was La Tour. "In this building," Stivers yelled to La Tour. "They are coming after us."

The two Legionnaires dodged into a low, squatty building. The build-

ing was dark and deserted. Their feet hit a dirt floor and they raced through the darkness to the rear of the house.

The door was suddenly filled with Arabs and they scattered over the dark room in a fan-like formation, but Stivers and La Tour had darted out a back door into a dark alley. Down the alley they raced madly, their robes flying behind them, making them look like grotesque figures in the darkness.

By this time the whole city was in an uproar. The din seemed to come from every part of it. The two Legionnaires stopped and hid in the shadows of an old building, standing against the mud walls, gasping for breath.

WE are out but we're in," La Tour said with a weak laugh. "We're out of the dungeon, but we're still in the town, and there are high walls around it and ten thousand Mohammedans inside those walls wanting to cut our heads off."

"Walls can be scaled," Stivers said grimly.

The alley was suddenly filled with yelling white-robed Arabs. Stivers and La Tour walked out from their place of hiding quietly and joined the milling, angry mob that surged down the alley. The two Legionnaires, clothed in the white robes, were not recognized by the Arabs.

On up the alley they went with the mob, keeping close together. They came to the far end of the city and over them loomed the wall. The wall was about eight feet high, a wall of mud and baked sand bricks. Time had played havoc with its structure and everywhere the mud and bricks had fallen out and great yawning gaps appeared.

"Back in the shadows," Stivers whispered to La Tour.

The two Legionnaires darted back

in the darkness of a building and the angry mob milled on. To the right of them was another mob, milling and yelling. This second mob passed Stivers and La Tour.

"Over the wall," Stivers said. "You first. I'll boost you up."

He and La Tour rushed to the wall and Stivers took La Tour by the foot and heaved him high in the air.

The Frenchman grasped at the top of the wall, got a hold, and pulled himself up.

Stivers started up the wall, putting his feet in one of the great yawning holes. La Tour lay flat on the top of the wall, which was several feet thick, and reached down to grab the hand of his friend. Slowly Stivers worked his way up. He was near the top when out of the darkness below burst a large number of Arabs.

Shots filled the air. Bullets clipped the mud near Stivers, but the far-famed poor marksmanship of the Arabs came as a life saver to the two Legionnaires. Stivers pulled himself to the top of the wall with one final supreme effort and then he and La Tour threw themselves over the wall and let their bodies drop to the ground.

THE force of the fall caused them to sprawl awkwardly on the ground, but they jumped to their feet; and as they did, they heard the gates of the city open and the next moment a swarm of Arabs were bearing down on them.

Stivers and La Tour turned and dashed down the wall, came to a turn and swung around this turn, their legs swinging like the fast pistons of an engine. The army of fanatical Arabs now realized that the two figures in white were the infidels, and came charging around the turn like insane fiends.

Flat on the ground, the two Legionnaires hugged the wall and the madly running Arabs swept past them, unseeing. Back toward the gate of the city the Legionnaires dashed.

There were a few Arabs near the gate, but these apparently did not recognize the two white-robed Legionnaires as the infidels that had escaped. Men on horseback were coming out of the gate to give chase.

With a wild yell to La Tour, Stivers made a spring for one of the horses. Behind him the first army of Arabs, the army that had plunged past them when they flattened themselves against the wall, was coming back.

Stivers' leap at the horseman landed him near the neck of the racing pony. With a terrific right to the jaw aimed from the crouching position Stivers was in, holding on to the horse; he knocked the rider off and was in the saddle, giving the pony all the rein it would take.

HE heard La Tour yell behind him. His horse raced madly out into the night. Other horsemen were following and in the next second a fleet Arab pony passed him and swung into the lead. In the darkness he could only see the white robe of the rider, but he heard the wild shout of La Tour.

On through the desert night, for by this time darkness had fallen, Stivers and La Tour raced the horses. Close behind came the Arabs, mounted on horses. Down through gullies and up over huge sand dunes Stivers and La Tour sent the fleet little ponies. They had a head start of a hundred yards on the Arabs behind them, and as they raced on through the night, they managed to keep this lead. Rifles roared behind them, but the bullets cut the air far over their heads.

Mile after mile passed by them. The horses picked their way with uncanny skill over the treacherous sand dunes; but always, several hundred yards behind, came the Arabs, driving their horses on at top speed.

A huge sand dune loomed up in front of the Legionnaires. La Tour turned his horse to the right and Stivers' mount followed; and then with a quick jerk of the rein Stivers pulled his pony to a stop, throwing it against the dune. La Tour turned his horse into a little gully that ran out of the dune.

Hoofs beating like hammers on the sand, the Arabs raced by, unable, because of the turn around the dune, to see the maneuver of the two Legionnaires. La Tour and Stivers swerved their horses around and sent them at top speed on into the desert night in the opposite direction.

They heard the Arabs yelling far behind them. They heard the beat of the hoofs of the Arab ponies, but as they raced on, the darkness of the desert night engulfed them and the sound of the pursuing horses died away completely.

A half hour later the two Legionnaires reined their mounts and jumped to the ground. On each of the horses was the Arab soldier's canteen and supply of food. The two Legionnaires washed their parched mouths with water and ate the goat cheese and Arab bread greedily.

"On horseback we can make Morocco," La Tour said, "but we will have to hurry, for horses can't go long without water."

WITHOUT many words they got on their horses and started through the night, La Tour leading the way, picking his directions from the stars that dotted the dark sky.

They rode on until midnight and then rested. Exhausted from their

race, their nerves still taut and racked from the experience in the city of Barkai, they talked little. After an hour's rest they mounted their horses again and continued on.

When dawn came they were surrounded by the endless desert—grim and silent and deathlike. They were following a narrow trail that led through a deep gully.

"But Forteau," Stivers said. "He'll hear about our escape."

"And he'll have half the Legion following us," La Tour said.

They turned a sharp corner, following the gully path and came out on a fan of level ground.

They halted their horses helplessly, and gaped at what they saw in front of them, gaped helplessly, with all color leaving their faces and their bodies sagging forward.

On the great stretch of level ground was camped a regiment of the Foreign Legion!

A MAN came riding up to them, saw their faces underneath the white hoods, and twisted his face in a half smile.

"Son of a swine," he growled. "We have two Arabs with the faces of white men."

Other men of the Legion had surrounded them. Stivers and La Tour got down, threw their Arab hoods away in disgust, and stood looking at the man on horseback.

The man, a captain, grinned unpleasantly, and shook his head.

"Deserters," he said. "Deserters dressed like Arabs."

La Tour looked at Stivers and Stivers looked at him, and they both shrugged.

Stivers laughed weakly, and said: "Forteau wins."

They were taken to Colonel Falltau, a tall, bronzed soldier of the Legion, with a face that was hard and cold, but with a reputation of

being a fair and stern and just officer. He looked at the two men and said: "Deserters?"

La Tour nodded and said nothing.

"But name of a name," the colonel growled, "where did you get those horses and those robes?"

"We were captured by the Arabs, Colonel," Stivers said. "We escaped from Barkai."

TWO days later Colonel Falltau's regiment was at the gates of Barkai. Word had been sent to Tirisiel-Lizai that Colonel Falltau wished to have an audience with him, and the colonel, having a grim sense of humor, added that it was his desire to inform the Caid about a proper and just price for machine-guns.

The Caid, being a fat man, shrewd in the ways of the world, and a man that knew, from experience, something of the power of the French armies, acceded to the wishes of the colonel for an audience.

And for the first time in the history of the ancient city, the gates were thrown open and the feet of Christians beat upon the streets.

The conference concerning the matter of military peace was a great success; but concerning the price of machine-guns, the fat old Caid smiled and handed Falltau the blouse of a captain of the Foreign Legion and thanked him for his desire to speak of the price of machine-guns. The Caid then told the colonel a story and the steel gray eyes of the colonel gleamed a little, and he said no more about machine-guns.

Outside the gates of the ancient city Bill Stivers and La Tour lay on the hot sand and stared at the walls that several nights before had loomed up as symbols of certain death.

They spoke few words; both were wondering what would be their fate as deserters of the Legion.

The colonel came out of the gate and walked up to them.

"Pigs," he growled, "salute this coat. In the Legion we salute the coat of an officer who has died."

Stivers and La Tour were on their feet, staring grimly at the Legionnaire blouse in the colonel's hand.

It was the blouse of Captain Forteau. Quickly their hands went to salute, but their eyes remained on the coat, caked with blood and torn by bullets. The colonel dropped the garment on the ground.

"At ease," he said. "You have saluted the captain for the last time."

Colonel Falltau looked at the two men and grinned.

"The only Christians to enter that city and to escape," he said. "The only men in the world that could do it would be Legionnaires. But from where did you escape and what have you been doing?"

Briefly Stivers and La Tour told their story. They told it simply and directly, with no attempt to color any part of it. The steel gray eyes of the colonel flashed as he heard the story. He pulled at his mustache angrily.

"Here, you swine," he called out to his men. "Bring these men food and water. So Tun Hammond was tricking Caid, Tirisi-el-Lizai. That fat old swine will listen to me now. Tomorrow we are entering the city of Barkai. The French Government is sick of the sniping attacks from that city, and when the report of the attack on Fort Deron went over the air, by wireless, yesterday, I was detailed to attack Barkai. There is another regiment approaching the city from another direction. We will put a stop to that fat Caid's fighting tactics. But this story! Quick, bring these men food. Death

wipes out all sins in the Legion and what you told me, which was confirmed by the Caid, has been buried in death. Keep your lips sealed."

Stivers was staring at the coat. He knew beyond doubt that Forteau was dead. A wave of relief came over him, but the sight of the bloody coat made him feel sick all over.

Then Colonel Falltau did several things decidedly unbecoming for a colonel in the Legion to do.

"For deserting," he said, "I could hardly give you a citation, but for capturing that machine-gun in the death trap—well, that merits the highest citation in the Legion. And, by the way, it was a touch of *cafard* that caused you to go to that cave, wasn't it?"

The colonel smiled and winked at the two startled Legionnaires.

"A touch of *cafard*, *Mon Colonel*," La Tour laughed. "A bad touch."

Stivers stared at the bloody coat at his feet. A strange feeling came over him as he looked at the coat, and then he said: "But—Forteau?"

"Thieves often fight over gold," Colonel Falltau said grimly. "Tun Hammond killed Forteau and Dufont and took the gold paid by the old Caid for himself, but the Caid confronted him with certain facts and Tun Hammond fled, leaving the gold behind. Tirisi-el-Lizai, the fat old toad, got the machine-guns and the gold, and kept the coat of Forteau, which he found near the cave, to give to me."

A bugle, blowing formation, broke shrilly on the desert air. La Tour said to Stivers: "Come on, *Ma Petit Cochon*, you're a real Legionnaire now."

Stivers grinned at him.

"Okay," he shouted. "I'm a Legionnaire now."

NEXT MONTH: PYRAMID OF GOLD, by George Allan Moffatt. A Thrilling Full Book-Length Novel of Breathless Adventure in Yucatan.

Double-Edged Mutiny



Murder and Intrigue Stalk Beneath the Ghostlike Canvas of the Schooner Flash in this Colorful, Gripping Drama of the South Pacific

A Complete Novelette

By JACLAND MARMUR

Author of "Wind Driven," etc.

IN THE sudden calm, the schooner's sails flapped loudly as the *Flash* rolled down her rails to the long oily swells of the south Pacific. The flat expanse of sea, the ship, and the two white men on her poop at the cabin skylight were etched cameo-like for a brief instant in the startling clarity before the tropical sunset.

The ship stood to the southwestward, some fifty miles to leeward of

the island of Fatuhiva: and just astern of her the reef upon which the steamer *Maccaw*—Mazatlan for Melbourne via Samoa with general freights and a shipment of bullion and gold coin—had found her death, showed its glistening white fangs in a grim warning to southern-going sailormen.

Suddenly the soft hiss of the sunset shower rose to break the charmed stillness. It drew rapidly closer, rip-

pling the water, spattering loudly upon the face of the sea. And as if to welcome it, from the skylight of the schooner a series of exotic sounds drifted in a guttural lilting bass:

Na, na, ada

Nada nada tu . . .

CAL NORTON, the mate, looked up sharply at his friend, the youthful skipper and co-owner of the *Flash*.

"There goes that damned Malay *serang* of yours again, Brett," he growled. "Black fool can't ever get over hearing his own voice comin' out of that ancient cylinder gramophone of yours. He'll wear it out, by God! What's the sense—?"

Brett Chadwick grinned and stuck his head toward the open lift of the skylight.

"Tu Atu!" he called sharply into the cabin. "*Pau!* Stop it! Turn that thing off. Wind—plenty quick. Come up here to the wheel, you grinning ape!"

"Ada, Tuan."

The weird song was cut short, and a moment later the huge black came pattering up to the deck. His ivory teeth flashed at the white men as he sprang cat-like toward the teetering wheel. Then he rolled his eyes to the peak of the mainsail and waited patiently for the first strong puff of wind and the slash of the rain. Brett Chadwick sat down on the skylight and mopped his lean weather-tanned face.

"Hobby of mine, Norton. There's a close relationship between Tu Atu's Malay and the language of these Tuamotuans. I know there is! Where's the harm in getting him to sing his honored folk song into that gramophone recorder of mine and—"

"Pah! You're as bad as he is. Relationship be damned! Listenin' to

his fool singin' comin' out of that horn through half the night. Language—!" Norton snorted disdainfully as he took a turn of the poop, stared anxiously to windward, and then stopped short again before the master.

"I'm glad this rotten business is done, Brett.

"The *Flash* is a copra an' a pearl shell schooner—not a damned salvage ship. Eighty bars of bullion an' forty-odd thousand in coin under that caulked forehatch of ours! No one but a reckless fool like you'd tackle a job like that with a blackcrewed tradin' schooner an' four native pearl divers. But we did it, Brett! By God, we did!

"I won't rest easy till we're safe in Tutuilla." He hesitated for a moment, and then demanded suddenly: "But how'd the *Maccaw* stick on that reef in the first place, that's what I'd like to know!"

He bent over and poked a thick forefinger at Brett's chest. "Muta, the divin' boy, says her bow under the water is pointin' nor-west. Nor-west, Brett!"

I KNOW," Chadwick replied quietly without lifting his head. "Captain Vartree lost fourteen lives in that wreck, Cal." He stood up abruptly, clear blue eyes boring at the stout red face of his friend and mate. "Ever strike you, Cal," he asked softly, "that the skipper of the *Maccaw* and his mate were damned anxious to come along with us and lend a hand when we took hold of the salvage job? And that they guessed pretty close where—?"

"You mean—?"

"Nothing, Cal, nothing. Where are—?"

From behind the spokes of the big wheel Tu Atu let out a quick throaty cry. The sunset shower raced swiftly upon the schooner, the first squall

of wind striking her sails with sudden loud reports. She heeled over, booms swung out, a loud hiss and roar in her shrouds as she gathered way and started snoring through the water.

TU ATU'S call was answered by a shriek of terror from the foredeck, followed almost at once by the snarling report of a Winchester. Brett Chadwick leaped for the break of the poop. Cal Norton, without waiting to discover causes, darted swiftly for the scuttle and reached into the rack for his own pistol. Meantime, Chadwick took in the grim scene at a glance.

Heedless of wind and rain, Muta, one of Brett's diving boys, naked but for the loin cloth about his middle, the bared steel of a chopping knife in his right hand, was racing madly aft along the weather deck. Blood dripped from a wound in his shoulder, and as he ran he uttered gurgling, inarticulate calls.

Behind him under the shadow of the forecastle stood the burly figure of Captain Vartree, master of the wrecked steamer *Maccaw*, his stumpy legs braced wide, a thin trickle of smoke still showing at the muzzle of the rifle he held in his hands.

Deliberately he worked the pump of the weapon again and snapped it to his shoulder. Chadwick had time only for a shout of uncomprehending rage. The black, just clear of the forehatch now, lifted his eyes to the poop in a swift pitiful plea. He staggered, caught himself, and whirled about, arm upraised to hurl his knife.

A tongue of flame belched from Vartree's rifle, the report echoing like thunder above the hiss of the rain and the shrilling of the squall.

Muta snapped upright as though jerked by an unseen string. The steel slipped from his nerveless hand,

and the next moment he pitched his length on the leaning deck. A hoarse medley of yells like the triumphant baying of hounds came from the forecastle door.

Brett leaped for the poop ladder.

Cal Norton sprang atop the skylight, pistol upraised. Far forward the smoking muzzle of Vartree's rifle moved in a short swift arc.

"Stand where you are!" he roared. "Norton, put up that pistol before I blow off the top of your head! We mean business!"

For the split fraction of a second Brett hesitated on the topmost rung of the ladder leading to the main deck. Out of the corner of his eye he saw "Dutch" Scrawn, Vartree's mate, advancing along the lee rail at the head of the black crew of the *Flash*, all mouthing excited gibberish among themselves. He called a warning over his shoulder to Norton.

"Steady, Cal! It's happened." Then, facing forward again, he shouted the length of the racing schooner's deck. "What the devil do you mean, Vartree, murdering—!"

"Stand where you are, I said! Dutch, you too! Keep 'em covered!"

II

VARTREE advanced steadily, the Winchester ready for action at his hip. Slowly Cal Norton's upraised arm dropped to his side and he came forward to join Chadwick at the break of the poop. Here he folded his bare arms across his chest, saying nothing, the muzzle of his Colt resting on his left forearm.

Dutch Scrawn and the blacks stood just below them, the white man's pock-marked face split in a savage grin, the natives waving the curved steel of their knives excitedly, ivory teeth bared, naked chests glittering with rain in the dimming light.

The shower passed swiftly, a sheeting wall of water receding to leeward on the face of the sea. The schooner settled into her pace before the quartering evening breeze, Tu Atu tending the helm in terror. Westward the sky cleared miraculously, and the setting sun showed like a great globe of bloody metal searing the horizon.

VARTREE swayed up and stopped short, his little shoe-button eyes lifted scowling to the poop, the Winchester resting in the crook of his left elbow. Brett Chadwick eyed the unsavory pair dressed in soiled singlets and dirty drill trousers.

"What do you mean, Vartree," he demanded again in a grim quiet voice, "murdering one of my diving boys?"

Dutch Scrawn aimed a stream of brown at the deck, waved the blacks behind him to silence, and hooked his right thumb in his trouser belt close to the protruding butt of his pistol. Vartree grinned broadly.

"Mutiny, Captain Chadwick!" He spat the words out in a harsh throaty bass.

"This schooner's mine, Vartree," Brett grated icily. "I'm master of the *Flash*. Your ship, the *Maccaw*, is split in two resting on the bottom of a coral reef—"

"Don't I know it?"

"That was a cold deliberate murder," Chadwick went on imperturbably. "If there's a mutiny aboard my ship I'll handle it myself! Put up your weapons and—"

"I'm handling this one. Your diving boy didn't think so: I convinced him!"

"Spit it out, Vartree! What do you want?"

"The gold under the forehatch!"

"You—!"

"Steady now! I ain't askin' you nothin'. Understand? I'm tellin' you!

Come off your high horse an' listen to reason. Muta, that damned black boy, wouldn't—and you saw what happened. That gold ain't goin' to Tutuilla! These seven blacks are with us. They got their blood up for a little easy money.

"We're nine against the two o' you, or three if you want to count that Malay savage at the helm. We got a Winchester, a pistol, an' a hell o' a lot more'n three shells between us if we need 'em—to say nothin' o' the krisses these boys are roarin' to use. Now what's it gonna be? Talk—or a slug through the head for you."

Cal Norton stiffened beside the gaunt figure of the *Flash's* master.

"Which one of us do you think ought to tell him to go to hell, Brett?" he said loudly and distinctly.

CHADWICK shook his head. Then, after a moment of silence, he called grimly down at the uplifted faces.

"Vartree, if you'll come into the cabin—alone—I'll talk."

Dutch Scrawn gave vent to a guffaw of laughter. Vartree grinned again.

"We can make our talk right here. Yes, or no?"

"Don't be a fool!" Chadwick snapped. "I'll not be armed. Give your rifle to Dutch and come into the cabin. Cal will stay where he is. He's got a pistol—and you've got Dutch and seven men watching him. The cabin skylights are open. At the first false sound you can rush the poop. What do you say? Or are you too damned yellow!"

Vartree shot Dutch Scrawn a swift look, then lifted his face again to the poop.

"All right," he called. Then to his erstwhile mate, "Dutch, here's the Winchester. Any monkey business—you'll know what to do."

He handed the weapon across,

hitched at his belt, and climbed the ladder. Brett turned without a word and descended swiftly into the *Flash's* little cabin, Vartree behind him.

FOR a moment they faced each other in silence, the darkening square of the open skylight over their heads, the unlighted lamp swaying gently in its gimbals.

The rushing noise of the wind and the steady slap of the sea filled the narrow saloon.

Vartree dropped his fleshy bulk on to the settee. Chadwick stood against the sideboard, his lean right hand toying idly with the cylinder of his ancient recording gramophone, the sole source of amusement for him through the long lonely tropic nights at sea.

"Y'know, Chadwick," Vartree growled abruptly, "I didn't think you'd be a damned fool."

"Thanks," Brett snapped drily. "Now out with it! Quick! You can't get away with a deal like this, and you know it! Spit it out!"

The erstwhile master of the *Mac-caw* laughed soundlessly.

"I can't, hey? I tell you it's a cinch! Easy, boy, the easiest thing I ever saw. Now listen!" He leaned forward eagerly, the words spilling over each other as they poured from his thick lips, his lumpy fingers gesturing nervously as he spoke. "What've you got under that caulked and sealed forehatch, hey? Eighty bars o' bullion an' forty-odd thousand in coin. The bullion's no damned good to us or any one else but a bank. Clumsy, can't get rid of it. A white elephant, that stuff."

"But the coin! Coin, I tell you, Chadwick, real gold coin! Money! Mounds o' it! An' money's good any place, any time! Twenty dollar American Eagles an' British sovereigns, I tell you! An' the bullion's

what makes it a cinch. Covers our tracks. Clean as a whistle!

"Listen!" he rushed on. "The *Mac-caw* went on the reef. All right. You got the salvage job on all that loose fortune. Me, I didn't think it could be done with a damned tradin' schooner an' a pack o' nigger divin' boys usin' weighted nets. But you did it. Okay. A swell job. But you bring it into Tutuilla an' what do you get for it? I ask you, what in hell do you get for it? A lousy pittance in pay! An' we got a damned fortune in our hands. As easy as that!"

HE stood up, eyes ablaze, opened the palm of his fat hand, and then snapped his fist closed with a swift violent gesture as he repeated hoarsely—

"A fortune! Just like—that!"

Brett Chadwick's eyes narrowed to squinting blue points of fire in the abrupt and ominous silence after that torrent of passionate words.

"That's nonsense, Vartree," he grated at length. "And you know it! The gold's under the forehatch all right. But you can't shove forty thousand dollars in gold coin in your pants pocket and walk off with it! You'd have half the world's police hunting for you. And when the *Flash* comes into Tutuilla—"

Vartree interrupted him with his harsh metallic laugh.

"You fool!" he snarled. "The *Flash* ain't goin' into Tutuilla!" He stepped suddenly closer and jabbed his clenched fist at Chadwick's chest. "You're a bigger sap than I thought. Listen! We run for the island of Fatuhiva, see? All right. The weather coast's jammed chock full o' deserted coves.

"You're sailor enough to know that and how to clear the reefs? Fine! We lay offshore, rip open the hatch, an' transfer the gold coin in the

longboat from the *Flash* to the beach. Easy, hey? In no time at all. We bury it there. *But we leave the bullion aboard the schooner!* It's no damned good to us—an' it clears us clean as a nor'west gale!"

HE hesitated, winked one eye craftily, and then went on in a sly harsh whisper.

"Then we run the *Flash* back for Tutuilla. But if the *Maccaw* could go aground an' sink on that damned reef—why not the schooner *Flash* caught on a lee shore? Hey? I ask you, why not? You're insured, ain't you?" He grinned and added with obvious meaning: "The *Maccaw* was! —Okay, then. After that we show up somewhere driftin' in an open boat, see? Shipwrecked sailors in distress. A hell o' a mess. An' they can't hang a thing on us!"

"If they send divers down to have a look-see at what's left o' the *Flash*—they find the bullion an' some scattered gold coin! They're welcome to salvagin' it. The rest o' the coin? Hell, it got washed loose when the *Flash* ripped her guts open on the coral. Let 'em hunt for it on the ocean floor. We, we're honest sailors shipwrecked an' broke!"

He drew himself up to his short obese height, a leer of triumph on his lips.

"When it blows over we take a little pleasure trip to Fatuhiva again an' get rich—very slow. We split it two ways. Half for me an' Dutch, half for you an' Norton. I won't say nothing about the insurance money you'll get from the underwriters. You can call that extra for yourself. An' remember," he spat out viciously, "as far as that gang o' black wharf rats I got yelpin' outside for your blood goes, they get nothin'! See? Niggers—drown—easy!"

Chadwick moved aside from the sideboard of the *Flash's* cabin, Var-

tree following his every move with his burning little black eyes.

"Aye, Vartree," Brett nodded. "I see. Not bad. Not bad at all. Damned smart ideas you got, hey?"

"I thought you'd see reason, Chadwick." Vartree's bloated fleshy face creased itself in oily wrinkles. "I know men, I do. Understand 'em. I wasn't born yesterday."

"Aye," Chadwick conceded again, a guileless puzzled look in his eyes. "Only thing I don't understand is why you didn't think of that when you had the gold in the *Maccaw* before you—before she grounded and sank on the reef. It—"

Vartree's laughter interrupted him, a series of hoarse throaty gurgles from deep in his chest. He broke off quite suddenly and lowered his head.

"Well if you ain't the sweetest little innocent God ever sent to sea! Me an' you 's gonna get along swell together, I can see that. It wasn't until you got the salvage job in Tutuilla that I figgered this thing out an' pulled strings to come along with you to help locate the wreck. Now you got the chestnuts pulled outa the fire, why hand it over to someone else? Eh? I'm lettin' you in on it. The sinkin' o' the *Maccaw*, that was a different deal."

HE lifted back his shaggy head again and roared his mirth.

"Listen," he snarled so that his voice resounded, deep throated and hollow, from the groaning timbers of the schooner's cabin. "Chadwick, why in hell do you think the Mex' owners of that tub the *Maccaw* sent for Bull Vartree to take command of the rotten hooker? She was down by the head with the insurance they had loaded on her! Me an' Dutch Scrawn drove her nose on that reef!"

"An' we're gettin' ours in Mazatlan as soon as the underwriters come across wi' the claims. When I do a

job, Chadwick, I do it right! Get that through your head right away!" He hitched at his belted paunch. "That's all there is about it. All right. Dutch an' me could just as well slit your throat an' heave that mate o' yours over the side. Couldn't we?"

"But we're square shooters, Chadwick, an' you're in on the deal—if you behave yourself. Otherwise—" He let the alternative hang in the air. "Hey? what do you say?"

Brett grinned, a queer far off grin, and nodded.

"I guess we understand each other now, Vartree. I wanted to get the whole lay before—"

"Don't blame you, kid, don't blame you. Let's get movin' now!" he rasped. "We ain't got all night. Come on!"

He spun on his heel and started for the companion. Chadwick tensed, speculating the advisability of a swift attack. But he knew that on the main deck Dutch Scrawn stood with a cocked Winchester, and beside him seven Tuamotuans with the blood lust and the craze for gold whipped to a frenzy in their aboriginal souls by the lashings of Vartree's tongue.

And he knew also for a certainty that at the first sound of a scuffle Cal Norton would go down with a lead ball through his head, or be hacked to pieces by the natives even if he did manage to ward off the attack temporarily with his pistol. The odds were too great. There was no other way out. Grim-lipped, he followed Vartree's waddling form up the companion to the poop deck.

III

IN THE clear lucid dusk the ship and the men on her seemed never to have stirred. But for the gentle whine of the wind and the

snore and gurgle of the phosphorescent water the *Flash* might have been a painted ship on a painted ultramarine sea. Tu Atu still clutched two spokes of the wheel with his brown hands, his white eyeballs rolling in uncomprehending terror.

Cal Norton still stood stonily at the break of the poop, his stare glued on Dutch Scrawn below him and the snarling pack of blacks at his heels.

Vartree stopped at the topmost rung of the poop ladder, his fleshy face twisted in triumph.

"It's all right, Dutch," he shouted. "Chadwick's listenin' to reason. Get that pack o' damned niggers to the sheets. We're comin' about for Fatuhiva! Lively now! Stand by the—"

He never finished that order.

"Cal! Drop for the deck! Quick!" Brett bellowed in sudden fury. "You yellow sea wolves—!"

AT the same moment he launched himself forward. Vartree, taken completely by surprise, whirled half-way around on his heel. Cal Norton, swift to realize what was happening, fell like a shot prone on his belly. On the main deck Dutch Scrawn, startled and taken unawares, snapped his rifle up, but the only clear target he had was Vartree's back.

Norton fired twice in rapid succession, more for effect than with any attempt at accuracy. Scrawn scrambled for cover; the blacks milled in sudden terror.

Meantime, Chadwick had lashed out with a short vicious right that had all his power and weight behind it. His fist caught the erstwhile master of the *Maccaw* flush on the side of the jaw. He staggered backward, waving his arms wildly as he fought vainly for balance.

Brett had timed his attack perfectly, and instead of meeting the poop rail, Vartree went flying backward down the ladder to the

main deck like a hurled sack of meal.

Dutch Scrawn sprang clear of the shelter of the poop overhang. The Winchester in his hand spat a fang of flame followed by a dull thud as the ball bedded itself in the schooner's timber. The seven blacks hesitated, all shrieking at once, lashing themselves up for a rush of the poop.

Had there been any courageous leadership at that moment from either Vartree or his pock-marked mate, overwhelming numbers would have left the outcome of the uneven struggle without question. But both renegade white men were too engrossed in their own scramble for shelter.

While Brett raced aft for his own pistol, Cal Norton's flaming weapon routed the native crew completely. That first exchange of shots spread panic through the Tuamotuans, and they started racing in a body for the forecastle.

FROM the shelter of the hatch combing where he lay supine, Dutch Scrawn pumped his rifle wildly to cover the ignominious retreat of Vartree who went scrambling forward on all fours to join his mate. Here the unsavory pair held a hurried consultation, then went dodging and leaping after their disappearing blacks.

In the temporary lull that followed, Brett Chadwick and Cal Norton lay prone on the poop deck behind the doubtful shelter of the weather board.

The leaning flares of the schooner's canvas and the uneasy swaying of the booms obscured their vision and made accurate shooting impossible. Still, as long as they both lived, they could hold the after part of the *Flash* inviolate—except against a massed and determined rush.

But the ship needed tending. Tu

Atu, the faithful *serang*, could not hold the helm indefinitely. The first change of wind might wreak havoc. They were two against nine, two against nine men crazed by the lust for a fortune in gold coin under the caulked hatches of the schooner's foredeck!

"Come out unarmed with your hands in the air, all of you!" Chadwick thundered down the shadowy length of the ship. "If you do, I promise nothing'll be said in Tutuilla about the mutiny!"

A string of obscenities and the roar of Scrawn's rifle answered Brett's warning. The ball whined harmlessly into the night: Norton's pistol came up.

"Hold your fire, Cal!" Chadwick rasped. "Wait'll you get something to shoot at. They're firing through the porthole of the fo'c'stle. Save your shells!"

"You double crossin' swine!" Vartree's mad bellow of rage echoed down the deck. "You had your chance! You hear? Now it's war! You an' this schooner ain't never gonna see Tutuilla! We'll shark-bait you, you—Let 'em have it, Dutch!"

A RATTLE of rifle fire drowned the rest of his vicious invective. Flashes of flame showed at the forecastle port. The balls thudded into the stout timbers of the schooner and sang whistling overhead. Chadwick answered with a single shot from his Colt; then looked quickly over his shoulder toward the helm.

"Steady, Tu Atu! Crouch low out of sight," he called firmly to the giant wheelsman, and then added a string of reassuring Malay.

"Ada, Tuan," Tu Atu's frightened voice replied in a guttural whisper.

Then a strange and a deathlike stillness fell upon the moving ship with her cargo of salvaged gold and human lusts, a stillness punctuated at

times by a blood curdling shriek from one of the Tuamotuans far forward in the mutinous forecabin, and the occasional snarl of Scrawn's Winchester.

Night had swept swiftly upon the south Pacific, the clear, brilliant star-studded night of the tropics, alive with the murmur of the land-breeze and the mutter of the lacy seas against the schooner's sides.

The night was so clear and serene it seemed impossible to believe that murder and barratry stalked beneath the ghostlike canvas of the moving ship. Yet the dark splotch still stretched on the weather deck where Muta, the faithful diving boy, had fallen with a lead ball from Vartree's rifle through his heart, gave mute evidence of the desperate nature of the situation Brett Chadwick and his mate faced.

"Why in hell'd you take that rat down into the cabin at all, Brett?" Cal grated between clenched teeth. "I thought for a minute you'd gone crazy with—"

SPARRING for time—and I wanted to find out the whole truth, Cal. Never does any harm to know exactly what you're up against. It gave us time to—"

"Yeah; damn little! How long do you think they'll stay for'ard? If they rush, we ain't got a chance."

"We won't go alone!"

"Not while I can still pump one more slug at 'em, we won't!"

"All right then. They won't rush till they get them Tuamotuans whipped up to a pitch of frenzy. Vartree and Scrawn won't take chances. Hear 'em screechin'? Know what it means?"

"Means? Damn 'em—!"

"It means Vartree's broached a jug of Tahiti rum. He knows what he's doing! He'll get them blacks worked up to mad drunken fury. Then he'll

follow their rush. And you can bet all you got that him and Dutch Scrawn will be behind the blacks, not leading 'em!—Cal, we can't let it get that far!"

"No? What'll we do? Call 'em all to prayer meetin'?" Norton asked bitterly as he rammed new shells into the empty chambers of his Colt. "We're in for it. All hell's gonna pop loose in about half an hour."

Brett was silent for a moment. Then suddenly he clutched Norton's wrist, his eyes burning with a grim light.

"I got it! Cal, I got it! It's our only chance. Them blacks, they're just following Vartree an' Scrawn blind. They don't know what they're up against. He's goaded 'em on with all sorts of wild promises about gold. All they can think about is that pile of salvaged gold Eagles and English sovereigns in that forehold. An' Vartree'll keep reminding them! Drunk, they'll be worse than sober, and that's what he's planning—"

"You didn't think they were playing ping-pong, did you?" Norton cut in drily. "What in hell did you think they wanted if it wasn't the gold?"

"Aye; that's it, Cal! That's it!—And the longboat's still hanging in the davits amidships there!"

HE scrambled abruptly to his hands and knees and started crawling carefully aft toward the lee of the cabin house.

"Brett, are you mad? What—?"

"The blacks want gold, don't they? They'd as soon cut Vartree's throat as ours. They don't give a damn for him! It's the gold they're after. Let's give it to 'em!"

"You're mad as a hatter!"

But Brett Chadwick paid no heed. Gaining the scuttle, he cut the fire-axe from its lashings and dragged it back once more to where Norton lay.

"Listen, Cal!" he bit off shortly. "Crazy or not, it's our only chance. I'm going for'ard to that hatch and smash it in. The whole gang of 'em are in the port fo'c'stle. I'll crawl along the starboard bulwarks. The booms and the shadows of the canvas'll cover me and give me a fighting chance. Keep blazing away at 'em, Cal. Keep 'em busy till I make it or—"

"Or go down with a slug through your brain from that whelp's Winchester!"

"I'd as soon go that way as lay here waiting to have my throat slit by a rum and gold drunk savage! Do as I say! It's our only chance!"

He waited for no further discussion. With his Colt stuck in his belt and the fire-axe clutched in his right hand, he maneuvered cautiously toward the starboard poop ladder. Here he called tensely over his shoulder.

"Now! Let 'em have it!"

Norton blazed away rapidly, shifting his position after each shot to confuse the answering fire that licked livid crimson tongues into the night. At the first fusillade, Chadwick dropped swiftly to the main deck and started crawling forward in the shelter of the deepest shadows.

HE knew for a certainty what Vartree's plan of action must be. With his plans completely disclosed, for the safety of his own skin he had no other choice now than murder of the two owners of the *Flash*. Secure in the fortress of the forecandle the mutineers could withstand indefinitely any attack from the afterguard.

They were nine against two. And at the proper time they would sally out behind the drink crazed blacks, rush the poop, and take charge of the schooner. Chadwick realized that the fight must be carried to them—before it was too late.

Heedless of the periodic snarl of the Winchester, and Norton's pistol barking angry reply from the poop, he gained the after combing of the forehatch without discovery. Under the hold's covering of tarpaulin and stout wood lay the bullion and gold coin salvaged from the wreck of the *Maccaw*.

Here Brett hesitated for an instant in the shadow of the foresail. The backdraught spilled noisily; the sound of the sea and the wind was in his ears. The schooner snored steadily through the starlit clarity of the tropic night, her booms shuddering slightly, sheets of spray spitting noisily to the leaning deck.

Suddenly he leaped upright on the hatch. His axe flashed in a swift arc over his head and came down with all his force in a splintering blow. The foremast and the wavering shadows of the sails alone protected him from the murderous aim of Dutch Scrawn's rifle.

HE worked with rapid deadly de liberation. At the sound of his first crashing blow, a loud roar of uncomprehending rage came from the forecandle. The door was hurled violently aside, silhouetting a black figure with half raised rifle.

Instantly, from the poop, Norton's pistol blazed, and the shape leaped quickly to shelter again.

Meanwhile Chadwick brought his axe down again and again. Dropping to his knees, he slashed madly with his knife at the tarpaulin, prying loose the covers beneath until a great gaping hole showed in the hatch, jagged and splintered.

Only then did he spring aside and race the length of the deck, the whistle of lead singing over his head. He gained the poop and dropped again at Norton's side. Cal was savagely ramming shells into the chambers of his smoking Colt.

"If that ain't the craziest damned thing ever I saw a man do, Brett!" he growled. "Hurt—?"

"Not a scratch. Hold your fire," Chadwick panted. Then, lifting his voice: "There you are, Vartree!" he roared down the deck. "The hatch's open! I'm making it easier for you. You want the gold, don't you? There it is! Come get it!"

"We'll take it whenever we damned well please, you blasted idiot! When the both o' you're feedin' the sharks! What good's that gonna—?"

Bull Vartree's hoarse answering shriek was cut short by a pandemonium of howls from the half-drunk blacks.

"It'll work, Cal," Brett Chadwick grated. "It'll work!"

Norton shot him a swift look, as if he thought his friend had indeed gone stark staring mad. Chadwick waited for a lull in the shouting from forward, then raised his voice again, bellowing this time in that strange mixture of Tuamotuan and pidgin English the South Sea Islanders understood.

"Listen, you men!"—He called the diving boys by name.—"Kilma, Patuti, Nadua! You want the white man's gold? *Na?* It is there for you! Come and take! Whatever your hands put in your *sarongs* is yours—and the boat in the davits is yours. Your pay for the work! We will not use the fire stick against you. The white man's word! Come and take your gold! Speak now! Which master is better to serve?"

A sudden silence followed Chadwick's amazing exhortation. For the fraction of a moment neither the blacks, nor Vartree and Dutch Scrawn, nor even Norton, Brett's own mate, understood the full meaning of Chadwick's offer. Then Cal's face split in a grin.

A low murmur of surprise and

astonishment came across the schooner's deck from the forecandle as the words sank home in the minds of the blacks. It rose swiftly to guttural cries of half drunken glee, mingling with the harsh voices of Vartree and Scrawn in an effort to stem the turning tide.

It was the gold alone the natives wanted. Their simple souls, lashed to greed by the promises of Vartree's glib tongue, had a single-mindedness of purpose upon which Brett had staked his whole mad play. Even a handful of gold coin meant wealth untold to them, wealth beyond their wildest dreams; and the sea in an open boat held no terror whatever for them; it was their natural way of life!

THEY felt no allegiance to either Vartree or his pock-faced mate, Dutch Scrawn. It was the gold alone they were after! And it was offered to them now, freely and with impunity! The erstwhile master of the *Maccaw* had indeed done his work well upon them in rousing their hopes and their lusts to mutinous frenzy. The youthful master of the *Flash* knew this—and he knew also that human greed was a double-edged sword!

What little coin the black crew of the schooner could make off with in their frenzied haste was a small price indeed to pay for the safe delivery of the remainder of the precious cargo!

A shrill shriek stabbed the night with startling violence. The door of the forecandle was hurled aside. A half naked black shape leaped out on to the deck and raced for that gaping black hole in the forehatch. Two others followed.

Vartree's voice snarled orders that went unheeded. Dutch Scrawn leaped to block the exit. He was thrust ruthlessly aside by the horde

pouring out of the forecastle with knives aglitter. The leading savage leaped into the hold, giving vent to little guttural cries of ecstasy as he passed up a few handfuls of the gold to those above.

Defeat stared the white leaders of the mutiny in the face. If the blacks were allowed to leave the schooner, the fight became even. It became Vartree and Dutch against Cal and Brett, and they had little stomach for that sort of an open fight. Scrawn sprang to the deck.

"Back, you black devils!" he roared, brandishing his rifle. "The first damned one o' you makes for the boat I'll kill!"

BEHIND him Vartree, throwing caution to the winds in their dire emergency, also leaped into the open. On the poop Cal sprang to his feet. Chadwick clutched at his arm. "Not yet, Cal!" he barked. "Stand by. Steady! Give 'em a chance at that longboat. I'm standing on my word!"

The blacks rushed in a body for the boat davits, knives stuck in sarongs, each one cramming gold coin in the folds of his loin cloth as he ran. The first three sprang into the boat, shrieking pleas for haste to those who followed.

Dutch Scrawn's rifle snapped to his shoulder. On the poop Chadwick levelled his pistol.

Two reports sounded like a single clap of thunder. One of the blacks pitched head foremost from the boat into the water, a Winchester ball through his heart. Scrawn staggered backward. Norton and Chadwick sprang for the main deck.

Meantime the infuriated blacks who still remained on the deck wheeled on the *Maccaw's* mate. Brett's ruse had worked perfectly. The sword of mutiny was doubled-edged! The renegade whites were

caught between two perils in a trap of their own making! The weird light glinted on the upraised steel of a curved chopping knife.

Scrawn grappled with the nearest savage. The blade came down, a blurred flash. Dutch let out a low gurgling sound, crashed against the bulwark, and then, still clutching desperately at his attacker's throat, they toppled together over the side. Only a hoarse cry sounded, and a loud splash.

The remainder of the blacks leaped clear of Vartree, intent only on escape with their spoils. The longboat was already in the water, the falls dangling over the schooner's side. They leaped for the ropes, disappearing swiftly below the level of the *Flash's* bulwarks.

VARTREE, blind rage suffusing his bloated face, wheeled like a cornered rat to meet the rush of the schooner's master and mate. His pistol spat fire. Norton staggered and clutched at his shoulder. The hammer of Chadwick's Colt clicked on an empty chamber.

Flinging it from him, he hurled himself bodily forward, and the two bodies crashed together with a thudding impact before Vartree could work his weapon again.

Brett's hand closed instantly on that gun wrist, and even before they fell to the deck, the weapon flew from Vartree's hand. Chadwick landed on top. Beneath him Vartree's massive bulk squirmed swiftly.

Brett sprang to his feet, the other following, head lowered in a blind charge. Chadwick lashed out with his left fist to Vartree's paunch. He grunted, doubling up with pain. And as he did Brett's crossed right smashed full on the point of the jaw with all his weight behind the blow.

The master of the *Maccaw* sagged, his knees doubling up under him.

With a low moan he collapsed to the deck. Brett wheeled, panting heavily. Norton stood leaning against the bulwark, his shirt stained a deep crimson at the left shoulder.

"Not bad," he approved, a quiet grin on his stout red face, "not bad, that, Brett, for a knockout smash. I didn't think you'd want me to be interfering in a private fight."

"You, Cal, you're—"

"Nothin'. Got me in the shoulder. I'm all right. The damned blacks made off, Brett," he growled, waving his good arm across the starlit sea. "All except the three they left dead on the deck here."

Chadwick nodded grimly, paying no heed to the dark smudge of the longboat being pulled frantically away from the schooner's side. "That's cheap salvage, Cal. They couldn't have made off with more than a few hundred. Give me a hand with this rat before he comes to. Heave him into the fo'c'stle and shore up those doors. He'll keep in there till we bring the *Flash* into Tutuilla."

He drew himself erect suddenly and pointed aft to the poop across the bloody deck of the schooner upon which three Tuamotuans lay stretched in death. "Damned if Tu Atu hasn't held the helm through it all, Cal!" Brett laughed. "Scared to death—but I'll bet he hasn't spilled an ounce o' wind outa the mains'l through the whole bloody business!"

IV

IT WAS toward evening of a blistering tropical day that the *Flash* cleared the reef and stood in for the fairway of Tutuilla with signal flags at her peak announcing to the harbor authorities that there was mutiny aboard the schooner. Cal Norton stood behind the spokes of the big wheel, his left

arm in a soiled white sling. Tu Atu and Chadwick hauled the main sheet taut. It had been no joke for three men alone to handle the ship, and the two white men showed the strain clearly in their grizzled faces and haggard eyes.

The schooner ghosted slowly into the flat sparkling water of the roadstead. A launch came snorting and puffing out to meet her, grappled the chains, and half a dozen uniformed native police, headed by the harbor master, swarmed over her side.

CAPTAIN MARLOWE, a thin sunbaked man, with a drawn revolver in his hand, stopped short at sight of the scarred, red-stained bulwarks, the jagged wound in the forehatch, and the crimson blotches along the port deck. "Good God, man!" he thundered. "What've you been up to?"

"A picnic," Brett returned grimly. "We've no crew left. Don't stand there gaping, Marlowe! Send your men along to let go my anchors and bear a hand furling sail!"

"The salvage—?"

"The gold's safe!" Brett snapped, "Except what I had to let go for—"

"Where are the mutineers?"

"He's shored up in the fo'c'stle—the only one that's left. Interesting devil. Get my ship at anchor, Captain Marlowe, and then come down into the cabin. And I'll want a guard over that forehatch till the salvors start unloading!"

He turned and clambered up the poop ladder. "All right, Cal," he called to Norton at the wheel. "Marlowe an' his men'll take over. Go for'ard an' bring that swine down into the cabin."

He disappeared down the scuttle. Barked orders sounded over his head, the noise of the gaffs straining down the masts, the plop of rope coils falling to the deck, and the rattle of cables as the anchors were

let go. Brett stood at the sideboard when Captain Marlowe came down. Behind him swayed Bull Vartree, shaggy headed, unkempt and dirty, his little shoe-button eyes afire as Cal Norton prodded him into the cabin. Chadwick grinned.

Vartree burst into violent speech.

AN OUTRAGE," he grated hoarsely. "A damned outrage!"

Marlowe stared at him.

"Good God, Chadwick," he exploded. "That's Captain Vartree of the *Maccaw*! He can't—"

"I want that man arrested!" Vartree snarled. "By God! the filthy dog had a damned scheme hatched up to drive the *Flash* aground after landing the gold coin from the *Maccaw* in a deserted cove on Fatuhiva. I tell you it's lucky I came along on the salvage job!"

"Dutch Scrawn an' me held 'em off an' drove the blacks from the ship at the point of a rifle. It was our only chance to break up his rotten game! Scrawn got murdered in the fight. Now he's hatched up his cock-and-bull story of mutiny. I've been kept a prisoner, I tell you!" His bloated face, livid with a rush of blood, weaved from side to side, his hairy fists clenched at his sides as he made his last play for vindication and freedom.

"They're tryin' to frame me!" he thundered. "I'm a shipmaster myself! My word's better than the say-so of a beachcombin' c o p r a trader! I know his tricks!"

Captain Marlowe looked from one to the other in outright astonishment. Brett Chadwick had said no word, remaining silent until Vartree's invective was done. Then he shook his head slowly.

"Won't do, Vartree," he grated. "It's a good try, but it won't do. Your game's up. I'll say nothing right now about the mutiny you led

on my ship." Ignoring Vartree, he turned on the harbor master.

"Captain Marlowe," he went on in a quiet deliberate voice, "you'll have to hold Captain Vartree for murder—and barratry. He killed fourteen lives in the wreck of the *Maccaw*. And she was wrecked because he deliberately ran his command on the reef south of Fatuhiva! The rest of his story's all true—except that it was the other way round."

"What did I tell you? What did I tell you?" Vartree thundered. "Framin' me! Barratry, hey? Tryin' your best to hang me so you can clear yourself! Not on your life!" He thumped his chest with his clenched fists till his whole paunch shook. "Me run the *Maccaw* aground? That's libel—I!"

"Aye," Chadwick interrupted calmly. "It's libel—unless I can prove it."

"That's serious charges to be making, Chadwick," Captain Marlowe cut in softly, nursing his leathery cheek with a thin hand. "It all sounds pretty far fetched to me. I wouldn't make damnable charges like that against a shipmaster unless I had proof and witnesses!"

HE shook his head deliberately. Brett Chadwick smiled a strange quiet smile and turned to face the sideboard. Fumbling there with his back to the puzzled watchers, he said over his shoulder—

"You're dead right there, Captain Marlowe. That's just what I told Norton a few days ago. It's always best to know exactly what you're up against. So I got Vartree to explain it all to me right here in this cabin. Maybe this'll remind him."

He turned again and stepped aside, still smiling. A series of faint scratches sounded, then from the horn of his ancient gramophone

there came a muffled rumbling voice, hoarse and metallic, the unmistakable voice of Bull Vartree himself!

"Chadwick,"—the machine groaned and wheezed—"why in hell do you think the Mex owners of that tub the *Maccaw* sent for Bull Vartree to take command of that rotten hooker in Mazatlan? She was down by the head with the insurance they had loaded on her. Me an' Dutch Scrawn *drove* her nose on that reef! An' we're gettin' ours in Mazatlan as soon—"

AS the first grating sound of the machine filled the gently lurching little cabin, Vartree's little shoe-button eyes opened wide in absolute astonishment.

That night when he had bared his plans to the master of the *Flash* in what he thought absolute security—!

He remembered now! Chadwick had been standing at the sideboard, fumbling with the discs of the gramophone!

A hoarse inarticulate cry from deep in his throat drowned the continued squawk of the talking machine. His face blanched, and suddenly he spun on his heel with the vague idea of a dash for liberty.

But before Vartree had reached the first step of the companionway leading for the deck, Brett, still grinning broadly, snapped open the door of the sideboard, and when his hand came to view again the blue barrel of his pistol caught all the glinting points of light in the cabin.

"Steady!" he called sharply. "The game's up, Vartree! Captain Marlowe," he went on to the harbor master as he calmly shut off the gramophone with his free hand, "get that rat out of here—quick! Rotting copra's damned clean smelling compared to the way this cabin stinks now. Get him out! I'll bring my—

witness—to an Admiralty court any time and any place!"

THE harbor master came swiftly to life, shouting orders to his men and bustling the erstwhile master of the *Maccaw* for the deck. Chadwick and Norton followed silently behind.

Several moments later they stood at the bulwark as the launch shot away from the schooner's side headed for the beach. Westward the sun set in a bursting bombshell of color and light, etching the fronds of the palm-studded shore sharply against the heavens. Norton mopped at his face. "Damn hot, Brett," he grumbled. "Sunset shower'll be welcome."

"Aye, Cal."

"And from now on the *Flash* stays in the copra an' pearl shell trade. You hear me, you hell-bending idiot?" Norton grinned. "But maybe you're right Brett. Maybe there is a connection between Malay and the language of the Tuamotuans, hey?"

Brett smiled faintly at the allusion and turned away from the land. Tu Atu, the *serang*, stood on the forehatch, a savage figure staring ruefully down at the gaping splintered hole at his feet.

And as Chadwick watched, he shrugged his shoulders simply and sighed a deep sigh. As long as he had his daily measure of rice and fish, a place to sleep and a ship to sail, he had little need for gold. Wealth ill-gotten, says an ancient proverb of the *Orang Laut*,—the Malay Men of the Sea—is the spawn of despair and death.

The sunset shower swept swiftly in from the open sea. And as Tu Atu marched with his dignified barefooted roll for the shelter of the forecastle overhang, he took to singing a simple song—

"Na, na, ada
Nada nada tu—"

Famous SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

"THE IDOL OF ITALY—"



**GIUSEPPE
GARIBALDI**

—WHOSE CAREER FORMS
ONE OF THE MOST DRAMATIC

TALES IN HISTORY. AT 15 HE WAS A SEASONED SAILOR, AND AT 20 WHEN HE BEGAN DREAMING OF A REPUBLIC, GARIBALDI TURNED MOBS INTO REGIMENTS AND STARTED THE MAKING OF A NEW ITALY. AT SEA, IN THE CITY AND IN THE WILDERNESS HIS LIFE WAS ONE LONG CHAPTER OF THRILLING FIGHTING AND MIRACULOUS ESCAPES.



ONCE, WHEN A FUGITIVE, HIS PLACE OF HIDING WAS FOUND BY SOLDIERS WHO OPENED FIRE UPON THE HOUSE. GARIBALDI'S AMMUNITION WAS EXHAUSTED SO SWINGING OPEN THE DOOR HE RUSHED OUT, SWORD IN HAND. THE ENEMY SOLDIERS, HAVING HEARD AND BELIEVING AS MANY ITALIANS DID — THAT "NO BULLET, SWORD OR BALL" COULD KILL THIS GREAT FIGHTER, ALTHOUGH ARMED AS THEY WERE, FLED IN EVERY DIRECTION.

AFTER 6 YEARS OF HELPING THE BRAZILIANS FIGHT FOR FREEDOM, HE RETURNED TO ITALY AND DROVE THE BLOODY TYRANT KING FRANCIS OUT OF NAPLES AND WAS OFFERED THE THRONE BUT REFUSED. HE TURNED HIS ARMY OVER TO VICTOR EMANUEL OF THE NORTH — A FEAT THAT INSURED A UNITED ITALY, THE CHIEF AIM IN GARIBALDI'S LIFE.

DARING HERO OF WAR WITH SPAIN WHO "BOTTLED UP" CERVERA'S FLEET IN SANTIAGO HARBOR!

UNDER PERSISTENT FIRE FROM THE ENEMY, LIEUT. HOBSON, IN A DARING SCHEME TO "BOTTLE-UP" THE SPANISH FLEET, RAN THE SHIP MERRIMAC INTO, AND SANK IT IN, THE SANTIAGO HARBOR'S NARROW CHANNEL, THEN JUMPED INTO THE WATER TO SAVE HIMSELF AS BEST HE COULD.

FOR THIS ONE OF THE BRAVEST DEEDS OF THE WAR, HOBSON MADE HIMSELF A NATIONAL HERO AND WAS GIVEN THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR AT THE WHITE HOUSE.



**RICHMOND P.
HOBSON**

This is the Original Illustrated Adventure

JOHN PAUL JONES

—FOUNDER OF THE AMERICAN NAVY!

THE FIRST U.S. NATIONAL NAVAL HERO WHO SO HEROICALLY CHAMPIONED HUMAN LIBERTY, FACING ANY ODDS AND FEARING NO FOE, IN 1778 RAIDED THE ENGLISH COAST WITH THE "RANGER" FIRST MAN-O-WAR TO FLY THE STARS AND STRIPES.



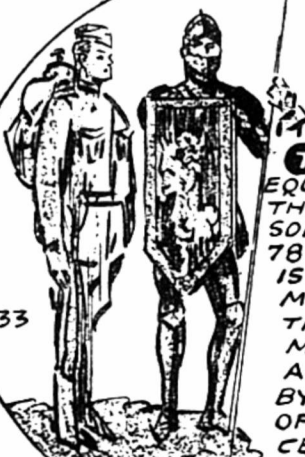
JONES, HIS SHIP LASHED ALONGSIDE THE "SERAPIS," A BRITISH SUPERIOR MAN-O-WAR, AFTER BATTLING FOR HOURS AGAINST HEAVY ODDS, WAS ASKED TO SURRENDER. SWINGING HIS SWORD IN A RENEWED ATTACK HE YELLED, "I HAVE ONLY BEGUN TO FIGHT!"

DURING THE REVOLUTION THIS GREAT SEA FIGHTER WHO CARRIED THE STARS AND STRIPES SO DEFIANTLY, FOUGHT 23 VICTORIOUS BATTLES AND CAPTURED 12 BRITISH SHIPS OF SUPERIOR FORCE.

15TH CENTURY

THE PRESENT EQUIPMENT OF THE AMERICAN SOLDIER WEIGHS 78 POUNDS, WHICH IS 10 POUNDS MORE THAN THE HEAVY METAL BODY ARMOR WORN BY KNIGHTS OF THE 15TH CENTURY.

1933



LUCKY HEDLEY FALLS OUT OF HIS PLANE — THEN FALLS IN AGAIN!

AT AN ALTITUDE OF 12,000 FEET, JAN, 6TH, 1918, CAPTAIN J.H. HEDLEY OF CHICAGO WAS THROWN OUT OF A PLANE — FELL SEVERAL HUNDRED FEET AND LANDED SAFELY ON THE TAIL OF THE SAME MACHINE!

-----LIGHT LINE SHOWS MAN'S PATH
———HEAVY LINE SHOWS PLANE'S PATH.



THE MAMBA SNAKE OF SOUTH AMERICA IS THE MOST POISONOUS IN THE WORLD AND CAN KEEP UP WITH A FAST-PACED HORSE.

Feature—the First to Appear in Any Magazine

Kaffir Diamonds

*Weird Superstition, Ruthless Treachery and a Desperate
Struggle for Illicit Wealth Under
South African Skies*

A Complete Novelette

By FERDINAND BERTHOUD

Author of "Black Mamba," "Tarantulas," etc.

A RAW-BONED Kaffir native crept falteringly from the outer burning brilliance of South African sunlight into the gloom of the wattle-and-daub trading store. Hesitantly, he stepped up to the rough counter built of empty beer cases. With his one good eye he fixed the storekeeper, Andrew Burnham.

"Funa gutenga, M'Lungu. I want to buy," he opened.

The tall young man behind the counter peered keenly at the native as he passed a hand through his sandy, rumpled hair.

"Want to buy, eh?" he asked as his blue eyes studied the native. "What do you want? Bully beef? Sugar?"

The native shook his head slowly, rubbed a leathery paunch. His one intent little eye never shifted from those of the tall white man across the counter from him. He apparently hadn't seen the third figure in the store, hardly more than a shadow among shadows at the far corner of the narrow room.

The man who lounged there might have been asleep but for a thin stream of smoke which trickled upward from his mouth and mushroomed out against the low ceiling

in the motionless air of the store. And the narrow-set eyes behind the trickle of smoke were almost shut, but not quite.

"Fuba wissik, M'Lungu. I want whiskey," the native said to the store man.

INSTANTLY sudden anger hardened in Burnham's eyes, made them glint as they pierced the gloom of the place.

"Whiskey, you dog! You get t' blazes out of here! I should get six months for selling a native liquor."

"Ikona six month," the other grinned slyly. "No six month. Givvit wissik, M'Lungu. I givvit big money."

The storekeeper's fists clenched. "Get t' devil outa here! You can't get whiskey off me, not for all the money in Africa! Hamba! Voetsack! Get out!"

"Big money," persisted the native, holding his ground.

Burnham snatched up a sjambok, a hippopotamus-hide lash, moved deliberately around the counter, threateningly raised the whip. The Kaffir cringed, but doggedly reached to a dried lizard-skin sack hanging from his neck, jerked it away, turned it



"Put them stones down," continued the snarling voice.

upside down, and shook its contents onto the counter.

"Nangu male. There's money," he nervously advised.

As if dumbfounded, for an instant Burnham stared, picked up the three uncut diamonds before him, threw them down again. As if they were poison, he shoved them away with the stock of his sjambok.

"Pick up those stones, Madoda!" he thundered. "Quick—throw 'em away—anywhere! You know it's against the law for any native even to have diamonds in his possession. And I'm not buying any stolen diamonds from you or anybody else. You and your white *baas* there in the corner can't put up any job on me. Get t' hell out!"

At Burnham's words the Kaffir shot an astonished glance toward the silent shadow in the corner. He wheeled as if to dart for the door, as the third man suddenly straightened up.

"Stop!" this man yelled, as he sprang swiftly forward.

THE Kaffir snatched up the diamonds and jumped to one side with a quick, guilty flash of his one dark eye.

"Put them stones down," continued the snarling voice of the third man. A gun in his hand made a menacing gesture to back his command. Savagely he turned from the native to Burnham. "Tryin' to pretend you never buy stones, Burnham, just because I was sittin' here watchin'?"

"Nothing of the sort, Saunders," said Burnham hotly. "Your 'boy' here and you are putting on a little act—up to your regular rotten tricks.—But you can't frame me, and you know it."

"You innocent Yanks always are just persecuted angels," Saunders sneered. "You're just another of the adventurin' mob—come up here to play with government diamonds—to play with fire. You've been buyin' stones from the 'boys' right along, and you know it!"

The tall American with sandy hair

calmed, shrugged his broad shoulders. Even in that lazy shrug was a suggestion of power.

"Very well," he said. "Have it your own way. You seem to know more about such matters than I do. But you can't railroad me, Saunders, not on evidence as slim as this. You smart I. D. B. men—detectives, you have the nerve to call yourselves—manage to create more diamond thieves by your rotten framing practices than there are diamonds. From what I've heard, you're always mighty anxious for an excuse to take a prisoner two-hundred-and-fifty miles down to court at Luderitzbucht. Don't pick on me. I won't be the goat, get me?"

"Pick on you?" jerked Saunders through thin, wet lips which formed words nervously. "What do you mean? I'm not framing anybody. And this one-eyed rat don't belong to me. I'll have to send him up for this. You're safe this time, but I got him for possession anyway."

SAUNDERS' beady eyes had shifted quickly to the cringing native. With a wet-lipped sneer, he crammed the point of his pistol into the trembling Kaffir's ribs.

"Hand them stones over!" he commanded. "Give 'em to me. I'm goin' to turn 'em in. Hold your hands out together 'til I get the bracelets on you. Cuchima! Hurry up!"

The Kaffir backed against the wall. "Ikona, *baas*, you know I no steal."

"You're a liar," Saunders cut in. "Give 'em to me!"

But as Saunders lunged at him, the native ducked. Like a loosed steel spring, he dodged beneath Saunders' hand and gained the door. For a moment he crouched there, poised.

"M'satinyoka! Son of a snake!"

The one-eyed native spat shrill curses back at Saunders, who whipped

up his gun. But Burnham's hand was quicker. He struck the detective's gun hand, knocking it upward, as its detonation shook the mud walls of the little store. The shot went wild, and in another second the Kaffir was gone, as if the desert had swallowed him.

Saunders lunged a couple of paces after him, then brought up short and turned back to Burnham cursing. To pursue further, he knew, was useless.

Just at the moment the native had ducked under Saunders' arm, Burnham had felt the thud of several tiny missiles on his chest. Hard little objects had pattered to the floor at his feet while the I. D. B. man was lunging away toward the door. But Saunders hadn't noticed the Kaffir's deft riddance of the incriminating stones.

"Put your gun down, Saunders," Burnham instructed quietly. "So he wasn't your stool pigeon, eh? I know it's against the law for a native to possess uncut diamonds, but you're not going to grab those stones off him and give him five years as well. You ought to thank me you didn't murder the poor devil."

ASHEN with rage the Illicit Diamond Buying detective veered to the counter, jerked his gun half up on Burnham, then lowered it hesitantly.

"You're a fool," he hissed. "I ought to have finished that Kaffir. You heard him curse me. Those one-eyed Kaffirs are hoodoos, an' you know it. That one-eyed desert rat put the curse on me!"

Burnham grinned. "Don't be an idiot," he said, shortly. "You're as superstitious as an old woman."

Just then one of the thrown diamonds, which had somehow lodged in a wrinkle of Burnham's shirt, plopped down to join its mates on the floor.

Saunders stared down upon them

in utter amazement, as if they had got there by magic. Then he stiffened, and his little eyes hardened with a gleam of satisfaction.

"You dirty crook!" he gritted. "So you did get 'em! You should have put your foot on those stones quicker. I got you dead to rights now!"

Saunders started again to raise his gun. Quick as the snap of a sjambok, Burnham grabbed it, broke it, dumped its shells to the floor. Then he tossed it through the door out into the desert. He indicated the doorway with a lean forefinger.

"I didn't drop 'em, Saunders," he said calmly. "Those are the same three stones the Kaffir had. He flung 'em away to get rid of them as he left. I'm going to report 'em and turn 'em in to Harmon at the mining compound office. Move on, now, Saunders. Keep moving. Out!"

Saunders hesitated. His eyes dropped before the curiously penetrating stare that riddled him from Burnham's blue ones.

"Better get out, Saunders—outside. You tried to cut the wrong diamond when you tried to cut me."

Saunders spat sullenly. "Damned cocky, ain't you? Wait, Burnham, you'll see if I can cut you or not."

II

IT WAS some weeks later that another man stood before the counter of that same little desert store. He was well-dressed, slimly built, and aristocratic looking. Burnham, behind the counter, smilingly sized him up and greeted him. In that up-country native trading store any man so spick-and-span, he knew, was out of place. The sudden puzzle of such a man in such a place engaged Burnham's curiosity.

"Doing some fancy traveling, aren't you?" Burnham grinned as he filled a glass for each of them.

Amiably the visitor responded, "No—come out to settle. Didn't know what would be needed, so I waited to outfit myself on the ground."

The stranger removed his Stetson and swabbed his head with a white linen handkerchief. His whole make-up was wonderful. But his eyes? Burnham wondered about them. Why were they continually darting about, taking in everything so avidly?

The newcomer responded to Burnham's curious scrutiny. The corners of his sharp eyes wrinkled into a shrewd grin.

"You're no fool, I can see," he flattered, "so I'm not going to treat you like one. You're kind of amused at my prettiness up here in the desert, aren't you? Well, some others aren't going to be so tickled."

"No?" Burnham's eyebrows lifted slightly.

"No—By the way, my name's Tom Church."

"Mine's Andrew Burnham."

FOR a while they stood there silent. Still Church's eyes roved and darted every place in apparent contempt, over the random stock on the shelves, over the few motionless natives squatting to one side. The silence became irksome.

"Drink up," Burnham broke in at last. "Have another. You seem to have something on your mind."

Church's mouth twitched. "Thinking, that's all. I'm peaceful and solemn, like my name. I say, what tribe are these natives?"

The "I say" somehow didn't ring true to the storekeeper. The "natives" was glaringly affected. There was something about it that gave Burnham a twinge of suspicion.

"They're Matabele, Mr. Church," he said. "The Germans killed off most of the Namaquas years ago."

"So?" Church expelled a wisp of smoke, and pointed to the long, raw-

boned Kaffir nearest him. The native was glaring at him from one fiery eye. "Is that one a Matabele, too?"

Burnham looked at him quickly. For the past few weeks the same native who'd brought the three diamonds had hung around the store, sticking close to Burnham. The storekeeper had gained a mortally loyal servant when he'd impulsively saved the one-eyed one from Saunders.

"He's a mongrel of the desert. Why?"

The newcomer leaned across the counter, unnecessarily cupped his hand, and whispered. "I have reasons for finding out. It's more than possible that some of these wandering natives may happen across new diamond fields. I want to stake some."

"You're crazy," said Burnham. "If you did find a new field and pegged it, the government would take it off you and close it down, and if you take out any stones, they'll pinch you and have you piling stone on the Breakwater for five or ten years of gentle labor."

The other nodded. "I know that."

FOR a moment Burnham stared at the smaller man opposite him. The American's face was expressionless, but his mind was trying to figure out the dapper newcomer's game. "Church," he said, "you can't expect to get away with things that even we old-timers steer clear of."

"Sh-s-sh!" came from the cupped hand. "I know that, too. But I've got a smooth scheme." Church grinned slyly. "I'm going to stake land like a settler, but I'll get my diamonds—like you do. I'm not going to mine 'em!"

"You're not another damn sneaking I. D. B. man, are you, Church," asked Burnham softly. "Did someone send you to draw me out? Someone like Saunders, maybe?"

"Saunders in this district?" the other gasped with apparent fear.

As Church had been speaking, the one-eyed native worked his way unnoticed silently around in back of the counter. Church tried to cover up his involuntary exclamation at the mention of Saunders' name.

"You startled me," he laughed uncertainly. "It just happens I had a run-in with that bird once." He hesitated, put out his hand. "Well, I'll be on my way, Burnham. Glad to have met you."

Burnham started to raise his hand when something brushed his ankle. His eyes dropped to the floor behind the counter. Hidden beside his legs crouched the raw-boned Kaffir boring up at him with a glint of warning in his single eye.

Close outside came the sound of footfalls.

"Wait," said Burnham. "Sounds like another visitor."

Church turned quickly, his back to the open door.

Saunders came in through the bright opening. He wore a sneering smile which didn't anticipate a cordial welcome. His sudden halt as he noticed the back of an apparent stranger seemed pre-studied to Burnham. Smiling, then, more confidently, he came on in.

"Hello, Burnham," he greeted with a sarcastic tone. "Ain't seen you for weeks. Who's your friend?"

The visitor stiffened as if he'd been stabbed. He kept his face in the shadow from the rear part of the store. Burnham, trying to watch both men at once, spoke to Saunders.

MY FRIEND here claims he's just a tourist seeking information, if it's any of your business."

"Oh, yes?" Saunders' face fell into an oily grin. "He is? Well, visitors in these parts are few and good for the eyes."

Then Saunders struck like a cobra. One wholesale jump, and he had the stranger by the shoulders, whirled him about, and clutched him firmly just above the elbows.

"Church!" he hissed. "You! The same solemn little Church—back again—back to play with diamonds again."

"Saunders!" gasped Church, his eyes wide.

Saunders dropped his hands from the man's arms and stepped quickly behind him, frisked him professionally. Church voluntarily raised his arms and held them aloft.

"Keep 'em up there," Saunders jibed, as he patted his man's pockets. "They feel kinda natural to you up there, don't they? Just keep 'em up 'til I've been through thoroughly for stones."

Burnham watched the pair intently. As Saunders finished his frisking, Church drew his right hand down from above his head and reached it across to Burnham. "Saunders has me right," he laughed. "Luckily he hasn't got anything on me this time. Shake hands with Africa's biggest diamond thief, Burnham. See how it feels to mit a worthy crook."

UNREADY for the gesture, and a little surprised, Burnham grasped the extended hand, was conscious of unpleasantly clammy fingers. Something solid was pressed into his palm. An almost imperceptible wink flicked Church's left eyelid.

The native on the floor again nipped Burnham's ankle from the murk in back of the counter. Quickly the storekeeper's closed hand jerked back past the edge of the counter. Then that same hand went into his breeches pocket and drew forth a handkerchief. As his hand came from his pocket, two guns, almost in unison, bored into his chest.

"Keep them fingers clenched!"

snapped Saunders, and his hatred flashed out naked from his little, beady eyes. "Don't move a muscle. You were goin' to roll th' stones into that handkerchief and fool us, eh? Not in front of me, old-timer. I'm wise to all the tricks. I used what you call a stool pigeon to get you, but I got you just the same. Keep them fingers clenched!"

"Church, you get 'round an' see he does nothin' tricky. Hold onto his hand. We'll take him over to Harmon at the mine office and let 'em search him just as he is, right now while we got him dead to rights."

Burnham pressed his foot slightly against the native under the counter, indicating that he wanted him to stay quiet.

Church dodged around the front end of the counter and caught hold of the hand Burnham held out to him, making no effort to resist. Chameleon-like, the native remained unseen behind him, only a black shadow invisible in the black shadows of his surroundings.

"You think you've trapped me this time, eh Saunders?" said Burnham.

"Trap be damned!" exulted Saunders. "It was a fair catch. I happened in just in time—caught you in the very act."

III

THE door of the office inside the mining compound crashed open. One on each side, Saunders and Church shoved their prisoner through and brought up short before the manager's desk.

"Here you are, Harmon," Saunders puffed. "Just an innocent Yank storekeeper, but we got him dead to rights. And I'm bettin' it was this chap that pulled that big robbery from this reserve a few weeks ago."

The scowl on Harmon's face deepened. "Burnham? That man? The

new Yank storekeeper, eh? I kind of guessed there was some big crooked deal behind it when you handed in those three stones not long ago. What was the big idea?"

Burnham's powerful arms and shoulders twitched, as if they itched for hand-to-hand action but the other two held him fast between them. The prisoner eyed Harmon viciously.

YOU thought a devil of a lot, you did. It was all right when I turned over those three stones to you for nothing, wasn't it. Make these two idiots loose me. They haven't got anything on me. By God, I'd like to wipe up the floor with the three of you."

"Shut up!" yelled Harmon. "The more threatening you do, the worse it'll be for you."

For a moment Burnham stood silent. This situation might prove ruinous to his plans. His eyes roved quickly about to the door, to the windows, as if he might be considering the possibilities of escape. Then he looked back and riveted Harmon with hard blue eyes.

"What have these vermin got against me, Harmon. What's the charge?"

"Buyin' stolen diamonds," supplied Saunders with an evil smirk of satisfaction. "Buyin' 'em off Church."

Burnham stiffened. The strained expression left his face as he turned abruptly on Saunders. "Buying? You sure that's the charge, are you?"

"Right," declared Saunders. "Buyin' off Church, here."

"You heard him, Harmon," said Burnham. "That suits me." He laughed. "That's the charge, then. Buying stolen diamonds off Church." He laughed again. His own plans needn't suffer after all.

The confidence in that laugh had its effect on the others. Church looked uncertainly at Saunders, whose

eyes shifted from Burnham to Church, and back to Burnham's hard-lined grin again. Somehow, they all seemed to forget for the moment the close clenched hand, still held tightly by Church, which gripped a crumpled handkerchief. Saunders couldn't stand the suspense.

"What's the matter with you now, you laughing hyena? What's so funny? You won't think it's so funny heaving rocks on the Breakwater."

"No," said Burnham quietly. "There's nothing funny about the Breakwater. You'll find that out when your time comes." He turned to Harmon, who sat glaring from behind his desk with a puzzled expression showing in the wrinkles around his eyes.

MR. HARMON," he said, "if I bought diamonds from Church, it must have been a cash transaction, or he'd never have let the stones out of his hand. Even if I possess diamonds illegally, that doesn't prove buying. Where is the money I paid to Church, then? Let's have him produce the notes I must have given him."

A tense silence gripped the little mine office. Church's face paled, as his eyes sought Saunders for aid, but the mouth of Saunders sagged open wordless. Harmon hunched forward across his desk. Burnham smiled at him and waited. Harmon's eyes shifted to Church.

"What about it, Church? How much did you get? You've got to produce the money as evidence."

"Four hundred," faltered Church without making any move to touch his pocket. He only gripped Burnham's hand tighter. But instantly he invented an excuse. "I must have dropped it. Dropped it when I reached for my gun."

"You're a filthy liar," remarked

Burnham. "And a damned childish one at that."

Church held his head awkwardly to one side. He was fearful that Saunders' grip on Burnham's left might slip, and he wanted no traffic with that left—not when it was free for use.

"Where's the money I gave you?" demanded Burnham again. "Put up or shut up! You try to railroad me, then steal the money that should be turned in—is that the idea?"

Church recoiled from Burnham's glare. "I haven't got it," he wailed. "I lost it, I tell you." Desperately, he appealed to Saunders. "Saunders, let's get out the other evidence. The stones are still wrapped in the handkerchief he's holding. He tried to hide them in it and then throw it aside in case he was searched," Church explained toward Harmon.

Harmon got up and stepped directly in front of Burnham, shoved Church to one side, and gripped Burnham's wrist.

BURNHAM, open your hand!" he commanded.

"Sure," said Burnham casually. "Why not? Church is the one that's been holding it closed—not me."

His hand shot open wide. "There they are," he offered. "Take your pick!"

Limply the handkerchief fluttered to the floor. There was no sound of anything solid as it came lightly to rest at their feet.

Flabbergasted, Saunders peered down, and Church did likewise. Harmon looked on silently with a poker face, and Burnham laughed again. Saunders and Church were on hands and knees upon the dirty floor.

"Diamonds," muttered Church, as he pawed the innocent floor. "Where the hell—"

Suddenly Saunders was up again, his face livid. "Them stones, Burn-

ham, where'd you put 'em? Church passed you two thousand pounds worth of diamonds! Where'd they get to, I say? Spit it out!"

HANDS free now, Burnham's fingers were closing and opening eagerly as he backed away a little. "What diamonds, Saunders? Your mind's wandering. You rat, you and Church came into my store to frame me. You dragged me down here into this silly mess. I never saw any diamonds except the three I turned over to Harmon weeks ago. Feel in my pockets if you want to. Search me all over."

"Never saw 'em!" shrilled Saunders. The veins stood out from his red neck. "I saw 'em! Church *had* 'em. I saw him pass 'em to you. You had 'em in your hand! And that's all the evidence we need."

"Sure," admitted Burnham, sarcastically. "I had 'em just like Church had my four hundred pounds! Give me back that phantom four hundred I paid Church, and I'll give you back your phantom diamonds."

Harmon was angry by this time. His tone changed. "What about it, Saunders?" he demanded. "What sort of infernal mess is this? Your detective work this past year has been nothing but one long muddle, and headquarters has threatened to look into it." Harmon turned to Burnham.

"You're free," he said curtly. "If these so-called I. D. B. men would cut out framing people, there might be a chance of their getting the crook who stole the whole month's output from this district. That was a hellish big parcel of stones, and down at headquarters they're pretty sore about it."

"I guess that's no lie," said Burnham. Then he turned on Saunders. "You'll pay for this crooked frame-up. You tried to frame the wrong

man when you tried to frame me.—Diamond cut diamond, like I said before. And some day you'll get what you're begging for."

Saunders pulled himself together with a show of bravado. His face twisted into an evil-eyed threat. "All right, Burnham," he snarled, "only the cuttin' will be too deep for you from now on!"

A second later the door of Harmon's little office quivered violently as Burnham slammed it behind him and strode off toward his store. In his eyes showed the fire of the thoughts that were kindling back of them in his mind.

He passed from the bright heat of the African sun into the cooler shadows of his apparently deserted store, and looked about.

"Bullalla," he called quietly.

His one-eyed Kaffir appeared like a genii from behind the beer case counter. Like a proud child might have done, he extended his hand, and Burnham took from it the diamonds that he had "bought" from Church.

"You made a good catch," Bullalla," said Burnham, smiling thoughtfully. "I'm not turning *these* back to Harmon." He weighed the stones in the cup of his long, lean hand. "And there's something else you can do, you black devil."

The freakish Kaffir hopped nimbly onto the counter and squatted. "Tell me, *baas*. I do it for *baas*."

A half hour later Bullalla slipped like a black shadow from the store and set out into the trackless Namaqualand Desert.

IV

IT WAS a few days later when Saunders, returning to the mining compound with Church, stopped nervously in his tracks and turned.

"Look, there's that damned little

witch doctor again," he said viciously.

In the half light of the early African evening they could see a diminutive figure dogging their footsteps like a shadow which had come out of nowhere. A few hundred yards ahead, the dark line of the compound was silhouetted against the slightly paler sky. In every other direction extended the boundless Namaqualand Desert, silent but for its own distant murmurings.

Suddenly, the hush was broken by a piercing howl from the wizened little witch doctor, as he jumped to his feet and reached for the spot on his back where Saunders' heavy veldt shoe had struck him. Limping, eyeing Saunders and Church malevolently, he moved a couple of yards, then squatted down again. At once calm again as if nothing had happened, he threw three small, strangely marked human bones in front of him on the sand. Just as if alone, he silently studied them.

With quick steps Saunders was upon him again, spitting out a command. "Get t' hell outa here! We don't want any stray witch doctors around here upsettin' our own Kaffirs."

THE pigmy, dirty yellow, potion be-decked native jerked his shoulder to avoid another expected kick. "Iknona, M'Lungu—don't do that," he urged in his own language. "I have come to tell the white man many good things. Far away out in the desert is much that the M'Lungu wants."

"Poppycock!" This time it was Church who jeered and made a half swing with his foot. "I don't believe in any witch doctor monkey-business."

Ugly as a baboon, the witch doctor leaped out of reach, eyed the pair as if reading right through them. "The M'Lungu's covet much money. The

M'Lungus are collecting much to take away with them."

"What do you mean, you desert rat?" Saunders stopped rigid in his tracks. "What are you gettin' at?"

Church stepped up alongside his companion. "Wait a minute, Saunders. Maybe he does know something. Where does he get that 'take away' from?"

"Damned if I know, Church. Wanderin' witch doctors are liable to say anything, an' they're dangerous, too."

"They mostly have some reason. They seldom guess. But to hell with the danger of 'em. Forget it—just superstitious twaddle."

The witch doctor bent over his bones, as if in a trance. "Much to take away. In seven days the M'Lungus are going. They take another white man, too."

With sudden fearful distrust, Saunders bent close over the little native, looked at the queerly marked bones with a superstitious awe in his eyes.

"Stop drivelin', you dog!" He turned back to Church. "These fellers can read you, Church. They're hoodoos." Then back at the crouched form he spat. "What're you after? Get t' hell out!"

THE native made passes over his bones. "I come to talk with the M'Lungu. In the desert is much money. Now it goes to the white M'Lungu at store."

"To Burnham, eh?" Saunders eyes gleamed down upon the squatted black with a new interest. Then suddenly he lurched forward. "What's that you got—"

With a smothered curse Saunders pounced at a glittering object among the magic bones. But the native's hand moved more swiftly. Like a viper's tongue it made a single sweep at the sand, and in a flash he was up and away. Saunders stood there

trembling with only a handful of sand.

"Stop!" yelled Saunders, as his gun jerked up. He fired wide. "Bring that back, or I'll finish you!"

A second bullet dusted up sand near the witch doctor's feet. As suddenly as if hit, he halted, turned calmly about, showing no sign of fear. He walked slowly back toward the raging white man. At a dozen paces he stopped and deliberately threw something.

"There is what the honest white man would steal. Now I give it. I can get many," he cried.

Mystified Saunders and Church both stared down at a large uncut diamond at their feet. Saunders stooped to retrieve it, one hand still holding up his gun.

"Where in hell did you get it? Why'd you run?"

"Same place can get many. Run to show white man 'fraid to shoot witch doctor."

"Hell I am, but come here. I won't hurt you."

"That's more like it," whispered Church. "Don't be afraid of his monkey-business. Maybe we can get—"

The witch doctor approached slowly. The two whites grabbed him at once, twisted his arms behind him cruelly.

"Tell me the place, you dog. Or we'll tear you to pieces."

THE native winced, but gave no sound of pain. "In desert are many di'mon's, also many Kaffirs take them to store, and store man cheats them. You M'Lungu, can buy cheap from me. I bring them. If the M'Lungus tear me, how they get di'mon's?"

"Easy," rasped Saunders. "I'll beat you 'til you take me to them."

Over the black face of the witch

doctor spread a cunning grin. "Boys in desert know the M'Lungu is policeman. They 'fraid policemen. Ask much money. The M'Lungu buy from me cheap. No 'fraid."

"All right. Bring th' stones. I'll pay you." Saunders winked at Church.

With a flash like an eel the native was away again. As he whirled off his hand ripped the gun from Saunders' grip. Safely out of reach, he threw down the gun.

"No trust the M'Lungus. The M'Lungus give money first. Trust me bring di'mon's to hidden place."

Greed showed in the eyes of the whites. It overcame their anger at his insolence.

"How much? How many stones?"

"Two hundred poun' in two more day."

"Stinkin' heathen, what can you do with money in this lousy desert? Try to spend it, an' you're pinched. Who's the white man behind you?"

SUDDENLY in the native's hand flashed a little pile of glittering stones. "Di'mon's—no white man—di'mon's every two day like this. Tell me place to meet the M'Lungus."

Saunders' mind saw only that handful of diamonds. His mouth became wet at the corners. He edged forward greedily, but the witch doctor moved also. It would be impossible to catch him, unprofitable to shoot him.

"All right, when the moon comes up tonight—at the compound gate. We'll take you in and give you the money."

With a quick movement the native tossed the gun at Saunders' feet. "The M'Lungu 'fraid, shoot witch doctor," he squeaked derisively. In another second the little shadow was gone, mysteriously swallowed up in the dusty blue desert night.

Church looked at Saunders. "Won-

der what we'll make off that little devil," he murmured. Then he laughed. "I believe you're really afraid of him—cinch he isn't afraid of you."

Saunders looked in the direction in which the shadowy figure had disappeared. He shivered. "I ain't afraid, you fool," he muttered heavily. "I just don't like them damn queer black devils—give me the jim-jams."

"Forget that stuff," jibed Church. "If he can supply diamonds cheap, that's all I give a damn about."

V

IT WAS hours later that same night when Saunders roughly pushed the witch doctor into the kitchen at the back of his quarters. Church followed them in and stood by the door grimacing at the stench of the little black man in the close confines of the room. Saunders eyed the native and shifted his feet uneasily. The weird little creature of the desert meanwhile peered lightning-like from object to object about the room.

Repeatedly those sharp little eyes rested a moment on the clutter of ashes and refuse spreading out neglected from beneath the small stove. Repeatedly that penetrating gaze veered back to Saunders, then to the ashes again.

At last Saunders forced himself to speak in an effort to break the spell. "How about the diamonds, Madoda?"

The native grunted. "I come get money, M'Lungu. Give money—I go."

Saunders glared down at the squatting figure and prodded him viciously with the toe of a heavy shoe. "Swine, you got too much nerve. If I give you money, how do I know you'll come back?"

"I leave this." The witch doctor offered a small, lizard-skin pouch.

"This worth more than much money."

Saunders' eyes brightened greedily. He reached into his pocket, brought forth a wad of notes, and fanned them out. Church stood silent, but watching closely. Saunders counted with his fingers—"Two hundred—Can you count, Madoda? Give me the diamonds you're leavin' as security. Take this."

"Lungali. All right," the dwarfed native agreed, rising up to his feet.

The native's left hand went into his pouch and came out closed, as his swift right hand reached for the notes and grabbed them. Eagerly Saunders' palm closed over the native's crumpled fist, felt its hard contents.

THAT'S more like—" he commenced. Then, gulping as if choked, he let out a gasping "ugh!" faltered backward against the solid wall. Aghast, his hand opened, and his fingers writhed as if to throw off a burning poison. To the floor close by the pile of ashes clattered only three small bones.

"Ugh!" Saunders shuddered. His mouth hung open, and his eyes bulged horrified like a man under some unearthly influence. "Them damned hoodoo bones of yours! Tryin' to put a spell on me, you devil. Tryin' to haunt me!"

"I come back foh them, M'Lungu," the witch doctor assured. "Bones holy."

At once the native knelt to pick up the bones, and almost immediately a mournful howl surged from him. "Waaaw! One bone gone under fire, M'Lungu," he moaned. "One bone lose!"

Like an animal fighting to rescue its young, the witch doctor poked into the ashes with both hands, spreading them frantically in every direction, but still clutching the detective's money in one hand.

"Get away from there, you rat," hissed Saunders. "Leave them ashes alone! To hell with you and your lousy bones! Get up and produce some diamonds for security."

With a quick jump Church had the native by the arms, flung him up against the wall, and twisted his arms behind him.

"You thieving dog. Trying to kid us, eh? Go through him, Saunders, for stones. We'll get what he has."

Wedging him against the wall, knee pressed brutally into his stomach, Church's hands helped Saunders search. Gingerly, they felt into every pouch and bag, tore his mouchi away, left him naked. Except snuff, not a thing was to be found. Furious, Church bashed his chin, slammed his black head against the hard wall. "Where are they? Where'd you hide 'em?"

Taut neck straining, the native turned his head painfully and stared into the mass of ashes and refuse. Saunders' eyes immediately followed. "My bones, *baas*! Let me get my bone. Then we talk di'mon'."

"You untrustin' hound! Quit looking there!" Saunders voice was high pitched, half furious, half afraid of some weirdness outside his comprehension. "Where's the diamonds for security?"

QUICK as a striking adder, the witch doctor ripped himself free, sent Church staggering, and reached the door, the bank notes still tight in his bony, black hand. Two anxious guns covered him as he turned.

"Shoot, *baas*," he dared, backing away. "You 'fraid to shoot witch doctor. I walk backwa'ds to gate—*baas* let me out. Make noise, all gau'ds come. When M'Lungu want me bring di'mon's?"

Eyeing him poisonously, watching a chance to rush him, the two whites followed step after step.

"You bring them diamonds two nights from tonight—same place. No more funny business. If you don't, I'll have the desert scoured for you, an' hang you up by your dirty black neck."

In the black shadow of corrugated iron shacks the native reached the compound gate. In the dangerous inkiness he stood to one side, cat eyes blazing. "Open gate, M'Lungu. Stand away, *baas*. I no trust."

The iron gate opened. The native leaped past it. For an instant his black shadow showed in the clear moonlight, then slid into the cover of the wall.

"Two nights," the little shadow seemed to laugh. "I be heah, *baas*. I know business. I sell di'mon's to p'liceman befo'."

"I don't trust that rat," muttered Saunders. "I'm gonna find another cache and clean out those ashes."

VI

IT WAS some nights later that three black shadows moved silently along, single file, on the Namaqualand Desert. In the lead went the wizened little witch doctor finding his way across the trailless expanse with the sureness of an animal. Next came Saunders. He carried his head bent forward, peering uneasily first to one side, then the other. Church brought up the rear.

Saunders paused hesitantly, then caught up on the witch doctor with quick strides and a muttered curse. He seized the black by the back of his neck.

"Where you takin' us?" he demanded in a rasping whisper. "Where's that kopje you were talking about? We oughta be there by now. You leadin' us into some trap?"

The native's teeth clicked as his slight body shook in Saunders' rough grasp. "No trap, *baas*. I tell the

M'Lungu befo'—afteh I sell two lots di'mon's to you, then white *baas* from th' sto' find out—chase me. He catch me—hold gun on me—say he kill me if I sell mo' di'mon's. One-eyed Kaffir tell *baas* Burnham on me. Now I show you how I get di'mon's from desert 'boys.' I show you how *baas* Burnham get di'mon's."

"You're a liar. You only had two lots of stones, an' when you got th' money, you quit th' deal."

"Quit, *baas*? Why I come back, then, see the M'Lungu now?"

Church caught Saunders by the arm. "He's all right. Leave him alone, you suspicious fool. You'll queer the whole show. We got to land Burnham, haven't we?"

Saunders stood still, his eyes searching the stunted growth of mimosa scrub just high enough to cut off the surrounding view. Overhead was only the pale light of the stars, which soon would give way before the dawn.

"He said we'd come to a lonely kopje just by the diamond ground where we could hide among the rocks and watch Burnham dealin' with the Kaffirs. We oughta be there by now," protested Saunders.

"Hush up!" cautioned Church, irritatedly. "We may be within hearing distance of him now. This witch doctor is just sore as you are on account of Burnham cutting off his supply of stones. That one-eyed Kaffir of Burnham's double-crossed him."

Saunders swore foully. His mouth closed grimly, as at a bitter recollection. "That black rat was in the store that day? The one-eyed hoodoo who put the curse on me? Them one-eyed Kaffir devils are always hoodoos."

"You're a plain fool," said Church contemptuously. "You're as stupid about that hoodoo rot as one of these desert rats."

"Shut up, Church, you can't talk to me like that. Who's the brains of this show? Who let you into the big deal in the first place? You listen to me, or it'll be too damn bad."

As if he were getting rid of a snake, Saunders let go the witch doctor, shoved him ahead, and drew his gun. "Go on, then. Madoda. No monkey-business, or I'll blow your black head off."

Padding on again, the native bent over forward, eyes almost as close to the trackless sand as a hungry hyena's. Presently he broke into more open, rocky ground. He pointed to a jagged smudge against the sky line.

"There kopje, M'Lungu. Holy man neveh lie. We hide in rocks. When sun rise, man from sto' come. Kaffir of one-eye come too and sell. We kill both."

In the semi-darkness the hand of Saunders fell heavily on the little black's shoulders. "No—no, Madoda. We don't kill. The one-eyed hoodoo knows where more stones are, an' we got to have th' white man, too."

A LITTLE way from the three silent watchers hidden in the dark shadows of jagged, projecting rocks, a startled desert rabbit scuttered. The witch doctor's body tautened. Close in the distance they heard the unhurried, almost silent pad of feet.

"Quiet, *baas*," the witch doctor whispered. "The di'mon' boy come."

Over their protruding ledge of rock the three watchers saw a blob of shadow that moved creeping almost beneath their hiding place. Behind the first shadow crept another. The two came to a halt together and turned their heads Eastward toward the rays of approaching dawn. The Kaffir's voice filtered up to them. Saunders clutched Church's arm.

"That's th' one-eyed Kaffir who

cursed me," he said in a tense whisper.

Below the watchers the single eye of Bullalla reflected the sky's pale light as he spoke. "You bring stones fo' *baas* Burnham today?"

"Yes," said the other 'boy.' "Good stones—many of them."

"Whe-ee-eel" whistled the one-eyed Kaffir shrilly.

At the signal a tall, alert man stepped out from the mimosa. The dawn behind him outlined his figure clearly.

"Lungali. All right, *baas*," the one-eyed one greeted him.

The dealings between Burnham and the "boys" was terse and quick, as between men well known in each other's ways. At the foot of the rocks of the kopje much money and many diamonds changed hands.

BURNHAM was ready to leave when from above his head jumped a human octopus. Steel-like tentacles gripped his neck and body as the witch doctor grappled with him. The impact of the jump from above hurtled them both against the one-eyed Kaffir. All together they fell against the other native. Then from above bullets spatted into the sand at their feet and held them stark still, frozen into immobility.

"Stop there!" Saunders yelled down as he clambered over the rough rocks. "Don't move a step. Don't touch anything in them pouches of yours. Keep your hands out of your pockets. Burnham, put 'em up!"

Gun in hand, Church scrambled down too. He got to Burnham first. "Get off him, you dog!" He kicked the little witch doctor away. "Let him up—You would hog all the diamonds in the desert, would you, Burnham, you smart Yankee crook!"

Burnham thrust his hands aloft, and his two Kaffirs cowered beside him. "Still hounding me, Saunders?"

Saunders looked at Church with a knowing grin of satisfaction. His eyes jerked back to Burnham, but not quite quick enough. Like a pile driver Burnham's fist caught Saunders on the jaw, sent him reeling against Church. The one-eyed Kaffir whipped into the staggering Church, only to get Church's gun butt square on the chin. The native settled slowly to the ground spitting blood.

At the same time the witch doctor tripped the second Kaffir diamond boy to his face on the sand, and the two men were free to handle Burnham. Their two guns came up, but they didn't shoot. There was a wordless, grunting struggle before a pistol barrel raked Burnham's forehead with a sickening thud. For the moment, the show was over.

Flat on his back lay Burnham peering up into the leering face of Saunders. "All right, Saunders," he said finally, "you got me, but don't forget what I told you—diamond cut diamond. We're not through cutting each other yet."

"Shut up," hissed the panting Saunders as he slipped handcuffs on his man. "It's five or ten years for you now, you dirty, innocent Yank."

Church herded the two Kaffirs before him and snapped cuffs on their meekly held-out wrists. Immediately he started to go through their pouches. "Gold, Saunders," he exulted. "No identifying marks. Our gold, now. Have you got all the stuff off Burnham?"

SAUNDERS was busy looting Burnham's pockets. "By heck, Church, the bloke was sure getting good stuff. Look at 'em! Look at this one here!"

Church's eyes widened covetously as he bent forward. The witch doctor butted in.

"I tole you the M'Lungus sto'keeper got plen'y di'mon's, baas. Witch

doctor—holy man neveh lie. I get the M'Lungus plen'y mo' like this—cheaper."

"You're on," muttered Saunders, hoarse with excitement.

AGAIN Harmon's door burst open, and he faced the two panting detectives and their prisoners—one white and two black. The little witch doctor tagged along behind.

"Why the hurricane, Saunders?" Harmon's tone held a trace of sarcasm.

Saunders' eyes burned eagerly. "We got him dead to rights this time, even if you did let him talk you out of it before. Caught him dead to rights in the very act of buying from these desert Kaffirs."

"Did he produce that big parcel of diamonds that was stolen so untraceably about a month ago? You seemed to think he had a hand in it."

Saunders dodged the direct question. "We got the brains of all that's gone wrong in this section for the past couple of months, Harmon. Soon as we get him headed toward the Breakwater, he'll crack and come clean with all the stuff that's been lost. He'll come clean to save himself as much as he can."

Harmon's eyes were a little puzzled as he watched the mixed group before him. "Well, get on with your story, Saunders."

Saunders brought out a handful of stones from his pocket. "He was buyin' these from these 'boys' out on the desert. Do they look like diamonds to you?"

Harmon's eyes widened as he took in the stones. "Gosh, yes. They're good stuff, all right. Looks just like the stuff that's been oozing away from this reserve."

"Prob'ly they are," declared Saunders. "These rats prob'ly stole 'em instead of findin' 'em on the desert. He was buyin' 'em in with gold."

Harmon looked at Burnham who had not spoken. "What do you say, Burnham? Looks bad for you. Where's the twenty thousand pounds' worth you got away with last month? Might as well shout—make it easier for yourself."

"Shout? Not me," said Burnham. "Ask Saunders where that parcel is. He'd rather frame a small-timer like me than hunt for it."

Saunders winced, then butted in loudly. "We'll keep a guard over him tonight, Harmon, and I'll start down to Luberitzbucht with him tomorrow."

For a moment the manager looked thoughtful. "That's all right, but Church and the witch doctor and my report will be plenty to satisfy the diamond court and get a conviction. You're needed here more than down there. We got to find that big parcel. So I don't think you need to go down."

"Well, I'm going." The detective's voice rose angrily. "Me not go down! Trust him and the two Kaffirs alone to Church? You're crazy, Harmon. I'll take him myself if it's the last thing I ever do."

"You'll get me alone in the desert, will you, Saunders?" Burnham's voice was bitter. "You'll get me out there and half kill me on the way down. That's what you want to go for, you sneaking rat."

"I'll take you, all right," Saunders gritted. "You'll get there alive—an' that'll be about all."

VII

FAR out over the desert a jackal screamed. Nearer, a hyena let out a blood curdling laugh. Vagrant shadows cast by a thin-rimmed moon made the still night seem peopled with ghastly figures with strange, intermittent voices. In his blankets beneath the high-

wheeled capecart Saunders stirred, covered up his head as if to shut out the dread noises. The desert nights were torture to his superstitious mind.

Again eerie sounds echoed over the expanse of desert, and the scared man slunk deeper into his protective blankets. In a moment more he stuck his head far enough out again to peer at the fire where Church still sat and Burnham squatted with his manacled hands resting in his lap. As Saunders looked, Church lifted a bottle to his mouth, making a faint gurgling sound as he swallowed. A little further away around a brushwood blaze squatted the two Kaffir prisoners, the witch doctor, and the capecart driver.

There was something weird about the night and its noises that got under Saunders' skin.

THOSE damn hyenas are making a lot of rumpus tonight," he complained. "A man can't sleep."

Church laughed unsympathetically and took a pull at his bottle.

The witch doctor rose slowly. He held his blanket out at arm's length and looked like a bat with jet wings. Soundless he moved over to where Saunders lay and stood looking down. Saunders stared back as if hypnotized by the black little eyes which held his own in their grip.

"The M'Lungu fears the voice of spirit that talks oveh desert? The M'Lungu fears spirit that waits for white man on trail?"

"Shut up, you spooky rat. You'll have him nutty," called Church.

The witch doctor bent lower with a slow, deliberate motion. "Spirit no good, baas. I keep spirit away from the M'Lungu. I stay by the M'Lungu."

Saunders couldn't stand it. He leaped up flinging his blankets aside. His eyes dodged fearfully from right to left, and his face showed un-

naturally pallid in the flickering light of the fire. He hurried the few paces from the capecart to the edge of the little blaze.

"Curse this filthy desert and that crazy witch doctor," he muttered. "For the love of God, gimme a drink." He reached down greedily for the bottle and took a swig that made him cough. "Only one more night of it, thank God, and we'll be in Luderitzbucht. These spooky nights are gettin' on my nerves."

BURNHAM said nothing at first. He only peered into the sparse surrounding scrub that dotted the sand of the desert. The strange noises of the night suited him, now, exactly.

"You're a brave guy, Saunders," said Burnham, looking down at the handcuffs on his wrists. "Got the shakes over the spooks of the desert. I hope one of 'em gets you and leaves Church and me to enjoy ourselves in peace."

"Shut up, you fool. Them noises ain't natural, I tell you," Saunders yammered. "Hyenas and jackals don't yap unless a lion roars before 'em."

Close over the desert came another screaming call, and the detective squirmed uneasily, slobbered over in his clumsy hurry to get the bottle to his mouth.

The witch doctor let out a sudden shrill cackle. "Spirits! Watch, baas, I make medicine—keep spirits away."

Saunders stood, knees half bent staring this way and that with his mouth open, but no sound came from him. The witch doctor threw some scrub on the fire, opened his blanket out at Saunders' feet, and cast upon it three little bones. With his skinny little hands he made weird passes over the bones, looking up intently each time into the frightened eyes of Saunders.

"Hoodoo spirit, baas. Hoodoo white spirit come in da'k an' look fo' money—look fo' di'mon's. Hoodoo spirit steal off all white man come this way."

Saunders shuddered and kicked frantically at the blanket near his feet. "Take them damn hoodoo bones away! You ain't natural. You're some kind of 'devil yourself."

FOR God's sake, Saunders," cried Church, "cut that out. You'll have us all crazy. You're making an utter fool out of yourself. I'm fed up with it."

It was the angriest that Church had ever spoken to Saunders, and for a moment it took Saunders' attention from his fear of the native hoodoos. Saunders took a long swig at the bottle, which seemed to steady him.

"You can't talk to me like that, you little shrimp. Who do you think's the brains of this outfit? Where do you think you'd be if I hadn't let you in on it?"

Burnham laughed. That made Saunders madder. He cuffed the handcuffed prisoner viciously across the face. Burnham winced but said nothing. The little witch doctor cowered back to one side, silent. Burnham made a slight motion with his hands, as warning to the natives to keep still.

"You're a brave guy, smacking a handcuffed man, aren't you?" said Church sarcastically.

Burnham broke in quietly, "You wouldn't stand for it, if you were much of a man, yourself." He eyed Church with a peculiarly penetrating look. "Damned if I see how a decent guy like you ever teamed up with this crooked, superstitious ass, Saunders."

Church stared back curiously at Burnham for a time. A kind of new light glinted in his eyes. His hand

moved slowly in the direction of his gun holster.

Burnham continued to Church, just as though Saunders was not standing there. "Saunders'll find some way of cheating you out of your share of the diamonds anyway. If you had the brains, you'd see that."

"Shut up, you," bellowed Saunders. He cuffed Burnham again. "What do you know about any diamonds?"

Then Saunders drew back and stood still. He stared a moment at Burnham, then at Church. There was a new glitter in his eyes, too. The same thought that Burnham had set up to Church was clarifying itself in his own mind.

BURNHAM rose slowly from his blanket and took a step nearer to Church.

"Church," he said, "I'm wise to the game you two have worked, but Saunders is going to cheat you in the end. If you want to—"

Saunders swung his gun butt viciously. Burnham was fast enough to dodge the full force of its blow, but it knocked him down. Then Saunders swung toward Church, only to find himself facing a drawn gun not two feet away from the middle of his stomach. It brought him up short, with a gasp.

"Burnham's right about you, Saunders," Church gritted, "but you're not going to get away with it."

"You dirty little double-crossin' rat!" spat Saunders. "If you think you can get away with anything like this, you're crazy. You ain't got the brains. Put your gun up, you fool. You don't even know where the—"

"Hell I don't. Didn't I help you hide it—"

"What if I told you I changed it later—just to make sure of you, Church?" Saunders stood there sneering.

Church stared back. His gun hand

wavered a little. His voice faltered, "You mean you changed the place on me, you—"

He was edging jerkily away toward the capecart, where the harness hung over the disselboom. Saunders dropped his eyes, shrugged, as if not paying any further attention. Burnham was lying still where he'd fallen without a move, but his slitted eyes were watching every move like a hawk.

Then with fearful suddenness Saunders' hand came up. The silvery African night was split with the roared death sentence of a forty-five.

Without a single sound Church crumpled down upon the sand beneath the dim oval outline of a big, padded horse collar. It hung there just above him like a noose of doom.

THE silence after the shot lay like a heavy blanket upon them.

"God," muttered Burnham. "that was cold blooded murder if I ever saw it. Shot your pardner in the back!"

"Shut up," sneered Saunders. "Dirty little double-crosser had it comin' to him."

"What're you going to do with him, now? How you going to explain—"

Saunders glared at Burnham, still prostrate on the ground. After a long minute, he said:

"Burnham, we'll take his body in to Luberitzbucht. You tried to get away while I was asleep. He tried to stop you, and in the scuffle, you got his gun and plugged him. You're a murderer now, Burnham, as well as a diamond thief. How do you like that kind of cuttin'? Is that cuttin' deep enough for you?" He reached for his bottle and took a long, gurgling swig.

"Yep," admitted Burnham. "That depth'll have to suit me if it suits

you. I hadn't planned it that way, but as long as you have, I'll have to go through with it."

Saunders looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing much."

Saunders was having another drink.

He smacked his wet lips and a brutal lust glinted from his narrow little eyes. Then he moved over and deliberately kicked Burnham.

"I had a terrible struggle with you, too, before getting you under control again at the risk of my life," Saunders gloated. "You don't look bunged up enough to have been in a real fight—but I'll fix that." Saunders swung his foot to again kick the manacled man's face.

Burnham rolled and tackled that up-raised leg as well as he could without free hands. His surprise attack flung Saunders heavily to the ground cursing and Burnham swarmed over him. Chancing it for a second that Saunders would not shoot, then flailing two handedly, awkwardly, lent with terrific force, he managed to bash the revolver from Saunders' hand.

The witch doctor came pouncing up with the gun he'd taken from the dead Church. Burnham saw his move in the nick of time and held up his manacled hands before the wild-eyed little witch doctor.

VIII

ATALL, sandy-haired man stood before the huge mahogany desk of Chief Inspector Ingals of the Illicit Diamond Buying Department in Luderitzbucht. The gray-haired, thin-faced man who leaned back in his chair behind the desk looked at him with sea-blue eyes which seemed to be more used to long distances and far horizons.

After a moment Ingals spoke. "Sit down, Burnham, and fill in one or

two points for me that I haven't heard yet."

"Thank you, sir."

"How did you first know it was Saunders who'd made the big haul?"

"I didn't. At least, not till a few days before we started down. The records here showed he was one I. D. B. man who hadn't done much good work for a year or so, but I had no definite reason to suspect him until he seemed so anxious to frame me. He was too anxious for an excuse to get down here from the diamond fields. I figured if he had got that one big parcel, he wouldn't dare go out with it unless he had a good excuse for the trip."

BURNHAM paused, ran his lean fingers through his rumpled hair, and smiled across at the waiting Inspector.

"So, after he'd made his second attempt to frame me by using Church as bait, and fixed up this crazy little fake witch doctor, I got my own one-eyed Kaffir to work. And I framed *him* into framing me still a third time, as well as finding out definitely that he was dealing in stolen stones."

Burnham's eyes seemed to be looking off into the distance of his memory rather than at the close walls of the room. He laughed more to himself than to the Inspector.

"You should have seen the swell act the Kaffirs and the witch doctor and I put on for them when they thought they had caught me buying stolen stones that last time. As a matter of fact, the stones they caught me 'buying' were the identical ones Church had used to trap me for Saunders on their previous attempt!"

"I don't see how you dared go that far with it," interrupted the Inspector, "before you were positive that Saunders had the big parcel."

"That's funny, too. The witch doctor noticed a pile of ashes under

the stove in Saunders' kitchen. Ordinarily, a white man would kill a native house 'boy' if he failed to clean out under the stove every day. My witch doctor deliberately lost one of his sacred bones in the ashes and rooted after it until he was sure they had a lot of diamonds hidden there.

"But they must have got suspicious after that and changed the place. It was all cleaned up the next time he went there. So I still didn't know how to locate the big batch."

"By Gosh, Burnham, you sure must have known you were taking your life in your hands to go out across the desert with a pair like Saunders and Church, and you with your hands cuffed."

The Inspector's low tone was one of frank admiration.

Burnham shrugged his wide shoulders. "Well, I trusted a good deal to the little witch doctor, and besides, I had to go through to the bitter end to get him down here with the diamonds actually in his personal possession.

"The one-eyed Kaffir and the witch doctor both worked on his natural superstitions, which got him jumpier every minute, and also helped make trouble between himself and Church. I knew my best bet was to play on their greed—knew if they got to double-crossing each other, they'd give the whole show away."

AND that's exactly what happened?" questioned the Inspector.

"Just about, although I wouldn't be surprised if each of them had more or less planned to skunk the other sooner or later. Church was just ready to quit Saunders, probably counting on my help if necessary, when Saunders finally got enough booze in him to get up the nerve

to kill Church off and keep the loot all for himself.

"Church had him covered, but Saunders tricked him—said he'd already shifted the loot. Church lost his head, then, and made a dive for their hiding place. Saunders plugged him in the back. A more cold-blooded murder, I never heard of."

"Gosh," murmured Ingals. "Your life wasn't worth a split twopence right then!"

"Sure it was. Saunders wanted to keep me to take the rap for Church's murder, and also put me where I couldn't come back at him." Burnham laughed again. "Later I found the smart rascal hadn't shifted the stones at all from their hiding place in the stuffing of the big horse collar.

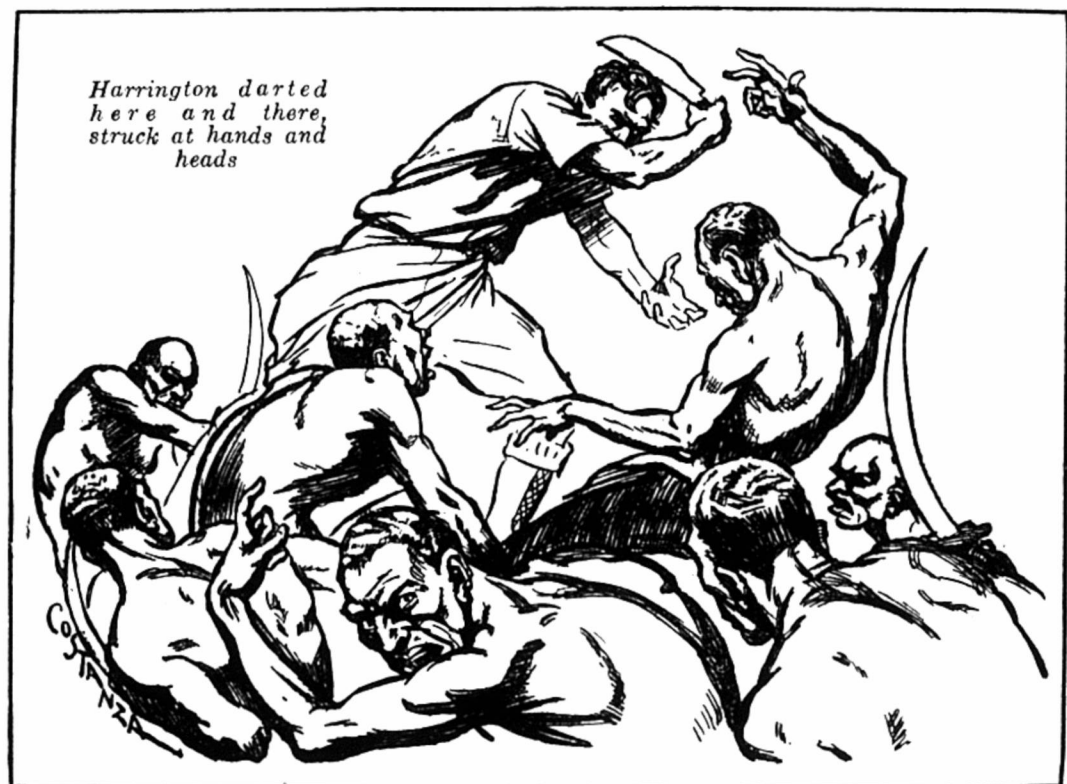
THE only trouble for me came when Saunders got through with Church. He decided to beat me up and I had to fight him, still handcuffed as I was. Then the witch doctor got Church's gun, and it was all I could do to persuade him not to plug Saunders, but to shoot out a link from my cuffs. After that we made short work of it."

"It was a good piece of work, Burnham. The government's damn glad to get back that month's output of stones, too. There'll be a promotion in it for you. It's still difficult to see how you accomplished it."

"Thanks, Chief, but after all, Saunders really did it all for me. I only did to him the same things right along that he was trying to do to me. You know, Chief, he never had the slightest suspicion that I, too, was a spy. And I'll never forget the expression on his face as the cell door slammed upon him. I'd told him a couple of times—'diamond cut diamond'—but he didn't get the idea until the bitter end."

HONOR BOUND

*Harrington darted
here and there,
struck at hands and
heads*



*An Action-Packed Story of Pulse-Stirring Combat With
Savage Taos on the Island of Samar*

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Author of "Bare Fists," "Those Funny Marines," etc.

PETER HARRINGTON stared at his Tagalog guide and shivered. The man was an enigma to him, like all the people of the Islands. And he reminded Harrington of things, dark things, of deeds which had been written in blood, long years ago, just before he had been born.

It was in these things he was now interested. He had a guide simply and solely because he knew he could never penetrate very far into Samar without someone who knew the dis-

mal land that had once been known as the dark and bloody ground.

It was not the land of the Tagalogs, but of the Taos. The Tagalog, however, could be trusted not to betray him to the Taos, for he feared them as much as Harrington did. Harrington did not know the reason and it did not matter, really.

The Tagalog spoke his own brand of English, which was almost incomprehensible. Harrington talked to him at great length, not because the man understood, but because it

made Harrington feel foolish to talk to himself, and he simply must talk.

They sat under a mighty tree whose leaves, thick and impenetrable, kept out the drab, thunderous downpouring of rain. The rain rolled across Samar like artillery fire. To look into it was like trying to look through a waterfall.

RIVULETS of streaming water cascaded down the sides of many ravines that were covered with dank tropic vegetation, and formed little freshets in the bottom that went roaring away to be lost in some unknown river or sea, vanishing from sight in the jungle walls which surrounded the two like a prison.

"It was in just such a time as this, boy," said Harrington to the unblinking Tagalog, "that the marines under Waller crossed the Island of Samar on their punitive expedition. Did you ever hear of it? It happened thirty years ago, and my father was one of the leathernecks."

The Tagalog grunted. Harrington noted that he had turned sidewise, in an attitude of listening. The man hadn't understood him, wasn't even listening. Harrington's hands tightened on the stock of his Springfield. He looked to his weighty bandoliers of ammunition.

"The account says," went on Harrington, "that 'some of the heat-crazed marines wandered away from the column, and were never heard from again.' My father was one who wandered, boy. When my mother died she left a will which stipulated that I should find some trace of him—a hopeless task; but I'll try. That's what we're here for."

Harrington's face was hard and grim as he stared into the wall of rain. Nothing seemed to be alive out there. He raised his head and stared up into the black foliage

above him. It might have hidden a hundred Taos, but he knew it did not, or they could not have remained where they were as long as they had.

"I picked the rainy season," he went on, "because I want to reconstruct that march across Samar as nearly as possible. Maybe I'll get some clue from happenings, as to what happened to Dad."

It didn't seem strange to refer to his father, whom he had never seen, so affectionately. His mother had mentioned the gallant marine every day of his life—had made him a living being to Peter.

"Lis'en," said the Tagalog suddenly. "I hear drums."

Harrington listened with all his power, but could hear only the thunderous roaring of the rain. A thousand drums within a mile would have been drowned out by the noise. It rattled on the great leaves of the tree like shrapnel. It roared across the land in slanting volleys with dreadful sound.

Harrington shivered. He looked at his watch. It was four o'clock in the afternoon.

THEY crossed the Island on a punitive expedition, boy," he said, as much to hear the sound of his own voice as to inform the uncaring Tagalog, "to avenge upon the Taos the massacre of Balangiga. Ever hear of that? The soldiers at the station were slaughtered to a man, and frightfully mutilated. More uniforms to fester in the sun! Is it any wonder I hate the thought of them? What's that?"

The Tagalog had risen to one knee. His ancient rifle of German make was tightly gripped across his bare knees, which were trembling. His eyes were big with fear.

"I 'fraid for the knives, mister," he said. "They strike when none ex-

pect, and there is no head upon shoulders."

Harrington had heard, or had it been fancy? the muted drumming, through a brief lull in the storm. Why were the drums going? They were used for signaling. Was the horror which his father had known to be visited upon him? His lips twisted wryly.

HE wore light clothing, riding breeches stout enough to protect his thighs, and heavy laced shoes. His hat was a broad helmet, above a shirt whose throat was open for comfort. He was steaming with perspiration, that vile mixture of rain and perspiration which can make the Philippines ghastly to visitors. His gray eyes were cold and hard, but there was no fear in them. He wouldn't "wander away and never be heard of again," nor would he be slain from ambush.

"Look!"

The Tagalog shouted, spinning almost around on the balls of his feet as he squatted on his heels. His rifle leaped to his shoulder and spoke with savage flatness in the noise of the rain. In the direction he had fired Harrington thought he had seen a moving black shadow, laced to dimness by the wall of rain between.

With the snapping of the rifle the shadow vanished. But no sound of a scream came to them, or the other noise had obliterated it. He doubted, though, that the Tagalog had hit the mark, for the man had fired with the rifle halfway to his shoulder. That told Harrington something—the Tagalog was frightened. He could not be too much depended upon in a tight place.

Harrington resolved to keep the man in sight. After all, he *might* be friendly with the Taos. Waller's guides had apparently been loyal,

yet they had betrayed their masters into the butchering hands of the natives.

"Look out!" shrieked the guide. "Here they come!"

Harrington leaped to his feet. He could see them now, ten abreast, running stooped far forward, right hands grasping curved blades. They were nude above the waist. They ran without sound, straight toward them, grimly determined. He twisted his lips wryly, remembering that Samar had been "pacified."

His rifle jumped to his shoulder, which was right and proper, for there was no mistaking the intention of the Taos.

They were charging in to the kill just as, thirty years before, their fathers had charged the thin column of marines. Bullets wouldn't even stop some of them, mad with blood lust.

Harrington wondered what they would think if they knew why he was here. It wouldn't matter to them, probably. White men were white men, and all were enemies and, when found far away from the protection of many guns, fair prey. Harrington's rifle spoke swiftly, but his shots were well aimed.

HE knew that his first bullet went full and true to the heart of one of the racing natives, but for all of ten paces the man did not even stagger. Then he dropped like a stone, raised to his hands, crawled on a few feet—hurled his weapon toward the two under the tree, and collapsed on his face.

The second one took a bullet in the head—and ran ten yards without swaying, before he fell. He did not try to rise. Something akin to fear began to grow in the heart of Harrington. What chance had one against men whom bullets could not kill? This sort of thing had kept

up for many days and nights in his father's day.

It was little wonder that the awful experience had driven some of the leathernecks mad. And now, remembering them, Harrington spoke to the Tagalog.

"We'll fire until our magazines are empty," he said. "Make every shot count. Then we run for it, while we reload. They've got to know we can shoot, that we won't be trifled with."

THREE times more Harrington fired and the Springfield was empty.

Five bullets had smashed into five brown bodies. Three men were down, two were still miraculously on their feet, and charging.

Harrington whirled, staring into the rain, just now thinking that perhaps they were surrounded, and started the retreat. The Tagalog was right at his heels. Harrington noted the sound of levering in fresh cartridges with approval. Maybe the Tagalog would stand by, after all.

Harrington looked back. The last two men he had shot had reached the dry place under the tree before going down. They were superhuman in their ability to fight off the wings of death.

They came streaming after Harrington and his guide. Some of them carried rifles. Harrington wondered why they did not use them, but was grateful that they did not. He had a suspicion that they really wished to take him alive, and his stomach constricted with horror when he fancied what that would mean to him. Torture!

The Taos were past masters at that sort of thing. What he had been told of Balangiga proved that. There wasn't a chance in the world that the leathernecks of thirty years

and more ago had escaped torture, except—

There was always one possibility: primitive races revered, usually, people who were demented. They must have wondered mightily at men who barked like dogs and pretended to be monkeys. But could any one have survived through all these years, even so, here on the dark and bloody ground?

Harrington sincerely hoped not. He would find information about his father, he hoped, but that he would ever actually find him, seemed absurd on the face of it.

He was glad that he was in excellent trim, for he was compelled to run his very best to distance the Taos, who ran with the lithe grace and speed of most savages.

The Tagalog ran easily at his side, now and again looking back with fear gray in his swart face. The Tagalog knew things, things Harrington could not even imagine. He knew these people, of what they were capable. Harrington might live among them all his life and not know them. But his life, right now, would be shortly ended if he were captured.

HE swerved, almost came to a dead stop—for now he saw other shadows through the rain—the shadows of running men to right and left, outspeeding him on either hand, racing to cut him off. Now he knew that the Taos behind him were not running their best, but merely following, giving their friends a chance to cut him off.

He flung up his rifle and fired twice, after having swiftly refilled his magazine on the run. He fired once to the left, and a thin cry, the first to come from the Taos, proved that his bullet had gone true. Unable to down men with bullets through hearts and heads, and find-

ing himself in the final analysis, with a vast dislike for taking human life—even the lives of these savage murderers—he had shot at the running legs of the enemy. With broken bones they could not run on. The two men fell.

Harrington was a crack marksman. He rarely missed, and he never fired without aiming. Much ammunition as he carried, every shot must be made to count.

THE Tagalog fired, straight ahead—and a derisive yell was his answer.

"Don't shoot, boy," said Harrington, beginning to run again. "Wait until there is a mob of 'em, then hold low and let 'em have it. Now you're only wasting bullets."

The Tagalog nodded stiffly. His legs worked like pistons as he kept pace with Harrington. He seemed in deadly fear of losing his white master. The Taos would give him short shrift indeed, for guiding a stranger into their land—a stranger who had, moreover, already killed several of their number.

Yes, the Tagalog could be depended upon to remain with Harrington, but his value was doubtful indeed. Frightened men made too many mistakes. A single mistake might well cost both of them their lives.

Now, all at once, they came to a rain-drenched clearing—and Harrington gasped:

"The place of the stone shaped like an altar, boy," he said. "I've heard stories about it. The Taos attacked the Marines here. The Marines beat them off and marched on. They marched for five days, thinking they were crossing the island to the sea. At the end of the five days they were right back here at this stone altar. Their guides had led them in a wide circle, bringing them back for the Taos to be-devil

and harass. The guides were executed—"

There he stopped, refusing even to think of that dark chapter in the lives of the "Heroes of Samar." But now, coming to pause at the edge of the clearing, where the land shelved down to a sort of pothole, in whose center was a huge slab of stone, large as a native hut, apparently slightly hollowed out on top, Harrington hesitated to catch his breath.

Through the sounds of the rain he could now plainly hear the muted throbbing of drums. He supposed they sent messages. Perhaps, if he could only understand, they sent messages about him, and about the Tagalog with him.

Maybe all Taos were being warned of the stranger in their midst, the stranger whose rifle was such sure and unerring death. It meant, if his guess were true, that more hands would be turned against them, when already there were scores and hundreds.

HE flung up his rifle and shot when the stock touched his shoulder. He had taken quick aim at the knee-cap of a running brown man, visible for a second through the trees to his left. The man's leg went limp under him, letting him down.

Harrington shuddered with horror as the Tao whirled on his stomach, dragging his legs, to face Peter and the Tagalog. His hand moved swiftly, placing the blade of a knife in his mouth. Then, dragging himself like a snake with a broken back, the Tao crawled toward Harrington. He seemed to dare Harrington to finish him with a shot.

Harrington turned his eyes away, looking back at the stone in the center of the clearing. There the marines had defended themselves against vast superiority of numbers.

"It's as good a place as any, son," said Harrington. "Run for it. This time they may shoot—with us out in the open."

Harrington raced across the clearing. He had scarcely broken from cover than wild shouts of exultation broke from what seemed to be a thousand hoarse throats.

The Taos were pleased that they had flushed him and his guide, and it came to Harrington that in racing for the stone altar he had played right into the hands of his enemies. Now they could surround him and starve him out to be captured. They could attack from all sides and, careless of death as they were, down him and the Tagalog by sheer weight of numbers.

HE gritted his teeth grimly as he saw ragged lines of Taos breaking from cover and racing as though to cut him off, yet keeping well away, as though to make it difficult range for his rifle.

They did not shoot, even yet, but they brandished their bolos, and screamed invectives at the two runners. Their yells were blood-curdling. There was no mistaking the fact that if the two men fell into their hands the result to them would be ghastly and gruesome.

Harrington resolved—and it sounded like something from a novel—to save a bullet for himself before he would allow the Taos to lay torturing hands upon him.

But now he was more determined than ever to continue his search. So this was what his father had known! This rushing horror, this flashing of knives, this steaming rain which soaked through clothing and skin and raised welts all over the body—sticky, gummy, horrible. It was no wonder, he decided, that men had gone mad.

He'd been on Samar thirty-six

hours, undiscovered until now, and already he felt reason tottering as he tried to foresee the future for him if he were taken. It seemed flying in the face of Providence not to start back for the coast and problematical safety, but he wasn't the sort to quit on any job, even a job as nebulous as to probable results as this one promised to be.

His mother's will had made it plain she expected it of him, and somehow he could feel her presence with him as he ran—and it was like a cool breeze playing across his face.

"She wouldn't have hesitated," he thought. "She was that kind."

They reached the high rock, which stood above the surrounding soil to a little more than the height of a man, and circled it quickly to make sure that there were no Taos beyond it.

Then Harrington ordered the Tagalog to boost him up. He still clung to his rifle, which made it difficult for him, but once atop the altar he turned back and helped the Tagalog up, pulling on his extended hand. Then he looked down into the depression atop the rock—looked and shuddered.

The altar had served a strange purpose, and it was plain that here, at least, was one who had "wandered away and never been heard of again."

Establishing identity was impossible. There were only bones and buckles, and nibs from an ancient haversack. A rusted rifle, with the stock long since rotted away, rested beside the bundle of bleached white bones in the depression.

HARRINGTON only knew that it was not his father, for Leatherneck Harrington had never reached this altar the second time, according to the reports survivors had brought

back. The skeleton on the rock must remain nameless.

"I may be beside you, old fellow," whispered Harrington. "If I am, I hope I give as good an account of myself as you must have done."

Now the Taos, mustering their forces all around the clearing, were starting out into the open.

"Put your cartridges in a row beside you, boy," Harrington said to the Tagalog. "And make every shot count. Here they come!"

The Tagalog, trembling, obeyed without answering. His cartridges numbered perhaps a score. Harrington shook his head. After the Tagalog had shot away his ammunition, wasting most of it perhaps, he would be a liability, for Harrington would have to protect him.

If there were any way to procure one of those bolos, the Tagalog would doubtless be an adept in its use. But there seemed little chance. The Tagalog had had one, but had lost it somehow in the fight and retreat.

HARRINGTON was flat on his stomach on the rock, his body slanting back into the depression, his toes almost touching the skeleton of the dead and gone marine, about whose bleached bones Harrington had seen the mute evidence of a last stand in empty, ancient cartridge cases.

Yes, this man had sold his life as dearly as possible. It was a sort of tribute to his bravery that the Tagalogs had left him here to use the "altar" as a mausoleum.

Carefully Harrington took aim, pulled the trigger. He was using the peep sight. The Taos were coming closer in great leaps, shouting as they came. A man went down after what seemed almost a minute after Harrington's bullet had struck him in the chest.

Harrington pulled the trigger again. Beside him he heard the banging of the ancient German rifle in the unsteady hands of the Tagalog. Out of the corner of his eye he watched for the results of the Tagalog's firing. He nodded his head with satisfaction.

The brown man wasn't doing badly. He was resolved to die well, too, it seemed. And the more he took with him the better his account in whatever Hereafter he aspired to.

Closer and closer they came now, closing in. They were side by side, the intervals between them becoming less and less. They brandished their bolos and shouts of triumph burst from their lips. Harrington could not tell whether they were tattooed, but that they were half-naked, so brown as to be almost black, was evident. They were muscular, ferocious men.

Harrington had heard, back at Manila, where officials had tried to dissuade him from coming into the Samar, that they were Mohammedans, which was why they did not fear death—so long as they could take an infidel or two with them on the endless journey.

FIVE times Harrington fired. Five times men stumbled, rose, and stumbled again, yet moved forward for unbelievable distances before they collapsed for good—and each time he fired he had aimed at the heart. He shook his head. What could be done with them, when they refused to die? How would one handle them in savage hand-to-hand combat?

Harrington knew he would soon find out. He carried a machete in his belt, which he used to cut his way through otherwise impenetrable jungle. He loosened it now, and saw the Tagalog glance at it. The Tagalog's face was gray, for he knew

what it would mean to them when the Taos closed.

Now they were a hundred yards away, still coming fast. Behind them several dots on the rain-soaked soil showed the efficacy of the bullets of Harrington and the Tagalog. Those bullets were counting, but the Taos did not even pause or hesitate, did not even seem to mind the loss of several of their number, or to be deterred by thoughts as to which of them would be next.

Now they were fifty yards away, the distance rapidly lessened to forty, thirty, twenty—and there were more dots behind the charging Taos. It did not seem that human flesh could stand the stream of lead which the two men were methodically pouring into the Taos. Yet they came on.

"What havoc they could work if they went *juramentado*!"

He referred to the practice among some Christian Island tribes of swearing oaths of vengeance, or going a bit mad, binding the legs and arms with thicknesses of cloth—to prevent undue bleeding in case of wounds—and then going out to slay and murder. Men who had gone *juramentado* were almost impossible to stop or slay.

MARINES, in the long ago, had emptied their rifles into the bodies of charging men who had gone *juramentado*, and yet had died before their swishing, bloody bolos. These Taos, without the inspiration of oaths or madness, were just as bad.

If that had been added—but it couldn't have been made any worse.

Harrington was firing faster now, while beside him the rifle of the Tagalog fell silent. He knew that the brown man had used all his bullets. No, he saw one yet remaining on the rock beside his guide, and the

Tagalog just now thrust it into the magazine.

But he did not fire it. Harrington knew why; the Tagalog, knowing the end to be a foregone conclusion, was also saving one for himself to escape torture. But Harrington refused to believe that this was the end. The spirit of his mother seemed closer than ever, out of place as she might have seemed in the flesh. But Over Beyond things were perhaps different. Even Tao bolos could not injure the spirit.

Faster and faster bullets sped from the Springfield Harrington had borrowed from naval stores in Manila. The barrel grew hot under his hands, but he scarcely felt it.

THE faces of the Taos were plain to see now, with rain streaking down beside noses and over mouths that were contorted in savage yells. The bolos gleamed dully. Harrington wondered just which one of them would be the first to caress his own flesh.

He fired and a man fell, his bolo flying back over his head, in among his fellows.

"At least it won't be *that* bolo," thought Harrington grimly.

He fired, and fired again. Then he carefully placed his Springfield in the depression behind him, beside the skeleton which linked him somehow with the past and still another grim battle at this same place, and whispered:

"Guard it, old fellow. I hope I'll need it back again!"

Then to the Tagalog:

"Put your back against mine if they get on top of the rock. When they try, though, smash them with the butt of your rifle, as hard as you can."

The Tagalog, his face still a mask of resignation, took his place as Harrington commanded, but his at-

titude seemed to say, "What's the use?" and Harrington didn't believe, either, that there was any.

The next five minutes were minutes of horror, while the two men tried to guard all parts of the rock, darting here and there, striking at hands and heads. The machete in Harrington's hands grew red—and redder still—and his arms grew weary, heavy as lead, with wielding the unaccustomed weapon.

But he must fight on. The Taos were shouting in derision, even though several of them were down.

Whatever the white man and his guide might think, the Taos knew there could be but one end.

By sheer weight of numbers they would beat down and win over the two on the rock. Human flesh could not stand to fight on endlessly. The Taos were like ants, trying to mount the rock. If they had all tried at once they would have succeeded. Soon the time would come when they would think of that, but they seemed to have none too efficient leadership.

Harrington admired their courage, wished they even had considerably less of it. Despair was beginning to envelop him, but he redoubled his offensive to counteract the hopelessness which would have possessed him if he had allowed it to do so.

And then the Tagalog went down, falling toward the edge of the rock. Instantly many hands grabbed at him—and the Taos, with great yells of delight, surged around the rock to the spot where the Tagalog had been pulled over.

Harrington lifted his rifle again and sent shot after shot into the milling mob of them. He could face and fight now, for a moment at least, without fear of attack from the rear, for in one direction the way was open, because of the surging of the Taos toward the ill-fated Tagalog.

Harrington could have turned, jumped from the rock and ran, but he would not do it as long as there was an opportunity, which he knew didn't really exist, to aid his Tagalog guide. Even if he escaped now, he would have to find his own way—and he had no compass, and the rain blotted out the sun so efficiently that it was impossible to tell direction. He thought, grimly, of the "Heroes of Samar"—that lack of compasses and inability to see the sun had been their undoing, too.

And now a strange, awesome thing happened. Harrington whirled as he heard a hoarse laugh—a white man's laugh—behind him. He flung up his rifle and almost fired, until he thought of the strangeness of that laughter, and noticed different things.

THE man who had come to him from the direction in which the way was temporarily clear, was old and gray and stooped, but still somehow suggested mighty strength and dauntless courage.

Harrington gasped as he looked at the shock of gray hair, covering the old man's head and shoulders like a white mat. Whiskers hung down past the breastbone. The man was dressed outlandishly—his clothing, mostly of native manufacture, held together by needles made of thorns, and thread made of—Harrington did not know.

But he noticed other things: the clothing was patched amazingly, and the color of the patches amazed Harrington, for they were faded khaki. And there were patches on the sleeves of dirty gray denim which the old man used as a shirt, and the patches held the parallel stripes of a corporal of marines!

The old man cackled:

"Sir, Corporal—er—er—Fredericks reports for duty!"

Harrington had heard his mother talk too often not to recognize the military method of reporting to a superior for duty. But of what use was this old man—who carried in his hands a rifle which could by no stretch of the imagination be worth anything at all?

CORPORAL FREDERICKS was leveling his rifle at the Taos and pulling the trigger—but no sound or bullets came from the weapon. He was a man playing at guns and soldiers. He cackled as he “loaded” and “fired,” without either loading or firing.

And something came hurtling over between them at that moment, to land at their feet. It was the head of the Tagalog—and the Taos were screaming their triumph. Harrington was to be next.

But Corporal Fredericks dropped to his knees, aimed at the nearest Tao—and pulled the trigger—and Harrington almost lost his breath in amazement. For where his bullets had scarcely stopped men even when he shot them through the heart, the mere pretense of aiming and firing on the part of the old man caused a man to fall as though he had been shot through the heart.

The man not only fell, but while yells of dismay fled through the ranks of the Taos, he began to kick in convulsions, and to foam at the mouth. Corporal Fredericks cackled—and moved the muzzle of his rifle to and fro, back and forth, pulling the trigger as rapidly as he could. And a still stranger thing happened.

The Taos, who had but to climb the rock and destroy both the white men, retreated precipitately across the clearing! Their retreat became a rout—a headlong race, as though they fled from sure destruction. Harrington stared at the old man in amazement. Corporal Fredericks

ended his senile make-believe and turned to Harrington.

“Now I’ll get you away,” he said.

He spoke English very strangely, as though it were a tongue he had all but forgotten.

“What made them run, Corporal?” asked Harrington, his voice shaking.

Corporal Fredericks tapped his forehead.

“They think me mad,” he said. “Sometimes I am—and spirits keep watch over madmen. To attack me, then, would be to attack the spirits themselves, and so they ran. I’ve never turned my rifle on them before. Come, I’ll take you to the coast.”

They were striding across the clearing, the old man walking with the ease and surety of Harrington himself, and Taos could be seen on all sides, flitting through the rain that had poured almost without let-up, keeping pace with them. The miracle of the old man’s presence here amazed Harrington. And now the old man stopped suddenly.

“I forgot to ask why you are here,” he said. Harrington laughed.

“I’d forgotten myself,” he said, “for the moment. Your appearance—”

“I understand; but you see, I’ve never been properly relieved.”

“What’s that?”

“You know, there are orders in the service. A soldier ordered to do something, or to walk a post, must not stop until he has orders to stop, or quit his post unless officially relieved. Well, I’ve never been officially relieved.”

HARRINGTON’S heart almost stopped beating. All of this was mad, but somehow thrilling.

“What were your last orders, Corporal?” he asked.

“Lieutenant Williams, of the expedition—I guess maybe he was a

little cracked when he gave the order, but that wasn't for me to decide—knew that some of his marines had wandered away from the column. As a corporal, they were partly my responsibility, too. He ordered me to hunt until I found them. The order was never rescinded. I have kept on hunting. I have found them all—but I only found the last one today."

The old man was leading the way back to the rock, and Harrington understood—that the skeleton he had found was the last of those who had "wandered away and were never heard from again."

And as they climbed atop the rock and, at the old man's suggestion, began to gather up the bleached remains for burial, Harrington told his own story in a subdued voice. He told all of it, omitting nothing—and when he had finished the old man said quietly:

"Your quest is ended. I've found and identified all of the missing. This poor skeleton can be but one man—the one you seek—for he was the only one left."

"But I always heard that he never got back to the altar—"

THE old man smiled sadly.

"I found one man thirty-five miles from where he had started. I didn't find his head, but never mind. And I found another on the opposite side of Samar! This is Harrington—and now you can tell your mother—"

But his mother was dead. He whispered to himself.

"No wonder I could feel her presence. She *knew!*"

They buried the skeleton with reverence—and many hours later Harrington stood before the old man where the jungle reached down and almost touched the sea. There would be a boat to meet him soon—

"And you won't come back, Corporal Fredericks?" he asked.

The old man shook his head.

I'VE been here too long. I've grown to like it. I understand the Taos. We are friends as long as they are sure I am mad. I shall never allow them to think otherwise, for there are times when I am mad. In the beginning I must have been quite mad—for many years. By that time I had been lost from the world too long, and besides, there was no way to get back—and my orders had not been changed!"

Devotion to orders! It was magnificent, even though it might be part of the old man's madness. Harrington lifted his eyes to where bright sunlight was just trying to reach through the clouds.

"Somehow," he said softly, "the brilliant light makes me think of flags flying—"

"Yes, the Stars and Stripes. I often see them, especially at sunset—waving in the bright breeze—"

And then, with the parting assurance that the Taos would not bother him before the arrival of his boat, Corporal Fredericks took leave of Harrington, vanishing into the dense jungle. Harrington did not see that he stopped behind the greenery to whisper to himself:

"After all, she's dead. *He* does not need me. It must have been *she* who inspired me to tell him my name was Fredericks—but why should I have selected the name of the man we just buried? I guess I knew when I saw that my job was ended, and I had spent a long time seeking Fredericks."

The elder Harrington strode into the jungle then, head up, and long gray hair flying in the breeze—sure that he had done right in remaining in the only world he still knew.

Drums of Nakawi



A Fast-Moving Story of Breath-Taking Peril in the Unfathomable Depths of the Jungle

By JACK D'ARCY

Author of "Danger Island," "The Sacred Scimitar," etc.

THERE was no sound in all the vast jungle about him. Yet Jim Cannon was aware of a vague apprehension that settled about his shoulders like an invisible cape of fear. He shuddered involuntarily. The blackness of the thick African night enveloped him like an evil sable screen.

As the sense of eeriness which was upon him increased, Cannon became at first annoyed, then angry. After all, he was too old a hand at this game to permit the terrible stillness of a jungle night to get him. Yet he found himself, like the

veriest tenderfoot, wishing for something that would in some tangible form, break the awful silence. Something—anything! Anything that made a noise.

Then it came! So suddenly that at first he felt nothing but relief—a welcome relief from the Stygian stillness that it put to flight. It went reverberating through the jungle, booming and monotonous, a deep sonorous rolling sound that sped swiftly through the murkiness of the night, then lost itself somewhere in the jungle's rim.

Cannon stiffened. His short mo-

ment of comfort and relief had faded with the departing sound. The awful import of that rolling roar had illumined his consciousness.

The drums! Nakawi drums!

Cannon stood up and looked around in the darkness. Then the sound of some more tangible menace came to his straining ears. With a swift gesture he snatched up his rifle, and riveted his eyes on a small clearing which stood on the other side of his smoldering fire. Again he heard what sounded like a snapping crackle in the matted underbrush. Cautiously, he backed out of the circle of light shed by the glowing embers.

BACK against the blackness of the jungle he made out the figure of a man reeling across the clearing, staggering crazily in the manner of one in dire distress. Cannon moved cautiously into the circle of light, his rifle held tensely at his side.

"Who's out there?" he challenged.

The stranger stumbled and fell to his knees, staring upward with glassy, uncomprehending eyes. Then his head fell, and silence held him.

Cannon dropped his rifle and dragged the prostrate form into the light. Something metallic gleamed on the man's shoulders, and Cannon noticed for the first time that the newcomer was dressed in the gray uniform of the Rhodesian Constabulary. He quickly produced a flask from his pack, poured some brandy between the unconscious man's lips. Then he watched anxiously.

The liquor had its effect. The newcomer blinked his eyes dully, seemed to orient his senses, then sat up. Cannon handed him a pannikin of cold tea left over from his evening meal. The stranger drained the vessel without a word, then put

it down beside him. He looked first at the fire, then at Cannon.

"Got a smoke?" he asked abruptly.

Cannon proffered him a cigarette. The other took it witho it deigning to reply, lit it. Cannon studied him closely as he smoked. Finally, the stranger spoke.

"Name's John Dent," he said laconically. "Thanks for picking me up."

Cannon waved his appreciation aside.

"What happened?" he asked. "How did you happen up here? You're miles from the barracks, you know."

Dent seemed to resent this rapid questioning. A frown creased his brow. Finally, however, he forced a wan smile.

"One thing at a time," he replied. "One thing at a time. It's a long story."

Again the roaring surge of those distant drums swept the jungle. Cannon inhaled swiftly. Dent appeared unmoved.

"You're damned casual about those drums," Cannon snapped. "Don't you hear them?"

Dent shrugged. "They amount to nothing," he replied shortly. "They're miles away. Some natives got a jag on. That's all."

CANNON stared at him in utter amazement. It seemed incredible that a member of the Constabulary should be so ignorant of the country. Cannon knew the ritual drums when he heard them. But this was no such functional music. These were the Nakawi drums of war—a steady sonorous roll of definite cadence. Ten years in the Rhodesian hinterland had made Cannon keen to the nuances of native music.

"You're in Nakawi-land," he said to the other. "Those are war drums. No white man is safe in this country at this moment. When they get

tired of their palaver, they'll take the trail in search of white men's blood. God help anyone who meets up with them."

DENT wasn't impressed. "They don't worry me," he said casually.

"Well, they should," Cannon snapped. "I'll take you down river with me in the morning. With luck we'll make it."

"I am not going back," Dent said, still unperturbed.

Cannon stared at him. "Are you mad?" he asked quietly. "Why you'll die if you don't get out of this country immediately."

"I'll take my chances."

"You're taking plenty, then," Cannon observed.

The talking ceased and they lapsed into silence as though by tacit consent. Cannon eyed the constable queerly. Certainly his attitude was strange.

And he had made no explanation why he was traveling as light as he was. True, he had a revolver strapped at his side. But no sane man would track so far afield without pack and provisions.

Cannon's suspicions grew. Still, if the fellow didn't want to talk, it was all right. He hadn't done much talking himself. He was glad now that he hadn't. He might have told him of the two native dugouts, one loaded with ivory, one with supplies, which he had carefully concealed in the foliage of the river bank. He might have commented on the heavy day's toil of loading the cache on the boats. But he had said nothing.

Though the facts were that he and his native boys, Malfi and Kwaag, who were now guarding the dugout, sweated all day, piling up the valuable tusks that he had cached there three weeks back. To-

morrow he would take the stuff down the river.

Dent stood up and yawned. "Well," he said quite patronizingly, "I think I'll get a little sleep."

He walked half way to the clearing, helped himself to one of Cannon's blankets, then lay down and slept.

Cannon sat silent and still, immersed in thought. He didn't mind the drums so much now, even though his pulse was pounding in perfect unison with those beats. But consciously he was scarcely aware of them. He decided to stay awake. The man who was coiled up in his blankets had made him too suspicious to attempt sleep. After all, it was just three days to the mouth of the Nakawi River. There was safety—wealth—and—

A voice rammed itself into his consciousness.

"Don't turn around, my friend. Hand me that rifle. Unbuckle your revolver and throw it behind you. Quick now."

CANNON didn't move. He felt something hard and cold in the small of his back. His eyes ranged over where the other man slept. Dent hadn't awakened. He cursed his ears which had failed to warn him of his captor's approach. With a grunt, he thrust the rifle behind him, then unbuckled his holster.

Then, and only then, did his captor reveal himself. Cannon saw a young giant, sunburned and seared by the jungle, an automatic grasped tensely in his hand. He was dressed in an old torn shirt and faded drill trousers.

The man with the automatic nodded in the direction of the sleeping figure. "Who's that?" he asked.

Cannon did some fast thinking. Despite the fact that Dent had acted rather oddly, there was no conclu-

sive evidence that he was not exactly what he appeared to be—a member of the Constabulary. If this man with the automatic, was for some purpose attempting the capture of the sleeper, it was up to Cannon to protect the latter. Finally, he answered. "That's my partner," he lied.

The other just nodded.

"You can turn in," he said shortly.

Cannon decided on frankness.

"Listen," he said impulsively. "What's all the mystery about? Who the hell are you? How the hell is it that you are out in the jungle in that outfit?"

THE other man didn't answer his question. Instead he said sharply: "You hear those drums?"

"Damn it," replied Cannon. "How can I help hearing them?"

"You'd better get down the river," the other counseled. "First thing in the morning. The Nakawi are thirsty for blood."

Cannon nodded. Here at last was a man who knew the country. He glanced at the man as he sat across from him, the weapon still held loosely in his hand.

"I'm leaving in the morning," Cannon said. "How about you?"

"I'll follow you later," the man replied. "I'm looking for some one."

Again they fell into silence. The tall sunburned man with the gun sat there tirelessly keeping Cannon covered. Cannon did not talk. Instead he wracked his brain for a solution to the enigma which confronted him. At last some of the pieces of this puzzle were falling into place. Instinct told him his captor was searching for Dent.

For a moment Cannon was tempted to talk; to tell of the suspicious circumstances which surrounded the appearance of the man who slept

beneath his blanket. But some sixth sense caused him to refrain.

The fire died down, but the drums rolled on.

Cannon was in that nebulous state which is not sleep nor yet complete consciousness. Twice he had fought off the overpowering drowsiness which the hard day's toil had engendered. Twice he had stemmed the stupor which enveloped his senses. But at last it proved too much for him. His eyes closed, and he lost himself in utter relaxation.

He awoke with the stench of the jungle in his nostrils. His clothes were damp with the miasmic steam rising from the lush jungle growth crawling along the earth. He sat upright and yawned. The yawn evolved into a gape. He stared about him.

Both of his mysterious visitors of the night had vanished!

There before him, lay the wrinkled blanket of Dent. At his side where he had tossed them were his weapons. Of the second stranger there was no sign whatever. One thought came to him.

HASTILY he threw his pack together and raced to the near-by river bank. Cautiously he made his way along the treacherous growth bordering the water course. Then he gave a sudden gasp of relief.

For there, gently swaying on the surface of the sluggish river, were his two dugouts, firmly lashed side by side, with Malfi sitting lazily in the stern of the supply canoe and Kwaag in the bow. Cannon wasted no time now. The surge of those savage drums had gone with the dawn.

It would take them three days to get down the river. Three days of swift moving with his valuable load. Whatever he may have feared from his two visitors was forgotten now.

He had but one task ahead. That was to reach his destination, or at least the Constabulary barracks, before the Nakawi came down upon him.

He leaped in the dugouts, barked a staccato order to the boy, who grabbed a pole and pushed his way out to the center of the river. They commenced their racking journey, the ivory dugout being towed behind them.

FOR two hours they poled methodically, grunting and sweating in the venomous heat of a blazing overhead sun. Cannon's eyes searched the bright green banks that held the river as he poled, but there was no sign of life. He was hungry, but he dared not take the time to eat.

Despite the sapping savagery of the sun he dreaded the oncoming night—the night that would once again bring that maddening, reverberating roll of Nakawi drums surging through the jungle. Sleep, too, he would deny himself. He must think of nothing save the interminable sixty miles of yellow sluggish water that lay between him and his goal.

He stiffened suddenly. Something on the river bank caught his eye. Something dark against the blackness of the lush growth. An ebony figure moved. Half a dozen other figures were mobile against the grim immobility of the jungle. He shouted to Malfi for more speed, then whipping his revolver from its holster, stood up in the fragile craft.

Even as he did so the air was suddenly thick with flying arrows. They sang a ziraleet through the air and buried themselves into the bark covering on the forepart of the craft. Cannon raised his revolver. Three crashing reverberations echoed through the forest.

Anxiously Cannon's eyes swept the shore. If this was the main body of the Nakawis, this indeed was the end. However, as far as he could make out there were no more than a dozen of them. Probably, a party of hunters who had wandered far afield in search of game, and who were now returning to the council at the imperative summons of the drums.

Bows twanged once more. Cannon heard a rattling gasp behind him and turned to see Malfi drooping over the stern, an arrow in his throat. A blind rage seized Cannon. A terrible icy coolness took possession of him. Aiming deliberately he pressed the trigger four times. At each shot a savage dropped. The others, panicked by such lethal shooting, screamed wildly and ran madly into the cover of the jungle.

CANNON turned. Malfi lay still and silent in the stern. Crimson fluid stained the ebony of his skin. Gently Cannon took the pole from his hand and slid the corpse into the water. It was impossible to carry the dead man sixty miles in that terrific heat. He looked around. Kwaag had vanished but a crimson stain in the river was his silent epitaph.

Down river he poled desperately. Sweat stained his brow, and his muscles ached wearily. Then for the second time within the hour he caught sight of a human being.

He shielded his eyes with his hand and peered through the shimmering heat waves rising from the sluggish surface, and distorting his vision. On the bank stood a man waving both arms violently. For a single moment Cannon hesitated. Then he poled vigorously towards the bank. Possibly towards danger, but then again this might be a white man in

distress. Clumsily the dugout pushed through the water.

Cannon gave a little jump as he recognized John Dent on the bank. The gray of the Constabulary uniform was plainly evident against the vernal background. He poled faster. Here, possibly, was an explanation of last night's untoward events.

As the boat ran into shallow water and scraped on the sand, the man on the bank waded out a few steps and pulled him aground. The blunt nose of the dugout thudded against the clay shore.

SO," said Cannon, "You've changed your mind. Get aboard. I'll take you ashore."

Cannon's fingers closed on his revolver butt. But before he could jerk the weapon from his holster, he found himself staring into the unwavering muzzle of a .38.

"What's the game?" Cannon asked.

The other grinned, but there was no solace in his smile.

"Pillage," he said curtly. "Pillage, plunder and perhaps—murder? Come ashore."

Cannon had little choice in the matter. He sprang from the boat to the bank. After making the dugout fast to a leaning mangrove Dent grinned triumphantly.

"So," he commented. "Ivory. A goodly store."

Cannon didn't answer. His face was grim and his eyes glinted dangerously as he grappled with the growing anger within him. Dent brandished his gun.

"March," he commanded, then jerked his head in the direction of the jungle. They moved off together.

For some twenty minutes they strode through the lush growth. Then Cannon caught sight of a wisp of smoke curling up through the tops of the trees. A moment later

they emerged into a clearing. In the center a fire, built by inexperienced hands, smoldered wearily. Two men were beside it. One lay bound and prostrate on the ground. The other stood guard with a rifle held in readiness before him. Dent spoke to the man with the rifle.

THINGS are looking up, Jake," he remarked. "This bird's just presented us with two dugouts and lots of ivory. They're at the river bank. We'll take them with us."

"Then you're not of the Constabulary," Cannon said. It was a statement of fact, not a question.

Dent grinned. "There's your constable," he said, indicating the bound figure on the ground. "There's the representative of Rhodesian law. Brave looking guy, isn't he?"

Cannon stared down at the luckless form on the ground.

"Don't waste any sympathy on him," put in Jake. "Because you're staying right here with him when we leave."

Cannon ignored the retort. He turned to the man on the ground. "Is that the truth?" he asked.

The man nodded. "Yes," he replied in a weak voice. "This pair here have been selling liquor and guns to the natives. I was out on their trail. I am a constable. But Dent, leaving his partner to guard the camp, ambushed me, and after a fight, took my uniform." The captive constable turned accusing eyes on Cannon. "If you hadn't lied to me last night," he resumed, "we wouldn't be in this predicament now. I dozed off from sheer exhaustion and Dent got me for the second time."

Cannon shrugged. There was no use bemoaning the past.

"If you had told me the whole story last night," he replied, "I would have told you mine."

There was a long moment of silence which Dent finally broke.

"Tie him up, Jake. We'll get along with that cargo down river."

Cannon regarded them somberly.

"You're new to this country," he said. "You don't know it very well. You'll never make it down the river."

"Why?" Jake asked.

"Because of those drum beats last night," Cannon explained. "The only safe place for you is the Constabulary barracks."

"I told them that," put in the constable. "But they thought it just a trick to capture them."

LISTEN," said Dent. "I'll take my chances with the natives. As for the Constabulary—tut!" he snapped his fingers. "Here's one man that can outwit the whole slew of them. Look at your friend there on the ground."

"You're crazy, crazy as hell," Cannon said. "You'll hear those drums again tonight—you'll probably hear more than that. We're your best bets if you only knew it. You had better take us along and head for the barracks. The constabulary won't be half as tough as those natives."

"Tie him up, Jake," was Dent's only reply to this warning.

Cannon shrugged his shoulders futilely as Jake came toward him with a rope in his hand. Under the threat of Dent's gun he was forced to submit. In a moment he was lying prostrate at the side of the captive constable.

His henchman obeyed.

"Now," continued Dent, "We're leaving. As for the Nakawi, we're not worrying. They're friends of ours. Haven't we just traded them a mess of raw whiskey and a whole boat load of rifles?" He laughed hoarsely.

"The Nakawi are no one's friends when the war drums sound," said the constable. "You're going to a certain death—just as certain as the one you're leaving us to face."

Dent only laughed. Together with Jake he turned and disappeared in the direction of the river.

The two captives looked at each other. There was a quizzical light in Cannon's eyes. "Well," he remarked, "I think it's time we knew one another. My name's Cannon."

"Mine's Cook," said the other.

Abruptly the jungle night came down upon them. Swift and sudden like a black pall of death dropped by a phantom hand. And with the darkness came again the savage legato booming of the Nakawi drums. Cook was silent, but grim sweat streaked down his distorted face as he struggled against the bonds that held him. Cannon fought back the sudden fear and strained his wrists in the thongs until the skin chafed and ran red with blood.

THEN an icy grip of dread closed suddenly over each struggling man's heart. For out of the jungle, out of the sinister night, there sounded high and shrill above the booming of the drums, a weird and ghastly shriek, a maddening blood curdling scream. Cannon turned darting eyes on Cook. The latter nodded confirmation.

"They've started," he said grimly. "They're on the trail. If we're to get out alive we must move quickly."

Cannon said nothing for fear that Cook would notice a tremor in his voice. But he redoubled his efforts to free himself. His wrists were almost numb with pain. Blood trickled to the ground from the chafed and broken skin.

His heart went into a sudden pounding as he heard something snap faintly. Perhaps he had won

free! His muscles were too dead for him to know immediately. With a violent wrench he tore his hands apart. An ejaculation of triumph and hope fell from his lips. For a short moment he massaged his bleeding wrists, then he sprang to loosen the bonds of his comrade.

"We're not out of it yet," said Cook. "But we've got a fighting chance. My pack was cached when they jumped me. It's probably still there, and if it is we'll have an extra rifle and an extra .38 to assist us."

He turned and cautiously led the way through the forest. Some three hundred yards off he reached in a hollow tree trunk and withdrew a knapsack, together with the weapons he had mentioned.

"Come on," Cannon said. "We'd better start down river holding close to the bank. It's our best chance."

COOK nodded. "There's a chance the Constabulary has sent somebody out looking for me," he replied. "If so, they'll probably come up the river in a launch."

They wasted no more time in words. Both plunged into the matted undergrowth and headed for the river.

Like evil yellow eyes in the night, a host of fires leaped to life in the jungle. The river lay placid and quiet beside them, murmuring softly. But in the jungle behind, the surging drums rolled out their threnody of doom.

Cook took the lead and Cannon followed him grimly. The bush tore savagely at his puttees. Thorned branches swung viciously into his face. He could feel warm blood trickling down his cheeks. His throat was dry, parched. His stomach was hollow and empty; half from hunger, half from fear. Still, on they fought through the thick night.

The booming grew much louder. The sound seemed to come from everywhere, as the maddening, ubiquitous music rose up about them. Cook stopped suddenly in his tracks.

"Listen," he whispered tensely.

Cannon froze to immobility. The drums had ceased their death rhythm. But from the black jungle depths came a more ominous sound—the slithering patter of naked feet on the lush floor of the tropical forest. Cook jerked the revolver from his holster. Cannon held his rifle in readiness, just below his shoulder.

"Don't move," Cook whispered huskily.

TOGETHER they stood, motionless and silent, each prepared to sell his life as dearly as possible. Two white men standing alone in a sea of blackness, entirely surrounded by a horde of blood hungry savages, running amok to the mad music of the Nakawi drums.

A wild, shrieking babble of voices, divorced from the sound of the drums, emanated from the forest depths.

"We'd better run for it," Cannon said. "If they get us here, we're caught like rats in a trap. Between them and the river—"

Cook nodded. "Chances are slim for losing them in the jungle."

"The time has come to take slim chances," Cannon replied.

But for the moment they remained still. From up the river came a wild yell. Not the weird throaty howl of a savage, but an articulate scream of fear from the throat of a white man.

"They've got them," Cannon said.

"The damned fools," Cook hissed.

"It's time to make tracks," Cannon snapped.

Together they raced from the swaying palms rimming the Nakawi

River, across a clearing to the deeper jungle beyond. But the howling savages were close behind. Something whistled over Cannon's head. He looked up. A shivering assegai had buried itself in the trunk of a gnarled tree. He turned swiftly and sent a stabbing shot blindly behind him. A howl of pain testified to the luck of his aim.

BUT that single cry of pain quickly evolved into a myriad shout from a hundred liquor-fired black throats lurking invisibly in the jungle behind. A dozen spears splattered. Cannon could hear them swish as they hurtled through the air.

"Quick," Cook barked. "Swing off to one side, and watch out for those spears. They're short of rifles and can't aim very well anyway through these trees. But they can do miracles with those damned assegais.

Cook darted off at a tangent and Cannon followed through the black abysmal forest. Cook swung into a wide circle, hoping to bend his course back to the river eventually in case the Constabulary launch had come up to effect a rescue.

The grim fight continued. Two white men against a horde of mad black savages. Occasionally, as an ebony figure was silhouetted against the ivory moon, a single rifle shot stabbed into the darkness and reduced by one the uneven odds. Cook's shoulder bled profusely from a jagged wound where a spear had pierced him. Cannon hurriedly attempted to give first aid but the other stopped him.

"No time for that now," he said. "We're about done. Let's try and make it back to the river."

He turned abruptly and plunged off to the left. Cannon followed him.

A hollow rhythmic muffled sound

reached Cook's ears from ahead. Cook stopped dead in his tracks, so abruptly Cannon collided with him.

"The Constabulary!" Cook exclaimed. "We must make the river! We must!"

CANNON felt a new wave of hope surge over him. He seemed suddenly drenched with a renewed courage.

"We'll make it," he said simply, and Cook caught some of the infectious note of resolve in his voice.

"Come on," he said abruptly.

The savages howled and yelled behind them.

It was impossible for the Constabulary to achieve a landing and face the savage horde in the forest. If Cook and Cannon were to be saved they must accomplish their job first. They plunged on, came out upon a rising gorge and below them saw the river. There, floating gently on her broad bosom was the launch, her swaying lights a beckoning haven—sanctuary from the evil African night.

Down they raced! But the goal was not yet won. Suddenly there emerged before them, almost at the river bank, a half dozen screeching painted figures, their garish head-dresses of blood-stained feathers waving weirdly in the dim light.

Cannon's rifle and Cook's revolver barked out their final challenge simultaneously. A pair of the savages fell, horrible and grotesque in death. The remainder uttered a blood-curdling war whoop and charged. Something bit deep into Cannon's chest. With an effort he kept his feet.

"Come on," Cook cried. "For God's sake, it's our last chance!"

They scrambled, fell; literally dived down the bank to the river. Into the muddy depths they plunged without waiting for breaths. For

a single moment they were bathed in the yellow glow of a searchlight. Then it disappeared. The welcome *chug-chug* of the launch's motor came to their ears.

CANNON swam desperately. His muscles were working mechanically, purely of their own volition. He saw a vague black hulk in the water beside him. He heard the gasping rattle of Cook's breath. He felt a pair of strong arms beneath his shoulders. Then a blackness even darker than that of the night enveloped him.

He regained consciousness to feel the comforting vibration of a deck beneath him. He looked up at the bandaged eyes of Cook.

"You're all right?" he asked.

Cook nodded. "Quite," he replied. "And you?"

Cannon didn't answer immediately. His eyes had automatically followed the glowing searchlight as it stretched its beaming finger out toward the shore. There, almost alongside of them, were two dugouts. Cannon sprang to his feet.

"My ivory!" he shouted triumphantly, as he rushed to the side of the boat. Cook followed.

"Your ivory, yes," Cook said, "but look!"

Cannon looked where he pointed. There, lying prostrate in the dug-out, in a crimson deluge, lay what was left of Dent and his partner. Arrows protruded from their inert bodies.

Dent had spoken at least a partial truth. He was one man that the Constabulary would never get. He had been the victim of a more powerful, more terrible law than that of the white man.

A STRANGE silence fell upon the launch as Cannon's dugouts were lashed to the stern. The engines started up again, and the boat kicked up a silver wake as she headed down the river. Far behind them the Nakawi war drums boomed hollowly in the depths of the river gorge.

"You have to know this country to beat it," Cook said.

"Even then the chances are against you," Cannon replied. "For Africa never sleeps. A human being must. This is my last trip."

But deep in his heart Cannon knew that he lied, knew that he would always return to the mysterious, unfathomable jungle.

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A Complete Novelette

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

Author of "The Whistling Waddy Rides On," "Voodoo Vengeance," etc.

AS HE SWERVED his galloping mount sharply to the right, Buck Mawson heard the echo of the hoofbeats of his pursuers. They were close, far too close for comfort. It would only be a few moments until they discovered he had turned into the yawning mouth of the ravine.

Still there was a chance that they might overlook the spot, for the entrance was shielded by a thick

growth of trees. Buck had discovered the place himself, a few days ago, but at the time he had been deliberately looking for a possible hidden way into the canyon and he had found it.

He rode rapidly into the tunnel-like opening between the rocks. Suddenly he drew his horse to a sliding stop, his left hand pulling heavily upon the reins, his right streaking for the gun in the holster on his

hip. In front of him stood a masked man, his eyes cold as he stared at Buck from behind a Winchester held ready for action.

"Let that gun alone!" the masked man barked sharply. "Stick 'em up high!"

Buck hesitated the fraction of a second, his fingers still hovering close to the butt of his heavy Colt, then slowly raised his hands high above his head.

"I hope I'm not intruding," he said mildly. "It was getting a bit too hot for me so I rode in here."

"Shut up!" ordered the masked man tersely as he heard the sound of hoofs just beyond the trees that sheltered the entrance.

BUCK remained silently sitting on his wiry little roan until the sounds of the horses of his pursuers faded away.

"Looks like they missed me!" he exclaimed with a sigh of relief. "I was afraid they saw me turn in here."

"Why were them fellers after you?" demanded the masked man, watching Buck intently. "If they really was chasin' yuh."

"They were chasing me all right," Buck grinned. "It seems I didn't make myself popular in town about an hour ago. I'd just hit this part of the country for the first time. Being kind of tired and thirsty I stopped at the Last Chance Saloon."

"So far it's a good story," remarked the man who guarded the canyon entrance. "Though maybe I've heard better liars from time to time. Uh huh, an' then?"

"Well, there was a stout gentleman standing up against the bar. Nelson, they called him, Jim Nelson. Maybe you've heard of him?"

"Sure, aside from bein' th' sheriff, Jim Nelson ain't much around here."

"As soon as he saw me he got nasty and began to ask a lot of ques-

tions," Buck Mawson's lean tanned face suddenly grew hard. "I don't like people that are too curious, and I told him so. He grabbed me by the arm and said he was going to make me talk. I didn't like that so I punched him just above the belt. He started to go for his gun, but I—"

THE masked man stepped back in startled amazement as he found himself staring into the muzzle of the heavy Colt held in the steady hand of the man on the roan horse. He was not even sure he had seen Buck lower his right arm, yet he now found himself covered by the other's gun.

"Maybe you'd better lower that Winchester a little more," said Buck. "I have a nervous trigger finger."

The masked man cursed softly, but pointed the barrel of the rifle toward the ground.

"As I was saying," remarked Buck in a conversational tone, "I happened to be a bit quicker than the sheriff on the draw." He shook his head sadly. "But he wasn't convinced. He took a shot at me and missed so I had to plug him in the arm. Then I left the saloon rather hastily and the sheriff and his men followed. That was they who just went by."

"Damn if I can figure you out," murmured the masked man. "You talk like a tenderfoot dude." He glared at the gun in Buck's hand. Then his eyes wandered over the other man's well worn Stetson, his gray flannel shirt, the holster tied low on the right hip, and the brown corduroy trousers tucked carelessly into the soft leather boots. "But you sure don't look an' act like one."

"That's worried a lot of people," Buck smiled again. "It just happens that I went to school when I was a kid, and what I learned there has

stuck with me." His tone grew hard. "Now suppose you tell me why you're wearing that mask and guarding this place?"

"You needn't tell him, Dave!" said a voice behind Buck and slightly to his left. "Don't move, Stranger!"

A warning note in the unexpected voice told Buck he was covered and he remained motionless, his gun still pointing at the masked man.

"Drop your gun," commanded the voice behind Mawson. "Or I'll plug you."

"If you shoot me I'll get him," stated Buck, his eyes still fixed on Dave.

"Careful, Chief," said the masked man hastily and anxiously. "This feller just winged th' sheriff a while ago, an' come in here to throw Nelson an' his men off th' trail."

"All right," said the voice behind Buck. "I won't shoot—yet."

"Then I won't either," said Buck calmly.

He was bluffing desperately, and he knew it. He was in a very dangerous position at the moment. The slightest move upon his part would bring the fire of the man behind him, and even if he did shoot Dave, as he threatened, Buck realized it would mean his own life. Yet he still remained cool, his brain working swiftly.

From the very first moment he had ridden into the little cattle town of Bever that morning, Buck Mawson had been playing a game for purposes of his own, and he was still doing so. He had been trained in a hard school and he knew when to take chances.

He had not heard the slightest sound behind him, but he suddenly found himself grasped by fingers that were like iron. Before he could recover his balance he had been pulled roughly from the saddle to land in a sprawling heap upon the ground.

His gun had been knocked from his hand as he fell. As he got swiftly to his feet he found the muzzle of a long barreled Colt pointing at him. The weapon was held in the hand of a tall man dressed in a frock coat and wearing an immaculate gray Stetson. The masked man stood a little to one side, again covering Buck with his rifle.

"We're right particular about visitors," said the tall man. As he spoke his long coat swung back and Buck saw he wore two holsters on his hips, one of which was now empty for he held the weapon in his hand. "Even when they're sent by the sheriff!"

BUCK MAWSON said nothing as he studied the tall man. Cold eyes that were like blue ice stared at him from a thin dark face almost the color of that of an Indian. There was an aboriginal cast to the countenance that the broken hawk-like nose accentuated, and Buck realized the man was a half-breed of some sort.

Buck knew he had at last come in contact with the notorious rustler and outlaw who had been terrorizing that section of the country. A description of the man who called himself Captain Antony LaGrew was firmly fixed in Buck Mawson's mind and he never failed to remember details.

"What'd you want to do with him, Chief?" demanded the masked man as he stood with his rifle covering Buck.

"Is what he said about running away from the sheriff true?" demanded LaGrew.

"You got me," Dave shook his head. "He come ridin' in here hell bent for election an' there was some fellers followin' him. It might of been th' sheriff and a posse. I didn't see them, just heard their horses passin'."

"It was the sheriff," said Buck

quietly. "He's after me all right. I wouldn't be surprised to find him coming back when he and his men learn they've lost my trail."

"In that case I'll take you with me," LaGrew's smile was like a death's head as he gazed at Buck. "We've had few visitors lately and you may amuse me."

Buck's heart leaped, but his expression remained blank and unconcerned. It was what he had been working for from the beginning, to be taken to the outlaws' stronghold.

That had been why he had risked his life by antagonizing the sheriff, even going so far as to shoot Nelson in the arm. He wanted to be permitted to enter LaGrew's hidden domain as an outlaw in the eyes of the cleverest bunch of rustlers that had ever terrorized that part of Texas. Only in that way could he even hope to accomplish his mission.

AS he stood there Buck recalled his interview with Captain Wesley Hill of the Texas Rangers. They had been together in Hill's office.

"You're a new man, Mawson," the captain had said. "But in the single year you've been with this organization you've proven to me you have the right stuff in you. This is a tough job I'm giving you, for the least slip upon your part is likely to mean your death."

"I realize that," Buck had answered quietly. "I understand perfectly, Captain."

"All right then," Hill had continued. "We think that a man named LaGrew who is half-Indian and half-Lord-knows-what, is the leader of a gang of outlaws known as the Renegade Rustlers. But we can't prove it nor do we know the identity of the other members of the band. That's what you have to find out," the captain had smiled then.

"You may use your own methods,

and conceal your being a Texas Ranger just as long as you possibly can. You understand?"

"I do, Captain," Buck had replied. "And when I gather all the evidence possible, what then?"

"If it is humanly possible, get in touch with Jerry Carter. He is located on the Diamond Ranch near the town of Bever. He is working there ostensibly as a cowhand, but he's also a ranger. You can depend upon Jerry if you need him. He knows how to get a message through to me quickly," again Captain Hill had smiled.

"Of course if you and Carter could clean up LaGrew's gang by yourselves it would be a big feather in your caps. Sheriff Nelson may be willing to work with you if you show him positive proof that LaGrew is really the leader of the rustlers. See what you can do, Mawson."

"I'll do my best, Captain."

"Right!" the captain had risen to his feet and held out his hand. "I wish you luck."

THAT was all that had been said. The next day Buck had ridden south toward Bever; three days later he had arrived there. This morning he had found the opening he had wanted when Sheriff Nelson had tried to question him. Now he found himself being taken to the hidden camp of the rustlers as a prisoner.

"You stay here on guard as usual, Dave," said LaCrew, as he glanced at Buck. "What's your name?"

"Dick Rand," answered Buck promptly.

He had been christened Richard Rand Mawson, so he had partly given his right name, though no one had ever called him anything but "Buck" Mawson for years.

"Rand, eh?" grunted LaGrew as he picked up Buck's gun and shoved

it in the empty holster on his right leg. He still carried his own Colt in his hand ready for action. "You know who I am?"

"I think so," said Buck doubtfully. "You're LaGrew, aren't you?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Might as well put my cards on the table," stated Buck. "I had a good reason for not wanting to answer the sheriff's questions. You see my partner and I held up a train about a week ago—up country further. He was killed when we were trying to make a break for it, but I got away." He smiled. "With ten thousand in cash and about ten more in jewelry."

THAT'S a lot of money," LaGrew's pale eyes gleamed.

"It's safe," remarked Buck dryly. "I've got it cached until things blow over."

"What's that got to do with your knowing my name?"

"Nothing," said Buck. "Only I thought that if you were LaGrew you might know where I could hide-out until later." He looked at the other man. "I might even split what I got from the train hold-up for protection."

"Get your horse and come with me," said LaGrew. "Either you've more brains than I thought, or you're a damn fool." He smiled grimly. "But you interest me!"

LaGrew stepped to one side as Buck lifted the reins of the roan's bridle from where they had dropped to the ground.

The masked guard of the canyon entrance stood a little distance away. He was watching carefully, his Winchester still ready, though he now held it carelessly in his hands. Dave had been out of earshot so he had not overheard the final conversation between the two men.

"You go first," commanded La-

Grew, his tone cold. "And I wouldn't try anything foolish, if I were you."

Buck merely nodded as he started to lead his horse on through the tunnel-like opening at the foot of the towering cliffs. The tall leader of the outlaws followed close behind him.

When they had gone a little over a hundred feet they came out into the sunshine. Buck found they were in a saucer-shaped valley that was completely surrounded by high mountains. To his surprise he discovered no signs of habitation.

"Turn to the left," ordered LaGrew as he walked a few feet in the rear.

Buck swung in that direction and his lead horse followed. They went on until they had almost reached a spot at the foot of one of the mountains where there was a pile of huge boulders. As they approached another masked man stepped out from behind one of the rocks, a rifle in his hand.

"It's all right, Manuel," called LaGrew. "We just have company."

"Right, Chief," said the masked man.

"You take care of the horse," commanded the leader of the rustlers. "You know what to do with him."

"Si."

Buck reluctantly handed his mount over to the masked man, who appeared to be a Mexican. The latter swung into the saddle and rode away. Horse and rider circled around to the right of a group of huge boulders and then disappeared from view.

BUCK watched them go with a slight feeling of trepidation. The disappearance of his little roan worried him, for it meant he might have to try and make his escape from the rustlers hide-out on foot.

He knew he was being watched every moment. Antony LaGrew was

no fool, and Buck felt he had better move carefully if he did not want to betray himself.

"This way," said LaGrew, stepping in front of Buck for the first time.

The ranger followed silently as the rustler chief made his way around one of the big boulders. When they reached the other side Buck found they were apparently facing the sheer gray wall of a cliff.

LaGrew advanced and touched a hidden spring. He had no sooner done so than a door that had been built in a fissure of the cliff and painted gray so it blended with the color of the rock swung inward. Beyond Buck saw a dark passageway that was wide and high enough for a tall man to walk through comfortably.

"Now you go first," ordered LaGrew. "I don't usually let visitors get this far unless I'm sure what's going to happen to them," said the outlaw leader as the two men entered the passageway. "Remember that, Rand."

"All right," said Buck.

THERE had been a menacing note in the tall man's voice that he did not like, but he felt it best to ignore it. He was very much in LaGrew's power at the moment and discretion was advisable.

The passageway was long, and ended in what appeared to be the interior of an abandoned gold mine. Evidently the place consisted of a number of different levels, for Buck saw one or two shaft holes with rope ladders fastened to the edges and leading down into the ground.

The place in which the two men now stood was about fifty feet square and had been braced at the top and sides by heavy beams of rough lumber.

Oil lanterns hung here and there, and in one corner was a rough wooden table with chairs around it. At

this sat five hard-looking men playing cards by the light of a lantern that hung on the wall. They had all paused in their game and were gazing at Buck and LaGrew.

"We've got company, boys," the rustler chief smiled faintly. "This is Dick Rand, and the sheriff is after him."

"Well, Nelson ain't very likely to find him here," said a big, sullen-faced man with a jagged scar on his left cheek. "You're sure th' sheriff's really lookin' for him, Chief?"

"That's what he says!" stated Captain LaGrew dryly.

"It's true," said Buck calmly. "Unfortunately I got into an argument with Nelson, winged him in the right arm, and he didn't like it."

"Huh!" the scar-faced man laughed. "I don't reckon he did!" He put down his cards and got slowly to his feet. "You talk kinda like a tenderfoot," he said as he came closer to Buck. "I'm figurin' it would take a right good man to get Nelson first. How about it?"

"Well," Buck smiled. "He did start to draw, but I was just a little bit quicker."

"You expecting me to believe that?" demanded the man with the scar.

"I rather doubt it myself," LaGrew dropped into the chair that had just been vacated as he spoke. He took Buck's gun out of the holster and removed the cartridges. "Suppose you give us a little exhibit of this quick drawing of yours, Rand!"

HE tossed the weapon to the ranger as he spoke and Buck caught it deftly and placed it in his holster.

"Let's make this interestin'" said the scar-faced man with a cruel grin. "We'll start even, an' if this jigger can't beat me to a draw I'm gonna take a sock at him just for luck."

"All right, Ace," said LaGrew. He smiled at Buck. "This gentleman is 'Ace' Wilson, and there is only one man quicker than he is on the draw in this part of the country," he laughed. "Modesty forbids my mentioning his name." The rustler leader's tone changed. "When I say ready, then draw."

Buck and Wilson stood gazing at each other. As they did so they suddenly grew tense and an expression of antagonism spread over their faces.

The ranger knew his life depended upon his being quicker than the other man. If he failed to win the contest the outlaw band would be convinced that his story of having shot the sheriff was a lie, and that would be the worst thing that could happen.

For some reason Wilson seemed to have taken a sudden dislike to the new arrival, and he was willing and eager to make trouble for the ranger.

"Ready!" exclaimed LaGrew sharply.

THE word had hardly left his lips when Buck lunged forward, his heavy Colt in his hand. The barrel caught the scar-faced man just above the belt before he could complete the motion of drawing his own gun. He gasped with pain for the blow had hurt. With an oath he drew his own Colt, but he was not quick enough. The barrel of Buck's weapon crashed down upon the other gun. Wilson growled as his fingers released their grip and the Colt dropped to the floor.

"Damn you!" exclaimed Wilson. "I'll break you plenty!"

He swung wildly at Buck with his right fist, and caught the ranger a glancing blow on the shoulder. Buck thrust his gun back into the holster with his right hand, while his left shot out. It was an uppercut, and it landed squarely on the chin of the

scar-faced man with all of the ranger's one hundred and sixty-five pounds behind it. Wilson staggered back and then dropped to the floor.

The other men had not moved from the table. Buck turned and glared at LaGrew.

"I'm beginning to believe you might have worried the sheriff," the rustler chief smiled. "But I think you've made a mistake. Ace Wilson is a dangerous enemy, and you two didn't act as though you were just playing!"

"When a man says he's anxious to take a sock at me," said Buck mildly, "I've always thought it best to take one first."

The five men at the table laughed. Behind the ranger Wilson got slowly to his feet. Buck was not paying the slightest attention, so he did not see the scar-faced man pick up his gun from the floor. His very first intimation of danger was when he saw a gun appear in LaGrew's hand with startling abruptness.

"Don't try that, Ace!" the outlaw leader commanded sharply.

BUCK swung around and saw Wilson slowly lowering his weapon. The ranger frowned, for he knew that if LaGrew had been a second slower he, Buck Mawson, would have been dead.

"Oh, all right," Wilson glared at Buck as he thrust his gun back in its holster. "But this guy is too damn' fresh. I'm warnin' you I don't forget. If it comes to a showdown again I'll shoot to kill!"

"Just as you wish," said Buck quietly. "Only it takes a bit more nerve to pick on a man whose gun happens to be loaded!"

"He's right, Ace," remarked LaGrew. "And I don't want any trouble between you two, not while Rand is here with us, anyway," he smiled.

"It wouldn't be fair. You see he's going to remain unarmed."

"Maybe," said Wilson. "But he's got a hell of a lot of bullets in that belt he's wearin' and a gun in his holster."

"I guess you'd better turn your gun and belt over to me, Rand," suggested LaGrew. "Then you and Wilson will both feel safer."

Buck unfastened the belt and handed it to the outlaw leader. LaGrew gave it to one of the other men, who rose from the table and walked to a door the ranger had not observed before and disappeared.

"You're free to do as you please around here, Rand," said LaGrew. "But I wouldn't advise you to try and get away again. Visitors to the Renegades Roost have found getting in a lot simpler than getting out again."

"It sure is, Chief," said one of the other men at the table. "I reckon th' feller we caught yesterday is right certain of it by now."

"He was very foolish," said LaGrew. "He tried to argue about the matter, and what was the result? He got a nasty crack on the head that put him out and when he came to—" He laughed. "Well, I guess he knows he's a prisoner by this time."

BUCK said nothing as he dropped down on a packing box and rolled a cigarette. The prisoner that LaGrew had just mentioned interested him greatly, though he had not the slightest idea who the man might be. At any rate he had obviously been considered a foe by the outlaws, and for that reason Buck felt he might prove a friend.

Ace Wilson had departed through the passageway. The scar-faced man apparently had something on his mind, and Buck wondered just what it might be. That it concerned himself he felt quite certain.

He knew that he had made a bitter enemy of Wilson, but it could not be helped. He had won his victory deliberately, for he had realized that only by doing something drastic would he be able to impress LaGrew and the rest of the rustlers.

As he sat thoughtfully smoking his cigarette Buck's brain was working swiftly. To an extent he had accomplished his purpose. He had learned that LaGrew actually was the leader of the outlaws, and the identity of Ace Wilson. The other four men's names he had not discovered as yet, but as long as he knew their faces it did not matter. He knew there were two other men in the gang at least, for he had not forgotten the two masked guards that LaGrew had called Dave and Manuel. That made eight men in the rustler outfit that he had actually seen, though of course there might be many more.

"Get the prisoner, Jake," said LaGrew to one of the men at the table. "I want to talk to him again."

"Right, Chief."

Jake rose to his feet and again disappeared through the door beyond which he had taken Buck's gun belt.

Buck waited patiently. In a few minutes Jake returned with a lean red-haired man dressed as a waddy. The new arrival looked at the ranger as though he found his presence unexpected, but he said nothing.

"Well, Carter," said LaGrew as he sat facing the prisoner who stood with his hands tightly bound behind his back. "I guess you're convinced that it's dangerous to come nosing around here."

BUCK listened tensely as he heard the other man's name. Jerry Carter was the man whom Captain Hill of the rangers had instructed him to get in touch with when it was necessary. Perhaps this prisoner was that same Carter.

"My welcome was right rough," Carter grinned. "Seems to me you're going to a lot of trouble over an ordinary cowhand."

"That's because I've found it pays to be suspicious," stated LaGrew. "You've told me you're working for the Diamond R, but that ranch happens to be ten miles from here."

"Sure, I know," Carter nodded. "An' we been losin' a lot of cattle lately. I figured all that beef wasn't just disappearin' in thin air, so I starts lookin' around." He smiled again. "Reckon I done found too much!"

"You did," said LaGrew coldly. "In fact, the way you were sneaking around when my men caught you has made me wonder. I've been warned that a Texas Ranger might be sent down here to investigate, and it makes things look bad for you."

BUCK yawned and leaned back on his box. The fact that LaGrew suspected the presence of a ranger in his domain was unwelcome news. Mawson felt it made his own position all the more hazardous.

He was convinced the prisoner was the Jerry Carter that Captain Hill had mentioned, and the fact complicated matters greatly. Since both he and Carter were in the camp of the outlaws the possibility of their being able to communicate with anyone outside was slight.

"I've told you before that I'm not a ranger," protested Carter. "Just a rider for th' Diamond R that was dumb enough to try an' find out about somethin' that wasn't none of my business!"

"That may be true," said LaGrew. "But you know too much now anyway." He glanced at Jake. "Take him back."

Buck dropped his cigarette and put his foot on the burning tip. He realized he had to try and rescue

Carter, or at least get word to the other man that he had a friend in the enemy's camp, but how to do so without betraying himself to the outlaws presented a problem.

It was not until night that Buck found his opportunity. He had eaten with the rustlers and whiled away the afternoon playing cards with three of them.

LaGrew had left a few minutes after he had talked to Carter, and he had taken Jake with him. Buck found that LaGrew, Jake and Ace Wilson had not reappeared up to eight o'clock that evening.

The three remaining men had departed after supper, going out through the passageway and leaving Buck alone in the level of the old abandoned mine. The fact that they permitted him so much freedom puzzled the ranger until he finally decided that they evidently considered him an outlaw like themselves.

When he found himself no longer watched Buck went silently to the door through which Carter had been taken. He discovered this was closed but unlocked, and he opened it and peered beyond.

THERE was no light save the faint illumination that came from the big open space behind Buck. This was very feeble, for the rays of the oil lanterns did not carry very far. However, he was able to dimly make out a figure stretched at full length upon the floor.

"Carter!" called Buck in a whisper.

"Yes," Carter answered, striving to peer through the semi-darkness. "Who is it?"

"Buck Mawson," stated the ranger softly.

"Mawson!" exclaimed Carter. "The man Captain Hill wrote me about?"

"Yes," Buck moved into the room as he spoke. He found the other man was bound hand and foot. "Care-

ful," he said as he drew a penknife out of his pocket and cut the ropes. "We might be overheard."

"All right, but what are you doing here? You're the new man I saw outside, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm supposed to be an outlaw myself. I got in trouble with the sheriff—intentionally. Found the hidden entrance to the canyon and came this way with the sheriff and his men chasing me. I told LaGrew my story and he brought me here."

"Did he believe you?"

"I don't know," answered Buck. "I doubt it."

"This is the gang Captain Hill wants us to get," said Carter as he sat up. "We've got to work fast."

"Someone coming!" said Buck, suddenly.

As he heard a slight noise from somewhere in the big room beyond, Buck edged silently toward the door. At the same time Carter dropped back on the floor as though he were still tightly bound. Buck was pressed close against the right side of the door and half hidden in the semi-darkness as a man peered into the room.

"Who's there?" called Carter from his position on the floor.

"It's me, Wilson," said the man in the doorway. "Where's the other jasper?"

"Who do you mean?" asked Carter. "I haven't seen anyone for hours."

ACE WILSON laughed harshly and stepped into the room. That was a mistake upon his part. He had not advanced more than a few feet when Buck caught him from behind in a flying tackle. Both men fell to the floor with a crash.

They were fighting desperately. Buck's sudden attack had taken Wilson by surprise but he was game. His big hands caught the ranger by the throat, and Buck found himself gasp-

ing for breath as he struggled to release the big man's grip.

Carter had risen to his feet and he came running forward. He waited his chance, then reached down and snatched Wilson's gun from its holster. A moment later he brought the heavy weapon down on Ace's head and the scar-faced man suddenly grew limp.

BUCK was gasping for breath as he rose to his feet.

"Got him," he croaked. "Good work, Carter."

"He's only one out of eight though," Carter laughed softly.

Mawson turned and entered the big room beyond with Carter close at his heels. There was no one in sight and they made their way swiftly toward the passageway. They had almost reached it when they heard voices.

The two rangers looked at each other, their expressions grim and set. They knew that they were in a dangerous spot.

"Down here, quick!" Buck indicated one of the rope ladders leading down to one of the lower levels of the old abandoned mine. As Buck spoke he had started hastily down the ladder, and Carter was close behind him.

They were descending into black darkness, and they did not know what they might encounter when they finally reached the end of the rope. The ladder was old and the ropes with which it was made were no longer in the best of condition. It sagged and swayed ominously under the combined weight of the two men, but it held together by some freak of chance.

Buck breathed a sigh of relief as he finally felt a rough board platform beneath his feet. He released his clutch upon the strands of the rope ladder and moved cautiously to one

side as Carter finished his descent and stood beside him.

Both men listened intently. From above they heard the sound of heavy footsteps, then an excited shout. They realized that the outlaws had discovered the unconscious Wilson.

"They'll figure that we came down here in a minute," said Carter in a whisper. "Light a match and let's see where we are. They may spot it from above, but we can't help that."

BUCK struck a match. In its feeble glow they peered about them. They found that they were standing close to the edge of a narrow platform built of boards that was about five feet wide and twenty feet long. At the back was a wall of stone and in front a sheer drop of they did not know how far into the grim darkness.

"Good thing we didn't try to move around much before we found out where we were," said Buck in a whisper.

"I'll say so," remarked Carter. He glanced up and saw the head and shoulders of a man outlined in the opening at the top of the ladder. "Quiet."

The man above dropped some small object. He was evidently trying to learn just what was below. The two rangers heard the bit of heavy wood make a faint splash as it struck water somewhere beneath the platform on which they stood.

"Move as far as you can to the right," commanded Buck in an undertone. "Then they can't reach you very well if they start shooting." As he spoke Buck moved to the extreme left of the narrow platform. "Come and get us!" he called loudly.

There was a shout from above and then a flash and a roar as a bullet sped harmlessly downward.

"Don't fire," Buck called softly to Carter. "They may not know we have

a gun and come down after us. That's just what we want!"

"Right."

Again the man above fired. Buck yelled as though he had been hit.

"Get you?" called Carter anxiously.

"No," Buck answered. "But I want them to think they did."

Above a man had started down the rope ladder. The two rangers stood motionless and silently awaited his arrival. When the outlaw reached the bottom rung Carter was ready. The butt of the heavy Colt descended, with a very little noise, but a good bit of harm, upon the head of the new arrival. Carter gently lowered the limp form to the platform.

"Jake," came LaGrew's voice from above. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah," Buck answered, trying to speak as much like Jake as possible. "They're both down here. One of 'em is wounded bad and th' other's cashed in."

THERE was a moment's silence from above. Had LaGrew realized the voice that had answered him had not been one of his own men? The leader of the outlaws was no fool. He could not be tricked easily.

"Say, Chief," called Buck.

"What?" demanded LaGrew from above.

"It's Rand that's wounded bad," answered Buck. "He's ravin'—talkin' about where he hid a lot of money."

"I'm coming down," LaGrew climbed out onto the rope ladder as he spoke. "Thought that'd bring him," said Buck to Carter in an undertone. "Take care of him the same way you did Jake."

"Right," whispered Carter.

LaGrew hesitated when he had almost reached the platform. He clung to the ladder with one hand as he peered intently below.

"Jake," he said softly. "What did

you do with the cattle you rustled last night?"

"Put them in the usual place," answered Buck promptly.

"You didn't rustle any cattle last night—you're not Jake!"

There was a roar as one of LaGrew's guns spoke.

Buck leaped back on the platform. He flattened himself against the wall as a bullet thudded into the dirt just above his head.

The gun in Carter's hand barked. LaGrew uttered a curse, but he was climbing back up the ladder like a monkey on a stick. Again Carter fired. From the opening above came an answering volley.

CARTER took a third shot at LaGrew as he started to climb through the opening. Again the outlaw leader cursed, he swayed on the ladder as though he had been hit, but someone grabbed him from above and pulled him out of sight.

"Looks like they've got us!" exclaimed Carter. "Only two shots left in this gun, Mawson."

"I know," said Buck. "But Jake is wearing a gun and a cartridge belt. I'll get it."

He edged toward the limp form on the platform. As he leaned over to take the outlaw's gun from his holster Jake suddenly came to life. His fingers clasped Buck's ankle and jerked him down on the rough boards with a crash.

A moment and the two men were fighting desperately. Buck's head snapped back as Jake's fist caught him on the chin. He grabbed the outlaw's arm, twisted it unmercifully.

Carter edged closer, seeking an opportunity to again bring the heavy Colt crashing down on Jake's head. It was very dark—he had to be sure which man was the outlaw.

Buck and Jake struggled to their feet. Again Jake's fist lashed out,

caught Buck in the chest, slammed him back against the wall. As Jake plunged toward him Buck raised his knee, it caught the outlaw full in the pit of the stomach. He reeled backwards, lost his footing in the darkness. He uttered a howl as he fell off the platform. From below came a heavy splash as Jake hit the water.

"There goes our other gun," said Buck grimly.

For a moment they stood listening. Up above it was ominously silent. Then as the two rangers watched they dimly saw a knife blade held in the hand of one of the outlaws as he cut at the top strands of the rope ladder. "Grab this end of the ladder," commanded Buck in a whisper. "And hold on to it."

Both men caught hold of the bottom of the ladder. A moment later the top part of it fell. The weight almost pulled them off the platform, but they clung to the ladder as it now dangled below them. "What's the idea?" demanded Carter.

"Maybe if we can't go up we can go down," answered Buck.

"You're crazy," stated Carter.

"I don't know," said Buck. "That water down there must come from somewhere."

"Sure—but I never claimed to be a fish," remarked Carter.

Buck did not pay any attention to him. He had found a brace at the edge of the platform, and he was tying the rope ladder to this as tightly as possible. "Looks like they figure they've got us," Carter glanced at the opening above. "Not wasting any more bullets, though. Maybe they're going to try and starve us out."

"LaGrew has something up his sleeve," remarked Buck. "The sooner we get away from here the better. I'm going down and investigate."

He stepped out onto the rope ladder as he spoke and slowly started down.

As he reached the bottom rung Buck found he was in water up to his boot tops. He hesitated, then slowly lowered himself down into the water as far as he could go without releasing his grip on the end of the ladder.

To his disappointment his feet did not touch bottom. He could feel the current flowing about him and he knew he was in some sort of an underground stream.

He uttered a soft curse as he felt the ladder give. The weight of his body in the pull of the water was proving too much for the rope strands. Hastily he started to climb back up, but he was too late. The ladder gave way completely and he found himself being carried forward by the current.

A few seconds later he found he was going more swiftly. The underground stream appeared to be heading down hill. Buck found he had drifted into a narrow tunnel.

There was no going back, he was caught by the water and it might lead him anywhere. The tunnel gradually decreased in size but above him he saw a faint streak of dim light.

HE lifted his head as he reached the spot. He found that the water poured through a narrow opening, which was not more than eight inches from the top of the tunnel.

Buck took a long breath and then dived under. Half swimming, half crawling beneath the water he struggled through the narrow passage. Finally he succeeded in passing out into the wider stream beyond.

Now he found he was in a wide and deep brook that ran through the upper part of the canyon that sheltered the outlaws' roost.

Above him were the stars, and all about the shadows of the night. Weakly, more dead than alive, he

made his way to the nearest bank of the stream and climbed up on the grass. For a long time he lay there limp and panting before he regained his strength.

He finally sat up and looked about him anxiously. He had not forgotten Jerry Carter was still back there, on the platform below the main level of the old abandoned mine that was the rustler's stronghold.

He had to rescue the other ranger if it were humanly possible, but how?

He was alone and unarmed.

BUCK got to his feet. He knew he would have to work fast if he hoped to aid Carter.

He started to move away from the brook. He knew that it was located somewhere to the west of the hidden entrance to the canyon, for he had noticed the stream when he had first investigated the vicinity.

He was heading in what he thought was a general northern direction, guiding himself by the stars. He had not gone far when he heard the sound of voices. He crept forward cautiously.

As he peered through a clump of bushes he found it was two men talking. In the starlight he could see that one of them wore a mask. As he looked more intently at the other man he discovered it was "Ace" Wilson.

"Si," said the man in the mask. "For the rangers it will be very sad after we have depart."

"It was my idea," said Wilson proudly. "I owe them two somethin' anyway. When we lower that keg of dynamite with a long fuse on it down into that level of the mine it will be just too bad, Manuel. That'll be all that Rand and Carter will ever know in this world."

Buck began to move away as silently as possible. After what he had just learned he realized that he would have

to try and rescue Jerry Carter without delay.

He intended to circle behind Wilson and Manuel and get back into the old abandoned mine. He had not gone more than a hundred feet when he heard someone behind him. He tried to swing around, but he was too late.

"Don't move—we've got you!" said a cold voice, and he felt the hard barrel of a gun jabbed into the small of his back. He stood very still. "This'll teach you that you can't take a shot at the sheriff and get away with it."

"Nelson!" exclaimed Buck in relief. "Just the man I'm looking for!"

"Yeah," said Nelson with a hard laugh. "Now I'll tell one." He spoke to the other men who had suddenly appeared out of the shadows. "All right, boys, keep him covered, and plug him if he makes any foolish attempts to get away."

"Listen, Sheriff," Buck turned so that he faced the official. "I'm sorry I had to wing you, but it was necessary if I even hoped to learn the identity of the rustlers that have been terrorizing this part of the country. I'm Mawson of the Rangers."

SURE," said Nelson. "And I'm Sitting Bull's grandfather!"

"You've got to believe me!" said Buck insistently. "A man's life depends on it."

"I know," Nelson nodded solemnly. "Your life."

"Not mine, but Jerry Carter's."

"Jerry Carter!" exclaimed one of the other men. "Why he's a rider for the Diamond R. I know Jerry well—what's he got to do with this?"

"Plenty!" answered Buck. "Carter is a ranger, just as I am. He's been working here under cover for some time. We have learned positively that Captain Antony LaGrew is the leader of the rustlers and their hangout is an abandoned mine very near here."

"LaGrew, the leader," exclaimed

Nelson. "I don't believe it. He always said he was anxious to aid us to clean up the gang."

"You've got to believe me!" insisted Buck.

AS SWIFTLY as possible he told them all that had happened since he had managed to escape the sheriff and his posse by riding into the hidden entrance to the canyon. The men around him listened intently.

"Sounds like he might be telling the truth," said the man who had mentioned knowing Jerry Carter. "Guess we'd better look into this anyway, hadn't we, Sheriff?"

"Well, I don't know," said Nelson doubtfully. "It may all be a pack of lies. How do we know that this man isn't one of the outlaw gang? He might be telling us all this just to lead us into some sort of ambush."

"It's the truth," Buck sat down abruptly and began to remove his right boot. From the boot he drew out a small folded bit of paper. "Here, read that." He handed the paper to Nelson.

The sheriff took it and read it carefully as someone held a lighted match for him. "This seems to prove that Mawson is a ranger, all right," said Nelson finally.

He had hardly finished speaking when there was a shot in the distance. Evidently one of the rustler guards had seen the faint light of the match and was taking no chances.

With the report of the distant rifle the sheriff's posse abruptly went into action.

"Duck in through those trees," Nelson waved his hand to the left. "All right, Mawson." He handed the ranger a heavy Colt. "Take this and lead the way."

Buck started toward the hidden entrance to the canyon, with the others close behind him. The man on guard saw them coming and fired

again. That was a fatal mistake upon his part. One of the posse took deliberate aim with a Winchester, and the guard dropped.

A MOMENT later there was the sound of galloping horses. Guns roared and flashed in the darkness. A man screamed as he tumbled from the saddle. "They're trying to make a break for it," the sheriff turned, started back to where the horses of the posse had been tied. "Come on—after them, boys!"

"What about Carter?" demanded Buck.

"You take care of him," Nelson called over his shoulder. "We'll be back later."

The hoofbeats of the rustlers' horses were growing fainter. Gunfire still colored the night. A member of the posse went down. The others dashed on, heading for their mounts.

Buck did not waste any further words. He was running in the opposite direction, hurrying toward the entrance of the rustlers' roost.

He had a little difficulty in finding the painted canvas door in the starlight, but he finally discovered it, touched the hidden spring. He hastened through the passageway. A few minutes later he was again in the main level of the old abandoned mine.

There was no sign of any of the rustlers.

He grabbed up a coil of rope, then hurried to the opening down which he had climbed with the other ranger.

"Carter?" he called anxiously. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, so far," answered Carter as he recognized Mawson's voice. "But they've lowered a keg of dynamite down here and the fuse is burning fast!"

"I'm lowering a rope," said Buck. "Climb up, and make it snappy."

He tied the end of the rope around his waist, lowered the rest of it, then

braced himself with his feet against the wall as Carter started to climb up.

Below they could hear the fuse on the dynamite keg sputtering. Drawing closer every second. Traveling fast. "Got you after all," said a voice behind Buck. He recognized the tones of Ace Wilson.

One of Buck's hands left the rope, streaked to the gun Nelson had given him, that was thrust in the waistband of his trousers. He fired over his shoulder at the same time that Wilson's gun spoke. He felt a dull pain as the bullet caught him in the shoulder, but he managed to brace himself as Carter climbed into view. Behind him Buck heard Wilson drop to the floor. "Let's get out of here." Buck rose to his feet, unfastening the rope from his waist.

THEY started running. High-heeled boots pounding through the darkness of the passage, out into the fresh air. As they once again found themselves out in the starlight they heard a dull booming behind them.

"That's the end of Wilson and LaGrew," said Carter.

"LaGrew?" questioned Buck.

"Yes, he was badly wounded—they left him in that room where I was held a prisoner all day. Beat it like a pack of frightened rats when the guard gave the alarm by shooting." Carter sighed. "That was too close for comfort, but we're all right now."

"Sure," said Buck. "Nelson and the posse are after the rest of the Renegade Rustlers, and they won't stop until they've rounded them up. Our work is done here, Carter."

"Say," Carter looked at him intently. "You're wounded—your shirt's all covered with blood."

"Just in the shoulder," said Buck, as he sat down weakly on a rock. "Say, Carter, have you got a cigarette? Mine are all wet."

The Avenger of Lo Chang



*The Further Perilous Adventures of an Intrepid
American on the Exciting Trail of the
Three Pearls of Death*

A Larry Weston Story

By LIEUT. SCOTT MORGAN

Author of "Brother to the Tong," "Riley of the Bengal Lancers," etc.

GEORGE DANE, broker in investments and securities, sat at his broad desk in his London office and beamed professionally upon the visitor who reposed languidly in a chair at his side. Dane, despite his immaculate dress, hardly reflected the picture that popular opinion carries of a broker.

He was a strong, sturdy man, with the air of the outdoors about him, and he appeared rather out of place in this luxurious office behind his

gleaming mahogany desk. This fact also applied to his visitor.

Younger than Dane was this prospective buyer of Mr. Dane's securities, younger and apparently he had lived a cleaner life. He sat quietly while Dane unburdened himself of the same sales talk which had already unloaded half a million pounds' worth of the very securities that this young man was interested in.

Then, even as he was speaking, George Dane became aware of a

vague sensation of apprehension. Something—indefinite it is true—some part of that intricate mental mechanism in the back of his memory, clicked for a moment. It seemed to him that he had seen this young man before. A faint fear pervaded him, a remote uncharted section of his emotions told him that his previous meeting had been under unpleasant circumstances.

HOWEVER, he dismissed the peculiar sensation almost immediately, for George Dane was a practical man who refused to pay attention to the inexplicable quirks of his own psychology.

The office door opened and a trim young girl entered. Silently she laid a handful of mail on her employer's desk, then left the room again. Mr. Dane paused in his rhetorical flight between two adjectives and said: "You'll excuse me a moment while I glance at these?"

The young man assured Mr. Dane that he would.

Dane picked up two letters. The first, a circular, he tossed into the waste basket. The second, he glanced at with a frown. Then, with a slightly trembling finger he ripped open the envelope.

He ran bulging eyes over its contents—contents which seemed to be as ominous as he had expected when he opened the envelope.

In a state of high excitement he threw the letter down on the desk and picked up the telephone with trembling fingers. His visitor craned his neck slightly and read the type-written paper that had so disconcerted the broker. These words leaped to his black eyes:

*This is the last warning. I
shall call for the pearl today.
Have it ready for me or you die.
Brother to the Tong!*

Hastily, Dane barked orders through the mouthpiece to an unseen underling.

"See that my bags are packed. Get me a ticket on the international express. Yes, I'm leaving this afternoon. Hurry."

He turned a pale excited face to his visitor.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lines," he said. "But I've just had some urgent news. You can speak to my assistant about these bonds. I'm leaving London immediately."

The man he had addressed as Lines rose to his feet. His air of careless detachment suddenly vanished. His eyes which a few seconds ago had been lifeless and sleepy became alert and hard. His hand dropped to his coat pocket.

It reappeared again holding a revolver.

"You're not leaving London today, Mr. Dane," he said in a voice of jagged ice. "You're staying right here until I get that pearl."

Dane lost what little composure remained to him. He gasped audibly.

"You—" he said in a thick, dry voice. "You! I thought I'd seen you before."

"You did," said the grim-faced man before him. "You saw me once before in a remote temple on the border of Thibet. Now I'm here to recover the pearl that you took from there. Do I get it or do you die?"

DESPITE the threat of the gun, Dane was so overcome that he sank back into his swivel chair. Perspiration stood out on his pallid brow. His breath came short and fast, and if there was a faint, crafty gleam in his eyes, the man with the revolver failed to see it.

Dane licked his lips nervously. "You—you are the brother to the tong? What does that mean?"

His visitor regarded him with cold, relentless eyes.

"It means that on that day when you stole the pearls of Lo Chang, I became a blood brother to the tong. A brother whose life was dedicated to the recovery of the jewels you stole. I've tracked you down here to your own office, George Dane, and I am waiting for that pearl."

"And if I refuse to hand it over?"

"You die."

FOR a moment the eyes of the two men met and held. In the gaze of one there was grim, deadly purpose; in the other stark fear, tempered by a gleam of hope.

Beneath the desk the right foot of George Dane moved imperceptibly. The other failed to notice the movement. Instead he watched the broker's face intently, his fingers never loosening the grip on the gun.

"Come," he said at last. "Stop stalling. You haven't got a chance. Get me the pearl. If it isn't here I will accompany you to its hiding place. On the way I shall have you covered with this gun in my pocket. One false move and you're a dead man. Come on. Let's start, unless you prefer to die in that chair."

George Dane stared at the speaker. He stared beyond him, and a faint smile of relief crawled across his frozen features. A hard voice spoke from the doorway.

"If anyone's dying, partner, it's you. Don't turn your head, and drop the gun on the desk."

For a single second Larry Weston's heart stood still. A terrible futile despair deluged his whole being. He had failed in his mission! Worse than that, he had been trapped by the enemy.

With a clatter the automatic dropped from his nerveless fingers upon the desk. Two men came up, one on each side of him. He felt

the muzzle of a .38 press into his side. On the other side of the desk, George Dane rose, flooded with the return of his old confidence.

"Ah," he said, vast satisfaction beaming from his features. "So you don't win after all, my friend. I, as you probably have surmised, live a somewhat precarious existence. That fact accounts for my body-guard and the button beneath my desk which I pressed a moment ago."

He turned to the two armed men.

"Take him out. Up along the Thames. Some lonely spot. Get rid of him. He's dangerous."

Larry stared dully at the man who uttered his death sentence. So this was the end. This was the end of the great adventure to which he had pledged himself and his life.

"Yes," continued Dane. "You, who style yourself *Brother to the Tong*, are a dangerous person. If I don't kill you, you'll probably hound me to my death. It's better to make an end of things now. Good-by, my friend. I enjoyed your little notes immensely. I regret that I shall read no more of them."

Then the mocking affability vanished.

He turned again to his henchmen, and on his face was an expression of bitter vindictiveness.

"Gorbes, Radner," he said, "I'm depending on you. Get rid of him. It means a lot to me. I'm holding you both directly responsible."

"All right, boss," said one of the men. "Leave him to us."

AGAIN Larry Weston felt the barrel of a .38 press against his side.

"Now, march," continued the body-guard. "And remember, that as we drive through the streets, there's a gun covering you, even if you don't see it. Hop to it, now."

Between the two men, Larry Weston was marched ignominiously through Dane's offices into the street. There parked at the curb was a blue coupé. Into that the two men climbed, Larry between them. One sat at the wheel. He stepped on the starter and a few moments later the three of them were running on the smooth London streets toward Kingston-on-Thames.

NOW, it is a far cry from the remote mountain fastnesses of Thibet to the busy hubbub of a London street at high noon. Yet at that moment to Larry Weston there was a very direct and pertinent connection.

For it was in the Lo Chang monastery on the far-flung outposts of Thibet, that the occurrences which were now apparently leading to his death had taken place. It was from that temple that the three magnificent pearls of the Lo Chang had been stolen. Stolen while he was responsible for their safe-keeping.

To save his own life and the honor of the Chinese that had befriended him, he had vowed that he would recover the jewels. Three men had stolen them. And at this moment only two of those men retained possession of one pearl each. They were to meet at an arranged date to put their loot together and thus obtain a far greater price for the matched pearls than any one of them could have done for each pearl sold singly.

It was to recover these pearls, ere that meeting had taken place, that Larry Weston had sworn a great oath by everything which he held holy. Already one of those three pearls was in his possession. And a month ago in Shanghai an unidentified man had been buried, a man who had been the first victim to Larry's revenge. The pearl

which he had carried was now safely put away in a London deposit box in Larry's name.

He had discovered on the dead man's person a paper, which had contained the names of the other miscreants who had robbed the temple. George Dane was the second person to whom Larry had come in order to retrieve the jewels.

He had sent him two warning letters, signed *Brother to the Tong*. The signature was genuine enough. Because the Lo Changs had made him a blood brother before he had departed from the temple on his mission of revenge and recovery.

And now after one success it seemed that not only his venture but his very life must end.

The coupé passed through the business section, and soon was making its way through London's ubiquitous slums. The three men within the car rode in a grim silence. The two thugs were intent on getting a routine job done quickly, while Larry's brow was knitted as his brain clicked on all six, desperately trying to evolve some scheme to extricate himself from the precarious position into which he had been plunged.

THE smell of the sea floated to them from the river. The slums gave way to the great warehouses of the East India Company. These in turn yielded to the ramshackle houses of that great oriental settlement of London's Chinese colony—Limehouse.

A gray fog was borne on the river. It floated wraith-like over the sprawled city. The buildings became gray and damp, and Larry Weston, recognizing the section through which the car was passing, found his heart give a sudden bound of hope.

He glanced down surreptitiously

at the ring finger of his left hand. Reposing there was a splendid jade ring, with an intricately carved silver setting.

It was the means of identification to Lo Chang's the world over. The bauble which had been given him by the head priest in order that he might identify himself to his tong brothers no matter where he found himself.

AND now fate had brought him to Limehouse. Brought him to the one place in the world where, perhaps, outside of China, the largest number of Lo Changs resided. Larry realized that if he put into execution the plan that had flicked across his brain he must take a long desperate chance.

But when one's life hangs in the balance, long odds look the same as short ones.

Silently, quietly, yet with every nerve in his body tingling, he awaited his chance. The coupé slowed down as the fog grew thicker. Then hard by a crossing, it stopped, entirely surrounded by two huge trucks that momentarily blocked the traffic.

Larry glanced swiftly through the window of the car. There on the sidewalk strolled a number of long-gowned Chinamen. Larry wondered if any of them owed allegiance to the same tong that he had sworn to avenge. Then, as he peered more carefully into the fog, he saw something which sent hope beating hard and fast through his veins.

On a dirty shop window about half way down the block he saw a weird Chinese dragon that breathed smoke through but one nostril. It was the symbol of the men of Lo Chang—the dragon of the tong to which he was a blood brother. A sudden idea flashed through his mind. It was a long and desperate

chance, but it was all that stood between him and ignominious death.

They were stopped on the street corner by the cross traffic. The smoke-breathing dragon was now right at the side of the car. Larry peered through the fog. Chinamen hurried hither and thither through the gray haze that blanketed the metropolis.

Then, in that single second, he gathered himself for his literal leap for life. Every muscle in his body tensed. Every nerve was alert.

With a sudden movement he swung his right hand to the point of the jaw of Gorbies. The astounded gunman fell back in the seat, momentarily stunned. Larry swiftly climbed over his knees, opened the door and jumped to the street.

Even as his feet hit the pavement he heard the shout of alarm from Radner. The latter emerged hastily from the door on the other side of the car. He rushed around the still vehicle, and even in the opaque gray haze that covered everything, Larry saw the black outlines of an automatic in his right hand.

"Stop, you fool, or I'll shoot!"

RADNER'S voice came to Larry's ears as he raced across the street to the sanctuary offered by that dingy painting of the dragon on the even dingier glass of the window.

A staccato crack ripped through the sodden air. Larry heard a bullet sing its ominous threnody over his head. There was a sudden crashing of glass as the steel slug ate its way into the plate glass window. From within a startled oriental screamed. Larry knocked aside an indignant pedestrian and raced into the building.

As he opened the door he found himself on the threshold of a large

hall, apparently the meeting room of the Lo Chang Tong. Toward him there rushed a score of Chinese; knives and hatchets gleamed in their hands as they came to avenge this outrage of a white man in their conference hall.

THEN, before Larry could speak, before the Orientals could close upon him, the door opened again. Radner entered the room, and close behind him, panting and glassy-eyed, came Gorbes, now recovered from the first shock of Larry's unexpected blow.

The charging Chinese halted temporarily as they saw the two white men standing in the doorway, drawn pistols in their hands. Between them stood Larry, glancing swiftly from the ominous muzzles of the white men's guns to the glinting steel weapons of the Chinamen. It was Radner who broke the tension.

"We're police officers," he said. "This man is our prisoner. He escaped. We're sorry for the intrusion. We'll just take him along and go."

A man clad in a long flowing robe moved out from the group of yellow men. He flung a staccato command over his shoulder to the Lo Changs. At his word, they replaced their weapons in their belts and stood quietly behind their leader.

He turned to the white men and bowed.

"It is well," he said. "I apologize for the unseemly conduct of my brothers. But they were taken by surprise. They resented the intrusion. But it is done now. Take your man and go."

He indicated Larry. With a smile of triumph, Radner advanced, gun still in hand. On his other side the Chinese stared implacably at Larry, hostility in their gaze, despite the sudden armistice. Radner jammed his gun in Larry's ribs.

"Come, on," he said. "The game's up."

Larry met his gaze squarely. A faint smile was on his lips as he replied.

"Perhaps, Radner," he said quietly. "Perhaps."

He thrust out his arm. His hand, palm downward, stretched forth before the tong leader's eyes. The Oriental in the flowing robe looked down. He raised his head again; and though his countenance was still the expressionless bland face of his race, there was a peculiar gleam in his eyes.

"Come on," said Radner again. "We can't wait here all day."

"Wait." It was the Chinese who spoke. Then he turned to Larry. "Is it help you desire, brother?"

Larry nodded.

"Deliver me from my captors, oh, brother," he said. "Then set upon them and make them prisoners."

Radner stared in astonishment. Behind him Gorbes frowned.

"Come on," he said. "What's all this parleying? Let's get out of here. You, Weston, march."

"Wait!"

THIS time it was the Chinaman who spoke again, but in his tone was a terrible command. He turned to his yellow cohorts and spoke rapidly in Cantonese.

A shrill scream rent the air behind them. The Chinese suddenly broke their ranks and charged. Half a dozen staccato shots, from the two white men's weapons, ripped the air, but they were soon overwhelmed by the superior numbers of the Chinese.

Larry stood calmly to one side as the battle raged. Then, a moment later, Radner and Gorbes, badly battered and lacerated, were dragged before him. The tong leader bowed politely to Larry.

"Here my brother," he intoned. "We have obeyed your orders. We have made your captors prisoners because of the ring which you wear, because the ring declares that you are brother to the tong. Am I correct?"

"I am, indeed, brother to the tong of Lo Chang," said Larry gravely. "I am on a mission now for the brotherhood. That is how I happened to run into danger here."

The Oriental bowed again.

"It is well," he said. "Your orders have been obeyed. Is there anything else that we can do for our brother?"

LARRY'S brow wrinkled in thought for a moment. True, he had, for the time being, outwitted Dane, but that fact had put him no nearer the second pearl of the Lo Chang. At last, however, he shook his head.

"No," he said. "Merely keep these two white men prisoners until you hear from me. That is all."

"Say," said Radner, speaking for the first time. "You can't leave us here. You can't—"

Larry turned on him.

"You're lucky that I'm leaving you alive, Radner," he said. "It's more than you were going to do to me."

With that Weston turned and strode from the building, assured in the knowledge that as long as he possessed the jade ring which had been given him in the temple, he would know allies all over the world, everywhere that Cathay had her living representatives.

Yet he still had a task before him.

He had escaped death, true, but his mission was not advanced save in the negative way of his still being alive. He walked slowly through the fog, his mind working swiftly, and gradually there trickled into his brain an idea to ascertain the location of the second pearl of Lo

Chang, which was in the unrightful possession of George Dane.

WITH a sleek Corona between his lips, Dane slid into the swivel chair before his desk with a grunt of satisfaction. The unpleasant incident of the preceding day was no more than an exhilarating memory now. He felt smug, completely satisfied with his ability to take care of himself and the pearl of Lo Chang as well.

He picked up the neat stack of letters piled up before him on his desk and with a casual eye scanned them over. Then for the second time within the past twenty-four hours, he received a swift and sudden shock.

The dozen or so envelopes fluttered from his nerveless fingers to the table top—all save one. The color drained slowly from Dane's face, then returned with a wave of hot crimson, as he studied the bold address.

George Dane, Esquire.

It wasn't three words that riveted his attention; it was the hand in which they were written. He recognized it instantly. That warning letter he had received the day before had been written by the same hand.

With a savage oath and a swift, impetuous movement, he inserted a broad thumb under the flap of the envelope and jerked out the sheet of paper within. With fingers suddenly clumsy, he unfolded it, focused his narrowed eyes on the brief message.

You will require more than gunmen to dispose of the avenger of Lo Chang. This is my last warning! Within the next twelve hours after you receive this letter, I will again call on you.

Be prepared, either to deliver the pearl to me—or die!

Brother to the Tong.

Dane read the message through twice, at first unable to believe the stunning import of the words. He was suddenly aware that his mouth was hot and dry. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. He ran a pudgy finger around the rim of his collar. All his smug self-assurance and placidity of a minute before were gone—destroyed completely by the ominous words of the warning.

With a physical effort, Dane threw off the paralysis of fear that crept about his heart. There must be some mistake, he tried to assure himself. Some ghastly joke. Radner and Gorbies had never before failed him on such a simple matter as disposing of a man, once he had been turned over to their tender mercies.

He snapped out of his momentary funk, leaped to the telephone. Violently he pumped the hook up and down, tersely snapped a number into the mouthpiece. His fingers beat an impatient tattoo on the table top for the connection to go through. He waited tense—ten, twenty, thirty seconds. The buzz in the receiver told him that the phone was ringing at the other end.

But no one came to answer the summons!

DANE swore savagely under his breath. He had given Radner and Gorbies orders to stay there in the house until he called them. They would have obeyed—unless something had gone wrong. And with each passing second, Dane was more firmly convinced that something had.

That grim warning clutched in his hand was no joke or jest. It meant business—the business of death!

He pumped the receiver again, called a half-dozen numbers in quick succession. But nowhere was he able to get any word of his two henchmen. As far as Dane was con-

cerned, they had disappeared off the face of the earth.

If nothing else, George Dane was a man of quick decisions and just as quick action. And he was wise enough to realize that at times discretion was the better part of valor.

He yanked open a drawer of his desk, extracted a brief case and hastily jammed it with a varied assortment of papers.

He called his secretary into the office and issued a series of brief, terse orders to her.

"Now tell Jarsen I want to see him," he concluded. "At once."

JARSEN, a tall brute of a man, entered the private office a moment later.

The word killer was written clearly in the low brow, the small colorless eyes.

"Look to your gun," snapped Dane without any preliminaries.

Jarsen's eyes narrowed to glinting slits at the order. He smelled action—trigger action. With a swift movement, he unlimbered a glinting automatic from a holster concealed beneath his left arm pit. He examined it thoroughly, expertly, patted it once affectionately and returned it to its leather.

"It's ready and hungry," he said laconically.

"Good," grunted Dane. "I have several calls to make this morning and I want you to be at my elbow all the time, understand? There may be trouble. If there is, I want you to shoot first and ask questions after. Get that?"

"Sure, I get it," grinned Jarsen. "But after I shoot, there'll be no need to ask questions. You won't get any answer."

Dane reached for his hat and picked up the brief case. He nodded for Jarsen to lead the way.

"Right! You go first!"

Leaning against the grimy bricks of Holbrook Court, his bearded face buried in the advertising section of the *London Times*, was a man. By him the hurrying throngs of Fleet Street drifted in swirling eddies of pedestrian traffic. The man with the beard was unnoticed, or if he did warrant a casual glance he was put down for one of the countless number of the unemployed looking for a job.

But why should a man looking for a day's labor pack an automatic on his hip? Why should a man, supposedly reading the want ads, cast such a furtive, wary eye at the entrance to Holbrook Court? There was only one answer. He was not a day laborer and neither was he looking for a job.

In fact, he was looking for a specific individual—one George Dane.

LARRY WESTON was thankful enough at having escaped from Dane's men with the aid of the Lo Chang brotherhood, but now that adventure was over, he realized that he was no closer to the possession of the second pearl than when he had started his quest.

He felt reasonably sure that Dane would not be so easily trapped again in his office, and just as sure that if he were, the pearl would not be on his person.

Though he had sworn a personal vengeance on the violators of the Monastery, the death of Dane would achieve him little unless he thereby secured the priceless gem held by that individual.

His first problem was to locate the hiding place of the jewel. Larry had devoted a number of hours of hard concentration to the matter and finally evolved a plan he hoped might work. He figured that if he could frighten Dane sufficiently to make him run to cover, Dane would take

the pearl with him. This would not only reveal the hiding place of the jewel, but put it on the person or in the personal effects of the broker.

And Larry felt every confidence that he would be able to lift it from Dane with bloodshed or without, by fair means or foul.

WITH all this in mind, he had sent his second letter of warning to the broker, and now in his unkempt beard and ragged clothes he leaned against the grimy wall of Holbrook Chambers, awaiting developments.

They were not long in coming. Larry suddenly stiffened to sharp attention behind the concealing pages of his newspaper. From the corner of his eye he caught sight of the familiar figure of Dane as the latter emerged from the door of the building. Larry noted with a grim smile the gorilla-like man by his side and correctly appraised him as a bodyguard.

As he watched, he saw Dane cast a swift glance up and down the crowded street, then speak to his man. The other nodded, and together they breasted the traffic of Fleet Street toward the bank on the far corner.

Larry's heart lifted as he saw their destination. Undoubtedly his letter had had the proper effect and Dane was going to hide out for a while. The trip to the bank probably meant that he was going to take the pearl with him.

This assumption was strengthened as he followed the broker and his bodyguard into the bank and saw them repair immediately to the safety vaults.

Weston wasted a few minutes at one of the counters making out a mythical check. Two minutes later, when Dane and his man reappeared, he casually drifted out of

the bank after them into the turmoil of Fleet Street.

For the next hour Larry clung to the trail of the two men like a leech. He was consumed with a feverish impatience to come at once to grips with his adversary. But fear of a second failure imposed caution on his impatient spirit.

It would have been a dangerous gamble to have tackled Dane and his bodyguard in the streets, with a million people about. No; common sense dictated that he wait till he got them in more secluded surroundings, or, better still, alone.

But that desire was not to be fulfilled. He trailed the two to a steamship ticket office, saw Dane stuff a cardboard into his pocket. But what his destination was, Larry had no way of finding out just then.

He was tying his shoelace at the curb when the two men emerged to the street again. They talked for a few minutes in low tones together, then Dane hailed a cruising cab.

Before Larry was quite aware what had happened, Dane had leaped into the still moving vehicle, snapped an order at the driver and was lost almost immediately in a tangle of traffic.

For a split-second, Weston was tempted to charge after the cab, but he realized instantly the futility of the chase. Instead, he turned, glanced swiftly up the street just in time to see the broad shoulders of the bodyguard rounding the far corner.

With pounding pulses he took up the chase. Bitterly he cursed himself for a rank amateur, for having let Dane get away from right under his very nose. If he should lose the bodyguard, too—

But he didn't. He came swiftly upon his quarry. His automatic was transferred to the side pocket of his coat. Now, without any preliminaries, he stepped close to Jarsen,

jammed the gun savagely into that individual's side.

"Keep walking ahead as if nothing was the matter!" he snapped tersely.

There was latent death in the tone of his voice. Jarsen had heard that tone of voice before and he was wise enough to obey.

"Edge over to the curb and hail the first cab!" ordered Larry.

JARSEN obeyed, but not without some verbal protest.

"What's the idea, guv'nor?"

"You'll find out soon enough. Flag that cab!"

Jarsen obeyed reluctantly and with Weston's gun still prodding him from behind, climbed into the vehicle. Larry sank to the seat beside him, his gun ready for instant action. To the driver he snapped the address of the Lo Chang Tong room.

"Where you taking me?" demanded Jarsen sullenly. "Why throw a gun on me?"

"I'll take you no place if you want to talk," shot back Weston.

"Talk about what?"

"About your employer, Dane."

Jarsen's eyes narrowed at the challenge. "Well, what about him?" he said truculently.

"He just bought a steamship ticket. Where's his destination?"

"How should I know, mister?"

"Too bad for you if you don't," smiled Weston, but there was no humor in his voice.

"Say, who are you anyway?"

"I'm the man Dane is running from."

"Well, what's that got to do with me?"

"Plenty. If you tell me where Dane is going—what boat—nothing happens to you. If you don't—" Their cab had pulled up before the building of the Lo Changs. "China-men here, you see. They're friends of mine. They have lots of cunning

ways to torture information out of a white man. Unless you tell me what I want to know, you'll get what Radner and Gorbes got—only worse."

"Radner and Gorbes!" exploded Jarsen.

"Right. Unless I'm mistaken, their bodies are floating in the Thames now."

"Bluff!" snorted Jarsen. "You can't get nothing out of me I don't want to tell."

"No?" purred Weston in an icy voice. "We'll see!" He prodded his gun into the other. "Get out. There are ten Chinamen watching you now. One move and it's all over with you."

SULLENLY Jarsen obeyed. Close behind him as they crossed the sidewalk, Larry called back to the taxi driver.

"Wait for me," he said confidently. "I'll be out in a few minutes."

But the few minutes stretched to a grim twenty. Jarsen proved to be a much tougher nut to crack than Weston had anticipated. Larry sweated him at first with words and dire threats, a grinning crew of the Lo Chang brotherhood making an effective background to the scene.

From threats he switched his attack to cajolerie with little better results. Larry began to lose patience. He tried a little manhandling of his victim. He had no taste for the work. He had nothing personally against Jarsen.

But he had to find out George Dane's destination. He threw away his easy sympathy, stripped off his coat and got down to the serious business of choking the truth out of his quarry. A scarce half inch from death, glinting, relentless eyes drilling their dire purpose into his, Jarsen broke down at last.

"The—Channel Boat," he sobbed. "Sailing—at—two!"

Weston flung the limp figure from him with a violent gesture. He glanced at his watch swiftly. Eighteen minutes to two! Could he make it? He had to make it, he swore to himself, as he ran pell-mell out of the room.

It was a mad, break-neck chase through London's congested traffic to the waterfront. But under the stimulation of a pound reward if he arrived at the pier before sailing time, the cabbie rose to the emergency.

He came to a skidding halt at the pier head just as the last line was being taken in. Larry knew that his game would be up if Dane saw his precipitous arrival, but he had to risk it and gamble that the broker would be in his cabin.

He scrambled aboard just as the packet pulled into the stream, repaired immediately to the purser's office. While the assistant purser was allotting him a cabin, he looked over the passenger list.

A thrill of exhilaration coursed through his veins as he noted Dane's name beside Cabin 26.

"Something up on A deck," suggested Weston. "Twenty-seven or eight—are they vacant?"

"I can give you twenty-seven."

"Fine."

LARRY made himself comfortable in his stateroom, lit a cigarette and concentrated on his next move. Indistinct sounds drifted to him from behind the bulkhead from Dane's compartment. Larry listened, arose himself a few minutes later when the door of the adjoining cabin slammed shut. Larry followed Dane onto the deck, strolled after him to the bar.

Dane ordered a whisky and soda and downed it as if he needed it badly. He called for a second, and gambling that a third and fourth

would follow, Larry went out on deck again.

It was but a minute's work to gain Dane's cabin unobserved. Larry knew that he had to work swiftly and surely if he were to find the pearl. True, it might not have been concealed in the cabin, but if possible he had to make sure.

He went over the small cabin with swift precision. Nothing escaped his attention. Bed first, washstand, traveling bags, under the carpet, behind pictures. No slightest crevice escaped his attention, but no pearl was forthcoming.

Larry was about to give up his search, convinced that Dane carried the gem on his person. If that were the case, his problem was considerably more difficult. Then an idea occurred to him, and with a grim smile, he decided on a bold bluff.

Calmly and coolly, as if he were in his own cabin, he sank into a chair. He had not long to wait.

The knob of the door turned; the portal was flung wide.

Only half way across the threshold, Dane saw him and immediately whipped out a gun from his hip. An ugly snarl fought with the smile of triumph on his face as he closed the door behind him and leveled the gun at the intruder.

"Oh, so it's you," he grated from between clenched teeth. "You threatened murder, but you turn out to be nothing but a cheap housebreaker after all. You'll have a hard time explaining this intrusion to the ship's captain."

The gun was steady and menacing in his hand. It pointed unwaveringly at Larry's heart. And Weston knew that Dane would be only too glad for an excuse to use it. However, he never flinched. If anything, he smiled brazenly up at Dane's infuriated face and insolently cocked one knee over the other.

"You know, Dane," he said suavely, "you wouldn't have the nerve to turn me over to the captain. I know too much."

A mask of hate descended over Dane's ugly face. He stepped to within a foot of Weston, jugged forth his jaw aggressively and rammed the point of the gun into Larry's stomach. His lips worked convulsively, but it was a full ten seconds before he could speak.

"You're right, you know too much!" he snarled. "Maybe I won't turn you over to the captain. Maybe I'll just shoot you. A simple little story with no aftermath. I surprised you looting my cabin. You attacked me. I shot you in self-defense. What have you to say to that?"

"Only that you'd be a fool to do it. What about your pearl?"

"Well, what about it?"

"Killing me would never get your pearl back for you."

A startled expression fell over Dane's face at the words, but he recovered almost immediately. The snarl returned to his lips.

"A pretty bluff, but it doesn't go with George Dane," he taunted. "You haven't got the pearl!"

Larry still hadn't moved from his easy position in the chair. His confidence and self-assurance was getting under the other's skin. He felt sure that if he could keep up the pose another minute he would succeed.

"What makes you so sure?" he mocked.

"Because you couldn't find it!"

"No? What does this look like?"

KEEPING his eye ever on the gun in Dane's hand, Larry fished into the pocket of his vest and extracted a shimmering bauble of glittering light. It lay taunting, bewitching, compelling in the palm of his hand. Larry twisted Dane's

wrist with his free hand and the gun went off harmlessly in the air. Dane whirled, sped swiftly for the small dressing table at the far side of the cabin.

WITH eagle eyes Larry followed his every movement, watched him snatch the powder box from the top of the dresser.

Then he sprang into action! In two swift strides he was across the cabin. The nozzle of his gun ground deep into Dane's back. With his free hand he snatched the gun from Dane.

Some instinct must have told the broker that he had fallen into a trap. He whirled, lips bared back from snarling teeth, but there was no denying the menace in Weston's leveled gun, the cold glitter in his eye that belied the smile on his lips.

"Step away from that dresser!" ordered Larry. "March!"

Dane backed slowly away.

"Thanks for showing me the hiding place of your pearl," laughed Larry, picking up the powder can. As Dane watched him with fascinated eyes, he snapped off the lid, fished inside and extracted a gleaming twin to the jewel that now reposed securely in his vest pocket. He held it before the other's baleful eyes. "A beauty, eh? I looked all over the cabin for it, but couldn't locate it."

"But the one you had—"

"Fool. You fell right into my trap as I had planned. The pearl I showed you was the first of the three pearls of Lo Chang, which I took from my vault yesterday. I retrieved it in Shanghai. A dead man points the tale. This is the second."

With an inarticulate bellow of rage, Dane risked all on a fool-

hardy move. He lunged suddenly forward, made a desperate attempt to grasp Weston's gun arm. He half succeeded. There was a fierce struggle in the room for a swift two minutes. But it was terminated just as desperately by the dull explosion of a gun.

Dane staggered back. A look of bewilderment spread over his face, then slowly vanished. His knees buckled and he plunged headlong to the floor. Weston stooped down to the grotesque figure on the floor for a moment, saw that Dane was only wounded.

IN his pocket reposed another of the pearls of Lo Chang, and in his heart was a strange mixture of triumph and wistfulness. He, whose life had been such a quiet, uneventful thing, was now a flaming adventurer who stalked the byways of the world, his life dedicated to a task of revenge and blood.

He sighed wearily.

Then his brain put an end to his emotional imaginings. He must get off this boat somehow. It would never do to be aboard when Dane was discovered. He would be accused of being a thief. He left Dane's room and strode on deck.

There, twinkling to the southeast, were the lights of Calais. He walked to the stern. He glanced around carefully. There was no one in sight. For a moment he stood poised on the stern rail, then he dived.

And as the channel boat continued to her destination with her cargo of death below, the *Brother to the Tong* swam silently through the night to a safety which would only last until he caught up to Lo Chang's third matchless pearl.

Watch for Another Exciting Larry Weston Story

Fangs of the East



*The Orientals
leveled their
pistols at the
intruders*

An Amazing Pseudo-Scientific Story of a Sinister Power Threatening the Peace and Security of America

By ALLAN K. ECHOLS

Author of "White Ivory," "Stolen Battleships," etc.

ALTHOUGH it was nearing midnight, Darrel Kingsley's great laboratory which he maintained in connection with his Park Avenue home was lit up to a blinding whiteness.

Gleaming electrical apparatus hummed silently, some of it giving off sizzling sparks.

Kingsley and his assistant, the serious young Bates, gave some finishing adjustments to a new apparatus that had been assembled at one end of the great room. Then Kingsley glued his eye to an attachment on the machine

that suggested the eyepiece of a telescope. He twisted a dial slowly.

"Good," he said, taking off the white smock he was wearing. "And just in time. That ought to be Delaney."

A servant had entered, ushering a group into the room without the formality of announcing them—this by Kingsley's arrangement.

Delaney was a robust man with black grizzled hair and clipped mustache, the most effective Police Commissioner who had ruled New York in a decade. The inevitable cigar in his

mouth continued its never-ending work of sifting white ashes onto the Commissioner's blue suit as he strode across the room and shook hands with his old friend. He was followed by three strangers.

MEET Mr. Weldon, Darrel," the commissioner said, introducing a lean man with a worried face and wrinkles around restless black eyes. "And Burch, Mr. Weldon's assistant."

"And this is Mr. Noel Hare, private secretary to Basil Strother, the man who's got us all up in the air."

Mr. Noel Hare acknowledged the introduction in a piping voice that befitted his appearance. He was short and slender, with a bald head and rimless glasses. His upper lip was decorated with a pale downy mustache above a weak chin.

Darrel Kingsley showed them into the office off the laboratory.

"As I understand it," he said when they were seated. "Basil Strother, the high mogul of the armament and ammunitions racket, is missing, and you want me to find him. Right?"

"Yes." Weldon answered. "I'm here on behalf of the President, himself. Department of Justice, you know. The President has a strong reason for taking an interest in the case right now."

"But I'm not a detective," Kingsley said.

Delaney interrupted. "But, Darrel, I couldn't tell you everything over the telephone. That's why I wanted you to meet all these men. Between them they have a story that I know'll interest you. It's another one of those impossible yarns—just the thing that you're always digging into. Suppose you let me engineer this thing and bring out the story."

A servant appeared with a bottle and brandy glasses and served them noiselessly.

"Let's have it," Kingsley said.

"Then, to begin with," Delaney said. "Strother is a big shot—tied up with the International Arms Trust—which isn't as unreal as people think it is. England, France, Italy—steel companies, chemical companies all over the world. They're all tied up financially.

"It doesn't matter to them who goes to war as long as some country fights. They win either way. The women of the world bear children and Strother's bunch furnishes the powder to kill 'em at a thousand percent profit! Beautiful set-up.

"But right now the government needs Strother—and something's happened to him. Hare, tell Mr. Kingsley what you told me."

The missing munitions king's extraordinary secretary now spoke up. He seemed frightened and his voice sounded cracked in its high-pitched cackle.

"You see, this morning Mr. Strother sent me ashore on an errand—"

"Ashore?"

"Yes. His home is located on Strother's Island which he owns. It's a small bit of land off the south coast of Long Island, near Fire Island. Mr. Strother's home is there, and we work there a great deal. Mr. Strother is a bachelor, you know, and we're not disturbed.

AT any rate, I went ashore in the launch and did the errand. Then I started back." The wisp of a man looked queerly at the Police Commissioner.

"Go on," Delaney said. "He's heard wilder tales than yours."

"Well, I couldn't get back to the island!"

Kingsley took a sip of his brandy. "Why?"

"I don't know. It seemed as though an invisible wall surrounded it."

"I don't understand."

Hare looked as though he expected to be called a fool, and then proceeded.

"The boat would go so far and wouldn't go any further, no matter how we tried. The launchman would steer straight but the launch wouldn't go past a certain point. It would sheer off every time we approached the island, as though it had run into something solid. We encircled the island completely, but we could get no closer than half a mile to it.

I KNOW that sounds silly—" Hare squirmed in his seat and dug at his collar with a forefinger—"but it's true." He finished with a look of feeble defiance.

"Not at all," Kingsley said reassuringly. "I've known stranger things. Haven't you, Commissioner?"

"Not till I met you." Delaney answered.

"What did you do next?" Kingsley asked.

"I went back ashore to notify the police, but this gentleman was in a boat and followed me in." The secretary nodded his head at Burch, Mr. Weldon's assistant. "He showed me his badge and said he'd had the same experience as I. He being a detective and knowing what to do, I left matters in his hands."

Delaney spoke. "Mr. Weldon, if you'd go on from there."

The Department of Justice agent cleared his throat. "We are to keep an eye on Strother for his own protection—for State reasons. My man Burch covered the house by fishing from a boat near it. He had the experience that Hare did, and got in touch with me. The thing looked queer. Then something else made it look queerer."

"What do you mean?"

"Strother's office manager called me and reported that Strother had called him and said that he was going away

suddenly, but would not reveal his destination. Now it's well known that Strother makes secret trips, but he has a code method of letting his office manager know—and the code wasn't used in this conversation. This precaution has been taken for such contingencies as might crop up—such as this, for instance."

"I see."

"Now the call came just a few minutes after the time Hare left the house in the boat. My man knows that Strother didn't leave the house or the island. We feel sure the message was forced from Strother. His house is shut off suddenly in some mysterious way from access by people on the outside. His phone doesn't work. The wireless doesn't work at his home.

"We have reason to know that he has been in danger. Therefore—we're convinced those who are after him have got him—imprisoned in his own home—*imprisoned behind an invisible prison wall of some kind!* That is, unless he's dead already. We're afraid that might also be the case. *And the President would consider that disastrous!*"

"Why?" Kingsley asked calmly.

"That I can't tell you. But you have my assurance that it is at the President's request that I ask you to try to deliver Basil Strother from whatever danger there is—or let us know that he is dead."

THE luxurious office was filled with tension. Bailey Weldon and Delaney sat on the edges of their chairs, Burch and Hare were slumped back as though the strain were too much for them. Darrel Kingsley smoked on silently a moment while they waited for his answer.

"This is all interesting," he said deliberately. "But I couldn't help you much with just those facts. It's apparent that the case involves something of considerable magnitude. But

I couldn't undertake to do anything about it unless I had all the facts. I would have to know *why* the government is so eager to have Basil Strother back."

"I don't see—" began Weldon.

"For this reason," Kingsley answered. "I have to know whom I would be fighting so that I could get some idea of their own plans."

DELANEY turned to the Department of Justice man. "If it is at all possible, I'd recommend that you tell Kingsley everything—absolutely everything. It may prove the only way he can help you."

The government man stood up and flicked the ashes of his cigar into a tray on the desk. Hands in his pockets, he paced the length of the room nervously two or three times, then stopped in front of Kingsley.

"All right," he finally said. "But I want you to know that it would be dangerous—disastrous—if the news leaked out. It must be in the strictest confidence. May I have your promise?"

Kingsley nodded assent.

"The United States—as is the rest of the world—is facing capture by an almost unknown and unheard-of country!"

Weldon looked around belligerently, as though daring anyone to contradict his next wild statement.

"Did any of you ever hear of Rhajovik? An Asiatic principality lost in the Himalaya Mountains? I thought not! Well—right now that little handful of mongrel Asiatics are just about ready to become masters of the world!

"Don't smile! They have scientific apparatus that they've been working on secretly for years, apparatus that would make the conquest of America almost bloodless and at the same time almost a certainty. You understand what we're up against. If this news got out—"

"Jhengis," Kingsley spoke the word meditatively.

The secret service man looked startled. "Yes," he said. "We know that Prince Jhengis is directing operations here. How did you—"

"I've dealt with him before," Kingsley answered. "Now that I know that it's he who is doing things, what is he after in this instance? You'd better tell me explicitly."

"Explicitly, then, it's this: Strother has just completed what might be called a war or defense scheme. By 'scheme' I mean a contrivance or group of contrivances and plans of operating them, which consist of newer and deadlier instruments of war than have ever been dreamed of by men before. I can't give you details—nobody knows them in spite of whispers.

"But at any rate, we have evidence that this prince has learned about them and is simply taking means to get his hands on them to use against us. He's got hold of Strother and will manage to get the secret from him. With this in the possession of his country—you might as well kiss the United States good-by. We'd be ruled by these mad mountain Mongols before the year is out."

THEN you mean that possession of this secret will give mastery of the world to whomever possesses it?"

"Right! and we're hopelessly out of it if we've lost it—or if they've killed Strother. If we only knew whether he was dead or alive—"

"That's not as difficult as you might think," Kingsley assured him. "Come into the laboratory."

He led his guests to the machine he had been working on when they arrived. His assistant, Bates, at his nod, went to a wall panel and operated half a dozen switches, at the same time watching dials that lined the panel.

Kingsley turned to Commissioner Delaney who stood with legs apart examining the complicated instrument of shining metal. "Did you bring those photographs I asked you for?"

Delaney dug into the pocket of his blue suit and handed Kingsley a group of envelopes. "That one's Strother," he explained as Kingsley sorted the pictures, "and that one's his chauffeur, and that one is his technical assistant, Strauss."

"Then that one, that's Armetti, the bird that's to burn at Sing Sing tonight. I don't see what you want with them—"

KINGSLEY looked at his watch. "It's two minutes to twelve," he said hurriedly. "I'll show you something."

He picked up the picture of the murderer, Armetti, and placed it in a rack which he pulled out of the instrument. Then shoving the rack and picture into the machine he adjusted knobs while he glued his eyes to the eyepiece.

"Take a look at that, and tell me what you see," he said to the police officer."

Delaney, with his hands in his trousers pockets, squatted until his eye fastened on the eyepiece. Cigar ashes dusted on his clothes as he looked into the instrument.

Finally he turned from the machine to Kingsley. "That's funny," he grunted. "It looked like waves coming from the picture. Like a blaze, you might say, but not bright. Like heat waves, about half an inch long. Then suddenly they went out—like you'd turn off a light."

"What time is it?" Kingsley asked quickly.

"Half a minute after twelve,"

"You've just seen Armetti die," Kingsley said. "Those waves you were looking at were life waves. They went out just as Armetti was executed."

"What are you telling me?" the officer asked, but there was a tone of discomfort in his voice, as though he were greatly perturbed by something he hardly dared believe.

"You admit that a radio station can utilize certain waves we call ether waves to make music come out of a machine tuned to it, no matter where the sender is or where the receiver is, do you not?"

"Sure, but what—"

"A new discovery," Kingsley answered. "Life, or specifically the brain, like a radio station, emits a distinct type of wave. When a photograph is taken, those waves are transmitted to a photographic plate and the force of them is active as long as the subject is alive. Just as a radio receiving set will continue to give off music so long as it is drawing the music from the active sending station on the same wave length."

"There's nothing spooky about it—it is simply the result of a new scientific discovery. Don't disbelieve it until you're ready to deny the fact of radio."

THERE was a stir of uneasiness among the men assembled in the laboratory, as though they had witnessed the execution itself. Strother's secretary with the blond mustache coughed and murmured a protesting, "I say!"

Kingsley snapped off the current and exchanged the picture of the executed convict for the one of Basil Strother, then set the machine in motion again and studied it through the eyepiece. The men in the room grouped about him closely.

Kingsley mumbled something under his breath, then tried a new adjustment on the machine.

"Odd," he said. "The waves are just about half the length they should be."

The Department of Justice man

was at his elbow. "That would mean he was in a weakened condition, wouldn't it?"

"Very likely," Kingsley replied. He examined the picture again, then replaced it with that of the munitions man's technical assistant.

"That man Strauss is dead," he announced. And then later: "And so is Strother's chauffeur."

Kingsley snapped off the machine, then paced the length of the laboratory in deep study. Then he stopped suddenly before the group.

"We'll have to work quickly, I'm afraid, before it's too late. And now I'll have to ask you for the same promise of secrecy I gave you a while ago. If I am able to do anything, I have to show you things I don't want to be known—things that it would be unsafe for the world to know."

THERE was an answer of assent from the group.

"Come with me, then."

Kingsley led his guests into a smaller room after a whispered consultation with his assistant. The room contained a wealth of electrical apparatus surrounding a peculiar looking cage.

The cage was like a large glass elevator, except that there were no cables for hoisting it. It seemed built into the room.

As Kingsley opened the glass door to this chamber, his assistant returned with a small wooden box, which he opened, displaying a group of small devices that had the general appearance of large, cheap wrist-watches.

"Now, gentlemen," Kingsley said, taking one of the devices, "if you'll just strap one of these on your wrists and then get into this cage—"

Delaney looked at the device speculatively and placed it on his wrist without question. He had known

Kingsley too long to question his actions. Then he took a gun from his hip pocket and examined it.

Bates had taken a chart of Long Island, and was working over it with a navigator's parallel rule and compass. As he made his computations he set dials on a switch-board.

Silently, but with mixed apprehension and determination, the remainder of the group followed the officer's lead. Kingsley closed the door of the cage and bolted it from the inside, then signaled to Bates, his assistant, who stood outside the cage before the switch-board. Bates started turning the handle of a thermostat and a humming sound penetrated the cage.

"I say!" protested Hare, jerking at his downy mustache, "what is—"

His speech was interrupted by a quivering of the glass walls of the cage, by a sense of pressure but without its accompanying discomforts.

It was Hare who spoke next, in a high-pitched voice that was filled with awe. "Heavens! *Why, we're on Strother's Island—*"

Kingsley gripped him by the arm. "Quiet, man," he cautioned.

Gasps of amazement came from the other men as they, too, realized where they were. It seemed as though no time had elapsed. At one moment they had been in Kingsley's studio—now they were standing in a group in the dark shadows of a great house set on a small landscaped island, no more than a dozen acres in size.

KINGSLEY spoke in a low, cautious voice.

"That was the only way to get through the invisible wall. You were broken down into electrical energy and reassembled here, in a manner of speaking. The device on your arms was for that purpose. And

now, Hare, lead us into this place. You should know the way. We want to get in and to the most likely place to find Strother without anybody knowing we're here. Ready, gentlemen?"

HARE ran his hand over his bald head, and his teeth chattered audibly. Kingsley caught him by the arm. "Brace up, man. This is no time to get frightened."

"That's right," Hare piped. "But it's d-d-dreadful. Something terrible might happen—"

"It's very likely happening," Kingsley retorted, "to your employer." Hare braced himself with a visible shrug and led the way up a shrub-lined trail. The silent group filed in behind Kingsley and Hare, and there was the quiet sound of guns coming out of pockets and being handled.

"This is the entrance from the basement to the boathouse," Hare whispered huskily. "We ought to be able to get in here."

The group, now in the shadow of the walls of the great house, had skirted its length and had come to a point where the house set at the water's edge. Hare, mastering his fear, groped until he found the door and led the way in.

They found themselves in a long dark passageway, which they negotiated by feeling the walls. They came at last to a point where a stair led upward, and from the opening above there came the faint glow of light.

Here Kingsley stopped the party, and motioned for Delaney and the Federal officer to come with him, both men being more likely to be efficient with their guns. In this order they mounted the stair and found themselves in a back hall.

"Welcome, gentlemen! But drop your guns!"

The voice came from behind them, and Kingsley whirled. The two officers dropped their weapons and turned slowly.

Facing them was a diminutive Asiatic in full evening dress. Flanking him were three other Orientals in the same garb. All had pistols leveled at the intruders.

"It's good to see you again, Mr. Kingsley."

"And I'm surprised to see that you're still alive, Prince Jhengis," Kingsley returned in a hard voice.

"The god of our fathers has seen fit to spare me from your efforts," the Mongol returned. "It almost leads me to believe that I am destined to finish my work."

"I sincerely hope not," Kingsley returned gravely.

Jhengis dropped the talk in that vein. "I presume you were interested in delivering Mr. Strother from our hands?"

"We were—and still are!"

"That's too bad. And yet, it is fortunate for me, in a way. I hadn't realized before just how great a scientist you really were. I'd like very much for you to explain to me your method of penetrating my invisible wall. I'm sure the knowledge would help us."

"If you could get it."

OH, we can do that all right," Prince Jhengis returned with the calm assurance of one who knows his abilities. "Doctor Bakri-Singh will get the details for me."

"It might have occurred to you that I gave the doctor the idea that resulted in your wall."

"But the doctor worked out the method," the prince insisted. "However, did you come to negotiate or to use force?"

In the light of the guns carried by the intruders, it was apparent that the prince was in a mood for banter.

Kingsley decided to make the most of it. "We'd like to negotiate for the life of Basil Strother—provided we know he's alive."

"I can convince you of that," Jhengis replied. "And at the same time indulge in a little of my infernal pride. Mr. Strother is going to tell Doctor Bakri-Singh and me a few of his secrets tonight. Perhaps you'd like to hear them, too. It wouldn't do any harm, since you, of course, won't live to reveal them."

KINGSLEY bowed formally, following the manner of the Oriental prince. "It would interest the scientific side of me to hear those things," he answered gravely. "And we can discuss my death later."

"Then come with me."

The captors herded their prisoners into the laboratory of Basil Strother's mansion. It was a great room fully equipped with strange gear used in chemical experiments, including much electrical apparatus. Three men were working, one their supervisor, an aged scientist with gray hair and beard. At the entrance of the group the older man came forward.

"Your friend, Mr. Kingsley, Doctor. I'm sure you'll be glad to meet again."

The scientist bowed formally.

"Doctor Bakri-Singh is putting some refinements on your electric curtain," the prince explained. "And now, perhaps you'd like to see Mr. Strother."

The doctor joined the group and they made their way to the farther end of the laboratory.

Basil Strother lay upon a white bed, partially covered with a sheet. His massive gray head with tousled hair was thrown back in an attitude of weakness, and his gray eyes were lifeless, a strange contrast to the appearance of this indomitable man's

usual appearance. His head moved slightly and his glazed eyes took in the crowd without any signs of recognition.

Kingsley glanced quickly about. Beside the bed was a white instrument cabinet, almost empty, except for a group of hypodermic syringes and a row of bottles and containers. On top of the cabinet was a bright metal sterilizer which gave off wisps of steam. "This is the man you've paid with your lives to see," said the prince matter-of-factly. "At the moment he is still trying to resist our truth serum, but I promise you resistance is useless."

"Our serum differs from the popularly-known kind in America in that it breaks down mental resistance as well as physical. As you know, your own serum will make a man helpless against answering questions, but unfortunately it doesn't keep him from lying, thus defeating its purpose. Ours doesn't have that fault."

WHAT'S the object of this?" Kingsley demanded.

"This is the last step in our preparation for taking over the management of your country. In a few moments Strother will reveal to us the entire secret he has discovered."

Prince Jhengis could not control his enthusiasm. "Strother was a great man. The new war implements he has created will make war bloodless and quickly decisive, although many lives may be snuffed out. But that doesn't matter; people will die painlessly—will just disintegrate, to be exact."

He grew excited. "Why, with the electric guns Strother has created we will be able to destroy utterly the last vestiges of your defenses. Imagine this: we land our armies on Lower California, transport them to your vital points by whatever

method you've just used to get through our electric wall. We aim Strother's weapons at your army, and presto, your armies cease to exist! Bloodlessly your soldiers have been disintegrated into gases—just as a dead animal or tree is gradually reverted to its original elements."

THE group was gathered around Strother. The physically weak and pale Hare dropped down and sat dejectedly on the foot of the bed.

Nobody noticed him. Prince Jhengis warmed up to his subject.

"You have given me a new idea. You couldn't have gained access to this house in but one way. I suspect that you have at last discovered the method of breaking down living matter and transmitting it by electrical waves, then reassembling it. Great! You are going to reveal that to us and thus solve the problem of assembling our troops wherever we want them." The prince swelled with emotion. He held his hands aloft and gazed upward.

"At last, oh, God of our fathers, the prayers of a thousand years have been heard! A Jhengis Khan shall sit in judgment on all mankind! Eternal is the House of Jhengis!"

He clasped his hands and looked at the doctor. "Quick," he ordered. "Start the injections on Mr. Kingsley. He has made everything possible at last."

The Americans were still surrounded by their silent captors who kept their drawn guns leveled at their prisoners. Doctor Bakri-Singh took a last look at Basil Strother. "Are you ready to answer our questions now?" he asked.

The prone financier, without looking at his questioner, answered in a hollow and lifeless voice: "Yes."

The doctor motioned to one of the assistants in white smocks, and the man sat beside the bed with a

notebook and pencil. "We will have to wait a few minutes to start on Mr. Kingsley," he said. "Mr. Strother cannot last very much longer." Then turning to the enfeebled prisoner, "Now, Mr. Strother, start at the first and outline your whole plan. Give us all the details and tell us how—"

There was an interruption. Noel Hare, pale and somewhat shaky, but with a strong effort, stood up.

"Listen to me," he said in his high-pitched voice that contained something of resignation. "Perhaps you do not know this. The laboratory—in fact this whole house—is undermined with high explosives."

"Mr. Strother knew spies would be trying to discover his secrets, trying to gain possession of this place to study his works, and he prepared for them. I can blow this place up instantly—kill us all! And destroy the secret you've come to get. Mr. Strother would rather I killed him, and us all, than for you to have the secret. Our lives are worth nothing beside the safety of the country as a whole."

"If you let Mr. Strother say one word, *I'll destroy this house and everyone in it.*"

Prince Jhengis' dark face went malignant and his black eyes flashed fire. "You're lying," he said in a low tone.

"I'll prove it, if you force me to."

"A Jhengis is contemptuous of death. Prove it." Kingsley stood tinkering with the watch-like device on his wrist. His group stood in silent tension, amazed at the sudden change in the weakling secretary.

KINGSLEY'S mouth went hard as he turned the stem of the device on his wrist. He looked at Hare, surprised.

Then he noticed Hare's arm. *The device wasn't in place on it!*

Kingsley bit his lips; his face was inscrutable. He took the few steps separating himself from the young secretary, and his hands gripped the young man's shoulder.

Kingsley spoke to Prince Jhengis. "Good-by, Jhengis," he said seriously. "I have a lot of respect for you as a man. It's too bad that we've met under these circumstances. And Doctor Bakri-Singh, you know I have always respected your learning." Prince Jhengis interrupted. "You aren't going to your ancestors for a while yet."

"No," Darrel Kingsley answered evenly.

"But you are."

His hand gripped the shoulder of young Hare. That young man looked long at his companions, then made a sudden dive toward a switch panel on the wall.

As his hand grasped the handle of an electrical switch, Kingsley pressed the stem of the watch-like thing on his arm, flashing a signal to Bates, standing before the switch-board back in the laboratory.

AN explosion rent the air like a clap of summer thunder, and Kingsley and his companions saw a vast white flame sear the darkness. They found themselves standing in a group on a sandy beach four miles from Strother's Island!

At their feet lay the half-conscious Strother. *Hare was not with them!*

The sweeping flame on the island that accompanied the explosion lifted a mass of masonry, black in the red flame, high in the air, then pieces of it rained down on the site with a roar that could be heard from the beach.

Strother's castle was a heap of smoking ruins. Junk! And junk was the machinery that had created the invisible wall around it. Buried somewhere in the smoldering heap

was the descendant of that ruthless conqueror of a thousand years ago, Jhengis Khan. And gone was the East's greatest scientist. And the little, frightened Noel Hare!

"Poor Hare!"

It was the commissioner of police who spoke. Delaney was gradually beginning to realize that he was back on the mainland and safe. It was seldom that he had a word of sympathy for anybody, no matter how much he felt it, and this time Kingsley knew how strongly he must have been affected.

"Why wasn't he brought out with us?" Delaney asked. "He had one of these gadgets on just like we did."

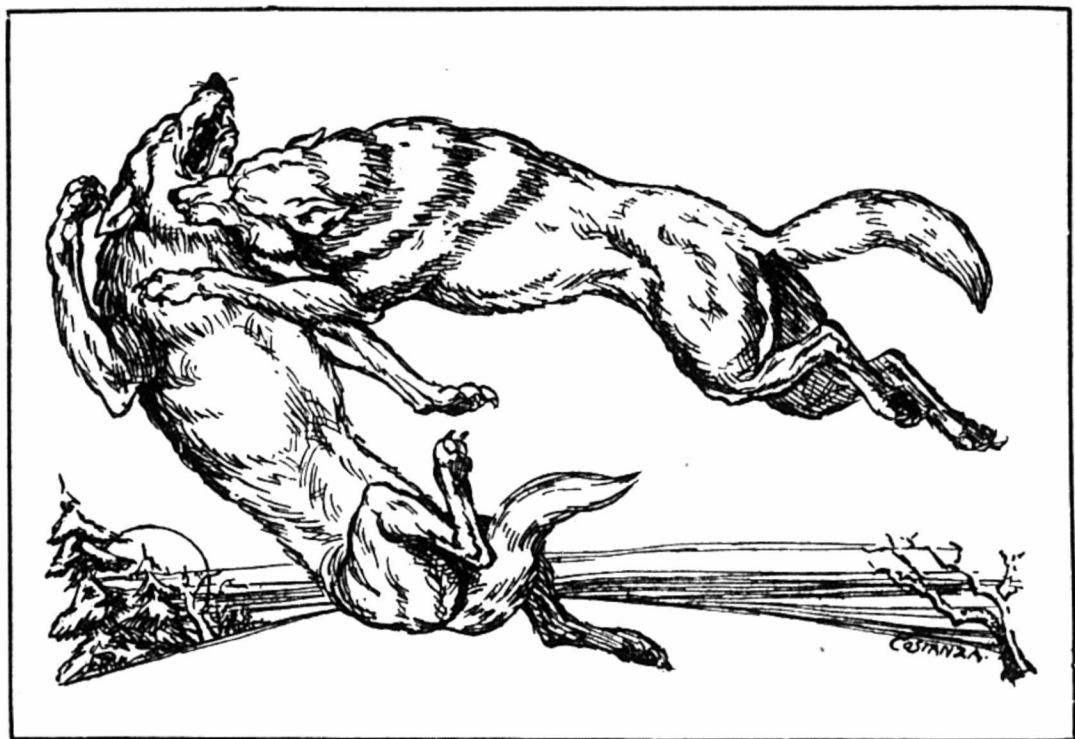
KINGSLEY answered: "I'd hate to be put to the test of doing what he did—and I imagine you fellows would, too. Look!" Kingsley stooped over beside the form of Basil Strother and grasped that man's ankle.

"While we were talking, Hare took the instrument off his wrist—he was sitting on the foot of the bed at the time, remember—and strapped it around Strother's ankle. Deliberately offering escape to Strother at the cost of his own life. One of you get an ambulance, will you, so we can get Strother to a hospital. He'll live, all right."

"I'll do it personally," Weldon said. "And while I'm gone, I'm going to put Washington at ease and mention what you've done."

"Never mind me," Darrell Kingsley answered. "But you might mention Hare's wonderful heroism and the work of my assistant, Bates. He's been sitting back at my laboratory doing all the work—and suffering all the suspense. Our wrist-watches wouldn't have done us any good if he hadn't been on the job to operate the machinery."

Last of the Brood



A Gripping, Tense Story of Bitter Rivalry and Elemental Struggle in the Wolf Pack

By HAROLD DE POLO

Author of "The Better Man," "The Pearl-and-Gold Bandit," etc.

THE GAUNT young wolf, far in the rear of even the last stragglers, gamely attempted to increase his pace as he heard the shrill cries ahead of him, signifying that the pack had come to a halt. It meant, he at first hopefully thought, that food had been torn down by the leaders. A deer or a moose.

Perhaps, if fortune had been kind, an entire herd. If the latter were so, there would be plenty for all, including such laggards as himself.

After the first dozen or more strides he had taken, however, he

was forced to relapse into his former slow progress. His wounded left haunch, ripped by the fangs of an older and larger adversary in battle several days ago, was too painful to allow him to make any great amount of speed.

Hungry though he was, eager for the taste of fresh and much-needed meat, he had to be content with laboriously limping along over the crusted snow.

With all his courage, his ability to take physical punishment, he nevertheless possessed a certain innate wisdom that was not common in a

yearling wolf. He knew, somehow, that if he put too much strain on his leg it would only prolong the healing process.

He had seen others of his kind, injured in combat, become permanently crippled by blindly refusing to favor a wounded foot. So, food or no food, he took his time and picked the easiest going.

HE had already made one mistake, he realized, when he pitted himself against that older and stronger wolf. The other animal, when the pack had halted for a brief rest, had suddenly snapped at him with his fangs for no valid reason. In all probability, it had been because hunger had made him irritable. Anyway, as the teeth of his attacker had grazed his shoulder, the younger member of the gray horde had valiantly decided to defend himself and not retreat.

The battle had been of fairly short duration. His heavier opponent, better fed and in better condition than he himself had been, had overpowered him with the sheer weight of his body. The young wolf, down under his antagonist, had suffered this cruelly torn haunch, but he himself had managed to inflict a jagged gash along the throat of the older animal. The latter, after receiving it, had been satisfied to discontinue the fray.

It had taught the young wolf a lesson, this being that discretion was occasionally the better part of valor. He should have retreated from that bulkier opponent when the other first snapped at him. He had decidedly not been ready to match his own weight against that of a full-grown wolf.

As the winter progressed he would fill out and take on more poundage, and perhaps then he would be able to even the score. Until he was a

trifle older he would move with caution in everything, he had definitely decided.

His caution in the use of his leg, he presently saw, had not caused him to lose any chance at food. The pack, he discovered, had not stopped because game had been torn down. They had stopped in order to witness a battle between their gigantic old leader and one of the older wolves. It was all over when the youngster arrived.

Weak and staggering, but still on his feet, the despotic ruler stood over the inert and lifeless form of his erstwhile opponent, whose jugular had been ripped wide open.

As the straggler approached the gray circle, he thought of what had probably happened. The wolf who was dead, perhaps, had come a bit too close to the leader, and the latter had turned and insisted on making the other pay with his life for the unintended affront. Time after time the wolf pack had seen this occur, for by fear and merciless tyranny alone did the ruler hold his throne. His great body, his almost phenomenal strength, had allowed him to do this, and there were few who would willingly come to grips with him.

NOW, after surveying his subjects with arrogantly blazing eyes that seemed to ask if any other cared to attempt combat with him, he suddenly sank his fangs with a savage snarl along the throat of his vanquished adversary.

He signified, at the same time, that he would not take it amiss if his mate and another comely young female joined him in this feast of fresh meat and hot blood. As they did so, not another wolf dared to approach the carcass, undeniably proving that his discipline was supreme.

But, as the straggler with the wounded haunch came to the outer edge of the circle, a queer mixture of rage and sorrow and pain gripped his heart as he procured a closer view of that dead wolf on which the leader was now feasting.

He did not, it is true, know the exact reason for his strongly experiencing these emotions; he knew, only, that an overwhelming desire was throbbing through his brain to leap forward and attempt to tear the despotic monarch to pieces. He felt, somehow, as if that mangled carcass on the frozen snow was somehow part of *himself*; as if something, suddenly, had been taken away from his own life, leaving an empty and unexplainable void.

HE could never be satisfied—could never rest content—until he had wreaked his vengeance on that gigantic leader.

Nevertheless, as the bloodthirsty tyrant gave the order to move on when he had completed his meal, the youngster wisely refrained from hurling himself forward and so sacrificing his own life in the vain effort of pulling down the older wolf.

Instead, he obediently dropped to the rear and followed the mighty pack, again reminding himself that he must use caution. He must use caution not only with his leg, he realized, but in every single thing that he did. He was not yet ready to face the leader, and the leader was the one that he now wanted to face. He had forgotten all about that other wolf who had given him his wound on the haunch.

The leader was his goal!

There was good and valid reason for his wanting to tear down the despotic ruler. The animal whom the latter had attacked and vanquished and devoured had been the father of the young straggler.

He had not sensed this kinship, for in the life of the wolf pack parenthood is practically forgotten as soon as the young whelps are able to shift for themselves. As long as they are helpless and dependent—as long as they need guidance in learning the laws of the wild—the cubs are tenderly and devotedly cared for by their progenitors.

But, just as soon as they are capable of shifting for themselves, they are left to make their own way in the world. Sometimes they go off and later join some other pack, while perhaps an equal number remain with the original group. In either case, the duties of parenthood have so completely ceased that the relationship is apparently utterly forgotten on both sides.

The young wolf who had all at once vowed vengeance on the merciless old chieftain had experienced about the usual life of one of his ilk. He had been one of a litter of four, born in the stump of an immense pine tree where his mother had gone for shelter in order to bear her brood.

He had been the prize of the litter, although naturally he had not been aware of this. He had been larger-boned, bigger-bodied, more quick of brain. He had always been the winner in playful battles with his brothers and sisters, and it had been his keen thinking as well as his physical bulk that had enabled him to do this.

IT was this same mental keenness, in fact, that was responsible for his being alive at present.

One morning when the litter had been eight or nine weeks old, their parents had left them for no more than a scant thirty minutes or so. During that period, two voracious lynx had made an assault on the wolf lair in the hollow of the pine.

Three of the cubs had been too terrorized to move, and had therefore lost their lives before they had known what it was all about. The fourth—the youngster who had just seen his father killed—had sensed that grim peril had been put upon him.

Remembering that he had been taught that self-preservation was the first law of the wild, he had scampered off and entered a burrow beneath a boulder where he knew the cats could not follow. Nor had he emerged until the return of his mother and father.

FOR the next month or more he had received inordinately close attention from his parents. They had lost all their offspring but one, and presumably they had decided to take not the slightest chance of having anything happen to the last of the brood.

He profited to a marked degree, of course, by this exceptional care. He became an adept at hunting, seeing that he had two teachers giving him their entire time, and he consequently filled out more and took on weight so that he was perhaps a full eight or ten weeks more advanced than any wolf whelps of about his own age.

One of those innumerable and common tragedies of the wild had been responsible for his being left to shift for himself shortly after this.

His mother, leaving him in charge of his father, had gone out on the hunt one evening. Night passed and the dawn came, but still she did not return. She never returned. Another lynx pair, a big panther, the cloven hoof of a moose, the bullet or trap of a dreaded man-creature—any of these might have been the cause of her doom. Her mate had never found out, as so many mates

of the wild never do find out what has happened.

Left alone with his last whelp, the old wolf had rejoined the pack. Gradually, as he saw that the youngster was more than able to handle himself in the company of those of his own age, he had allowed him to think and act for himself. In another week or ten days, indeed, the older wolf calmly went his own way and scarcely gave any notice to the cub he had so carefully reared.

From then on, it is doubtful if either of them ever gave the slightest heed or thought of their relationship to the other.

It is true that the youngster, deep down in his heart, occasionally felt a vague kinship or comradeship for the older animal. He would never, for instance, try to outdistance him on the hunt. Instead, he had always preferred to run shoulder-to-shoulder with him, so they might both be in on the kill simultaneously.

Again, if ever he had done something that he deemed noteworthy, such as besting an animal of his own age or even larger, he would unconsciously find himself glancing at the old wolf for approval. In various other small ways, as well, he had shown his interest in the rugged old veteran.

THESE were the feelings, the emotions, that had become so intensified when he had seen his sire lying dead on the snow. He must have vengeance.

It was not a passing thing of the moment, either. All through that night, on the continuance of the long and gruelling hunt, the idea kept growing in his mind. Like many another of the pack, he had always felt a just rancor against their cruel leader.

Also, like many another of the

pack, he had dreamed of possibly some day becoming sufficiently powerful to hurl the ruler from his throne.

Now, however, this desire had suddenly become the one and only passion of his life.

Someway, somehow, he would conquer the leader!

The young wolf, the following night, took what may have seemed an odd way of preparing for his revenge. While the pack was on the hunt, and his injured leg kept him among the stragglers, he gradually dropped back and back. His doing so, apparently, had gone unnoticed, and soon he was almost half a mile or more in the rear.

THEN, very quietly and calmly, he veered off from the trail, straight south, and continued on his way. He had deserted the pack, deserted his heritage.

He found one thing out very definitely, even before the next dawn came. It was far easier to procure food, in either a lean or a fat season, if hunting alone. His approach on prospective prey could be made much more silently; he did not have the worry of watching other members of the pack, always ready to fight off a companion for meat; he did not have to obey the law of the gray horde and blindly go only where the despotic leader would direct. He was his own master.

He captured a ptarmigan and a rabbit, that first night, and when he stretched out to sleep in a rotted old fallen log he felt rested and filled for the first time all winter.

He wanted, above everything else, to keep away from the haunts of the pack, so the next morning he continued southward, toward the fringe of human settlements that were ever creeping further up into the northern wilderness. Near the settlements,

he knew, the men creatures set out traps. - Wherever they were, the hunting should be thicker for any animal who moved with extreme caution. And he knew, full well, just how to do that.

His object, in this, was to gain as much rest as he possibly could, for he was shrewd enough to realize that he was worn and raw-nerved from lack of food and too much exercise in trying to find it. Rest would gradually bring him back to full strength, and before he would dare attempt the plan which he had more or less vaguely formulated he would need all the vigor it was possible to procure. He would never make the mistake of again underestimating an opponent.

His strength and weight did begin to come back, quite amazingly, after no more than the first week of his lone existence. Fighting as he was for a goal that he never allowed himself to forget, he became an expert at robbing the traps of the men creatures. As much as he could, he followed several of the humans when they set out some of their traps, doing so whenever he could safely trail them from the protection of the adjoining forest.

In that manner, he learned to avoid their pitfalls.

HE saw what was to him a new method of trapping, during his second week, and at the same time he was able to enjoy the fullest and most satisfying meal he had yet had.

In trailing after a man creature he had never seen before, he saw him stop in a deer runway and sling some strange tools to the ground—a pick and shovel, as it happened. He saw the trapper, then, use them to dig a hole in the frozen ground. It was a good eight feet deep and at least half that distance square.

When it was completed, the hu-

man with great care covered it over with brittle limbs from fallen trees. These, in turn, he hid from view with a blanket of snow. After that he effaced his snowshoe tracks from the vicinity, as best he could, and trudged away.

Gazing at the scene from hiding, the wolf realized that it would take an alert animal to sense the lurking danger.

FROM curiosity, as well as from his desire to obtain as much knowledge as he could, the wolf made up his mind to linger here by the runway and see what would happen. He waited all the rest of the morning, all that afternoon, and it was not until close to dusk that he was rewarded.

A doe, with her fawn ahead of her, came prancing down the path. The fawn, leaping friskily along, landed on that spot covered with snow and dead limbs and disappeared with a bleat of fear. The mother, frantic, went to the edge of the hole and peered down. She stayed there for a moment, unable to do anything. The leg of the fawn had been broken.

The wolf, then, made his appearance, and the doe flashed off in terror. It was all just one more of the innumerable and unavoidable tragedies of the wild.

Taking the place that the doe had left, the wolf looked down and saw the plight of the fawn. His own leg had been mending rapidly, and now he tested it, putting all his weight upon it, as he wondered whether or not to jump down. He was not certain that he could manage to make the upward leap to safety, but the sight of that generous meal below him, that would feed the man creature if he himself did not get it, caused him to make up his mind. Carefully, he slid down into the

cavity and put the suffering fawn out of misery.

He ate his meal somewhat hurriedly, for he could not know when the trapper might return, and then he crouched down for his upward leap. He made it, too, with ease.

His leg was completely healed and he had never felt stronger in his life, and he made his way to a comfortable cave in the near neighborhood to enjoy rest and sleep to the full. This he did for the balance of the night, and when he awoke with the coming of dawn he knew for a certainty that he was in the finest condition of his career.

He had taken on weight and his body had filled out, and he felt that soon he would be competent to search out the pack and come to grips with his hated enemy.

But he must not hurry. He must take his time.

BRIEFLY, he allowed two weeks to go by before he started out to hunt up the pack, and in that period of time he had continued to gain in strength and cunning.

Luck was with him, he discovered, right from the beginning. He did not find it necessary to do so much traveling in order to come across the tracks of the pack. He found them, as a matter of fact, when he had worked his way directly northward for no more than a scant morning.

He saw, too, that the tyrannical leader was working toward the south. This told the younger wolf that the hunting toward the north must have become even poorer. Otherwise, the wily chieftain would never have come down near the settlements.

He caught his first glimpse of the pack that afternoon, and he was careful to approach them with the wind coming toward him. He did no more, now, than remain in hiding and study them. It was hard to do

this, for it took tremendous effort on his part not to throw caution aside and rush in and grapple with the leader. His hatred for him, his desire for revenge, became almost overwhelming.

Nevertheless, he mastered his emotions and remembered that he must keep cool. One thing, though, pleased him vastly. The veteran leader was looking as lean and hungry as he had over a month ago. Hunting had decidedly been poor.

HE waited until early the next morning before he began his campaign. He found the trail of the pack even further southward, and when he came upon them he saw that they had passed another night of futile searching for sufficient food.

He approached them stealthily, working to join in with the stragglers so that his arrival would not be noticed immediately by the ruler. Much to his satisfaction, he succeeded in doing that, the other wolves no doubt thinking he had merely strayed away from the pack and only now found them again.

For not more than a mile the younger wolf loped along with the end of the pack, and then, very gradually, he began to change his position. He moved up to the center, went on even beyond that, and then pressed ahead to fall in beside the members who were just in the rear of the leader. He continued here for a few hundred yards, no more, and suddenly made the opening move in his plan of action.

Silently, swiftly, he left the snow on a gigantic leap that brought him to the very side of the leader.

As the old ruler turned, surprised and raging, the younger animal snapped out with his fangs. He caught the other on the tip of the nose, made a painful rip that drew

blood, and then bounded away just in time to avoid a savage return blow. Without wasting any time, he put on all of his phenomenal speed and raced forward, giving the impression of one who has repented of a daring deed and is attempting to evade the consequences by retreating. The fierce leader, too, must have been of this opinion, for with a snarl of anger and offended dignity he charged on after the fleeing form of the animal who had opened hostilities.

The younger wolf, from the start, realized that he had never before understood precisely how much speed of foot was possessed by the veteran ruler. He himself, leading the way, was using his topmost gait in order to test the powers of his adversary without any delay, and the older animal was having no trouble in keeping fairly close to him. Hungry though he was, worn down by a grim winter, he still was able to call on his muscles and have them respond to him.

THE aspirant to the throne, in admitting this, was not in any way discouraged. He felt supreme confidence in himself for the first time in his life, although he squarely faced the fact that he had pitted himself against a formidable foe.

First of all, he wanted to put as much distance as he could between the pack and the two of them. When he did meet the leader in battle, he preferred to do it without an audience. He did not want the odds unfairly against him, and he was aware that in this case, being ravenous for food, some of the others might break the law of the pack and step in to join against him.

He took the easiest going, at first, keeping to level ground and trodden runways. For a league, for two leagues, he did this. By that

time, with the leader no more than a hundred yards in his rear, the pack was spread out from half a mile to a full mile behind them.

He took to the heavy timber where the going was rough. Deliberately, he chose the worst ground he could find. Over logs, between boulders, through underbrush. For a mile or more he continued, and still that big gray animal behind him kept up the pace.

He knew then that his task would be no easy one. Far from easy. It would be doubtful, dangerous, when they came to grips. He had thought that, by this time, the old leader would have shown some signs of fatigue. When this had occurred, the younger animal had planned to slow down his speed, allow the other to catch up with him, and fight it out with a more tired opponent.

He racked his brain for some new plan, for each time he turned his head and glanced behind him he saw that implacable pursuer coming steadily on, always about the same distance away. Finally, he turned straight for the settlement section, making in particular for the trap line he had lately been robbing. He had, all at once, definitely decided on exactly what he would do.

He made for the runway where he had found the fawn in as direct a line as possible. Simultaneous with this move, he began to decrease his speed and to act as if at last he were feeling the effects of the chase.

Occasionally he hesitated, swayed a trifle before going on, and out of the corner of his eye he saw that his pursuer was taking the bait. The old battler was getting anxious for the kill.

As he struck the runway and raced down it, the younger wolf saw with his keen eye that the trapper had again visited the spot and covered up the treacherous hole with fresh

branches and snow. It would not have been visible to any of the forest folk unless they had previously known of its existence. He made for it without a qualm, with the older wolf now not more than a short dozen paces behind him.

When he came to it, he very deliberately bounded squarely onto the middle of it, and as he sank down out of sight much as he had seen the little fawn do, he emitted a howl of terrorized surprise.

LANDING on the bottom, he hastily stuck his left hind leg under him and set up a wail of pain. He wanted it to seem as if he had broken or at least badly injured his wounded leg. He held his breath, however, as he awaited developments.

Luck was again with him, nor was he kept long in suspense. The old ruler, nearly crazed with joy at the prospect of wreaking his vengeance on the younger animal who had dared to flaunt him before the pack, came to the edge of the human trap and took merely one glance below.

The younger wolf, cringing and whimpering his pain, must have caused the leader to believe that his left leg was broken and that the last vestige of his courage had completely gone. So, with a snarl of rage and blood-lust combined, he flung himself into the hole.

While still in midair, almost, he was given the most thorough surprise of his life. The wolf who had been cringing below, presumably with a broken leg, suddenly bounded to his feet and launched himself straight upward at his antagonist, fangs ready. They met, also, exactly where he had planned and hoped to have them do so, and that was at the throat of the despotic ruler.

When they did meet, crunching through hide and flesh, they hung

on with a strength and a certain grim doggedness that there was no withstanding. Together, in a snarling and clawing and growling mass, the two of them crashed down.

For what must have been a long, long minute to each antagonist, the bottom of that virtual death-pit became a veritable hell. They were fighting for their lives, for the leadership of the pack, and they knew it.

The younger wolf, however, was fighting for something greater. Last of his own brood that he had been, last of a line of gray warriors that had known many rulers, he was instinctively struggling to regain his heritage and to even the score with the wanton killer of his sire.

He was, it seemed, practically insensible to the claws that were ripping him, the fangs that were trying to reach his throat. Gamely and fiercely he hung on, ever and ever digging his fangs in deeper.

As they fought, as they rolled over and over, there came to his ears the cries of the approaching pack, and it served to send him into what amounted to a frenzy of strength.

Clamping his jaws as close together as they would go, he tossed his heavy body to the side with all the power of which he was capable, and as he did so he felt hide and flesh give way from the throat of his enemy.

WHEN it did, he also felt the body of his opponent suddenly relax, twitch spasmodically, and then become inert. At the same time, hot blood gushed out and spilled over his own chest and shoulders and jowls, and he knew that he had severed the jugular of the tyrant who had sent so many others to their doom.

Even then he did not lose his poise. Weakened though he was, aching from his wounds of combat, he pulled his superb muscles to-

gether and made his leap for the ground above.

He made it!

HE did not reach there any too soon, for as he stood trembling on the brink of the pitfall attempting to get his breath, the first few of the gray horde came into view. When they did, he proved again that he had the stuff of heroes and kings in him, for he threw back his head majestically and proudly eyed the oncoming wolves.

He looked every inch a conqueror, ready to meet one and all, and his upper lip unconsciously curled back in challenge.

One of the wolves—then another—started to accept this offer of battle. But, as the first one strode forward, the conqueror of the despotic leader launched his body forth on the attack.

He did not, this time, strike home with his fangs. The other wolf was too quick for him. Almost as soon as the feet of the young victor had left the ground, the other animal had turned around and vanished into the forest.

His companion, as well, followed him without any delay, and the avenger was left there alone. He stood with head held high, eyes blazing defiance, as the rest of the pack came up. None of them, however, seemed prone to dispute his right to the leadership.

Coolly turning his back upon them, he started to lope leisurely off toward the west with a gesture of his head that signified he desired them to follow him. Without a single exception, without even a mild complaint from any of them, this greatest pack in the northland obediently settled down to follow him.

The last of the brood of a long line of kings had come into his own!

The GLOBE-TROTTER



HOWDY, gang. Glad to see all you adventurers here with us again this month. And besides the old gang, Ye Olde Globe Trotter sees a lot of new faces in the gathering, faces that have peered into the action-packed, thrill-seeped pages of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** for the first time.

Welcome, newcomers. The good ship **THRILLING ADVENTURES** is glad to have you aboard. And there is no better time to get aboard than the present. The stories in this issue, as well as the ones to follow in succeeding ones, are bigger, better, and faster than ever before. The authors are doing their stuff with bells on. This is the fall of the year and the approaching cold weather is putting pep into their efforts, a pep that bangs into your consciousness with the snapping effect of a barking Lebel in the hands of a wild *legionnaire*.

And, speaking of pep, that pep and zest for life that stimulates to the very last degree, "Gone Again" Flannigan, an old friend of Ye Olde Globe Trotter's, whom I met in Nicaragua more years ago than I care to remember, dropped in to see me just the other day. I wrote *dropped*. That isn't quite the right word, for Flannigan never drops anything. He burst through the door and hurricaned into the office like the blast of a West Indian typhoon.

He thrust out his steel fist, grasp-

ed mine and almost squeezed it to pulp in his massive hand. "Howdy, Old Timer," he boomed. "I just landed here off the rods of a rattler. I'm on my way across the big pond. I hear through the *grapevine* that there's something stirring in Turkey again. I want to be in on it when she pops!" He wheeled on his heel and started back through the still open door. I grabbed and got a handful of his coat tail.

"Wait a minute," I yelled. "After darn near busting my mitt, I'm not letting you off that easy. Give me a story, dang your old hide! Give me something that will be good reading for the gang that follows Ye Olde Globe Trotter around the globe."

He turned and looked at me funny-like.

"Yes, I mean it," I said. "All the boys that come in here and pop off leave something for the **THRILLING ADVENTURES** gang to remember them by. Come on, plank your frame in that chair there and give me a story. You've taken part in more revolutions than you have fingers on both hands. Tell me who was the greatest rebel leader you ever served under."

When I mentioned that last, his steel-gray eyes lighted. His square face broke in a smile.

"Pancho Villa," he snapped in reply without hesitancy. "Pancho Villa of Mexico was the craftiest

rebel chieftain I ever met. And what a man! Ignorant, unschooled, he couldn't even write his own name legibly. Yet he gave General Pershing and the whole U. S. Cavalry a merry run for their money and beat them to the draw every time they thought they had him cornered."

"But he was cruel and heartless with his own men," Ye Olde Globe Trotter interposed. "That kind of let's him out as an ideal leader, doesn't it?"

"Gone Again" Flannigan jerked his eyes on mine, and almost bored me through with his penetrating stare.

"Cruel? Hell, no!" he blurted. "He was one of the kindest men I ever met, despite the fact that he was the craftiest. A brave and misguided U. S. Cavalryman, disguised as a Yaqui Indian, made his way into Pancho Villa's headquarters when he was at Parral and attempted to kill Pancho in cold blood, with a stiletto he had concealed in the sleeve of his shirt. He drew blood from Pancho, too. Made an ugly gash right under the rebel chief's right arm, before Pancho reached out with his left hand and twisted the stiletto from his grasp.

"Then Pancho laughed openly and loudly, showing the double rows of gold teeth of which he was immensely proud.

"'Gringo,' he said, in his cold, incisive manner, jerking the long black-haired wig from the cowering trooper's head, 'you are just a plain damn fool. You come into the land I know better than you know your own mother's face and try to beat me at my own game. I knew the minute you got inside my lines. My men wanted to kill you on the instant. I ordered them not to. Let Pancho take care of his own,' I told them.

"'I wanted to see how far you would go. How much courage you had—and how little sense. I found out. You're a brave man, but you're dumb. I wanted to test the muchly heralded *gringo* initiative and resourcefulness. You were only bait, man, just bait. I let you come on, like a cat watching a mouse. I have only played with you, but I have learned. I have nothing to fear from you damned *gringos*. I give the laugh to your great American General. He can't beat me in my own land. I have sense enough not to try and beat him in his. That is where I am smart and he is dumb.'

"By this time the cowering trooper had recovered some of his equilibrium. He stood up and thrust out his hands. 'Take me, General, and do what you will. Execution is my store. I'll take it standing up. You won't have to blindfold me and stand me against a wall. Give it to me right here.'

"A confident smile rippled across Pancho Villa's thin lips. His dark flaming eyes leaped with little flames.

"'Gringo,' he said, 'you are a brave man. You gave your best for your General and your country. It wasn't enough. It didn't work. You have too much pride to go back to your own colors after this failure. I can read that in your eyes. You are not afraid to die. I couldn't punish you by shooting you. I let you live. I'll detail a squad of my men to take you back in the hills. There you will live in peace and comfort. I won't ask you to take up arms against your own kind. I won't send you back to their lines in defeat. Stay in the hills, live off the fat of the land. The *gringos*, they will all leave soon, when they find out they can't catch me. Then I will have a place for you in my armies, fighting the exploiters of my people, the people I sprang from

and love more than you love your own mother. Go, *gringo*, go! Return when I give you the call."

Ye Olde Globe Trotter had been listening in silence all the time. "Gone Again" was certainly steamed up and spouting out the story a mile a minute.

"But how do you know that story is true?" I asked. "It seems funny that I have never heard it before—"

Flannigan smiled. His eyes gleamed with an eager light.

"I was the U. S. trooper," he replied. "This is the first time I have told it to any man."

With the words, he was off through the door. He was out of sight before I could recover my breath. *Gone Again!* Here again, there again, *Gone Again*, Flannigan! That's the way he has been ever since I first met him, and that's the reason for his nickname. Of course it isn't his real name. But it's the name he has been known by, ever since that ill-fated U. S. Cavalry expedition into Mexico after the bandit leader, Pancho Villa.

And he's 52 years old now, but doesn't look 35.

That's what red-blooded adventure does for a man like Flannigan—that and the courage to live the life he loves.

A few months ago we asked readers to write in and give their experiences with the *grapevine*, that uncanny means of communication without the aid of physical apparatus. A whole flock of letters have come in. One is printed below. There will be more in later issues.

North Woods Grapevine

Dear Globe Trotter:

In a recent issue you asked readers to detail some of their own experiences with the mysterious *grapevine*. I had an experience somewhat similar to Lieutenant Scott Morgan's, in the great north woods of the

Peace River country some years back.

I was poling down the river in a loaded canoe some hundred or so miles from Athabasca Landing when a terrific storm broke. I struck for shore and lashed my canoe near the river bank. But the storm was over in no time at all, and the sun came out full and hot, when the black clouds passed. I stepped into my canoe and poled out from the shore. I heard something like a voice behind my back. "Don't go, stranger—don't go stranger," it seemed to say. I looked back but saw nothing, poled a few more strokes. The same sound came again, even louder than before. I looked back again, saw a Northern Plover standing on the rim of the river bank and squawking loudly.

A whole flock of plovers suddenly appeared above me then, and they all squawked in unison; loud, raucously, but very distinctly: "Don't go, stranger! Don't go, stranger!"

I felt foolish, but somehow, I couldn't lift my arms to paddle any more. I floated for awhile with that same eerie uncanny squawking above me and the plovers flying every which way. At times almost flying straight into my face.

Finally I turned in toward the shore again and lashing my canoe to an overhanging branch, got out and climbed a high bank.

The squawking stopped instantly, and I felt a peculiar relaxation coming over me.

Minutes later, a mountainous wall of water swept down from somewhere with the roar of a breaking dam. The canoe and its contents were swept away and dashed to pieces right before my eyes. If I had been in it I would have gone the same way. Luckily, I was on a high bank and the wall of water never reached me.

I had a long tramp afoot back to a post of *Revillon Frères* but I made it safely.

Was that the *grapevine*, or wasn't it? If not, what was it?"

Yours sincerely,

Harry S. Stincomb,
Vancouver, B. C.

Well, Stincomb, I don't know whether you could call that working the *grapevine* or not. Certainly, if it isn't the *grapevine*, it is something very similar. Maybe some of the readers will be able to give you a full explanation. But it seems positively uncanny to me. I have heard the plover call many times,

but certainly the call never sounded anything like, "Don't go, stranger—don't go!"

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Globe Trotter:

I understand that the government hires men to do regular trapping and act as game wardens on the various game preserves and national forests.

I would like to know where I could get information concerning such a job.

Carl Stenstrom,
Bemidji, Minn.

You don't say whether or not you are experienced in running trap lines or not, or in forest work. If you have had no experience in either line, you have absolutely no chance of getting such employment now. If you have had experience, you might write to the Biological Survey, Department of Agriculture, in Washington, D. C., and make application for such a position.

Dear Globe Trotter:

Is there any state in the United States where diamonds have been found? And is it possible for a young man of good health, strong physique and ambition and with a limited capital to prospect for same with

any hope of finding a field that would prove out as a commercial proposition.

I want to get out in the open, and I picked on diamonds as a good thing to look for. Please answer as soon as you can in the columns of your department. I like THRILLING ADVENTURES and think it is the best magazine on the stands for a dime. I buy it every month the first day it comes out and read it from cover to cover. If I had more money I would go to South Africa or Brazil and prospect for the gems there, but I haven't saved up enough money for that yet.

Wolfe Armstrong,
Decatur, Ill.

Well, Wolfe, you certainly are going after hot stuff. Boy, if you can find a diamond field that can be worked commercially in this country your fortune is made. I am not saying that it can't be done, but I doubt it. A few diamonds, small ones, have been found in this country, mostly in the state of Arkansas. But certainly not enough of them to make the quest worth while commercially. However, the still hidden vastness of the great Rocky Mountain range may hide just what you hope to find. Go to it, man, and if you find such a field let Ye Olde Globe Trotter in on it. I'd like to get my hands on a whole fist full of those glistening rocks.

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Dear Globe Trotter:

Me and my buddy here at Fort Slocum expect to be discharged from the army next month. We want to go on a hunting trip to Canada. We figure on doing a little trapping, too, and would like to travel by canoe. Can you suggest a good part of the country for us to go to?

We will have about a thousand dollars between us when we get discharged and we want to see if we can't double or triple that stake during a season or so in the north country. What do you think?

Yours very anxiously,
Harold Malcomson, Pvt., U. S. A.,
Fort Slocum, New York.

Well, soldier, you are wise to have that grand between you, for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police guard all the water routes to the Canadian North, and if you don't have an outfit that they think is sufficient and money enough to carry you in and out comfortably they won't let you enter.

Better information than I can give you concerning the thousand and one places in Canada where you might go and find what you want can be had if you will mail a letter of inquiry to Mr. Ben Deacon, Assistant Director of Publicity, Canadian National Railways, Montreal, Quebec. They will send you maps and answer any questions that you may ask. What is more, they will give you up-to-date last-minute in-

(Concluded on page 159)



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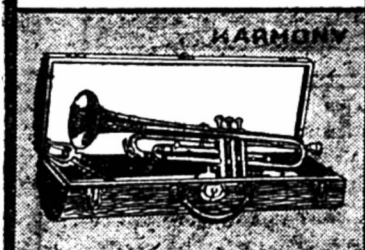
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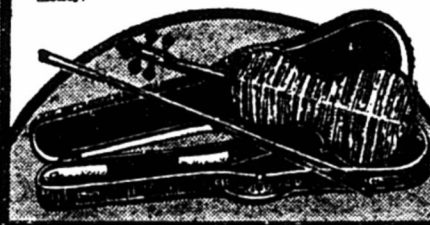


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formation. As for doubling or tripling your stake, don't bank on it. You might come out broke, for the north country in its upper reaches is tough territory for tenderfoots—and you have to go to the upper reaches if you expect to find rich trapping. And that depends a whole lot on the seasons and luck.

So much for the Questions and Answers this month, fellows. Ye Olde Globe Trotter is running short of space and has to sign off pronto.

But before signing off I want to tip you off to next month's great complete book-length adventure novel—PYRAMID OF GOLD, by George Allan Moffatt, which takes you to Yucatan. It's a novel with a thrill on every page—fast-moving, exciting from the word go—and you can't afford to miss it.

And then there'll be FALSE CARGO—a swell novelette of the sea, by Wallace R. Bamber. Those readers who liked Jacland Marmur's exceptional sea story in this issue—and I'm sure you all liked it—will find FALSE CARGO another winner.

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And let's have some more thousands of letters and postcards. Who was it that said something about making a mountain out of a mole hill? Well, Ye Olde Globe Trotter has got that guy skinned to death and beaten both ways from the draw. Letters and coupons make better mountains.

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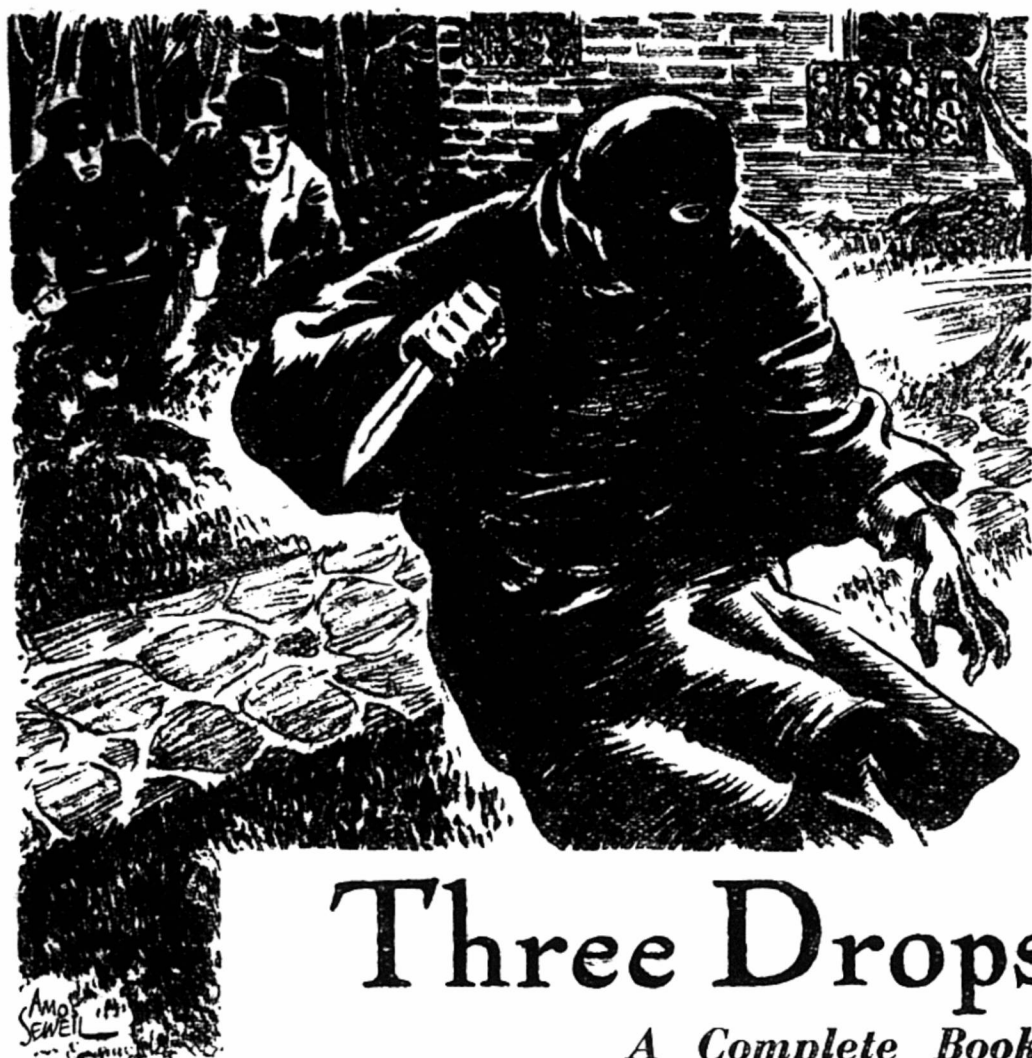
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THE condemned man sat in his death cell, his body shrunken and his face pale and thin. It was the face of a man who had died, day by day, hour by hour, for weeks, waiting for that final hour when the state would exact its last full measure of punishment for murder. The cheeks and the mouth and the forehead were bloodless and a yellow gray.

Only the deep blue eyes, liquid and gleaming, seemed to be alive in that face of death. Hatred, cold and brutal and relentless, flashed from them—a hatred so intense, so terrifying that it seemed to live

when all else in that broken body was crumbling away in death.

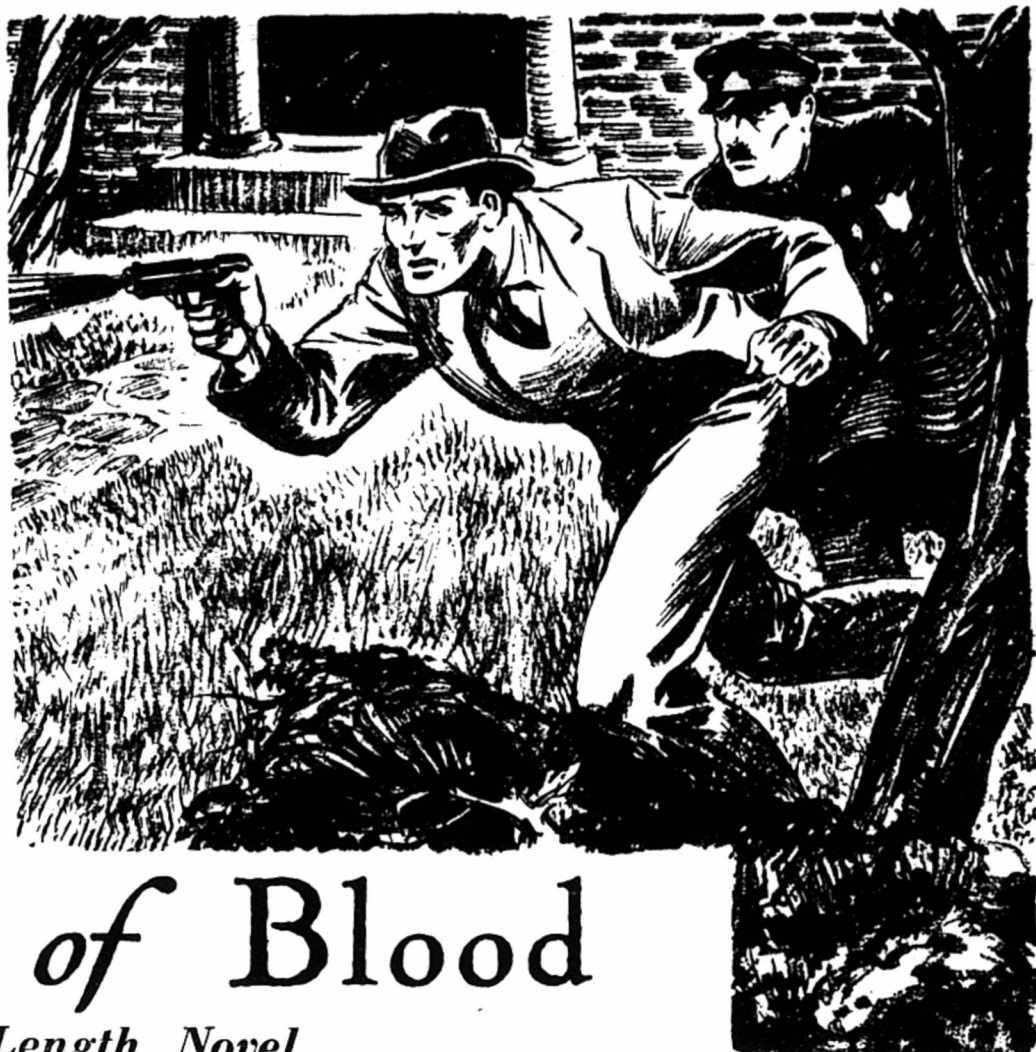
Outside the cell, guards waited to lead him on the dreary march of death, down that long, narrow, dark hallway from whence no condemned man has ever returned.

At his side sat Father Conklin, the prison chaplain. The condemned man's lips moved slowly and his voice came in a hoarse whisper.

"Father," he said, "in a little while I will die. This body, these hands, these arms will cease to be.

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Now I can tell you, confess to you, that I did not murder Philip Sanford. Three little drops of blood, Father, just three little drops of blood have sent me to my death."

He stopped talking, his tongue wetting the lifeless lips.

"You say there is retribution for sin," he continued in a hollow, whispered voice. "I respect your retribution—but when I am dead there is going to be a greater retribution for the man that sent me to my grave. My body will die—but my

blood will live. Three little drops of it to follow that man to his grave."

Father Conklin shook his head sadly. He had heard the last statement of many prisoners. Sometimes it was one thing, sometimes another. It was strange, to hear a man talk like this on the threshold of the grave.

The condemned man rose slowly and took one stiff step toward Father Conklin. His hand suddenly shot down and pulled a pin from the priest's robe.

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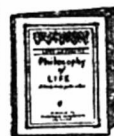
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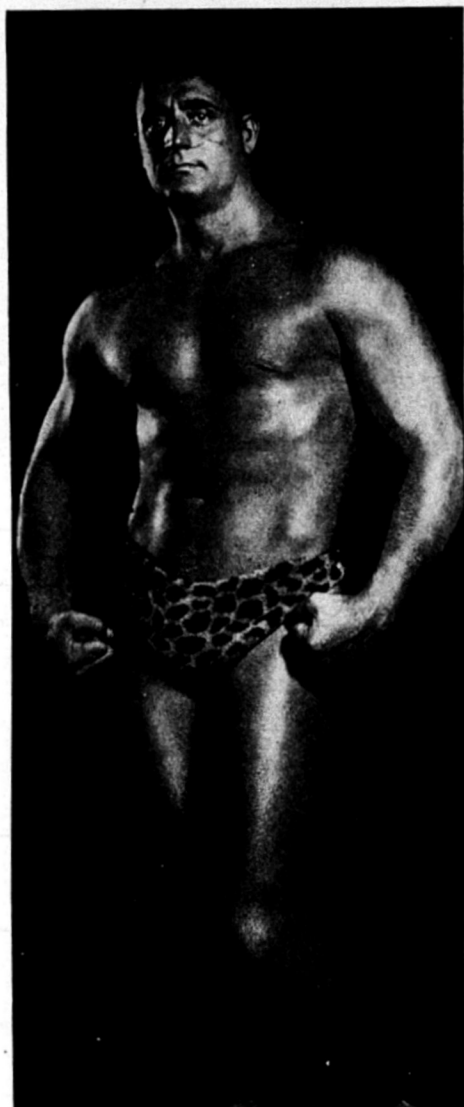
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