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# THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. VII, No. 3

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

November, 1933

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*Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet*

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M. A. Goldsmith, President; N. L. Pines, Treasurer. Copyright, 1933, by Metropolitan Magazines,  
Inc. Yearly, \$1.80; single copies, \$1.15; Foreign and Canadian, postage extra. Entered as second  
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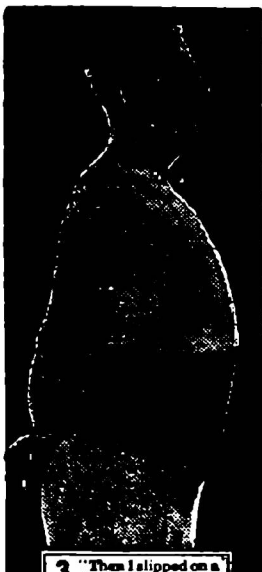
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It supports the sagging muscles of the abdomen and quickly gives an erect, athletic carriage.

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## **THE MESSAGE-LIKE ACTION DOES IT!**

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# Clean Out Your Kidneys

## Win Back Your Pep

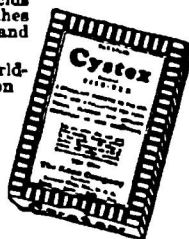
Good Kidney Action Purifies Your Blood—Often Removes the Real Cause of Getting Up Nights, Neuralgia and Rheumatic Pains—Quiets Jumpy Nerves and Makes You Feel 10 Years Younger.

A famous scientist and Kidney Specialist recently said: "60 per cent of men and women past 35, and many far younger, suffer from poorly functioning Kidneys, and this is often the real cause of feeling tired, run-down, nervous, Getting Up Nights, Rheumatic pains and other troubles."

If poor Kidney and Bladder functions cause you to suffer from any symptoms such as loss of Vitality, Getting Up Nights, Backache, Leg Pains, Nervousness, Lumbago, Stiffness, Neuralgia or Rheumatic Pains, Dizziness, Dark Circles Under Eyes, Headaches, Frequent Colds, Burning, Smarting or Itching, Acidity, you can't afford to waste a minute. You should start testing the Doctor's Prescription called Cystex (pronounced Sias-tax) at once.

Cystex is probably the most reliable and unfailingly successful prescription for poor Kidney and Bladder functions. It starts work in 15 minutes, but does not contain any dopes, narcotics or habit-forming drugs. It is a gentle aid to the Kidneys in their work of cleaning out Acids and poisonous waste matter, and soothes and tones raw, sore, irritated bladder and urinary membranes.

Because of its amazing and almost world-wide success the Doctor's Prescription known as Cystex (pronounced Sias-tax) is offered to sufferers from Poor Kidney and Bladder functions under a fair-play guarantee to fix you up to your complete satisfaction or money back on return of empty package. It's only 3 cents a dose. So ask your druggist for Cystex today and see for yourself how much younger, stronger and better you can feel, by simply cleaning out your Kidneys. Cystex must do the work or cost you nothing.



### New York Doctor Praises Cystex

**Dr. N. T. ABDOU**  
New York Physician

Doctors and druggists everywhere approve of the prescription Cystex because of its splendid ingredients and quick action. For instance Dr. N. T. Abdou, New York, Licensed Physician and author of *Medicine and Commerce*, recently wrote the following letter:

"It has been my pleasure to make a study of the Cystex formula. This prescription impresses me as a sound combination of ingredients which should be of benefit to men and women troubled with night rising, putrefaction of the urine, aching back in the kidney region, painful joints or stiffness—due to insufficient activity of the kidneys or bladder. Such functional conditions often lead to indigestion, headaches, high blood pressure, rheumatic pains, lumbago and general exhaustion—and the use of Cystex in such cases should exert a very favorable influence. Within 15 minutes after taking Cystex the color of the urine is changed and the irritating excretions expelled."—Signed, N. T. Abdou, M.D.

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Former Police Reporter in Chicago, New York and Boston. Author of "What Happens to Innocent Girls," "How Girls Go Wrong," etc.

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32x4-40-50	\$3.65	32x4-40-52	\$3.75	32x4-40-54	\$3.85
32x4-40-56	\$3.95	32x4-40-58	\$4.05	32x4-40-60	\$4.15
32x4-40-62	\$4.25	32x4-40-64	\$4.35	32x4-40-66	\$4.45
32x4-40-68	\$4.55	32x4-40-70	\$4.65	32x4-40-72	\$4.75
32x4-40-74	\$4.85	32x4-40-76	\$4.95	32x4-40-78	\$5.05
32x4-40-80	\$5.15	32x4-40-82	\$5.25	32x4-40-84	\$5.35
32x4-40-86	\$5.45	32x4-40-88	\$5.55	32x4-40-90	\$5.65
32x4-40-92	\$5.75	32x4-40-94	\$5.85	32x4-40-96	\$5.95
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32x4-40-104	\$6.35	32x4-40-106	\$6.45	32x4-40-108	\$6.55
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32x4-40-134	\$7.85	32x4-40-136	\$7.95	32x4-40-138	\$8.05
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32x4-40-212	\$11.75	32x4-40-214	\$11.85	32x4-40-216	\$11.95
32x4-40-218	\$12.05	32x4-40-220	\$12.15	32x4-40-222	\$12.25
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32x4-40-230	\$12.65	32x4-40-232	\$12.75	32x4-40-234	\$12.85
32x4-40-236	\$12.95	32x4-40-238	\$13.05	32x4-40-240	\$13.15
32x4-40-242	\$13.25	32x4-40-244	\$13.35	32x4-40-246	\$13.45
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# Page by Page this

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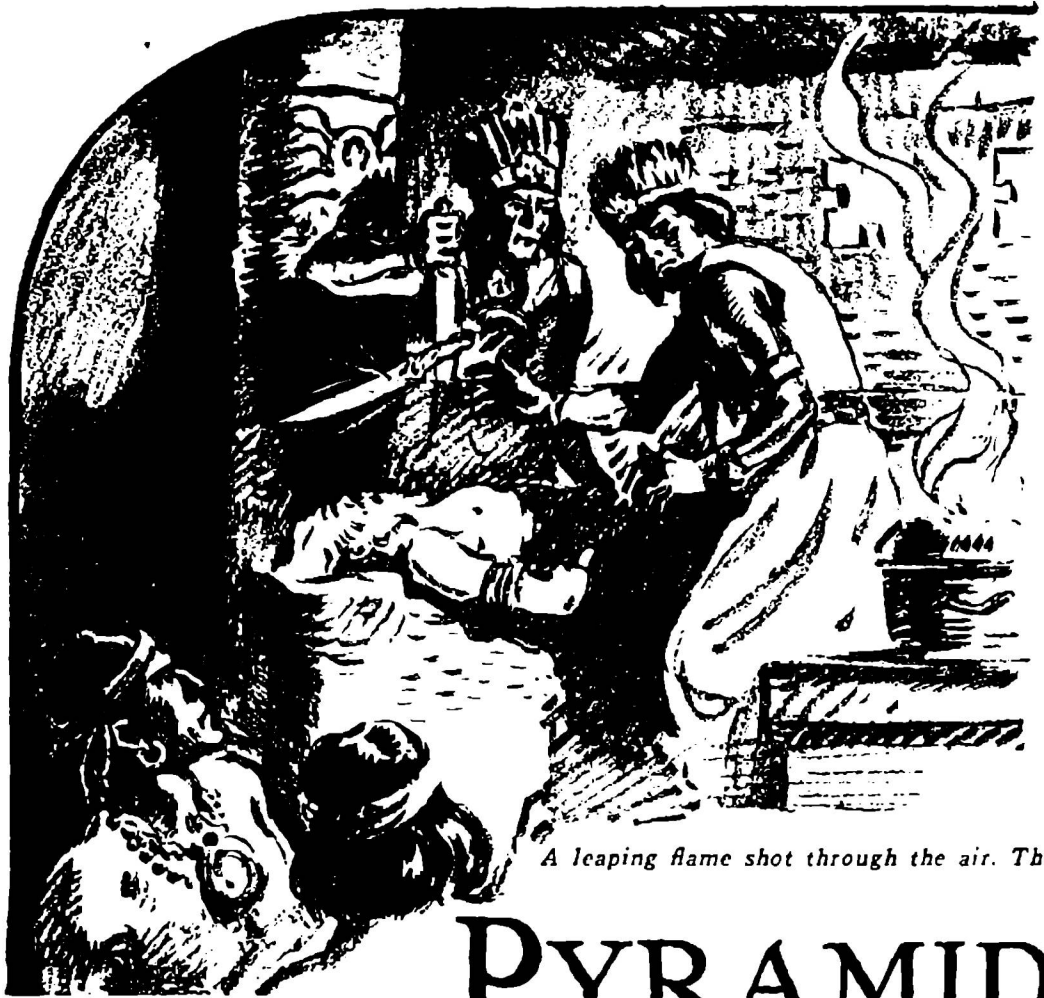
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*A leaping flame shot through the air. The*

# PYRAMID

## CHAPTER I

### *Treachery!*

## *A Complete Book-*

By **GEORGE**

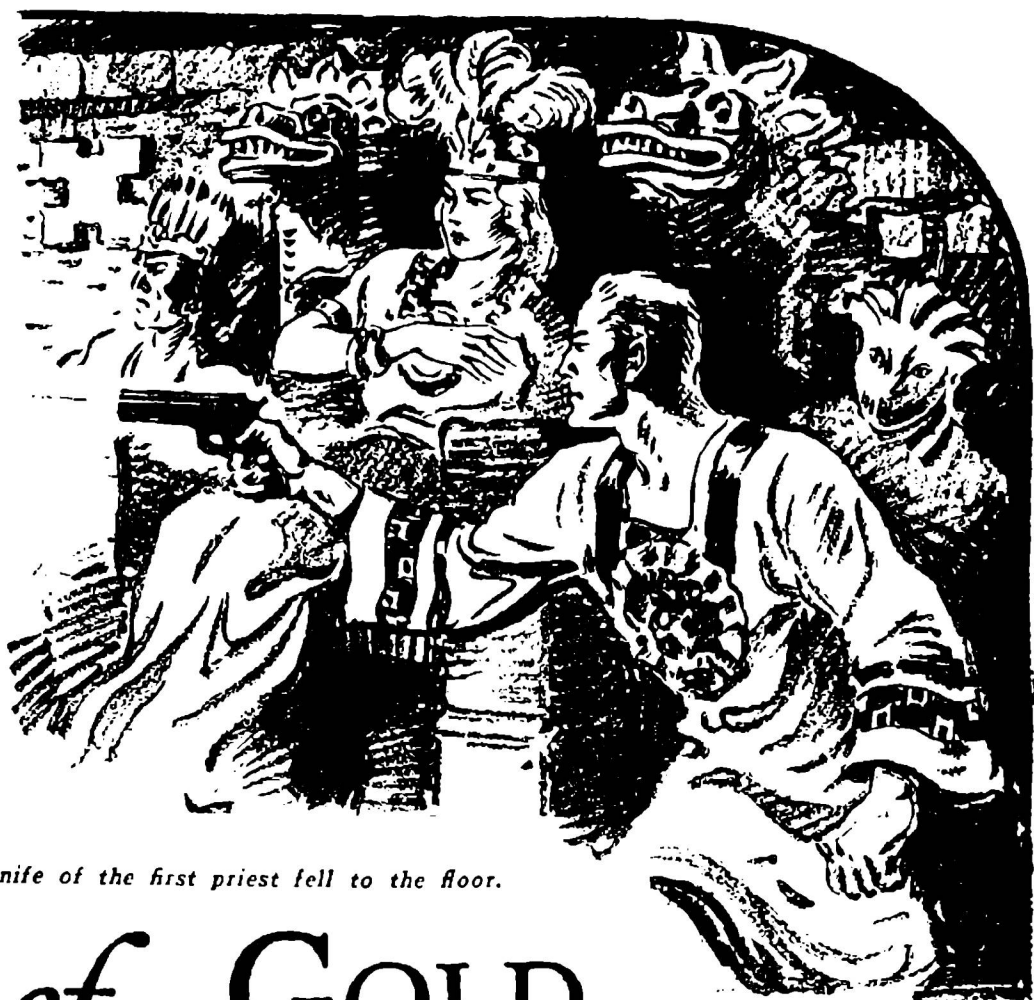
*Author of "The Devil From Devil's Island,"*

**G**ORDON LEYBREN awoke as the dark form hovered over him, knife gleaming in the black hand. In the vast, desolate silence of the jungle night there had been no sound; yet deep in his brain that ever watching sixth sense, the sense that warns man of dangers he cannot hear or see, had telegraphed the alarm to his sleeping mind. His eyes snapped open. With lightning speed his right hand shot down to

his knee. Then, as his fingers closed around the automatic, he hurled himself sideways out of the hammock.

And even as his body went plunging through the darkness to the ground, he heard the ripping of the hammock cords as the knife cut through them. He landed on his back. Two black legs, spread far apart—the legs of the man wielding

*Exciting, Glamorous Adventure and Breath-Taking*



*knife of the first priest fell to the floor.*

# *of* GOLD

## *Length Novel*

**ALLAN MOFFATT**

*"Wings Over Asia," etc.*

the knife, were near him. He fired upward, the bullet hitting the groin of his assailant and plowing up through the body. With a yell—the sharp, piercing yell of sudden death—the man crumpled to the ground.

Leybren was on his feet, his cold, blue eyes searching the darkness. Another black form loomed in front of him. There was another whish

of a knife. Leybren fired point blank into the black body, and it doubled up like a jackknife, then fell forward, hitting the ground at his feet—a writhing, groveling, gasping mass of human flesh.

Leybren swerved and faced the jungle river, a dark, velvet strip in the night, not more than ten yards from him. And as he swerved he saw from the corners of his eyes, that the hammock next to his was empty.

A bitter, grim smile crossed his face. Von Schlossman's hammock empty! This discovery startled him

*Peril in the Unexplored Depths of the Mayan Jungle*



but did not surprise him. For two weeks he had expected this. And now it had happened!

With body tense and nerves on edge, Leybren stood straddling

his fallen hammock, his right hand gripping the automatic. No other forms moved in front of him, but from the dark river there came the splash of a paddle dipping into water. With a muffled curse, Leybren dashed forward.

As he did so, a long, darting flash of red came from the river, leaping through the night at him.

A bullet crashed through the *platanillo* leaves behind him. The echoes from the gun filled the forest, but before it had died away, the night was cut with sharp, stabbing flashes of red from his own gun. A man screamed out on the river. Then came the oppressive silence, broken only by the recurring splash of water.

Leybren turned and started down the river bank, after the fleeing canoe; but he crashed against the matted jungle growth that threw him back as if he were a mere atom against it. Far down the river now, the sound of the paddles was dying away; the splash in the water was indistinct and vague, and came at long intervals.

**T**O attempt to follow the canoe along the bank in the dense undergrowth was futile, and Leybren turned and walked, grim-faced, back to his camp. A thin, pale moonlight filtered down through the trees in long, narrow shafts, dotting the ground, here and there, in splotches of light, outlining the trees and the brush and the giant *platanillo*

leaves like phantoms of the night.

At the hammock Leybren's icy gaze clung to the two stark bodies, but at length he raised his eyes slowly and stared at the breathless jungle that seemed to engulf him, to press down on him mockingly and relentlessly.

**H**E WAS alone! This thought pierced his mind slowly. An hour before there had been six of them, six men who eternally watched each other's every move and knew that death hovered near when night fell. Yet to Leybren it had meant human companionship, a thing man craved in the jungle more than life itself. Now two of those six lay dead at his feet and the other three—Von Schlossman and the two remaining *mestizos*—were gone forever. He had won life in the furious fight, but he was alone in a breathless stillness that seemed to taunt and to laugh at his utter helplessness.

He shook his head violently and wet his dry lips. Then he faced the jungle with an unwinking gaze, mouth tight, jaws set, as if he were trying to chase away this new danger, this new fear, that had come to him. His body leaned forward a little, the muscles tense and alert. His sharply-featured face, with the muscles contracting in thin ridges around his mouth and jaws, remained immovable and cold. In his face showed the cold determination, the unbending tenacity with which he had faced danger and death before.

Beside him Schlossman's empty hammock was stretched taut between the trees. In front of him the ebony water of the river gleamed in its utter blackness. Overhead, the spreading *platanillo* leaves blocked out the moonlight. At his feet lay the two bodies.

That was all; all but the dense, gloomy forest, spotted feebly by the

shafts of pale yellow moonlight. And over it all lay utter silence, unbroken by the call of a bird or the rustle of a beast through the undergrowth. All nature seemed to be watching him breathlessly, waiting to see what move, what action this human prisoner in their midst would take.

What he did was simple. He reached up to a limb that hung over his hammock, took his cartridge belt down and reloaded his gun. Then he removed the holster from his leg and strapped it around his waist. And after that he walked away from the hammock, into the darkness under the trees, and kicked among the bushes with his foot. His foot hit something hard. He knelt down and pulled some canned goods from the dark brush.

When the job of sorting out the necessary supplies from the meager store was over, he stood up. A grim, bitter smile crept over his face as he reached for the money belt around his waist.

The paper was there on which was scrawled the vague and indistinct directions that had sent him into the unexplored jungles that lay to the south of Yucatan and to the west of Belize—that desolate wilderness where many white men had gone and few had ever returned alive.

Von Schlossman, he was now convinced, had a copy of those crude instructions. He had gotten them before they had left Campeche and he had sent the Indians to murder Leybren simply to get him out of the way.

LEYBREN backed to a tree, his automatic resting on his thigh, his body relaxed and at ease. Slowly the moonlight was fading away. It would be four hours between moonset and dawn.

And with the dawn? Leybren had

four hours to make his decision—to go forward or to retrace his steps. It didn't make much difference now which way he went. Backward or forward, death lurked in his footsteps, grimly and hungrily.

The moonlight that filtered through the trees died away. Night—the ebony darkness of the jungle night, fell over everything. Leybren welcomed this blinding darkness. It hid from his view the stark bodies at his feet; it left him alone with his thoughts.

He wanted to think, to reason all things out coldly, rationally, before he made his next move.

## CHAPTER II

### *Land of Sleepless Dead*

THE SERIES of unbelievable events—all strange and furtive in themselves—that had sent him into this unexplored region of the world came back now like an ugly dream, a nightmare of gnawing fear and oppressiveness, during which he had waited for Von Schlossman to strike.

Six weeks before he had been in a hotel in New York City, without a job, wondering what he was going to do next. Then had come the strange gray-haired lady, dressed in black, with a face which was even yet beautiful and bewitching. The story she had told Leybren had sounded impossible and absurd, but he had checked up on some of it and found that the woman was telling the truth.

Twenty years before, she explained to him in a soft, well-modulated voice, she had been married to Thor-





ton Hillright, who at that time was a professor at Harvard. Their life, she insisted, had been happy and complete together. There were children—two of them, and Hillright had been a model and affectionate husband.

Then one night he started for the university library, and that had been the last time she ever saw him alive. A search by the police of two continents disclosed no clue, no remote trace of what might have happened to her husband. The years went by and he became only a memory to her.

**B**UT suddenly, two weeks before her visit to Leybren, coming as if from the grave, came the voice of Thorton Hillright, out of the air, through a thousand miles of space.

A wireless operator on a ship coming from South America heard a strange, sputtering message come over his set. At first the waves were so feeble and unintelligible that he could make nothing of it. Then it came again, each letter spelled out awkwardly, as if the hand behind them was feeble and little accustomed to the sending of messages.

"Martha Hillright—husband dying—Usumacinta River—West Belize."

Then the words died away abruptly, as if the set sending them had broken down or the finger operating it had stiffened in death. When the ship got to New York, the operator excitedly told the ship reporters about the message.

It was brought to the attention of Mrs. Hillright. She had heard of Leybren, and had come to him with the proposal that he go into that jungle and find her husband. In her hand was a draft for five thousand dollars and Leybren was promised ten thousand more, deposited to his credit in a New York bank, if he would return with Thorton Hill-

right or specific knowledge of his death.

Mrs. Hillright took from her pocketbook a paper. What was on this paper, she had explained to Leybren, was the only remote clue she could muster concerning the strange mystery of her husband's voice coming out of the void which had claimed him. She remembered very well a certain night on which a strange-looking man had come to their home and talked privately with her husband. From that time on, she felt, he had acted queerly and talked increasingly little to the family. This had been three months before his disappearance. In going over his private papers afterward, this paper with its strange figures and message had been found.

On the top of the paper were traced two lofty mountain peaks. Sharp-pointed, like the ends of knife blades.

Under them were written:

*Ten rivers up Usumacinta and turn west. See two peaks, between which runs ancient Indian trail into Valley of Darkness and the Lake of the Mist.*

**T**HE wife explained that it was her belief that the dark-faced stranger had given her husband a paper on which these words had first been written in Spanish, and that her husband, in making a copy, had written in English. When she first found this paper, she had been puzzled, but now the voice of her husband coming from the Usumacinta jungles left no doubt in her mind but that his disappearance must be linked with this strange message.

Leybren had smiled grimly when he saw the name Usumacinta on the paper. He knew the dreary wilderness of impassable jungle that lay in the path of this great river—a



*Leybren lifted the body of his enemy over his head.*

jungle whose green blanket of dense undergrowth had hidden, for centuries, the countless ruined cities of the great Maya civilization.

Explorers had called this region, "The Land of the Sleepless Dead." Many had ventured in, but none had come out to tell what strange mysteries this wilderness held. Even the famous explorer Stephens had shrunk from entering the country, unwilling to face the insurmountable barriers of unknown terror.

But Leybren had embarked upon the dangerous undertaking. In less than a month he was on the first leg of the perilous journey.

At Campeche he was met by Von Schlossman, who had entered the picture unknown to him. He was a tall, thin faced man somewhere in his fifties, with cold gray eyes and a manner that indicated cunning and craftiness.

He had a cablegram from Mrs. Hillright requesting him to assist Leybren. Von Schlossman explained that he had been a great friend of the missing husband and that he was ready and willing to do anything in his power to help in the search. In fact, he had explained, he already made all the arrangements for the trip, having secured a crew of *mes-*

tizos and a stock of provisions. Leybren cabled Mrs. Hillright and she confirmed Schlossman's words.

They had plunged into the great jungle from Laguna de Terminos, following the Usumacinta until they had come to the tenth tributary, which was a small jungle stream, and then had slipped into the vast darkness of the unexplored wilderness.

Three nights out Leybren knew that Van Schlossman would strike. He knew by then that Schlossman had picked his *mestizos* carefully. And it was five against one, with the one lone man powerless to turn back, powerless to do anything but wait until the blow came. Von Schlossman's actions told Leybren beyond a doubt what was in store for him.

AND now Leybren dozed, standing against a tree. By deliberate will power he coaxed himself into a sleep, his body still resting in a standing position against the tree, his hand on his automatic; and so he remained until the dawn broke slowly through the impenetrable gloom of the forest.

Wearily Leybren lifted his head and looked around. Above him was a rustle of wings. A huge bird, whose plumage was gorgeous, flew through the trees. It was the *Meleagris*, the wild turkey of Yucatan and Guatemala, one of the most beautiful birds of those forests. Leybren looked at it and grinned. It was food, but right now he was not worrying about food.

After a quick dip in the river and a frugal breakfast from some of the canned meat, Leybren threw the supply pack over his shoulders, fastened the straps, and then, without a look behind at the bodies of the dead *mestizos*, he plunged into the jungle—heading toward the interior of that

dark and unexplored region. In those hours he had slept, his mind must have come to the decision to go on; for when he awakened at dawn the idea was firmly planted in his brain.

The first move was made!

### CHAPTER III

#### *Valley of Darkness*

A WEEK later, Leybren came out from the fringe of jungle undergrowth and stood on a plateau that shot upward toward a great range of mountains in the distance. His face was lined and thin, his eyes sunken, and his cheeks hollow. His body leaned forward as he staggered up the plateau, as if weighted down by a weighty load, but the pack on his back was no longer heavy.

Days before the last of the canned goods had been eaten, and all that remained to him now was a few pounds of ammunition and quinine, and the hammock.

All during that week he had savagely beaten and cut and thrashed his way through the jungle undergrowth. His face was lashed and streaked with welts where the high grass and the vines had beaten it unmercifully; his clothes were torn to strips and his body was discolored from the *piume* flies that infested the swamp grass and the deadly *inata* mosquito, found only in the Yucatan jungles.

The torrid, suffocating heat had sent his senses reeling time and again until it seemed that all sanity would leave him, but he had pushed on, relentlessly and grimly. During those first days the pack had retarded his progress, but as little by little the supplies were consumed, the pack lightened and he was able to make better time.

He traveled without a compass, but he kept the sun a little to his left, pushing southeast, basing his hopes on the fact that the jungle river's source lay in that direction. To follow the river was out of the question. And yet it was somewhere at the source of that river that the two peaks were located, and beyond the peaks lay the Valley of Darkness, his goal.

And now he had come to the edge of the jungle and within sight of an unknown range of mountains. His eyes widened with wonder at what he saw. Rising majestically at towering heights were giant *Cendralls* of a virgin forest; at places the trunks of the trees reached diameters of twenty feet. And under those great trees animals roamed unmolested as they had done since the beginning of time: gorgeous birds with gorgeous plumage hovered in the air.

**L**EYBREN staggered into the cool shade of the trees and sank to the ground.

During the week he had traversed the flood country, where neither man nor beast lived, he had had no fear of attack. But now, he knew, the situation was different. Here would be the added peril of unknown Indian tribes to contend against, as well as jaguars and other beasts of prey that infested the jungles.

But as he lay on his back, his body weak from lack of food, and every part of it stinging and swollen from the bites of the *piume* fly, he cared nothing for dangers from savages or beasts. His one overwhelming emotion was hunger. He realized the folly of a shot in the forest—but he also knew that unless he got food, death from starvation inevitably faced him.

So after resting his exhausted body for a while, he got to his feet,

slipped the automatic from his holster and walked slowly through the great trees that towered over him. As he plunged deeper into the forest, the matted jungle growth around the trunks of the trees thinned perceptibly, and finally he was wandering through a wood where only flowers grew under the trees—the great bushes of the *dahlia maxonii*, with their starry pink and white blossoms; the long vines of the yellow orchid-shaped blossoms that crept high in the trees, giving forth the fragrance of bananas; and the large blue violets that dotted the earth everywhere.

Monkeys chattered and jumped among the trees. Small deer darted among the bushes and a tapir crashed through the undergrowth.

It seemed to Leybren that he was walking in a sylvan forest, such as had the kings of old. The air was cool and refreshing and his brain cleared; and the blood coursed back through his veins with a renewed vigor.

But he was famished and his body was weak. He came to a small clearing. Reckless of danger, he shot a tapir with his automatic. He skinned it and cut a steak from the rump and ten minutes later was broiling it over a fire.

And then when he had eaten his fill, he doused the fire and stretched his hammock between two trees and laid down. His exhausted body had hardly straightened out before he fell into a dreamless sleep.

How long he slept he did not know, but once again that ever alert sixth sense flashed the alarm through his nerves and he woke up fighting.

**B**UT this time he had no chance to reach for the automatic strapped on his knee. It seemed to him that the lid of hell had blown up and hit him squarely in the face.



All he knew was that over him, around him and under him were fierce, inhuman devils. He was on the ground, shooting his left viciously, kicking his feet at the same time, and with his right hand trying to reach for the automatic at his knee.

He had no idea whether the weapon were still there, and even if it had been his right hand was blocked by snaky arms and black torsos grappling with him. And more and more of these bodies were piling on him, grabbing at his throat, battering his head in the ground with fists, knees and feet. Fingers were gouging at his eyes and the sharp click of biting teeth was near his face.

**W**ITH a snarl of rage, Leybren raised himself by a superhuman effort to his knees, heaving bodies up with him. With a wrench, he threw them off. Powerful punches shot out from his shoulders, hitting the groins of the attackers with dull thuds. There were yells of anguish, but suddenly new assailants leaped at him. His right and left continued to shoot out wickedly, methodically, connecting with perfect regularity on the black groins. At every blow, he twisted his body, facing a new opponent at his right, partly evading his last attacker who clutched frantically at his back and his throat.

He made no attempt to aim his blows. They shot out, landing where they might, high or low, and at every smack a black shape doubled up and fell writhing and gasping to the ground. Around him now was a huddle of twitching bodies, hindering his actions, but capable of no return blows. Fighting with ponderous power, but with uncanny speed, he was like a bear surrounded by wolves, his fists going out with deadly precision and chopping his enemies down.

But fight as he would, he could not protect all sides at once. Behind him an enemy, fresh in the fray, leaped on his back and clutched wiry fingers around his throat. Leybren brought his chin down with a jerk and broke that grip; and then grabbing the arms around his neck and hunching his back powerfully, he hurled the attacker over his head. The man's body hit the ground, but Leybren was grimly holding on to the arms; then jumping instantaneously to his feet, he whirled the astonished assailant around, gaining momentum as he did; and using the man as a human bludgeon, he swung him around and around, battering down every opponent within six feet of him.

From the unwilling acrobat came yells of pain and fear and from the savages floored by the swinging legs came another medley of screams. Grinning wildly, his blue eyes glazed with fatigue and his mop of blond hair wet from the exertion, Leybren whirled the man. It couldn't last forever, but while it did, he was safe.

Then suddenly there came a sharp piercing yell—this time not a shout of fear, but one of command—cold and hard and vibrating. The yell stopped the incoherent clamor of the attackers as if a sword had suddenly cut their lives away in one sweeping stroke. Even Leybren, caught by it, stopped swinging the human form around. He let the man fall to the ground, but he kept his fingers tightly around the wrists.

**T**HROUGH a blur of fatigue, Leybren for the first time saw two things. The first was surprising. Dawn had broken and the sunshine was beginning to penetrate the forest. In the fury of the battle he had not realized what time it was or how long he had slept.

The second thing he saw was an old man. In all his experience among savages he had never seen one that looked quite like this one. He was tall, but his body was shriveled and gaunt. His face was a bronzed yellow, but the usual heaviness of the savage features was not there. It was the face of a man with a keen intellect and an active mind. The lines were finely drawn across the mouth, and the eyes were a steel gray—cold and piercing and calculating.

He was dressed in a cotton robe, snow white and embroidered with gold lace. The robe—a work of exquisite beauty and art—held Leybren's eyes as the old man surveyed him slowly and coldly. Downward over the fighter's build, the steel gray eyes wandered, taking in every feature of the tall, powerful frame—the broad shoulders, the heavy chest muscles, the long arms and the heavy fists—fists that were still closed around the wrists of the half-dead human bludgeon that lay on the ground. The eyes of the old man scrutinized the face, the mop of blond hair and the blue eyes, the well formed mouth.

ALL during that survey no one spoke, no one so much as moved. Leybren, badly battered and out of breath, seized the respite to regain his breath and clarify his mind. In the stress of the combat he had paid little attention to his attackers.

Now he looked at them. They were Indians, but like the old man, their faces were thin and intelligent, lacking completely the animal look that is to be found among the savages of the jungles. Their bodies were tall and straight, and most of them wore a cotton blouse that was wrapped around their waists and up over their shoulders like the *saris* of the Malay country. A few of them,

those who had come up with the old man, carried long spears; but those who had surrounded Leybren appeared unarmed.

Leybren let his eyes wander back to the strange old man. His body stiffened and his eyes widened at what he saw. The old man was staring at him, and in those steel gray eyes was terror—stark terror of some strange fear; and the shriveled body, covered by the gold laced cotton robe, was shaking and trembling as if in a fit.

"*Martikatasi!*" came shrilly from his mouth.

And at the sound of that word, utterly foreign and unknown to Leybren, the old man was on the ground, his body prone at the feet of the American. The strange word acted like a shock of electricity to the other Indians. With groans and lamentations that filled the great forest, they fell forward on the ground.

Leybren stared at the sight in an almost stupefied amazement. Slowly his hands released their grip on the wrists of the man he had used as a swinging club. This man rolled over on his stomach and crawled painfully to the feet of Leybren, and his groans and jabbering rose above the others.

For minutes this weird groveling on the ground continued, and then the old man rose to his feet and threw his arms high in the air, as if supplicating the heavens for aid. Leybren wondered if he were in a dream or if his brain had not snapped and he was the victim of an hallucination.

IT IS Martikatasi," the old man sent up to the heavens in a fear-stricken voice. "It is HE whom we have awaited these many circles of the moon. HE has come and we have smitted him."

The words came in the Mayan

language, which Leybren understood well. The other Indians remained prone on the ground and in a chanting, wailing chorus they repeated: "HE has come and we have smitten him."

Leybren looked at the old man and then at the bodies at his feet. His mind, still a little dazed at the strange sight, was unable to register properly what was going on.

He had known when he plunged into that dark and unexplored wilderness that there would be danger of unfriendly savages. And here he had met them, had been practically overpowered, and now they were groveling at his feet, bringing to the end of the fight almost a comic opera touch.

He had no idea who this Martikatasi was, or the occasion for such great lamentations over having attacked him, but he saw that as long as the Indians believed he was this Martikatasi, no harm could come to him.

**T**HE Indians rose to their feet and at a command from the old man, they surrounded Leybren. While they were doing this he saw his gun on the ground and he surreptitiously picked it up. Then the Indians moved on in procession through the forest, with Leybren walking at the head beside the old priest.

Like a somber funeral cortege, they advanced. The sun was already high in the sky, but the great forest was cool and the fragrance of the flowers filled the air with a sweet perfume.

For over an hour the march continued, but then suddenly the forest ended and they came out on a great rocky plain—the base of the mountain range.

Leybren's lips went tightly together and a cold smile came to his

face. Rising far up in the air, their sharp points lost in the clouds, were two peaks, with the summits like the points of knives.

The peaks drawn on the paper! Between them lay the secret Indian path that led beyond the mountains into the Valley of Darkness, and to the Lake of the Mist!

## CHAPTER IV

### *City of Gold*

**T**HROUGH the long weary hours of the morning, with the sun mercilessly baking the flint of the narrow trail—a trail worn a foot deep by the countless footsteps that had trod it for centuries—the procession moved forward. Upward it went, slowly winding in and out of the huge boulders along the steep grade of the slope, until at last they were high upon the mountain.

The heat from the sun caused Leybren's head to reel and his senses to wander. The fight had destroyed what little strength the tapir steak and the night's sleep had given his body, and he staggered forward, blindly at times, until he thought every part of his body surely must collapse. But silently, like phantom beings at his side, the strange Indians, with their aged leader, moved at his side.

At noon the procession stopped and Leybren threw himself down in the shade of a large rock. The Indians brought out some goat skin canteens of water and maize bread. He was given all of the bread and water he desired, and though the food was meager and the water very warm, it gave his body a little much-needed strength.

From where he lay under the rock, Leybren could see, far below, the great forest he had passed

through. Over the tops of the tall *cendellas* stretched the jungle—vast, impenetrable, and brilliantly green, even from that distance; and in this blanket of green was a thin thread of a river, winding in and out like a twisting snake.

He wondered if that were the source of the river he and Von Schlossman had followed from the Usumacinta. They had taken the tenth tributary, which was specified in the instructions on the paper, and this tenth tributary was supposed to bring them to the two peaks, under the shadow of which he now lay.

These thoughts, however, were brought to an abrupt end. The Indians had gotten to their feet and the leader approached Leybren, his face still twisted with some strange fear.

"We go now into the Valley of Darkness," he said, "and from that Valley of Darkness into the Lake of the Mist and beyond these we will find *Her*."

LEYBREN was too weak, too utterly bewildered by the fantastic proceedings of the morning to take much interest in what the old man said. It would have made little difference to him if he had been told they were about to enter the center of the earth. Somehow it seemed that he was in a dream—a wild, improbable dream, from which, after awhile, he would awaken and find himself lying in his hammock. And nothing that was said or done mattered, for when he awoke it would be over.

Once again the procession started. The Indians now headed for the great rocks that jutted out from the mountain side. The ancient trail led into these rocks and suddenly Leybren was conscious they were in a huge cave and that the air was damp and cold. They walked on

through the semi-darkness of the cave and then everything became a stygian black as they advanced further into the underground passageway.

The clammy air turned to a bitter, freezing cold. His clothes, which now were not more than a few strips on his body, gave him no protection from the cold and his body trembled and shook with chill.

But after what seemed hours to him, the air suddenly became warm again and he could feel the sun on his half-naked body. The sound of a great rock being moved came from before him. Then he walked out into the brilliant light of day.

The glare blinded him for a moment and he stood, trying to adjust his eyes to the daylight again. Then as his eyes grew accustomed to the light, he stared — bewildered and dazed at what he saw.

Spreading away from where he stood on the mountain side was a great crater-like basin, with the tops of the jagged cliffs surrounding it lost in the clouds. At places these cliffs rose hundreds of feet into the air.

And in the center of the crater-like basin was darkness—a vaporous darkness that shifted and moved and changed from a dull black to a soft gray and then to a yellow haze. Changing, moving, wavering, the vapor was ghost-like and terrifying.

"The Valley of Darkness," the aged leader of the Indians said to Leybren. "It is through the Valley of Darkness that we must go, to find what lies behind it."

DAZED, and certain now that he was walking in a weird dream, Leybren wordlessly went with the Indians down the narrow trail that was soon lost in the mist. The darkness proved, when Leybren got down in it, to be nothing more than



a dense, blinding fog, but he could see the outlines of the Indians in front of him, walking silently and in single file, and he had no difficulty following them.

Down and down they went. The fog covered his body with a cold moisture, and then the fog was no longer around him, and he was following the Indians down into a region of eternal twilight—the soft, cold twilight of coming night.

In the gray shifting shadows of this light he could see the rocks and the ground. From somewhere far ahead came a dull, thundering roar. This roar increased—angry, sinister—like the growl of some prehistoric animal in the bowels of the earth.

And then suddenly he was standing at the brink of a great lake, a lake of dark-blue waters. Three great boats were tied to the banks—canoes hollowed out of the trunks of giant trees. Still without a word, the Indians got in, and the old leader escorted Leybren into one with him. The canoes were pushed away from the banks and a powerful current swung them along without the necessity of using their paddles.

**SILENTLY**, awestruck, Leybren watched the dark-blue waters. Overhead was the dense fog which hid the lake, and emerging from the depths of the waters was the mighty, thunderous roar, increasing in volume as the boats raced on, carried forward by the mysterious current.

The speed increased. Leybren saw the Indians gripping the sides, their bodies leaning forward tensely and their faces grim and set. Then suddenly everything went dark. The roar increased to a deafening thunder. And through a bank of jet black darkness, Leybren felt himself flying. He was conscious that the boat was under him, but he seemed to be no part of it.

He closed his eyes. On and on he went. He wondered if he were being taken into the very bowels of the earth. He opened his eyes. A brilliant light appeared far ahead. It died away. Then it came back again, rushing toward him at an increasing speed, growing larger and larger.

**T**HE roar died away; their speed perceptibly lessened. And soon the boat was gliding slowly over still and sparkling waters. The darkness disappeared, and in to Leybren came the familiar blindness from the sun. This lasted only a moment, and when he was able to see again, he found that the three canoes were being paddled by the Indians with an ease that was astounding in view of what they had gone through.

Leybren looked at the river. It was wide and the water was blue and clear. The banks were covered with a soft blue grass, over which towered tall and ancient trees. He raised his eyes. He was in a great valley. Several miles to his right and left rose gigantic granite cliffs, cliffs that towered two and three hundred feet in the air.

Down the river the boats glided easily and swiftly. Leybren watched the landscape on either side. It was not the landscape of a jungle. It was a countryside dotted with fields of corn and wide roads and giant trees. Every part of it denoted the presence of a highly civilized people.

The river took a sudden turn and there burst upon his eyes a sight that made his body stiffen and his eyes open in wonder.

It was a city—a beautiful city of shining buildings, buildings whose walls gleamed in the sunlight as if they were constructed of gold and silver, mixed in shimmering waves. From a distance moving on toward it, Leybren watched as if he were

looking at a city of old taken from the Arabian Nights.

He stared, awestruck, but now his mind was functioning normally. He realized that the city in front of him was none other than the famous hidden city of the Maya civilization, the city for which explorers and historians had searched for countless years. He realized that this was no myth, no fantastic dream. It was simply that through a series of impossible events he had stumbled accidentally on the ancient city which so many other men had sought in vain.

Certainly there must be paths that led out of those granite cliffs; but the Indians finding him had taken the most baffling and hidden way to enter the valley where the city was located. The entrance he had gone through, Leybren realized grimly, was one which would elude the search of centuries.

AS he approached the city, he saw rising in the center of it, gleaming snow-white in the afternoon sun, a magnificent structure. It seemed to be an almost exact replica of the famous Temple of Warriors, uncovered and restored in the ruin of the famous Maya city, Cheihen Itza, in Yucatan. The temple was built on the top of a pyramid that rose upward some forty feet in four receding terraces. A wide stairway wound up the east side to the edifice.

Leybren could see the pair of great feathered serpentine columns, standing some fifteen feet high, which divided the entrance into three doorways. The lofty walls of the temple were covered with freizes and sculpture.

And surrounding the pyramid and the temple was a broad terrace of many acres on which stood thousands of high columns, symmetrically laid out. It formed a great court

where gold robed priests could be seen wandering slowly about, absorbed in their devotions.

Around this great temple were the other buildings of the city—smaller temples, market places, ball courts, astronomical towers—all of which covered an area of over a square mile. Beyond this area were smaller houses, all snow-white like the temple, the homes of the Indians.

The valley was broad and flat. In all it covered some ten square miles, with the huge granite cliffs rising over it and shutting it completely out from the outside world. The river passed through the center of the city, alongside the great court of round columns. And as the boats neared this place, the old man with the cotton robe of embroidered gold rose to his feet and called out in a loud voice: "Martikatasi has come!"

The boats came to a stop alongside a stone wharf. Tall priests, wearing feather cloaks, walked solemnly to greet them, while Indians, apparently court attendants or guards, clothed in jaguar skins, ran down to the wharf and threw out long *pissaba* ropes to make the canoes fast.

Leybren was escorted up the time worn stone steps and onto the terrace of the Thousand Columns. Above him rose the Temple, a piece of architecture that would have been a gem in any civilization. And then suddenly he was conscious of the great crowd that had gathered around them. He could catch a few words of the muttered exclamations from the Indians. He heard blue eyes and blond hair mentioned.

WAS it his blue eyes and his blond hair that had attracted the attention of the Indians in the forest and caused them to fall prone at his feet?

But he had little time to pursue

this thought. The crowd had broken, and two priests with gorgeous feathered cloaks came toward him. They dropped to their knees, and as they did the crowd followed their example. From all parts of the city, as if the news of his arrival had spread like wild-fire, people came running to the court. They remained at a distance, staring at him in wonder and amazement; and after they had seen, they, too, fell to their knees.

The whole procedure was bizarre—childish and foolish to Leybren; but he held his tongue and played the part of a god, if that was what he was supposed to be.

The priests and the crowd finally got to their feet. Then two priests led Leybren to a low house behind the temple, a house that looked like a miniature temple in itself. Inside the building was a large room, with a great couch covered with jaguar skins. Indians brought luscious bowls of fruit, and inviting food of every kind.

Without a word the two priests backed out of the room and left Leybren alone.

## CHAPTER V

### *A Voice From the Shadows*

**L**EYBREN was hungry to the point of starvation, and the first thing he did was to eat. There was meat, deliciously boiled goat meat, and bread and soups and the fruit. For fifteen minutes he ate and gave no thought to the fantastic situation in which he had so suddenly found himself.

And after he had eaten, he lay down on the couch, and stared up at the ceiling. The food, the first real nourishment he had had for days save the tapir steak, gave his body a feeling of relaxation, of complete indolence

that was not bothered by the conflicting thoughts in his mind. But after lying there for some time, he began to think.

The process was wholly unsatisfactory and without results. So he got up and walked around.

**T**HE room was large, about twenty feet by thirty. The walls were of a white granite, in which had been sculptured, in alternating panels, grotesque human masks, and the gruesome looking serpent bird. The body and wings and feet were of a bird, while the head was that of a huge snake with a forked tongue, with a human head clamped between the serpent jaws.

The sculpture did not add anything to his peace of mind. He walked to the door and looked out. The Temple seemed more than ever an enchanted palace from some fairy tale—a mirage created only by the fantasy of forgotten time.

Leybren shook his head weakly. Was he still dreaming? Slowly he went back to the couch and laid down again.

Outside the sun was going down and twilight was filtering through the city, making the white buildings look ghostlike and eerie. An Indian came in and lit two lamps, lamps of wicks floating in oil; and the flickering light played against the white walls in spritelike shadows that danced and leaped and twisted over the feathered serpents sculptured on the walls.

It was weird—inhuman and uncanny, the semi darkness of the ghostlike room. Leybren picked up a robe that lay on the couch. It was for—

His body stiffened and turned. Somewhere in the dark shadows of the room, he had heard a voice. It had come to him faintly, as if emerging from a great distance; yet when he heard it he thought it was only a few feet behind him.

"'Ullo—'ullo there," the urgent voice called. *"Move that loose rock in the rear of your room and come down here, Martikatasi."*

LEYBREN'S body remained stiff and his thin face knotted in muscles. It was the voice of a white man, a man speaking English. With a spring he was at the rear of the room.

"Move that rock and come down here," the voice continued. "Don't try to answer me or they will hear you."

Leybren was down on his hands and knees.

The dirty, yellow light from the burning wick did not penetrate so far back into the room, and the darkness was intense. His hands moved over the wall. They found a large stone that jutted out an inch from the others. The rock moved as he pulled on it; it moved softly and easily, as if soaked in oil.

Leybren strained it softly, strongly out, and then he was staring into a dark opening, the opening of a passageway that led down into the earth.

He twisted his body through the narrow aperture and plunged into total darkness, having no idea where the passage might lead or what he would encounter at the other end. It was a low, narrow covering, and he had to crawl on his stomach through it, feeling ahead with his hands. Suddenly it shot downward at a steep grade and he let his body slide, keeping his balance and guiding himself with his arms.

For a long time he slid over the rock floor, until it seemed to him that he must be fifty feet below the ground, when, without warning, without seeing the gleam of the small wick lamp ahead, he rolled out into a small, dungeon-like room. Slowly and warily he got to his feet. At first he saw nothing save the shadows from the

lamp that danced on the cold and damp walls of the cell.

Then he heard a dry, hollow laugh behind him. He turned and as he did, his body twisted a little and his teeth came together with a sharp click.

Sitting on a pile of old straw with wrists and ankles chained to the wall, was an old man. He was in tattered rags. At first, Leybren could see nothing but the shaggy hair and the great white beard, unkempt and knotted, that covered the face. Then he saw a pair of gleaming eyes—and the face was that of a white man.

"Well, Martikatasi," the old man said dryly, "I thought you might hear me and would come."

Leybren, his face set and his eyes filled with amazement, studied the tattered rags that covered the broken body. Then he relaxed and smiled grimly.

"I take it," he said, "that I have the honor of talking with Thorton Hillright, one-time professor at Harvard and now lost in the Mayan jungles." The eyes of the man studied Leybren coldly—impersonally. The body seemed to contract a little and pull against the chains that held him to the wall.

YES," came from the man, "you are speaking to Thorton Hillright. But this is quite interesting. I have been here for twenty years waiting for the coming of a white man, and the first one to come knows me by name. Very interesting, indeed!"

"You sent a message to civilization," Leybren replied. "The message finally got to your wife. She came to me, hired me to come and find you."

"My wife," the words fell from Thorton Hillright's mouth in gasping sounds. "My wife—Martha—and she hired you to come into this cursed city of the dead—to get me."

Leybren shrugged. The discovery



of Hillright had unnerved him. He squatted on the floor and watched the mere shell of a man in front of him.

Hillright returned the stare and then his body started to shake and tremble and the white bearded face fell forward. His body was shaken with loud sobs. It was as if some tense cord within his mind, a cord that had been strained and held taut for twenty years, had suddenly snapped, and the pent-up emotions of the years burst forth at last wildly and uncontrollably.

**A**T length the sobs stopped and the exhausted body went limp. The tired eyes stared at Leybren pitifully. Leybren understood and said nothing, waiting for Hillright to regain control of himself.

"You—you came in answer to my call," he whispered. "You came to take me—from this hell I have—have—"

The voice quivered again, but Hillright threw his head back and the half-frightened, half-startled look left his eyes.

"We must work quickly," he said, his voice and his manner undergoing an almost miraculous change. "In ten or fifteen minutes you will have to return to your room. Should the priests enter and find you gone, I would be killed for speaking to you. You know very little, I am sure, of the real story of my disappearance twenty years ago.

"Two months ago an aviator, flying over the city crashed. His plane was broken to pieces and he was killed, but in the wreckage I found a wireless set. Wireless had been a hobby of mine years ago. I tried to send a message, not knowing whether it would ever be received by the outside world. The Indians caught me sending it, and the set was destroyed, for they believed it to be some evil spirit."

Hillright smiled. Through the great mass of his white beard, Leybren was able now to see the outlines of his face, strong and intelligent.

"No, I am not chained down here all the time," he continued. "Only at night. I am supposed to be crazy—possessed of evil spirits. But among these aborigines, there is a legend that ill luck attends those that kill or sacrifice an insane man. That has saved my life for twenty years; yet some day it will not suffice and I will be killed.

"Now approaches the month of Karaiti, the god of the harvest, and on that day there must be sacrificed to this god a human life. It may be I, for the witch doctors can, at any time, declare that the evil spirit has left me.

"Twenty years of this living hell, Leybren—chained to these stone walls at night. And in the daytime, as I wander out, the people curse me and pelt my body with stones. And each feast day that comes brings the danger of death.

"A living hell—but you have come! It almost seems that the hand of a just God gave you those blue eyes and that blond hair, for that is why you have been taken for Martikatasi."

**L**EYBREN remained squatted on the floor, his eyes watching the pallid face of Hillright. The professor was talking rapidly now, in an excited, nervous manner.

"First I will tell you of the legend of the God Martikatasi," he continued. "You are, as you perhaps now realize, in the hidden city of the Maya.

"It is ruled over by a queen, the most beautiful of all women. I have seen her only a few times, but her beauty, you can be assured, is a thing that has never been equalled.

"She is a descendant of the great

Queen Kinich-Kakmo, wife of famed King Chaacmol. I have not time to go into the story of this famous queen, but she ruled over the far-flung cities of the Mayas in centuries past.

**B**UT a great evil visited her family and they were murdered by the nobles, all save a little girl that was spirited to safety by a trusted servant. When this girl grew up, she gathered around her a few loyal followers. She came into this valley and founded this city, and the present queen is a daughter of this girl.

"It was said then by the gods that out of the north would come a blue-eyed, blond-haired god to lead the Mayas back to the greatness they had known, and this god would be called Martikatasi."

Leybren listened, a little bewildered, as Hillright continued the legend of this strange god, of the marvelous deeds expected of him when he came. He would be of super-human strength and he would slay the enemies of the queen. The people would know no want and the harvest would be always bountiful.

"Sorais, the old priest, found you in the forest and saw your blue eyes and your blond hair and believed you were Martikatasi," Hillright explained. "But soon you will have to go before the queen. She will study your face and consult the witch doctors and they will have to convince themselves that you are really the God that is to lead the Mayas back to their one-time glory."

"I was brought into the city the same way as you. But my eyes are not blue and my hair is not yellow. I did not know their language or anything about Martikatasi. I failed to convince them that I was a God. Because of my hardships in the jungle my brain snapped and I was a little crazy for a while. Had I not

been crazy, I would have been taken to the great sacrificial stone and my body hacked in many pieces.

"But with you, it is different. Your eyes are blue and your hair is blond and you can speak their language; and greater than all that, you now know the legend of the Coming God. You can easily convince them that you are Martikatasi."

Leybren smiled grimly and nodded.

"I can take care of that O.K.," he said, "but my job is to get you out of this city. But you might as well tell me why you came. It wasn't your interest in Maya ruins. Too much happened to me after your wife gave me the copy of the paper you had hidden in your safety deposit box!" Hillright stared at him, his mouth gaping open a little.

"A copy of a paper in my safety deposit box?" he said. "A copy of a paper with twin peaks—"

"Just that," Leybren interrupted. "It was the only clue your wife had as to where you might be."

"And after you got that paper, someone tried to kill you—"

**T**RIED very hard." Leybren laughed grimly. "Only a week ago in the jungle a man named Von Schlossman tried to have me killed. He escaped with the canoe and all the supplies. I was left in the jungle to die."

"Von Schlossman." Hillright's eyes left Leybren and fell to the floor. "Von Schlossman coming up here?"

Leybren nodded.

"Sit down," Hillright said weakly. "Sit down and I will tell you the secret of my coming here. The secret for which that man tried to kill you."

The yellow flame from the lamp flickered and started to die out. Hillright moved the wick with his finger and the flame rose slowly and again cast the weak light over the darkness of the dungeon.

"Even when I was a student at

Harvard," Hillright began, "the mystery of the Maya civilization intrigued me. I had delved far into such meager knowledge as historians had been able to discover. Three years before my disappearance, on a pretext of going to Europe, I came down here to study the ruins of the cities in Yucatan. Studying these ruins, I made the discovery that started me on my final tragic quest.

THE Mayas had reached a stage of civilization almost equal to the civilization of ancient Greece. They were a rich race: yet nowhere in all the ruins of the cities was found one trace of gold, one gem of any value. What happened to the wealth will never be known. I think sometime it will be found buried beneath the ruined temples. Or perhaps the jungle, creeping up to claim its own, has hidden it from human eyes forever.

"But I thought then that if, in the vast jungles, could be found a Maya city of the old civilization, unlimited wealth would be there."

The old man looked up at Leybren and stopped talking.

He shook his head sadly, and stared at the floor, a habit he had acquired through the lonely years of his captivity.

"At that time," he continued, "I was young and foolish. I had a good position at Harvard, but I craved wealth and independence. This overwhelming thought of finding an ancient city, still inhabited, fascinated me. Then I first learned of the strange story told the explorer Stephens in 1850 by the *cura* of Quiché, an Indian village in Guatemala. This *cura*, according to the story, had wandered forth alone, and had gotten lost in the great mountain range that could be seen from his village, a nameless range that came out of the land of mystery.

"Briefly: in his wanderings this *cura* came to the top of the range, at the top of the very cliffs that surround us now, and looked down upon this city, the last remaining one of the Maya civilization. And standing there he saw what you have not yet seen. The great pyramid of gold glistening in the sunshine on the far side of the temple.

"He followed the cliffs around until he came to the twin peaks and there saw the ancient Indian trail. He followed it, and somehow he discovered the hidden passageway through the mountain, something no one else ever has done. But when he came to the Valley of Darkness, he became frightened and hurried away. He followed the jungle river down to the Usumacinta, where some friendly Indians gave him a boat and supplies. He finally arrived at Campeche, more dead than alive."

Again Hillright stopped talking and looked at Leybren quietly.

"The story seized my imagination and made me lust for this wealth," he confessed bitterly. "I went to Quiché to see if I could find some of the relations of this *cura*, someone in whom he might have confided his experiences."

THE *cura* had refused to give Stephens any idea of the location of the city, claiming that he could not remember; but I knew the cunning of these Indians and I was certain that the secret of that city could be found. I knew the *cura* was dead, but I had a wild idea that somewhere in his papers or with his relatives, if he had any, would be the data about the city.

"I talked to a nephew of the *cura* and told him what I believed. I offered him five thousand dollars if he could discover any such information and deliver it to me at my home in Cambridge.

"It was on my way home, on the ship, that I met Von Schlossman. He was a young man then, well versed in the history of the Maya civilization. He was intelligent and we struck up an acquaintance, but at no time did I like the man. But I was foolish enough to repeat to him the story of the *cura* and to further say that I had been at Quiché.

HE apparently believed that I had found the information, for he made an attempt on my life before the ship got to New York. Made it in such a subtle way that I could prove nothing against him. Later he came to my home and demanded point blank if I had the location of the city. I told him no, but he did not believe me.

"Well, when the nephew appeared two years later and gave me the parchment paper with directions to the hidden city on it, something snapped in my brain. Here was the key to hidden wealth. I would go alone, secure the endless gold, and then return to my family. I could not tell my wife, for she would have believed me insane.

"So I disappeared one night and came down here. I was young and very foolish. I did not realize the utter impossibility of finding the city and getting the gold and escaping with my life. I followed the instructions on the parchment paper and finally came to the forest where you were captured.

"And there I was seized and taken for Martikatasi, just as you have been—"

Hillright raised his manacled hands suddenly.

"Quick," he whispered, "they are coming to your room. If they find I have talked to Martikatasi, they will kill me like a dog."

Leybren jumped to his feet. His ears strained to hear a sound but

none came. He looked at the old professor.

"For twenty years," Hillright said, "I have listened to footsteps coming and going in that room. I can hear what you cannot. Hurry and get back there. We can plan further tomorrow night."

Leybren turned quickly, dropped on his hands and knees, and started up the narrow little passageway that led to his room far overhead. He crawled rapidly, more certain of his way in the darkness now.

Near the top he stopped and lay flat on the cold, damp rock floor. Above him, coming from his room, he heard voices—low and excited!

He had moved too late! At first he considered retreating back into the dungeon. But that would do little good. He would soon be discovered with Hillright and that would be the end.

If he went forward, they would also know, unless—

He rose to his hands and knees and crawled forward through the darkness. He came to the small opening in the wall of his room. He could hear the voices distinctly now.

His jaws set with a clicking sound: his body was tense as he pushed his way through the small opening and fell to the floor of his room, his body still partly hidden by the shadowy darkness that the feeble rays of the wick lamps could not reach.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Gold Pyramid*

LEYBREN lay on the floor, his body tense and every muscle alert and ready for action. The lamps threw their yellow glow over the room, and in this shadowy light he could see two men standing near the couch. Outside the building the two guards remained.

From his prone position, he could

not see the faces of the men. One was clothed in a white robe. The other appeared to be a servant or a warrior, wearing, as he did, the white saris around his waist and shoulders.

Suddenly the man in the robe started toward him.

Leybren was on his feet with a spring. His right hand went back to drive a paralyzing blow in the face of the man, but the blow died before it started.

**T**HE man standing in front of him was the old priest, with the shriveled body and steel-gray eyes, the one that had found him in the forest.

"You have found," the priest said quietly, "the man with the face of white."

The old priest bowed, and in the presence of Leybren his body trembled a little.

"He is possessed of the evil ones," the old man continued, "and if he has talked to Martikatasi, he must die: for no evil can touch you whom we have awaited so long."

Leybren walked over to the couch and sat down wearily. The reaction had unsteadied him.

"My friend," he said, "if I have come from a distant land to lead you—"

"You are Martikatasi," the old man cried and fell to his knees. "And you have come to lead us back to our ancient glory—"

"And yet your men smote me," Leybren answered dryly. "But no one knows that you did this."

The priest rose to his feet and gazed bewildered at Leybren.

"If it is your wish, Martikatasi," the old man said, "that no one knows Timkanti, the evil one, has spoken to you, my lips will not speak of it. But he will not speak to you again, for it was ordered last night that Timkanti die in three suns on the festival of the god Karaiti."

"That he die!" Leybren gasped.

The old priest nodded.

"When the sun will have passed beyond the cliff three times," he said, "he will be sacrificed to the god of the crops."

Leybren stood up and his face paled.

"And you," the priest continued, "will on that night be taken to our queen and be declared the god of our forefathers—the god to lead us forth again."

Then the old man and his attendant, whom Leybren recognized as one of the warriors of the woods, bowed and left the room.

For the next three days Leybren was showered with all the attention, all the homage that could possibly be bestowed upon a god. He was permitted to wander over the city and he went far out among the corn fields that stretched in every direction over the valley.

Despite the cloud of death that hung over Hillright, the city of the aboriginal Mayas fascinated him. The fields were cultivated by hand, and the corn indicated a large yield. The Indians were aided in their farming by the priests who, from the towers, kept them in touch with the different astronomic phenomena that forecast the prospective weather changes.

**T**HE city itself represented a civilization and a development of the arts that rivaled the Greeks. The Temple and other buildings were elaborately sculptured and many of them brilliantly painted. Wood carving, jade cutting, feather work pottery design, weaving, painting, and other arts were carried on successfully.

But the fascination of the ancient city did not prevent Leybren from using every effort to discover some avenue of escape, some outlet through those granite cliffs that kept



him and the valley safely guarded from the outer world.

He studied the current of the river running through the city, the river that had shot him out of the bowels of the earth and into the valley. The current was strong, but he knew that, somehow, the Indians had gotten those boats into the lake of the Valley of Darkness.

IT was undoubtedly done by trained and skilled paddle men, who could take the canoes through the underground passage where the river shot down into the earth from the lake. But to a person inexperienced and untrained it would be utterly impossible.

It was on the second day that he discovered the famous Pyramid of Gold, near the palace of the queen.

The palace was situated on a high terrace court, a beautiful building constructed in white marble. On its walls were sculptured friezes of human heads; and the feathered serpent was there, stretching along the wall, with its reptile mouth holding a human head.

Wide and impressive marble steps swept from the ground to the doors of the palace.

South of the palace, rising some twenty feet in the air in five small receding terraces, was the Pyramid of Gold that the bewildered *cura* had seen from the top of the cliffs. In the sunlight it shone with a dazzling, brilliant glitter that could be seen for miles.

Leybren tried to estimate the value of the gold in the structure, but the figures got so high that they startled him. No wonder the poor *cura* had gazed in awe and wonder at what he saw: no wonder poor Hillright, hearing of this fabulous fortune in the wilderness, had left family and home to secure it. And the mystery of why Von Schlossman was willing to

commit murder was no longer a mystery.

DURING his wanderings around the city, Leybren saw Hillright, his shaggy white beard falling far down on his chest, and his unkempt, snowy hair falling over his shoulders, running and darting around like a beaten and haunted dog. Dirty rags hung over his long body and his feet were bare. The Indians jeered after him, threw rocks at him.

All during those two days Leybren saw nobody go near the poor old man, save to pelt him; no human voice talked to him, save to curse and abuse him. Hillright, playing the part of a demented man that his life might not be taken from him, jumped and groveled on the ground and screamed wildly.

For twenty years this had been his role. The very terror of it, the utter brutality struck Leybren with a force that sickened every part of his mind. He wondered that Hillright had retained any semblance of sanity; yet through all these years his powerful will, encouraged by hope that could not die, had kept his mind alert and keen.

Any communication with him was impossible. Two attendants were at Leybren's side at all times, and wherever he went the people—men with the *saris* over waist and shoulder and women in the embroidered dresses of white—flocked after him and fell to their faces on the ground when his eyes met theirs. Had Hillright sought to come near Leybren, he would have been beaten to death by the people.

Thus the three days passed, and Leybren was unable to convey to Hillright the plan that had been forming in his mind.

But on the third night, as twilight was filtering over the white city, Leybren lay on his couch. His face

was tense and his eyes narrowed a little. Near him stood the two attendants. He had found out from his friend, the old priest of the woods, whom he learned was called Sorais, that it would not be until the moon was high in the heavens that he would be taken to the queen. And it would not be until dawn that the sacrificial ceremonies would call Hillright to the stone slab to be killed.

THE plan that had formed in Leybren's mind was desperate—almost absurd; yet it was the only one he could conceive. He had come up here to save Hillright and if he was going to do that, the break would have to be made *before* he was taken to the queen. He wondered if the poor professor had yet been told of the doom that the dawn would bring him.

His eyes watched the tall, bronze-skinned attendants that stood mutely at his side. The muscles on their bodies rippled as they moved their arms. Each carried a spear. Leybren smiled coldly. He would have the advantage of striking first, and by that advantage he might be able to put one of the guards out of business before the other one was upon him.

Outside the silence of the night was eerie and oppressive. It would be over an hour before the girls would come with the fruit and food bowls. But there was always the chance that some priest might wander in and if he did—

Leybren's eyes wandered to the part of the rear wall where the stone had been pulled out several inches. He had a file and a hammer, both crude implements, and with them he hoped to break the chains that held the professor.

Leybren's body moved slowly, stealthily off the couch. He was on

his feet. The two attendants were several feet from him, in front of the couch. One of them turned his head slowly.

And as he did, Leybren's right shot through the air like a piston rod and caught the man flush on the jaw.

## CHAPTER VII

### *The Black River*

THE blow landed with a loud smack and the man went to the floor with a dull groan, falling face forward, as if every muscle had suddenly gone limp and useless; but before the body had hit the floor, Leybren was sending his left through the air at the second attendant.

The man ducked the blow and jumped back, his eyes terrified with fear at seeing the white god turn against them. For a split second the man stood there and stared at Leybren, and that split second was all Leybren needed. Rising on his toes, his right went against the man's chin, backed by every ounce of weight in his body, with every ounce of his strength behind it.

Like the first attendant, this man crumpled to the floor in a limp and senseless heap. Leybren was tearing one of the cotton robes into long strips, and with deft and sure hands he bound and gagged the two unconscious men. Quickly he dragged them to the shadowy end of the room and thrust them into a darkened corner.

Then he plunged down the narrow tunnel passageway to Hillright's cell. Hillright looked up in amazement and fear as Leybren's body hurtled into the dungeon room.

"We've got only minutes to get out of this hole, Hillright," Leybren said brusquely. "I've got an Indian file and a hammer to break your chains."

Hillright drew back, his eyes flashing anger.

"Fool," he hissed. "What good will it do to get out of here? Where will we go?"

**L**ISTEN," Leybren said grimly. "If you don't know the news, I'll break it to you now, and not gently. When dawn comes you are going to be sacrificed for the benefit of some fool god that makes the corn grow."

Hillright's body stiffened and terror came in his eyes.

"The month of Karaiti," he gasped. "I am going to be killed—"

"The priest Sorais told me," Leybren answered. "And for three days I have been unable to get the word to you. Now we've got to act."

"But—but where can we go?" Hillright groaned weakly. "For twenty years I have been trying to find some path out of this hole—"

"We'll talk about that when we get out of this dungeon," Leybren broke in quickly. "I've got my automatic, and that'll get us somewhere!"

He had the file and hammer out, and was working rapidly on one of the chains.

"Escape!" Hillright straightened suddenly. "God, escape from this—here. I'll show you how to break these chains—give me the hammer. Escape! We can go through the underground passage that leads from this dungeon out under the courts of columns, and from there we can hit the river. The river will carry us somewhere—maybe to death—but it will at least mean freedom. Escape! God, escape!"

The sudden change in Hillright's demeanor filled Leybren with fresh hope. The two men hacked and filed and beat the iron links. From overhead in Leybren's room there came no sound. But any minute some priest might enter the room, discover Leybren gone and the insensible attendants tied and gagged on the floor.

One of the links broke. Feverishly—with an almost insane energy, Hillright assisted Leybren. Another link broke and now the professor's hands were free. The iron band around his right ankle came open easily, but the left band did not yield to the file and hammer. Hillright tore and hammered against it, ripping his skin without any apparent feeling. Blood spurted from his ankle and ran into the filthy straw.

But finally one of the links gave in the chain and Hillright was on his feet.

"This way," he whispered, starting for a darkened door of the dungeon.

Overhead came a sudden babble of voices. Leybren looked at Hillright and smiled grimly.

"They have found the god is gone," he said. "Quick. Which way are we to go?"

**H**ILLRIGHT darted out through the door of the dungeon, with Leybren close on his heels. The voices coming from Leybren's room were shrill and excited now. Someone was hurtling down the narrow tunnel that led from the house above into Hillright's dungeon.

But neither Hillright nor Leybren paid any attention to the person coming behind them. They ran madly through the pitch darkness of the corridor which was outside the cell. Leybren followed the little dots of white, which were Hillright's tattered clothes. He crashed into a wall and was thrown back. He heard Hillright's voice ahead of him and he sprang to his feet, progressing less hastily through the darkness, feeling with his hands.

"Look out for these steps," Hillright cried. "After the steps we will be under the court of columns surrounding the Temple. Then we will have to make a break for the river."

Leybren felt ahead in the dark-

ness with his toes. He touched a step and then he was racing up them, three at a time, trying always to keep the white of Hillright's rags in front of him. It seemed to him that the underground passageway had suddenly become a babble of a thousand voices. The voices raised in shouts echoed and re-echoed through the maze of black tunnels behind them. But he continued up the steps, not allowing the pursuit to deter him.

He came to the top of the steps, stumbled through the darkness and nearly fell, but Hillright's hand grabbed his shoulder and straightened him up.

"The current of the river will carry us beyond the city," Hillright whispered. "It may carry us to our death. But it is our only hope. Don't use your gun unless absolutely necessary, as it will bring the whole city down on us."

Cool air came through the darkness, and far ahead Leybren saw a small square of bluish moonlight. The end of the tunnel, and after that—the river! He set his jaws with a click as he dashed for the opening.

Hillright stopped and yelled: "They are coming from the front!"

**L**EYBREN crashed into the old man, and as he did he saw pass across the little square of moonlight ahead, two forms, shadowy and dark. Far behind them in the darkness of the underground passage, the pursuing Indians were yelling.

A trap of death! For a moment Leybren looked back of him and then in front. His body was now naked to the waist. He had discarded the gold robes, and all he wore was the remains of his trousers. Even his shoes, torn and cut from his trip through the jungle, had been thrown away.

In that passing moment he made his decision.

"We'll get to the river," he said to Hillright. "I'll take care of the two men in front of us."

**H**E advanced slowly now, with his body leaning over and arms swinging at his sides, ready for action. His gun was stuck in the belt around his waist to be used only as a last resort.

Hillright kept at his side, his breath coming in short gasps from the exertion of running. The opening of the tunnel seemed to be coming to meet them. It grew larger and the darkness around them was broken by the faint moonlight that penetrated the opening.

There was a swish of air. Hillright groaned. A spear hit the rocks and its metallic twang echoed weirdly down the tunnel.

With a snarl and a curse, Leybren's body lurched forward, his right coming up in a vicious, paralyzing undercut. The blow cut up through empty air, but his body hit the man that had thrown the spear and they went together to the earth, snarling, fighting, cursing.

The man was powerful and Leybren had difficulty in keeping him under. Near him he could hear another struggle, but he had no time to turn his head to see how poor Hillright was coming out. Against a young Indian the old professor could last but a few seconds.

Leybren brought his right crashing down to the face of the man under him. He heard the crunching of bones as the blow landed on the Indian's mouth. Again the right came down; again there was a crackling of bones. And suddenly the body under him went limp.

Leybren was on his feet with a leap. A struggling, fighting mass hit his legs and knocked them from

under him. He was thrown violently backward. He heard the gasping groans of Hillright as he hit the floor.

Leybren's body came up slowly, resting on his hands and knees. He lurched forward and grabbed at the indistinct, seething mass of human flesh. His hands caught the white beard of Hillright, and with a vicious pull, he had the professor away from the Indian and threw him back against the wall.

**A** FORM rose above Leybren with the speed of a tiger, but Leybren remained on the ground. He rolled over the floor and grabbed the feet of the Indian standing ready to pounce. With a hunch of shoulders and a sudden raising of his body, Leybren threw the Indian over his shoulder, hurling him through the darkness against the wall.

"Come on!" he yelled at Hillright.

Without stopping to see what had happened to the unlucky assailant, Leybren and Hillright dashed madly down the passageway for the little patch of blue moonlight that indicated the opening. They came to it and fairly flew out into the open. Five feet ahead of them could be seen the waters of the river, gleaming brightly in the moonlight.

Leybren's dive for the waters started the minute he left the opening of the tunnel. His body hurtled across the five feet and hit the river at the edge of a stone wharf. And as he did, he heard another body splash alongside him.

His body sank under the still waters. He went down and down. At first he seemed to sink naturally and slowly, from the force of the dive. But suddenly something gripped him, something that seemed to have the power and strength of a giant deep-sea octopus. The next second he was being twisted and

dragged and thrown in churning, maddened waters.

He struggled wildly against this gripping, tenacious power that was tearing him down and down. He was conscious that he was being hurled through the water at a terrific rate: the sickening thought flashed through his numbed mind that he was in the throes of an underwater current, so powerful, so deep that no man could ever hope to come out of it alive.

His lungs were bursting for air. His senses reeled. One second—two seconds—three seconds. He could not hold out much longer. Every part of his body cried for air. His jaws were set in the vise-like grip of death. The minute he opened them—

Water was rushing through his mouth, filling his lungs and stomach, and then his body began to sink lower and lower.

That was the last he remembered—the water filling his lungs and his body going down and down. After that merciful unconsciousness came over him and thoughts ceased stabbing through his tired brain.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *The House of Silence*

**L**EYBREN came to slowly, his eyes still closed and his lungs filled with shooting pains. He was lying on something soft, but he did not have the strength to open his eyes. He wondered vaguely, in a dazed manner, if he were at the bottom of the river. He had been sinking when consciousness left him, but if he were on the bottom of the river how could consciousness return?

Crazy, distorted thoughts flashed through his mind. Then even these thoughts left and he felt tired to death, and his mind sank slowly back into the oblivion whence it had come.



When consciousness returned again, his head was clearer. He opened his eyes. Forms—dark forms were standing over him. Somewhere a soft light was glowing dimly; everything around him was shadowy and spirit-like. Then slowly the forms around him took shape. They were men—Indians, and the face nearest him was that of his friend, Sorais, the priest. The old man was staring at him with fear and terror registered all over his shriveled and yellow old face.

Leybren smiled at him and muttered: "What are you doing here?"

"Martikatasi," the old man breathed weakly, "the evil one talked with you, and those he talks with die. We saved you from the waters of the river by throwing a net across it."

Leybren sat up. Now he remembered all that had happened. He and Hillright jumping into the river and the undercurrent pulling them down. He had been saved from the river—but Hillright?

"You saved me," he said to Sorais, "but Timkanti—did you save him?"

Leybren saw now that the room was filled with priests and warriors. They stared at him with the same fear and terror in their faces that Leybren had seen in the face of Sorais.

"The evil one was saved to die at dawn, Martikatasi," Sorais said. "He will die to satisfy the god Karaiti, and never again will he bring evil to others. When we pulled the net up and found you, you were dead. But our doctors brought you back to life, for you cannot die."

**A** SICK, weak feeling spread over Leybren. He thought for a moment that unconsciousness was coming back again. His body swayed. But a priest came up to him and gave him an earthen jug to drink from. The liquid was sweet tasting and it

brought strength back to the American's body, and dispelled the last vestiges of weakness.

"The moon, O Martikatasi," Sorais cried, "is high in the heavens now. And now you will go to tell *her* that you have come to lead her people to the glory that once was theirs."

Leybren looked around him, his lips pressed tightly together, his mind working coldly and rationally. It would be some hours before Hillright died, and in that time some escape might present itself.

Any move now would be found to end as tragically as had their attempted escape. So Leybren got up slowly and motioned with his head to Sorais that he was ready for his visit to the queen.

**O**UTSIDE the moon, high in the heavens, flooded the Temple and the court of columns with a bewitching bluish haze: in this soft moonlight the whiteness of the buildings seemed ghostly and unreal. Slowly and solemnly, the procession of priests and Indians, escorting Leybren to the Palace of the Queen, moved through the night.

Two Indians with jaguar skins around their waists went ahead, holding burning torches high above their heads. Behind them walked the priests with the feathered robes, their faces covered by masks and in their hands earthen jars of burning incense. And then walked Leybren, now clothed in a robe of pure gold. Sorais walked at his side, silently, as if in a hypnotic trance. At the rear came other priests.

The procession wound through the court of columns and then came out in front of the Temple. Up the wide, snowy-white stairway that climbed the four receding terraces to the Temple, Indians were moving about slowly. And at the top, lights were

burning in preparation for the sacrifice to the god of the harvest.

The procession ascended the marble stairs to the great doors of stone that were rarely opened. At their approach these doors, as if operated by some electric switch, opened slowly and noiselessly to permit their entrance inside the sacred portals.

A soft, fragrant light of wavering red greeted Leybren as he stepped into the palace. At first he could see only this wavering red light, and then as his eyes pierced the haze he could not suppress a gasp of utter wonder. In all his life he had never seen anything quite as exquisite, quite as enchanting as the beauty of that room.

Gorgeous blood red rugs lay over the floor, and in the light—a light that seemed a representation of the very blood of life—these rugs presented an appearance of a lake of bewitching scarlet waters. Around the room were sculptured pieces—human bodies, great feathered serpents, and animals—each of which would have been considered a beautiful work of art in New York or Paris. On the walls were friezes done in a style that would have caught the attention of connoisseurs in any country or civilization.

The whole room, with its soft red light, its gorgeous rugs, and its sculpture and paintings seemed to Leybren to be a floating, enchanted land far removed from anything human or real.

THE two torch bearers had remained outside the palace and with them stayed the priests and Indians who had comprised the procession. Only Sorais and the two men bearing the incense jars had entered the front doors with Leybren.

Slowly Sorais led Leybren across the blood red rugs and to the far

end of the room. Here he stopped in front of a second door, fell to his knees, and cried: "O Queen of Beauty, hear thy servant, the humble Sorais, for he brings to you Martikatasi, whom you have awaited so long."

SILENCE, eerie and deadly, followed those words. Leybren had remained standing, his mind and his body in a daze of bewilderment.

Slowly the second door opened. Sorais rose to his feet. "You go alone," he said to Leybren. "The queen awaits you in her own room."

Leybren walked through the door, walked as if he were floating in some fantastic dream of a magician's creation. He tried to smile, but no smile came to his face. He wet his lips and wondered if he had entered some strange world in the misty vale beyond life.

The click of doors behind him, as they closed, brought him to his senses. He looked around.

He was in a smaller room, and here the wavering light was a soft blue—a hazy mist that passed before the eyes softly and gently. In this blue light he could see the multi-colored walls of the room and a domed ceiling suspended, it seemed, in the clouds.

For a moment he stood, wondering what he was supposed to do. Then softly, as if from afar off, he heard a voice whisper: "Martikatasi."

He swerved quickly, stood as if he had suddenly been riveted to the floor, and stared in utter amazement and wonder at what he saw.

He was looking at a woman, such a woman as he had never before dreamed could exist. She was standing before a throne that sat back in the wall, her graceful body swaying a little as if she were floating in the cloud of blue that surrounded her.

A long gown of snow-white fell

over her body, but Leybren saw nothing but the face that was gazing at him. It was the face of a woman, of a bewitching, divine beauty—a face that some Greek sculptor must have hewn from a marble white as snow. The face, the eyes, the nose, the mouth—every feature was utter, beautiful perfection. Over the exquisite shoulders long yellow hair fell gracefully and softly.

For a moment it seemed to Leybren that every part of his little act to prove that he really was Martikatasi had fled from his mind. He stood gaping in wonder at the beauty of this woman, his mind a complete blank.

And then he realized that the queen was looking at him, and that those eyes were watching every move he made. She must make sure that he was a god and not an imposter.

He advanced toward her slowly and then he fell to his knees at her feet.

"Rise, Martikatasi," she said in a voice that was soft and tender. "Why wouldst thou kneel before a poor child of human blood, such as I?"

Leybren rose slowly. He wasn't quite sure that he was doing what a god should do. He shook his head a little to disperse the bewitching spell the queen's beauty had thrown over him.

"Even to Martikatasi, O Queen," he said slowly, "thy beauty is a wonder never glimpsed before."

**T**HE queen laughed, a quick, nervous little laugh, and sat down.

"Flattery is also the weapon of a god, Martikatasi," she answered. "You may call me Esterais. But come closer that I may see you—your eyes and your hair, and your face."

Leybren advanced until he was

standing within a foot of the queen. Her eyes studied him closely, and he knew that his life was hanging on a thin thread. But even faced with death, he felt no fear, no nervousness in her presence. Only utter amazement that a woman could be so beautiful, so entrancing, and still be human.

**B**UT the amazement passed and cold reason returned. Leybren was conscious that the eyes of Esterais were sapphire blue and her hair was yellow. What connection this could have with the coming of a blue-eyed, blond-haired god mystified him.

"Your eyes are blue," she said softly, "and your hair is yellow, as it was written that the eyes and the hair of Martikatasi would be. Your face is thin and your features noble, as also were to be the features of Martikatasi when he would come to lead us to the glory that was ours. Ours before the evil one struck and slew those who were noble and wise."

"And I see also that your eyes are blue and your hair is yellow, O Queen," Leybren said in the soft, slurring accents of the Mayan language. "As it was written that my eyes were to be the color of the skies and my hair the color of gold, so it was foretold to me that I should wander the face of the earth until there appeared a queen of the Mayas whose eyes and hair were a like color. A queen of a beauty that was not of this earth."

A tremor passed through the queen's body, and then she swayed in the throne-like chair. She rose stiffly, and with a moan fell at the feet of Leybren, her body quivering and sobbing.

Quickly he reached down and touched the soft flesh of her delicate shoulders and raised her to her feet. Her eyes were closed and her body

was still trembling, and she moaned: "It is Martikatasi. He has come—he has come!"

He helped her back to the marble chair and rubbed her wrists nervously, but her eyes remained closed and her lips quivered.

Then she opened her eyes slowly, and her white, delicate hand went out to caress his hair. He was on his knees in front of her, staring helplessly up into the soft blue eyes and the white face. It was as if she held him in a hypnotic trance—a trance that left every part of his body numb and helpless.

And in that moment he renounced everything. Outside the poor old professor was being prepared for the sacrifice to the god of the harvest, but Leybren had forgotten him.

The professor, the world, the gold—everything had fled from his mind, as he knelt in front of the queen, a helpless victim before the beauty of her face.

## CHAPTER IX

### *The Sacrifice to a God*

THE hand of Esterais left his hair and Leybren rose to his feet, his mind still dazed and bewildered. But through the bewilderment gradually seeped the slow realization of his tremendous task.

"You have come, Martikatasi," Esterais said softly, "and together we shall strike my enemies and once more lead my people forth. You have come just as I thought it was too late. But now I cannot speak of those that are seeking to undermine my rule and my life. You must go before the priests and the wise men, and they must be convinced that you are Martikatasi."

"When the dawn breaks," Leybren said quietly, "there will be a sacrifice to the God Karaiti, and the

man you have called Timkanti, the evil one, will be sacrificed to this god. It is my wish that this man be not sacrificed. For he is not a man of evil but a man who can help us."

The queen looked at him and shook her head sadly.

"It has been ordered by Kankomo that the evil one shall die," she said. "Kankomo is powerful. Timkanti is evil. There is nothing I can do to save his life."

LEYBREN pressed his lips tightly together and his eyes narrowed.

"If the man of white hair and white face dies," he said, "a friend and helper dies. For he is not a man of evil, but one who wishes to work with me—"

Esterais interrupted him with a short, nervous movement of the hand.

"Kankomo has ordered his death," she repeated. "Kankomo is the high priest of the palace, a man who would be king. His influence over my people is great and I am helpless to save this man. Enough!"

Leybren smiled grimly and said: "Then Martikatasi will save him, for it is written that Martikatasi must save all who are white of face and hair."

Esterais looked at him, her soft blue eyes unfathomable and mysterious, and he wondered what thoughts were passing behind those eyes. Then suddenly she leaned forward and again a flashing gleam came in her eyes, and on her face came a look of triumph.

"Thus it is as I have long wished," she whispered. "Only one man can defeat Kankomo and that man I have known would be Martikatasi. For ere you can lead us out into the glory that has passed, you must first slay those who fight within our ranks."

Behind them the doors to the

room suddenly opened. Esterais rose slowly and whispered: "Kankomo."

Leybren turned quickly. He saw the doorway fill with priests, headed by one who was tall and powerful of build.

**T**HE priests fell to their knees and the tall leader's body was prone on the floor.

The queen stood in front of the marble throne, her body straight and her eyes flashing at the form prostrated in front of her.

In the hazy blue light of the room the whole procedure looked bizarre, unreal to Leybren. He stood silently at one side of the throne and watched Esterais.

"Arise," she called out in her low, melodious voice. "Arise, ye that kneel before your queen, and behold the god Martikatasi come to us."

Slowly, moving in perfect unison, the ten priests and the leader rose to their feet and gazed at Leybren, and in that passing stare he saw the face of Kankomo, the high priest of the palace. The face was a fitting complement to the powerful, highly muscled body. It was a face of utter cruelty and cunning; a face heavy with the passions that surged behind it, with eyes of a savage, beast-like ferocity.

And in the passing second that his eyes met those of Kankomo, Leybren sensed a struggle, a struggle between himself and this high priest, that could only end in the death of one of them.

"Kneel, thou fools," came from Esterais in a sharp command. "Kneel, for thou art in the presence of the god Martikatasi—the one foretold by the great father, the king of kings, Chaacmol."

Down the priests went, this time flat on their faces, with Kankomo striking the floor before the others. For a long time they lay there, and

then Esterais looked at Leybren and nodded.

"Arise," Leybren called out in a loud voice. "Arise, ye mortals of clay!"

His words sounded foolish and he had an impulse to laugh aloud, but he kept his face serious. But the speech had an electric effect, for the priests were on their feet with a spring.

Leybren watched them closely. He was convinced that he had passed for a god in front of the queen, but the cunning look he had seen in the eyes of Kankomo told him that a greater test was yet to come. A test of two wills, each seeking ruthlessly a different end.

**T**O Kankomo the presence of Martikatasi would mean increased power for the queen: to Leybren his successful passing as a god meant the life of the man he had come into the jungles to save—the life of a white man.

Kankomo walked up to Esterais, his long robe of gorgeous feathers trailing on the floor. On his head were other feathers, placed in a band that circled his forehead. His face was twisted in an anger that he could not completely dissimulate.

"If thou, O Queen," his voice was cunning and low, "will take the advice of a poor, humble subject whose whole life and whose every move is for thy safety and thy love, you will first make sure that he who stands here as Martikatasi, the god that is to come to you from the wilderness, is really the god.

"Be certain that he is not one of these white men of the north who slew our people—our women and our children—with savage lust, when our people lived in great cities that stretched even unto the endless waters of life, that led to where no man knew."



It flashed through Leybren's mind that Kankomo was speaking of the Spaniards who had come with Cortez, and destroyed the few Mayan cities that remained at that time. Kankomo's tactics had a certain sinister danger that Leybren knew would grow rapidly, if not cut off before they got under way. He further realized that Kankomo was not talking so much to the queen as he was to the ten priests behind him. It was obvious that his words were taking effect on them.

HE turned quickly, his face tense and his hand resting on the golden robe over his automatic.

"Queen of Beauty," he said to Esterais in a voice that was low and piercing, "who is it that questions thy word and the word of Martikatasi? Martikatasi who, as was foretold even when Mayapan was a great city and on the throne sat the Queen Kinich-Kakmo, wife of the great King Chaacmol, has appeared to lead you and your people to a glory that was denied the Mayan people. Because in that city were evil ones—nobles and priests who slew the king and the queen, and destroyed the city.

"Tell me, O Queen, who is this man that dares to speak evil in the presence of your beauty and your goodness?"

Leybren's eyes bored into Kankomo relentlessly as he spoke, and he saw the heavy face of the high priest pale and his body tremble, as Leybren told the story of the City of Mayapan, a story every student of Mayan history knows well.

And then when he ceased speaking a silence oppressive and terrible followed. Esterais stood in the misty blue light, her eyes flashing fire and her face pale with the great triumph she knew now was hers. She waited for the high priest to answer.

Kankomo's face was still twisted with fear and rage, but finally anger and cunning won out in that heavy face, and with a wicked smile, he turned to Esterais.

"O Queen," he said, "the strange one speaks with wisdom of our people; yet such wisdom could be learned by the great white race that came out of the wilderness of waters to slay us. If this one be Martikatasi, let him then throw from his body the robe.

"If he be a god, his body must needs be without a blemish; but if he be a human creature, as we are, there may be a weapon, a knife or an axe that he has carried to protect himself from animals of the forest."

Leybren's body stiffened and the muscles contracted around his mouth. His hand went to his automatic. The trickery of Kankomo was obvious. If Leybren unrobed and they found the gun and the money belt, in which was still the paper Mrs. Hillright had given him, these things would prove powerful weapons toward Kankomo's case.

And as he stood there, his right hand resting on the butt of his automatic, his body tense and his eyes riveted on the face of Esterais, watching what move she proposed to make, it flashed through Leybren's mind that Kankomo was working his plan with a confidence that could not spring from his mind alone.

THE high priest of the palace was playing a lone hand—a hand that carried danger and death to him, if there was one slip up. He was an Indian, steeped in the superstitious lore of his race, and no matter how much he regretted the coming of Martikatasi, every part of his make-up should cause him to fall on his face and worship the god.

His suggestion that Leybren disrobe, Leybren was convinced, was

made with absolute confidence that on the so-called god would be found something to his absolute undoing. It was obvious to Leybren now that Kankomo paid little attention, and cared not at all for what Esterais might believe or say; every move he made, every word he uttered, though addressed to her, was meant as propaganda for the priests.

But how could this Mayan Indian priest, isolated in this aboriginal city, knowing nothing of what lay beyond those granite cliffs, have information sufficient to make the daring request that Martikatasi unrobe? A request that threw a direct challenge in the face of the god.

These thoughts flashed through his mind as he watched the pale face of Esterais, and as they did, another thought came to him, a thought that caused every muscle in his body to jerk and his eyes to narrow to pin points.

But Esterais' next move gave him little time to follow up this last thought. Her chin went up and a look came to her eyes that caused the priests—all but Kankomo—to shrink back a little.

"On the face, thou fool, Kankomo," she screamed. "Wouldst thou question the belief of thy queen, daughter of Tinctum, descendant of the great Chaacom? Speak! Thou dog, thou unbelieving vandal of the woods. Speak! Or when dawn breaks thy body shall go on the sacrificial stone, and thy blood shall atone for the evil that has come to thy body. Speak!"

**K**ANKOMO was on the floor before the words of Esterais were finished, and he crawled to her feet, covering them with kisses, and his face went up to her in supplication.

"A humble servant would die at thy feet, O Queen of my people," he cried. "Strike him dead now, that

the evil in his soul may die forever. I only question such things in life as will bring happiness to thee and to thy people. If I have spoken evil, I would that a dagger shall pierce my heart."

Esterais looked at him and with her foot she pushed him away.

"Arise, fool," she said, in a voice that was deadly in its coldness. "Arise and go forth, and nevermore question what thy queen believes or death shall strike thee."

Kankomo was on his feet, and without a word he walked out of the room. The other priests stared at Esterais a moment, as if unable to decide what to do. Then they turned quickly and followed the high priest.

"We have little time to work," Esterais said to Leybren, her eyes flashing anger. "The priests have gone out with Kankomo. We must move quickly and against great, almost impossible odds, if we are to save the life of the white man."

## CHAPTER X

### *An Unseen Enemy Strikes*

**T**WO hours later Esterais, escorted by a procession of priests and warriors, walked out of her Palace with Leybren, headed for the temple where the sacrifice to the God of the Harvest was to take place. The first streaks of dawn were breaking over the tops of the great cliffs, whose bases were still hidden by the darkness of the night.

At Leybren's side was Sorais. The old man's shriveled face was tense and his eyes darted around nervously. During the two hours after Kankomo had left the Palace, Leybren and Esterais had estimated their possible forces and realized that the odds were stacked ten to one against them.

With the ten priests ranged on the side of Kankomo, it meant that only those few with Esterais had remained faithful. It meant also that the warriors of the city would go over to Kankomo.

It was a small, pitifully small, group of faithful followers of the Queen that made up the procession. Leybren had his gun and that was about the only advantage they held in the coming conflict. But the few shells he had could not hold off the horde of warriors very long.

Grimly and silently Leybren walked along. Already he could see the fires burning in the Temple. He wondered if Hillright were already there; he wondered if the old man had accepted his fate calmly. That would help a great deal.

Leybren's faith in his power as a god was not great. He realized that the queen had accepted him as such, as had Sorais and her followers. But somehow he felt that Esterais, driven to hopeless desperation by her continuous war with Kankomo, had been ready and willing to accept as a god anyone who might bring relief and aid to her followers.

HE looked at her. In the night she appeared more like a phantom of beauty, than a girl in her early twenties. She walked with head up and body erect, with an ease and grace that was enchanting. Her fairness, the blue eyes and blond hair and white skin, was puzzling to Leybren.

Yet he realized that among historians the identity of many of the Mayans was a moot question. Some contended that the ruling families of these Indians had been a European race that had filtered down through the Bering Straits and into Mexico and Central America. The color and eyes of Esterais confirmed this belief.

The procession, moving slowly and solemnly, with the torch bearers ahead and the priests with the incense behind them, turned a corner and walked on into the court of columns; and as they did, the city, which had appeared asleep when they first stepped out of the palace, came startlingly to life.

Over the great cliffs far above the city the gray shafts of dawn were breaking rapidly, and the darkness of the night was lifting. In its place was the cold, shifting mist of day-break.

SUDDENLY from over the city there burst forth chanting and singing, a barbaric melody that was savage and nerve racking to hear. People came running across the squares and plazas, placing themselves in front of the great Temple in which would be the sacrifice to the god Karaiti. The din increased to a deafening roar. Undisturbed by the noise, the priests escorting Esterais to the Temple moved forward with the somber silence in which they did all things. Esterais was apparently oblivious to the noise and the wildly running people; her face gazed straight ahead, body erect, and her eyes flashed a look of subdued excitement.

They came to the bottom of the long stairs that led up to the Temple. Above them the great pyramid, with its four receding terraces, rose up grimly and gleaming in the gray mist of the early morning. Priests walked up and down the stairs, robed in jaguar skins, feathered cloaks, and embroidered cotton stuffs, their bodies half lost in the clouds of incense that swirled around them.

At the entrance to the Temple, beside the two columns of the Feathered Serpents, tall Maya warriors were leading a small man, clothed in a robe of laced gold, with stooped

shoulders and a stiff walk, into the doorway.

Even from the bottom of the steps, where the barbaric splendor of the scene held him enthralled, Leybren saw that the small man, ironically robed at last in a gorgeous cloak of gold, was poor Hillright; and he recognized the tall, powerful body of Kankomo striding behind the professor.

**E**STERAIS stood at the bottom of the great stairway. She threw her hands high over her head, and as she did, there came from all parts of the Temple the wailing cry, "The Queen."

Priests, warriors, and Indians fell prone on their faces, and slowly, with the majesty of a true queen, Esterais started up the steps. She ignored completely the groveling human beings at her feet. Leybren followed behind her, his eyes moving slowly over the forms that lay prone on the stairs. As the queen passed, the Indians rose to their feet, and the din of the barbaric music continued.

At the top of the stairs, Esterais turned. Her face was pale and drawn, but her body seemed animated with a strange fire of vitality. Her voice rang out clearly, over the vast throng that moved on the stairs and stood in the dense crowd at the foot of the steps.

"Hear ye, O my people," she cried. "There has come to us the god, Martikatasi, whose advent, through the cycles of time, since the great Chaacom ruled our race in splendor, we have awaited. He has come, and the prophecy of the ages will be carried out.

"This god, with eyes of blue and hair of yellow, will bring to us great harvests.

"He will lead us from this valley and we will build great cities, and

there will be abundance and happiness for all.

"Kneel thou, for thine eyes are now gazing on Martikatasi."

Her arms swept to the right and her finger pointed to Leybren, and from the vast multitude there rose a chanting, a wailing cry of exultation. Then the great crowd fell to their faces, their bodies writhing and twisting.

For a long time this weird, grotesque sight filled Leybren's eyes. Then, from a command of the queen, the Indians rose and threw their arms high in the air and chanted: "He has come! Martikatasi has come to lead us to the land of food and plenty! He that we have awaited since the cycles of the moon have been three hundred fold, he has come. Our God—our leader."

**T**HE chanting cry rose to a shrill, insane scream. It was powerful in its effect—weird—fascinating in its very savagery. Leybren stood, transfixed at the sight, not knowing exactly what he was supposed to do. It seemed to him that a god meriting such homage should say a few words, especially when this god was facing a struggle for life wherein the only hope lay in his power over the Indians.

So he walked to the edge of the top step, threw his arms high in the air, and cried out:

"Ye children of Chaacom, of Kanchichici, of Mayapan, of Kukulcan, who have lived since the first cycle of the moon when the earth was a vast land of desolation, hear me and listen to my words! I have come to lead ye forth, to make again your race the great race of the world.

"And if ye follow me, life and abundance will be yours; if ye do not, the sun will burn your crops and ye will die for lack of food, and desolation will visit ye.

"And your city will be a ruins, so that the god of life, wishing to hide the sight from the eyes of the sun and the moon, will cause grass to grow over your Temple, and rock and dirt to cover your city from that day.

"Follow me and I will lead to the glory that once was yours."

He stopped and let his arms fall to his sides. It was about the third speech he had ever made in his life—the second having been in front of Esterais—and he was surprised at the melodious quality of his voice and its carrying power, which had borne his words to all parts of the great crowd far below.

For a moment a deathlike silence followed his words; then from the Indians came an answering dirge, as if from childhood they had been prepared with certain words for Martikatasi when he came. The words came in a chant that was monotonous and ghastly in its wailing quality.

"You have come, O Martikatasi, and we will follow you, that we may have food and riches, and that our cities may again be great and cover all the land even to the land of the waters."

LEYBREN raised his arms to the skies again, and then turned and with Esterais entered the Temple. The excitement of the scene outside passed at once, and his face again was set and hard. His eyes looked around him coldly and penetratingly.

His reception by the Mayans had been successful, but now he was to face Kankomo. Without any doubt he felt that in dealing with this cunning Indian, he was not dealing with a primitive soul who could be moved by mere superstition of a god.

The front chamber of the Temple was a long colonnaded hall whose twelve sculptured columns were painted with a dazzling brilliancy of

riotous color. Through this long hall the queen's procession filed, and then they came out into a large room, filled with priests. At the rear of the room, against the far wall, was a huge altar of stone, supported from the floor by small statues of human figures, with hands raised above their heads, sustaining the weight of a great flat rock. This was the top of the sacrificial altar.

LEYBREN'S eyes took this in at a glance. He saw the priests standing near the stone. Two of them wore strange masks and their bodies were covered by long, purple robes. The huge knife each held told Leybren that these were the priests of the sacrifice.

And standing between them, his body broken and his eyes glassy, was Thorton Hillright. He was wearing a long gold robe, interlaced with white, and his hair seemed to have been combed down with some kind of oil and his long white beard was clean. His preparation for the sacrifice had been complete.

But his body seemed to have shriveled up and his face, around his eyes, was haggard and drawn.

His eyes saw Leybren, but they failed to register either recognition or surprise. He seemed like a condemned man, who in the hour of waiting for death, had started to die, and only the shell of a broken body remained.

Leybren signaled him with his eyes and the old man's body straightened a little and color came back slowly to his face. Leybren embraced the situation at a glance. Kankomo was there, seated on the right of the stone chair where Esterais had taken her place. Behind the high priest stood several gold robed men who wore masks of serpents over their faces.

The entrance of Esterais in the



room was the occasion for more kneeling on the part of the priests, but this time Leybren did not play his little act of being Martikatasi.

He realized grimly that the time for action had finally come. Every priest in that room, except those that had come with him and Esterais, was loyal to Kankomo and nothing he might say or do would change their attitude.

Leybren had no time to try to figure out just what Kankomo's plan of attack would be, but the cunning look the high priest gave him indicated that he knew what Leybren planned and had prepared himself for the test of power that was at hand.

**T**HE priests suddenly started an inhuman chanting—the chant of death. Far down at the foot of the great stairs that ran up to the Temple, the Indians took up the chant, and it rose to a terrifying crescendo. The two purple robed executioners had picked Hillright up and laid him on the sacrificial stone. Now they turned and looked at Esterais, as if awaiting the signal for the sacrifice.

Weirdly, like the chant of thousands of ghosts, the wailing song of death continued, and then came the beating of drums on the terrace in front of the Temple. The drums and the death dirge held Leybren with a strange power. It was barbaric—savage—brutal. He looked at Esterais. Her eyes were blazing and the fine nostrils of her nose rose and fell, as if her very soul were in that threnody.

The robe had been stripped from the body of Hillright, and the old and broken body lay exposed on the slab, helpless and inert. The weary face stared lifelessly up at the ceiling.

Leybren came to himself with a

spring. The priests had raised their knives, and as they did, his hand went for his automatic.

Then shrilly, over the noise of the chanters and the drums came Esterais' voice.

"Martikatasi," she cried. "The god sent by our fathers would speak."

The chanting of the priests ceased and a silence fell over the room. Outside the Temple, the drums continued to beat and the unearthly chanting rose to a frenzied roar.

Esterais was standing in front of her throne, her body leaning forward a little and her face pale. In her lovely eyes was a look of determination—of power and authority that caused the priests of Kankomo to stare at her helplessly. Even the purple robed executioners let the knives drop at their sides, and their eyes flew to Kankomo.

The high priest was on his feet with a snarl of rage.

"Karaiti," he cried, "the god of the harvest, of food, of life commands this sacrifice! Strike, that the blood of the evil one may run down the steps of the Temple to appease the anger of Karaiti."

The voice of Kankomo brought his priests to their senses, and the two wielding the knives of death turned and raised them over their heads. The knives cut through the air and came down in a flashing arc toward the body—the inert, helpless body of the unconscious Hillright.

**B**UT as they did a leaping flame of white smoke shot through the air. The roar that followed filled the room. The knife of the first priest fell to the floor and the priest screamed in anguish and grabbed his wrist. Again the leaping flash of white smoke and again the explosion of Leybren's automatic, and the knife of the second priest was on the floor. The man doubled up and fell face

forward against the sacrificial altar.

Leybren had backed to the throne and was standing to the right of Kankomo, watching the high priest from the corners of his eyes. He was breathlessly aware of the turmoil and consternation that had followed the shots. Even the beating of the drums and the wailing dirge had ceased outside. A silence, oppressive and ominous, followed.

Then suddenly Leybren felt something hard pressed in his back, and he heard a voice behind him, a voice that spoke a cold, precise English.

"Well done, Martikatasi," the voice said, "but drop your automatic. Your little game is over."

Leybren's body stiffened and the muscles around his mouth contracted. Without looking around he knew from whom that voice came. He had heard it many times before.

It was Von Schlossman!

## CHAPTER XI

### *The Battle For the Palace*

A COMPLETE picture with every detail fitted in perfectly flashed through Leybren's mind when the voice of Von Schlossman came to him out of the deadly silence that followed the reports of his automatic. Ever since Kankomo had called upon him to disrobe, he had suspected somewhere in the background the master hand of Von Schlossman.

How the German had got into the city remained a mystery, but now it was certain that he had. Finding Leybren hailed as the god Martikatasi, he had been able to convince Kankomo that he could destroy this new god that threatened the power and the hopes of the high priest.

It was all very plain: every move Kankomo had made now showed the advice and cunning of Von Schlossman.

But knowing those things were of little aid to Leybren as he stood near the altar with Von Schlossman's gun in his back. Von Schlossman had been one of the three masked priests behind Kankomo. Whether the other two were the *mestizos* that had escaped with the German, Leybren had no way, at that moment, to discover. If they were, it was three armed men against one, and that one was standing in front of the three with a gun stuck in his back.

SUDDENLY Leybren's body twisted a little to the right—just enough to throw Von Schlossman's aim off, and then he was on the floor of the room with the swiftness of a tiger. The twist of the body was an old trick when a gun was in a man's back; it was flirting with certain death if the twist and the subsequent movement of the body were not done with the very speed of lightning. But it had worked now!

Von Schlossman's gun roared and the bullet cut over Leybren's back and struck the marble wall with a sharp twang. And then before Von Schlossman could fire again, Leybren's arms had gone around his legs.

Together the two white men went to the floor struggling, fighting, kicking and gasping. In his struggle Leybren had no chance to see what was going on around him. He heard screams and the sounds of bodies crashing back and forth. He had no time to see if the other two masked men were the *mestizos*, for his one job was concerned with getting his arms around Von Schlossman's body, so that he could crush the German to the floor and overpower him.

Something crashed on his head. It was a sickening, paralyzing blow, and for a moment every part of his

body seemed numb. Pains shot down his neck and over his back; and in that split second, Von Schlossman threw Leybren's body over on its back and sent a crash right down on his jaw. Through blurred eyes, Leybren saw the tall German reach for his automatic, which had fallen on the floor.

With a shake of the head, a violent, desperate shake that sought to halt his fleeting senses, Leybren was on his knees. Carefully, with perfect aim, he shot out his right, throwing behind the blow his last remaining ounce of strength. It caught Von Schlossman flush on the jaw. He went face forward to the floor, an inert, helpless mass.

**M**EN were screaming over Leybren. He rose to his feet unsteadily, and as he did, bodies hit him, struggling, snarling, fighting bodies. He was carried along with them, unable to stop the onrush, or to fight against them. He was crushed against the wall. And then suddenly he seemed to be alone. He let his head clear before opening his eyes, and when he did, he gasped in amazement.

The first thing he saw was Thornton Hillright, his white hair and beard caked with blood, his body naked as it had been on the sacrificial stone, standing a little way from him, swinging one of the huge knives that the priests in purple had held in their hands. The old man's eyes gleamed with diabolical fury. Around him lay priests, with their bodies cut and bleeding.

Beyond Hillright, he saw Sorais, wielding the other knife, keeping the onrushing priests back from Esterais, who remained standing near her throne, her face calm and her eyes watching the scene coldly.

And on the floor, near the throne, where Leybren had grappled with

Von Schlossman, lay the tall German, still unconscious from the blow to his jaw. Lying near him, on his back, with head crashed in by a blow from Hillright's knife, was one of the *mestizos* that had escaped with Von Schlossman. An automatic lay near the body.

**W**ITH a leap, Leybren got into action again. He dove for the automatic, reaching it with his fingers, just as a great yell came from the front room of the Temple, and the next moment warriors carrying spears horizontally over their heads, burst through the entrance of the altar room.

Leybren was at the side of Esterais, and he stood with his body protecting the queen. Slowly, and with deliberate and careful aim, he fired at the onrush of Mayan warriors. Four times the gun in his hand spit fire and four warriors crumpled to the floor, writhing and twisting. The barking, roaring weapon of death caused the others to stop, and some turned and fled. But the voice of Kankomo, coming from somewhere back of the warriors, caused their ranks to close up again.

"The other room," Esterais said to Leybren. "We must force our way out there, for from there we can escape through a secret passageway to the palace."

Leybren smiled grimly. They might as well have been miles from this passageway, for the warriors were massed in the doorway, their spears poised overhead. Behind them the voice of the high priest rose, exhorting them forward.

Sharp, quick orders came from Leybren to Hillright and Sorais and their followers. The work of Hillright and Sorais with the huge knives had cleaned the room of all the priests loyal to Kankomo. And then Leybren, flanked on each side

by Hillright and Sorais, forced a flying wedge; with Esterais at their rear, protected by her priests. Leybren fired the two remaining cartridges from the automatic. Two warriors crumpled to the floor. The others hesitated, their eyes stark with terror at this strange weapon that sent death through the air so mysteriously.

And in that split second of hesitation, the flying wedge hit them. Hillright and Sorais hacked and wielded the executioners' knives with a fury that sent the warriors back in dismay. And in the center of the wedge was Leybren, his right and left shooting out like pistons, sending warriors to the floor before they could get their large and unwieldy spears into action.

LIKE an irresistible moving object, the wedge plowed through the warriors. Far to the rear could be heard the shrill, enraged voice of Kankomo. But now the words of the high priest had no effect on the bewildered and fear-stricken soldiers, and the few that remained suddenly broke rank and ran.

"This way, quick," Leybren heard Esterais call to him. "Kankomo will return with more warriors."

He turned. The queen had left the flying wedge and was running between two brilliantly painted columns, with Hillright and Sorais and the priests following her. They came to the far wall. Esterais touched something with her fingers, and slowly the wall opened. A great marble slab moved outward on the floor, disclosing the entrance to a secret passageway.

Esterais entered the passageway and Hillright and Sorais and the others followed after her. Leybren waited outside. He had slipped another clip in his own automatic, having thrown away the one picked

up from the body of the *mestizo*. He started to enter the passageway, but as he did, there was a swish of air over his head and a spear clanged against the wall with a loud metallic ring.

And then through the columns came a horde of new warriors, this time bloodthirsty and unterrified by the sight of a weapon that spat death like a serpent spat venom at its victims.

LEYBREN backed against the wall. His gun brought down the leader of the onrushing horde. Twice more his gun barked and the two men behind the fallen leader fell face forward. Again the gun roared. Leybren was watching the last of the priests dart into the opening, and when they had disappeared, he emptied his gun into the bodies of the warriors and made a dive for the passageway. Slowly the huge marble rock started inward. Spears hit it with sharp, ringing sounds; the brown bodies of the warriors grabbed for the marble slab, but slowly, relentlessly, it closed, crushing bodies with it.

Fifteen minutes later Leybren and Esterais and their followers entered an underground room of the palace. They mounted a dark flight of stairs, following it for some distance; and then taking a narrow stairs that branched off from the main steps, finally coming out into the cerise colored room, the front room of the palace.

Sorais and Hillright, both grim and silent, went to the great stone doors of the palace and Sorais peered out through a small hole in the wall that was placed there for just such an emergency.

"Kankomo is surrounding the palace," Sorais reported. "His warriors are coming across the Court of Locusts below."

Esterais laughed coldly and in her laugh there was no weakness, not the faintest trace of fear.

"His warriors can beat their bodies against the walls of my palace," she said, "but never will they enter. We have food and supplies here to last us for many nights and days."

**B**UT after that," Leybren questioned.

"Sometime the food must give out, and sometime Kankomo may succeed in breaking through a secret passage."

Esterais looked at him and smiled wearily.

"Thou dost not speak as a god, Martikatasi," she said with a sigh.

"Thou speakest as one of us, who in time will get hungry and weary, and long for death to relieve us of our sadness."

Leybren's mouth was grimly set and his eyes were narrowed.

"I speak as one, Esterais, who is willing to die for your beauty," he answered. "And if I can do that, I believe that then will I be a god."

Her hand reached out and gripped his, and her eyes looked at him sadly.

"Thou art a god, Martikatasi," she said, "but I have led you to destruction. I did not realize the power of Kankomo until too late. I did not believe that all the warriors that have fought for me so long would go to him. There are a few servants in the palace, and a few old men, but we would be cut down like corn at harvest should we venture out on those stairs."

"We would be if we walked out now," Leybren replied. "Kankomo is in command of the city. But when night comes we can attack with some hope of success."

"Attack with a few servants?" Esterais laughed. "I am afraid Martikatasi, that you underestimate

the fighting qualities of my warriors."

"I am depending on the faith of your warriors," Leybren said. "Right now a new Martikatasi has come to your people and if my blow to the jaw didn't bust his face completely, I believe you will see him being paraded very soon as the god you all have awaited these cycles of time."

A strange look came into Esterais' eyes. A sad smile lit her face and her hand pressed Leybren's firmly.

"There is only one Martikatasi for me," she murmured, "and you are he."

"I hope you have made no mistake," Leybren said quietly. "The first thing we better do is to take a count of our forces and see just how many men we can count on."

They went into the throne room and sat around a low stone table that had served as counsel table for Esterais in her meetings with the priests and wise men of the city. The table was a large flat stone, held up from the floor by a number of small human statues, as was the great sacrificial stone that had embraced the body of Thorton Hillright.

**T**HE change that had come over Hillright was almost a miracle. As if a cord had been cut and a great curtain had fallen suddenly, it seemed that the twenty years of shrinking and brutality and terror had been shut out from his eyes forever. There was no fear left in his clear eyes. Again he was a man, quick of mind and erect of body. He had tasted freedom and that one small taste had brought back all the courage, all the desire to live that he had possessed before his twenty years of a living hell.

And while Sorais and the faithful priests went through the palace



gathering such servants as had remained, and checking up on the number of spears and men available for an attack on the forces of Kankomo that night, Esterais and Leybren and Hillright sat around the conference table and considered the situation they were facing.

On the whole, their plight was neither favorable nor hopeful. For over an hour they discussed it from every angle, and they were still so engaged when Sorais brought back the report that Kankomo was parading a white man through the streets of the city and proclaiming him the great god Martikatasi.

**T**HE irony of the situation caused Leybren to smile bitterly. Now it looked like a struggle to see who was to successfully pose as Martikatasi. Undoubtedly, as far as prestige and victory were concerned, Von Schlossman was the successful Martikatasi for the time being.

But there was little irony in the position Leybren and Hillright found themselves, with the queen and her few faithful followers. There might be food for a few weeks in the palace, but at some time that food would give out. And by that time Kankomo could be in supreme command of the city.

Both Leybren and Hillright impressed upon Esterais the need for striking quickly before her people believed her dead and before Kankomo could proclaim himself king with the aid of the new Martikatasi.

Esterais saw the logic of their arguments, and was ready and willing to leave the whole matter to Leybren. For a long time she was unable to accept Hillright, who but a few hours before had been Timkanti, the evil one, a dirty groveling human being that even the dogs in the street bit when he appeared. Slowly his keen mind and his power-

ful personality won her over and she listened to him, a little bewildered and amazed, with almost the same confidence that she listened to Leybren.

Sorais had rounded up some thirty men in all and had armed them with spears and knives, many of the weapons coming from the royal kitchen. Most of the thirty were old and trusted servants of the palace, men little accustomed to battle. Theirs was a sorry looking army to go forth and fight the powerful Mayan warriors that were now under the banner of Kankomo and Von Schlossman.

There was, however, one thing in favor of the thirty priests and servants. Old as they were, they were ready and willing to die for their queen, and their love for her made them soldiers that would fight with an insane fury. But the insane fury, however sincere, of thirty men could avail little against the strength and brutality of the hundreds of men Kankomo commanded.

Leybren spent a great part of the morning examining the vast rooms and passageways that lay under the palace in the center of the pyramid on which the structure sat. Great store rooms held an abundance of food, and a spring of clear water ran through that one of the rooms which acted as a sort of refrigerator for the food supplies.

**T**HEN in the afternoon he went to the front room of the palace and spent a long time watching the forces of Kankomo mobilizing at the base of the Temple pyramid. Twice he saw Von Schlossman, clothed in a gold robe, being paraded in front of the Indians as the new god.

The German was received with great shouts. The Indians fell to their faces in tribute to the new Martikatasi. Late in the afternoon

Leybren saw a small Indian being led to the stairs of the Temple, and after a time there came the weird chanting wail he had heard just before the scheduled sacrifice of Hill-right. Kankomo was not forgetting the god Karaiti, and he was leading a native victim to the Temple to be murdered.

This move carried with it greater dangers than anything else. The sight of blood, the sacrifice to the god Karaiti would work the Mayans up to a frenzy of lust that would make it impossible to win any of them away from Kankomo. It promised to make any pitched battle a short, bloody affair, with the few loyal servants of the queen slaughtered before they could even get down the great stairway that led from the Temple to the ground.

The hours of the afternoon passed slowly. With each passing moment Leybren realized the utter hopelessness of their situation. When the sacrifice to Karaiti would be completed and the bloody body of the poor victim thrown down the stairs of the Temple to appease the god of the harvest, the city would be in such a state that any attack would be almost foolhardy.

But as the hours wore on a plan, daring and dangerous, began to form in Leybren's mind. A grim smile came to his face as he thought of it, but he kept his own counsel and waited for darkness.

## CHAPTER XII

### *Night and Death*

**N**IGHT fell over the city with an orgy of barbaric ferocity that reached heights of savage frenzy. The sacrifice to Karaiti had been made and the body of the victim thrown down the long stairs, where his blood flowed to satisfy

the anger of the god Karaiti. The sight of blood had acted as a goad of insane fury to the Indians.

The chant of death, which had been a low, monotonous roar that morning, was now a screaming, piercing dirge. Everywhere in the city great bonfires lighted the squares. Around these blazing fires Indians gyrated and whirled and yelled until they fell exhausted on the ground.

The festival of Karaiti was under way!

**A**ND over it all, supreme and confident, stalked the tall form of Kankomo with the gold robed figure of Von Schlossman at his side as the god Martikatasi. Everywhere they went people fell prone on their faces and proclaimed the new god, and already the murmur had gone through the crowd that Kankomo had been ordered by Martikatasi to be their king.

Around the base of the palace pyramid stood the warriors of Kankomo, with their spears ready and their bodies alert and tense. It was as if they expected, with the falling of night, the great doors of the Temple to open that they might dash up the stairs and enter the house that through all their lives had been the great House of Silence to them.

The warriors took no part in the celebration. Grim faced and stolid, they stood their watch, waiting for the first sign of battle; and among the Indians that groveled and yelled and fell on their faces was the expectation that the night would yet end in a great battle. It was to be hoped for; it would mean more blood and more hysterical excitement.

At the door of the Temple Esterais stood with Leybren, and through the holes in the thick walls they silently watched the mad threnody of the Indians.

Finally Esterais said: "My serv-

ants will die for me, but it is useless. We have no hope now. Kankomo has wisely chosen the night of the festival to Karaiti, and my poor people, insane with the celebration, know not what they are doing."

"If we wait, Esterais," Leybren said, "tomorrow will be too late. Kankomo will be declared king and the palace will be stormed. Your doors are of stone, but time and men can break them down. If we strike swiftly, while your people are in the fury of the feast there may yet be hope."

**E**STERAIS' hand rested on Leybren's arm. Her face was drawn and tired looking.

"We will strike when you wish, Martikatasi," she said. "I will go forth and lead the few of my faithful followers. If death must be mine, it is my wish that I die at the hands of my own people, whom I love."

"You will remain in this palace," Leybren broke in curtly. "What fighting there is to be done, will be done by myself and the men."

Esterais patted his hand, smiled and said nothing.

Leybren turned and with Esterais walked back into the throne room. Hillright was there waiting for him. He still held the huge executioner's knife in his hand.

"The sooner we start," Hillright said to Leybren, "the better it will be."

Leybren turned to Esterais.

"Sorais will lead your faithful few into the battle," he explained. "Hillright and myself, with five of your best men, will go forth into the city while the battle rages."

A sudden terror-stricken fear came into Esterais' eyes.

"You go forth into the city," she gasped. "O, Martikatasi, they will kill you—"

"No quicker there than on the

stairs," Leybren broke in quickly. "While Sorais and his men attack from the front we will attack from the rear."

"There are a thousand warriors out there," Esterais said. "Of what avail will you and the small army of Sorais be against such a force? You will be swallowed up in death—and then I will be alone. If you go, I go with you!"

Leybren could not repulse with a curt order the pitiful, pleading look that came into the blue eyes of Esterais. Her white face with its alluring beauty was pale and sad; her body, graceful and delicate looking in the long, white gown she wore, seemed to slump forward brokenly.

Taking her hands, Leybren said: "You must put your faith in me, Esterais. We are not going into the city wildly. We are going to wipe out the evil that has crazed your people. We are going to bring your people back to you, but if we die in the attempt, know that we have died for you and that the death we experience will hold no terrors—no fears."

**T**EARS came to Esterais' eyes. Her hands went to the face of Leybren, and the soft white fingers traced lines on his cheeks.

"Go," she said softly, "and if death finds you I will be at your side. Together we will go into the vast vale of night where have gone those of my blood since time started the cycle of the moon. Go, and know that I will be with you, even though my body remains in the Temple. Go with my love that will be even greater in death."

Leybren's body swayed. A feeling came over him that he had never experienced before. He felt humbled before the very beauty of Esterais; yet as his body swayed, it seemed

that those eyes, blue and sad and eternal, held him up, as if they contained a power, a strength greater than any human power.

For a long time—ages it seemed to Leybren, his eyes were held by the sheer beauty of Esterais, held in a trance from which he could not break away. But suddenly he heard Hillright's voice telling him that darkness had fallen, and with a quick turn of his body Leybren swerved and walked away from Esterais. He did not dare to look back at her face.

A half hour later the great stone door of the palace opened, and to the astonished eyes of the warriors at the bottom of the white stairs, Esterais' small army burst forth, led by Sorais.

**C**ARRYING spears and knives they advanced down the marble steps in a wide thin line—advanced slowly and relentlessly toward the warriors who had been waiting throughout the day for their appearance.

The great bonfires of the city cast a flickering, grotesque light over the stairs, a light that made the small army led by Sorais look like toy figures of brown moving forward on a lighted stage.

For a full minute the warriors of Kankomo stared at the pitiful little army. The very absurdity of the attack startled them, but suddenly from behind came the shrill voice of Kankomo—now eager and triumphant in its brutality.

Kankomo, with Von Schlossman, stood a little to the rear of the soldiers, directing their movements with sharp, vicious commands. His army, spurred on by his voice, leaped for the stairs.

And then the battle began.

But Kankomo's warriors did not cut Sorais' men down like corn at harvest time. There were two good

reasons why they didn't. In the first place they met a silent, stubborn fury at the hands of the few faithfuls of the queen; fury that refused to give ground and that thought only of slaying as many of Kankomo's men as possible before death should strike them.

**A**LSO their position on the stairs helped a great deal. They were shoving their spears downward and slashing with their knives from a superior position, and their flailing weapons struck before the enemy could charge advantageously and destroy them.

Yet despite this advantage in position, despite the silent fury that drove Sorais' men on, theirs was a losing battle. It was only a question of time. The first onslaught of Kankomo's army was repulsed and bodies of Indians lay strewn over the stairs.

The second onslaught met with the same result, but among those bodies that lay in death were a number of Sorais' small force; and each onslaught was weakening them.

While the battle raged on the marble stairway, raged grimly and silently with only the clash of spears and knives breaking the weird silence of the night, and the fire from the great piles of wood scattered around the city cast its yellow, flickering rays over the gruesome sight, Leybren and Hillright, followed by five powerful Indians, were running through an underground passage that led from the Temple to the center of the city. In the hands of the five Indians were long *machete* shaped knives. Leybren carried his automatic, with four bullets left in the clip, and Hillright was lugging the huge executioner's knife with which he had wreaked such damage in the altar room.

On through the pitch black darkness they dashed, giving little heed

to what they might crash against. They came to a stairway and took the steps up two at a time. Dashing through the stone door at its end, they emerged into the night at a point near the river, some two hundred yards from where the battle was raging on the stairs of the Temple.

To the right and left of them the great fires were burning and Indians were moving around, silently now, their eyes turned toward the Temple where the hideous clash of spears and knives rent the air. There was no hope of hiding or slipping up to the battle lines on the part of Leybren and his men; so they dashed openly, fearlessly across the Court of Columns, waving their long knives and shouting in stentorian refrain.

When they got to the rear of Kankomo's men they saw that the thin line of Sorais' army was slowly breaking and, spurred on by victory, Kankomo's warriors were pushing their way up the stairs, intent upon murdering the remaining bodyguard of the queen. In a few minutes it would all be over.

**B**UT suddenly the air was rent with savage yells, yells that broke over the din of the battle, and then came two sharp reports from Leybren's automatic. The two captains leading the men on the stairs grabbed their throats and fell backward, rolling awkwardly down the stairs.

Then with the fury of demons, the five Indians with the long *machete* knives were up the stairs cutting and slashing Kankomo's warriors from the rear. Dazed and bewildered by this sudden assault behind, the warriors turned. They tried to fight back but the five knives cut them down as if they were straws of wheat.

While the fierce battle raged, Leybren and Hillright were dart-

ing behind the battle lines surrounding the base of the pyramid. Hillright, with the huge knife high in the air, was leading the way, his eyes gleaming like two dark burning coals.

With a piercing yell of rage, Hillright made a flying leap at a body of warriors standing around two men—Kankomo and Von Schlossman. His knife came down in a vicious curve and one of the warriors went to the ground, his body sliced in half from the right shoulder down.

**A**ND in the next second Leybren was in the midst of a milling mass of brown bodies. He saw the knife of Hillright go up in the air: he heard it whiz down again with a sickening crunching of bones and torn flesh. Then he saw the professor make a leap for the tall figure of Kankomo, who had stood surrounded by his warriors, watching with fear and fury the unexpected retreat of his army.

Then Leybren had time to see no more.

Two powerful bodies came down on him. His automatic barked twice from his crouching position, and the bodies rolled off him, lifeless. He was on his feet. A searing, belching flash of orange red shot through the night at him, but he was diving to meet the flash of red before it had died away.

His body hit Von Schlossman, and as it did, his right shot out and knocked the gun from the German's hand. Von Schlossman's left came up in a paralyzing uppercut and caught him on the jaw. His senses reeled and his knees started to buckle under him. He grabbed for Von Schlossman's body to hold on until the effects of the blow wore off. Like pummeling jabs from a machine, Von Schlossman's fists went



into his ribs, trying to break the hold.

Leybren's brain cleared and he jumped back. He shot his right out and caught Von Schlossman behind the ear. The blow was delivered with all the power in Leybren's body, but the tall German shook his head, groaned a little, and then bored in. Back and forth across the narrow space the two white men fought, fought for life and death.

The Indians looked on in awe and amazement at the two gods fighting, fighting in a way they had never before seen. No one made a move to interfere. The great struggle on the stairs was neglected. The clash of steel could still be heard, but no attention was paid to it.

Like two beasts of the forest the two men fought back and forth across the plaza. Leybren did not see the body of Kankomo lying at his feet; he did not know that Hill-right had dashed up the Temple stairs to take part in the battle that was still raging, a battle now made more grim by the fact that Kankomo's men had been reinforced, and slowly but surely the five Indians with the *machete* knives were being backed up the stairs toward the Temple doors, leaving a welter of bodies in their backward retreat.

**L**EYBREN knew nothing, save that in front of him was the man that had tried to kill him, the man who aimed to destroy the power and the life of the lovely Esterais.

A hard right from Von Schlossman caught Leybren on the neck and knocked him back. With the savage lunge of a tiger Von Schlossman was on Leybren, his fingers reaching for the throat and his knee looming up in a hard kick to the groin. Leybren ducked and his left shot out, burying itself in Von Schlossman's stomach.

The German doubled up and his hands went for his waist, and as he did Leybren, with every ounce of power left in his body, sent his right, in a blow that started from his toes, to the jaw of Von Schlossman. There was a sickening crack and the German rolled forward on his face, his body crumpled and inert.

Leybren stood like one dazed and stunned. He was conscious that around him Indian faces were raised with awe—looking at the Martikatasi that had won.

Then there came to his stunned senses the sound of a voice, clear and distinct above the noise of the battle. His body turned as if a shock of electricity had shot through it.

**S**TANDING at the entrance of the Temple, her arms outstretched to the battling warriors below her, was Esterais.

"O, my people," her voice pleaded, "why dost thou slay each other for naught? If it be thy will that your queen shall die, slay me and end this slaughter that will suck the blood from the veins of my people."

Her voice carried to all parts of the great stairs and down to where Leybren was standing.

With a quick movement Leybren reached down. He lifted the body of Schlossman over his head and pushed his way through the crowd. He had seen the dead body of Kankomo but he paid no attention to it. On the stairs the carnage of death had suddenly ceased at the words of Esterais. With Schlossman hanging over his shoulder, Leybren made his way over the mass of dead bodies and up to where Esterais stood.

"Martikatasi," she cried. "Martikatasi, you still live!"

Leybren turned and stood at her side. His gold laced robe was in tatters. The warriors on the stairs

—the great crowd of celebrating Indians, stared up at him silently.

**W**ITH a mighty heave of his arms Leybren raised the body of Von Schlossman, still covered by the robe of Martikatasi, high over his head, and then he hurled the body of the German down the stairs into the midst of the soldiers of Kankomo.

"Martikatasi speaks, thou unfaithful," he called out in a voice that sent a chill through the crowd. "Ye wouldst slay thine own queen. Look yonder on the floor of stone and ye will see the body of the traitor, Kankomo, the man that led ye from the queen that loves ye and who would lead ye to happiness. Look at that body in death. Below my feet I have hurled the white man who would come to steal thy gold and thy jewels, who would pose as Martikatasi and scheme with Kankomo to destroy your city. Those that defy the queen will die, for now Martikatasi speaks."

His speech produced an electric effect in the crowd. Already the word had passed out that Kankomo was dead, and the presence of Esterais on the stairs had worked another wonder.

With cries of rage, the former warriors of Kankomo and the Indians below the pyramid seized the body of Von Schlossman and carried it away.

"My people," Esterais cried. "*My people!*"

And then a great hush fell over the night and every man, woman and child in the great throng fell forward on their faces in humble homage to the queen that had risked her life to speak to them.

In that silence Leybren stood by the side of Esterais. He felt her hand reach for his and heard her whisper softly: "Martikatasi."

Three days later Leybren and Hillright stood on the far side of the mountain, beyond the twin peaks, at the edge of the great forest that led to the jungle river and to civilization. Five Indians were carrying a boat on their shoulders, a canoe hollowed from the trunk of a tree, and other Indians were carrying an abundance of supplies for Leybren and Hillright's trip back to Campeche. The Indians would take them as far as the river and then they would return to the city.

Esterais was there, still clothed in the long white gown. Her face was sad and her eyes looked at Leybren pleadingly.

"Thou returnest to thy people," she said softly. "Thou hast said thou art not a god, yet thou came and slew my enemies. And now thou leavest me forever!"

**L**EYBREN looked at her, and his lips were white and tightly pressed together.

"Esterais," he pleaded, "your face is white and your eyes are blue and your hair is yellow. You are of my race, and if you return to my country I shall make you happy, a happiness born of love."

She smiled wearily and her eyes moistened, but she shook her head slowly.

"Countless ages ago," she said, "my people came out of that great land of waters from a country far, far away. The legend says that they were white and blue-eyed and that they found the race of brown Indians and taught them the art of building great temples and of planting crops. And the Indians heralded them as their kings. Even then my people awaited the coming of Martikatasi, who would lead them back to a glory that had died.

"And thus must I return to my city and await the coming of Marti-

katasi, for now the people with brown skins are my people and I am their queen and I must await the prophecy of countless ages ago. Go thou to thy people and be happy, and because I wish only that thou be happy, take a small gift from me."

**S**HE turned and motioned to two Mayans behind her. They came forth, carrying boxes. Esterais took these and handed them to Leybren and Hillright.

They were boxes made of gold, and when Leybren lifted the lids he saw the dazzling brilliance of hundreds of beautiful jewels—rubies, diamonds, sapphires.

"You white men fight and die for such things," Esterais said. "Thus they must bring happiness to you and you shall take them with you to remember me and the love that I cannot give you, but which is as much a part of me as life itself. Go now, and please do not look back."

Leybren turned slowly. The look

in Esterais' eyes told him the pain more words from him would give her.

He followed the Indians carrying the canoe down to the edge of the great forest; he followed as if walking in a trance. He was not conscious of the gold box in his hands.

He was conscious only that on the side of the mountain stood Esterais, watching him go out of her life forever.

**O**NCE, only once, he paused to look back.

That was from the great forest trees, where she could not see him, and as he looked back, he saw her white form outlined against the mountain side, her arms outstretched towards him in humble pleading.

Then, slowly, her white form was lost in the mist that was falling over the mountain, and Leybren slowly walked on through the shade of the sylvan forest.

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# BLACK DOCKS



*His back to the wall, Bennet could only be attacked from the front*

## *Desperate Combat in North Borneo As a Lone White Man Faces Murderous Singhalese and Arab Foes*

By CHARLES GREEN

*Author of "Scared to Death," "Listen, Pal," etc.*

**F**OR some minutes now, ever since he had left the fat Malay's hell-hole, Bennet suspected that he was being followed. He tried an experiment. Turned two corners, traversed a stinking, narrow alley, then paused to light a cigarette. Yes, the men were still behind him—

Skillful shadowing. They moved with the deadly efficiency of a tiger stalking its prey—vanishing in dark doorways whenever he carelessly glanced over his shoulder, reappearing again when they thought his

suspensions were lulled. And ever gaining, closing in the distance between them.

Bennet shrugged and slushed on through the mud. He wasn't worried. True—they'd cut your throat in the native quarter of Sandakan, on the North Borneo coast, for the price of a drink; but Bennet didn't have it. And felt himself he could damn near do some throat-slitting for one. He was in a state of mind when some merry hell would be a welcome diversion.

A black, hot night. Breathless.

The sticky, maddening sort of heat. A putrid stench rose from those crooked native streets.

Garbage, filth—certain smells peculiar to the East.

He passed men crouching in the low, arched doorways. Here a half-naked Dyak, with burning, feverish eyes. White man's liquor had dragged him out of the jungle; in his blood now, he would never return.

There a rat-faced Singhalese. A Malay, a Suhaeli, a Hindu, an Arab, a Chinaman. Half-breeds, quarter-breeds. Riffraff of Asia. Creatures of the night, lurking there in those dark doorways, waiting for some deviltry that Allah or Buddha or heathen gods might send their way.

Some recognized Bennet and voiced greetings to which he replied in their own language. Others just appraised him hopefully—and slunk further back in the doorways when they read the mocking invitation in his eyes. A jackal does not attack the gray wolf.

ON the edge of the quarter, where a steep hill winded up along a brick wall to the twinkling red-and-white lights of the government buildings, Bennet made his stand. For the men behind him no longer made secrecy of their intentions. Running now, closing in quickly.

He leaned against the wall, lighted another cigarette and watched them approach. *Pat-pat-pat* of bare feet; ghastly, grayish blurs of their sarongs. He waited, curiosity his only emotion. Swiftly, the grayish blurs took human shape. One man, another, a third. Still others following. Singhalese—muscular black devils from Ceylon.

Five altogether, they ringed him in a silent, sinister semi-circle. Threatening without threats. Simply stood there, three facing him and one on either side. A strange tableau it

made: the white man leaning carelessly against the wall, cigarette dangling from his lips, his bronzed face insolently nonchalant, mockingly indifferent; the five black men surrounding him—statues of ebony. None of the men moving a muscle, uttering a sound.

But in spite of his air of indifference, Bennet's brain raced. He was puzzled. This wasn't an ordinary back-stabbing affair with whatever he might have in his pockets as excuse. Too many men, in the first place—and the wrong technique. What was it then? What were they waiting for?

"Ah!" Bennet said softly.

Another man joined the group—a well-dressed, bearded Arab. Evidently he had walked while the others ran. He pushed through the semi-circle and bowed from the lips.

"Greetings, my friend," he said in Arabic.

"Greetings," said Bennet. "Has Allah been kind to Yaman Ben Harim since we last met?"

"More than he justly deserves. And has fortune smiled upon thee, my friend?"

"Only as much as he justly deserves," Bennet parodied, smiling faintly.

BOTH spoke softly, courteously. But they knew each other. Bennet knew Yaman as a cold-blooded, murderous devil, with a reputation for fiendish cruelty, for sheer deviltry second only to his master, Hafriz el Rab—the white-bearded patriarch who was cursed, feared and hated from Port Said to Cape Town, from Morocco to the Solomons: gun-runner, slaver, pirate.

And Yaman knew Bennet as a strange white man who frequented many places, who talked little but knew much, and who could match even Hafriz el Rab in brains, courage



and daring. The three had clashed before off the Ivory coast.

"An hour ago," said Yaman, "Hafriz and I were in the fat pig's trough of filth, cursed be it! And suddenly Hafriz said to me, 'By Allah, Yaman, is it not, at yon table, my friend Lloyd Ben Et?' But dark it was in the room, and much smoke, and so I told Hafriz he must be mistaken."

Bennet said nothing. He was curious what the other was leading to. He had seen the pair in the fat Malay's joint, and knew that he himself had been seen and recognized.

"Time passed," Yaman continued, "and again Hafriz asked me to look. And then, by Allah, I saw that he was not mistaken. Then Hafriz said, 'He is a brave fighter, Lloyd Ben Et, and his wisdom as great as his courage. Go, Yaman, and ask him to honor me by joining my table.'"

**B**UT then the stupid English came in to gaze upon filthy carcasses. They made my friend angry, whereupon he had got up and left. It displeased Hafriz. 'By the beard of the Prophet,' he cried, 'these English pigs shall not deny me the pleasure of speech with Lloyd Ben Et.'

"Follow him, Yaman, and beg him to accompany you to my dhow, aboard which a great feast we shall have in his honor.' And so," the Arab concluded simply, "I do that."

Bennet flipped away his cigarette, then yawned with studied indifference. But his eyes caught significant details. Yaman's right hand beneath his burnoose, clutching, as Bennet knew very well, the butt of a revolver. That sinister ring of Singhalese. Five of them, each probably armed with a long-bladed knife. Tough odds to buck!

Bennet definitely knew that Yaman was lying. Hafriz did want to see him, but not for the pleasure of his company. And he wanted him badly

enough to send out those cut-throats to shadow him, overtake him at some deserted spot and then force him to come along.

If it weren't a trap of some sort, Hafriz would not have employed the method he did. Then Yaman would have come alone, and explained just what the old devil wanted with him. Actually, this was a kidnaping, leading to God knows what deviltry.

"Yaman, my friend," Bennet said softly, "the hour is late, and much fatigue possesses my flesh. Tell Hafriz that greatly honored am I with his invitation, and tomorrow at sundown—"

"Tomorrow," Yaman interrupted coldly, abruptly dropping his mask, "shall be too late. Now, Lloyd Ben Et!"

"A command, Yaman Ben Harim?"

"Be it so."

"And since when," said Bennet, smiling crookedly, "did the jackal command the tiger?"

"Enough!" the Arab said sharply. "You are coming with me, Lloyd Ben Et."

Bennet gently shook his head.

**L**IKE a striking snake, Yaman's hand darted out from beneath the burnoose. A flash of blue steel—and then the sharp crack of bone striking bone. Bennet had lunged forward and smashed his fist against the Arab's jaw. Yaman dropped the revolver, staggered backward.

Bennet whirled, and dropped on one knee. An instinctive move, perfectly timed. The murderous knife in the black hand of one of the Singhalese passed over his right shoulder. Upright, it would have disemboweled him. A fifteen-inch blade!

He straightened jerkily, leaped in. A hard right to the black man's body—and the Singhalese dropped as if he were shot, writhing in the mud

like a snake. Again Bennet whirled, and for the second time by inches escaped being disemboweled.

Another murderous knife, the long blade flashing toward him. He side-stepped it, crashed his fist into the ugly black face. Followed it with a terrific left to the side of the head. Leaped out of the way of the third knife, retaliating with a vicious kick to the groin.

The Arab's voice, shrill, screaming, "Alive, by Allah! Take him alive!"

Bennet grinned. Now they were due an exhibition of the gentle art of rough-and-tumble. And with Bennet it was an art, a science. The science of boxing, with none of the ethics of the ring. A convenient mixture of jiu-jitsu. And certain tricks in dirty fighting which he'd picked up in waterfront dives. The odds weren't so great now.

A grim smile on his lips, he met the charging black devils. His back to the wall, he could only be attacked from the front. And that Bennet welcomed. Like a piece of well-oiled machinery, his body swung into action. Hard fists hammering. Powerful men, those Singhalese, but clumsy, awkward. While Bennet's lithe body was a melody of grace.

ONE thought began worrying Bennet, as he leaped in and out, fists pummeling. There were five Singhalese originally. One was down in the mud, completely out. Another sprawled to his right, bleeding from nose and mouth. Two—black giants, whom Bennet consistently floored but couldn't knock out—kept charging him. The Arab stood discreetly across the road, watching the battle. But where was the fifth Singhalese?

And then, abruptly, Bennet caught one of the Singhalese looking upward—looking past him. He whirled. Too late. The black man on the wall leaped down upon him, arms out-

stretched. A heavy man, he bore Bennet to the ground. Black fingers sought and found his throat.

Another body hurled itself upon him. Still another. And then something crashed against the side of his head. Bennet felt as if a black, bottomless pit had opened beneath him. He was falling, falling, falling—

A SHARP pain jerked Bennet back to consciousness. He opened his eyes. The world gyrated madly. Gradually, as he shook his head, it slowed, steadied, stopped spinning. He found himself looking into Yaman's cruel, bearded face.

"By Allah," the Arab snarled, "there are limits to my patience. Will you walk, Lloyd Ben Et, or must I drive a knife between your ribs—at the risk of Hafriz' anger."

Bennet realized that his hands were tied behind his back. He replied simply, "I will walk."

Yaman snapped a curt command. Two of the Singhalese roughly jerked Bennet to his feet.

"A last warning," said Yaman. "Try to escape—and you shall die. Now follow me!"

Bennet shrugged. He obeyed. The other alternative was too swiftly certain. Yaman would knife him without another moment's hesitation. Bennet knew the man.

The Arab avoided the main streets. He led the way through crooked, stinking alleys, so narrow that a man could touch the buildings on either side by spreading out his arms. For minutes, they slushed through the thick, sticky mud. And then, abruptly, Bennet found himself on the black docks of Sandakan.

Only native craft moored at that particular section. Chinese junks, Malay pearling schooners, Arab dhows. Yaman led the way toward one of the latter. As Bennet crossed the flimsy gangplank, his hands were

freed with a swift slash of a knife. He shrugged again. No sense guessing now. The next few minutes would reveal what the devil it was all about.

IT was a bigger dhow than the average. Constructed for speed. Well-constructed, too, as Bennet noticed when he stepped on deck. He followed Yaman down the steep companionway to the small quarters below deck. And there, sitting upon a silken cushion, stroking his venerable white beard, Hafriz el Rab smiled up at him, a picture of gentle benevolence.

"Greetings, O Lloyd Ben Et!"

Bennet said to himself, "Grin! Where the hell's your sense of humor?"

He did grin. "And greeting to thee, Hafriz el Rab. You have business with me?"

"I see," the Arab murmured, "my friend is impatient. But time is pressing, so I am glad you have asked. Yes, Lloyd Ben Et, I have business with thee—upon a matter which only Hafriz el Rab would dare to undertake. For your help I shall pay you one thousand pounds in British gold."

"Indeed," said Bennet, "it is a matter of much importance."

The Arab smiled. "It is! Two hours ago, my friend, you will recall being in the place of a fat Malay pig. There you saw me. There you saw Yaman. There you saw the party of English. Of these, you might recall, one was a young woman of rare beauty.

"She is the daughter of the President of the British North Borneo Co., who is also a man of great importance in the British government."

"And," Bennet added, "possessor of wealth which one can only dream about."

"I have thought of that. Think

you, Lloyd Ben Et, he will pay ten thousand pounds for the return of his beautiful daughter?"

Bennet stared at the Arab.

"Audacity," he said coldly, "is a commendable virtue, but one must never confuse it with madness. What you are thinking of, Hafriz el Rab, is madness!"

"I am not thinking of it," the Arab corrected gently; "by Allah, I have done it! The young woman is here!"

"What!" Bennet gasped, lapsing into English. "Good God!"

"Yaman," said Hafriz, "have the young woman brought here."

The younger Arab, lounging, revolver in hand, in the doorway, threw a curt command over his shoulder. Bennet lighted a cigarette, puffed on it thoughtfully. He understood now the Arab's anxiety to have him brought there. Somehow, Lord Henry Clifton's daughter had been kidnaped from the Malay's place. Hafriz engineering the plot, it must have been a smooth piece of work. No loose ends, no bungling.

BUT he, Bennet, had seen Hafriz in the Malay's dive. The Arab realized that Bennet would instantly link him up with the kidnaping. Only Hafriz would be capable of such a breath-taking stunt. Rather than having him, Bennet, on his trail—and Bennet knew that the Arab respected him, at least, if he didn't fear him—he had him brought to the dhow.

Cheaper to buy an enemy than to fight him—especially when he could always be destroyed later. Bennet knew quite well he would not be permitted to go ashore with as small a fortune as a thousand pounds. Absurd to think of it! He knew Hafriz el Rab.

Betty Clifton stepped into the cabin. Tall, blond, perfectly collected. The same air of insolent superiority that had choked Bennet when

she had looked at him back in the Malay's joint.

"So," she drawled, "there are white vermin associated with this business too."

The Arab's purring voice cut off the angry retort which rose to Bennet's lips.

"Tell her, Lloyd Ben Et, that she must write a message to her father. I understand the tongue of the English, but I do not speak it. Tell her!"

Bennet turned to the girl. He said curtly, "You're commanded to write a letter to your father."

"Oh, I am!" she retorted insolently. "Well, I'll do nothing of the sort!"

**B**ENNET leaned forward, his handsome, bronzed face set and grim.

"Stop acting!" he said harshly. "Personally, I don't give a damn what happens to you. You're a type that I particularly dislike. But take my advice and forget for a few hours that you are the daughter of Sir Henry Clifton.

"No one around now to help you. No one to run to you when you beckon with your little finger. You take your choice of either writing that note or being dumped overboard with your throat slit. These men realize they're playing with dynamite; believe me, they aren't going to hesitate."

She faced him, paler, but still insolently defiant.

"They? Why aren't you including yourself?"

"Damn you," Bennet said savagely, "you don't think I've had anything to do with this?"

She stared at him. "But why are you—"

"No time to discuss that now. What's your answer?"

For a moment, the gray eyes interlocked with the blue.

"Very well," she said quietly; "I'll write it."

"Good!" cried Hafriz, who had easily followed the conversation.

Three minutes later, Bennet read the note. He could not repress a grin. The note read:

*"Dear Pater:*

*"Your fair daughter has just been informed that unless you give the bearer a paltry ten thousand her lovely throat will be slit and her ravishing body dumped overboard. Yes, kidnaped, my dear! And I think they mean business.*

*Betty."*

Bennet handed the note to Hafriz who got up off his cushion and waddled to the door.

To the two Singhalese, sent down by Yaman, he gave grimly-eloquent orders. They would remain in the cabin until he returned.

**I**F the man acted suspiciously, they would kill him. If the girl acted so, they would kill her. If either escaped, they would answer for it with their lives. He smiled at Bennet, bowed courteously to the girl and went out. The door slammed shut.

Grinning black apes, the Singhalese planted themselves in opposite corners. Each held a heavy blue revolver.

"And that," Bennet said abruptly, "is—that!"

He shrugged, fished out his battered package of French cigarettes. Lighting one, he sat down on the floor, his back to the curved bulkhead.

Hot in the cabin. Stifling. The swinging oil lamp on the wall threw a cheerless yellow light over the tiny room. The black bodies of the Singhalese glistened with sweat.

Tomb-like was the silence—heavy, depressing.

The girl said, her voice strained, "May I have a cigarette, please?"

He tossed her the package and the book of matches.

"Six cigarettes there," he said coolly. "You may have three. No more. So go easy with them."

"My, but aren't you a *pleasant* person! Keep your damn cigarettes!" She tossed back the package.

"Thanks," Bennet murmured.

Again silence. Minutes dragged.

"How long," she asked abruptly, "do you think I'll have to stay here?"

BENNET shook his head. "I don't know."

"But my father will pay."

"Of course, he will pay. But whether you may be permitted to return is another matter."

"Surely," she said tersely—"surely you don't think they would—"

"Yes," said Bennet. "You can describe them. The old devil, especially. Police will instantly identify him. He won't take the chance."

"You mean—they'll kill me anyway?"

"That—or worse. The slave block in Foochow."

"Why," she asked quietly, "are you telling me this? Just to frighten me?"

Bennet grounded out his cigarette.

"No," he said coldly. "How you feel or what you do doesn't interest me. But if we want to live we've got to get out of here within the next hour. I am thinking of my neck as much as yours. More, perhaps."

"I'll need your help. So I wanted you to know exactly what you were up against. Have I made myself clear?"

"You have—thank you. What do you want me to do?"

"First tell me the details of the kidnaping. I want to know what

chances there are of the police getting to us." She smiled ruefully. "There aren't many, I am afraid. We'd gone into that fightful Malay's place. A slumming party, you know."

"Yes, I saw you," Bennet said shortly. "I even overheard your remark—regarding me. Something about moral disintegration, and drawled in your cursedly-superior British way."

She flushed. "Sorry. I thought you were just some drunken tramp."

"I am that—precisely. But continue!"

She looked at him curiously. "You admit it?"

"Of course."

"But—your speech is that of an educated man."

"You're wasting time!" Bennet said curtly.

"Just one question—please!" she begged.

"Well?"

"Did she look very much like me?"

STARTLED, Bennet jerked up his head. He stared at her.

"Yes," he said harshly. "Very much like you."

Her eyes lingered on his face. "It explains a lot," she said quietly. "And now to continue. Someone—a Hindu, I think—approached our party and asked me if I cared to have my fortune told."

"I agreed. He led me to one of the rear rooms through a short passageway of a sort. Quite dark. And that's all I remember. A handkerchief saturated in chloroform was clapped to my nose and mouth. I regained consciousness here."

Bennet shook his head. "Of all the stupid stunts, your going off with that Hindu—alone—takes the big prize. Well, we may expect no help from the police."

"But the Hindu—"

"Will be found in that passage-



way—dead!" Bennet said grimly. "And no one will know anything. You're in the East now. Listen!"

"Yes."

"We have two guards. Don't look their way! I'd probably get a bullet in me before I had a chance to close in with one of them. Even if I should manage to catch him off guard, grapple with him—the other will surely kill me. That's rather obvious, isn't it?"

"Rather!"

ALL right, here's what I want you to do. It will take courage. You will wait a couple of minutes, then you will get up. They'll be watching you. You will begin pacing the room. Keep that up a while—say, a dozen times. Then glance at the porthole. And then assume an expression of horror!

"Point to the porthole and scream. You are seeing something horrible, understand? Act it well. Being Sir Henry Clifton's daughter, you've been acting all your life; it shouldn't be difficult."

"Limit yourself to the instructions, please," she said coldly. "Very well; I am terrified by something that I see through the porthole."

"What next?"

"Reason tells me that the following will happen. Both Singhalese will leap to their feet. So will I, of course. The three of us will be startled. You continue screaming and pointing to the window. These Singhalese are children."

"One, at least—the one in the right corner, I suspect—will run over to see what you are pointing to. He will cross in front of you. Will have to, if you stand in the center of the room. Then you grab him."

"Grab him?"

"Yes. I said it will take courage. Throw your arms about him and hold on. Ten seconds is all I ask. I warn

you—he might bash in your skull with the butt of his gun. But it's our only chance. I've got to have those ten seconds!"

"He is frightfully dirty," she said quietly.

"Of course."

"He is simply dripping with sweat."

"Yes."

"Very well," she said; "I'll do it."

"You have courage!" Bennet said shortly. "By the way, you might go easy on the screaming. One scream—then that attitude of frozen terror. And pointing to the porthole. Good luck!"

Several minutes went by. Bennet studied the vacant, stupid faces of the two Singhalese. It might work. *Might!*

"Try it now!" he said quietly, out of the corner of his mouth.

She stood up, her face pale but determined. No fear on it. The Singhalese watched her, swift suspicion in their yellow eyes. She began pacing the cabin. Back and forth, back and forth. Gradually, the suspicion in their eyes died out, the vacant expression returning.

AND then the scream—abrupt, choking, and so realistic that even Bennet forgot for a moment. She was standing before the porthole, pointing. Superb acting—real, convincing. A picture of frozen terror. Pointing to some dreadful horror outside the porthole.

Bennet leaped to his feet. So did the Singhalese. But they weren't paying any attention to him. Staring, open-mouthed at the girl.

The rest happened swiftly. One of the Singhalese padded across the cabin to the porthole. The other stared after him, some of the terror on the girl's face, in her attitude, transmitting to his own. Her acting carried it. Superb!

Bennet edged to the left. Took a deep breath. Leaped in. His fist smashed behind the guard's ear. The black man crashed against the wall. Bennet had no time to make sure whether he was knocked out.

For just then the other guard had whirled from the porthole, bringing up the revolver. The girl grabbed his arm, held on. Held on for a few seconds only, for with a savage jerk he sent her flying across the cabin.

But those few seconds were sufficient. Bennet closed in with him. Buried his fist in the black body. Followed it with a terrific right to the side of the head, his full weight behind the blow.

The girl laughed hysterically. "It's all over!"

**A**ND amazingly, incredibly, it was—all over! Both men were out—out completely. The girl continued laughing. Bennet ran toward her. He shook her savagely.

"Come on! Pull yourself together!"

She stopped laughing, shook her head.

"Sorry. My nerves. I don't—"

"Can you use a gun?" Bennet interrupted curtly

"Yes."

"Take this one. We're not out of this mess yet—by a damn sight! Come on!"

He picked up the other guard's revolver, opened the door softly.

"Follow me!" he whispered.

Cautiously, they crept up the companionway. Bennet stepped on deck—to stare into Yaman's startled face,

who was about to go down. Both men carried revolvers. And both fired at the same instant. Yaman screamed—the high-pitched scream of a man mortally wounded. He went down, clawing at the deck.

Again Bennet's revolver belched flame. The Singhalese behind Yaman dropped the knife, spun around. From behind the mast, flashes of orange began stabbing at the darkness.

Bennet dropped to the warm deck, began crawling to the mast. Two shots behind him—fired so rapidly that they blended into one. The girl's voice, cool, composed.

"Never dreamt my target practice at home would come into such good use."

Silence now.

"You have courage!" Bennet repeated quietly.

"Thank you. What next?"

"Nothing much," Bennet said, a bit wearily. "See those green lights approaching us. Harbor police. They'll take you aboard your father's yacht."

**S**HE leaned closer to him. "You mean—us!"

"No," said Bennet. "You! I'm going ashore here."

"Look again! Am I very much like—her?"

The green lights swooped down upon them. A rough voice, "Hey, what's going on there?"

A soft hand touched Bennet's.

"You will come—as my guest?"

"She lacked your courage," Bennet said simply. "Yes, I will come."

*A Gripping Story of the West*

## THE SHERIFF RIDES ALONE

By OSCAR SCHISGALL

*In Next Month's THRILLING ADVENTURES*

"A HERO  
WHEN THE  
UNITED  
STATES  
FOUGHT  
NAPOLEON"

# Famous SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE



## ADMIRAL THOMAS TRUXTUN

— AMERICA'S MOST PICTURESQUE SEA HERO WHO LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR U.S. NAVY, WON THE RESPECT OF EUROPEAN POWERS AND HUMBLING THE GREAT NAPOLEON WITH HIS DARE-DEVIL FIGHTING.

AMERICA IN 1798, ONLY RECENTLY EMERGING FROM THE REVOLUTION, WAS UNPREPARED TO FIGHT ANOTHER WAR — ALTHOUGH NAPOLEON'S CRUISERS WERE PLUNDERING U.S. SHIPS — SO TRUXTUN WAS GIVEN COMMAND OF THE 38 GUN CONSTELLATION AND ORDERED TO STOP THE FRENCH ATTACKS.

DURING THE FOLLOWING YEAR TRUXTUN TOOK PART IN SEVERAL OF THE FIERCEST BATTLES EVER FOUGHT IN DEEP WATER. ON FEB. 9TH, 1799 THIS DESPERATE FIGHTER IN YARD-ARM TO YARD-ARM COMBAT — THE STARS AND STRIPES FLOATING DEFIANTLY AT MASTHEADS — WON THE GREATEST NAVAL ACTION THE AMERICAN NAVY EVER HAD PART IN, CAPTURING THE 40 GUN, L'INSURGENT.

AFTER FURTHER FRENCH DEFEATS, NAPOLEON, THEN VIRTUALLY RULER OF ALL FRANCE, ADMITTED "THAT FROM THE FIRST TO THE LAST, HIS SHIPS HAD BEEN OUT-SAILED AND OUT-FOUGHT BY THAT AMERICAN TRUXTUN," AND HE ORDERED A SUSPENSION OF HOSTILITIES.



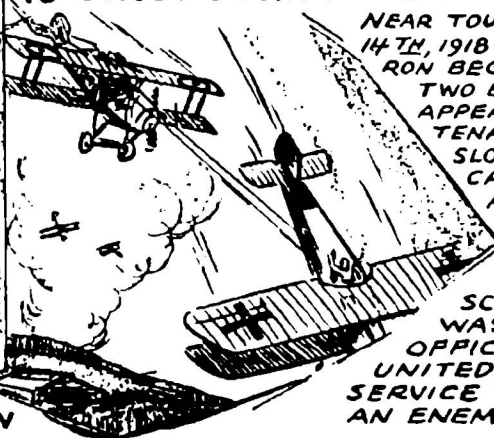
## FIRST OFFICER OF THE U.S. AIR SERVICE TO SHOOT DOWN AN ENEMY PLANE!

NEAR TOUL, FRANCE — APRIL 14TH, 1918 — THE 94TH SQUADRON BEGAN ITS OPERATIONS. TWO ENEMY PLANES APPEARED AND LIEUTENANTS ALLAN WINSLOW AND DOUGLAS CAMPBELL WENT UP AND SCORED A DOUBLE VICTORY.

WINSLOW WAS THE FIRST TO SCORE AND THUS WAS THE FIRST OFFICER IN THE UNITED STATES AIR SERVICE TO SHOOT DOWN AN ENEMY PLANE.



LIEUTENANT  
ALLAN WINSLOW



*This is the Original Illustrated Adventure*

# MAJOR. FREDERICK BURNHAM-

"THE KING OF SCOUTS"

BORN ON AN INDIAN RESERVATION AT TIVOLI, MINN. 1861, HIS ROVING CAREER LED HIM THROUGH ONE THRILLING ADVENTURE AFTER ANOTHER. AS A YOUTH IN ARIZONA TRAILING INDIANS OVER THE PLAINS AND WHEN SHERIFF, DURING THE TONTO BASIN FEUD, HIS NAME BECAME FAMOUS AS A HARD RIDER AND A BRAVE OFFICER.

ON SEARCH OF GOLD YOUNG BURNHAM WENT TO THE KLONDIKE THEN TO AFRICA TO FIGHT THE FIERCE MATABELLE SAVAGES.



CHIEF OF SCOUTS MAJOR BURNHAM WHEN DECORATED BY KING EDWARD

THERE, THIS "SHERLOCK OF OUTDOORS" ASTONISHED THE NATIVES BY HIS SCOUTING INSTINCT WHEN FOLLOWING A TRAIL. HE WENT INTO THE HEART OF AFRICA ALONE AND IN A STRONGHOLD MET AND KILLED ULIMO, THE CHIEF OF THE UPRISING, — ESCAPING ALTHOUGH SURROUNDED BY MURDEROUS NATIVES.

LATER, DURING THE BOER WAR, FOR HIS BRAVERY WHILE IN SERVICE, BURNHAM WAS GIVEN THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD AND OTHER HONORS BY KING EDWARD AND THE BRITISH WAR OFFICE.

THE DUMDUM, A BULLET PARTLY CASED IN STEEL — THE SOFT CORE OF WHICH SPREADS WHEN IT STRIKES, ADDING INJURY TO THE WOUND — WAS SO NAMED FOR THE DUMDUM ARSENAL IN INDIA WHERE IT WAS FIRST MADE.

ITS USE WAS CONDEMNED BY PEACE CONFERENCE OF 1899.



ONCE SOLDIERS ON HORSEBACK CAPTURED A FLEET OF SHIPS AT SEA!

IN HOLLAND, JANUARY, 1794, THE FRENCH CAVALRY SURROUNDED AND CAPTURED A NUMBER OF DUTCH MEN-OF-WAR THAT WERE ICE-BOUND IN THE ZUYDER ZEB.

## FIELD MARSHALL VON HINDENBERG

(BELOW - RIGHT)



## MARSHALL FOCH

BOTH OF THESE FAMOUS GENERALS WHO LED THE WORLD'S GREATEST OPPOSING ARMIES, WERE BORN ON THE SAME DAY OF THE YEAR — OCTOBER 2ND.

Feature—the First to Appear in Any Magazine

# CANYON *of the*

*Young Bob Chaplin Had a  
Blood Debt to Pay—And  
No Force On Earth  
Could Stop Him!*

## *A Complete Novelette*

By JOHNSTON McCULLY

*Author of "The Mark of Zorro," etc.*

### CHAPTER I

#### *Stick-Up*

**S**LIPPING through the rear door out of the night, Jed Dawkes led Brown and Jones into the wildest resort in the roaring mining camp of Midas Gulch.

The place was filled with excited, jostling men who fought to get to bar and gambling tables. Jed Dawkes and his two pals elbowed a path to the lower end of the bar.

Dawkes flashed a meaning look at the other two. Jones stepped to the end of the bar as though to order a drink. Brown walked a few feet in the opposite direction. Dawkes was between them.

Whipping out a six-gun, Dawkes fired one shot toward the ceiling. It blazed and echoed through the place. The roar of raucous and strident voices stopped. A hundred faces were turned toward the end of the bar.

"Get 'em up!" Jed Dawkes shouted. "Paws in the air—everybody!"

The shotgun guard had been sitting on an empty keg near the end



*The knife came like a*

of the bar. He sprang to his feet, but did not have a chance to use the weapon he held. His eyes were on Dawkes, and he did not notice Jones.

And Jones knew that the guard would not obey a command to put up his hands. This was the moment for which the shotgun guard had been hired. So, as he started to lift his weapon, Jones shot him down.

"Keep 'em up, gents! We mean business!" Brown was yelling at the crowd.

Those nearest backed away and put up their hands. The death of the money guard had convinced them that these three men were desperate. Word of what was happening was flashed to the far corners of the big room.



# LOST



*bolt of lightning. Dawkes screeched with pain*

With the shotgun guard no longer a menace, Jones had trained his gun on the four men working behind the bar. But they were holding up their hands already. Brown was covering those in front.

Jed Dawkes darted behind the bar to the money keg. In it, chamois sacks stuffed with bills and coins and little bags of gold dust had been put at intervals by the proprietor of the place. Dawkes threw aside the covering board and pulled out a chamois sack filled with loot. He pulled out a second—and a third.

A sudden cry of warning came from Brown. His gun barked and flamed. Another gun replied, and Brown gave a screech and fell, his weapon clattering to the plank floor.

Jones fired into the thick of the crowd, at somebody Jed Dawkes could not see.

"Come runnin', Jed!" Jones cried.

That meant danger. The crowd was not being held in check properly. If there was a break in it, Jones and Dawkes would be engulfed and their retreat cut off.

Dashing toward the end of the bar, carrying the sacks of money, Dawkes flashed a look over it and into the thick of the crowd. He saw Bob Chaplin, the old sheriff, charging forward madly. His hat had been knocked off, and his long gray hair was blowing back.

Beside the old sheriff ran a young deputy. Both had six-guns held ready for action. The old sheriff's

was smoking—he had been the one to shoot Brown.

The sheriff fired again as he came. Dawkes could tell that the bullet struck Jones high in the left shoulder.

Dawkes fired at the sheriff and missed. He reached the end of the bar, holding the sacks of swag in the crook of his left arm and the gun in his right hand.

"Dawkes! Put 'em up!" the sheriff shouted.

"To hell with you!"

**D**AWKES dropped down behind the bar before the sheriff could fire, and now raced suddenly toward where Jones was standing half bent over.

"Wake up, Jones! At 'em! Empty your gun at 'em, you fool!" Dawkes shouted.

Jones roused himself, and began shooting. Dawkes joined him, and they ran toward the rear door. But the aggressive move of the sheriff had brought others out of their trance of fear. More of the guns barked. A hail of bullets sang past the heads of the fleeing pair.

Jed Dawkes cursed wildly as a bullet burned a path across his back. He stopped an instant, and turned. Old Bob Chaplin was bearing down upon him, at the point of firing again. But somebody lurched in his way, and the sheriff was compelled to hold fire.

But Jed Dawkes cared nothing about what might happen to innocent bystanders. As he saw it, all these men were his enemies.

"Damn you star-wearers!" Dawkes cried.

He fired twice, rapidly. He shot down the old sheriff at the end of the bar. He saw the official drop his gun, and slowly start to double up and collapse. Dawkes raced on with a yell of triumph, and followed

the fleeing Jones out into the black night, unscathed.

The wild mining camp was wilder now. In the thronged street, men were fighting to get into the big resort and learn what had happened. Those who had seen the hold-up and shooting were possessed with furious rage.

The rear door of the resort spewed a mob of infuriated and determined men. A shower of bullets, fired haphazardly, swept the dark hillside behind the town. Jones fired in reply.

"You damned fool!" Dawkes barked at him. "You've tipped 'em off where we are!"

The flash of Jones' gun betrayed their direction of flight. A volley came instantly, a fusillade searched them out. Bullets fell around them like hail, to strike rocks and glance screaming into the night.

Jones stumbled, fell.

"Jed—they've got me—"

"Serves you damned well right!" Dawkes howled. "If you hadn't fired—"

He said no more. Jed Dawkes ran on, alone, clutching the sacks of money. He returned his gun to its holster, and got all speed possible out of his legs.

**H**E knew that those behind would pursue cautiously in the black night. They did not know but what Dawkes might be waiting in ambush.

Dawkes came to a small grove of stunted trees, where he and Brown and Jones had left their horses, when they had sneaked into the camp after nightfall. He turned the other two horses loose, and mounted his own.

Madly he rode toward the trail, thick with dust and crowded with heavy freight wagons. Toward the frowning hills he went at top speed.

He knew there would be an imme-

diate man hunt with himself the quarry. The old sheriff's deputies would see to that. It would be a determined, desperate hunt. And the posse would not be long in getting started. They would want to avenge the death of the old sheriff.

Back in Midas Gulch, a young deputy was kneeling beside the body of the old sheriff.

"I'll get him, Uncle Bob!" he was saying, as he sobbed unashamed. "I'm startin' right now, and I ain't comin' back till I either bring him with me, or leave him dead out in the hills. I'm swearin' it, Uncle Bob!"

## CHAPTER II

### *Into the Earth*

**T**WO days later, the pursuing posse found itself scattered in wild country.

They had been able to cut off Jed Dawkes from the route he had planned to follow. So Dawkes had been compelled to ride wild, into a district almost inaccessible, a corner of the mountainous country where few men had gone before him. The posse had tracked him, lost the trail and found it again, urged on by young Bob Chaplin.

Here was a corner of the country never opened up, a wild jumble of valleys and canyons, masses of queer rocks, indicative of some ancient upheaval of Nature.

Dawkes had found the going difficult. He clung to the sacks of money. He had fastened them around his neck with a piece of lariat, and they hung in front of his breast, with his coat buttoned over them.

He came to where the brush was so thick that he scarcely could force his mount through it. He knew the posse was not far behind. He decided that he could do better afoot.



*Dawkes threw up his arms in a wild gesture, and toppled into the rushing water*

Fastening the reins to the saddle-horn, he dismounted, struck the horse on the rump, and compelled him to slide down a slimy slope and run along a canyon's floor. Dawkes believed the pursuit would follow the horse's tracks.

Then Dawkes plunged into the thick brush.

An hour later, young Bob Chaplin and some of the possemen came to where Dawkes had dismounted. Dawkes' horse had traveled for only a

short distance, then had backtracked. Instead of leading the pursuit astray, the mount was pointing out the correct trail.

"I'll get on the ground, too," Bob Chaplin told those with him. "I want one man to volunteer to come with me. You others scatter, and use your own judgment."

One of the others dismounted and joined him. They picked up Dawkes' trail, followed it, steadily alert and ever ready for sudden trouble. Through the thick brush they traveled for miles, always following the plain trail of broken brush and trampled wild grass.

The man with Chaplin gave a sudden cry of pain, and young Bob turned quickly to find he had fallen.

"It's my ankle, Bob. I think it's snapped."

**A** LOOK of despair came into Chaplin's face.

"Go on, Bob! Don't let this stop you."

"But you—"

"Don't worry about me. I'll crawl back to the nearest creek, cut off my boot and bathe my ankle. Then I'll keep shootin' distress signals till the boys hear and come. Don't stop on account of me. Keep goin', Bob! Be careful—and get that skunk!"

Chaplin shook hands with him, plunged into the thick brush again, and traveled on alone.

Now it was man to man between him and Jed Dawkes, skill against skill in woodcraft, in nerve and marksmanship, if they met. If Dawkes learned only one man was in close pursuit, he might stop and fight it out.

Night came. Chaplin stretched on the ground and slept. But he was awake before dawn, and when the first streaks of day stained the sky he arose and went on.

The middle of the morning found

him following a plain trail. Up to now he had seen nothing of Dawkes. But, as he started across a small natural clearing, a bullet zipped past within a few feet of him; a gun barked in the distance, and a wild yell of defiance came ringing down the wind.

Chaplin located the tiny puff of wind-driven smoke which revealed the position of the foe. He took to cover and began circling cautiously. When he reached the bottom of the slope, he found where Dawkes had been, but Dawkes had gone on.

"Hello! Chaplin!"

The hail came from a distance.

"Yeah?" Chaplin called.

"This is Dawkes! Turn back! I'll get you, if you come on! Don't be a damned fool. The money ain't worth it."

"You killed Old Bob!"

There seemed to be something final about that statement, a notice to the fugitive that the chase could not end until either pursued or pursuer was unable to go on.

Chaplin pushed on through the brush, his gun always ready. Now he found he was entering a narrow canyon with high walls and sparse vegetation, through which a stream was roaring. Dawkes had gone into that canyon—and was running into a trap.

**I**T was a peculiarly-shaped box canyon. Half a mile from the narrow mouth was a high natural rock wall. The sides could not be scaled. To get out of the canyon, Dawkes would have to pass close to Chaplin.

Keeping under cover as much as possible, Chaplin came to the bank of the thundering, rock-studded stream, a rushing mountain torrent in which a man would be powerless. It seemed to smash against the rock wall, and there disappear in foam.

Cautiously, Chaplin went on. And

finally he caught sight of Dawkes a short distance away, hiding behind a rock and watching the brush, in ambush and ready to wreak murder on another Chaplin.

Gun held ready, Chaplin sprang into the open and shouted. The roar of the stream drowned his words, but carried the sound of his voice.

"Hands up, Dawkes! You're under arrest!"

Dawkes jerked around and saw Chaplin zigzagging toward him over the rough ground. His gun cracked, but the bullet went wild. He fired again, missed again in his eagerness to get in a mortal shot.

CHAPLIN did not fire in reply. He wanted to return Dawkes for the rope, if possible, not shoot him down out here. He rushed on, changing direction constantly. In a frenzy, Dawkes emptied his gun without scoring a hit. Then panic came over him. He tore cartridges out of his belt, tried frantically to reload.

Chaplin rushed on. Dawkes sprang backward, close to the water's edge, where the bank of the stream was matted with slippery grass. He swerved aside sharply.

Chaplin spurred to reach him. He felt a sickening sensation even as he heard Dawkes give a cry of fear that rang back from the rock walls. The bank of the river seemed to be falling away beneath his own feet. He saw Dawkes throw up his arms in a wild gesture, clutch at the air, and topple over into the rushing water.

Bob tried to spring backward, but again the ground gave way beneath his feet. The bank of the river, undermined, was caving under his weight. He sprang into the air, tried to throw himself toward firm earth. He felt himself falling.

Then he struck the tumbling wa-

ter, was engulfed. The current tore at him as he fought his way to the surface. He could see Jed Dawkes' head bobbing on the water like a cork.

Chaplin could not make his way toward shore. He was swept along in the middle of the churning stream. The rushing water carried him helplessly toward the solid rock wall ahead. Dawkes he could no longer see.

Then Chaplin understood, and a thrill of horror went through him. The stream was rushing, swirling, under that rock wall. He was utterly helpless, would be pulled down into that boiling cauldron as Dawkes had been, to be sucked into the earth and borne helplessly in the swift current of an underground stream!

### CHAPTER III

#### *Unknown Country*

CHAPLIN fought to keep on the surface of the water, but it was like battling a heaving monster. He was powerless as the raging flood sucked him hungrily below. Around him was the darkness of pitch black night, and the thunder of the water tore in his ears. He felt consciousness slipping—then it went—

His return to consciousness was accompanied by considerable retching. When the fit was over, he opened his eyes. He found he was on the ground, the river swirling past only a few feet away, and that he was out in the light again.

He had been cast ashore at a sharp bend in the rushing stream. Not far away was the rock wall. Undoubtedly, he had been swept beneath it, then thrown to the surface again and tossed on land.

His coat and vest were gone. His shirt was in ribbons. Gunbelt and



holster were missing. He had dropped the gun when he had fallen into the stream, and the belt must have been ripped off by the water. His water-soaked corduroy trousers and boots were the only intact remnants of his outfit.

Chaplin staggered to his feet and looked about. There was no sign of Dawkes, and he wondered if the bandit had been drowned. He seemed to be in a big cup in the mountains, a valley through which the stream rushed. It was surrounded by high rock walls.

He started along the stream, watching for indications of his prey. Suddenly he fancied he heard a slight sound off to one side in the thick brush, and jerked his head around quickly. He thought he saw gleaming eyes for an instant in the brush.

"Who are you?"

**T**HE voice was soft and clear. Chaplin whirled around again. Out from the brush came a girl. She was bare-footed, only about half-dressed in skin clothing.

"You come out of river?" she asked.

"Yeah, out of the river," Chaplin replied. "Who are you?"

"I am Lucy."

"You live near here? There are people here?"

"There are my grandfather, my two brothers, and another man."

"Sure glad to learn that! I need help. I'm a deputy sheriff chasing a murderer."

"You are what—deputy sheriff? What is that?"

"Why, an officer of the law!"

"What is law?" she wondered.

Chaplin was startled by her obvious ignorance. He started toward her. She had been standing with her hands behind her back, but now she brought them swiftly forward.

In one she held a long knife. And the expression of her face changed, became one of warning.

"Stop! If you don't, I'll throw the knife!"

She raised it. Chaplin stopped.

**I** AIN'T aimin' to hurt you," he said. "Where's your home? Can I get somethin' to eat?"

"That is for my grandfather to say."

"Let's go find him then. How far is it?"

"There by big rock."

The rock she indicated stuck out from the face of the high cliff, perhaps half a mile away.

"Why did you come here?" the girl asked.

"I fell into the river and got washed here. Don't other folks ever come here?"

"I never saw anybody, in my life, except my grandfather, my two brothers, and Dave—not since I was a little girl."

That puzzled Chaplin. Here was some mystery. "Let's get to your home. I want to talk to your grandfather," he urged.

"Wait!"

She tossed up her head, and from her throat issued a strange call that ran back from the rock walls. From the far distance a similar call came in answer. The girl sat down on a rock and stared at Chaplin again as though inspecting a curiosity.

"You sit down. We wait," she said. "They come right away—What's your name?"

"Bob Chaplin."

"Bob—nice name," she admitted.

From somewhere in the woods that peculiar call came again, much nearer, and the girl trilled an answer. A moment later sounds told of somebody crashing through the brush.

The girl sprang to her feet. From the brush rushed two men. They

looked like savages. They were dressed in skin clothing. Their hair was long, and they had scraggy beards. Their bodies were brown from sun and wind.

They stopped, one on either side of the girl, and gaped at Chaplin. She spoke to them rapidly, her voice so low that Chaplin could not understand the words. Then one stepped forward.

"I am Mark, and this is my brother, Luke. Our sister says you came out of the river. That is strange. Nobody ever came to us from the river before. Our grandfather must see you. We will bind your arms and take you to him."

"No sense in tyin' me up," Chaplin protested.

"But we *must* bind your arms."

AS he spoke, he and his brother rushed forward. They were upon Chaplin before he realized their intention. But he did not try to fight. He knew it would be useless, and only antagonize them. He smiled wryly, and let them do as they pleased.

They fastened his wrists behind his back with a thong made from a strip of skin. Then they lashed his arms to his sides.

"Come!" one of them ordered.

The girl led the way into the brush. The two men nudged Chaplin to follow. They trotted slowly along a narrow trail that curved through the woods.

"Mark and Luke and Lucy!" Chaplin muttered. "What's your other name?"

"Creighmer," Mark told him. "And there is also our friend, Dave Lattish."

"How long since you came here?" Chaplin asked.

"We have always been here," Mark replied.

"We were born here," Lucy added.

"And here," said her younger brother, Luke, speaking for the first time, "we shall die. It must be that way. Our grandfather has said so!"

## CHAPTER IV

### *Prisoners for Life*

CHAPLIN had decided that he would eat and rest, then make a search for Jed Dawkes, or his body, on both sides of the stream. Boot tracks in the mud or soft earth would indicate if Dawkes had escaped and was going on, trying to complete his getaway.

The four came finally to a clearing. The river could be seen through the trees not far away. And in front of them was a large log house, with smoke rising from a chimney. A tall man came from the house and looked toward them.

"That is Dave Lattish," Mark said to Chaplin.

Lattish seemed greatly surprised at their appearance. He called, and another man came out—a little, stoop-shouldered man with thin gray hair.

"That is grandfather," Lucy Creighmer said. "He is excited. He is sending Dave back into the house."

The three conducted Chaplin along a path and up to the bottom of the steps which led to the porch. Chaplin found watery old eyes studying him intently as Mark, in swift recital, told the old man the story.

"Can't I have my arms untied?" Chaplin asked, when Mark had finished. "I ain't meanin' any harm to anybody."

"You're a law officer, and you're chasing a murderer?" the old man asked. "How am I to know?"

"You'll just have to believe me, I reckon. I lost my star and gun, and almost my life."

"It's been many years since I've seen a man from the outside world."

"How's that?" Chaplin was interested. "Don't you ever go any place?"

"Not since I was twenty-three years old—and I am nearly ninety now, if I've kept strict account. My father's generation, and mine—three families—I've seen them all go. Only these children remain. I am John Creighmer. There'll be no more, after these young ones die."

Chaplin didn't know what all this meant, and he didn't care much. He imagined he had run into a nest of half-wits, or that the old man's mind was wandering.

"If you'll tell 'em to unfasten my arms—" Chaplin hinted again.

"But the other says you are a murderer."

"What?" Chaplin cried. "What other are you talking about?"

THE man Dave Lattish rescued from the river. The water cast him up, down by the bend. Dave saw him, and brought him here."

"Another saved from the river?"

"I reckon he means me, Young Bob!"

The voice came from the doorway of the house. Chaplin looked up quickly. Jed Dawkes was standing there on the threshold leering at him.

Chaplin felt that old John Creighmer was watching them both carefully.

"So you were spared, too?" Chaplin said.

"I reckon! *Spared to take you in, Chaplin,*" Dawkes said genially, but with an evil light in his eyes.

"What are you talking about?"

"About taking you in for murder." Dawkes shot back. "I've told the old gent all about it—how you shot down a man and made a run for it, with me after you."

"Why, you—!" Chaplin whirled about and faced the old man again. "I'm Bob Chaplin, deputy sheriff. This man is Jed Dawkes, an outlaw. He and two others robbed a place in Midas Gulch. They killed the money guard, and this man shot down my uncle, the sheriff."

"He tells the same story, except he says you are the outlaw and he is the officer," John Creighmer said, in an uncritical tone.

HE lies! You found him first. He prob'ly thought I'd be saved, too, so he spilled that yarn."

"How am I to know which tells the truth?" Creighmer asked.

"Yeah, how's he to know?" Dawkes cried. "Where's your star, if you're an officer? No star and no gun—a hell of a deputy!"

"Where are yours?" Chaplin countered.

"Lost in the river."

"So were mine. You can't get away with this, Dawkes!"

"What are you aimin' to do about it?" Dawkes asked.

"Somehow, I'm goin' to take you in!"

"You mean that I'm goin' to take you in," Dawkes corrected. "When I get around to it. This seems like a right nice place, and maybe I'll stay here and rest up a while."

Chaplin faced old John Creighmer again. "You've got to believe me!" he said. "Take off these bonds, and I'll attend to this man Dawkes."

"There may be a little argument about that," Dawkes replied, his face clouding heavily.

"Dawkes, you're a murderin' scoundrel! I could have shot you down before you tumbled into the river—"

"You see, Mr. Creighmer, how blood-thirsty he talks?" Dawkes interrupted. "No question about him bein' the outlaw, I reckon. Have you got some place where the boys can

put and keep him, till I'm ready to take him away?"

John Creighmer turned watery eyes upon him. "Take him away? You cannot," he said.

"What's to stop me?" Dawkes asked.

"No man would lift a hand to stop you. But—you're in *Prison Canyon*. That's what we've named it. Nobody can get out of here."

"What?" Chaplin cried.

"You're here for as long as you live, both of you. I was a young man when it happened. We had come overland in prairie schooners, three families. We found this canyon and decided to live here. Then the earthquake came."

"Earthquake?" Dawkes repeated.

"The earth trembled. That rock wall across the river—it was not there before the earthquake. But it was there afterward. It sealed us in here."

"There must be some way out," Chaplin said unbelievably.

rock salt, but no spices. We plant a patch of corn each year, and have beans and potatoes."

"How about meat?" Chaplin asked.

"Pork and chicken. Plenty of fish in the stream. We kill game in season, and dry the meat."

"But you haven't any weapons!"

"The knives," Creighmer reminded him. "They all throw them. They stalk and kill deer and bear that way."

"Aw, hell!" Dawkes exploded. "There *must* be some way out of here."

"Search for it!" Creighmer said. "See if you can find a way out. We gave up years and years ago."

The old man got up from the bench upon which he had been sitting and went toward the door.

"Mark, take the bonds off this man," he ordered. "Officer or outlaw, I care not which—he's a prisoner of the canyon now, the same as the other. Both prisoners! *They can never get out!*"

## CHAPTER V

### A Weapon

CHAPLIN was freed of his bonds, taken into the house and fed. Dawkes already had eaten. When Chaplin had finished, he went outside again, with Mark at his heels.

"Where do I live?" he asked the patriarch.

"There are two other houses. You'll use the one downstream," John Creighmer replied.

"I'll go along with you, Chaplin," Dawkes put in.

"I ain't needin' your company now. When I find a way out of here, I'll take you in, Dawkes."

Dawkes laughed. "You mean I'll take you in."

"The money you stole—I suppose you lost it in the river."

WE hunted for it. We went over every foot of the high granite walls that encircle this place. No way out!

"The elder ones died. My generation died. I had been ordained a minister—was going to do missionary work among the Indians—and I married the others. These young ones are all that remain, except me. They know nothing of the outside world. You two are the first strangers they ever saw."

"But—but—" Jed Dawkes was stammering.

"The things we had wore away or were destroyed. We had some chickens and pigs we'd brought with us, and I've been careful they didn't die out. Our weapons—gone long ago, except some knives. Clothing all gone. We dress in skins. We always have plenty of food. There's

"You mean you lost the money you stole."

John Creighmer gave a bit of cackling laughter. "Money! Little good it would do you here," he told them. "Money—gold! We have piles of it."

"What are you meanin'?" Dawkes asked quickly.

"Gold! Two little creeks run into the river, and their bottoms and banks are paved with gold. We began collecting it years ago, thinking we'd get out some day, and be rich."

"You washed out a lot of gold?" Chaplin asked.

"Sacks of it! Nuggets and dust," Creighmer said wearily. "But what is it here? Nothing but bits of broken stone."

"Where do you keep it?" It was Dawkes who asked that.

OLD John Creighmer laughed bitterly. "Gold is of less value here than food. A sack of it isn't worth as much as a skin that can be made into a garment.

"And you can't get out with it. Where do we keep it? It's in skin sacks, tossed in a corner of one of the rooms at the old house down by the river. Help yourselves!"

"Batty!" Dawkes muttered.

"Sensible, you mean," Chaplin corrected. "He's right."

"The man Dawkes will have the house in the clearing, and the man Chaplin the one by the river," Creighmer decided. "You boys take them there, give them food and fire and skins for their beds. I'll allot them shares of the work tomorrow."

Mark touched Chaplin on the arm, then led him around the house to a shed. They selected some skins, and made up a pack of provisions. As they left the shed, Luke appeared with Dawkes, on the same mission.

The log house to which Mark conducted Chaplin consisted of four

rooms and a lean-to shed. Inside the house were some articles of furniture that had been made by the men. Mark dumped the skins on the old bed, and stowed the provisions in the kitchen.

"You can clean up the place, and I'll get fuel," Mark said. "We'll bring live coals from the other house and start your fire. You must keep it going."

MARK hurried away. Chaplin went through the house, from room to room. He found a dozen fairly large sacks filled with gold dust and nuggets. He laughed aloud as he looked at the wealth. In Midas Gulch, it would have created a sensation. But here it was what old John Creighmer had said—nothing more or less than broken stone.

Mark returned with fuel, and the fire was made. "You are to do as you please today, my grandfather says. Here is a line and two hooks, if you wish to catch fish. Grandfather makes the hooks from bone, and the lines from little vines he dries over the fire."

Chaplin fished, and loafed around the rushing stream, killing time until the dusk came. None of the others intruded. As it began growing dark, he took some of the skins and went to the brush not far from the house, and made a bed on the ground.

After the ordeals of the day, he would sleep like an exhausted man. And Jed Dawkes might decide it would be best to remove Deputy Sheriff Chaplin, to guard against possible events in the future.

He finished the bed and straightened up.

"You need not be afraid during the night," somebody said.

Chaplin whirled, to find Mark standing within a few feet of him.

"You can sleep in the house, if



you wish. The other man will not attack you tonight—nor will you hurt him. You are both being watched."

"Thanks, but I'll sleep here," Chaplin said. "It's better than the stuffy house. How long has it been, Mark, since anybody tried to get out of this canyon?"

"They stopped trying long ago."

"I've got to get out, and take that man with me!"

"He says he must get out and take you."

"Which do you believe?" Chaplin asked intently.

"I do not know. My grandfather will find the truth."

"I'm not afraid of what he finds out. And I wish you'll tell your sister she needn't be afraid of me. She acts like she is."

**D**AWKES told her you are an evil man, but that he is a good man and will be her friend."

"Knowin' what I do about him, I've got an idea what kind of a friend he'd be," Chaplin muttered.

"You need have no fear for my sister. Dave Lattish loves Lucy. He would kill the man who offended her. I am telling you as a warning. I told the same to the man Dawkes."

"Fair enough!" Chaplin said.

A hail came from the edge of the clearing.

"Chaplin! This is Dawkes! I want to talk to you!"

Chaplin stepped out from the brush with Mark beside him. He saw Dawkes approaching through the dusk, with Luke Creighmer at his heels.

"What do you want, Dawkes?" Chaplin asked.

"I want to talk to you alone. This Luke is taggin' around after me, and I see you've got a tag on you."

"Come on and talk."

Chaplin advanced to meet the outlaw. Mark and Luke held back and allowed them to get together. Dawkes sat on a big rock, and Chaplin remained standing, facing him.

"What do you think of this damned nonsense?" Dawkes asked gruffly.

"Nothin' to it. Some early settlers got cooped up in here, and their descendants are here yet."

"There must be some way out of here," Dawkes said, growing excited. "You heard what the old coot said about the gold, didn't you?"

"I've seen it—sacks and sacks of it."

Dawkes gestured hurriedly. "Listen, Chaplin! Let's bury the hatchet. We can get out of here, somehow, and take a lot of that gold with us. Plant it somewhere and come back for more.

"Give us a couple of guns, and we can make these fools wash it out for us—tons of it! We'll be millionaires, Chaplin!"

"I ain't joinin' hands with the man who killed my Uncle Bob!"

"You won't make the deal? All right! I gave you the chance. I'll do it by myself. It's man against man now. A deputy sheriff don't amount to a damn here!"

"If there's a way out of this canyon, Dawkes, I'll take you in to swing!"

"You'll never get out—but I may!" Dawkes threatened.

**H**E turned and strode angrily off under the trees, with Luke trailing him. He sought the bed he had made in the other abandoned house. But he did not go to sleep immediately. He lay awake, figuring, plotting until the early hours.

He was awake at dawn, and cursed to find Luke Creighmer still standing guard. But, after he had pre-

pared and eaten food, he found Luke gone. He supposed Mark and Luke would have to do some sleeping in the daytime. That left only Dave Lattish, the old man and the girl to deal with.

Jed Dawkes had not lost his gun-belt. It was filled with cartridges, but he had no gun to load. But he had seen something in Creighmer's house that had interested him. It was a weapon. To the old man it was useless because of the absence of ammunition.

**B**UT ammunition to Dawkes was a reality—at least, enough for a couple of shots.

Slipping from the house, Dawkes furtively plunged into the thick brush. Certain that he was not observed, he circled toward the Creighmer house. He approached from the rear, cautiously. From behind some rocks, he watched the clearing. He saw Chaplin and Dave Lattish down by the stream. Lucy Creighmer was sitting on a log at the edge of the woods, working at something.

Dawkes crept silently from the brush and reached the rear wall of the house. Through a window, he saw Mark and Luke sleeping in one room. John Creighmer was on the porch. Dawkes crawled through an open window.

And he got what he sought—an old, rusty-looking gun standing in the corner by the fireplace. He slipped out through the window again and back to the brush.

Some distance from the house, he stopped to examine the gun. It was a muzzle-loader, with its stock rotted away. But at some time, somebody had drenched the barrel with grease, and the thing had possibilities as a weapon.

With strips from his shirt, and a ramrod he cut with his jack-knife, he cleaned the gun. He saved

some of the grease and worked it around the trigger. In time he succeeded in getting it to snap. A bit of slab-wood fashioned with the knife was fitted as a makeshift stock.

Jed Dawkes had a gun!

Now he took the cartridges from his belt, extracted the bullets and made a little heap of the powder. With the point of the knife he carefully removed some of the caps. Then he loaded the gun, ramming home powder and bullets and wadding, using bits of his shirt for the latter. He put the remaining powder and bullets in a piece of the shirt, wrapping them carefully.

Exulting, he went back through the brush, circling toward the stream.

Chaplin was walking along the shore. Dave Lattish was sprawled on the ground in the shade. Lucy was still on the log, engrossed in what she was doing.

Holding the gun behind his back, Jed Dawkes got to the stream and started along it toward Chaplin, as though returning from a tour of exploration. He advanced swiftly until he was within twenty feet of the man he sought to kill. Then he called:

"Chaplin! Turn and take it!"

## CHAPTER VI

### *The Flash of a Knife*

**I**N JED DAWKES' ringing voice was a tone of triumph. Chaplin whirled swiftly and darted aside. He saw Dawkes with the weapon held ready to fire. He could see the outlaw's gleaming black eye sighting down the barrel.

"Here's where I end another of the damned Chaplin tribe!"

It was a moment for instant action. Chaplin whirled and darted toward the near-by woods. The gun

roared and flamed, and a cloud of smoke mushroomed into the wind. Chips flew around Chaplin, but miraculously he remained unharmed. He plunged into the woods and ran. He did not know the gun was single-shot, that Dawkes would have to reload.

The shot roared and crashed against the granite walls of the canyon. Up at the house, old John Creighmer gave a startled cry and got to his feet. Dave Lattish stood as though struck dumb—he never heard the explosion of a gun before. Neither had the girl, who gave a cry of fear and fled toward the house.

Howling curses because he had missed, Dawkes plunged into the woods as though in pursuit of Chaplin. But he stopped where there was good cover, and, sure that Chaplin was not near, hastily reloaded.

Then he walked into the clearing again. Mark and Luke had rushed from the house and to their grandfather's side. Lucy and Dave Lattish joined them.

"March right down here, all of you!" Dawkes threatened. "Make it quick, or I'll shoot!"

OLD John Creighmer spoke to the others:

"We must do as this man says now. He has a gun, a weapon that can kill instantly. It makes him the master."

They approached Dawkes in a line, and stopped in front of him when he gestured for them to do so.

"You'd better understand I'm the boss around here," Dawkes told them. "I'm givin' orders. First, I want that man Chaplin. I'm goin' to shoot him—"

"That would be murder!" Creighmer interrupted.

"Yeah? Whatever it'd be, I'm goin' to shoot him. When he's out

of the way, there'll be other things to do."

"Then he told the truth—you are the outlaw."

THAT'S right! So you know I ain't a man to be trifled with. Now, you men know every foot of the canyon. I want Chaplin. Start and run him down, and bring him to me. You can find him and handle him."

"If he's brought here to be murdered—" Creighmer began.

"Rather have me shoot one of you? Get busy! If you try any tricks, *somebody's* goin' to die."

Old John Creighmer made a gesture of helplessness, and looked at his grandsons and Dave Lattish.

"This man wants the other caught and brought here," he repeated. "Search the woods!"

The three men hurried away.

"Now we'll sit on the porch in the shade," Dawkes said. "Life begins to look better. I'll get rid of Chaplin, then get out of this damned canyon when I'm ready, and take a lot of gold with me."

"You are a prisoner here forever."

"We'll see about that."

In the thick woods, Chaplin stopped when he believed he was safe. He heard no sounds of pursuit.

He realized that Dawkes, with a gun, was master of the canyon. He would have to be outwitted. Hand to hand, and both unarmed, Chaplin felt he could conquer Dawkes. But a single shot from the gun might leave old Bob's murderer unpunished, remove the last Chaplin, and leave the people of the canyon at the mercy of a human beast.

Chaplin started back through the brush, with the intention of locating Dawkes. The brush cracked near him, and he whirled to find

Mark Creighmer coming through the woods. Chaplin stopped and waited until the other caught up with him.

"Where's Dawkes?" he asked.

"At the house."

"Where did he get that gun?"

"It was by the fireplace—an old gun. Our grandfather said it was worthless because we had nothing to shoot in it."

"You mean one of the first folks brought it here? Then I'll bet it's an old muzzle-loader, a single-shot. We'll have to get it away from him."

"He has ordered me to find you and take you back," Mark said helplessly. "If I do not, he may harm one of us."

"So that's his game! He'd shoot me down in cold blood!"

"He has admitted you are an officer."

**G**LAD you folks know the truth. Now, about takin' me back—you don't want to do that?"

"He may hurt my grandfather or Lucy if I do not."

"Have sense!" Chaplin begged. "Find the others, and fix it up. Say you haven't found me yet. Pretend to keep lookin' for me. Give me a little time, and I'll get that gun away from him."

"What will you do?" Mark asked.

"Get near the house and watch. If I can catch him with the gun fired, I'll get him before he can reload."

"I give you your chance," Mark said.

He darted back through the brush searching for his brother and Dave Lattish.

Chaplin went through the brush also, keeping always under cover, and finally got near enough to the clearing to be able to see Dawkes on the porch.

With the stealthiness of a panther he circled to the rear of the house.

He could see Lucy in the kitchen cooking.

Chaplin crouched along the wall of the house until he eased his way to the front, where he could overhear what was being said on the porch. Mark had arrived and was talking.

"We think the man Chaplin has circled through the brush and is going down the creek," he was reporting to Dawkes. "But he cannot get out of the canyon."

"That ain't the idea. I want him right here," Dawkes raised his voice harshly. "Get busy and find him. If you don't I'm liable to do a lot of shootin' around here!"

Mark went across the clearing and plunged into the woods again, on his pretended search. Chaplin returned to the rear of the house. Lucy was still cooking.

"When do I get that grub?" Dawkes was shouting from the front.

"It is almost ready," she called.

**A** MOMENT later, she carried food through the front of the house and out to the porch, where Dawkes wished it served. He propped the gun between his knees and attacked the chicken he had compelled the girl to cook for him.

"Some cookin'," Dawkes leered, between huge mouthfuls. "I wouldn't mind havin' you cook for me reg'lar, Lucy. You're a right pretty girl."

"Go into the house, Lucy, and tend to the fire," her grandfather said quickly.

"I want her to stay here!" Dawkes barked.

"Evil will befall you if you as much as touch this girl!" the old man warned.

"Yeah?" Dawkes sneered. "You ain't makin' me shiver a bit. You come here to me, girl!"

Holding the gun in his left hand he got up, lurched forward, grasped

her with his right hand and whirled her back against the wall.

"Well, I sure put a hand on her," he grinned at the old man. "Where's the evil that was goin' to befall, huh?"

At the corner of the house something flashed in the sun. Like a bolt of lightning, that flash traveled the length of the little porch. There was a soft thud, as the point of a knife pierced Jed Dawkes' left shoulder.

He gave a screech of pain, and dropped the gun. He stooped quickly to regain possession of it. But through the door came a human catapult in the form of Bob Chaplin, to crash against Dawkes and hurl him flat.

And from the corner of the house rushed Dave Lattish, to hurl himself upon Dawkes also, following the knife he had thrown.

## CHAPTER VII

### *In Chains*

**C**HAPLIN had arranged the attack. He had gathered the three men, then had slipped into the house and hidden behind the front door, while the others stationed themselves at the corner of the porch.

Mark and Luke had followed Dave Lattish in his wild dash. Now Jed Dawkes was bound swiftly with skin thongs.

Chaplin examined the wound.

"Not bad. Just gave me time to jump him and keep him from gettin' the gun again. Thanks, Lattish! Got to patch him up, I reckon."

"It would be a waste of time. One does not feed a dying horse," John Creighmer decreed. "My word is law here. It is impossible to take this man out of the canyon. It is impossible for him to live here,

where he may harm others. He has admitted his guilt of murder. Mark!"

"Sir?"

"You will prepare a grave far down the creek. This man must be executed for his crimes."

"We can't kill him," Chaplin protested.

"It must be done! He would be a constant menace here."

**H**IS life's already forfeited to the law," Chaplin explained. "I've got to take him back for trial. He'll swing for what he's done."

"You can never take him back."

"I'll find a way out of the canyon. It's been years since you've tried."

"It cannot be done," the old man said, stubbornly. "Mark, you and Luke will take this man to the edge of the river. He must be executed."

"Who is to do it, sir?"

"Lots must be drawn. It can be done either with the gun or with a throwing knife."

"It won't be done with a gun. I happen to be holdin' it," Chaplin said.

"I can't let you do this. Who's got the best right to have this man? He shot my Uncle Bob, and I trailed him for miles over the hills."

"Your claim is just," Creighmer said. "You shall be the executioner."

"Yeah, but I aim to take him back and see him swing proper. I'm an officer, and I'm arresting him—"

"To hell with you!" Dawkes growled.

"Better be arrested by me than turned over to these men. It's my sworn duty to protect a prisoner, you know."

Dawkes caught the drift. "All right! I'm your prisoner. And a hell of a lot of good it'll do you!"

Creighmer was on his feet. "Mark! Luke! Do as I ordered. Take this



man to the river. I'll come along. Lucy, go into the house."

The brothers grasped Dawkes roughly, held his arms, urged him forward, down the steps, across the clearing and toward the stream.

"Chaplin!" Dawkes screamed. "You goin' to let 'em do it?"

"Appealin' to the law for help, huh?" Chaplin said. "Why should I help you?"

THEY came to the bank of the stream and halted. Dawkes' face was white, and not entirely from the blood he had lost through the shoulder wound. He looked like a trapped animal.

"Stop 'em, Chaplin!" he begged. "It's your duty! You've got the gun."

Chaplin said nothing. He stood aside while John Creighmer got three reeds, broke them off, and brought them to the group.

"Mark and Luke and Dave shall draw," he said. "If this man Chaplin wishes to draw also—"

"It's against the law for me to execute him like this," Chaplin said.

"Then the other three shall draw. The man who gets the shortest reed does the work.

"He will not betray that he has drawn. When the drawing is over, the three shall walk around and around this man, holding their knives, and the executioner will strike when he wishes."

The three stepped forward gravely and drew the reeds. Their faces were blank after they had measured them and decided the lot. They turned and looked at their grandfather.

Creighmer faced Jed Dawkes. "You have committed the greatest of crimes," he said. "Your punishment—"

"Stop it!" Dawkes shrieked. "Chaplin—make 'em stop!"

"Nobody stopped you when you shot old Bob."

"They'll use a knife! Stop 'em!"

"All right! I just wanted to see you wilt, Dawkes. I'll be watchin' you wilt again, when you see the rope, and there won't be any stoppin' the executioner then!"

He turned to old John Creighmer. "Wait! This man's my prisoner, under arrest for murder. He must be taken back for trial. Give me time to find a way out of the canyon and take him along. If I can't, then it'll be time enough to execute him."

"He will be a menace!"

"We'll make a prisoner of him. Give me a little time. If I don't find a way out, draw lots again, and let me draw with the others. He killed my uncle, remember."

THE old man stood back and seemed to be considering the problem. Presently he looked up.

"I desire to be honest and fair," he said. "His life shall be spared for a short time. Your search for a way out is folly, but you may have your try at it."

"Thanks, sir!"

"But this man cannot walk around like an honest man, and perhaps plan future mischief. Mark! Go with Luke to the shed and bring the old chains, and the big lock on the peg in the wall."

Mark and Luke hurried away.

"Heavy wagon-wheel chains," Creighmer explained. "They were on the wagons which brought us to this place. This man shall be bound in chains, carry them with him always. At night he must be chained to a wall."

Jed Dawkes shouted bitter imprecations. Dave Lattish was walking back and forth in front of him, on guard, fingering his knife.

Lattish was disappointed—he had drawn the short reed.

## CHAPTER VIII

*The Hideout*

**C**HAPLIN found the way out!

After days of searching, he found it, where the high rock wall joined with the cliff across the river. Through the years, seeds which had fallen into tiny cracks had become small trees whose roots had split the rock as they embedded themselves.

Chaplin was sure the trees could be used as anchoring places for a long ladder.

Trees were cut and vines found, and branches chopped into short lengths for rounds. In this manner they started making the ladder. When they reached the first tree above, they anchored the ladder and built a small landing stage. From that point they built upward again.

It was slow and dangerous work. But the top was reached at last.

Preparations for the journey began.

"We'll pack a little of the gold, and take cold food," Chaplin planned. "We'll have to break trail through raw woods, until we find the first ranch."

"I'm not going," John Creighmer said. "I have been here too long."

"But you can't stay here alone."

"Dave Lattish will stay with me, and wait for you to come back. Mark and Luke will go, and help you with the prisoner. And you must take Lucy. Use the gold to buy what you need. My grandchildren must learn to know the outside world."

They could not change him, he was firm, and so it was decided. They made up some small packs of the gold, and enough cold food to last for four days. They did not need to carry water, for there were plenty of springs and streams.

"We're startin' in the mornin',

Dawkes," Chaplin told him one evening.

"You ain't got me back yet," Dawkes growled. "You're goin' to have one big job, handlin' me and controllin' them there three savages you're takin' along."

They ate a hot meal before sunrise, then made their way over to the bottom of the ladder, John Creighmer and Dave accompanying them. Chaplin had decided to leave the old gun with Dave. It was charged, but he had nothing with which to reload it. Chaplin thought he could control Dawkes, with the help of Mark and Luke.

And sight of the gun in the hands of Dave Lattish might stop an intruder, if news of the gold leaked out, and others reached the canyon before Chaplin could return.

Farewells were said. Chaplin was the first up the ladder. Then Luke Creighmer followed, then Dawkes, and then Mark. Lucy was the last.

At the top they waved good-by to the two black specks below, and plunged into the brush.

The chains had been removed from Dawkes before the start, but his legs were tied together with thongs so that he could take only small steps. After the climb up, they had fastened his wrists with a long skin thong which ran behind his back, and removed the leg hobble.

**W**ITH no gun with which to enforce a command to halt, Chaplin had to guard constantly against Dawkes' making a quick dash to get away. But, in such case, he relied on Mark and Luke to run the murderer down.

They made a comfortable camp the first night. Mark stood the first watch and Luke the second, judging their time by the stars. Luke awoke Chaplin for his turn, and he sat with his back to the bole of a tree

and kept an intent eye on Dawkes, who was apparently sleeping.

Dawkes stirred, rolled over, then sat up.

"So you're takin' me back, huh?" Dawkes said. "Why don't you use your head, Chaplin? Let's ditch these savages. Think of the gold back in that canyon."

"You're wasting breath, Dawkes. I'm takin' you back!"

"You ain't got me there yet."

**T**WO days more they fought through the brush. They saw no sign of human habitation, found no trail.

On the fourth day they toiled up a steep, wooded hill and along the crest. Chaplin climbed a tall tree to survey the land. He was excited when he descended.

"Smoke!" he said.

Smoke meant human beings. Chaplin was certain it indicated the location of some isolated ranch. They went over another hill, quickening their pace, and came to a small stream.

"There!" Chaplin pointed. "Boot tracks!"

The tracks looked as though they had been made recently. Chaplin shouted in a stentorian voice, but got no answer. They came to a clearing and started across it, following the direction of the tracks. Suddenly a command shot out at them:

"Stop right there!"

They halted dead. Chaplin did not doubt that their appearance was enough to startle any who saw them. He and Dawkes looked like scarecrows, and Lucy and her brothers in their skin clothing would scarcely inspire confidence.

"Who are you?" the voice called from the brush.

"Bob Chaplin, deputy sheriff, with a prisoner, and friends."

There was silence for a moment, and then: "Keep comin' straight on."

They advanced again. The boot tracks led around a huge boulder. Suddenly they found themselves facing a man who held a six-gun ready for use. A short distance away was another, similarly equipped.

"It's Chaplin, all right!" this second man called. "But them others—"

"One is Jed Dawkes, my prisoner, wanted for murder. The others are folks who've been livin' in the hills all their lives. I want horses, some clothes if possible, and a gun."

"Mean you ain't got a gun?"

"Lost it," Chaplin said.

"Come along behind me."

They followed into the brush, passing the man standing there, who closed in behind them. Around a ledge of rock they came to a tiny cabin.

"This here is our headquarters," their guide said.

"You sure ain't ranchers, then," Chaplin told him. "Are you prospectors? Maybe you'd got a good claim and are workin' it."

"Guess again, Chaplin. This here is a hideout. We ain't specially glad to have a deputy visit us, but we don't mind much—when he ain't got a gun!"

## CHAPTER IX

### *Fight and Flight*

**A** HIDEOUT! So they were outlaws! And Chaplin had walked into them unarmed!

Dawkes laughed. "Gents, we belong to the same lodge!" he puffed. "Get me loose, huh?"

"You're Jed Dawkes?" one of them asked.

"That's right. I'm willing to throw in with you gents."

"Who said we wanted you to throw in with us?"

"I can buy my way in, maybe. Get me loose, and I'll show you where to get more gold than you ever saw. This pack on my back is dust and nuggets. Some of the other packs, too. And I know where it came from."

**D**AWKES had his bonds removed in a jiffy. He leered at Chaplin.

"Knew I'd live to finish the Chaplin breed," he boasted. "But I ain't goin' to borrow a gun and shoot you down. I'm goin' to think of somethin' special that can be done to you."

Chaplin spoke to the outlaws. "You'd better do a little thinkin'. If you ain't wanted bad now, you'll be fools to tie up with Jed Dawkes. Just lend me a gun, and I'll travel on with him."

"Inside the cabin, and we'll talk it over," one said. "I aim to see that gold."

The cabin had a single room. They crowded inside. Mark and Luke stood against the wall with Lucy between them, silent and wondering.

Dawkes told the story of the gold, and opened the packs. "I can take you to the canyon," he said. "Nobody'll know we went there, if Chaplin is fixed so he'll never talk. And these two men and the girl—they're ignorant. If they stumble across somebody and tell the yarn, they'll be declared lunatics."

"If you hook up with Dawkes, you'll be marked men," Chaplin repeated. "There's a jinx on his trail. He lost both his pals in the Midas Gulch holdup. He lost the money he got there. Think that over!"

The two outlaws stepped aside and whispered.

"Reckon we don't need to hook up with any hoodooed outlaw," one of them grated, as a result of the whispered conference. "We don't want anything to do with you,

Dawkes. But we sure can use that gold!"

"Goin' to take it and ride off and leave us here?" Dawkes cried. "Leave me a prisoner again?"

"There won't any of you be goin' to Midas Gulch to tell tales. The buzzards hereabouts are due for a feast."

Mark and Luke, standing silently against the wall, ignored by the outlaws, had been interested though silent spectators. But they understood the situation. And now suddenly they hurled themselves forward, and Mark jerked one man's gun out of its holster, and held it back for the astonished Chaplin to grab.

But Luke was too slow. The other man fired, and the bullet scraped Chaplin's arm. Chaplin shot, and the man went down. From somewhere, the other outlaw brought forth a second gun. Chaplin fired twice.

There came another explosion, and he realized that Dawkes had the gun the first outlaw had dropped when hit. Chaplin whirled to fire at Dawkes, only dimly seen in the cloud of smoke which filled the cabin.

Dawkes screeched defiance and melted through the door.

"Luke, stay with your sister! Come with me, Mark!" Chaplin shouted.

**H**E picked up the second outlaw's gun. Both men were prone on the ground, fatally wounded. Chaplin sprang out of the cabin. A bullet sang past his head. He saw Dawkes plunge into the brush.

"Luke! Lucy! Come with us! We won't get separated," Chaplin cried.

They rushed toward the protecting brush.

In Chaplin's mind was the knowledge that the outlaw had fired two shots from that gun and Dawkes

one. Dawkes had but three shots remaining.

In the brush he told Luke to stay with Lucy a distance from himself and Mark. They could hear the cracking of the brush off to the right.

"Dawkes!" Chaplin called. "I'm callin' on you to surrender! It's your last chance."

"Try to take me!" Dawkes jeered.

CHAPLIN motioned for Mark to remain with the others. He crawled around some rocks, and a bullet went past his head. Dawkes had missed again—and had but two shots left in his gun.

Chaplin pursued, then halted and remained motionless for a time, trying to hear sounds that would reveal Dawkes' location. When he did, he realized that Dawkes was circling back to where the girl and her brothers had been left.

Chaplin started retracing his steps. If Dawkes got Lucy or her brothers in his power, he could dictate terms. And that was undoubtedly his object.

He crashed on through the brush. Another bullet zipped past him. Chaplin darted behind a convenient rock.

"Dawkes!" he cried. "You've got only one shot left."

"That'll be enough!"

"I'm goin' to take you in Dawkes!"

Unminding, Dawkes back-tracked cautiously toward where he thought Chaplin would be. He had only to down Chaplin with that last bullet, and his troubles would be over. He could take the gold and make a get-away; live high, perhaps down in Mexico.

Carefully he crept through the brush.

Then he saw Chaplin. The deputy was some distance away—a long shot with a six-gun. But Dawkes

could not wait. He tossed up his gun, and fired.

The bullet struck a rock in front of Chaplin and sang away. It dawned upon Dawkes that he had a useless gun. He threw it aside, turned and ran, blindly; not caring in which direction he went, wanting only to get away.

Chaplin crashed through the brush and found the others.

"I've got to get him. You wait in the cabin," he ordered.

"Let us get him," Mark begged. "We can track. We can travel swiftly through the woods, and with little noise."

Chaplin realized that these men, accustomed to stalking game for food and clothing, could effect Dawkes' capture with little difficulty.

"Get him!" he said. "But don't hurt him with your knives."

The two dashed away through the brush like bloodhounds on a trail. Chaplin advanced with Lucy toward the outlaws' cabin.

## CHAPTER X

### *Trail's End*

THE TWO brothers brought Dawkes back. Mark and Luke had run him down, cornered him, quickly subdued him when he showed fight.

The outlaws had two ponies and a packhorse. Chaplin decided to appropriate the animals. He covered the bodies of the dead outlaws with blankets, closed the cabin; he caught up the horses and put bridles and saddles on.

Neither Mark nor Luke would ride. Chaplin put Lucy on the packhorse, which he would lead. He made Dawkes mount, and lashed him onto the saddle with a lariat; mounted the last horse himself, and the cavalcade started.



They went across country, following a barely perceptible trail. Late in the afternoon they caught the odor of smoke, and heard dogs barking. They rode out of the woods to find themselves at a desolate, run-down ranch.

"Hello!" Chaplin sang out.

Two men came from the house and toward them.

"I'm Bob Chaplin, deputy sheriff. How far is it to Midas Gulch from here?"

"Almost a day's ride."

"Can we put up here tonight? I want some clothes for these folks, and maybe an extra horse. I'll pay the bill."

"Come ahead!" one called. "You're Young Bob Chaplin, huh?"

"That's right."

"You've sure come to the right place. Old Bob did me a big favor once. Ain't that Jed Dawkes you've got?"

"Yeah! I'm takin' him back."

"We'll help you get him to Midas Gulch safe. Glad to ride in with you tomorrow. Good excuse to go to town."

THE group ate ravenously that night. Some old clothes were found for Mark and Luke, but none for Lucy, this being strictly a bachelor ranch. Sleeping accommodations were made ready, and a vigilant guard for Dawkes was arranged.

They were up at dawn, ate and set off once more.

"Young Bob, you're due to shock Midas Gulch," one of the ranchers said. "You've been given up for gone. Some of the posse tracked you to a creek, where it looked like you and Dawkes had put on a fight and tumbled into the water. They even took up a collection to build a monument for you, but they ain't got around to chiselin' it yet."

Throughout the day they traveled

on. Sunset was staining the sky as they turned into the rough road with its train of freight wagons. Chaplin did not notice that one of the ranchers rode ahead, eager to spread the news of Chaplin's return from the dead and Jed Dawkes' capture.

THEN the rancher came galloping back to them.

"Chaplin! Like a damned fool, I went ahead and shouted the news. Old Bob's friends are comin' to meet you. They'll string Dawkes up!"

"They will not!" Chaplin cried. "After what I've gone through to bring him back, he'll stretch rope legal. You men, take charge of these folks. Take 'em to the restaurant and keep 'em there. If you see any deputies, tell 'em to hustle to the jail."

He seized the bridle of Dawkes' horse and pulled the mount off to one side. The others rode on.

Dawkes was on the verge of collapse.

He could hear the dull roar of a mob in the distant street. He had seen a mob work before.

"Get me to the jail, Chaplin," he begged. "Don't let 'em get me!"

"Don't you worry! You'll be guarded all right tonight, and tomorrow you'll go to the county seat with a dozen men ridin' around you. It'd serve you right if I turned you over to that mob. But Uncle Bob wouldn't have wanted that."

He urged the horses on, cut down the side of the hill to the little log jail, which was now shrouded in darkness. Behind it, he stopped the horses, untied Dawkes and got him out of the saddle, took him in front, and pushed him through the door.

Then men rushed toward him from both sides, to collect in an ominous crowd in front of the building.

"We'll take care of that gent for

you, Chaplin! We'll take him off your hands, Yeung Bob!"

Chaplin thrust the cringing, whining Jed Dawkes in front of him and pulled the door shut. Somebody outside ignited a kerosene flare, and it lit up the scene. It showed Bob Chaplin standing in front of the door, a gun in either hand. He raised a hand, and the mob quieted.

"You can't have him!" Chaplin bellowed. "He's goin' to the county seat for trial. He's goin' to swing legal!"

"It was your own uncle," somebody called.

"Yeah, my own uncle, and you all know what I thought of him. Uncle Bob would want the law to take its course. And that's what I want. I've had a tough time bringin' this man back. I'm askin' you, gentle like, to break up and go back to the street. I don't want to hurt any of my friends!"

Deputies were getting through the crowd now and hurrying to Chaplin's side. They howled greetings at him, took up positions beside him. Chaplin lifted his hand for silence again.

"Dawkes is the same as swinging now," he shouted. "I'm askin', as a

favor, that you don't try to get him. This is a law-and-order camp! My Uncle Bob said that, and it stands. We ain't goin' to make a liar out of him, are we?"

With the fickleness of a mob they howled approval of the sentiment, and some started back down the hill. Soon others straggled after. The mob gradually melted away. And presently Bob Chaplin was alone with his deputies, and Dawkes, whining in the little jail, was begging to be put into the cell.

Chaplin gave a few terse instructions about guarding the jail, and starting for the county seat with the prisoner at dawn, then mounted and rode slowly down the hill to the rear of the building where Old Bob Chaplin had met his death.

He stopped at the back door, bent low in the saddle, and peered inside. He could see the spot where his Uncle Bob had been stretched lifeless when he had ridden away. The blood debt had been paid.

"I did it, Uncle Bob! I've kept my promise," Young Bob Chaplin whispered. "He's up there on the hill, in the little jail you built! I got him, Uncle Bob, like I said I'd do!"

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## **ALIAS THE WHIRLWIND**

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*Introducing a New, Dashing, Romantic Character,  
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# The Savage Horde



*There was a rush forward, and Bart's rifle was wrenched from his hands*

*Moments Packed With Action in a Fast-Moving Story of a  
Gory Raid on Tai-fei by Merciless Tibetan Bandits*

## *A Complete Novelette*

**By CAPT. KERRY McROBERTS**

*Author of "The Devil Fish," "Danger Trails," etc.*

**B**ART wakened with a start, senses keyed to some unknown alarm. He sat bolt upright, called sharply to his Chinese boy.

"Lo Shen! What's up?"

Abruptly his brain became aware of weird, unaccustomed silence—an oppressive silence freighted with menace.

He called for Lo Shen again. His voice echoed with the unmistakable hollowness of an empty house. That

Lo Shen, who arrived punctually each morning just as the sun tipped the Chiang hills to the north, should be tardy was understandable. But not that uncanny silence which was not of the house alone but of the Chinese border city outside.

By now, with the sun far above the hills, the crooked streets of Tai-fei should be a veritable bedlam of groaning camels, shrill coolie sing-song, and clattering, snorting ponies.

Bart leaped from his bed, flung

open the iron shutters that guarded his one window. Before him the close-packed roofs spread to the encircling city wall. No smoke lifted from the squat mud chimneys. In the streets—narrow canyons in a crazy, twisted pattern—there were only mongrel dogs that crept along furtively, heads and tails down.

The rice fields between the city walls and the hills that marked the Tibetan border shimmered yellow in the flooding sun, but the city itself seemed to be asleep.

**Y**ET Bart knew that it was not asleep. As clearly as if his eyes could pierce the thatch and mud roofs he sensed the hushed movement of life beneath them; tense, frightened life.

It meant but one thing. From across the rice plain some warning message on the wind or some breathless coolie who had strayed too far on a rabbit trail, had brought the alarm. Bandits coming! The Black Horde out of Tibet!

Loot, murder and fire!

Bart Metcalf, who represented the American-Asiatic Trading Company at Tai-fei, had experienced bandit alarms before, half a dozen times during the two years he had been stationed at the tightly settled outpost. But the threatened raids had never come off. Once when the Horde came through the hills it appeared for a few fearful minutes as if the city were doomed. But the mad-riding band of wild, loot-lusting raiders had swept past the gates on their shaggy ponies, bound for the richer Mandarin city down the river.

Somehow, Bart had the feeling that this time it was not a false alarm. Tai-fei was in for it! Its men would be butchered! Its women and other loot across the Chiang hills before nightfall! No doubt Lo Shen's absence had much to do

with the birth of this feeling. Chinese minds are intuitive. Lo Shen had remained behind his own doors, in hiding.

Bart threw on his clothes, fastened the iron shutters and gathered a handful of company papers from the drawer of a teakwood table that served him as a desk. His mouth twisted grimly while he shoved the documents into an inner pocket of his coat. Small chance the smug bosses back in San Francisco would ever see them! Among them was a letter telling him that when he shipped the season's accumulation of amber, turquoise and silver, he could come along on three months' leave.

The shipment was already loaded on the go-down junk tied up in the river just outside the city walls. He had planned to start tomorrow toward Hankow on the first leg of the journey home.

It would make rich booty! Could he reach it before the long-haired Tibetan riders circled the city from that quarter? He dropped a pistol and clip of cartridges into his pocket, picked up his rifle, slung it in readiness for a quick hip shot, and hurried down into the quiet street.

Bart's first impulse was to hasten down to the river and board the go-down junk. If he could maneuver the small vessel into the middle of the stream he might have a chance. Then he remembered Dave Stallings.

**H**E turned resolutely away from the closed gates and walked rapidly through the twisting, narrow alleys until he came to the house of the only other white man in Tai-fei.

Bart had no particular liking for Dave Stallings, agent for another American exporting firm with offices in Shanghai, not because they were rivals in business, but because of the man's base nature and unscrupulous methods. As he went to-

ward the house where Stallings, Bart was confident, would still be sleeping off the effects of last night's rice brandy, he recalled the man's latest shameful trick.

It was the affair of the white jade vase, the pretty Chinese girl, and the Mandarin of the city down the river.

The Mandarin had come up to Tai-fei, had stopped in at the tea house of Tso Lin, and had complimented Tso Lin on the high quality of his tea. But it was Tso Lin's ill luck that his daughter, Chin Sung, should come into the shop just then and earn more elaborate compliments for the house of Tso Lin.

**Y**OUR daughter, O worthy Tso Lin," the Mandarin had concluded, "is the ripening bud of a sweet plum blossom that shall bloom in rapture." He issued his orders, implicating obedient compliance. "This very hour you shall put her in a wicker basket and deliver her to my barge, which your coolies will find waiting in the river."

Old Tso Lin had other plans for the girl. Many of the sons of well-to-do merchants of Tai-fei would make her a full fledged wife. He pleaded with the Mandarin—and it was finally agreed that the red-feather official would accept fifty taels of silver in place of the girl, if the money were paid at once in addition to Tso Lin's overdue taxes.

Tso Lin did not have the money. He went to Dave Stallings with a white jade vase which had come down from the Tso Lin ancestors and was to be Chia Sung's dowry. He asked Stallings to loan him fifty silver taels, under strict promise to hold the vase safe and return it when the money was repaid after the rice crops were in.

Stallings agreed to the bargain, advanced the money—then promptly sent the vase to 'Frisco and sold

it for the equal of some two hundred silver taels.

According to his religion, losing the vase was an affront to the Tso Lin ancestors, and the old merchant had killed himself. Stallings never turned a hair.

"What's one Chink less?" he calmly said.

Bart had heard the story from Lo Shen. He had said to Dave: "My boy, Lo Shen, tells me that the old man left a curse—and charged Chia Sung with seeing that it was fulfilled. Lo Shen thinks you'd better watch out."

Stallings merely laughed.

Still—no matter how despicable the man was—Bart could not have it in his heart to let him be caught by bloodthirsty bandits while in a stupor and helpless. No doubt his servants, too, had remained away, as had Bart's own China boy.

Bart found Stallings sprawled across a floor mattress, and shook him into consciousness.

"We may have time to untie the go-downs," Bart said. "Yours and mine. We can dump some of the stuff—make room for a few of the women and men that are trying to—"

Dave's brain cleared instantly.

**M**AYBE you'll dump your cargo to make room for these yellow devils, but I'm damned if I will," he interrupted. He jumped up, rushed down to the street door. "You'd think everybody was in the grave already," he said. "If they really come this time, it ought to be a damn fine show. I hate to miss it."

The deathly stillness was suddenly broken by the sharp ping of a rifle.

"We're probably not going to miss anything," Bart muttered.

The two men turned from Dave's door toward the river gates.

As they made their way to the gates they carefully avoided the Street of the Dragon Temple, the one straight thoroughfare that divided the town from wall to wall. In this street they would be fair marks from either direction. But they had to turn into it at last, hugging the shuttered shop fronts.

They had gone but a few yards down the street when Bart heard a second vicious ping. It was followed by another and another. Big, leaden Mauser bullets knocked chunks of mud from the walls at their side. Bart felt a stinging sensation in the fleshy part of his left arm. He looked down, surprised. A great spreading stain of red showed where the skin-searing slug had all but passed him by. He had felt no pain.

**T**HE messengers of death were seeking their marks. Dave Stallings gave an animal-like grunt and toppled over, collapsing like an inflated bag when the air is suddenly let out.

"Got me in the ankle," he said through tight lips.

Kneeling over Stallings, Bart looked down the long street. Except for the ping-ping of the searching bullets, there had been no sounds till now. But all in an instant this was changed. Tai-fei rocked with the explosive noises of all hell let loose. Snarling, guttural yells. The unearthly rattle of sheep-gut drums. The barking of a hundred different kinds of guns that once had been in the arsenals of the raiding Chinese war lords. Thatch from the roofs and dry mud from the walls splattered down in the street in a veritable shower.

At the far end of the street an endless stream of hideous figures was swarming over the wall. Men with long hair, knotted and shaggy like

the manes of their ponies, bodies bare from the waist up or wrapped in untanned sheepskins. Curved knives gleamed in the blazing sun. Pistols and rifles spat a wild tattoo of lead in useless fusillade.

And above all the din the unearthly rasp of raucous, ear-splitting prayer wheels whirled aloft by the Tibetan priests, black-robed lamas who invoked Heaven with one hand—while they sought a throat to cut or a woman to steal with the other. The fighting lamas of Tibet!

The raiders came on in what seemed to be an endless wave, a score poisoning at a time on the ridge of the wall before they leaped down.

Bart lifted his rifle. They were good marks, those wild shapes on the wall, silhouetted against the blue sky—but he put his rifle down. What was the use—yet? A means of escape was more important just now.

He scanned the house walls on either side, seeking a set-back doorway where he could carry his stricken companion while he examined the injured ankle.

Directly ahead, perhaps ten yards away, a door that was not quite flush with the street opened. An ancient Chinese woman stepped boldly into the street. She would belong to a good family, Bart took quick note. Her jacket and trousers were of shining satin. Her slippers were tiny dots of red. She faced the Horde coming over the wall at the end of the street, stood rigid for a long moment, her hands raised aloft.

**T**HEN, as Bart watched, the woman's tensely stiffened body seemed to shudder all over like a leaf in the wind, the upraised arms slowly slipped down. The ancient figure in yellow satin crumpled, twisted and dropped. Even as the woman dropped she seemed to have purposely tried to guide her body



so that in falling it fell, face down, exactly across the threshold of the narrow entrance door that led to the house door further back, beyond the street, at the end of the short hallway.

"Her dead body will keep the marauding devils out of the house, and away from the younger women," Bart thought. He knew that the superstitious Tibetans would never enter a house if they had to step across a dead body at the threshold. The lamas believed that great evil would come out of it—evil that would destroy the very soul of the offender.

BART hoped he could make that open hallway door. Stallings tried to stand, but could not. On hands and knees he crawled close against the house walls, Bart watching for any menacing figure that might appear close at hand out from a side street. They reached the open door at last.

Bart pulled the body of the dead woman inside the narrow hall, carefully arranged the body again—when he was satisfied there was no life left—so that any raider who forced an entrance would have to cross the recumbent figure. He pulled Stallings into the temporary shelter and tore wildly at his blood-stained shirt for enough free cloth to make a stiff bandage.

As Bart leaned over the injured man, he heard the door at the end of the hall open. He looked up quickly. A face, round, set with two great expressive black eyes, glowed like a pale saffron moon in the shadow. A slight figure in blue silk darted out—and before Bart could realize exactly what was happening, they were all through the inner door. Dave was sitting on the floor of a darkened room—the blue figure was ripping cloth and

making tight a skillfully arranged bandage around the man's shattered ankle.

Bart looked about the room. He saw at once that it was the serving room of a pretentious tea house. Family quarters would be beyond and upstairs. In corners were dark, gilded idols. Red embroideries hung on the walls. Strewn about were burning incense sticks and bowls of sacrificial rice.

Through an inner door women came scurrying into the room. Serving women, from their drab black jackets and trousers. Some of them young like the one in blue satin. One of them very old in yellow—like the woman lying dead at the front entrance door.

The toothless old woman in yellow clutched Bart's right arm tightly. "There are no men," she sing-songed in Chinese. "You will save us—save the women of the household of the departed Tso Lin?"

"Tso Lin!" Bart exclaimed. He looked at the figure in blue. Could this be the daughter of Tso Lin? She still bent over Dave Stallings' ankle. Bart had never seen the girl before.

Just then the blue-clad figure straightened and Stallings got shakily to his feet.

"Good job you've done," he said in Chinese. He moved, limping, but with considerable swiftness, toward the inner door that would lead to the back of the house. To Bart he called: "Come on. Let's get into the back street. Maybe we can give them the slip yet."

BART got in his way, his face dark.

"These women?" he said. "And the girl. She must be—"

The girl slid close, silently. Dave looked into her face.

"This is Tso Lin's house," he

said. "You must be Chia Sung?"

"I am the unworthy daughter of the departed Tso Lin, who is gone to the Yellow Fountain," said the girl.

Stallings rested a hand for an instant on the Chinese girl's shoulder, then stood free and said haltingly: "Thanks, for the trouble. Well, you owed me something. I saved you from that fat red-feather down the river. Get us into the back street and we're quits."

The girl said quietly: "At the Yellow Fountain there will be gladness—when the daughter of Tso Lin has paid the debt of the departed."

**B**ART felt something of a shiver down his spine. He remembered what Lo Shen had said. "Tso Lin charged his daughter with a curse. She will discharge it—if the white man no watch out."

Pandemonium reigned in the streets beyond the closed doors. Savage yells, the wild clamor of lust-mad men, bestial cries and the harsh, strident din made by the whirling prayer wheels gave warning that the attack of the hill-men was well under way.

Bart glanced at the blue clad figure, standing silent before him. Her voice had been soft and meek. There had been no hint that a pointed dagger lay hidden in the words she had said to Stallings. Her face was a mask, even with howling death stalking at the portals.

Suddenly the old wrinkled woman threw herself at the feet of the Chinese girl, kneeled forward and touched the floor with her forehead. She mumbled something in a household dialect. Bart gathered that she proposed to go to a back door and duplicate the sacrifice the other old woman had made at the front.

Chia Sung said gently: "Aii! We will meet at the Yellow Fountain."

But Bart caught and stopped the old woman. "No," he said firmly.

To Chia Sung he said: "Take us upstairs where we can look out and see what's happening. If the back way is clear we may all be able to get beyond the walls, and reach the go-downs in the river while the Horde is busy in the town."

Chia Sung led the way. Stallings limped in the rear. Bart saw that Chia Sung watched him and that each time his limp was pronounced she moved close to him, as if to offer the help of her shoulder. This apparent anxiety surprised him. He thought it curious that the girl should be so thoughtful about Dave Stallings, the man who had practically stolen the white jade vase of her father's ancestors and sent him to the Yellow Fountain—the Chinese Heaven.

Bart opened the iron shutter a crack and looked out over Tai-fei. The streets below were a hideous sight. The half-naked vandals, their bodies dripping wet, coarse hair streaming over their snarling faces, were frenzied with blood lust. Over the bedlam of their savage yells and the agonized cries of their victims rose the discordant drone of the prayer wheels whirled by the fiendish, maddened lamas. They were beating in the doors along the street.

**A** GIGANTIC fellow with a sheepskin over his shoulder came hurtling out of a house directly in front, carrying under one great hairy arm a kicking, screaming woman, her head down so that it almost bumped along the ground. A man, the woman's husband, perhaps, was clinging to the big fellow's legs. The bandit rid himself of the man by smashing in his head with the butt of his gun.

With a curse, Bart opened the crack of the shutter and leveled

his rifle. Foolish to attract attention, but he could not help it. He hoped against hope that he would not hit the woman—sighted carefully—pulled the trigger. The big snaggle-toothed Tibetan let out an animal like scream, fell forward on his face. While he sprawled, the woman dropped prone to the ground.

Instantly another bandit appeared. He stooped to swoop the woman up before she could get to her feet. Bart fired again, and this fellow crumpled over the other. The woman ran into the house. Bart watched to see what would happen now, because the dead body of the woman's mate lay outstretched across the threshold. Would the bandits, who were gathering before the house which held such a comely prize, be held back by that body?

THERE was a consultation. A lama came running up. He carried a knife in one upraised hand, a knife dripping with blood. The bandits appealed to him. One seemed to be telling him of the desired woman on the other side of the guarding body. The lama considered awhile, then gravely held his prayer wheel high and whirled it furiously.

The snarling beasts before the guarded door were ready to spring forward in a race for the prize. But whatever the message was that the lama got from the jarring voice of the rasping prayer wheel, it held them.

There were savage protests in a guttural volley, then the crowd swept on into the next house.

Bart closed the shutter. Dave Stallings, who had been watching, said: "We're safe as far as the front door is concerned, until these devils get drunk on rice brandy. Then they won't listen to the lamas."

"When they're drunk we'll have a better chance of getting out through

the back," Bart returned. "And they won't be guarding the wall."

Stallings looked about him. "Where's the old hag?" he demanded. "Send her out to the rear entrance to do her stuff, quick. They'll be turning into the side streets any minute, now."

"We'll get along without that," Bart said decisively.

He looked hurriedly about him. His searching eyes failed to discover the wrinkled face of the old woman in yellow.

Had she, too, determined to destroy herself in an effort to save the Tso Lin household? He must stop that. No further sacrifices by the women. He turned questioningly toward Chia Sung. She understood, pointed to the hallway. She spoke in a calm, cool voice:

"The milk mother of the Father Great One, Tso Lin, goes to the street—to guard the back door."

At the head of the stairs, Bart saw a flash of familiar yellow. Just a flash, then the figure had disappeared down the dim stairway. Bart rushed into the hall, bounded down the stairs. He must stop the woman before she reached the door.

But fate played Bart a pretty trick. At the bottom stair his ankle twisted sharply. He fell to one knee, steadied himself against the wall with his hand. At his sharp call the woman looked back—but she did not stop. Determinedly she ran forward.

BART straightened himself. The moment's delay had given the purposeful woman time to reach the door. She withdrew the bar, stood for a moment beside the partly opened door. Bart saw the withered fingers fumbling beneath the yellow jacket. Her hand raised to her mouth. The little pellet she held between forefinger and thumb glint-

ed white in the light from the street.

Bart hurled himself limpingly forward. He clutched at the woman's shoulder, tried to knock the white pellet from her fingers. But she slipped out of his grasp, whirled away. She was through the door, into the street.

A moment she stood on the threshold—then slumped down across the narrow step. Bart would have reached out a hand, hauled her back into the room. But he saw it was too late. The woman was dead. The ready poison had done its work. He closed the door, fastened the bar across it and started for the stairs.

He felt sick at heart. Two strong men granted a quarter of an hour's grace by the sacrifice of two old women!

**W**HEN he reached the upper floor he went into a rear room and looked down into the back street. The Tibetans had already swarmed into it. They were dragging along captive women and looted stores of silk, priceless porcelains and ornaments of jade. Directly below him, the scene in front was being duplicated. A wild band were halted before the door. Bart could not see the ground because of the jutting roof over a first floor projection. But he could see the heads of the milling Tibetans and knew that the body of the second old woman was stretched at their feet, across the rear door.

A lama ran up, his black robe torn into shreds, his brown, lean body showing through the filthy tatters. He whirled his wheel and shook his head. Half a dozen bullets were splattered viciously into the body on the ground. Then the crowd ran on, both Bart and Dave taking pot shots after the retreating figures, lustful for prizes not guarded by corpses. Bart sickened again

when he saw that one of his bullets, or one of Dave's, had done for a captive as well as the savage brute who was carrying her. Bart went back to the front room. In the narrow corridor that led from the back of the house he met the household women. They were wringing their hands, but were silent. Chia Sung was not among them. The door to the front room was closed. When Bart started to open it, a hand was laid quickly on his arm and a woman said:

"The flower of Tso Lin talks to the tablet!"

Bart knew what that meant. Chia Sung was "talking" to the teakwood panel on which would be inscribed the names of the Tso Lin ancestors. It would have been before this tablet that her father had killed himself over Stallings' treachery with the white jade vase.

A Chinese woman may not talk to the gods direct, but she may "talk" to the family ancestors.

He opened the door and went in. No time now to stand on ceremonies.

**T**HE room was empty of all save the little Chinese girl in blue. She was bent to the floor in humble supplication, murmuring in singsong before the teakwood tablet which hung on the wall.

Bart caught a phrase and stiffened in his tracks.

"O worthy Father Great One, look down this day upon thy humble daughter and guide her hand to the fulfillment."

Fulfillment! Her father's curse on Stallings!

And yet she had seemed to care for him.

Had gently nursed the injured man's ankle. Had gazed at him graciously with her great refulgent eyes. Could the girl be thinking of vengeance in the face of the

terrible carnival of death that raged in the streets outside?

Chia Sung got up from the floor. Apparently she had not heard him enter. Bart's eyes suddenly darted to the thing she held between the tips of her fingers. She had been bending over a thin bladed knife, a long pointed knife with an inlaid hilt. As she turned around, the slender weapon disappeared beneath her blue silk jacket.

AT that exact moment Stallings came into the room. He had stumbled in the dark hall and wrenched his ankle. He sank into a chair with a sharp groan. Chia Sung flew to kneel at his feet. Her fingers caressed the ankle lovingly. While her hands soothed, her face turned up full to Dave's, and there was an expression in it that puzzled Bart.

Under some other circumstances he would have said the girl was adoring the white man. In her eyes was tenderness—downright affection, Bart thought. He could not understand it. Tenderness—and a long, slim knife!

In the back of the house there was a crash. A woman screamed. Her scream rose to an agonized shriek, then was broken off in a gurgle.

"God!" Bart cried. "They've come over the roofs!"

No dead body across the threshold guarded the upper windows. The Tibetans had sacked a neighboring house and then sallied out onto the flat, one-story back roofs. They had reached Chia Sung's windows, and with mighty heaves of their combined shoulders had crashed in the iron shutters.

Another scream from a woman who did not finish her cry. The others rushed into the front room. Behind them loomed the savage faces of half a dozen bandits. Other raiders had gone downstairs. There

was the terrific din of doors being beaten down.

Bart fired pointblank into the hall. One face, slit by a line of white teeth, sank. A volley of bullets whistled into the room. But Bart had leaped out of range. He fell onto the floor, flat. Drew his pistol and fired around the frames of the door. The Tibetans were so closely packed in the hall he could not help hitting some one of them with every shot.

One fellow, a little wiry fiend who had gone literally mad with blood lust, sprang into the room. In one hand was an old army Colt that probably had once belonged to a missionary. In the other hand he held a crooked knife. He stopped in the middle of the floor, crouched to look around. The women stood in terror against the walls. Stallings and Bart were on either side of the door behind him.

The bandit's appearance startled both Dave and Bart. There was something so fantastic about his being there in the center of the room—with both Bart and Dave ready and able to shoot him down instantly. He seemed to sense his own madness, and grinned.

Bart's attention was distracted by a rush from the hall. The door filled with sweating brown bodies. Bart forgot the fellow inside and fired from the floor into the clustered invaders. Their bullets answered, but were unaimed. Stallings' rifle chimed in and presently the door was blocked by a swirling mass of bandits who writhed in death agonies.

THEN Bart remembered the fellow who had sprung into the room. He looked around wildly. He saw him, still in the middle of the floor—but sprawled on his back. His hands were clutching at his throat. Suddenly his hands dropped with a

thud. His body twitched and was still.

Bart looked at Chia Sung. Her knife was just slipping back under her silk jacket.

Her face, so faintly yellow, was emotionless. He called across the room:

"Good girl, Chia Sung! You saved our lives. He would have killed us. For a moment we forgot him."

The girl said quietly: "My father, Tso Lin, looked down from the Fountain and sent him into the room—that Chia Sung might learn how to kill."

**B**ART could not ponder that calm, toneless statement. There was no time. Bandits were now coming up the stairs from below. Stallings had limped into the hall to begin shooting down the dark stairs. Chia Sung caught at his arm.

"You are safer here," she said pleadingly.

Stallings looked down at her in surprise. Then he chuckled coarsely. He called out to Bart: "Now where's your curse? If we ever get to the river, it'll be my go-down she boards."

Bart smiled grimly. He went cautiously into the hall. A brown face appeared around the stair landing, and Bart fired straight into it. There was a rush forward, and Bart's rifle was knocked out of his hands. He used his pistol. Stallings joined him. Over the din Dave shouted, "We've got to get out of here. If we clear up this mess, I'm for the street. The women will be too much danger for us."

Together they cleared the stairs. There were no sounds below. Bart went down. The lower floor was a wreck. Loot was piled high in the center of the tea-shop room. Every one of the bandits who had come in over the roofs was either dead or

dying. It was like a horrible nightmare.

Bart went back upstairs. Some move for escape for the women had to be made.

Outside the sack was quieting. The Tibetans were getting drunk. After the sack, fire; the town would be burned. Then the captive women would be carried across the rice plain to the hills.

Bart looked out from the back window. The rear alley was deserted. In the front street the crowd was thinned out. The raiders were busy on the inside of houses.

Stallings had crowded to Bart's side. He seemed to be examining the prospect along the rear roofs with the idea of going down into the back street by crawling over the first floor projection. He leaned forward, started to climb through the window opening. Bart caught his shoulder and whirled him back.

"Look here," he said firmly, "you may be a skunk, but I'm not. I'd be glad to get rid of you, but your guns are needed. We'll herd the women and go out the back door. Chia Sung has saved our lives twice—when she let us in the front door, and when she knifed the man in the room here. We can't forget that!"

**S**TALLINGS snarled angrily. "You can commit suicide over these yellow heathen. But I won't." He endeavored again to get through the window. But Bart threw him back, warned him with his pistol.

"By God, I'll shoot!" he announced grimly.

Stallings stepped back, strode surly into the front room. He cursed at the women assembled there, then ordered them into the hall in readiness for the flight. Bart glanced down the well of the stairway toward the floor below. He started.



Where all had been semi-darkness, there was a flash of daylight—as if the street door had been opened, then closed quickly.

He ran into the front room. He missed the slight figure in blue. "Where's Chia Sung?" he cried.

A noise in the street distracted him. Heedless of danger, he flung open the iron shutters and put out his head. In front of the house there was a massed group of Tibetans who were neither shouting nor shooting. They stood, half crouched, as if they waited. A big, black-robed lama stood directly in front of the door. He, too, was standing quiet, and seemed to be watching something.

**B**ART could see the feet and part of the body of the old woman who had given her life to guard the door. While he looked, the dead body moved—as though it were being twisted about by unseen hands.

For an instant Bart was speechless with an unnamed fear. Then he cried out an oath. The body of the woman was withdrawn from his sight, and a mighty shout went up from the bandits. The lama disappeared into the house. The savage crew followed him. The noise of their entry came up from below.

Shouting the alarm, Bart sprang into the hall. He came face to face with Chia Sung, who had just come up the stairway. Her black eyes were wide—and he thought they gleamed. He called out excitedly: "Did you—?" But the question he framed appeared to be quite too fantastic to be finished.

Chia Sung could not have gone out the front door and moved the dead body, so that it no longer guarded the threshold! It was unthinkable. Not with a lama and his savage crew looking on, ready to swarm into the house!

Chia Sung slipped past him. He looked back and saw that she again stood close to Dave Stallings, who knew nothing of what was happening below. Bart shouted for Dave to join him at the head of the stairs. But when Stallings moved forward, Chia Sung threw her arms about him and screamed her plea that it was too late—"My lord," she cried, "must not be killed."

Her cry rang in Bart's ears. She had called him "her lord." She had fallen in love with the man her father cursed!

Strangely, the bandits were not yet coming up the stairs. Bart ran to look out the back window. The reason was evident. They were cutting off all escape by stationing guards to surround the house.

"This is the end," Bart muttered. "There are enough of them to rush us down."

He had hardly uttered the thought aloud, when it was translated into swift, crushing action. The hall that lay between him and the front room filled with brown forms. The lama towered above them. The onrushing horde cut Bart off from where the others were. He emptied his rifle, but as fast as a man fell, his place was taken by another. His bullets missed the lama, somehow, each time he fired at the man.

**S**UDDENLY it was borne in upon him that there were no answering shots. They had him cornered. Why did they hesitate to kill him? Especially when he was killing them! That seemed strange. The Tibetans killed all men. They spared only the younger women.

Bart's brain began to reel. He saw a vision of pretty Chia Sung being carried across a pony's shoulder, into the hills. Then the thought again occurred to him. What had she been doing downstairs? Who

had moved the old woman's body and let the raiders in?

But there was no time now to figure out puzzles. A little more shooting and— He must go down shooting! He lifted his pistol and sighted for the tall lama's bald, shaven head.

Strong, vice-like arms closed about him.

A bandit had crept in, noiselessly, through the window behind him. It was odd—that noiselessness. But however queer it struck Bart, he was down on the floor with a dozen wiry, flailing fiends on top of him. Sheep-thongs were being twisted about his body, pinioning his arms and legs. He called out to Stallings and to the girl.

"Good-by, Chia Sung," he shouted. He realized that his voice carried clear. The Tibetans in the room were making almost no noise. Stallings' voice raged back. "This is what we get for not taking my advice."

**B**ART wondered what was happening in the front room. There had been short screams from the women, but none from Chia Sung. Now all was quiet, as though the bandits were waiting for something or somebody.

Presently there was a commotion below. More Tibetans burst up the stairs. One of them, a tremendous fellow with coarse black knotted hair that strung down to his bare waist, stood over Bart, glowering. Bart had never seen a creature so viciously horrible. Below his waist he was clothed in a skirt of skins. His feet were shod in leather boots.

"The Tibetan chief," Bart thought. By the watchful attitude of the other bandits he knew his guess was right. The big fellow grunted an order. Bart was swooped up and carried through the back window

onto the lower roof. Unceremoniously he was dropped into the cradled arms of the bandits in the alley.

A second later he saw a strange sight. Chia Sung—unbound, and walking free—came to the edge of the lower roof and slipped down to the ground. After her came Dave Stallings, his hands bound but feet free! Stallings walked virtually alone, since the bandits on either side of him did not touch him. His face wore a puzzled expression, but in it there was also a leer of triumph when he had dropped to the alley and looked back at Bart. It was as if he were saying, "See? This is how you get treated if the women fall for you."

Chia Sung's women came next. There was a surge of bandits toward the younger ones. But a growl from the chief, who stood on the edge of the roof, sent them back. Chia Sung stood for a second close to Bart. She looked up into his face. He had the curious feeling that there was some sort of message for him in her eyes. But he dismissed the thought.

He spoke to her: "You let them in, Chia Sung. Why did you do that?"

**T**HE girl did not answer. She stepped to Stallings' side. The bandits closed in around them. The chief grunted an order and they were pushed down the street toward the walls.

The alley was strewn with bodies. Other bodies were being flung from the roofs of houses. Now flames had started. In a little while Tai-fei would be a smouldering mass of embers. Outside the gates the raiders' ponies were herded in a restless mass. Bart was lifted across the rump of one pony and lay face down.

He saw that Chia Sung was lifted up in front of the big fellow. Other women were flung across pony necks. Stallings was sprawled in front of a rider who took his place close to the chief. The group started in a mad gallop across the rice plains.

It was a cruel ride. Bart's body was wrenched a thousand ways at once. Numbed, at last his senses left him.

When he came to it was dark. He had the impression of cool hands laving his face. The sensation was so soothing he hesitated to open his eyes. When he did open them, the cool hands were gone.

HE lay on the ground, shadowy Tibetans huddled near in a great circle of blazing fires. Far off under the night skies was the glow of burning Tai-fei. Bart sat up painfully and looked around.

Dave Stallings was a dozen feet away, sitting on the ground. Chia Sung crouched at his feet. The cries of the women were low and spent. Most of the bandits were drunk and asleep. Those who retained their wits were moving about among the scattered piles of loot.

Stallings saw that Bart was conscious, and slid over toward him, his body hugging the ground. His feet were bound now, as well as his hands.

"Chia Sung would untie us both," he whispered, "but it would be a bad idea. They'd swoop down on us in a second."

"Pretty trick she pulled," said Bart. "She let the murderers into the house to trap us all."

Stallings chuckled. "She's some girl! Know what she did—just because she wanted to save me for herself? She went out the front door and called to the lama who wouldn't let the fiends shoot across the dead

women. Told him that two rich foreign devils were in the house. That the Tibetan chief could collect a million taels ransom for us. She made a bargain—to let them in if the lama would promise the women their lives."

Bart whistled, wild hope mounting. But he was immediately grim again. "I don't trust her, somehow. I don't like the peculiar glints in those pretty eyes of hers."

"That's because she favors me," Stallings said. "She wouldn't let them truss me up the way they did you. I suppose that handsome chief will upset part of her plan. He'll never release her with us, that's certain. But that's her bad luck."

"It'll take months before ransom negotiations can be started," Bart said. "We're a thousand miles from the coast."

Stallings was unperturbed. "They have a better system than that. They can get messengers from tribe to tribe in no time. Anyhow, we can depend on Chia Sung. I think she'll get us away without waiting for ransom. She's pretty solid already with the big fellow."

Apparently the Tibetan chief proposed to lose no time in sending out his messengers. He came up to Bart and went through his pockets thoroughly, abstracting every bit of paper and every personal belonging. He did the same thing with Stallings. He carried these things away, Chia Sung following.

CHIA SUNG seemed to be giving advice. The big fellow listened attentively. She stepped back and the chief summoned some of his men. From these he picked only one. A young, lithe fellow.

"He's sending only one messenger," Stallings said. "That means he won't ride far, but will turn over his mission for another relay to an-

other tribesman. They'll get the message through to Shanghai within two weeks."

The chosen Tibetan squatted on the ground in the firelight to drink from a gourd of goat's milk, and fill a squat jug with rice brandy from the loot of Tai-fei. The big fellow continued to growl instructions. Presently the younger one rose and hitched at the sheep skin about his waist.

Chia Sung came away from the fire. Bart thought she was returning to Dave's side. But she slipped between them and disappeared in the shadows beyond the circling fires. The chosen rider's pony was brought him. He leaped astride the beast and quickly disappeared into the darkness, in the direction Chia Sung had taken.

**A**CTUATED by some intuition that was too vague to define, Bart strained his ears to identify any unfamiliar sound above the din made by the boisterous, celebrating bandits. And a separate sound did come to him. A fierce grunt—a choked off scream—the thud of a pony that snorted suddenly. Bart supposed it was all a disordered fancy. Stallings, he saw, had heard nothing but the wild, drunken cries of the bandits milling about the fires.

Bart heard another sound. Close behind him, this time. He turned and saw a patch of misty blue coming toward him, creeping softly. Chia Sung's face took form. She was motioning him to quiet.

She crept between the two white men, and took her place at Dave Stallings' feet.

In a little while, the vicious looking chieftain swaggered up. He was almost hopelessly drunk. He kicked at both Bart and Stallings and reached out a hairy hand for Chia Sung. She got up quickly and

caught the big paw in both of hers. She said something softly. The bleary-eyed monster threw back his head and roared.

Through the tortured hours Bart watched the scene around them. Chia Sung, a ghostly figure in blue, danced around the fire, her quaint Chinese dances, accompanied by the high singsong rhythm of a score of wild, drunken voices.

An elf-like figure she was in the fire glow, drinking from every gourd thrust at her—drinking apparently, but spilling it all, Bart knew. Drinking and dancing while the bandits dropped off one by one into drunken stupor.

Stallings, fascinated, muttered, "The little devil will go too far. She's trying to save herself from the chief. But if she gets them all too drunk they'll make short shift of us. They'll forget all about the ransom."

"I don't look ahead to four or five weeks of this with any keen enthusiasm," Bart returned. "They can finish it off tonight, if they like."

**T**HE guttural sounds from the men's throats lessened, died out. Only the moans of women floated in the night.

The big chief got drunkenly to his feet. He caught Chia Sung by the hand. Bart shuddered. The big fellow led the girl out of the fire glow and up to where Bart and Stallings were huddled. He stood there over them, grinning down. He kicked Bart viciously, and then kicked Dave. He looked at Chia Sung for approval.

And Chia Sung laughed. She stood close to the chieftain's side, almost at Bart's feet. As if the laugh was a spur to greater viciousness, the big fellow kicked Stallings again, heavily in the side.

A sudden wave of rage surged through Bart. He, too, would have to lie helpless before the blows of this cruel monster. He tugged furiously at the tight thongs that bound his arms and ankles. They cut into his flesh. There was no escape. Unless—

Suddenly it came to Bart that Chia Sung was bending toward him. A gleam of fire scintillated on the slender knife blade she held in her hand! Now the blade was at Bart's wrists. It cleaved the bonds that held his ankles. He was free!

AT that moment the big fellow turned around. He was grinning horribly. He drew back his foot for a second kick at Bart. But the foot never came down against Bart's body. During the brief instant that lifted foot was poised in air, every tense muscle in Bart stiffened like a spring. In a flash he had twisted to one side, wriggled free, rolled forward with great force against the Tibetan's leg, kicking the man's feet from under him. The heavy hulk crashed to the ground.

Bart was on his feet now. He evaded the groping hands of the half-winded bandit, circled the sprawling figure and reached for the knife that Chia Sung held out to him. The suddenness of the attack had given the Tibetan no time to call out. Now he was regaining his wind. Guttural noises were issuing from his mouth. Their lives at stake, Bart plunged forward against the maddened, repulsive beast!

He withdrew the red blade and hurried over to Stallings' side. Chia Sung held out her hand to Bart, motioned toward the long thin knife.

"Chia Sung will cut loose the thongs," she said softly.

Bart glanced down at the still body of the murderous bandit. He placed the knife in the girl's hand,

and said: "All right, Chia Sung—only hurry. We have no time to waste."

He looked around, trying to decide which way to make the break. The best path through the foothills would be the one taken by the ransom rider. It would lead directly to the tall yellow-ripe stalks in the rice fields. In among these tall stalks they would be lost until they reached the river.

Bart was hopeful their go-downs still floated—looted, undoubtedly, but still above water. He investigated the path for a few yards in the darkness, then stole back. Chia Sung ought to have Dave Stallings unbound by now and his numb feet and wrists back to normal.

He saw the girl dimly—on her knees at Dave's ankle. He waited, thinking it better not to move back into the thin fire-light. Suddenly he heard Stallings' voice, crying out—a frightened cry.

**BART!** Quick! The little devil is—"That was all. Bart saw the flash of Chia Sung's knife. Saw Dave Stallings lean back, far back—then crumple down.

Chia Sung was on her feet. Her face was turned up—up toward the Chinese heaven of the Yellow Fountain. "Rest, O worthy Great Father Tso Lin," she was saying. "Chia Sung has fulfilled the command. The gods have given me strength."

Bart rushed to Dave's side. He worked frantically over the stricken man. But it was no use.

Chia Sung watched—silent, aloof. Presently she said:

"Come, we must hasten. At the go-down it will be your hand to mete out punishment. It is the command of Tso Lin. The unworthy daughter of the Father Great One must pay the toll of the gods."

She held out both her hands to

Bart—and in them he saw the unmistakable white glare of paper. Everything that had been in his pockets. "Chia Sung secured them—for you," she said quietly.

"You killed the rider?" Bart asked sharply.

**A**T the river you will punish the unworthy Chia Sung for killing." Her hand darted under her blue jacket. "Here is Chia Sung's knife."

Bart said no word. He took the girl's hand and together they picked their way through the night's blackness along the foothill path that led to the rice fields. The go-down floated, and it was Chia Sung's knife that cut the tie-up rope. Bart worked the junk out into the current, then stood over the helm watching the glow above Tai-fei recede, until the dawn broke.

Chia Sung sat at his feet—silent, meek. When, too tired to stand any longer, he tied the tiller so that it would swing with the current and dropped onto the junk exhausted, she reached over to touch the slender little knife that hung now on Bart's belt.

"Chia Sung will watch while you sleep," she said. "When you awake, she will mete punishment to her own unworthy self."

Bart smiled wanly. It would be useless to try to reason with the girl.

Her mind was made up. She felt that she must atone to the spirits of her ancestors by the obliteration of her own courageous self. The inscrutable logic of the East.

He said: "You have been wonderful, Chia Sung. Now I will sleep. Later, when you, too, have had sufficient rest, Tso Lin and the other judges at the Yellow Fountain will make known to you a reward greater

than death in payment for your obedient filial devotion."

His eyes were heavy, his muscles tired. He soon sank into deep, untroubled slumber.

The sun was high overhead when Bart awoke. Through half-closed eyes he gazed at the changing scenes about him. The go-down was slowly approaching the narrowing channel that skirted the walls of the Mandarin city far south of Tai-fei. There was movement all along the course, through which the steady hand of the blue-clad Chinese girl had adroitly guided the drifting junk.

Chia Sung was quietly looking his way. Now she turned from him. Bart wondered if she had sensed his awakening, had noted the cessation of his slumberous breathing.

**T**HE girl stood for a moment looking out across the yellow river toward the distant hills, her face upraised. Then she knelt quickly.

"Your unworthy and never-to-be-sufficiently punished daughter bows before you, O Father Great One," she was murmuring. "Know that the hand of the wise and brave one falters. He will not punish—as the unfit daughter of Tso Lin would greatly have desired. Should I not, therefore, do what seems best?"

As Bart's lazy eyes watched the girl's movements, she sank slowly forward. Her forehead touched the boards.

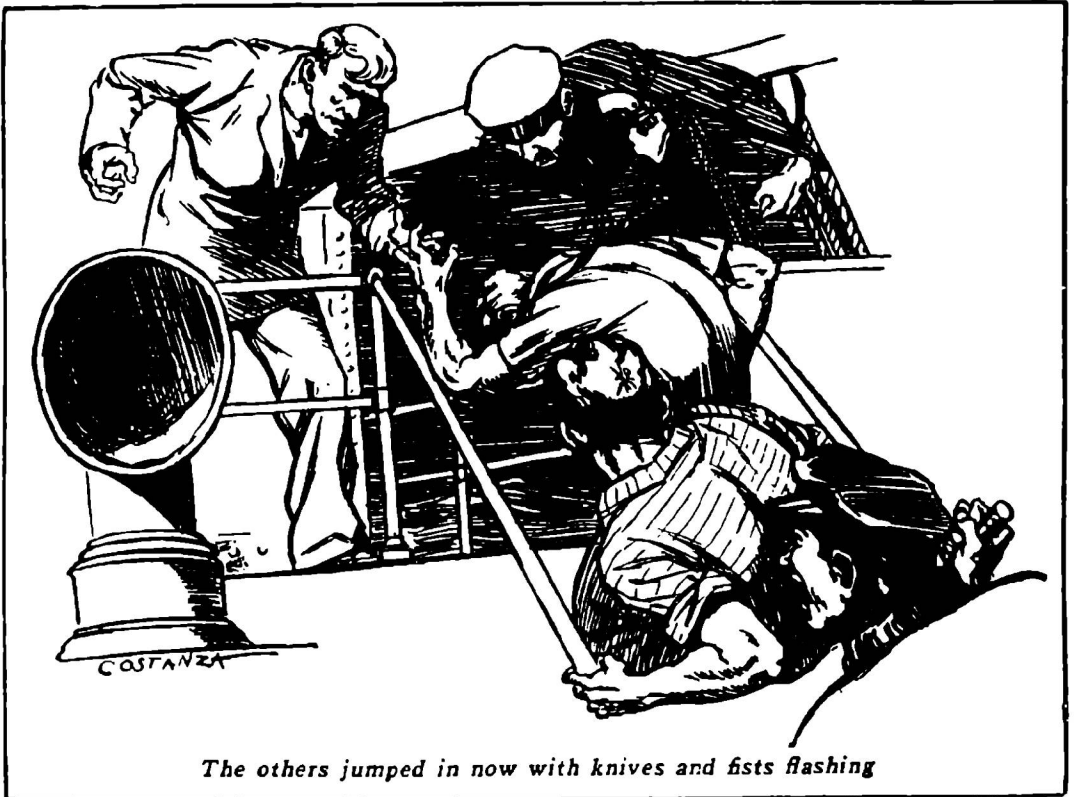
She remained motionless for long, breathless moments.

Bart jumped to his feet. Too late, he understood. He felt for the knife in his belt—Chia Sung's knife. It was not there. She had removed it while he slept!

It was all over. Chia Sung had paid, in her own deliberate way, the exacting toll of the gods.



# FALSE CARGO



*The others jumped in now with knives and fists flashing*

## *Captain Anderson is Faithful to His First Command in this Tense Story of Treachery and Stirring Conflict at Sea*

By WALLACE R. BAMBER

*Author of "Black Shadows," "Lake of Horror," etc.*

SIX other masters, older in years and wiser in the ways of the sea than Captain Bob Anderson, had been offered the job of taking the *Banda Lu* from Hongkong to Makassar in the Celebes. All had refused.

But Captain Anderson, who was young and fair-haired, with the pink glow of youth on his rather handsome face, still as fresh as the ink on his master's ticket, didn't know this when he first came aboard with the sour-faced agent who had hired him.

It was his first chance for command. He jumped at it.

The crew was aboard. The cargo had been stowed. And the *Banda Lu* was being towed out to sea when he took charge of her.

After a routine examination of the ship, the agent suggested that they go to the captain's cabin and have a drink.

Captain Bob ordered the steward to bring a few assorted bottles from the lazaret. The steward, an ugly, sloppily attired man with a mean and

furtive eye, grinned peculiarly as he uncorked a bottle and filled two glasses. The thin-faced agent reached for his, then motioned the steward outside. His gaze ranged vacantly over the cabin for some moments, then he leaned over closer to Captain Bob and grinned feebly, glass in hand.

"Well, here's to a good voyage, Captain," he toasted, the feeble grin cracking wider over his thin, sour face.

Their glasses met.

CAPTAIN BOB just touched the rim of the glass to his lips, then lowered it. The agent downed his peg in a single gulp.

"The cargo's all stowed—ship's fully insured," he muttered in a mysterious manner, his gaze not meeting Captain Bob's, but ranging erratically over the cabin. "I wouldn't be surprised if something happened—"

He leveled his eyes then and winked knowingly.

Captain Bob stared at him curiously.

The agent rambled on in idle talk for an hour or so until a whistle blast from the towing tug indicated that the *Banda Lu* was far enough out to sea to cut loose. The agent poured himself another drink.

"You're pretty lucky to win a command so young, Captain, and upon such short notice," he said, shoving the empty glass aside. "And the extra bonus you got for signing will come in pretty handy."

"It surely will," Captain Bob replied.

"There's full two months supplies below," the agent went on. "And the boats have been put in first class shape."

He smirked as he added that last.

"I hope so," Captain Bob said. "A ship's boats should always be in A1 condition."

The agent smiled again, a thin furtive smile that made his long face look overly ghoulish.

"I'll be going now," he said.

Captain Bob accompanied him out on deck, to the side where the tug was waiting. The agent turned before going down the ladder and extended his clammy hand.

I AM sure we understand one another," he said in parting. "The company owns better ships than the *Banda Lu*."

Captain Bob didn't reply but he stared after the departing tug for quite a long time.

Then he suddenly recalled that the agent had told him he would meet him in Makassar, and he wondered why he had not gone along on the *Banda Lu*. Was there any reason why he shouldn't?

Preoccupied with his thoughts he returned to the cabin where he ordered one of the men to go and fetch the first mate. Peter Scoggin, a lean listless looking man with a sleepy voice soon appeared.

"I presume we're all ready to sail," Captain Bob said. "Everything's ship shape—"

"Aye, sir," the mate drawled and touched his greasy cap. "Well's it can be, sir, for this tub. But the boats are in very good shape—provisions stored—fresh water in casks and—"

Captain Bob looked up at the mate curiously. The mate grinned, a sickly yellow grin that had a hint of meaning.

"What do you mean?" Captain Bob snapped.

The sickly grin faded from the mate's face. In his dull lack-lustre eyes was reflected a look of astonishment.

"Nothing, sir," he replied. "Only we're well prepared for any emergency."

"That's all!" Captain Bob said crisply.

When the mate had gone he shook his head slightly. He didn't like the mate's looks any better than the agent's, nor for that matter, his mysterious answers or actions.

He called the rest of the officers in one by one. The second mate was only a youth with little experience. The saloon steward was just so much junk like the *Banda Lu's* gear, nothing else.

Of them all, the bos'n was the only one that impressed him. And he had served his time on the cross channel steamers between England and France, or, so he said anyway—poor training for a bos'n's job on a South China Sea windjammer.

If the officers were bad, the crew was worse. Just scum that the agent had picked up in Hongkong for the lowest possible commission.

The *Banda Lu* rested motionless on a flat glassy sea like a painted ship for a matter of hours. The first wind didn't spring up until after nightfall and it was only then that she got under way.

FOR three days everything went pretty well, despite the fact that the stores the agent had put aboard proved almost worthless, most of them being spoiled.

At the end of the third day a calm fell, and the bark rolled heavily on the smooth oily sea for a full forty-eight hours. That jerky, spright, sickening sort of a roll that jarred every mortal thing loose.

The members of the crew swore profanely as they listlessly holy-stoned the decks. And ever so often they muttered a low curse aimed at the young captain. The mate, Scoggins, when he wasn't on watch, kept to his bunk with a long necked bottle for company.

At night, the heat and thick fetid

smell of the oily sea was bad enough. But by day, under a brassy sun that seemed to fry the very livers inside the men, it was a hundred times worse.

A calm is never a joke.

Captain Bob kept the men working at odd needless tasks to keep them from thinking too much. He knew that if the calm lasted much longer there would be trouble in store.

BUT of all the men abroad, the bos'n, a thick heavy-set little man with a decidedly unseamanlike look, seemed to be the most affected. He went about with a look of anxious worry impinged on his small round face. He'd stop ever so often in his pacing of the deck and stare over-side, as if the sight of the smooth, swollen, glass-green water held him in thrall.

He kept apart from the men and the officers as well, but seemed always to be within earshot when Captain Bob was giving orders or taking reports from his mates or the steward.

On the seventh morning the calm broke. A whisper of wind came up from the port beam and rustled the limpid sails. Captain Bob rushed from the cabin in his pajamas and went out on deck issuing orders right and left. But he was halted halfway to the poop where he was met by a delegation of four men from the crew, four of the ugliest and toughest looking of the whole bunch aboard.

"We ain't movin' a hand," one of them, a swarthy faced, husky seaman named Estenaba spoke up, "until we get better food."

The bos'n, Clarke, had appeared from nowhere suddenly and stood directly behind the captain. The young second mate regarded the scowling delegation from the head of

a companion way. Scoggins was nowhere about.

Captain Bob stood with his feet apart and braced and unflinchingly returned Estenaba's scowling stare.

The muscles of his long, wiry arms rippled perceptibly under his shirt sleeves.

His fists folded.

"I'm eating the same grub," he said, "for the simple reason that it's all we have. Get back to your jobs or I'll put you all in irons."

Estenaba's black eyes glinted. His hairy hand went to his middle. Something zaffed blue and white in the growing light. But Captain Bob reached out and caught his wrist before he could send the wicked sheaf knife home. At the same time he brought up his knee in a terrific thrust. It caught Estenaba squarely in the groin. The knife clattered from his hand and slithered into the scuppers. He fell to the deck with a groan.

The three others jumped in now with knives and fists flashing. For a full minute all was a wild scramble. Captain Bob reached down and picked up Estenaba, lifted him like a sack of meal and literally threw him down the companionway to the lower deck.

**A**NOTHER knife flashed and Captain Bob felt something like a burn on his right forearm. He whirled and met the attacker with a flurry of steel fists. In a short moment he had followed Estenaba down the companionway. He wheeled again to jump into the fight at his back, but the young second mate held him off.

"I'll take care of 'im, sir," the young second hissed as he went at his attacker with the butt end of his revolver flailing through the air.

Clarke put his man out with a belaying pin. He stood over him now as he lay prone on the deck with a

grim, triumphant smile spreading over his round face.

Within a few minutes all was quiet. All four of the toughs had been chucked down the companionway.

"Scum, sir. All scum," the young second said, sucking at his sore knuckles and nursing a bump on his head. "What shall I do with 'em, sir? Put 'em in irons?"

Captain Bob looked at the young officer for a moment. His unruly shock of hair was ruffled and awry. His full downy face was streaked with blood.

"No," he said finally, a sense of elation coursing through his veins. "Get those four men back on the poop and have them clean every speck and fleck from the planking. They wouldn't have to work if they were in irons."

"Aye, sir," the young second replied, touching his forehead and jamming his pistol in his belt.

**T**HE second left and Captain Bob turned to the bos'n. His face was smiling, but there was a queer unfathomable look in his wide far-apart eyes.

"Aren't you afraid they'll act up again?" the bos'n said. "Wouldn't they be safer in irons?"

"We need all hands," Captain Bob replied. "All we have, such as they are, won't be one too many if we run into a blow."

"I see," the bos'n replied, as he turned away, but the look in his eyes hadn't changed any.

"Get Scoggins," Captain Bob ordered. "Tell him we're getting under way. I want him on deck to take charge."

He went below then, doused himself with a couple of buckets of sea water, after which he bandaged his injured arm, which proved to have only a superficial wound.

When Captain Bob came on deck again, the sails were bellying, every rope was quivering and the *Banda Lu* was moving serenely along through a purple-clear sea, rippled by the growing breeze and broken here and there by little pools of frothy foam. The sun climbed high and expanded into a brassy ball in the limpid sky, but the heat was tempered by the really cool wind which fanned through continuously.

The mate, Scoggins, who was walking the poop, engaged the young captain in conversation. He talked about the agent, about the owners, and how generous they were. And then he added with a queer sidewise regard:

"And they pay extra well for special services rendered. You know that, I suppose?"

"I am not aware of that," Captain Bob said. "I've never done anything special for the firm."

Scoggins chuckled and spat into the sea.

"But you're going to, aren't you?" he drawled in his peculiar lackadaisical manner. Then he grasped the rail and stared out into the vastness of the rippling purple sea.

CAPTAIN BOB was silent for a long moment. Here was that same mysterious and evasive manner again. That hint of something which he did not understand.

Finally the mate turned and spoke again. He was actually leering now.

"It's fine weather for the boats," he said. "I suppose it'll last long enough—yes, long enough."

Captain Bob's face reddened. He jerked around and grasped Scoggins by the arm.

"Look here," he snapped. "What's all this strange talk. You've got a damn insolent tone and look. What in hell do you mean, throwing out all kinds of hints? You talk like that

damned agent. Is there something queer about this ship?"

Scoggins regarded the young captain stupidly. He didn't answer right away but just stood staring at him, opening and closing his mouth like a fish.

"No—nothing funny—nothing unusual," he answered finally, blinking his bleary eyes. "Nothing but you."

Captain Bob felt a sudden surge of exasperation. His fists folded instinctively.

"Don't you talk to me like that!" he thundered with bursting passion. "Listen, you! Is there anything queer about this voyage? Tell me, I want to know."

Scoggins looked extremely startled. His tall frame shuddered. He licked dry lips with his tongue and managed to utter: "No—yes, nothing queer, nothing funny at all, sir."

He moved away then, quickly, as if he was afraid of Captain Bob, went down the companionway. The young captain would have followed after him if he hadn't heard a voice behind his back.

"A minute, sir. I have something to show you."

Clarke had been standing behind him for some minutes, waiting for him and the mate to finish their conversation before interrupting.

CAPTAIN BOB turned. His face was red. The corners of his mouth were white.

"Yes, what is it?" he managed to ask with some semblance of outward emotional control.

The bos'n held out his hand. In it were some coarse pebbles and sand. Captain Bob stared at it with curious inquisitiveness.

"I had some men down below shifting cargo," the bos'n said. "One of the cases cracked open, sir. And this is what was in it. Just pebbles and sand, sir. The box was marked

'Machinery parts,' sir. I thought you ought to know."

Captain Bob's cheeks flushed with a burning fever. He reeled unsteadily on his feet for a moment. Then his face went ashen and he answered.

"Yes, bos'n, I'm glad you told me. Have you examined any other cases?"

The bos'n nodded.

"Yes, sir, I did, without permission, though." The bos'n's eyes reflected an unusual light. "It contained sand and pebbles, too. Yes, sir, just sand and pebbles."

Captain Bob didn't answer, but he hurried down to the hold with the bos'n at his heels. There, he opened case after case and found them all to contain identically the same thing—sand and pebbles.

When he came up on deck again, his face was even whiter than before. It was as though the warm blood that pulsed through his veins and arteries had been suddenly changed to ice water.

FOR the first time he began to realize the situation that confronted him. The strange mannerisms of the agent and first mate connected together clearly now. The *Banda Lu* was loaded with a false cargo; a cargo that the owners themselves never intended should reach Makassar. The *Banda Lu* was supposed to sink before it reached there.

He rushed into the cabin, threw himself down on the bunk and covered his face with his hands. After all, Captain Bob was scarcely more than a youth. He had the dreams and ambitions of all young seafaring men. Now here he was confronted with failure on his first command.

Everything was against him, the owners, the ship which was little more than junk, her gear and rigging was a disgrace; the crew, the officers, with the possible exception of the

young second and the bos'n. Of these last he wasn't certain, they hadn't yet been fully tested.

For a half hour or so he abandoned himself to sorrow and compassion for himself. However, after awhile he calmed down and sank into that firm, grim mood which is a part of those who follow the sea. It seems then that one's very soul rises above mere emotion. One gives orders automatically at such times, precisely, as though they are roots going out from one's feet to every part of the vessel. Ship and master are welded in one. Together they stand and face the wrath of sea and man—fearless, aloof and cool.

When he reappeared on deck, his manner was such that no one who noticed him would have sensed that anything had happened. He was firmly determined to take the *Banda Lu* to Makassar despite all the obstacles that had been thrown in his way.

By this time the wind had risen to a considerable degree, and the *Banda Lu* was racing along through an ocean of growing swells. Scoggins whom he could trust no longer, he dismissed and walked the poop by himself. The second he had sent below for sleep, so that he might be on watch during the night.

TOWARD midnight the sea grew very high and the squally wind was such that Captain Bob had the bark shortened down almost to bare sticks. Even so she sped like a startled dolphin through the black running waters, groaning and creaking in every spar and stay.

The breakers rolled up from the stern. Captain Bob couldn't see them, of course, because of the darkness, but the *Banda Lu* would lift and lift, then the water would swish and roar and sigh away under her, all the harsh noise muffled because of the shrieking wind. Then she would



sit down in the blackness between the peaks of waves with a squashing noise until the next breaker came.

Captain Bob held the watch until the dawn began to break, then he turned it over to the second while he went below to snatch a cup of tea and a sandwich.

Somehow he felt better. The *Banda Lu* had been making knots during the night's run and she had stood up well, despite her rotten gear, in a sea that had been far from gentle. Another forty-eight hours of such going would find him off the Sulu archipelago. From there it was a downhill coast to the Straits of Makassar.

He forgot the mate and the agent, even forgot the false cargo in the hold in the spell of fascination which the sea and the sturdy ship held over him.

From the galley he went to the main cabin to have a look at the charts and check up on the course. He was just picking up the compasses to make some rough calculations when he felt a sudden jar of the deck.

**T**HEN the whole ship checked, swung and shuddered violently as a breaker swept her somewhere amidships.

From overhead came the sound of cracking spars and slatting canvas mingled with the startled cries of scared men.

Captain Bob was flung against a bulkhead and a stark fear worse than the fear of death gnawed at his stomach. He galvanized into sudden action and raced to the poop, gained it in less than a dozen strides.

Forward and amidships was a tangled, shadowy mess over which the angry sea breached continuously with the pounding roar of a cataract. There was something else hammering and yammering against the ship's

side, making her yaw widely and tremble like a frail leaf.

The young second clawed to his feet from the midst of the deck wreckage and shouted: "Good gosh! Did you see it? Broke off just like a clay pipe in a shooting gallery. Yes, sir, just like a clay pipe!"

The second caught sight of the captain and rushed up to him, grabbed his arm. His face was ashen. He was panicky.

"Damned squall, sir," he wheezed in a high pitched nervous voice. "Damned squall, dead abeam. Didn't figure it fast enough, sir. Got the men up, but the foretopmast went—took the whole blooming main—like a clay pipe, sir—rotten masts—rotten spars."

"Get an axe," Captain Bob shouted. "Don't stand there like a fool talking."

In a few minutes they were working at the tangled mass of debris forward. The foretopmast lay in a tangle of rigging and torn sails across the fo'c'sle head. The mainmast had snapped off at the butt and was lying alongside the ship, held there by a tangle of rigging and spars which kept it hammering at the *Banda Lu's* hull.

**W**HILE the second and Captain Bob were flailing away at the tangled rigging with their axes the bos'n made his appearance. His eyes were wide as saucers in his small round face.

"What shall I do, sir," he asked in a voice that was very weak but determined.

"Get to work with your sheaf knife on these tangled ropes here!" Captain Bob snapped.

By dint of much sweating and back-breaking labor they got most of the wreckage forward at last and had it anchored securely with a couple of lines that looked like they might

hold, hold long enough at least to act as a temporary sea anchor. The mizzen had held, luckily, and progress could be made if the sea abated. The ship drifted away and tautened the lines and they held, much to Captain Bob's relief.

Certain now that the cumbersome sea anchor fashioned from the wreckage would work all right, temporarily anyway, Captain Bob raced aft where he had the men get some more canvas on the mizzen. When the canvas was set, the *Banda Lu* steadied and rode well in the waves.

Only then did Captain Bob stop to get full breath and wipe the salty sweat from his pallid brow. On the ship there was complete desolation and ruin. Of the vast ocean around there was disclosed nothing but an endless area of leaping, tossing, green and white crests.

THE *Banda Lu* had been dismasted by a freak squall, a beam squall that had cut across the general wind current too fast to be combatted. It wasn't the young second's fault, even though he thought it was.

At that, the bark might have weathered it if her gear had been good and her spars not so rotten. When Captain Bob examined the butt of the mainmast later he saw that it was just rotten wood clear through to the core. How it had held up for so long was a mystery.

Storms subside as quick as they come. Within two hours after the *Banda Lu* was dismasted the sky cleared and the wind subsided to but half a gale. By midafternoon the sun was hot and brassy again in a clear blue sky. The *Banda Lu* began to steam then like somebody had poured boiling water over it.

After having two pumps rigged up to pump the flood of sea water from the hold Captain Bob turned to the second mate.

"I'm going down for a little sleep," he said. "I'll send the mate up to relieve you so you can do the same. Nothing will happen now."

Clarke, who had come up for further orders, came up to Captain Bob's side as he turned to go down the companion.

"Are you sure of that, sir?" he asked, his eyes still wide, still holding a rather unfathomable look. "The ship seems pretty bad, and er-er the mate's been drinking, sir."

A faint smile spread over Captain Bob's strained face.

"A child could take over now," he answered. "There's nothing to do but drift until the sea calms down. Maybe we can salvage some of the wreckage then in the sea anchor. That's one of the reasons I wanted to save it."

"Oh, I see," the bos'n said.

Captain Bob ran across the mate in the ship's galley. He was talking to Estenaba in a deep husky voice. Both of them had their backs turned.

"Just a kid they picked up in Hongkong," the mate was saying between drinks from a bottle which he shared with the sailor. "They must of thought he understood when they offered him the job. But he's just dumb, I guess. He didn't get it at all when I threw some hints at him."

"He's pretty tough, though," Estenaba said.

"But we'll get him," Scoggins replied and laughed confidently. "The gang for'ards pretty tough, an' they can be talked to."

CAPTAIN BOB listened for a minute, then he stepped inside. "Get on deck, Scoggins," he snapped. "Relieve the second."

They both went rigid and straightened erect.

"Estenaba, you go forward and stay there until I give you further orders."

"You surprised me, sir," Scoggins said. "I was just going on deck."

"Then be quick about it," Captain Bob snapped. "You've spent two whole watches below. I am going to enter it in the log, that you were lying below drunk while the ship was in danger."

A slow sneer crept over the mate's thin face. His mouth slanted.

"You're just a plain damn fool," he replied. "The company wouldn't pay any attention to that. What do you suppose I'm here for?"

He grinned then inanely.

"I'll smash that damned grin off your face," Captain Bob blurted, his face purpling. He took a step forward.

**T**HE mate retreated. His sneering grin faded.

"You don't have to act that way," he choked back. "Don't you know this ship's insured? The owners don't want her at Makassar—they want you to lose her—"

"Enough!" Captain Bob jerked out savagely. "They didn't say anything to me about that. Nothing but a lot of hints, I didn't understand. Listen, I took this job clean. They can't get me to commit barratry. I'm taking this ship to port and be damned to them all. It'd be a nice mark on my record losing my first command, wouldn't it. God, I'd never get another—"

"The owners'll look after you," Scoggins started to say, gesturing with his hands. "A big bonus—another job—"

"More dirty work, eh? Do I look like a crook?" Captain Bob hissed, his spent up passions rising.

"I'll do it," insisted Scoggins, "if you're scared. That's why they sent me. You got a good excuse. The ship's dismasted. Leaking, too. We can't be far from Balabac. The boats are in excellent shape—"

"Shut your damn mouth!" Captain Bob exploded. "Get on deck and work—if I catch you—"

Captain Bob's fists folded into hard knots. He took another step forward. Scoggins sidled past with a queer look in his eyes, jamming his cap on viciously as he went.

The young captain stood dazed and immobile for some minutes after he departed. The blood pounded through his temples tempestuously. His hands and feet felt like lead.

"He's a queer one, ain't he?" said the bos'n, who had been standing outside the door unnoticed. "Funny deal, isn't it? Looks as though we're going to sink whether you want to or not."

Captain Bob wheeled back, startled.

"Yes, no," he stammered impulsively, then he caught himself. "No, by heck!" he cursed. "Nothing's wrong. I'm taking this bark through to Makassar. Nobody told me I was to sink her. I couldn't, anyway. She's a part of me. God, bos'n, don't you realize? She's my first command."

The bos'n's eyes blinked. His fingers twitched.

"Yes, yes, sir, I understand," he replied, then turned away when he noticed that there were tears welling up in the corners of Captain Bob's eyes.

Captain Bob finally found his way to his cabin where he lost himself in sleep, utterly exhausted and mentally and physically fatigued.

He left no word to be called at any specific time, and no one called him. He slept the clock around, and was only awakened when he heard a loud pounding on his cabin door.

"Are you up, sir? Are you up?"

**I**T was Clarke pounding on the door. Captain Bob leaped out of bed. The bos'n's eyes were wide staring. His lips quivered.

"The second mate told me to call

you, sir. We got the wreckage in when the seas calmed, fixed up a jury mast, have been making good time until just now. Something's happened. Water's gaining in the hold."

**D**AZED and still unable to think clearly after being so suddenly aroused from his sound sleep, Captain Bob shook his head violently to regain his senses, then followed the bos'n down to the pumps.

The young second affirmed the bos'n's report, but said he couldn't understand it. The two pumps had held the water in check all right until just a few hours before. Then suddenly it had started to rise.

"Where's the mate?" Captain Bob asked, scowling.

"Asleep, sir," the second replied. "He took one watch. Then I relieved him. I didn't want to awaken you, sir. I thought you needed the rest. The bos'n and I rigged up the jury mast. It worked very well, sir. But this last, sir, it beats me. We must have sprung a seam somewhere."

"And there's no more pumps," the bos'n put in.

"What, no more pumps?" Captain Bob repeated, his eyes showing great surprise. "I'm sure—"

"We've looked all over, sir," the second said. "I wouldn't have called you if I could find them."

It was while the captain was thinking and figuring out the best course to pursue that the carpenter came up to him, holding some water soaked shavings in his hand, shavings that had been freshly turned.

"Here, sir," he said. "I found these floating on the water in the forepeak. And it's most unusual, sir, but I can't find my brace and one of the bits is missing from my chest."

Captain Bob started. His mouth gaped. His eyes flashed.

"Get me a hurricane lamp and follow me down in the hold," he said

to the bos'n. Then to the second: "You stay on deck and keep the men working at the pumps. Change 'em often and make 'em pump fast. We're getting to port, understand!"

Captain Bob had only been in the forepeak a few minutes when the bos'n came in with the hurricane lamp. Floating on the water there were more chips like the carpenter had shown him. And under a rough plank that had been thrown across the stark ribs just above the water line he found the missing brace and bit. He tossed it up through the trap door that led to the fo'c'sle.

"Hold the lamp down here," he ordered the bos'n, and stripped off his shirt as he prepared to dive down in the slimy bilge water to see if he could discover where the holes were.

Time after time he went beneath, coming up ever so often for breath but not saying a word. Finally after about half an hour he came up and rested on the planking.

"Take that bit out and tell the carpenter to make some plugs the size to fit, taper plugs. Make it fast."

He rested then while the bos'n hurried out the trapdoor to do his bidding. And while he rested he thought, tried to figure out just who it was that had drilled the holes in the ship's bottom. He was still figuring when the bos'n came back with the plugs and a hammer.

It took him all of an hour to get the plugs in place. And when he had finished he was thoroughly exhausted again. He clambered out and went up on deck.

**T**HE young second had a smile on his face when he greeted him.

"The water's not rising so fast now," he said.

"I'll relieve you," Captain Bob said. "Go to your bunk and get some sleep. Stop on your way and tell the mate to report to me here."

The young second touched his cap. "Aye, sir."

Scoggins came up and stood before the captain, who was still dripping and wet from his recent submersion. He started to say something when Captain Bob reached up and snatched the cap from his head. Holding it in one hand he snatched the First Mate's insignia off with the other.

"I'm disrating you," he said. "Somebody has bored holes in the ship's bottem. I'm not accusing you, I haven't got any proof. But I don't like your talk or your actions. You're an able seaman from now until we reach port. Relieve that man at the pump there."

Scoggins leered. His mouth pursed and showed yellow teeth. He didn't move, just stood and grinned.

Captain Bob's right fist came up from his side. It flashed out like a whisking rapier in the next instant. Scoggins' head flopped back. He staggered. A left caught him behind the ear and knocked him over the pumps. When he lifted erect his hands were on the handle.

For the rest of that day and into the following night Captain Bob worked the men unmercifully, driving them, goading them, and cursing at them profanely.

*Clank-clank! Clank-clank!*

The sound of the squeaking pumps grew monotonous.

But the water in the hold lessened inch by inch, and the *Banda Lu* moved on slowly through the straits of Balabac and into the Sulu Sea.

FOR two days the slow movement continued with Captain Bob goading the weary men on.

On the morning of the third day afterward land was sighted off the port bow far ahead. A small patch of purple bellying up from the rim of the bottle green sea.

And immediately the men at the pumps stopped working. "Land! Land!" someone yelled, weakly, and the cry was taken up by all.

THE young second and the bos'n both showed a real relief. Their tired eyes lighted. Their faces glowed.

"It looks like we'd make it," the bos'n said.

"Make what?" Captain Bob asked.

The bos'n pointed to the purple splotch on the rim of the sea.

"That's Jolo," Captain Bob replied. "We're going to Makassar!"

The bos'n's wide eyes dimmed. The second's, too.

"Yes, that's right, Makassar," the bos'n repeated.

Estenaba, bending over one of the pumps opposite the disrated mate spoke up.

"But the ship, sir—she won't last that long—the mate says—"

"Foolishness," Captain Bob snapped. Then to the men lolling over the pumps. "Come on up and at 'em. It isn't time for relief yet. Get pumping!"

By sheer power of his own determination and will he kept the men working at the pumps, kept them working until the purple splotch had faded into the distance aft.

The bos'n came up to him again just at nightfall right after he had sent the second to get some rest. He touched his cap politely and said very softly.

"Do you really think we'll make it to Makassar, sir?" I measured the water in the hold and it's gaining again. The men are all in, fagged out, maybe we should take to the boats? After all you've done about all you could, don't you think?"

Captain Bob looked the bos'n squarely in the eye for a moment, then he smiled faintly.

"It's my first command," he an-

swered. "You know how it is. You understand." Then very crisply: I'm taking her to Makassar!"

That strange unseamanlike look appeared in the bos'n's watery eyes once again.

He forced a faint smile.

"Yes," he said. "I understand. But maybe we could jettison some of those cases of sand and pebbles? That would lighten the load and she'd ride higher. She wouldn't leak so much—"

Captain Bob smiled broadly.

"Not until we have to, bos'n. On my manifests those cases are labeled 'Machinery and parts as specified.' I don't know any different, you understand."

The bos'n nodded and moved away.

When darkness fell like it does in the tropics with the suddenness of a dropped curtain, Captain Bob stood for a bit on the poop in a sort of pleasant reverie.

The *clank-clank-clank* of the creaking pumps, the hiss of the lifted water as it poured back into the sea, was like music to his ears.

He stared absently down at the main deck where the hurricane lamps were burning and casting moving yellow circles of light over the ship, setting grotesque shadows astir and creating weird fantastic shapes out of the sails and gear whenever the bark canted to the swells.

**A**FTER a night of no untoward events that presaged no such thing, the end came rather suddenly, when the land they had sighted had passed far to the rear.

The *Banda Lu* was running along smoothly when it happened. There was a barely perceptible jar, probably from a deeply submerged derelict or bit of heavy wreckage.

The second mate came running from his cabin.

"What's that?" he asked, his face tense.

"Struck something," Captain Bob answered calmly, and rushed to the well where he had one of the men sound it. He knew though that the sounding was just an empty gesture, a matter of form. Some intuition told him that this was the end—all there was! Despite that, he was quite calm.

He didn't wait to get the man's report on the sounding, but turned and stepped into his cabin for a moment. He came out with the ship's log.

**T**HEN the deck began to tilt perceptibly.

"Prepare the boats," he called out in a clear voice. The second ran to carry out his orders.

"Are we going to abandon ship, sir?" the round faced bos'n asked.

"We're getting ready for any emergency," Captain Bob answered. "You will take the mate's boat. He's only a seaman now, remember that."

There was no confusion. There was no noise. All was quiet and order. But there was an ominous tenseness.

The man who had sounded the well came up and reported.

"Six feet below, sir. It rose eight inches while I was sounding."

Captain Bob nodded. "All right. Help the steward load the boats with extra stores."

Scoggins came past with Estenaba. Captain Bob regarded him squarely and forced a smile to his lips.

"Well, she's sinking. I suppose you're satisfied."

Scoggins turned and faced him, snarling.

"I'm going to tell 'em all the trouble you've caused. You won't win anything by your actions."

Captain Bob lifted the hand in which he held the ship's log.



"It's all written down here," he said. "I'm filing a complete report with the first consul I meet."

Scoggins laughed and walked on amidships.

The deck tilted more and the bow elevated.

"We'll abandon ship, mister," Captain Bob said to the second. "See that the men are in their proper places."

THE *Banda Lu* was sliding deeper into the sea all the while Captain Bob was giving his orders. He gave them calmly enough, coolly and unhastily as though it were routine business. But it wasn't because he felt no emotions. Far from it! Inwardly he seethed with them. The *Banda Lu* was his first ship, it was probably his last. He wanted to do this last thing correctly. It was all he could do.

When the boats had lowered away and the last man had left, he stood alone on board with his back to the bulwarks and slowly looked her over. All was terrible—the confused, hectic appearance of her forward slanting decks, the dilapidated and make-shift jury rig, the broken stub of mainmast jutting up through her center like a giant javelin from the deep that had given her the death blow.

He would have remained just that way while the water swelled up and submerged him, if it hadn't been for the round faced bos'n who shouted up at him from his boat sliding away on the surface.

"Come on, sir. She ain't worth it, loaded with sand, pebbles and all that. Nobody wants her, not even the owners. Why should you?"

He would have paid no attention to the bos'n's entreaty if it hadn't made him think of his crew. His first duty was to his ship. He had done all he could. But his crew wasn't safe yet. He still had a duty

to perform—he had to get them safely to land.

"Come on, sir," the second yelled. "Or I'll come back and stay with you."

Captain Bob didn't need that last. He slapped the rail affectionately, cast off the painter and slid down into the stern sheets of the last boat. He took the tiller in hand then called out firmly: "Give way!"

The boats didn't pull far away. They didn't have time. The men turned when grouped together and rested on their oars.

The *Banda Lu* was already well down by the stern. And her bowsprit kept tilting higher and higher as the men watched. Then something gave way inside her, the cargo probably. It crashed to the lower end. Then she began to creak and groan. The whole ship shuddered for a moment, then suddenly she slid from view. One moment she was there, the next minute gone. It was just like that, no commotion, no whirlpool. No spectacular climax.

It is an awesome thing to see a ship die. No one in the boats stirred for a bit. Then some one let out his breath and the spell was broken. The boats rowed away.

FOR a night and a day the three lifeboats drifted in a calm, motionless sea. About noon of the second day they were picked up by a tramp steamer headed for Batavia via Makassar in the Celebes.

"That's fine, your heading in at Makassar," Captain Bob said to the ship's officer leaning over the rail. "I can meet the owner's agent there and turn over the ship's papers and log. And I can file my report with the consul."

He waited while his men climbed up the Jacob's ladder and boarded the tramp. Then when the last man was aboard he stooped down and

reached under the thwarts where the mate had been sitting to get the box containing the ship's papers and log. It wasn't there. It was gone!

One of the men on deck mentioned something about Scoggins.

Captain Bob remembered the enmity between he and the mate. Yes, that was it. Scoggins had gotten hold of them some way and thrown them overboard.

For an instant his face went pale. His last official defense was gone. He would even now be reprimanded for not saving the log.

"Oh, well," he said finally, straightening. "What's the difference? I might as well lose all."

SCOGGINS smiled smugly as he climbed aboard.

"Shall I hoist up the lifeboats?" the tramp ship's officer asked.

"No, cut them adrift," Captain Bob replied, indifferently.

"Don't worry, sir," the round-faced bos'n spoke up. "There are better ships on the sea than the *Banda Lu*."

"But not for me," Captain Bob replied sadly. Two days later the tramp docked at Makassar. The round-faced bos'n was the first man down the gangplank. And oddly, as soon as he debarked the gangplank was lifted. Captain Bob was puzzled, but he didn't say anything.

About fifteen minutes later the bos'n returned with two police officers of the British Foreign Service. The gangplank was promptly lowered again. The bos'n and the police officers rushed up. The bos'n pointed his stubby forefinger at Scoggins

and Estenaba in rapid succession.

"There! Arrest those two!" he said sharply.

Captain Bob stared vacantly.

THE bos'n turned to him, thrust out his hand.

"Congratulations," he beamed, his small eyes flashing. "You're a real skipper. I know I'm a darn poor bos'n. But you see, it's been twenty years since I served, then only on those cross-channel boats." Then while Captain Bob's face went expressionless: "My name's not Clarke. I am Mortimer Harris, criminal investigator for Lloyd's. Here's my card." He handed it to Captain Bob.

"You're no—er—real bos'n," Captain Bob stammered as he read it.

"No," the special gent answered, laughing. "But I managed to get by with your assistance. This crooked shipping ring has been busted up now. We've suspicioned them for a long time—false cargoes, high insurance on old junks and all that. But we didn't have the goods on them until now."

"What about the agent?" Captain Bob asked.

"He's here in Makassar," the ex-bos'n replied. "I've sent the police for him. They'll all go to jail together. And believe me, boy, you're going to be recommended for the best job shipping can offer. Lloyds will see to that. You're a real skipper."

The special agent shook Captain Bob's hand vigorously.

"And you'll do as a bos'n," Captain Bob replied, breaking into a broad smile.

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*Next Month:*

## BOB DU SOE'S

*Great Novelette of the Tortures and Terrors of Devil's Island*

## ESCAPE

*—Don't Miss It*

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# The Pearl of Death



*He smashed his feet against the side of the hatchetman's head*

## *The Avenger of Lo Chang On the Trail in San Francisco's Mysterious Chinatown*

### *A Larry Weston Story*

By LIEUT. SCOTT MORGAN

*Author of "The Avenger of Lo Chang," "Brother to the Tong," etc.*

LARRY WESTON'S face was covered by a thatch of straggly beard; his eyes were bloodshot and his face pale through the tan. It had been a long grueling task, this searching out the pearls of Lo Chang, and there had been dead men strewn along the pathway to their recovery.

As he stood on the Embarcadero, staring out at the vast expanse of San Francisco Bay, over which gulls circled and screamed as they fol-

lowed the ferries back and forth, his eyes were very thoughtful.

He lifted his arm, pulled back the sleeve and stared at the slender cicatrice, a wound which had been made by the Lo Chang, in a monastery in far Tibet, when he had become a brother of the tong by mingling his blood with that of the priests of the temple.

There he had taken the vow to bring back the pearls which had been filched from the hand of the

Buddha in the secret room of the monastery. He was here in San Francisco now to recover the last of three pearls.

Two others had been returned to him—a man was long since dead in Shanghai who had possessed one of them for a brief space—a second had been left unconscious on a boat from Dover to Calais—and the third, whose name was various—George Furness, Caleb Thane, Joshua Horne, depending on where the man was and what he did—was supposed now to be somewhere in San Francisco.

AND San Francisco would hold many of the Lo Chang in its Chinatown. Here, at least, Larry Weston would be able to summon the genii of the ring which Lo Chang had given him, that queer ring which, shown to brothers of the tong, evoked their absolute loyalty, called upon them to give him every support, even to the risk of their lives.

Yet just now he felt very much alone—one man pitted against the mysteries and dangers of a great city.

Where should he begin? The trail of Joshua Horne—the last name the man he pursued seemed to be using—had ended on the docks at San Francisco, where the great city had swallowed up the man, caused his trail to vanish.

One more pearl to get—and his vow would have been kept. The other two pearls—priceless in themselves, greater in value than the ransom of a dozen kings when the three were together—were on his person now.

He wondered, with a wry twist of his lips, what the people who passed him with averted faces, as though afraid he would ask for the price of a cup of coffee, would think if

they could know his possessions, vast enough to have paid off the tax burden of San Francisco. In specially constructed little holsters, the two pearls reposed in his armpits—where policemen sometimes carried their weapons.

He sighed a little. Nothing had happened for several weeks, since he had left Dane, the possessor of the second pearl, on the Dover-Calais boat, unconscious. He ached for action, and the fulfillment of his vow.

And he must begin somewhere. He had so little to guide him. Just a name on a passenger list, an almost illegible scrawl—and the memory of a face with deep-sunken, murderous eyes.

He turned away and was lost in the crowd.

## II

THAT night, down on Pacific Street at one of San Francisco's most famous night resorts, a smartly dressed man, with the beginning of a mustache and the rudiments of a spade beard, pushed his way through the standing throng of sweating humanity to the end of the long hall, above which rose tiers where men and women—the women of the place who took a percentage on drinks—sat and looked warily into one another's eyes.

Larry Weston was casually interested in an Eurasian woman who did a snaky dance for the benefit of pop-eyed men who cared about such things. She did her act behind a taut rope against which men of all sorts leaned heavily, as though the better thus to see her writhing convolutions. She was a beautiful woman, with hell in her eyes. She met the gaze of many men and stared straight at and through them. She made Larry Weston shiver.

He could fancy her, even in the

midst of her dance, thrusting a knife into a man from the back. She seemed a creature without mercy.

Larry Weston pressed forward against the rope, while his eyes roved over the faces of those who came to watch. So closely was humanity packed that when one person moved, even to breathe, all the others moved, too, to accommodate the original movement.

This was the sort of thing which would interest Joshua Horne, he felt. It was as good a place as any to begin.

ONE thing only troubled him. Nobody molested him, yet he had known from the beginning that his interest in the pearls of Lo Chang was known to the man he pursued. That man was one of three who had looted the Tibetan monastery, after which they had separated, each with a pearl, to make recovery difficult if not impossible, planning to get together in a year to divide the spoils from the sale of the pearls.

And now, where was Joshua Horne?

Larry Weston, through force of habit, shrugged his shoulders, to make sure that the two pearls he had already recovered—and which must have cost the lives of many men down the ages since their first discovery and bringing together—reposed in the little pouches he had made for them.

They were there.

He was watching the dancing girl and remembering others he had seen—the Nautch girl of Benares, the Egyptian girls with the lower part of their faces hidden by provocative *yashmaks*—and comparing this girl in San Francisco's once famous Barbary Coast with them.

It seemed that all the meaning, all the innuendo he had read into the movements of the others, in the far

places, was incorporated into this girl's dance.

Smoke from cigars and pipes and cigarettes clouded the room. Faces pasty white, yellow, brown, even piebald, were fastened on her—and then Larry Weston knew: this girl was all the others; their dancing she had made her own: their twistings and writhings, created to appeal to the eyes of men, she had copied and improved upon—hers was the age-old lure which made fools of men.

Something touched him behind, at the shoulder blades. His coat, light for summer wear, became flabby across his back. He whirled. He had been too long on strange missions not to know when exploring fingers touched him. What he saw when he whirled was a strange thing.

It was a woman who had been directly behind him. She was a beautiful woman, with dark eyes, with little fires deep down inside them—eyes which showed no hint of fear, but only, now, glints of the devil's mockery.

The woman was thrusting something into the bag on her arm.

ONE glance told Larry Weston what they were—the two pearls of Lo Chang which he had been at such pains to recover!

He realized, with a sudden flash of thought, that a razor-sharp knife had taken the back out of his coat, that a hand had retrieved the pearls from their resting place, that he had lost them. But at the same moment he knew exactly where they were: the woman was dropping them into her purse.

Split seconds were needed for the flashes of thought. They came and went even as he turned and looked. There went a year of labor, of passing through danger, always with the

knowledge that brothers of the Tong watched his every movement to make sure that he played square with the priests who really owned the pearls—which they held in trust for Buddha himself.

He did the automatic thing. He thrust forth his right hand to clutch at the leathern twin bags—and the whole roof of the resort seemed to descend on his head.

Stars danced a crazy rigadon in the blackness which descended over him. He felt himself falling, while the woman seemed to be receding from him. Her shapely white hand was falling to her side, the pearls were safe in their appointed resting-place.

"I mustn't pass out," he fiercely told himself. "That way leads to the door. That way is out. But why must it be so dark? I've lost my eyesight. I've got to get those pearls back."

**H**E ducked his head. Another blow struck him between his bare shoulders, which the slashing knife had made naked. That blow had also been intended for the top of his head. He had avoided it by pure chance.

He knew, in a dim sort of way, that two blackjacks were being aimed at his skull. There might be many innocent ones here. That didn't matter. Just now they hampered his efforts. He couldn't see where his blows went and it didn't seem to matter.

He began to fight. He surged forward on rubbery legs, knowing that the blackjacks still strove to bring him down.

He sent long lefts straight ahead, felt them crash against faces—of whom he didn't know—and followed with savage, murderous rights. The mob ahead of him, few perhaps of whom had had anything to do with

the daring robbery, tried to give back.

Women screamed that a madman was loose in the crowd. He knew that the Eurasian had ceased her dancing, that she had pressed to the ropes and was urging the mob, in a monotonous, quiet voice, to make way for the crazy man, let him through, so that she could go on with her dance.

There was nothing to worry about, really.

He wondered what had become of the blackjack wielders. They would be conspicuous in such a place. They, too, were probably fighting their way to freedom, with better chance for success than himself, perhaps, because their weapons were more savage.

He lunged forward. The crowd swayed away from him. His teeth were set in a snarl as he lashed out, left, right, left, right—left and right again—and each time he struck he surged forward, using husky shoulders to force a way. He felt that once he gained the street that the light would give his eyes back to him, that a miracle would happen and he would see the woman who had taken the two pearls of Lo Chang.

**T**HEIR loss might well mean his death—for the Lo Chang were watching him every minute. It didn't matter that the pearls had been lost through no fault of his own.

His life was forfeit, by the terms of his vow, if he failed in his mission—and the arms of the Lo Chang were long enough to reach around the world many times over.

Forward he surged again—taking one step—two—and now he found his voice.

"The woman in white! She has robbed me! She's getting away. Stop



her, some one!" It was plain that he couldn't see. It was plain from his blind advance, from his stumbling gait as he fought forward toward where he thought the door which gave on Pacific Street ought to be. Now hands tore at him and he knew that his already damaged coat was gone entirely from his torso, together with his shirt and undershirt.

The blackjacks had probably made good their escape, because they must still have the sight of their eyes.

And they might be in league with any number of men here. All that must have been secretly planned in advance.

Maybe the woman who had taken the pearls had been following him as long as he had been following the evasive trail of Joshua Horne. It didn't matter now; nothing mattered except the woman, the return of the pearls, and the recovery of the still missing third pearl of Lo Chang.

HE didn't know why he did it—it was more of a hunch than anything else—but even as he shot forth his hard fists, he turned that strange ring he wore so that its insignia was inside his palm. There was no reason for so doing—it would mean nothing to anyone except the Lo Chang—but he did it just the same, never guessing that it was that ring which would save his life.

When a blast of cold air struck the left side of his face, when he had fought until he could fight no more, he turned to bring the breeze against his face, stumbled out through the open door unmolested—and collapsed on the concrete sidewalk, half in and half out of the gutter.

Far up the street a taxicab, bearing a beautiful woman in white, turned a corner and vanished.

## III

STRANGE things happen on Pacific Street and Larry Weston never discovered how it happened that he could be picked up from the gutter and taken away, without his captors being molested by any one, even the police.

But this much he did know: he regained consciousness to the odor of incense in his nostrils, incense and opium, of birds'-nest soup and sharks' fins—of Jasmin tea and queer candies—Chinese odors.

He knew by the feel of the bed that it was not a bed, but a *kong*.

From somewhere beyond the walls he sensed surrounded him, he heard shrill voices raised high in sing-song cadences.

There were the voices of men, the sweet melodious voice of a young girl.

He opened his eyes.

The room was small, with a low ceiling, and the walls were covered with many scrolls and pictures of sober Chinese. He knew that only the dead were pictured in old-fashioned Chinese homes. So he was probably staring at the dead and gone ancestors of the people whose voices he heard through the wall.

He tried to move.

He could not. He stared down at himself, his head reeling with pain, blackness threatening to flood over him again, to find himself bound hand and foot with small, stout cord. He tested out his bonds a bit and found he could do nothing with them.

They did prove, though, that he was in the hands of enemies. Friends did not cover one with lengths of stout cord that could not be broken.

The room rocked and rolled and seemed to shake on its foundations. That was because his head spun like a top and his brains felt, he thought

to himself, "like the yolk of a fried egg."

Then he called weakly.

"Will somebody be so kind as to tell me where in the devil and Tom Walker, I am?"

The voices outside ceased. He heard tapping steps, the footfalls of slip-slopping sandals. A narrow door opened at one end of the room and two men came in.

One of them was very old, with face covered entirely by wrinkles, the other was young, hard of face, deeply black of eye, and with the look of the professional hatchetman about him. Both stared at Larry Weston with baleful orbs.

"Just what," asked Larry Weston, "is the big idea? How did I get here?"

"I brought you!" said the younger man. His voice was toneless, the words came forth casually as though the speaker didn't care a tinker's dam whether or not he answered.

"Why?"

"We received word, my father and I, that you were an enemy of Lo Chang. We are Lo Chang. So—"

THE Chinese shrugged his shoulders as though that said everything.

"Who said I was an enemy of Lo Chang?" demanded Larry Weston.

"One does not know. But the word came by mail, a letter without a signature."

Larry tried to rise to a sitting position, while sweat burst from every pore and his body went hot and cold by turns.

"Where was that letter posted?"

"How should I know?"

Larry settled back. It was plain that neither of these two intended to release him. The younger was probably a college graduate, the old one knew only Chinese. Chinese

families in America were often like that.

"So, Horne tried to have me slain by locating Lo Chang here and telling them I was an enemy, eh? Well, if I prove to you that I am not only not an enemy, but am, indeed, a brother of the tong, what then? Will you help me?"

The eyes of the younger man widened. He spoke to the old one in the speedy sing-song, after which the eyes of the old one narrowed.

"How does it happen that a foreigner speaks of being brother of the tong? It has never been done!" stated the younger man flatly. "The brothers do not admit foreigners to their secrets."

"Yet if I were to tell you—"

"We would say that you lied!" snapped the younger Chinese. "It is for the Lo Chang to decide."

"But I have proof!" said Larry Weston.

He looked at his right hand, which had worn the queer ring which had been given him at the monastery in far Tibet—and the ring was missing! When had it been taken? There was no way of knowing. Only the white circle on the finger proved that he had ever had it at all. And he had no proof, beyond that ring, of his vow of blood brotherhood with the tong.

"Let me up," he said coldly, "and tell me where that letter was posted, if you know. And then I swear I'll find the proof that I am brother of the tong."

"That will be proved tonight, my son," said the old man, suddenly speaking out in *mandarin*, "when the American brothers of the tong meet. If you are an enemy—"

THE old man looked at his son. That worthy's right hand fell to his waist, where a squatty hatchet hung. The fingers played over the

sharp blade with a loving caress. Larry Weston, panting, tried to relax.

"I can prove it," he said, "given half a chance. But if I must wait to be tortured — can't you loosen these thongs a bit? They are biting into my arms and legs, cutting off circulation."

"Perhaps if they were tightened," said the younger man, "we would have less work tonight to prove that you are an open enemy of our tong. You know, my friend, enmity to the Lo Chang means death."

The younger man came closer to the bed, grinning a little as though enjoying the suffering of Larry Weston. He leaned over the bed and examined Larry's bonds. Larry Weston acted then, knowing that he forfeited his life if he failed.

HE drew his knees up with the speed of a serpent striking—and smashed his feet against the side of the hatchetman's head. The Chinese fell without a sound. As the old man plunged through the door, slamming it shut, screaming for help in a high falsetto, Weston rolled off the bed, turned the unconscious man over with his feet—and rolled against the razor sharp edge of the hatchet. The bonds fell free.

There was a rush of feet outside as Larry Weston bent over and slashed at the bonds which held his feet. His ankles were free, but for a moment he swayed. Nausea bit at his stomach. His hand went to his head to find it dotted with lumps that were egg-size. The people who had smashed him with blackjacks had done a thorough job of it.

Larry caught up the hatchet, swung it back over his shoulder.

Men came through the door, hatchets in hands of some of them, snub-nosed automatics in others. This old man was well guarded. Larry

stood, legs wide apart, over the body of the man he had downed.

"Attack me, my friends," he said, "and I'll drive this hatchet through the skull of this man!"

He knew that no threat against the newcomers themselves would have been as effective. They had him beaten in advance, by the sheer weight of their numbers. They would know that. The old man answered:

"He has forfeited his life anyhow by allowing himself to be tricked by an enemy of the tong!"

Larry Weston decided on a bold move.

"I have told you I am not an enemy of the tong, but a blood brother," he said quietly. "A year ago, far up in the Tibetan mountains beyond Darjiling, up beyond Nepal and Bhutan, the Lo Chang made me a blood brother. I took a vow—"

"What was the occasion of this meeting with the Tibetan Lo Chang?" parried the old man, while the others edged forward, aching to charge and overpower this upstart who had forfeited the life of one of their number by outwitting him. "What was the vow? And where is the sign that the words you speak are true?"

"I cannot tell you until I know for a certainty that you are Lo Chang. But I had a ring, in which was set a certain design—"

HE began to describe it. The old man held up his hand. On it was a ring.

"Is this the ring?" he asked. There was something ominous in his voice, his eyes were hard—and Larry Weston knew that the old man was setting a trap. Larry studied the ring as best he could from where he stood. He dared not move closer.

"It was not like that," he said

slowly, "though that ring comes very close to being a replica. These are the differences—"

He went on to describe them faithfully. And when he had finished he knew he had won, for the old man said:

"There is a possibility that you speak truly, yet in this land where men are hanged by the neck if they take even the life of an enemy, one should be careful. If you can produce proof of your words—then you shall be given the chance.

**I**F there is a mission for the Lo Chang, it is our duty to aid that mission. What can we do for you? If we do aught at all, a member of the Lo Chang will always be close enough to drive the bit of a hatchet into your skull."

Larry Weston sighed his relief.

"That letter you say you received," he said. "I wish to find the writer. Send out your men to aid in the search. That writer has precious possessions of the Lo Chang which he would, in time, barter for money—and those possessions are the world's richest, belonging to Buddha himself."

"We will help you find this man. But how are we to know him? Is he a foreigner, or a Chinese?"

"I do not know for a certainty. When I last saw him it was among the shadows of the monastery about which I have hinted—the headquarters of the Tibetan tong. I only know one thing about him—that his eyes were cat-slitted; their pupils, instead of being round, were ovoid, like those of a cat. Find all the cat-eyed men in San Francisco. Turn the town upside down."

"That eye marking is unusual, but I have seen it several times," said the old one. "Is there nothing else? There may be several cat-eyed men."

Then Larry Weston, taking into

consideration all the details of the recent robbery, the fight at the resort, and his subsequent awakening here among people who had been warned he was an enemy, thought he had some inkling of the kind of man Horne might be. So he said:

"The man will be wearing that ring I just described to you—"

Something like fear overspread the faces of the Chinese.

"If this is so," said the old man after a moment of tense hesitation, "then we are bound to help *him*, for if he possesses that ring it is proof that he is blood brother of the tong."

"But if he does not wear it on the middle finger of the right hand? Where do foreigners wear their rings? The left hand—and that's where he will wear it, thus proving himself an impostor. To him it will be just a ring."

A long hesitant pause. Then the old man nodded.

"You may depart, but you will return here this evening. You must always return here when sent for—and remember, my friend, that there is always the blade of a hatchet within reach of your skull. If you are a brother in very truth, then, later, we will express to you our sorrow that you have been so illy treated by us. We will make full amends. But if you fail, the hatchet will strike!"

"It is agreed. You have a telephone? Then, listen: I shall telephone here for news every half hour I am away."

#### IV

**L**ARRY WESTON had no idea how many Lo Chang there might be in San Francisco, but that there must be hundreds, perhaps even thousands, seemed a certainty. Lo Chang were almost as

numerous as Buddhists. Their creed, or faith, had lived through the centuries—since the three pearls had first been brought together.

And Chinese were notoriously prolific. That meant that the offspring of even one family, in the course of centuries, might cumber the whole earth. So Larry Weston felt safe in believing that when the old man had given his word that the Lo Chang of San Francisco would help him, it meant something.

But what—just to be supposing—if Horne knew of the necessity for wearing that strange ring on the middle finger of his right hand—and the Lo Chang accepted him, instead of Larry himself, as the blood brother of the tong?

He knew he would die with great speed, his slaying so carefully covered up that his body, even, might never be discovered.

**T**HERE was one break in his favor: that the Lo Chang had even listened to him at all. That had been, he knew, because he had managed to describe the identifying ring with great exactitude. That had saved his life.

But supposing—

He made an end of supposing as the Lo Chang, taking him by a narrow passageway which gave him no chance to see the room, led him out of their dwelling. When he saw a patch of light from which came the roaring of traffic, he submitted to a blindfold.

He went out, felt the touch of pavement under his feet, was thrust into a taxicab by men who laughed immoderately, as though they were playing some joke. And the cab driver received his blindfolded fare in that spirit. Or maybe he knew his Chinatown, knew it was indiscreet to ask too many questions.

As someone gave directions to the

cab driver, one of the Chinese leaned into the cab and spoke to Larry Weston:

"Remember the hatchet. The Lo Chang are everywhere."

But when the cab drew away he knew that he was alone, or thought he was, until he tried to remove his blindfold. Then a voice said:

"Not yet."

It came from the floor right below his feet and he knew that one of the Chinese had crawled into the cab with him, unseen by the cabby. If he were to raise his feet and kick—but even as he thought this, as though the other had read his thought, something sharp, razor-sharp, pressed against his ankle. He knew it for the bit of a hatchet and made no further move. The man chuckled. Larry Weston leaned forward and spoke softly.

"We are brothers," he said. "I shall prove it yet."

"We are not brothers," came the low-whispered reply, "until you have produced the proof."

They traveled for what Larry Weston judged to be fifteen minutes. The way led downhill. Finally the cabby stopped, laughed a little, spoke to Weston.

"I guess this is where the joke either begins or ends. It's where I was supposed to bring you."

Larry now lifted his hand to the blindfold without hindrance, then stared down at the floor of the cab in amazement. He hadn't heard the car door open, nor felt the breeze of its opening on his face—yet the hatchetman of the Lo Chang had vanished. Larry Weston climbed from the cab, stood for a moment on the street.

**A**S he stood, wondering what to do next, two young girls passed him. He caught at the threads of their conversation:

"Lord, did you ever see so many Chinks on the street—outside of Chinatown, I mean?"

"No, but ain't some of 'em handsome—that slender one we just met."

And then they were gone, and Larry Weston's heart was beating high with excitement. The Lo Chang were abroad! He looked back up the street, which he discovered to be Van Ness Avenue.

A half block back a young man stared in at a window. His hat was pulled down to his ears. His Occidental clothing could not disguise his yellow skin. He didn't even seem to be conscious of the scrutiny of Larry Weston, but Larry, studying the man, estimated the distance to him. A good hatchetman could throw a hatchet that distance with deadly accuracy.

HE shuddered a little. The Lo Chang meant business. How much did they know of his mission? In the end he would probably have to tell them the whole thing. If he failed, well—he kept thinking of the distance from himself to that young Chinese, how a hard arm could send a hatchet hurtling swiftly to its goal.

He shrugged. The old one was keeping his promise to keep Larry Weston under surveillance. Larry was as much a prisoner as though he had never won free of his bonds. If he called a policeman—but how could he ask for the arrest of a Chinese who merely stared through a window at American food?

He decided on the downtown district, along Market Street. But first he looked at his watch. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. Lord, he'd been out a long time—since last night. His quarry might be hours out of the Golden Gate now, traveling to some other hiding place. Unless he felt sure that the Lo Chang

would unceremoniously dispose of Larry Weston.

He stepped to the curb, called another taxi. He ordered himself taken to Market Street, near the Civic Center. He peered back through the rear window. The Chinese before the restaurant window was also calling a taxicab. Larry Weston turned back to watch the road they traveled. As the cab whirled him along he studied the people on the street. Every tenth man seemed to be a Chinese!

And was he mistaken, or did they gaze slantwise at every man they met, seeking the man with the cat-eyes? Lord, the whole city was acrawl with yellow men! How many of them hid hatchets under their coats? How many deaths would eventuate before he regained possession of the pearls of Lo Chang?

He thought of many places he had visited—because, having inherited two millions of dollars he could go wherever he wished—in which he had seen the way yellow men operated. He'd seen them in Lhasa, in Golokwa, in Altan Buloc, everywhere—and always they had been the same: stalking nemeses of their enemies.

They were like that now. He wondered how many Americans on the streets of San Francisco noticed the increase of strolling Chinese, how many of them even sensed the dynamite held in leash by men trained for centuries to hide their feelings under philosophic calm.

He quitted the cab.

HE strode down Market Street. Half a block and he looked back. A Chinese, not the same as the one before the restaurant, followed easily along behind, blandly ignoring Larry Weston. But Larry



knew that, for the moment, this man was his "trail." He was half-minded to go back and ask the fellow what the hell he was after, but thought better of it, because he knew.

He looked at his watch. Three-thirty. He stepped into a cigar store, called the number the old one had given him. A girl's voice answered, the soft, melodious voice of the girl whom he had heard through the partition of the room of his captivity.

"Yes, Mr. Weston?"

He hadn't said a word. He gasped. She had called him by name.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"You said every half hour. I kept the time. I knew you would call. Three calls have come in from—from—our people. Two men with cat-eyes have been found. One is a very old man who walks on crutches and talks to himself."

"He isn't the one."

ONE is a young man who runs a garage on Sutter Street."

"No. I'll call back again at four o'clock."

But when he tried to call back at that time the line was busy. It was busy for ten minutes, and when the girl answered again her voice was high-pitched with excitement.

"Two more men have been found. Both have offices on Market Street, two blocks from the Ferry Building. One wears a ring like—like the ring of which you seem to know. The other is negroid. Both men are being watched by three of the Lo Chang. The three travel together, like students in animated conversation."

Larry's heart leaped with eagerness. He liked the sound of the girl's voice. He told her so. Her answer was sharp.

"If you are what you claim," she answered, "you are a brother—and

could not show undue interest. If you are not, you are an enemy of my house. Do not speak compliments again. It is not mete in either case."

But he felt, despite her coldness, that she was laughing at him.

"After I have finished my mission," he said boldly, "I shall no longer be a blood brother."

Her answer was sharper still.

"Once a brother, always a brother of the tong. Vows are not taken so lightly among us."

THE girl clicked up the receiver. Larry Weston went out onto Market Street, the south side. He was four blocks from the Ferry Building. He hadn't asked the girl on which side of the street to look, but the traffic scarcely obstructed his view, so he knew that he would easily spot three Chinese walking together, even across the street.

But he didn't have to cross the street—for three Chinese, laughing and chatting easily, and gesticulating as Chinese did—one even made a character in his hand to elucidate the meaning of something he was chanting in shrill Cantonese—came out of a department store and turned toward the Ferry Building.

Ahead of them was a broad-shouldered, lowering individual, who waded through pedestrians, giving way neither to the right or left, like an ice breaker through skim ice. Larry Weston hated the man instantly for his obvious ill-nature and truculence.

But, when he came to think about it, he could scarcely blame the man. Larry Weston had been trailing him for months, keeping his nerves on edge, so that it was little wonder that the man was almost savage.

Larry Weston overtook the Chinese without glancing at them. When, almost abreast of the hulking brute,

he looked back, the three Chinese had become four. The three had been joined by his tail. Larry grinned to himself at their elaborate show of disinterest in himself or the striding man.

Larry came abreast of the man. The fellow's lips were twisted in a snarl. His eyes were bloodshot and wild. But as he walked he suddenly lifted his left hand and stared at it—and Larry's heart jumped again. There was his ring!

And this man was Joshua Horne, one of the deadliest of the men whom Larry Weston had followed halfway around the world. How did one go about handling such a one, here in crowded Market Street?

He didn't know. If there were trouble, and the police came in, there would be complications. He would have to tell about the pearls, which had been smuggled in.

HE'D not bothered to declare his, because he intended returning them to their owners. He knew men of Horne's ilk well enough to know that the hulking brute would have laughed at the idea of declaring a pearl worth a million dollars.

What could he do? He decided on a long chance. Walking abreast of the big man, who glanced neither to right or left, he spoke out of the corner of his mouth:

"What would you say, Horne, if I were to say that I was a brother of the Lo Chang?"

Even as he spoke, Larry Weston turned his head away, before the other could look at him squarely. At the same moment a man of almost Larry's size and build shouldered between Larry and his quarry—and Horne spoke.

"This is what I would do!"

He knocked the perfectly innocent man into the gutter, then broke into a run for the Ferry Building.

THERE could certainly be no doubt now that the man was Horne, the man who held the third pearl of Lo Chang which Larry Weston had vowed to return to Tibet. And—it just came to Larry—he was probably the man who had been the power behind the girl who had robbed him last night on Pacific Street.

It was barely possible that Horne might have had no connection with that robbery. And yet—no, no one else could ever have known that he had the other two pearls.

However, the near future would tell. But that man who now raced for the Ferry Building was undoubtedly the one whom, in the darkness of a secret room, in the high mountains cradling a Tibetan monastery, he had been attacked by. As a result Larry had forfeited his life to the Lo Chang, and it had been spared him only when he had vowed to bring back the pearls the man had stolen from the upturned palm of the great Buddha in the temple.

Larry Weston had got two of the pearls. The third was in the possession of that running man—and maybe the key to the location of the others. Yet Larry dared not run.

Horne had not had time to recognize him, if Horne had ever even seen him face to face—for it had been dark in the monastery, though not so dark that Weston hadn't noticed the peculiar shape of the pupils of Horne's eyes.

To run after him now would be to attract undue attention, inasmuch as Horne was looking back over his shoulder, obviously expecting pursuit.

But when Horne had vanished into the building Weston raced across the clearing where street cars turned to go back up Market Street slowly

to a walk when he entered the building. A ferry boat whistled. It was preparing to cast off for the run across to Oakland or Berkeley.

Larry Weston must get on board. He couldn't depend too much on his disguise—which consisted solely of the rudimentary mustache and the sprouting spade beard. But he wasn't too sure that it mattered any longer, with Chinese all over San Francisco—and of course the bay cities—on the lookout for the man with slitted pupils. Horne hadn't a chance to escape.

Larry's one fear was that the Chinese themselves would take more than an active hand and defeat his purpose entirely. They might not even be Lo Chang—and to them the pearls would be priceless possessions indeed.

THEY, if not Lo Chang, might guess that the quarrel between Horne and himself involved something precious which would be of use to them. But he cast the thought aside as unworthy. Knowing Chinese, he didn't have the usual Occidental distrust of them. They were honorable—at least as honorable as the average Occidental.

He raced for the gangplank of the ferry, got aboard. He was strengthened in his belief that Horne was aboard by the fact that two Chinese moved unobtrusively—but with deceiving speed—up the gangplank ahead of him. He felt that they, too, were on the trail of Horne.

Larry Weston searched the first deck as the boat pulled out. Just away from the slip, gulls began to scream over the ferry. Passengers tossed out bits of biscuits, remnants of noonday lunches of people who commute to Frisco from the bay cities.

Weston shook himself, consider-

ing all that had befallen him since he had last watched the gulls with a show of interest.

"If Horne got cornered he wouldn't be above throwing the pearls into the bay," he decided. "I wonder if gulls would catch them before they hit the water—and wouldn't I have a sweet job following the right gulls to get them back. That *would* be a job for the Lo Chang."

He cast out such whimsical thoughts as, finding that the man he sought was not on the lower deck, he climbed the stairs to the upper deck where tired shopgirls and clerks were catching the evening breeze. He passed from bench to bench, studying the faces of the men—seeking Horne.

But it seemed that his search was to be fruitless. Just as he was about to give up, one of the Chinese who had preceded him onto the ferry, passed him and spoke slantwise out of motionless lips.

"The Lo Chang watch. The man you seek is aboard. Look sharply!"

The yellow man was gone before Larry Weston could see his face. Now Larry's hand went to his pocket; but he remembered that he had no weapon. The Chinese had come from some place aft—and Larry guessed that he must just now have seen Horne.

SO Weston turned about, retracing his steps, looking into all the nooks and crannies where a man might make himself inconspicuous during the crossing.

And in a corner near a lifeboat he found the man he sought, leaning on the rail, apparently deeply interested in the ducking and diving of the gulls. Unobtrusively, Larry Weston slipped to the rail beside him, looked over the side. Horne did not even notice him. He re-

mained where he was for a minute or two.

Weston finally faced Horne squarely, spoke:

"It's a swell day, isn't it?"

Horne snarled at him.

"What the devil if it is?" he demanded.

Larry took the plunge.

"I was just thinking what a fine day it would be for you, Horne, to return to their proper owners the pearls of Lo Chang!"

At the same moment a sudden outcry came from forward. Shrill cries in Chinese rang through the boat. Passengers eager to satisfy their curiosity, were rising from their seats, racing to the point of excitement.

At the same time four Chinese appeared, running silently toward Weston and Horne. Horne took in the situation at a glance. His right hand darted to his pocket.

"So you're the guy that's been following me for a year, eh? Well, I'm a different customer than the chaps you got the other two pearls from, see? I won't give them up to anybody without a fight!"

"Then fight it is, Horne, or whatever your real name is," said Larry grimly, "for I mean to have the pearls, all three of them."

**T**HE last was a shot in the dark, but Horne did not dissemble in the least.

"Well," he snarled, "try and get them!"

And his hand snapped forth, gripping the butt of an automatic. Weston jumped at Horne. His right hand dropped down to the muzzle of the automatic before Horne could pull the trigger. He grabbed the barrel.

Horne's right forefinger was on the trigger. Weston twisted the weapon back so that it pointed along

the back of the man's hand. That left the trigger finger of Horne fastened tightly in the trigger guard. He was a prisoner—or almost any other man would have been, for this trick was a crippling one.

With a little jerk Larry could break the man's finger as he would snap a twig. He saw sweat start from the cheeks of Horne. But Horne, in spite of the agony of a finger bent back upon itself to almost the breaking point, aimed a savage left hand at Larry's chin.

Larry twisted the automatic quickly, secure in the knowledge that Horne would not fire it, or if he could that the bullet would fly off across the bay.

**B**Y jerking the man he pulled him closer, and that cruel left-hander went harmlessly around Larry's neck. Horne swore furiously. The four Chinese, with glances back over their shoulders to make sure that their countrymen were still keeping the passengers interested, grinned at the struggling men—and Larry Weston saw approval of himself in their grins.

He was making good in their eyes. There was no collusion in the meeting of Horne and Weston, which they might previously have suspected.

They knew now that he was a brother of the tong.

But Joshua Horne was a hard man. He wasn't finished yet. For sheer nerve the next thing he did was the best Weston had ever seen. For Horne, knowing that he would break a finger, suddenly yanked away. The finger snapped. The trigger guard of the automatic raked the skin and flesh from the man's finger, clear to the broken bone.

But Horne was free. With a snarl on his lips, even as Weston reversed the automatic for a shot at Horne,

the killer-bandit turned away—hurled himself at the rail of the ferry, went over the side in a great leap. "Follow!" snapped Larry at the Chinese.

HE himself vaulted to the rail and dived, hurling himself as far as possible in the direction of the circle of waves where Horne had gone down. He swam swiftly under water when he struck, and went deeply down. Even as he came up he kicked out strongly, away from the path of the ferry. He had no wish to be caught in its mechanism.

But he was risking even that to make good his capture of Horne—and the pearls. That Horne had them he was quite sure, else Horne would not have taken such desperate chances to win free of his pursuer.

Larry Weston came up immediately after Horne did. The lights of the ferry were receding. Apparently their plunge had attracted little or no attention. The Chinese had managed that somehow, with skill.

Weston, while Horne trod water and awaited his attack, hurled himself through the water at Horne. Horne waited to meet him. He was swearing bitterly, savagely.

"I can handle you with both hands broken, whoever you are!" snarled Horne.

"I'll tell you who I am, though I'm sure you know. I was the man in the temple in Tibet. I'm the man that caused the death of your partner in Shanghai, the man who got the second pearl from your second partner aboard the Dover-Calais steamer. And I'm here to get you in the same way!"

He pounced for Horne with both hands. Horne struck at him as savagely as he could manage. But Larry ducked, and with his head under water to avoid the blow, acted

on impulse. He dived, fastened his arms around the legs of Horne, dragged him into the depths. He doubted if Horne were in as good physical condition as himself, could stay under water as long.

So he swam downward as long as he himself could hold his breath, then rode, side by side with Horne, to the surface of the bay. Down there he had felt the terrific pull of the current, and it had come to him that even if he whipped Horne, and got the pearls, he had barely a fighting chance of getting to the mainland with them.

He recalled stories he had heard of prisoners trying to escape from Alcatraz, and losing their lives in the treacherous currents.

HORNE was only half conscious when they floated again on the surface, Larry Weston swimming heavily because he had to support himself and Horne, too. The killer-thief didn't seem to care now whether he lived or died. And then his eyes opened and he seemed to become aware for the first time of the vast expanse of the darkening waters which surrounded him.

With a sudden cry of fear he flung his arms around Larry—and they went down again, while Larry fought with might and main to jerk free of entangling arms and legs.

He managed it finally—managed it when the under water world was becoming a black hell shot through and through with spots of red light—and beat his way back up, holding fast to Horne's coat collar.

This time when they floated he kept Horne's back to him—and spoke savagely, shaking the struggling man as a terrier shakes a rat.

"Give me the pearls! And don't drop one of them or you sink, here and now."

"What does it matter? No mat-

ter how much I help you," Horne was gurgling, proof that he had taken aboard plenty of the bay's waters, "we still can't swim all that distance to the shore."

But Weston remembered what he had said to the Chinese aboard the ferry—and that Chinese were resourceful. They would manage somehow to help him. He shook Horne again.

"Quick, Horne, the pearls!"

"Inside pocket of my coat, if they haven't been lost in the bay!" gasped Horne, all the resistance gone out of him. Taking a firm grip on Horne's coat collar, and twisting it until he had shut off the man's breath, Weston felt around the big man until his hand delved into the inner right pocket of his coat. With his fingers he felt a bulge; three of them.

There were the leathern shapes of the little holsters in which he had carried two of the pearls under his arms. He managed to place the holsters in his own pocket.

**T**HE third packet was the right size and shape—and it seemed to be a bag of yellow silk. He dared to maneuver the mouth of the bag, to open it slightly, until he could see the third pearl. He knew the other two by their feel. He thrust all three into places of safety.

"Now, Horne," he ordered grimly, "lie flat on your back, don't mind a few waves wetting your nose, and we'll see if we can make it. Kick your feet a little to help."

Horne was obedient, docile, but Weston didn't trust him. The man might conserve his strength while Larry used up his, then turn on him with a savage attack, and regain the pearls of Lo Chang.

And when they were almost within hailing distance of the shore, Horne did exactly this. By this time appalling darkness mantled the waters

of the bay, so it was little wonder that Weston hadn't noted the small boat creeping up on them. Nor did he think of small boats as he found himself fighting tooth and nail against Joshua Horne, there in the water. Horne's fists were heavy and Horne had regained all his strength. Larry was in the grip of a deathly fatigue. He felt himself start sinking as a savage blow landed squarely on his jaw.

**H**ANDS explored his clothing. He clamped his right arm hard over his pocket. And then—something happened: the small boat, with a shadowy figure in the prow holding a long oar upright, materialized beside them out of the night.

The oar crashed down atop the head of Horne. For a moment Horne rested on the surface of the waters. Then something gleamed in the shadows. A streak flashed from the hand of a second man—and ended at the skull of Joshua Horne.

With his last strength Larry Weston clutched at Horne, found his left hand, dragged off the ring, and slipped it onto the middle finger of his right hand. Then his fingers went nerveless and Joshua Horne slipped away from him.

Strong hands that were friendly grasped him under the arms—one of which, the right, still clamped down tightly over his pocket—and pulled him aboard the small boat.

He passed out.

When he regained consciousness it was to discover himself far at sea, aboard a steamer bound for China, with the pearls intact. Chinese were clever. Later he stood at the rail, staring out at the heaving waste of waters. His lips moved.

"When I've returned the pearls," he told himself, "I'm going in for something not exciting—say hunting black leopards in Malaysia!"



# North of Guinea



*Slip waited, tense and alert, charged with dynamic strength*

## *Searching For the Pelts of the Royal Superba in the Forgotten Islands of the Pacific, Slip Tracy Runs into An Old Enemy*

By JACKSON COLE

*Author of "Pearls of Peril," "Valley of Giants," etc.*

**S**LIP Tracy set his faltering seaplane down easily in the coral rimmed harbor of remote Ternate. Numerous proas and junks floated lazily on the shimmering surface of the lagoon. The owners and crews, a mixed lot of humans, stared strangely at the queer apparition that had suddenly dropped down on them from the skies.

But Slip Tracy paid no attention.

After securing his plane and jumping out on the long wharf he thundered imperiously: "The trading post of Jan Van Tiedt, where is it?"

A barefooted and curious Chinese gave him the answer.

The Dutch half-caste proprietor was lolling lazily over a counter when Slip entered.

"Ah, tell me," Slip said, as he gazed at the marvelous display of bird of paradise skins hanging from

the walls, "tell me which variety is the most expensive."

"You come to buy?" Jan Van Tiedt asked huskily. "I asked you a question," Slip snapped. His words were short-clipped and decisive.

Van Tiedt blinked his eyes, then stared intently at Slip, his fat jowls drooping.

Finally he answered.

"Z' Rouge Magnifique, dot ees a fine bird, undt also z' Superbe an' z' Epaminique are very scarce." Van Tiedt stood up behind the counter. "But on zees bird I vill make you a bargain."

**T**HE half-caste trader reached up on the wall and took down a string of feathery pelts, threw them on the counter. "I didn't come to buy," Slip said. "What will you pay me for some just like them?"

Van Tiedt blinked again. He raised his vision and stared past Slip out at the tiny seaplane in which he had arrived. Then he shook his head negatively, from side to side.

"You have zem in zat zeeplane?" he asked dubiously.

"No," Slip said. "But I'll get some for you if you make me a price."

The half-caste laughed.

"No, not efen wiz zat zeeplane will you be able to get zem. Oh, seex, seven, maybe zat many? But zen z' natives zey get your head."

Slip Tracy straightened suddenly. His brows narrowed and his thin lips pressed together. Twin pools of flame leaped in his flashing eyes.

"Thanks!" he snapped out sarcastically, and grabbed up the pelts on the counter. "I didn't come here for advice. I came here to get prices. Come, snap out of it. What's your offer for skins like these?"

The half-caste trader jerked up right now, narrowed his too close-set

eyes and stared at Slip Tracy approvingly.

Apparently satisfied with what he saw he sat down again abruptly and relaxed.

"Vell," he began, then motioned to Slip to sit down on the bench beside him. "You musdt know zat ze price vat ve pay, eet ees much differndt zen ze price vat ve sell—"

Slip dismissed the halting explanation with an abrupt wave of his lean, bronzed hand.

"I don't care about that. Tell me where those birds come from. I'll get you more than enough to fill this room here. We'll haggle about prices later."

Van Tiedt peered up at him inanely, dubiously.

"Come on," Slip chided. "Open up. Tell me where the best skins come from." He was obviously becoming impatient.

The Dutch half-caste looked around vacantly, out through the door of the store and the open window. Then he put his stubby and dirty finger to his lips, and winked one beady eye.

"Ah, leesten," he said. "Undt I vill tell you a secret." His pudgy hand came up and gripped Slip's muscular arm tenaciously. "Z'ere ees vun bird zat ees more valuable zen all ze rest. Vunce ever' two year zey comes to me seex of ze skins. An' ze seex are worth more zan all ze skins you see hanging here—"

Slip gasped.

**S**IX skins that were worth more than all the stock in the store!

He shook loose the hold on his arm and grabbed the half-caste's in turn, pinched the flabby biceps until the trader squirmed. "Tell me," he fairly shouted. "Tell me where they are to be found and I'll bring you six times six."

Van Tiedt blinked, stuttered out a reply.

"Ah, but zat ees ze secret. No vun hass ever seen ze bird alive. Eet ees only ze skins zat come here. But zey are *magnifique* wiz ze colors of royalty—purple undt gold! Brilliant as ze sunrise! But only seex do I get undt zen only ever' two year."

"Tell me," Slip said excitedly. "Tell me where they come from." His face was flushing crimson beneath the bronze coating.

VAN TIEDT just shook his head negatively. His beady eyes were sad. "Efen I don't know zat. No white man hass ever seen it alive. It ees traded from tribe to tribe oudt in ze Forgotten Islands. Undt ze sea gypsies zey bring it in to me. But only seex skins ever' two year. No more, no less."

Slip Tracy folded his hands impatiently.

"You have those skins here now," he asked. "Let me see one for a sample and I'll get you a roomful."

Van Tiedt smiled sadly.

"I haff ze pelts here if you would like to see zem. But to catch zem alive, zat ees anozzer matter. No vun knows where zey live. It ees better zat you stay here undt save you head."

"I'll take care of my head," Slip snapped. "And I don't thank you for your advice. I'm free, white and twenty-one and not in the habit of taking advice from those whose blood runs thick with the dirty slime of the tropics."

Van Tiedt jerked his flabby neck back and blinked his eyes as he stared at Slip vacuously.

"I mean it," Slip thundered. And his voice had the tone of command. "Show me the pelts of that marvelous bird."

The half-caste trader got up from

his bench hesitatingly, as though unwilling to do as requested. He moved across the floor and opened a door that led off the main room of the store. "Ah, yess," he muttered as he bent over a locked chest. "Certainly, I vill show zem to you. But you musdt tell no vun zat you have seen zem here."

Van Tiedt unlocked the chest.

"No, no one," Slip said, and wondered why the half-caste had cautioned him so. He was just about to utter some jesting reply when the lid of the chest was thrown open.

There before his eyes was a bursting bomb of color. Radiant as pyrotechnic and brilliant as the morning sunlight—the mounted pelt of a Royal Superba, the rarest and most valuable of all the birds of paradise.

Slip Tracy blinked and turned his eyes away.

"Enough," he said. "I'll find the island they come from and bring you a roomful."

Van Tiedt smiled as he slammed the lid down and locked the chest.

"Many haff told me zat before," he said. "Undt a few of zem, a long time afterwards, I haff seen zere smoked heads. Ozzers—" The half-caste shrugged his bulbous shoulders. "Vell, ze ozzers, I haff not efen seen zere heads."

SLIP laughed, laughed openly in the fat trader's face.

"Your story is good," he said, "and true so far as I know. But this is a different day. The airplane has changed things. There is no longer such a thing as an inaccessible spot where a man can't go. I'll find that island and come back with my head still fast on my shoulders."

He went out the door.

Van Tiedt stood with his pudgy

hands on his hips and watched him go.

"I haff seen zem like zat before," he mumbled. "But never haff I seen zem come back."

## II

**F**AR TO the north, northeast of remote Ternate, lay a thousand or more black specks on the heaving bosom of the great Pacific. The mariners had designated these spots as the *Forgotten Islands*. Remote, inaccessible by ordinary means of transport, and unpeopled, they had come by the name quite naturally.

And most of the marine charts didn't even indicate them. The charts Slip had, showed but a few scattered dots north of the East Indian Archipelago, and the words *Forgotten Islands* had been written in by pencil on what would have been otherwise only blank space.

On one of these thousand islands was the habitat of the Royal Superba, six skins of which equaled a fortune.

Something flashed suddenly in Slip's mind. "If you ever go north of Guinea, look in at a spot 4° 50' North, 128° East." They were the last words of a dying trader. They meant nothing when Slip heard them. They took on added meaning now. Slip banked his plane, headed for the spot.

He was so intent on looking ahead that he never glanced back over his shoulder even once. If he had he might have noted the black speck that bloomed in the blue void behind him, and taken steps to combat it. But he didn't.

The further he flew to the north the larger grew the black speck behind. In fact, it expanded and belled out until it absorbed the blue of the sky, and dimmed the rearward

horizon line. The storm—they break like lightning in this region—caught Slip and his fast flying seaplane when he was not more than three hours out of Ternate.

A blanket of ebony folded in from behind and enveloped him. At the same moment something that seemed like a giant hand appeared to grasp his tiny plane and shake it vigorously.

He was lifted straight up for a thousand feet one moment. The next he was being hurled downward, the plane meanwhile crackling and groaning in every brace and strut to the accompanying roar of a thousand thunder peals that seemed to blast the heavens.

How long he fought there in that heaving welter of blackness, no one, not even Slip, knew. He passed out at the controls when something like a terrific bludgeon descended on his head. Then all was still and quiet as death.

**S**OME hours later he came to fully. Where he was he had not the slightest idea. All that remained of his seaplane was a bit of water-tight hull and a mass of shredded linen. The engine itself had broken from its fastenings and disappeared into the sea.

The wreckage to which he was clinging was being whipped up and down in the crests and hollows of the high running waves. The gale was howling and moaning weirdly and driving him along at a merry pace—when finally he struck something solid.

He was washed ashore onto a narrow shingle of rough beach, strewn with coarse pebbles and jagged coral. It required all of his strength to haul himself out of the surf before he should be ground to bits on the tearing edges of the coral.

There on the shoreline just barely

free of the reaching surf, he collapsed again.

WHEN he next awakened there was standing above him a giant of a man. A simple cincture was around his waist and a great mass of shaggy red beard covered his face and chin. "Get up!" he thundered at Slip, kicking him at the same time with a shoeless hoof big as a rhino's and harder than rock. "What in hell you doing here?"

Slip made an effort to rise, shook his head to clear the cobwebs from his brain. He mumbled something that the giant couldn't understand.

"Where's your shipmates?" the red-bearded giant boomed and gave Slip another kick which almost jarred him into unconsciousness again. "I don't see any wreckage along the reef here."

"I came in an airplane," Slip managed to gasp. "I came alone. There's no one with me."

"Airplane?" the giant stammered in reply, while a strange light flashed in his eyes.

Then he became suddenly silent and scowled down at Slip sternly. Slip was weaving up on his haunches now, unsteadily.

"Get down there!" the giant boomed, and spun Slip around with a blow from his balled fist. "You're just another o' those thievin' fortune hunters come to spoil my island. But you're on the wrong track." He gave Slip another belt. "You'd better go back where you came from."

"Who, what, who are you?" Slip mumbled, struggling to his haunches again. "Where am I?"

"I'm Schmidt," the giant said. "This is my island. Came here ten years ago and I don't owe anybody east or west. And I'm not standing for any poachers. You'd best watch your step."

The giant's deep blue eyes flashed with a sudden light and then he smiled. "Come," he said. "I have an idea."

He reached down and gathered Slip up under his arm, carried him off the rock shelf and up a hill through a path in the lush tropical growth, to a house back from the sea, a house neatly built of bamboo and roofed over with thatch.

Along the front of this house was a wide veranda. The giant carried Slip there and threw him down on the veranda. Then he called to somebody inside the house. Slip himself was too fatigued to even roll over on his back. He lay there with his face on the veranda floor until he felt warm hands tugging at his shoulders and attempting to get him to rise.

IT was a girl who had come at the giant's call—a brown girl. Her face was round as the moon, but it wasn't the face that caught Slip's attention when he turned his tired eyes on her. It was the cloak of dazzling splendor that adorned her lissome figure—purple and gold and brilliant as sunshine.

The little brown girl stared at Slip with growing amazement as he slumped there on the floor of the veranda, and he stared back with a growing amazement of his own. For the resplendent garment that was slung so carelessly across the brown girl's shoulders was made all of bird skins—skins of that rare variety of the bird of paradise, the Royal Superba.

Its great beauty and stupendous worth was the first thought of Slip Tracy. He scarcely noticed the girl at all, even though she persisted in her efforts in getting him to rise.

Her lips moved and she spoke, but Slip caught not a whit of sense from what she said.

"Ah, it isn't dead," she cried when she noticed Slip's eyes fastening on the resplendent cloak she wore.

The giant Schmidt stooped over now and lifted Slip upright, held him so that the girl might see him better. "No, Little One," he said, and laughed raucously. "Not all of them that are washed up on the beach are dead. This one is still alive, so I brought him up to you for a play-thing."

The little brown girl stepped over to Slip and touched him.

"It's alive! It's a man!" she gasped.

The giant laughed again.

"Aye, Little One," he said, "if you can call what's left of him that. But he's a poor excuse. Why, look at his skinny arms and legs!"

To demonstrate his point Schmidt reached down and twisted Slip's arm. The native girl rushed at him and sank her teeth in his massive paw. The giant jumped back and glared at her in surprise, then he flung out his hand and sent her spinning off the veranda.

Slip Tracy had never been much taken by women—even white women. But some unplumbed depth deep inside him was stirred into activity when the little brown girl rushed to his defense.

**H**E gathered all his strength and leaped erect. His right fist lashed out like a rapier and landed flush on the giant's chin. But Schmidt just calmly shook his head and brushed a finger across his jaw.

"Is that the best you can do?" he rasped.

Schmidt punctured his remark with another swing of his ham-like fist. It thudded against Slip's ear with the crashing din of a train wreck. He went out like a smashed lamp.

"So you like him, eh?" the big

giant said then to the native girl, his thick lips screwing up in an angry snarl. "I was going to kill him right off and I see I should have. But I thought you'd like him to talk to."

Schmidt stooped down and gathered Slip under his crooked right arm.

### III

**W**ITH the unconscious form of Slip Tracy dangling grotesquely from the arch of his armpit, Schmidt stalked away from the house and into the forest until he came to a sort of ravine. There he calmly hurled Slip down, watched him sprawl in an ungainly posture at the bottom, then cackled raucously as he walked back to the house.

Slip came out of his latest daze about fifteen minutes later and found himself in a sort of pit. He rose up and looked around the four rock walls of his natural prison cell. The blood pounded through his temples tempestuously, and every bone and muscle in his lean body ached. His hands and face were bleeding and raw.

The pit was open at the top, ceiled only by the blue sky above. But his place of imprisonment was just as effective as any man-made, steel-barred one, for the four rock walls were smooth as glass with no chance anywhere of gaining a hand-hold for climbing.

His eyes ranged around the enclosure, and while he was surveying his chances of escape, just as though it had come to taunt him, appeared a regal bird—the rare bird of paradise—the Royal Superba in all its living splendor and dazzling brilliancy.

Slip smiled painfully and immediately there surged in his mind a pic-



ture of the fat half-caste, Jan Van Tiedt. And the last words he had heard him say rang in his ears.

"Zen z' natives, zey get your head."

The regal Royal Superba twittered for a second or two, then took wing and flew away. But a soft, padding sound reached his ears at the same time. And presently the moon-round face of the brown girl appeared above the rim of the pit.

Slip was surprised. "Why did he let you come?" he gasped.

"What, let me?" she replied surprisedly. "What is that, 'let me?'"

The conversation between them went on for a matter of a half hour or so, and Slip got nowhere. The native girl's English was almost perfect, but she didn't seem to understand any of the questions that Slip put to her.

"Child," he asked finally, his brow knitting in perplexity, "don't you know anything?"

"Yes," she came back quickly, and flaunted the gorgeous garment of purple golden feathers in his face. "I know everything. Herr Schmidt has told me everything there is to know. I know about boats and trains, and even about airplanes—"

"What—what?" Slip broke in and jerked his head back so he could hear her clearer. "You say you know about airplanes? But you never have seen one!"

"Oh, yes, I have. I have even sat in one."

"Not here," said Slip unbelievably.

**Y**ES, right here on this island," she replied. "But I only did so when Herr Schmidt wasn't looking. He won't let me go near it when he is around."

Slip was still unbelieving. He put another question to test the truth of her assertion.

"Tell me, child," he said, and his own voice was soft and pleading now, "tell me what that airplane you sat in was like? Was it like a bird?"

"Oh, no," she replied hurriedly, and gathered the feathery cloak more closely about her. "The birds have feathers and are warm to the touch. But that airplane, it is hard, cold and hard, made of tin and wood and cloth. And not pretty. When you sit in it there is a stick that wiggles around when you move your feet."

**T**HE statement was enough. The proof was self-evident. There was an airplane on the island. Slip was too amazed to do anything but stand silently at the bottom of the pit.

The native girl leaned down again.

"Why don't you talk any more with me?" she asked.

Slip did some fast thinking before he answered, then his eyes lighted and he pointed at a trailing arum vine that rimmed the mouth of the pit.

"There, that," he said, and pointed. "Throw that down to me so I can climb out and be with you. I'll talk more then."

"Get!" he heard a great booming voice thunder just as the little brown girl moved to do his bidding. "Get back to the house and cook the evening meal."

"I bring you a puppy dog for a plaything, and you neglect all your duties. I should of snapped his head off right away. A dead man wouldn't be so interesting."

The native girl disappeared in the bush and Slip heard what sounded like a series of sobs. "Like her, don't you?" the giant Schmidt bellowed down at him, then bared his yellow teeth in a fiendish snarl.

"Well, it won't do you any good."

Slip didn't answer, but he held the air of listening. The more he

listened, the hotter and more turbulent his pulsing blood stream boiled within him. No, it wasn't because he was falling in love with the little brown thing. Slip had never done that, but there was a feeling of sympathy for her.

"I should have known better than to send those Royal Superba skins out into the world," Schmidt went on. "I might have known that you thieving white traders would follow the trail."

Slip had said nothing up to this point. But his eyes were carefully taking stock of height and reach and build. And his mind dwelled on means of escape from the pit. Finally he could restrain himself no longer.

"If you were a man," he fairly shrieked, "you'd let me out of this pit so we could fight on even terms. Or else you'd drop down here yourself. The best man lives and comes out alive, eh? No, you're too yellow for that!"

The giant Schmidt laughed raucously again. It was a horrid chuckle that sifted through his beard and rattled the fronds of the near-by palms.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

He left off there with a bit of irony, and a sardonic grin spread over his bold features as he disappeared in the bush.

**N**IGHT fell with the suddenness of the tropics, just as though a dark blanket had been drawn over the opening of the pit.

Slip sat in silence trying to figure out some way of escape, but none seemed to offer. He finally fell asleep sitting up.

Three or four hours afterward he heard a noise above the rim of the pit. He leaped erect and peered into the darkness. Then came a soft voice, tuneful and vibrant.

"Herr Schmidt, he is asleep, so I come to bring you something to eat. Are you asleep?"

"Child," Slip asked, "is that you?"

"Yes, Mister Man," she replied.

"But I'm not hungry," Slip said.

"All I want is to get out of this pit. Toss down that vine."

The native girl shook her head.

"No, my master, Herr Schmidt, he forbids that. But he didn't say I couldn't bring you something to eat." Slip got a sudden thought.

"All right, then," he replied. "Just tie the dinner on the end of a vine and lower it."

She did so without thinking and Slip held his breath until he was able to grasp the end of the trailing arum the instant it came within reach. A few seconds more and he had climbed to the rim of the pit.

"The airplane," he said softly, trying to restrain his impatience. "The airplane, child. Show me where it is."

**A**T first the little native girl appeared afraid, but soon she acceded to his request. "He didn't tell me not to show you," she replied. "Come, follow me."

"Did he beat you?" Slip asked as he followed her along a trail that had been cut through the lush forest growth.

"Yes, he did beat me. But that's nothing, he always does. It makes him happy."

Slip shook his head. He couldn't understand her simple philosophy.

Finally they came out in a clearing on the edge of the forest.

"There," the little native girl pointed, and indicated a large bamboo walled and thatched affair that was built upon a narrow strip of sandy beach below them. "There it is in there. But I dare not go in with you. The master forbids me to go there when he is not along."

Slip threaded his way down and across the sand shimmering ghastly white in the silver moonlight, and presently came to the queer hangar that housed the airplane—if there really was an airplane on the tiny isle. He still doubted the fact.

Yet this queer building he was about to enter must have been built for some such purpose. And then, too, the narrow strip of hard beach served ideally for a landing field.

He searched some time for the door, and finally found it around one corner of the long hut. His heart was pumping wildly now and he held his breath while he entered.

"I will watch," the little native girl said. "If the master comes I will sing a little song."

Slip opened the door and thrust inside. It was so dark in the interior that he could see nothing. He stole further in, and presently his hands encountered something that was stiff and unyielding.

"My God!" he gasped. "It is a plane!" His hands felt further along the wing surface until they encountered a strut.

"Metal!"

The plane must have been a modern one or else—

"No," he said, "that can't be true."

HE went further along the wing edge, and his eyes began to see better in the darkness now. To the right of him there were rays of moonlight seeping in.

"Hum-m," he mumbled. "That must be the hangar door."

He felt of it. It gave with the touch, looked like a lateen sail.

"Cinch," he said. "That's what it is—a lateen curtain that drops down and covers the hangar when the plane's inside."

He walked to the further end and found the coiled ropes that lifted the curtain. He lost no time in

hauling it up. The moonlight flooded in, clearly revealing the plane.

SLIP gasped again. What he saw was like an apparition to him.

"Good Gosh! A Fokker!"

He could scarcely believe his eyes. But it was just that—a war-time Fokker of the vintage of 1918, with camouflage and a set of twin Span-da-us mounted on the engine nacelle.

The black Maltese Cross insignia was still on the wings. Slip made a dive for the fuselage around the wing tip.

But he drew up stark still and silent when he rounded the wing tip and saw—

"Oh no! It can't be," he gasped weakly while all the strength seeped from his lanky limbs. "No, no, I'm crazy!" The native girl approached now from the spot where she had been standing on the sand. But Slip paid her no heed.

He staggered drunkenly toward the cockpit with burning eyes narrowed down, his intent gaze fastened on a painted insignia right below the pilot's seat—the crude representation of a black devil squeezing a bleeding heart.

Slip Tracy's memory flashed back through the years on the instant to a gray day on the Western Front fifteen years before.

"No, no *no!* It can't be!" he mumbled incredulously. His brain was reeling wildly. "I'm crazy. Crazy as hell!" The native girl came up and touched Slip on the elbow.

"What's the matter, Mister Man?" she asked plaintively.

But Slip had no ears for her words. His quivering fingers traced grimly the hazy outline of the painted insignia while he muttered unintelligible words and phrases mingled with blasphemy and profane oaths. The now vivid memory of that final day on the battle front

burned like an acid etching in the very lining of his soul.

Here, on a remote reach of the Forgotten Islands, was the cause of his downfall and degradation on that day. Hans Schmidt and the self-same plane that he was standing by now was the cause of it all.

**S**LIP had tried to make explanations, but his superiors wouldn't accept them. The army had cashiered him and sent him away with hanging head. For fifteen years he had been trying to forget—and now this!

Schmidt, the giant Schmidt. He remembered now the leering, sneering scowl on the enemy pilot's face. He remembered the thick-set lips and massive features. Yes, that pilot of fifteen years ago and Hans Schmidt were one and the same.

Schmidt had pounced down out of a cloud while he was out on patrol with his C. O. The enemy Hun had taken him unawares while he was surveying the ground below, had got in two Spandau bursts on his tail before he knew what was happening. That was all right. That was fair in war—part of tactics and strategy.

Slip in his Spad, by agile stick handling, had managed to worm out of the deadly tracer stream. In the next split second he had transposed positions with his attacker and got in firing position himself.

A single burst slithered away from his Vickers and tore through the Fokker's wing section, and Slip was riding his adversary's tail in such a manner that it was impossible for him to worm out.

He needed but to edge the stick forward slightly to blast the Hun pilot's head off. And he did edge it forward. But just as he prepared to press the Bowden triggers and spray another burst, the Hun

pilot rose in his seat and pointed to the breach of his Spandaus. A look of simulated fear was in the Hun pilot's eyes. His face was white. His guns appeared hopelessly jammed. Slip, because of some inner trait of character that would never allow him to take advantage of an underdog, released his grip on the Bowdens and allowed the Hun to wing free.

The heinous Hun then showed his appreciation for Slip's mercy by wheeling up in an abrupt bank and lining the nose of his Fokker on the C. O.'s Spad. A burst followed then that blasted Slip's C. O. from the skies. He went hurtling down to crash to a horrible death on the shell-cratered earth beneath.

Before Slip had time to act again, a whole squadron of Fokkers dived from the clouds and drove the remaining Spads back over their own lines. The flight leader of Slip's flight, rabid because of the loss of the C. O. while out on his patrol, preferred charges against Slip Tracy—accused him of funking it when he had the enemy pilot who afterwards killed the C. O. dead in his sights.

The charges stood up.

Slip's actions had looked bad and he couldn't refute the charges. Disgrace and dishonorable discharge followed. For fifteen years he had been trying to forget.

#### IV

**N**OW, on a remote islet north of Guinéa he had come face to face with his nemesis—the heinous Hun who had played him that dirty trick.

As he stalked out of the hangar the lambent pools of fire in his deep-set eyes leaped into searing flame.

"Take me!" he blazed, and his voice held the tone of stern command. "Take me to this man you

call the Master—Herr Schmidt!"

The little brown girl, her feathered robe flowing, her black eyes staring wildly, jumped back from him. "But he will kill you," she implored. "You must go back in the pit now. If you don't I will get whipped."

"Take me!" Slip repeated sternly.

**S**HE guided him to the veranda steps, then vanished like a wraith inside the shadows of the house.

"Tell the yellow scut to come out here!" Slip rasped as he stepped up on the porch. "Tell him the man he brought you for a puppy dog is going to kill him. After that we fly away to civilization."

The little brown girl said nothing, but Slip heard her calling to Schmidt, trying to awaken him.

Finally there came sounds from inside and a lamp was lit. Slip sized up the length and breadth of the veranda by the light that streaked from inside, grimly took stock of his battle ground. Then loud guffaws of raucous laughter issued through the door.

When Slip heard heavy footsteps he set himself solidly on his feet.

The giant Schmidt came bounding through the door like a rogue elephant with hideous yellow teeth bared and profane oaths pouring from his lips.

"I'm the guy you pulled a dirty trick on over the Marne some fifteen years ago," Slip hissed at him. "I'm the guy you double-crossed in a fake plea for mercy because of jammed guns. I'm going to kill you here and now! I give you fair warning beforehand. Come and take it!"

Schmidt hesitated for a moment, then a pale glow of recognition flashed in his eyes. He lowered his head and rushed in with both massive paws flailing.

Slip waited, tense and alert,

charged with that dynamic strength and will-power that only supreme anger can foster.

**T**HEY neared each other. The giant lashed out with his left as Slip had figured he would, poked it out straight to prepare the way for the following right. Slip took it on the point of his shoulder. The ham-like fist slithered past his left ear.

Like a flash Slip's right zipped forward and up. The thumb was upthrust and rigid. The rigid thumb laid into the giant's armpit at the spot where the nerve ganglia from the vertebra were closest to the surface. It was a trick he had learned in Japan—an effective one.

Schmidt bellowed in pain and rage. His left arm swung limp as a rag from his husky shoulder. Then even before the bellow was out of his bull throat, Slip brought the point of his right knee up hard to the groin. The giant Schmidt fell writhing to the floor grasping at his middle, and moaning like a speared bull.

Slip then drew back his booted foot and prepared to finish the job, to bash the giant's brains in until he died. But even as he drew back his foot, the little brown girl with the agility of a panther, leaped at him and sunk her teeth in his forearm. Slip drew back his arm and shook her off.

"What, what's the idea?" he gasped. "Don't he beat you? Curse you? Mistreat you? I'm giving him some of his own medicine."

But the look that flamed in her eyes now was one of seething hatred. The way she pursed her lips was horrid to see. "Yes, yes," she hissed. "But I love him!"

She fell on the floor beside him and began smoothing his wet and massive brow. "Me, what about me?" Slip grated. "Don't you want to fly away with me to safety?"

"No," she hissed back, and glared at him. "I hate you. I stay here forever."

Slip was bewildered.

"Just a wild thing on a Forgotten Island North of Guinea," he muttered as he backed off the veranda and stalked down the path which led to the hangar on the beach.

A half hour or so later he had the plane wheeled out on the beach and the motor started. He had never flown a Fokker before and the plane and its Mercedes engine were new to him. But he was an A1 mechanic as well as a pilot, and the fact didn't bother him.

The ship and the engine were in excellent shape. The gas tanks were filled to overflowing and it appeared that the ship was all set for a flight.

A leaf wrapped bundle was stowed away behind the pilot's seat, but Slip paid no attention to it. What interested him most was the chart that hung alongside the throttle control.

He studied it for some moments in the light of the moon, then put it back in its place, gave gradual gun to the motor and took off from the narrow strip of beach.

## V

**J**AN VAN TIEDT was just opening the doors of his trading post store when Slip Tracy strode down from a field where he had landed. A leaf wrapped bundle was under one arm and his sun-bronzed—if scarred—face was wreathed in smiles.

The fat trader's jaw dropped and he stared at Slip as if he were seeing a ghost.

"Vat? Vat? Ees eet you?"

"How much for the pelts of the Royal Superba?" Slip asked, and

threw the leaf wrapped bundle athwart the counter.

"No, no! You do haff ze pelts of ze Royal Superba! No white man hass efer brought zem to me!"

"Open the bundle," Slip said.

**A**ND when Jan Van Tiedt did, his beady eyes almost popped from his head.

He gazed bewilderingly at the dazzling array of feathers—purple and gold, the colors of royalty.

"Vare, vare, did you find zem?"

"I asked the price you will pay to-day," Slip replied coldly.

Jan Van Tiedt scribbled some hasty pencil marks on the counter top and stated a figure.

"Sold," said Slip. "Give me the money now. I'm selling out and retiring from business." Van Tiedt handed it over hesitantly.

"But—but," the half-caste broke in, sputtering and swinging his hands in frantic gestures, "zat island where you have found zem ees worth many fortunes—"

Slip froze him with a stare, then started for the door.

"I have come back with my head," he yelled back over his shoulder as he went out.

"I don't sink you haff," Van Tiedt piped after him, as he stood and whirled his dirty finger around the rim of his ear while watching Slip Tracy's purloined plane being swallowed up in the blue haze that mantled the eastern horizon.

"Luck, sheer luck and Fate, that is what it was," Slip mouthed out in the howling slipstream as the plane hurtled him toward the flaming dawn. "But I had it coming to me after all these years of false disgrace. As for the tip of the dying trader, I'll carry the secret to my grave. Schmidt can have his island—alone."



# The GLOBE-TROTTER



**W**ELL, fellows, here we are again. Another month, and the gang flying the colors of the good ship **THRILLING ADVENTURES** is still growing. More new faces this month, a lot of them—and still more to come, judging by the hordes of new guys who are crowding up to the newsstands in eager effort to lay down their money and come aboard for the winter cruise.

And why not, fellows?

What a cruise she's going to be this winter! We had to enlarge the ship to take care of the new adventurers. Suppose you noticed that, eh? 160 pages now instead of 128. Longer stories now and more of them, by the same old gang of five-star authors, aided and abetted by some new ones who have just come aboard for the big winter cruise.

Most of them write exclusively for **THRILLING ADVENTURES**. You can't find their stories in any other magazine. No wonder the **THRILLING ADVENTURES** gang is growing by leaps and bounds, eh?

Real adventurers know the real thing when they see it.

And speaking of real adventurers, one of those two-fisted, red-blooded, double-gear'd he men who is really entitled to the monicker, blasted in to Ye Olde Globe Trotter's sanctum a week ago last Friday.

I'm speaking of Dick Considine, who has more medals than a Mexican general, and has had more experi-

ences crowded into his thrill-packed life than ordinarily come to a thousand men.

Dick has red hair and the Congressional Medal of Honor. As you fellows know, that last decoration is plenty scarce. There are only 66 living men entitled to wear it, while there are millions who have red hair. Yet, I'll be darned if I don't think Dick is more proud of his red hair than the Medal of Honor. And maybe he's right, for he was out having thrilling adventures long before the turn of the century. He's been in enough tight spots to turn his hair silvery white a hundred times. Yet, it is still a brilliant red, with not even a streak of gray.

"Tell me, Dick," I said, putting the same pressure on him that I do on all the boys who burst into my office and monopolize the easiest chair, "tell me something to pass on to the **THRILLING ADVENTURES** gang—"

He slammed on his hat and leaped for the door.

"Listen," he objected. "I haven't got anything interesting, and I'm not any good at talking, anyway. I'll see you when I come back from Shanghai—"

He turned the knob on the door, but the door didn't open. Ye Olde Globe Trotter had played smart and latched it when Dick came in. You see, I know these birds from long experience. They won't talk unless

you press them. "Come on," I insisted. "Give us a line o' type or two. You were in China during the Boxer Rebellion when the Manchus ruled. Tell us something about the intrigue there then. I know darn well you were in on it, because it's on the records down in Washington. You were awarded the Victoria Cross for your part in it, but you couldn't accept because it was against regulations then for an American soldier to accept decorations from any foreign government.

"Come on, spill a fast explanation of that one, and I'll let you go. What say?"

Considine's blue eyes twinkled. He took his hat off and slumped down in the easy chair again.

"So you heard about that, eh?" he said. Then more crisply: "Well, you don't know a damn thing. I'll tell you just how it was for your own benefit. There was nothing to it."

Ye Olde Globe Trotter knew he was started on the yarn, so kept quiet. You have to trick those queer birds like Considine to loosen their tongues.

"I was on furlough in a foreign settlement in China. I'm not saying just what settlement it was. I wasn't in uniform. I was dressed in civilian clothes. No one knew I was an American soldier. I went there to get away from war, intrigue and what have you. I was fed up on the mess at Pekin. Frankly, I was there to have a good time. It was there that I chanced to meet the very beautiful wife of a certain foreign consular agent. The consul himself had gone to Indo-China for a short business trip. This woman who was of South European descent invited me to be her guest at the consulate on several occasions. I wasn't interested in her, but I did take sort of a liking to her younger sister who

lived with her. We took in the sights together.

"Finally my furlough was up and I had to leave. Imagine my surprise when I ran right smack into this same woman at the steamer wharf where I had gone to embark for return to my regiment. She was very excited and frustrated. As soon as she saw me she rushed over and grabbed my arm.

"Listen, Dick," she said whispering softly in my ear. 'Something terrible has happened. I had to pack up and run away quick. An awful foreigner, whom I was forced to cultivate because my brother-in-law was using him to get secret information, has demanded that I marry him. He threatens to expose the whole secret conferences if I don't. But I simply can't marry him. I hate him. For the sake of the diplomatic arrangements my brother-in-law is making I am honor bound to remain. But I can't do it.' the girl sobbed on my arm. 'I had to leave, Dick. In my hurry I left certain papers—love letters of course. It would be terrible if they were found. Why, I could never go back to my people—'

Considine looked at me and winked.

"You know, the old stuff," he said. "I was young and romantic then, and fell for her line like a ton of bricks. I calmed her and told her not to worry, that I would go and get the package of letters for her. She gave me the directions and off I went.

"Well, I got the package all right. But getting out of the place again after I got them wasn't so easy. Their loss had been discovered while I was there. I was accused at the point of a revolver of having them. I did, of course, so couldn't deny it and submit to a search.

"I knocked the revolver out of my accuser's hand, jumped out through a window into the pitch darkness of a narrow lane, and made my getaway.

I gave the package to the girl who had been awaiting my return at a secret rendezvous. She thanked me profoundly and went on her way."

"I don't see what all this has to do with the V.C.," Ye Olde Globe Trotter broke in.

Considine smiled.

"Just keep you ears cocked and you'll learn something," he resumed. "I have never explained this to anyone before. I found out when I got back to Pekin that those *love* letters weren't love letters at all. They were important strategical plans which would have meant the loss of a whole regiment of English soldiers if they weren't recovered immediately. The consular agent's wife wasn't his wife. And the girl I met wasn't his wife's sister. They were a duo of international spies who had tricked me into doing their dirty work for them. They had located the plans, but dared not take them out of the consulate. I did."

Ye Olde Globe Trotter let out a whistling gasp.

"Still, I don't see why that entitles you to a V.C.," I commented. "Seems like just the reverse. They should have stood you up before a firing squad."

Considine smiled again.

"I was one of the special secret agents detailed to recover those papers," he explained. "The British, German, French and Americans composed the Legation Guard at Pekin, as you know. Each army chief of intelligence detailed his best man to the job.

"I got the plans back—after some trouble. But I had the inside track, I knew who had them. No one in Pekin or anywhere else knew that I had a part in their disappearance. If anyone had known, I would have been shot at the first sunrise. That's why I was mentioned for the V.C. I got those plans back where British,

German and French operatives failed. But they didn't know who took them. I did. That's why I say there's nothing to the story. I wasn't entitled to the decoration. But, I learned something, believe me. Ever since then, I've never had anything to do with a woman!"

Dick Considine sneaked out the side door while I was pondering over his strange story. I was wondering what would have happened if his own C.O. had ever learned of his part in the conspiracy. He would have paid with his life undoubtedly, and the story above would have never been told.

I was sorry I didn't get to ask him another question. When he went out on that detail he had five fingers on his right hand. He came back with only two. Three he lost somewhere in the pursuit of those papers.

Oh, well, maybe Considine will blast in again some time. If he does Ye Olde Globe Trotter will get him to spin that yarn. Also the one behind his being awarded the Medal of Honor 17 years after he was given up for dead on the field of battle.

There's stories galore in these strange birds that drop into Ye Olde Globe Trotter's sanctum.

Here's a reader who takes exception to something that was written in the department a few issues back. Captain Kerry McRoberts isn't around these parts to answer the letter in person. But Ye Olde Globe Trotter will go to bat for him after he gives you fellows the letter.

### CAMELS IN TEXAS? DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH!

Dear Globe Trotter:

Who ever heard of a wild camel on this side of the big pond? No one, I'm sure, until you published Captain Kerry McRoberts' *tall* yarn in your department a few months ago.

Doesn't the captain know that camels

are native only in Africa and Asia? I have looked this up in several encyclopaedias and all of them bear me out. There are no wild camels in either North or South America. What he saw were probably wild asses, but his vision was blurred by drinking too much *mescal*, of which there is plenty along the Mexican border country. He, therefore, saw double and concluded the asses had humps in their backs and were camels.

I feel that his mistake in stating the actual facts should be corrected. I don't claim to be any explorer or adventurer. I am too young for that, being only sixteen and still in high school. And I have never been more than 200 miles away from home (except in the pages of **THRILLING ADVENTURES**), but that stuff about camels in America is too much for me to swallow.

The captain ought to be court-martialed for kidding us with that tall tale and trying to pass it off as a true experience.

What do you think?

Yours for true facts,

Bennie Pearsons,

Salina, Kansas.

Well, Bennie, I don't blame you for getting up and spouting off to Ye Olde Globe Trotter. The captain had me blinking my eyes when he told me that tale, so I got busy and looked up the facts on the case after he left. And, what do you think? Yes, sir, Bennie, I found he wasn't stretching the truth one bit. As far as the camel not being native in the Americas, you are right. But don't forget that our western standby, the horse, is not native either. The first horses came to this country with the Spanish *conquistadors*.

The wild horses of our old West and the Argentine pampas are the descendants from those original Arabian steeds, brought over by the Spanish conquerors.

So, whether an animal is native or not has nothing to do with the facts. Some years ago, in the late seventies, when the southwestern country was just being opened up, some bright individual in the War Department in Washington got a brilliant idea.

He talked it up fast and furiously. The result was that the Army in-

stituted a Camel Corps, and sent officers over to Africa to get a supply of the best camels obtainable.

Hundreds of these camels were shipped over here and landed at New Orleans. The Army fooled with them for several years, then gave it up as a bad job. Those that hadn't died from illness were turned loose in the deserts of Texas and New Mexico. By themselves they managed to live on for some time—and even years afterwards prospectors used to come into the boom towns of that country and recite tales of having seen the slow-footed beasts. Their tales always brought laughter from those people who hadn't learned of the camels the U. S. Army had turned loose.

So, Bennie, despite your doubts about Captain Kerry McRoberts, I'm going to believe him. It was some time ago when he saw those camels he told about. But I wouldn't be one bit surprised if there were still some of the descendants of those original Camel Corps camels left somewhere in the still unpopulated deserts of the border country. Gosh knows, there are still plenty of wild horses—so why not camels, too. Neither is native here, but that doesn't mean anything. Neither am I, for that matter.

I was born in England, but managed to live on after becoming an American citizen without any increased difficulties. So, I repeat, why not the camels?

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Globe Trotter:

I read in your July issue a letter from a fellow in Rhode Island asking about *Tristan da Cunha*. I have never heard of this island, and would like to know where it is and what manner of people live there.

Yours with thanks,

Milton Cline,

Janesville, Wisconsin.

(Continued on page 156)

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(Continued from page 154)

P. S. I have the August issue and think the stories in it are swell, especially "Brother of the Tong," by Lieutenant Scott Morgan.

Well, Milton, *Tristan da Cunha* is one of the most remote of all lands inhabited by the white race, so you are excused for not knowing where it is. It is a small island group totalling only 45 square miles in the South Atlantic Ocean. If you would take your map of the world and draw a straight line from Buenos Aires in the Argentine to Cape Town in South Africa you would have a fair idea of where the group is.

It is just about midway between those two cities. It's exact location is 37 degrees 5 minutes South, 12 degrees 10 minutes West of Greenwich, entirely off the ocean trade routes. The total population is not more than 400 souls, men, women and children. And these are all white people, descendants of a shipwrecked crew from a sailing vessel which was washed ashore there almost a hundred years ago. The island had no native inhabitants.

The people who live there now raise cattle and sheep and engage in agriculture generally. There is no regular steamer transportation. Once every one or two years the British government sends a tramp steamer there with mails and provisions. Otherwise the inhabitants have no contact with the outside world. So you like Scott Morgan, eh? Read his story in this issue and you will like him even better. Nuf sed!

(Continued on page 158)



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—THE PUBLISHERS

(Continued from page 156)

Dear Globe Trotter:

I just finished the July issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** and your department, of course, with real enjoyment.

I want to know anything you can tell me of the "Rogan Gang" of New York City. Would like to know the names of some of them. Dates they were operating and when they quit, and why. Of course, I know why, or think I do, but I would like to have you verify my beliefs.

If it is against your policy to write of such things in your department, can you tell me where I can get information concerning the gang?

Yours truly,

Mrs. Ruth Nay,

Arlberg, Arkansas.

Glad to have a lady adventurer write in to the department—but, the questions you ask are slightly out of line for Ye Olde Globe Trotter. I can, however, tell you where you can get all the information you want on the gangs of New York.

There is a book titled, "The Gangs

(Continued on page 160)

### COUPON

The Globe Trotter,  
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570 Seventh Ave, New York City.

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1. ....

by .....

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"Have secured position as Draftsman designing elevators complete—quite a large bill to fill, but I can hold it with your help."—Clarence C. Grieser, St. Louis, Mo.

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"Am entering Drafting room of Blaw-Knox Company, Pittsburgh, with every chance for advancement. Money spent for your course was best investment I ever made."—Arthur F. Eason, Brownsville, Pa.



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"Thank you for helping me get a job as Tracer with Detroit Steel Products Co. I like my work very much."—Peter Permittin, Detroit, Mich.

## "Tickled Pink"

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**YOU CAN DO AS WELL**



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Then Oscar Schisgall—another ace writer—contributes **THE SHERIFF RIDES ALONE**, a gripping story of the West.

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What to Allow a Lover  
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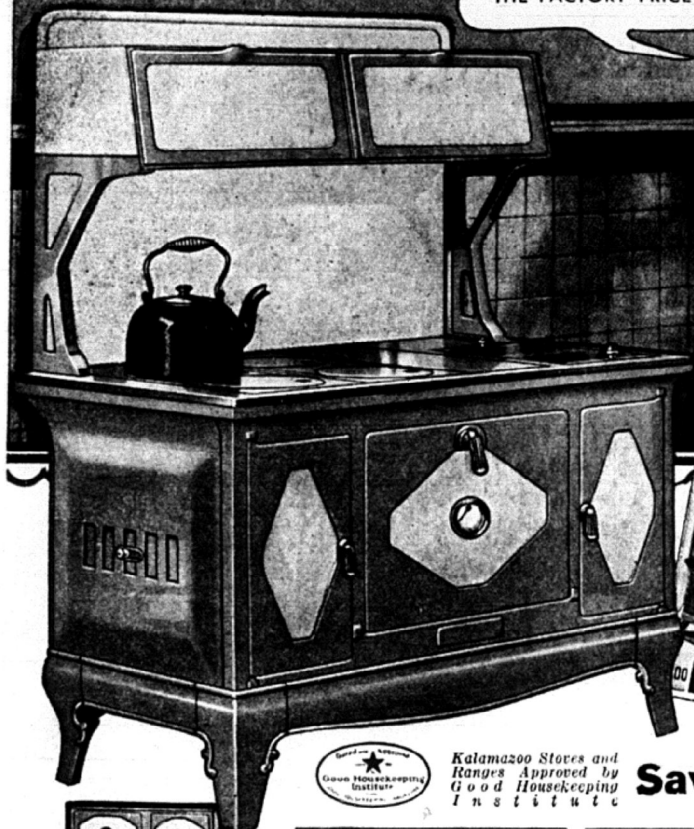
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