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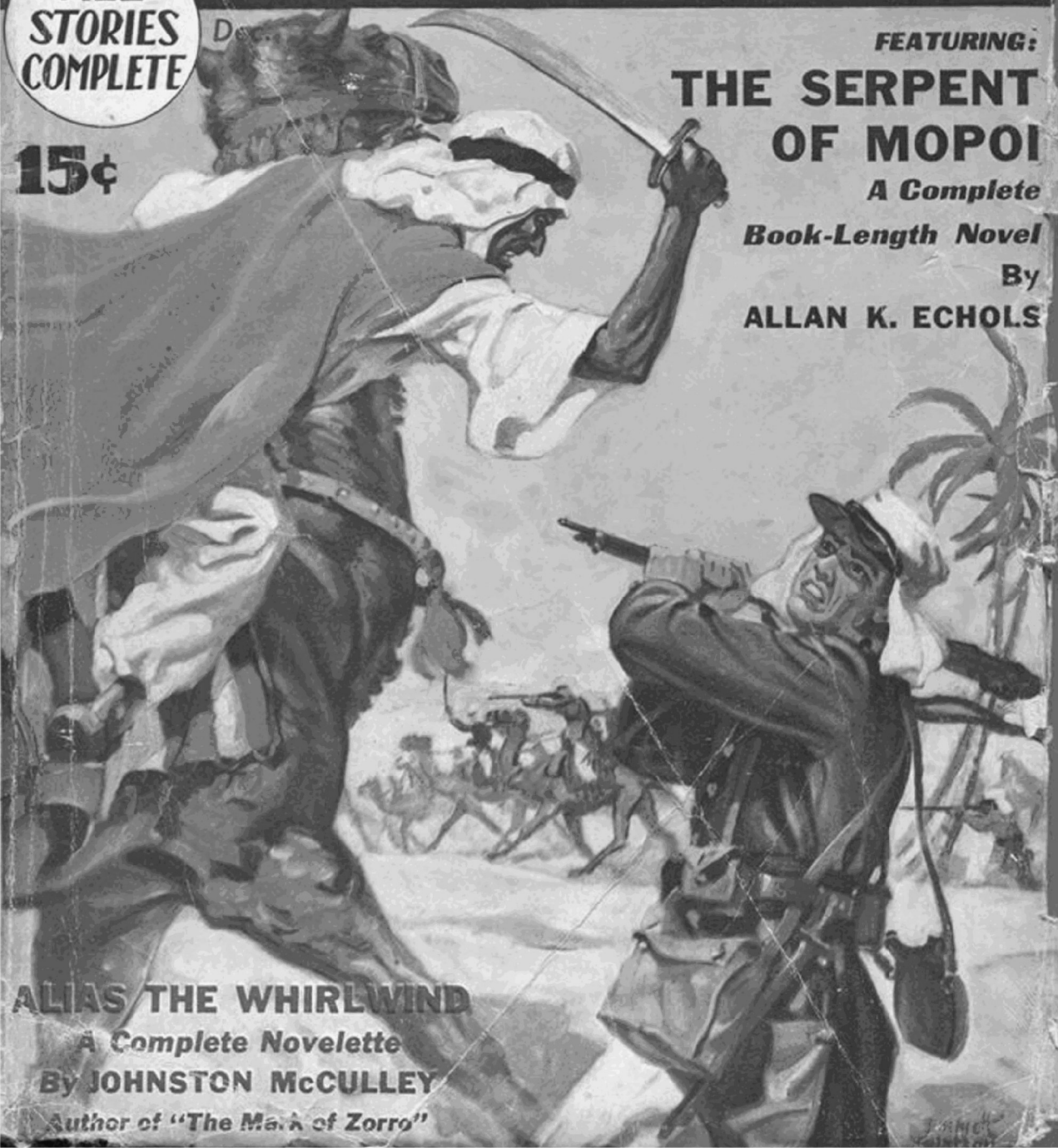
THE SERPENT OF MOPOI

A Complete

Book-Length Novel

By

ALLAN K. ECHOLS



ALIAS THE WHIRLWIND

A Complete Novelette

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Author of "The Mark of Zorro"

Health Authorities **WARN** Against **BULGING** Waistline!

The New York Times

LARGE WAISTLINE HELD HEALTH PERIL

Middle-Aged Man Who Keeps
His Small Lives Longer, Gov-
ernment Bureau Says.

FIGURES SHOW DIRECT LINK

Overweight People Have Worst
of It in Mortality Tables
Covering 15 Causes.

WASHINGTON, Aug. 24 (AP).—The man who keeps his waistline small when he reaches middle age is the most likely to win the race for health, is the conclusion drawn from a new study of the relation of weight to physical defects just published by the Public Health Service.

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It also shows "a great excess of mortality among overweight persons, whatever the age, and also an excess among young adult underweight persons."

The conclusions are drawn from records of more than 3,000 men from 1909 to 1928, showing the ratio of actual deaths to expected mortality, according to different weight groups. In the following table, figures below 100 indicate less than the expected death rate; those above 100 indicate more than the expected death rate:

	Age Group.			50 and over
Weight Class.	20-29.	30-39.	40-49.	Over 50.
25 pounds or more underweight—				
	118	105	83	77
10 to 20 lbs....	101	94	76	85
5 lbs. under to 5 lbs. overweight—				
	92	84	87	92
10 to 20 pounds overweight	99	88	94	90
25 to 45 pounds overweight	113	123	125	119
50 lbs. or more overweight	163	143	144	130

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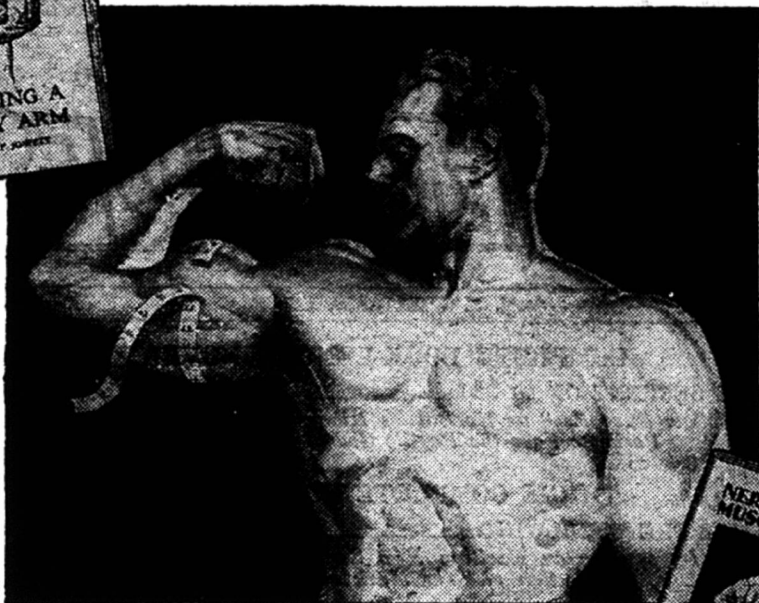
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THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. VIII No. 1

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

December, 1933

COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

- THE SERPENT OF MOPOI**.....Allan K. Echols 10
*Follow Dave Reed as He Battles His Way Through Savage
 Perils to Face the Reptile God of the Jivaros!*

THREE COMPLETE NOVELETTES

- ALIAS THE WHIRLWIND**.....Johnston McCulley 58
*Introducing an Exciting New Series by the Famous
 Author of "The Mark of Zorro"*
- ESCAPE**.....Bob Du Soe 84
*Pulse-Stirring Conflict and Perilous Adventure Amid
 the Tortures and Terrors of St. Laurent*
- THE JUNGLE TRAIL**.....Jackson Cole 123
*An American Secret Service Man on a Dangerous Mission
 in the Depths of the Colombian Wilderness*

FOUR THRILLING SHORT STORIES

- THE SHERIFF RIDES ALONE**.....Oscar Schisgall 75
A Gripping Story of Cattle Rustling in the West
- MILITARY HEELS**.....Ralph R. Fleming 102
An Action-Packed Story of the Central American Lowlands
- PIRATE GOLD**.....George Allan Moffatt 115
Desperate Battle on the Pirate-Infested East China Sea
- A SOLDIER OF THE LEGION**.....Capt. Kerry McRoberts 138
Marching Men Beneath the Blistering Sahara Sun

THRILLING FEATURES

- FAMOUS SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE**.....Illustration 56
General Funston, Colonel Cody and Others
- THE GLOBE TROTTER**.....A Department 150
Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet

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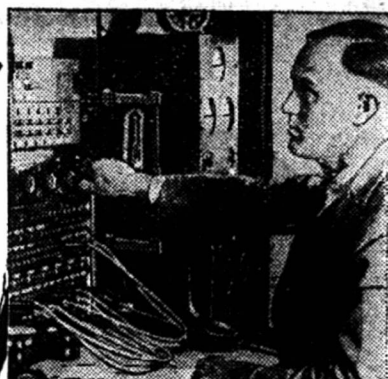
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30x4-30-20	2.55	1.05	32x4 1/2	3.35	1.15
30x4-28-20	2.60	1.15	32x4	3.45	1.15
30x4-26-20	2.65	1.15	34x4 1/2	3.45	1.15
30x4-24-20	2.70	1.15	30x3 1/2	3.65	1.55
30x4-22-20	2.75	1.15	32x3 1/2	3.75	1.45
30x4-20-20	2.85	1.15	35x5	3.95	1.55
30x4-18-20	2.95	1.15			
30x4-16-20	3.05	1.15			
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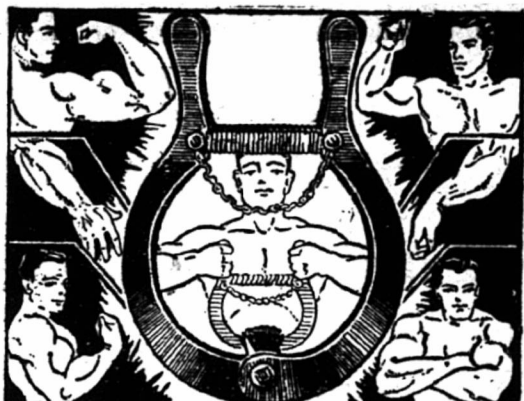
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PARTIAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

RACKET IS AS OLD AS HISTORY AND ALWAYS GETS THEM.

CHAPTER IV
THE GOLD-DIGGER—THE BROADWAY BUTTERFLY—GIRLS WHO "NEVER GIVE A SUCKER AN EVEN BREAK."

CHAPTER V
GIRL AUTOMOBILE GYPS—GIRLS WHO ASK FOR A HITCH—WITH STRANGE CONSEQUENCES—AND THE GAMBLING RACKET

CHAPTER VI
THE NOBILITY RACKET—THE BIGGEST MONEY PRIZES GO TO THE BRAINY TYPES—THE MOST DANGEROUS OF ALL

CHAPTER VII

GREEP JANE'S PROGRESS—WHAT HAPPENS TO THE GIRLS WHOSE RACKETEERING IS AT FIRST CONFINED TO BAGGING FREE MEALS.

CHAPTER VIII

SWINDLING AND BLACKMAIL—SENSATIONAL STORIES OF VULTURES IN HUMAN FORM WHO PREY ON THE EMOTIONS OF INNOCENT VICTIMS.

CHAPTER IX

JUST DOWN FROM COLLEGE—A COLLEGIATE MANNER. AN AIR OF NON-CHALANCE AND PLENTY OF NERVE ARE THE STOCK-IN-TRADE OF CERTAIN UNSCRUPULOUS RACKETEERS

CHAPTER I
LADIES MUST LIVE—HOW DO THEY GET THAT WAY—AND WHY? THEY EVEN DO IT IN OLD JAPAN

CHAPTER II
THE VIRTUOUS GIRL RACKET—AN EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF CHASTE AND UNCHASTE GIRLS WHO WORK MEN FOR ALL THEY'RE WORTH

CHAPTER III
THE LOVE RACKETEERS—THE "MARRY 'EM AND MAKE 'EM PAY"

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Grimly they defended themselves against

The SERPENT

CHAPTER I

Iquitos

A Complete Book-

By ALLAN K.

Author of "White Ivory,"

DAVE REED poled his raft around the bend of the river with great effort. Laden heavy with arrobas of rubber, and fastened together with palm leaf strips, the unwieldy craft responded slowly to the combined efforts of Reed on the front end and his helper at the rear.

Sweating, the two men tussled with their makeshift float with all the care due the results of their

year in the teeming and death-infested jungle.

Gore, the man at the rear end of the raft, clad for the jungle, hand cut and held at the seams by rubber milk, with a year's growth of hair and beard, blackened by a jungle sun, looked up the river bank and shouted.

"Iquitos! Civilization, by the Lord

Follow Dave Reed As He Battles His Way Through



the mass of Indians before them

of MOPOI

Length Novel

ECHOLS

"Fangs of the East," etc.

Harry. Look at that gorgeous metropolis, David, me boy! Look at that skyline. New York ain't in it!"

Reed grinned back at his partner whom a year's agonizing hardships could not repress.

Iquitos could hardly be justly described as a great metropolis, and its skyline was not quite that of New York Harbor.

The little town rested on the bank of the river, hardly distinguishable from the bank itself, for the structures in it were adobe, mud taken from the river bank itself and baked in the monotonous sun. The only suggestion of civilization about them was that they had galvanized tin roofs, metal that absorbed the heat and baked the occupants.

The one street of Iquitos was a short twisting path of red sand. Back of the buildings were scattered half a dozen huts of laced bamboo with thatched roofs, where half a

Savage Perils to Face the Reptile God of the Jivaros!



Dave Reed

hundred dirty Indians lived.

"Look," Gore yelled. "They're out to meet us."

"Must be something else," Reed answered as he spied a crowd at the

small wharf. "Whatever it is, it must be a pretty big attraction to get those Indians out in the sun."

The two men poled their raft toward the dock. In half an hour they were at the water's edge.

Gore yelled. "I'm a chipmunk's maiden aunt if it ain't an ocean liner. Boy, what a ship."

Reed twisted his end of the raft in closer to shore. The boat that had brought out the entire population of Iquitos was a twenty foot motor launch, gleaming new and white in the tropic sun, and showing no signs of having seen any service.

"Boy," Reed said, "that craft couldn't have come three thousand miles up the river under its own power. Where could it have come from? And look who's in it!"

The mysterious new craft floated at the dock, bouncing slowly up and down to the fresh waves from the river. In the pit, bent over the engine was a man, a stranger to the two men on the raft.

THE man was in his thirties, perhaps, and his white face was surely a stranger to this part of South America. As the two watched, he signaled for an Indian to cast off his line. He operated a starter and the trim craft shot forward under the man's clearly awkward hand. "Hey! You fool! Look out! Stop it!" Gore jumped up and shouted frantically. "You'll hit—"

The bow of the new boat coming dead ahead cut squarely into the

midships section of the rubber-laden raft, chopping the warning off short as the jolt sent him overboard, floundering in the water. Reed dived at the same time.

The raft cringed with the noise of parting strips of bamboo leaves which held the poles together. The man at the launch's wheel stood helpless, surprised at what was happening and in no way able to collect his thoughts well enough to meet the emergency.

The man in the boat shouted belatedly, "Get out of the way, you."

BUT his shout was useless. The launch cut through the improvised raft like a knife. The two-foot balls of rubber tumbled into the water and the poles of the raft, released from each other, swirled around and drifted toward the shore. The man in the motor launch fumbled with its controls, shot it forward at breakneck speed, turned it in an arc to head back for the dock, then cut the motor.

Dave Reed came up from his dive, ducked a floating log and swam, sputtering oaths toward the dock. Gore followed him. The two men looked like some strange kind of aquatic animals as they struggled ashore, their beards dripping water and their blackened bodies gleaming in the sun.

The motor boat hit the dock with a heavy thud and the angry man in the engine pit threw the line out to a waiting Indian, then climbed up on the dock and faced the two rubber hunters.

"What do you mean by getting in my way?" he demanded arrogantly.

"You savve white man push boat? You pasear quick."

The stranger, clad in new khaki shorts and with gear fresh from civilization, glared impressively. In contrast to him, Reed and Gore

looked like the scum of civilization, with their home-made shorts. Their hair dangled over their shoulders and their beards were as long, while their skins were burned darker than any of the natives who kept more out of the sun.

Gore twisted his face and ran his hand through his beard as he studied the man addressing him and his partner. Then he glanced at Reed.

REED was fighting mad. "I savor a white man is a damned fool," he said, trying to restrain himself. "Do you know that you've lost for us all the rubber we've spent a year gathering?"

The stranger held his ground, determined to master the situation. "You men nearly wrecked my launch," he said sharply. "You should have kept back when you saw me here."

Despite the loss of their year's hard work, Gore burst out laughing at the man's arrogance. Reed was trying to control himself.

The stranger's fury flared up at Gore's laugh, and he flung himself forward.

"I'll teach you water-rats a lesson right now," he roared.

City-bred and unaccustomed to the jungle as the man appeared, he was fast, terribly so. Before either of the men knew what he was about, his fist shot forward and caught Gore squarely on the chin in an unexpected blow.

Taken by surprise, Gore fell backward. He was standing at the edge of the dock, and the blow knocked him overboard. He caught at a piling, and in his efforts to save himself his head caught a jutting point of the upright timber. He fell limply into the water, then he sank.

Reed rushed to the dock's edge and looked over. Gore didn't come to the surface. Reed waited a few

more seconds, then dived overboard.

He went down through the muddy water, eyes open and looking through its murkiness.

Everything looked dark and gray to him. Then he saw a slightly moving form and swam toward it, still under water. He was beginning to need breath now.

He found Gore. His partner was not making a move to reach the surface. Reed gripped his body and found that he could not bring it upward. It was caught on something.

Reed tried again. Now his lungs were aching badly, but he dared not waste the time of going to the surface for more air. He ran his hands about the body of the man and found at last what was holding him under the surface. A knot on one of the supporting timbers had entangled the rag of Gore's clothes and held him fast.

REED'S strength was deserting him fast. He wouldn't be able to hold out much longer. He jerked at Gore's clothes, found them held tight. Jerked again. This time they tore a bit; then another jerk. Gore was free.

Almost insensible with the pain in his lungs, Reed struck out upward with one hand, the other with Gore's hair in his clutch.

His head broke water and his lungs emptied of their long-held poison air, and he drank in great gulps that filled his lungs.

Holding Gore's head above water, he swam around to the bank and with the help of an Indian got him out and laid him on the ground in the shade.

Gore was unconscious, and blood



A Native of Iquitos

oozed from a gash at the back of his head where he had hit the timber of the dock. Reed stood over him and lifted his arms, then pressed them downward. Upward, and downward again like pump handles. He turned Gore on his face and lifted him by the middle.

He worked furiously for fifteen minutes, breathlessly, like a man in despair.

Through lips that were only a slash in his grim features he watched his partner. Finally Gore stirred and later opened his eyes.

"Where's the man that hit me?" he asked dazedly.

"That's what I'm gonna find out pronto," Reed answered. "You feel well enough to lie right here and rest till I get back?"

GORE rubbed his wounded head. "Save him for me, will you? It's my debt and I want to pay it when I feel a little better."

"You stay here till I get back," Reed returned. "You're not in shape to interview that hombre. I'll be back in a minute."

And before Gore could make a protest, Dave Reed, his long hair and beard a wet mass of entangled hair, trotted up the winding trail, the blistering sand scorching his feet and the thoughts of the stranger blistering his soul. He headed toward the farthest of the three large adobe buildings.

At the entrance of the first building, he passed a man who called to him in English.

"Ho, Reed—stop off a moment, will you? Got word for you."

Reed pulled up at the door of the shack, where stood a burly Irishman, clad in soiled whites. This was Flannigan, local agent of the American Rubber Company.

"What is it?"

"Just heard you lost your raft—

rotten luck," the Irishman said with bluff sincerity. "There's a man wants to see you. Got what looks like a big deal. Feller from the States."

Still filled with the urge to find the man who had nearly killed Gore, Reed was in no mood to listen to Flannigan's story. He looked up the street. And he saw the man he was looking for.

"See you later," he said hurriedly to Flannigan. "I'm doing business with this bird right now."

Reed walked out to meet the approaching figure. The other party met him and tried to hold his ground.

He looked up frowning when Reed did not step out of the way to let him pass, as an Indian would have done.

Reed planted himself squarely in front of the stranger.

"If you want the chance you didn't give my partner—put up your fists," he said.

And with his last word he plunged into the man.

The stranger was quick and met the approach with a sharp blow that glanced off Reed's jaw. Reed answered with a solid one that thumped into the stranger's ribs.

THEY backed off after the first sally, each sizing the other up like men in a prize ring. Reed found surprise that the tenderfoot was much huskier than he appeared, and that he knew how to handle himself easily.

They returned to the attack, each wary of the other. Reed's great strength and agility, his brute force was more than matched by a display of science from the other man.

Reed caught a sharp jab on the point of the jaw, and it knocked all the caution out of him. Head down, he plunged in, this time giving no



A knot on one of the supporting timbers had entangled the rag of Gore's clothes and held him fast.

thought to the punishment the other man inflicted on him. Their feet ploughed up the red dust of the road, their breath came in great sobbing heaves as they exchanged blow for blow. Sweat popped out on them until they were soaked to the skin, and it ran in little rivulets down Reed's glistening body.

Reed's nose was bleeding and the man from the States had an eye that was fast swelling. Every blow Reed caught renewed his hatred of the man who had knocked Gore off the dock without giving him a chance to defend himself.

A few scattered Indians saw the

beginning of the fight; they passed the word and now practically the town's whole red population was ringed around the two contestants.

Reed was blowing like an over-worked ox; the other man was in as bad shape.

Suddenly the man from the States darted in under a blow from Reed's fist that sailed through the air, and locked his arms around the rubber-gatherer. His hands found their way up to his neck and Reed felt sharp fingers digging into his windpipe. His breath came in short gasps—then stopped.

His eyes bulging, his lungs burst-

ing, Reed took a desperate chance. He toppled himself over backwards with all his remaining strength, fell flat on his back and at the same moment pulled against the man and raised his knee.

The momentum of the fall and Reed's pull had the desired effect. The man came down on Reed, pivoted on his knee and went on over his head, losing his grasp on Reed's neck.

INSTANTLY Reed was upon him, and again the two rolled over and over in the hot sand like a pair of wild dogs. The Indians about them grunted their approval of this entertainment.

Again the hands of the stranger found their way upward and fingers buried themselves in a hold on the matted locks of Reed's uncut hair.

Then the man started pounding Reed's head against the hard ground, trying with all his strength to bat his brains out.

Reed was desperate. His hands dug into the sand. He clutched at it.

Then with a quick flit he flung a handful of it into the man's face.

The man loosened his grip and clutched at his burning eyes, gouging the sand out. Reed, still flat on his back under the man, doubled his fist and with a slow, careful aim, drove it squarely to the point of the man's chin.

The man tumbled over, rolled over on his back and lay there.

Panting, Reed regained his feet and looked about him. Seeing an Indian he had known around the village, he barked a few words at him.

The Indian said something to one of his fellows, and four of them grabbed arms and legs and carried the bedraggled stranger toward the third adobe house, the one that was

used for visiting people in Iquitos.

Reed walked wearily back toward Flannigan's shack.

CHAPTER II

Into the Jungle

REED found his partner was already in Flannigan's house, receiving the ministrations of the agent's Indian servant. With hair clippers and razor and tubs of water, and with clothes from their own trunks which Flannigan kept for them, they sloughed off much of their wild appearance.

And as they cleaned up, Flannigan talked.

"I've been twenty-seven years up and down this river," he said, "but I've never run into such a batty party as this. When the boat from Para came in yesterday, it was packing that launch and the Slater party.

"Professor Slater, he calls himself, and his daughter. Can you beat that? A girl and an old professor and his business manager coming into the jungle to make a trip I'd not dare make myself.

"They've got about as much business here as I've got in Buckingham Palace. And they fit just about as well."

"Who's this young fellow?" Reed asked.

"That'd be Morgan, their business manager. He's the professor's assistant and looks after all the details of the trip. And that's where you come in. Professor Slater wants you to take him inside!"

"Gonna leave the girl here?"

"No, the damned fool. He says she's going too."

"I'm not the man he's looking for," Reed said with finality. "I'd no more take a girl into that jungle than I'd take one of those head-hunting Indians to Sunday school."

"Neither would I," Flannigan returned. "But the old man's obstinate and says he's going in—with or without you."

"What's he looking for?"

Flannigan's ruddy face took on a grin. "Mopoi. He wants to study ruins." The Irishman quoted the words derisively. "It seems somebody's been telling him stories and he believes 'em."

CORE spoke up. He had been sitting quietly while the Indian clipped his hair and applied a bandage to the cut on the back of his head.

"Mopoi," he said dramatically. "The dead civilization—the tomb of jewels and beautiful women—thousands of years old—the sarcophagus of diamonds and rubies buried in caskets of gold. Boy, if there'd been anything to that old rumor, I'd have spent the last ten years of my life looking for it instead of squeezing sap out of rubber trees. So he came all the way from New York, he and his daughter and his little playmate that doesn't know how to run a boat—just to see this fabled place."

Somebody outside shouted a hello. Flannigan said under his breath, "This'll be the professor. Come on out and meet him."

A few moments later the two men emerged and met Professor Slater. The scientist was in his sixties, stooped and abnormally thin. His aquiline nose was high-bridged and he wore heavy glasses, behind which burned gray eyes, intense with the fire of enthusiasm.

"I know that I'm laughed at down here," the professor said. "But I'm convinced that I know what I'm about. I have come into possession of papers that I have reason to know are authentic, and in them I've been able through translation of the Jivaro picture writing, to exactly

locate the ruins I'm searching for. It lies at the intersection of the Napoi River and a small stream that flows down from a certain mountain on its left bank, about fifteen hundred miles upstream from here."

"But, Professor," Reed returned, "I admit hearing rumors of this place, but I think you'll not find it. The chances are that if you found the location of these missing Jivaros, and there are several such tribes, you'll only find a few thatched huts of temporary design. They never build permanent structures."

"I don't agree," the professor said with assurance. "At any rate, I'm taking the risk. And I learned about you down in Para. I understand you've been in this jungle for ten years and know every foot of it."

"Nobody could know every foot of it if he stayed here a lifetime. There are things back in that jungle that white men never dreamed of, things that people like you and me had better give a wide berth to. Queer tribes—head hunters—strange and mysterious secrets—"

"The very things I'm looking for," interjected the old professor with a show of enthusiasm. "Man, don't you know how much it would mean to me to be the first white man to bring out such information? I would be doing science a service that it would always remember."

"AT the probable cost of your life," Reed said.

"P-sh," the professor answered deprecatingly. "Those people would not want to harm us. We're friendly to them. We only want to study them."

"Which is just what they don't want," Reed argued. "They have their secrets and their own business and they'd resent anybody butting

in. No, the whole thing is impossible."

The lean old teacher screwed up his mouth in a gesture peculiar to himself. "Nothing's impossible, my boy. We can go in there and come out safely. That's what we're going to do. And you're going to be in charge of the trip. Just name your price—if it's reasonable."

REED continued getting into the first clean white clothes he'd had on in a year. Jungle-darkened, he was a far different sight from his first appearance—bearded and bedraggled.

"Will you lead us?" the professor insisted. "I'd like to get started as soon as possible."

Reed shook his head. "I won't."

"And why?"

"In the first place, the route you propose to take would be difficult—almost impossible for a white—even if he were accustomed to the jungle. For you—it would be fatal. I understand you have a daughter who intends going in with you?"

"Yes," the professor answered, then added a hasty argument. "She's fully capable of taking care of herself, however. Very athletic—represented her school at tennis and archery."

Gore, with his back to the professor, emitted some kind of a noise that sounded like he was choking. Reed turned slightly red under his browned skin.

"Undoubtedly the girl could hold her own," Reed answered soberly. "But there are other things in the jungle besides fighting. Fever, snakes, poisonous insects, to mention only a few. I am sorry, but I have to refuse to be a party to such an impossible idea as this one of yours is. I am not a professional guide."

"I'm sorry, too," the professor

said thoughtfully. "But even if you refuse to go with us, we are going to carry out our plans. We'll go in by ourselves if we can't get somebody to go with us."

There was such disappointment in the elderly man's voice that Reed felt a wave of contrition come over him. He was actually sorry for the man, as he would have been sorry for anybody with so little experience undertaking such a rash trip.

"By the way," the professor said, "I should have apologized for Morgan's actions before. Of course, we'll repay you for the loss of your rubber. Morgan is very sorry he lost his head, and he'll apologize to you. He's not a bad sort, you know. The responsibilities he is under have just made him a bit nervous and high strung. So if that is the reason you won't join us—"

"That is not the reason," Reed said flatly. "The reason is that the whole thing is an impossible phantasy—an insane idea."

The occupants of the room had reached an impasse where nothing could be said on either side. Flannigan leaned back on a bamboo cot and tapped his knuckles with the fingers of his other hand. The silence was becoming awkward when suddenly there was a shout from the outside.

Flannigan jumped up and answered. "That's Pedro," he said calmly. "Been up in the mountains."

And Pedro entered!

OR rather, he almost tumbled into the adobe room. A Spanish type of man, dirty and clad in the barest shreds of what had once been duck trousers. The upper half of his body was bare, and long hair and beard matted his head and face. His body was a welter of sores.

"Señors!" he said, and despite his obvious weakness, he bowed deeply.

"Señor Flannigan! Ah, and Señor Reed. The gods are with me!"

Flannigan handed the man a tin cup of liquor and he downed it at a gulp with good effect. He seemed to be a bit revived. He dropped to a seat on Flannigan's cot.

"You had a long trip," Flannigan suggested.

The Spaniard took his time, gave some consideration before answering. Reed said nothing, knowing the man, and that he would only talk in his own way. But he was filled with excitement and they waited, knowing he had news.

The man's hand toyed with a dirty cloth bag about the size of a tobacco bag, hung around his neck with a strip of bamboo leaf.

"Señors," he said, "*I have visited Mopoi!*"

THE news would not have been more profound if he had casually announced having found a pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow.

Flannigan stood up--speechless. Reed leaned back in his seat as though the news had weakened him, as indeed it had weakened their ability to reply. The old professor looked at this strange creature fresh out of the jungle in a dazed sort of fashion for a long moment.

"Mopoi!" he repeated slowly. His eyes behind their strong glasses searched Pedro's face for a long moment.

"Mopoi! Are you sure? It could not have been some other place? Maybe--"

"Señor, it was Mopoi. I have lived my life in this jungle. I know its legends, and I would not be fooled. But I have seen strange things—I have seen Mopoi. And I have seen *Yacu-maman!*"

The professor's face was a study as he arose from his seat.

"*Yacu-maman!* The Snake God! The old Jivaro god who could turn himself at will into a tapir or a frog or an anaconda!"

"The same, Señor. And *Yacu-maman* now lives in the form of a snake fifty feet long. Pedro has seen with his own eyes.

"And people worship him. A large and unknown tribe of the Jivaros live in this strange place and they worship him. But that is not all.

"Señor Reed! For many years you have been a friend to Pedro, and it is that we have all wished to leave this jungle which eats men's souls. We shall go—and we shall be rich *cabaleros*. *Regardez!* Look, Señors! Gold! Jewels!"

Pedro tore the bag from around his neck and spilled its contents on the gray blanket. Out poured a collection of objects that drew gasps from the assembled men, that caused them to rush to examine them, heads together and talking excitedly.

"See, Señors! A medallion of the sun," Pedro exclaimed, holding aloft a trinket.

THE object glittered in the light of the nut-oil lamp. A necklace of heavy flat medallions of pure gold, held together by finely devised gold wire links. The ornaments were engraved with weird symbolic designs of rare beauty. Set in each was a ruby, a blood red stone of the purest water that sparkled even in the feeble light of the adobe room.

And there were other trinkets of gold and jewels. Their intrinsic value was great, the value of them as antiques, as relics of that strange race, the Incas, was beyond computation. The little group stood around examining them in a breathless hush except for an occasional ejaculation of amazement at their beauty and strange design.

Pedro spoke first. "Señor Reed,

CHAPTER III

Jungle

there is much more—very much more of this stuff where this came from. I would have brought more, but as it was, I barely escaped with my life. I came for you to go with me and bring back all we can carry. There is plenty."

STUDYING a little gold carved idol, Dave Reed did not answer immediately.

"Señor, it means freedom from the jungle. Civilization! No more of the terror and the great toil for rubber. The trip will be hard, but it will be worth it. Will you make this one trip in return for your freedom? Think! Think what it means! Back among white men."

Reed looked queerly at Pedro, clearly not seeing him, but seeing spread out before him—civilization, comfort, freedom from the jungle that had taken so much of his life and had given so little in return.

Mopoi! So it wasn't a dream at all, wasn't a wild legend born in men's fever-stricken minds! There was such a place where the secret of the Inca's gold was known, and where the craftsmanship in it, perhaps, was still practiced. A city offering wealth, freedom.

Gore caught his partner by the arm and his look conveyed, more than any words could have, that he, too, was visioning escape. Where Reed led, Gore would eventually follow.

Flannigan looked at the last trinket longingly, then turned to Reed. "I wish I was a little younger," he said, "and not quite so fat." He did not trust himself to say more.

Suddenly Reed turned and faced him, his eyes sparkling.

"Flannigan," he said sharply, "fix me up a load of mixed trade goods. I'm going to Mopoi!"

Gore grinned. "Shoot the works, boy! I'm with you!"

FOR two solid weeks Dave Reed led up the Napoi River as ill-assorted a group as the jungle insects had ever pounced upon. Leading the party in the new motor launch were Reed and Gore, Morgan, Pedro, Professor Slater and his daughter, Marcel, her athletic figure clad in white shorts and a white toppee resting jauntily on her head of blonde hair.

The launch put-putted upstream, towing behind it two large canoes, each manned by two half-clad Indian carriers, and filled to the gunnels with gear. On the day before, the caravan had turned out of the Napoi into a tributary, the Yacusuni, named by the Incas as "lost river." No white man had ever set foot on its banks nor navigated its long and tortuous course to its mountain source.

At a bend in the river where a shallow sandy beach offered a camping spot, Reed called a halt. While the Indians set about building a shelter for the night, Reed called to Gore and Pedro, and the three, armed with rifles, went out to shoot monkeys for the evening's food supply.

Out of earshot of the camp, Gore spoke his mind. "I don't like the smell of things," he said. "I still think we made a mistake bringing the professor's gang along."

"It wasn't a matter of bringing them or leaving them," Reed answered. "They were bound to come, anyway, and I just brought them with us so we could do what we could to protect the girl. What with this Morgan gone nuts on the subject of that gold, he'd lead 'em to their death in no time. And besides, that launch saved us several days hard paddling upstream."

The jungle they were hunting was an almost impenetrable mass of trees and network of Liana vines. The air was heavy and humid and sickening with the perfume of wild orchids, while the ominous stillness was broken only with the incessant hum of insects.

PEDRO stopped at a tree and hacked an oblique slash in its brown bark with his machete. Placing his canteen under the wound he held it until it was half filled with a white liquid sap that had all the qualities as to taste and nourishment that could be got from rich cow's milk.

He was a different Pedro from the dirty jungle rat who had stumbled into Flannigan's trading post a fortnight before. The wounds of his trip had responded to treatment and civilization had furnished him with razors and scissors and clean white clothes, all of which had worked the miracle of leaving him the smooth and sophisticated Ecuadorian Spaniard. The many-sidedness of the man had never ceased being a source of surprise to Reed in their long years of friendship.

"Did you hear the drums last night?" Pedro asked casually as he screwed the top on the canteen of milk. "I think they were very—very far away. But—" he shrugged cynically, "—they were drums."

"Drums!" A chill shot down Reed's back and the perspiration on him felt like ice water.

"Si, Señor Reed. And they were not of any of the Jivaro tribes whose signals I understand. We are in the country of the *infles*—the tribes nobody knows. I think we're in pretty bad territory. If we—"

Reed was looking at a clump of bush ahead, hardly hearing Pedro. Something had moved in the clump—something black.

A pair of white eyes had protruded for a moment, then had disappeared. Reed's hand gripped his rifle butt.

Then from the bush had protruded the end of a long black stick—aimed directly at him.

On the instant Reed's gun came up and roared, and Reed dropped to the ground. A tiny bamboo dart flew over his head, through a spot where he had been standing, and stuck in the bole of a tree, where its feathered end quivered now, its poisoned end in the tree.

AS Reed's shot rang out, the black form in the bush jumped straight in the air with a piercing shout and fell floundering in clear sight of the white party. It was an Indian, in full war decoration of black, his ears decorated with red and yellow puffs of feathers. The six-foot blow-gun fell beside him.

The Indian's dying scream was the signal for the surprise attack that had been precipitated by Reed's accidental sight of the man.

Shouting, he and his two companions darted behind trees just as the air became filled with the little poisoned darts, coming from every direction.

Their guns blazed, spraying the bush ahead of them with lead, aimed at concealed figures whose silent replies were more of the death-dealing little darts.

But now the woods around them echoed to the roar of their guns, and an occasional yell of pain announced that a bullet had found a victim.

"The dirty devils," Reed gritted between shots. "The woods must be full of them."

A black head raised itself above a green clump, and the long black tube was pressed to its lips. Gore's rifle swung toward it and he

squeezed the trigger. As his gun roared the figure fell sprawling out of the bush.

"There's one less, anyway," Gore said.

Pedro knelt behind a tree, with a small bunch of weeds beside it, giving him a slight shelter. Balancing his rifle in his left hand, he rolled a cigarette with his right while arrows from the blowguns buried themselves in his protecting tree or whizzed by his head to fall behind him.

He lit the cigarette calmly.

"I'VE always observed," Reed said "that defending oneself from these Indians is like fighting ants. Killing them individually is not too effective. We should devise some kind of wholesale method to drive them away. We need an idea more than bullets right now."

Unprepared as the men were for a siege, their predicament was growing serious. Aside from the danger of poisoned darts, their ammunition supply was light, not having brought with them any more than they expected to use for hunting. The rest of the supply was in camp.

"How about our heading back to the camp?" Gore suggested.

"Not so good," Reed advised between shots. "They've no doubt cut off our retreat. And besides, it would only draw them on to the rest of the party, and that would be worse than useless."

The silent rain of darts continued pouring on them, now, it seemed with renewed vigor. The Indians were trying to mass their attack.

"They seem to be collecting instead of spreading out," Reed said when he observed that the arrows were beginning to come thicker from a concentrated position in front of them.

"The better for us," Pedro answered.

Grimly they settled down to defending themselves against the mass of Indians before them. The odds were all with the Indians, packed together and outnumbering the whites as they did. Their weapons were silent, which gave them the advantage of better concealment. They could stick the tubes of their deadly blow guns through the foliage and project their darts unobserved, while the whites had to expose themselves to get in a shot at their protected enemy.

Alternately firing and loading, the little party crouched behind its feeble protection and fought, grimly, methodically.

"Well, it can't last much longer," Gore said. "I've rammed in my last clip of shells."

It seemed as though the Indians had sensed the weakness of their defense.

Suddenly the air was awakened with a throbbing sound.

The drums again!

The Indians' medicine man was taking charge, working them up to a frenzy that would throw them against the blazing guns in a mad desperate rush.

THE air throbbed as the pulsating rhythm of the drums became louder and louder. Even the trees above the stuffy floor of the jungle seemed to echo to their poison throb, setting the air to vibrating to their sobbing thump.

The sound tore at the nervous system by its very monotony, clutching the nerves and rubbing them so raw that it threatened insanity. There was no escape from them, the very breath that entered the nostrils was filled with it, throbbing, groaning, pounding with tortuous hammers against the brain.

Louder and louder it grew. It became a frenzy, irresistible and agonizing. Back in the woods the Indians would be driven to a pitch of hysteria which would thrust them forward into the very jaws of hell itself.

"They'll make a break in a minute," Reed said in a hard voice. "When the last shell's gone, cut down as many as you can with your knives. There may be a slim chance we can stop them, but—"

BACK of him there came the sound of threshing in the bush. Reed looked around then shouted, astonishment almost paralyzing him.

"Get back! Go back, you fool!"

The approaching figure seemed not to hear.

It was the professor, as strange a sight as Reed had ever seen in the jungle.

Unmindful of the arrows into which he was walking, the lean man came on, the khaki shorts flapping against his skinny legs, his white sun helmet thrust back on his cadaverous head. In his right hand he held a small hand-movie machine. His left hand was upthrust, holding aloft a flashlight reflector, loaded with flashlight powder and ready to be set into flame with the trigger under his thumb.

The professor stumbled forward through the brush with his bespectacled eyes peering through the sighter of the movie camera.

"Keep it up, men," he shouted. "Reed, aim your gun and hold it that way. This is great—"

"Get back!" Reed cried at the top of his voice. "*Go back, you fool—back!*"

The professor might as well have been stone deaf.

"Point your guns, men. That's fine, Gore. *Now!*"

The professor clicked the spring

of his little camera which set up a buzzing as it reeled off the film. He pressed the trigger of the slow-burning flashlight pan. Then he started walking forward—directly into the line of fire between Reed's party and the natives.

As the flashlight powder ignited it flared up with a blinding brilliance that lighted the shaded jungle brighter than the sun. It filled the air with an acrid smoke that instantly penetrated every cranny of the foliage. Professor Slater stood in between the warring parties in the blinding light of his flash pan, oblivious of his surroundings.

Eyes glued to the sights of the camera, he moved it about from Reed to the bushes that concealed the Indians. Only a miracle kept him from becoming a pincushion of poison darts!

THE professor shouted, "Now, Pedro, tell the Indians to come rushing out—like they were attacking, you know."

Reed closed his eyes and groaned—speechless. When he opened them, they stared in amazement.

A transformation had taken place!

The drums had ceased as suddenly as they had started—and not an arrow came from the bushes!

It was as though there were not an Indian within a thousand miles of them.

While the three whites hidden behind trees were trying to recover from their surprise, the flashlight powder in the reflector pan burned out and the blinding brilliance left the forest.

The professor looked at it disappointedly, then at Reed.

"Too bad," he said, shaking his head. "Why didn't they come out? Think of what a record this would have made."

Reed came out into the little

clearing where the professor stood. Sweat poured from him and he was limp, as though he were too weak to stand.

Pedro followed him and started rolling a cigarette. The professor busied himself by re-rolling his precious film.

Reed struggled for some word to express himself, but nothing he thought of was adequate. Finally he gave it up and said:

"Thanks, professor."

"Don't mention it," Slater answered absently. Then he looked at Reed questioningly. "For what?" he asked.

PEDRO tried to answer him fittingly.

"We were just trying to think up an idea that would drive these Indians away on a wholesale basis when you came up and furnished it."

"Idea?"

"Yes. Your flashlight pan and camera appeared to them to be greater magic than their own. And any sensible native knows how useless it is to fight against a stronger magic than his. So—" Pedro shrugged and threw out his hands—"what could they do but leave?"

Reed felt the gravity of the situation and set about making arrangements to get the party out. He sent the professor back to camp while he, with Pedro and Gore, started to look for monkeys.

Trying to keep within a safe distance of the camp, they at last found a tree of chattering animals, three of which they brought down. Pedro tied their tails together and the party set out for camp.

"I think that party ought to realize now that this country is not healthy for them," Pedro observed while they walked. "That locoed *padre* of the girl—what manner of

man is he? I've missed encountering his type before."

"He's a professor," Reed answered. "And professors are supposed to have great knowledge."

"He has great knowledge of foolhardiness," Pedro observed. "Unless in his thirst for information he would be interested to see the look of his daughter's head shrunk to decorate a *chonta* lance."

When they reached camp the four Indian carriers had bamboo shelters erected and fires going.

Reed looked at the narrow strip of sand where the boats had been. The launch was gone! Somewhere up the rapid stream of the river they heard its motor coughing.

The professor sat on a log in front of his shelter busily caring for his motion picture film.

"Where's Morgan taking that launch?" Reed demanded.

THE professor looked up absently. Reed repeated the question.

"Oh, he's gone up with Marcel to look at a rapids the Indians reported. Said he'd try to navigate it so we'd know the best way to get through in the morning."

Reed cursed under his breath and went off to get Gore.

"Come on," he said. "That fool will get in trouble as sure as he's born. He's got the girl with him, and the woods are full of Jivaros."

"I wish he'd drown himself—if it wasn't for losing our gear while he's doing it," Gore snapped as the two set off in one of the dugout canoes and paddled upstream.

In half an hour's hard pulling they reached a point where the river narrowed between the upcroppings of two cliffs overhung with dense foliage. The river pressed over jagged rocks with a speed that caused sucking whirlpools and eddies that made the canoes dance dizzily,

and made it almost impossible for the two men to make headway against it.

"Look at that idiot!"

The ejaculation came from Gore and was directed at the man in the launch ahead. Reed watched the movement of the launch a fraction of a second and shouted a warning at Morgan.

The man in the launch ahead either did not hear or, intent on showing his skill to the girl who sat in the boat with him, ignored it. At any rate, he continued his occupation of trying to shoot the motor boat up the rapids, weaving it in and out between jagged rocks that pointed sharply upward, and paying no attention at all to the fact that many more such sharp boulders were concealed just beneath the boiling surface, indicating their presence only by the foaming splash of the water above them.

REED set up a shout, but the man was now in the middle of a sprint upstream. He had the motor opened up wide and roaring. The bow of the boat angled sharply upward as the sturdy little craft fought against the boiling water.

Then Reed saw the bow of the boat shoot higher and the stern end sink until it shipped water. The craft had run up on one of the concealed rocks.

A grinding sound floated down to them as the engine sputtered and died, and at the same time the boat careened over sharply to one side. Caught off balance by the sudden jolt, Morgan floundered overboard, grasping wildly at the bulwarks of the craft. The water sucked him into its boiling stream instantly.

The girl screamed. She sat in the boat that was stuck in midstream on the rock while the foaming water whipped it dangerously.

Simultaneously, the two men in the canoe dug paddles into the water and pulled their canoe up into the swirling rapids. There was a possible chance of rescuing the drowning Morgan.

Then halfway between themselves and the foundered launch Morgan's head popped up and the man shouted. The stream was bearing him down toward the canoe at a frantic pace.

Reed dropped his paddle and coiled the bow-line of the canoe. On his knees, he balanced himself to throw.

Then the man's body rushed by, borne down by the current.

Reed heaved the line just as he passed. Morgan's floundering hands grasped it frantically.

Reed and Gore hauled in until the man grasped the gunnels of the canoe and tried to haul himself aboard.

"Stop it," Reed shouted. "You'll upset us. Let us pull you aboard." But the man, frantic with fear paid no attention to the command, ignored the danger he was thrusting the others into.

"TAP him," Reed shouted, and Gore raised his paddle and cracked the man across the head with it, just as Reed caught his arm. Then the two balanced their weight on the opposite side of the canoe and hauled the unconscious man aboard.

"It was all I could do to keep from hitting him harder," Gore groaned. "I sure owe it to him for knocking me off that dock."

"You'll get a chance to pay him yet," Reed said. "We've got to get the girl now."

With its extra burden, the canoe made slow progress upstream, and minutes were precious. For the launch was gradually being lashed to pieces on the rock which held it

fast. The brave girl did not cry out, but kept moving back and forth to offset the effect of the roaring water which rocked the craft to a point where it was rapidly filling.

AFTER what seemed an interminable period of rowing, a period marked by aching muscles and breathless labor, they were within ten feet of the girl. Poised on the rapidly-disintegrating craft, she suddenly shouted.

There was a grinding noise, and the launch, as though it had been a living thing, suddenly turned about in answer to the pressure of the boiling water. Stern first, it slid off the rock and sank.

The girl jumped just as the craft submerged, and her head came bobbing by at a rapid speed.

Dave Reed stood up in the boat and dived. He came up after a long underwater swim that cleared him of a near-by jagged stone and looked about. The girl was still about five feet from him and rapidly passing the point where he would intercept her.

He struck out with a long overhand stroke that ate up the distance. Soon he overtook her and grasped her by the hair.

"Turn over and float on your back," he ordered. "I'll hold you up."

The look on the girl's pale face was one of terror, but at the order from Reed, she turned over as he directed, and left her fate in his hands. Even as he floundered in the rapids with his burden Reed could not help being strongly conscious of the girl's gameness. Out of place in the jungle as she was, she had endured the hardships without a whimper or complaint, and now, fighting for her life, she was more than brave.

Floating downstream, they were

now far below the canoe, nor could Gore row the craft down fast enough to overtake them. Seeing no other way out, Reed started guiding himself and the girl slowly toward the left bank.

The stream made a rounded turn a short distance below, and Reed made for the point where the current carried him near the bank. Reaching the nearest point, he made a few strong strokes and grabbed a handful of overhanging bushes and dragged himself ashore with the weakened girl. Almost exhausted, he leaned weakly against a tree.

Out in the stream, Gore was bringing his canoe down and searching for a place to beach it.

"Go on down to camp," Reed shouted at him. "We'll walk on."

THE girl recovered her vitality quickly. She looked ruefully at her water-soaked clothes and, conscious that her youthful form was outlined underneath them with tantalizing distinctness, laughed with embarrassment.

"Thanks," she said, then seeing an expression on Reed's face that he made no effort to conceal, she continued. "I guess I was a fool to go out in the boat with Morgan. He doesn't seem to be so handy with it as you are."

Reed looked at her with a hard expression. "You are right," he said evenly. "You were a fool. And so is your father and so is Morgan. Let's go!"

The girl, surprised, started to answer, but Reed turned about and started pushing a way through the dense undergrowth without waiting for a reply. The girl cut her ejaculation short, then followed him silently.

When he and Marcel Slater reached the camp they found the rest of the party seated on the beach near

the fire which served to keep mosquitoes away from them. Near the main party the Indian carriers sat around a similar fire. All were eating the freshly-made stew of monkey meat.

Morgan sat off to one side, suffering the disapproval of the stern professor in silence, a silence that marked the whole group. It was as though he were being ostracized. His clothes were still wet and there was a drop of blood over his eye where Gore's paddle had broken the skin on his forehead. There was a glint in Gore's eyes that told Reed that he was happy for the first time since the little party had left Iquitos.

THE girl dropped down on the sand beside her father who, having heard that she was walking back from the accident, had given his thoughts to other things and showed no concern when she came in uninjured.

"I hope you didn't worry, daddy," she said, throwing her arms around his neck. "Fortunately I was in the hands of an extremely competent jungle man—Mr. Reed." There was something in her voice that Reed could not quite understand, but he gave it little thought at the moment. Something else occupied his mind.

He whipped off his shirt and spread it on the sand beside the fire to dry. Standing there in the jungle, his browned body bared to the waist, he looked more like some jungle god, some primitive man half-god, than a young man who had left his desk in the New York offices of a rubber company to seek his own fortune nearer the source of that commodity.

Standing spraddle-legged, he looked over the mixed group on the beach and addressed himself to the professor and the others.

"I agreed to let you people join me on this trip for one reason and one only," he said. "And that was because with us you might have a slight chance to come out alive. But without us you would have gone to your sure death.

"We had trouble with you, Morgan, on account of your thick-headedness and ignorance of what you were doing, even before we left Iquitos.

"You came along on the understanding that I was to be in charge—in full charge of things at all times. No one was supposed to do anything unless I agreed that it was all right to be done.

"What has just happened was the result of that agreement being broken by Morgan. The result is that the greater part of our provisions are now in the bottom of the river. And our launch is gone. We are stranded in a country full of hostile people—of head-hunters! Do you understand? People who cut off your heads and make trophies of them! This is no place for you men—and still less a place for a white woman. Tomorrow morning we are going to make rafts and with those and our canoes we are heading back to Iquitos. I can't chance taking you people any further. We return in the morning."

PROFESSOR SLATER, his lean legs clad in shorts from which his sharp knees protruded, sat on a stump and finished gnawing the foreleg of a monkey. Then, wiping his mouth on the back of his arm he blinked at Reed through his strong glasses.

"I'm afraid you're somewhat justified in being out of sorts with Morgan," the old man said. "We all are. He has inconvenienced us greatly, not to mention having nearly drowned Marcel. However, we'll have to

trust Morgan not to get into any more trouble. You know, he expects to marry Marcel when we're out of this, and I'm sure he wouldn't want to do anything to endanger her if he could help it. He has promised as much."

The old man peered at his daughter. "Do you want to go back?" he asked.

The girl cast a defiant glance at Reed. "I'm sure I don't want to be a burden to Mr. Reed, but I certainly don't intend to be taken back. If Mr. Reed doesn't want to come with us I think we can make it alone somehow. I'm ready to try. I'm not afraid of a few ignorant Indians."

"THERE, you see," the professor said in a tone of finality. "That settles it. We go on."

Disgustedly, Dave Reed took a leg bone from the pot and went off to the edge of the clearing to eat his supper and think his way out of the difficulty the old man's obstinacy put him in. Gore and Pedro joined him later. Pedro smoked in silence. Gore heaved a stone into the jungle to give vent to his feelings. "I wish we'd let that Morgan bird drown," he snorted. "This outfit's jinxed as long as he's alive."

"Any outfit," Pedro observed between puffs, "is what you say—jynx—ted—when you have a woman in it. I have observed that a woman is a trial to a man except on two occasions—the first week one loves them and the week in which they announce their final departure from one. On those two occasions they give delight."

"What can I do?" Reed demanded. "I can't make them go back, and to desert the girl would be nothing less than a crime."

"I have a feeling, Señors, that Yacu-maman, the god of the jungle,

will make a way of dealing with the problem."

"Then he has more intelligence than I give him credit for," Reed answered bitterly. "Even if he does repose his immortal soul in the body of the serpent. He—Listen!"

"Drums again."

The sun had set with that abruptness peculiar to the tropics, and the tangled foliage of the jungle now threw a black canopy over the river bank. For a short hour the birds were still, and it seemed that even the insects had been frightened into silence by the uncanny sound.

It seemed to rise slowly, a throbbing rhythm that was born of the very night air itself, humorless and with a sinister throb that vibrated one's whole being, coming out of nowhere but completely poisoning the whole air.

The distant thunder sounded faint, yet clear, with a weird cadence and regular but strange tempo that appeared meaningless while conveying the dark and sinister threat of the very jungle itself.

"Tunduli drums," Pedro said evenly. "Signal logs. We should consider ourselves important, Señors, to be the objects of such solicitude. The *infiles* are not through with us yet."

"PEDRO, you know the secret messages of the various Jivaro tribes."

"But not these, Señor, I have never heard that peculiar cadence before. Hear!"

The air throbbed with the regular booming.

"Boom-ta-ta-da-da, boom-ta." The accents were placed as though on the first and fourth note of an *eight-eighth* measure of music, then after two repetitions of this shifted; a definitely-recognizable change in accents—but all in regular tempo.

The throbbing of the sound seemed to penetrate directly to the nerves instead of the ear. It was as though one felt rather than heard their vibrance.

Silently and filled with an unnamed apprehension, they listened for a long period.

Reed was the first to shake off the spell. Turning toward the camp, he said:

"We set watches tonight—and every night after this. We haven't seen the last of those birds."

"One's head can be shrunk but once, Señors," Pedro observed. "And our friend Morgan's could stand some shrinking. Shall we join our rifles?"

All through the night the air throbbed with the thump of the *tunduli* drums. Booming.

CHAPTER IV

Trapped

DAVE REED woke at daylight, just as the jungle took on its sunrise clatter. Parrots and jabbering monkeys added their bit to the grunting of tapirs and the multitudinous sounds of wild life. The sun sent sharp lances of light through the steaming foliage, but Reed could not shake off a feeling of apprehension.

He emerged from his shelter feeling that something was wrong. And this feeling was increased when he saw that the fires of the night before had been allowed to die. The camp itself was still as a tomb.

He looked quickly at the narrow stretch of beach before the camp and his feeling of apprehension quickly crystallized to one of despair. The two canoes were gone! He strode swiftly down to the water's edge and looked up and down stream, a gesture that he knew

to be futile. There was no sign of anybody on the river.

He had hoped that he would see the Indians out trying to catch fish but his better judgment and the empty river quickly dashed this hope. He trotted back to the Indian carriers' shelter and looked inside. The last of his hopes sank when he saw the shelter was empty.

Now, they had not even canoes to make their way back to civilization. But that was not the worst of it.

He examined the camp gear. Much of it was missing as well.

As he dejectedly searched the camp he heard footsteps and Pedro emerged from a dim trail beside the river. Pedro had been up for a long time, apparently. He came in quietly, smoking a cigarette as impassively as though he were on the main street of his Equadorian village. Reed marveled at the man's stoicism.

"Did you see anything of the porters?" Reed asked.

"No! And I am sure that we won't see them again, Señor. They did not relish the thought of their heads becoming souvenirs. I suppose it is not for one to blame them too much."

"BUT the boats! We've got to get these people back to civilization."

"I think we shall find them," Pedro answered calmly. "No native would dare be seen with a white man's boat. I believe they would float downstream far enough for us not to hear them at work, then make themselves dugouts out of pith palm. Shall we see?"

Together the two men set off downstream, hacking their way through the tangled undergrowth with their machetes. It was grinding toil and the sweat poured off them in rivulets.

But hour after hour they hacked

their way along the river bank.

Their work was made doubly hard by the necessity of carrying their rifles slung on their backs. They had neither seen nor heard any new signs of their attackers, other than the sound of the drums, but the very absence of such was significantly ominous.

It was at a time when the sun's rays beat straight down that Pedro shouted:

"Here is where they have worked," he said.

Reed caught up with the Spaniard at a tiny clearing of freshly hacked undergrowth.

Pedro was looking at the stump of a peculiar kind of palm tree which had been removed.

THE tree is peculiar to this part of the jungle. The trunk of the tree bulges like a barrel and consists of a hard shell filled with a soft pith. It is the work of only a few minutes with a machete to fell the tree and shape a fair improvised canoe by clearing out the soft pith and chinking the two ends with mud. They found three of these tree stumps where the six carriers had made their own canoes.

"Our own boats should be in the first backwater," Pedro said calmly. "Let's try the next bend."

They came upon the canoes just as Pedro had prophesied. Then, one in each of the craft, they started the labor of paddling them back upstream to camp.

It was late afternoon when they arrived, hungry and exhausted.

Gore sat before a small fire a rifle across his knee. Nobody else was in sight.

"All lying around like this was a hospital," Gore said. "Bats!"

Reed emitted a curse. Heretofore the party had not been bothered by this loathsome creature which for-

ages both banks of the Napoi, and he had not given that new danger a thought.

He found the professor reclining in his camp chair, his face pale and his body listless. Marcel Slater and Morgan occupied other chairs and seemed as badly affected.

"Did you tell them what was the matter?" Reed asked Gore.

"No. I didn't want any more panic on my hands while you were away. They've worried enough about the missing boats and where you had gone. I figured what had happened and tried to explain but they were too frightened to believe me. All except the professor, who was apparently thinking about something else and didn't seem to care where you were."

Reed approached the group. "We'll have to be here another night or two before we can get started *downstream*," he said. "And while we're here I want you all to sleep with your heavy blankets wrapped around you—head and foot. Is that clear?" He looked at Morgan sharply.

"IT'S clear—all except the reason for such foolishness," Morgan growled. "What's the idea? Blankets when we're already being nearly cooked to death."

"Why have you been loafing around all day?"

"I don't feel well. Weak. Must have been something I ate."

"And you, Miss Slater?"

The girl looked penetratingly at Reed and there was a touch of defiance in her voice when she answered.

"If it concerns you—I don't feel very strong either. It is probably the result of my accident last night."

"And I suppose you think the idea of blankets is also foolish?"

"I can't see that this weather calls for any such action."

Reed turned to the professor who was deeply absorbed in writing in a black leather notebook with his fountain pen.

"Professor Slater. You are somewhat of an authority on things like natural history. What do you think is wrong with your party?"

"Wrong?" The professor peered at Reed. "Why nothing, I'm sure. What could be wrong? We're all here, aren't we?"

Gore stamped out of earshot of the group. Reed got a glimpse of the twisted look he gave Pedro.

"We're all here," Reed said, "but we won't be here long—at least some of us won't—if you people don't begin to realize that you're not camping out on Boston Common. This happens to be the middle of the South American jungle.

"**WE'RE** in a territory inhabited by a number of groups of gentlemen whose hobby is cutting off people's heads, by insects and snakes who make a hobby of injecting poison into the human system and, last but not least, swarms of little animals who make a diet of human blood, drawn from you while you are asleep. I am referring, of course, to Vampire Bats, in case you've never heard of them."

His sarcasm was lost on the professor, but the girl's face turned pale with horror at the mention of the filthy and dreaded creatures, and Morgan stirred uneasily in his canvas chair.

The professor returned to his interrupted writing. "I'll have to make a note of that," he said absently. "We must watch out for them at night."

"Unfortunately, it won't do you any good," Reed answered. "They won't molest you while you or anybody else is awake, only when you are sleeping. And they can't be

caught because they don't wake you when they suck your blood. There's some kind of anesthetic in their teeth that makes the bite painless.

"But you'll be weak for a long time, perhaps a week, afterward. And if they work on you every night which they're likely to do, you'll be in pretty bad shape in short order."

The girl shivered. "I'd wake up if one even came into my shelter," she said. "I know I would."

"You didn't wake up last night," Reed returned. "Or you'd know you'd been bitten already."

The girl's face became a study. "I haven't been bitten, or I would have known it," she said, but there was not her former air of sureness about the statement.

"All of you have been bitten," Reed said. "If you'll examine your heads and feet I'm sure you'll find the bites.

"They'll be entirely cylindrical and about an eighth of an inch in diameter and a sixteenth of an inch deep. You locate them and then you'll believe me. And after that, take my advice and you'll keep covered when you go to sleep. We can't carry you out of these woods on our backs."

REED turned and picked up his rifle and, followed by Pedro and Gore with their own guns, he went back away from the creek bank where the foliage was densest and came upon a sufficient amount of game to last the camp until morning.

As they emerged from the darkest point in the jungle the three of them cast their eyes aloft apprehensively. The looks they gave each other were filled with significance. They hastened their steps toward the camp.

The thing that had come upon them was not unknown to them, but

was hardly expected so early in the year.

They had emerged into thinner vegetation at a point where they should have seen mid-afternoon sunlight. But there was no sunlight.

Instead, great banks of clouds scurried across the sky, dark and low-hanging and of threatening intensity. A tropical storm would break upon them any minute.

BY the time they reached the camp great flares of lightning split the sky and the drum roll of thunder followed it and echoed off into the hills in the distance.

Unexpected as the storm was, Reed was at a loss as to how to find shelter for his charges.

He hurried into the camp. "Pack all gear," he barked. "And throw it together as fast as you can. We may be caught before we can find a shelter."

Morgan grumbled, complaining that he did not feel well enough to help, but a sharp word from Reed and the sight of the others busily engaged forced him to at last reluctantly give a hand.

"We might be able to find some kind of protecting cliff," Reed said. "The least we can do is to try."

When they had packed the greater part of their easily portable gear, Reed urged them to greater speed. The first few tentative drops of rain hit the ground.

"Leave the other stuff here," Reed ordered. Then he apportioned the loads to each of the party and set off upstream toward the rapids.

At this point the adjacent hills met the river and their sharpness gave him hope that the party could find some kind of temporary shelter in the lee side of one of the jagged cliffs.

The party set out single file, following Reed up the path he had

blazed for himself and the girl at the time the launch foundered.

Then the rain hit!

Like all tropical storms, the few first drops had come as though heralds for the following clouds, going ahead and preparing a way for them. Trailing close on their heels came—pandemonium itself.

The skies blackened, then became an inferno. Great streaks of jagged lightning rent it apart and the thunder burst the eardrums with its sharp peals. The afternoon became as dark as dusk.

One flash of lightning split the sky in a jagged knife blade of blinding brilliance and burst with an ear-splitting roar a hundred yards away. As the clap of its thunder rolled away, the jungle cried out with a rending agony as some giant of the forest toppled over, dragging with it smaller trees whose destinies were interwoven with it by tangled masses of clinging vines.

Night birds screamed and the howls of animals in terror added to the inferno of a jungle gone mad.

Near the trudging party the underbrush became alive with grunting things and a file of terror-stricken tapirs, those giant rodents of the jungle resembling wild hogs, burst across the path and dispersed the party in their blind rush toward the water.

REED, with his head down against the downpour that beat upon him, cut and slashed a narrow trail through the entangling underbrush, followed by Pedro and Gore, and with the others trailing. Alternately, each of the three jungle men stepped to the head of the column and swung his great knife through the dripping, rain-soaked entanglement.

Thorns and briars dug at their flesh and ripped their clothes to shreds without their noticing it.

Blood dripped from scratches and bruises and sweat with rainwater to run down their faces in rivulets.

When Reed, who was now cutting, shouted the news, the party was almost exhausted, driven forward only by urging and pleading of Reed and Gore.

"Here we are," Reed said. He had slashed away a heavy mass of foliage and now stood beside an upright cliff face that was almost completely hidden behind jungle growth. "This looks like a good cave."

THE mouth of the cave was no more than four feet high, but when Reed flashed the beam of his torch into it he gave an ejaculation of pleasure. The floor of the cave sloped slightly upward into the hillside as far as he could see.

But, more important, it was dry!

Without waiting for further explanation, he ducked inside and the others followed. The professor, looking more like a scarecrow than ever in his dripping clothes, trooped in, followed by Morgan, who suddenly had become solicitous of the girl's comfort.

Reed examined the cave more deeply, thrusting the beam of his flash around. The interior surprised them. Gore commented first.

"I don't see any end to it," he remarked. "Must run a way back under the mountain."

Reed had already noticed the same thing. The floor was not level, and the cave, like a long hallway, ran in such a curved and wandering direction that they could not see very far ahead, but no end of it was in sight. Its walls of red clay were dry in most of its surface, but at points where rocks jutted out from sides or roof, there water had dripped. The minerals in the water had solidified and hung like great icicles. When Reed threw his light upon

them, they reflected back sparkling colors that outdid the spectrum. Their brilliant glow of reds, yellows, oranges, emeralds and blues were dazzling past all belief.

The girl gasped at the magnificent spectacle. Her father dropped his bundle of gear and dug into his shirt. "I want to make a note of this, if you will wait for me," he said.

The girl stopped him by taking his fountain pen which he was already opening. "Later," she pleaded.

They dropped their gear to take a much-needed breathing spell. The whole party was soaked through to the skin and inside the cave the air was damp and chilly.

They settled down to rest several hundred yards from the entrance to the cave and out of sight of it.

It was fully an hour later when Pedro made a trip back to the mouth of the cave to report on the weather. Reed had turned off his flash to preserve the battery and they sat huddled in the darkness.

Presently Pedro returned. He sat down without speaking.

Reed waited for a while, thinking he would make a comment, but the Spaniard did not seem inclined to volunteer any information.

"Is it still raining?" Reed asked.

"I couldn't tell, Señor."

REED felt that something was amiss.

"Why?"

"I couldn't get out of the cave!"

"What?" demanded Morgan excitedly. Professor Slater sat wrestling with some great mental problem and seemed not at all conscious of the others. The girl said nothing.

"Why?" Reed asked.

"The water has risen."

Reed flashed his lamp on the Spaniard. Pedro was sitting against a wall of the cave, his knees up as

high as his shoulders, trying to roll a cigarette with wet papers and tobacco.

"How high is the water?" Reed asked patiently.

"It completely fills the mouth of the cave, Señor."

CHAPTER V

Ruby Eyes

REED was filled with consternation at the news the Spaniard delivered with his voice that never raised itself above a simple statement of fact. He was sure that if Pedro had visited the mouth of purgatory, he would have referred to it as a sizeable fire and nothing more. It was against his private code to let externals break his poise.

But to Reed the predicament was more than serious—it meant disaster, more than likely, and quite possibly a horrible death. He knew enough about these rivers to realize that these sudden storms which originated in the mountains near their headwaters usually brought about an exceedingly rapid rise that might be so great that it would fill the whole valley.

And if this river rose very much, the water would fill the cave and drown them like rats caught in a trap!

Calling Gore, he rapidly retraced his way to the entrance, followed by the others who trailed the beam of his light.

Pedro was right! More than right!

The water formed a dark eddy and whirls with gray foam on it as it lapped into the cave. It now reached at least fifty feet inward, and from where they stood they could see it pouring in clear to the roof of the tunnel that sloped downward toward the river.

Morgan uttered a helpless cry. "Good God! We'll be drowned."

Pedro sucked on his damp cigarette. "That often happens, señor, when one is submerged long enough."

Reed trooped back quickly to where their gear was stowed.

"We've got to try to find another opening," he said sharply. "We'll take the gear and follow the cave further."

"I can't," Morgan groaned. "I'm too weak to go another step. And besides—those savages—"

Reed paid no attention to the man's complaint until they had shouldered their rifles and packs and were ready to tramp. Then he saw that Morgan had not taken up his own.

Reed turned to Gore. "See that Morgan brings his bundle," he said.

Gore grinned. "Right," he said. Then turning to Morgan:

"Did you hear that, buddy? It's the thing I been waiting for. Are you picking up that load without another word—or am I going to wrap a rifle barrel around your neck like I'd be happy to do?"

"I'm not able to move."

Without answering, Gore laid his pack down. He stepped over to Morgan and caught him by the collar of the shirt and jerked him to his feet.

"Now stand up while I hit you," he barked.

AS he got in position, Morgan, without a word, picked up his pack. All the fight was out of him. Then Reed flashed his light deeper into the unknown cave and the sad little party trudged forward.

The cave wound and twisted, went uphill over damp and sharp boulders and dropped off into darkness that might have been inferno itself. It was slow going, treacherous where

the slick rocks offered poor footing to the party trying to get over them.

But, all in all, the general direction of the cave was upward.

They suddenly came to a sharp turn, a point where the underground chamber veered steeply upward and to the left. A great boulder had evidently fallen from the roof at this point and blocked the passage of the party.

THE cave had widened considerably as they had progressed, and its roof was now nearly fifteen feet high. But it was pitch dark, except for the yellow glow of Reed's flash.

Reed held the lamp focused on the rough boulder while the rest of the party climbed upward and disappeared over the boulder after handing their bundles up. Then he followed.

On level footing again, he flashed his lamp around.

And a chill ran down his spine at the result!

The roof of the cave was a black mass; it was dotted with myriads of tiny eyes that reflected ruby red in the darkness!

The girl screamed.

Then an uproar suddenly burst forth in the cave that filled it to the suffocating point.

Strange whistling sounds, *swishes*, as though a bullet had sped—as though a thousand bullets were speeding through the cave, but without the roar of the guns that had projected them!

Gurgling sounds, unholy and fiendish in their horror.

And the beady red eyes—hundreds upon hundreds of them, filling the very air, crowding it. Red eyes that floated, that darted, or that rested on the roof of the cave.

It was a nightmare—some ghoul-ish fancy that couldn't last.

And a kind of clucking sound that

must have come out of the throats of a thousand demons released from hell.

And now it was worse. Black shapes! Everywhere! The air was filled with them. They floated, darted, hung suspended from the roof, clucked, dripped from the roof like some over-ripe fruit of a poisonous tree, then darted again.

It was the flying, milling, stinking black shapes that had the eyes that shone ruby red in the feeble light of the flash lamp.

Bats! Hundreds — thousands of them. Disturbed, angry bats, foul little beasts with a stifling stench and an unholy lust for human blood!

The Vampire Bat!

Reed had heard strange tales of the cave nests of these nauseous creatures, weird stories of travelers straying into the haunts where the vampires of the night slept by day. But this was his first experience with them.

The tales had told how men, trapped in these caves, had become victims of the fiends. The bats, ordinarily the most wary of night-flying creatures, seemed to take courage from the force of their numbers and from the fact that they were in darkness, their natural element, and would attack in swarms.

FOR once the professor came out of his abstraction, became active. But his actions were fruitless. He moved about, fended off the animals as they swished about his head.

The girl was a picture of horrified fear. As though instinctively, she edged nearer Reed, leaving the side of Morgan who was escorting her.

She looked at Reed. "Get us out of here, please." It was as though she knew he was the only one capable of handling the situation, and Reed felt the implied compliment. Impatient with her and her party as he

was, he could not help feeling pity for her.

"I'll do what I can," he promised. "But I don't know what that will be."

REED flashed his lamp around, and something about its glow sickened him. It was shining very dimly now. The battery was rapidly becoming exhausted.

The ray of the lamp settled on Morgan, the dim outline of his white clothes showing him fighting off the bats with his two wildly swinging arms.

Then Morgan, frantic, pulled his gun and fired before Reed could utter a shout. The cave echoed with the roar of the weapon, magnified many times in the confinement of the cave and almost bursting the eardrums. The shot left the close cavity stuffy with the fumes of the burned powder.

And the echoing roar set the cave into an inferno of beastly terror. Excited to a mad pitch, the bats filled the air, darting like bullets, bumping against the party and each other in their frenzy. And wherever they struck one of the party, their sharp claws left long scratches from claws sharp as razors.

The cave was a nightmare.

Reed darted toward Morgan and grabbed his gun. "You damned fool," he shouted. "Do you want to suffocate us?"

"I wanted to kill those things," Morgan answered sullenly.

"Don't you know that you would fill this place with powder fumes?"

Reed stuck Morgan's weapon into his belt and shouted at Gore. "Get all the gear and let's get moving," he said. "We've got to find a way out in a hurry—if we are to get out at all."

The party fought its way forward, lugging the little remaining camp

equipment and trying to fight off the maddened bats. Thus they trudged on through the darkness of the cave. Reed walked ahead with the flashlamp shining before him.

Back of them they could hear the lapping of the water of the river as it pursued them deeper and deeper into the underground cavern, hungry to overtake them and drown them.

Then the last ray of the lamp died!

In utter darkness the little party clung together, hopeless. Still, around them, the air was filled with the little red eyes that shone in the black of the cavern, and still, around them, the musty forms of the vampires floated in the dank and stuffy air. Back of them, the sound of the onrushing water echoed loudly.

It was Pedro who spoke.

"My eyes may be playing me tricks, but I think I see light. Yonder, Señor."

Reed felt the Spaniard guide his arm toward the left.

"It looks like it," he answered hopefully. "Maybe we can get to it without falling into a pit. We'll try, anyway."

Reed lined the party up one behind the other and himself took the lead. In single file they followed while he measured each step in the darkness, lest they step off into some unseen well.

"IT'S light, all right," he said. "Looks like a star."

"You can see stars in the daytime when all the light is excluded from around you," Professor Slater observed thoughtfully. "As for instance, when you're in a deep well."

After a long interval of slow progress through the cave, they knew the light was growing larger. Then they felt a draft of fresh air and the interior of the cave began

to take on a grayish appearance as more light seeped into it.

Suddenly Reed emerged, but his gladness was quickly dispelled.

He was standing on a narrow ledge of rock, scarcely a foot wide. Underneath him it was fifty feet to the floor of the jungle, although the tops of the highest trees were higher than his head. The face of the cliff upon which the opening of the cave emerged was sheer and perpendicular. It offered no footing upon which a man could climb down. Indeed, it would have been difficult for even the most agile monkey to have made an escape.

BEHIND him, the professor exclaimed, "Thank God, we're free again."

"Free?" Reed asked. "I think we're in more danger than we were before."

The rest of the party crowded behind him, awed by the trap that held them.

"How are we going to get down?" the girl asked.

"It looks like we don't get down," Morgan answered. "But maybe the ingenious Mr. Reed can show us a way."

Reed was studying the nearest tree and ignored the remark. The nearest limb of the tree was a full ten feet from the precipice on which they stood. It branched out from about halfway up the trunk of the giant tree, and was so small and fragile that even the gentle breeze that assailed it rocked it in the wind.

Reed studied the tree and the distance to the ground. That limb offered them their only hope. But that hope was slim, slim and weak as the limb itself. Underneath it was only death, and death awaited them for any other effort to get down.

"Maybe I can find a way," Reed

said. "At least it is the only chance. You people stand aside and give me a little running space."

"No," the professor said. "That's foolish."

But Reed had already gone back a dozen or more paces into the cave.

Then with his eyes glued to the limb, he sprinted forward. His feet sped him out the mouth of the cave. On the very lip of the precipice he heaved himself into the air, his hands outstretched toward the spindly tree limb. Underneath him it was fifty feet to the ground.

Like some expert aerialist he sailed through the air while back of him the group stood breathless. The girl screamed.

Reed's one hand caught a fragile tip of limb, the other missed its hold. His body dropped downward, but caught short in its plunge by his grasp of the limb. The willowy branch gave under his weight and bowed downward. Reed clutched at it with his other hand while his feet dangled helplessly.

HIS second hand caught the limb and he could get a better grasp with his first.

Then the limb cracked. It split off the trunk with a tearing sound that brought shouts from the others.

Downward plunged Reed's body, but the arc of his fall brought him sharply against the trunk of the tree. He released the useless branch and entwined his arms around the trunk.

Resting a moment to get his breath, Reed then began a slow painful ascent of the tree.

The climb was difficult. Parasites, orchids and other leafy things barred his way, and they were all filled with insects that resented the disturbance of their homes by attacking him with sharp and painful stings.

The climb was long and agonizing, but finally he reached the point

he had been aiming for from the beginning. Near the top of the tree, higher than the ledge upon which they had been marooned, he had seen the upper end of a dead vine which hung ropelike toward the ground.

REACHING the vine, he tested it by hanging his weight on it. He found it was secure, then started his downward climb, grasping the vine and keeping it near the trunk of the tree as he descended.

Again reaching the point level with the precipice, he grasped the vine tightly and swung out toward the cave mouth. The natural swing carried him across the intervening space and Pedro caught his foot as he landed, bringing him to a safe footing.

Reed motioned to Gore. "You swing over to the tree," he said, "and catch us as I swing the girl over. Then you help her down. The rest of them will have to climb down the tree by themselves."

Morgan looked at the slender vine and complained. "I'm not going to swing across to that tree on that thing. It might break."

"Good," Gore answered. "You can stay here and starve, or be eaten by bats. This is their main entrance to the cave."

Gore grabbed the vine and swung across to the trunk of the tree easily, finding himself a secure crotch running off the trunk which would facilitate his security. Then he swung back.

"Okay," he said. "Let's go."

Reed joined him and the two swung across, where Gore stayed and Reed swung back to bring the vine to the second person.

"Now, Miss Slater, if you don't mind being too much of a burden to me—" Then without another word he caught her up in his arms,

held her with one hand around her waist and swung her across the fifty-foot gap to the tree, where Gore caught them both.

One by one, Reed brought the members across, and one by one, they got down the tree, Pedro coming last and making several trips with their very little remaining gear.

"I hope that's the end of that," the professor said. "Perhaps this time we're really free of that place."

While the party was recovering from its trying experience Pedro had been looking around. He came back just as the professor finished speaking.

"Free?" he repeated. "I've got a very good idea that we're not quite free yet."

The party looked at the Spaniard who was lighting one of his eternal cigarettes.

"If you will look closely through that clump of brush to the left," he said, "and again before you and to the right, you will see what appears to me to be some kind of stockade. I don't want to discourage you, but—"

He shrugged his shoulders suggestively.

"Then we're prisoners?" the girl asked.

Pedro shrugged his expressive shoulders.

CHAPTER VI

Prisoners

LED by Reed, the party examined the enclosure. It was built of upright bamboo poles held together with *bejuco* thongs. The bottoms of the poles were buried in the ground and the corral-like structure was more than ten feet high.

"Here's a gate," Reed observed as

he stopped near one end of the enclosure.

Reed and Gore lent a hand with their machetes and cut the thongs that allowed a small portion of the fence to be opened.

As the party filed out they came to a sudden stop! They were in the center of a bunch of thatched huts! In the middle of an Indian temporary village.

The party stopped, spellbound with surprise. It was too late to retreat, nor were they of a mind to reënter the cave.

BUT their surprise was no less than that of the people who occupied the village, milling about in groups and resting under the thatched shelters.

"Jivaros," Gore said excitedly. "The bunch we were fighting. We've walked square into a nest of 'em."

The girl shrank back near Reed, who stood watching the actions of the Indians.

After the first start of surprise, the Indians congregated in a knot before them. The two parties stood facing each other, the six whites facing fully half a hundred seminaked Indians, their black hair hanging down their backs and tufts of red and yellow *lumbiqui* feathers in the lobes of their ears.

But there was another thing about them that struck the attention of the three men who knew the customs of the Indians.

The women were of the brownish color of the race, but the men were black from head to foot! Reed had been too busy during the recent attack to note the significance of this.

Pedro lit a cigarette and made an observation. "The men have stained themselves with *huïto* dye. It's their war paint; they didn't put it on. We've walked into a war!"

The professor peered at the na-

tives, who were still staring back at the party, as yet still amazed by their emergence from the cave of the bats. "This is a stroke of luck," he said. "Perhaps they will let us observe their practice of shrinking human heads. I would be fortunate if I were lucky enough to be the first white man who could give an authentic report on the process."

"White heads are their most prized and rare trophies," Pedro observed casually. "One would have difficulty reporting the shrinking of his own head."

Reed faced the Indians, who stood before the party, their black teeth filed to points and their greedy eyes half frightened, half belligerent, watching the party warily.

"There's only one way to do," he said. "Bluff it through. Don't any of you show fear. I'm going to talk to them in the Jivaro dialect. Keep your hands on your guns, but don't a one of you fire until after I have. We've got to avoid another fight, or they'll kill us all. They're afraid of us now."

Then Reed stepped forward, his hand held outward but with his revolver swung so that it would be within instant reach should the Indians try any treachery.

OUT of the group one of the Indians came, obviously their chief. He was dressed in only a loin cloth, as were the other men, but his pierced ear lobes held gaudier feathers, and his waist was encircled with more belts of human hair, clipped from human heads after the ceremony of the Festival of Rejoicing, after which time the heads themselves lose their value, but the hair is clipped and kept.

Reed addressed him and the chief answered warily. Then Reed made a long speech, after which he dug into one of the few remaining kits

of their gear and presented the chief with a string of their colored trade beads. The chief in turn spoke a sharp order to the group behind him and three women came forward bearing earthen jars of a liquid substance, white and thick, and resembling buttermilk.

Reed accepted one of the jugs and placed it to his lips, tasting it, then he passed it to Gore and Pedro, who did likewise.

HE handed the jar to Professor Slater.

"This is *giamanchi*," he explained, "their ceremonial drink. Touch it to your lips at least, or they will be offended."

The professor tasted the liquid, then drank a part of it with considerable satisfaction. "Not bad," he opined.

The others followed suit, Morgan only after Reed's stern insistence.

"They've decided to be friendly?" the professor asked.

"No—just going through the formalities of acting friendly," Reed answered. "None of the Jivaro tribes can be trusted."

"What are they doing here?"

"The chief says that they have suffered ill fortune from the magic of their enemies, the Rajacs, another tribe of Jivaros who live about one day's march from here. They are going to break the magic of their enemies, then return to their home."

"Good," the professor exclaimed. "We will go with them."

"I think we would do that whether we wanted to or not," Reed answered. "We're virtually prisoners. The only way to act is to appear not to know the fact, but to be continually on our guard. These people are a tribe of the Mopois—one of the lost tribes for which you were looking!"

Reed returned the *giamanchi* jug

to the Indian women, then addressed the chief.

"You have seen how great is our magic," he said in the Jivaro tongue. "We are willing to be friends of the Mopois. We shall lend our magic to our friends to help them against their enemies, the Rajacs. Our medicine man"—indicating the professor—"shall call down the sun and point the magic eye at your enemies."

The chief thanked him with great ceremony. Then the long confab was just an exchange of elaborate lies, a great game of bluff that would go to the side which could outlast the other.

No mention nor explanation of the attack was made by the chief.

"We have heard of your great people, the Mopois," Reed said with many gestures, "and we wish to visit them in friendship."

"We will help them destroy their enemies and then accompany them to Mopoi to celebrate the Festival of Rejoicing."

The chief with his childlike mind immediately explained that the road to the home of the Rajacs was easy, but the return trip to Mopoi was dangerous, exceedingly so. In fact, he was sure that the whites would never be able to make it, so fever-laden and dangerous was the country.

HE doesn't relish the idea of our going back home with him," Reed explained to the professor. "I thought we would have that trouble."

"Perhaps I can convince them," Slater said. "We don't mean them any harm."

Pedro spoke. "You might not have noticed it," he said to Reed, "but all their shelters are decorated with those little sprigs of green berries. I think this the period that immediately precedes the sacrifice

to *Yacu-mamam*, the snake-god. I have an idea they do not care to have us witness that."

"That's just the thing I want to witness," the professor exclaimed.

"Your head might be there," Pedro observed.

The ceremony of friendship lasted for the better part of an hour. Reed passed out his trinkets with elaborate speeches, and the Indians received them as long-windedly, amid much drinking of *giamanchi*.

FINALLY the whites prepared shelters for themselves, using the labor of the Indians that the chief furnished them. Another hold-up occurred when the chief insisted that they be sheltered in the middle of their own village.

"That would not be right," Reed explained elaborately. "You are a mighty race of warriors, and we are not worthy to be sheltered among you. And, besides, we are in the enemy country. If we were near you we might mistake one of your warriors for the enemy and shoot him with our guns. You must understand that we are very watchful, and if we saw a warrior near our shelter we would shoot—and we never miss. Therefore, you will tell your men to keep a long way from us at night. Thus we will not be grieved by shooting him by mistake."

When dusk came the party ate food furnished by the chief. But they did not enjoy their dinner. The air was one of unrest. The Indians were visibly excited under their more or less calm exteriors, and an undercurrent of trouble was plainly felt by them all.

"We're going to set watches tonight," Reed announced. "And I don't want you to relax your vigilance for a moment. This bunch is in a religious frenzy, and they'll get

our heads at the first chance. One slipup and we're finished."

"Whatever it is—it's going to be plenty bad for us," Gore answered. "They've been looking covetously at our heads ever since we've been here."

"It is lucky for us that they're so cowardly," Pedro observed. "As long as there's any chance of us killing the first man that attacks us they won't do anything openly. Not one of them's willing to lay down his own life for the tribe. Otherwise, they'd overwhelm us immediately. But like it is, they'll wait for a chance to do it without risk."

Reed set the watches and the party tried to sleep. But all through the night the campfires of the Indians blazed and the members of the tribe could be seen stirring about restlessly.

Morgan took the watch just before daylight, relieving Reed, who took the worst watch, figuring it would be best to give Morgan the shortest one just before sunrise.

Exhausted by the previous day's effort, he fell into a fitful sleep. It seemed hardly five minutes before he was awakened again. Pedro was shaking him.

"Señor," the Spaniard said, "we are done for. See!"

Reed jumped up from the ground quickly—and his heart sank within him. The shelter beside his was empty. The professor, Morgan, Gore and the girl were gone!

THEIR packs of gear were gone. Their rifles were gone! The only weapons left them were the machetes and pistols worn by Pedro and Reed. Every other movable thing had disappeared.

The chief of the Indians, together with a group of his warriors, were approaching their shelters.

"There's only one answer," Reed

said bitterly. "Morgan went to sleep and the Indians have captured them. I wonder why they didn't take us, too?"

"I think they're afraid of us," Pedro observed. "They have recognized the fact that we're more at home in the jungle than the others, except Gore. They probably caught him napping."

Reed's first impulse was to draw his gun and put a bullet through the chief, but Pedro's hand restrained him.

"It would do no good," Reed admitted. "They'd get us in the long run. We'd better try to outwit them. They know where the others are and it's up to us to find out from them. We can't do it by shooting them."

They recognized the wisdom of this and met the chief's ceremony with one equally deceptive.

"Your friends have decided to go on without you," the chief said. "My men saw them pack their gear during the night and depart." There was a cynical smile on his face.

"I EXPECTED them to do that," Reed said, controlling his desire to kill the man. "They were eager to be on their way. But we shall stay with you and attack your enemies with you. It is of little importance that the other whites have left us. Perhaps your men will bring us some breakfast?"

The chief gave the order and they ate.

Somewhere in the jungle was the rest of the party, facing a fate unknown to all of them. Reed's mind continually reverted to the girl, and he cursed Morgan from the depths of his soul.

He could only guess what was in store for Marcel Slater.

For the first time, Pedro's thoughts seemed to destroy his ap-

petite. He glanced from time to time at the war party a few yards away, watching them preparing to move camp.

CHAPTER VII

War

THE PARTY got under way quickly, marching in single file around the point of the hill to the river, where they took to canoes that had been concealed by being sunk half-loaded with stones. Reed was sure the Indian party was slightly smaller than before.

Reed and Pedro took positions in the chief's canoe that led the file a quarter of a mile long. Seated back to back so they could protect themselves at every moment, they settled down to the long trip.

"Those drums again last night," Pedro said. "It must be that several tribes are active. I have an idea that they are all gathering at Mopoi for the yearly sacrifice to *Yacu-mamam*. I gathered while I was there that the feast would be happening soon. But I was too busily engaged in being a prisoner to get much information."

Pedro had rarely spoken of the captivity from which he had just escaped when the party had picked him up back in Iquitos, and Reed had known better than to ask him questions, but had hoped that in due time the story would come out piecemeal. But for some reason best known to himself, Pedro had kept his silence.

Reed knew a little about the Jivaro religion, a few scattered things he had learned in his wanderings in the jungle, but the natives were distrustful of the whites even when they professed friendship, and they were secretive about this great ceremony.

"At least," Reed said speculatively, "they won't be warring on each other while the ceremony is going on. I've heard that they declare a yearly truce at that time."

"So," Pedro answered, "but they usually prepare for it by becoming very active just beforehand. Thus they take advantage of the last minute's opportunity to gather in trophies with which to propitiate the Big Snake. I suspect that accounts for the disappearance of the others of our party."

Reed looked at him questioningly.

PEDRO rolled a cigarette. "Snakes won't touch dead food," he said significantly.

When the sun was halfway past its zenith the party drew up beside a sandy spit of beach while two canoes of the warriors advanced to a point across the river and disappeared into a dense growth that lined the bank at that point.

The chief addressed the two white men. "Our warriors will be back quickly with word of our enemies. We will camp here and await a sign from *Yacu-mamam*."

As they stood on the sand talking, a canoe came up containing a medicine man and three warriors, who paddled for him. Dressed in outlandish garb, the man had the canoe loaded with a mass of peculiar paraphernalia, prominent in which was a number of conical red pots of burned clay.

One of the old charlatan's warriors left the canoe with his blowgun, a long black rod six feet in length and two inches in diameter at its larger end. Dipping a six-inch dart into a tube made by a small section of bamboo and bringing it out smeared at its pointed end with a sticky substance resembling chocolate syrup, the man disappeared into the woods.

He returned in less than ten minutes with a large bird which must have measured six feet from the beak to its feet. It was bright blue.

He threw the bird at the feet of the old medicine man, who immediately attacked it with a sharpened bamboo knife and laid it open. The man mumbled an unintelligible jargon of Jivaro words that the two whites could not understand, at the same time drinking copiously from a pot of *giamanchi*, which was slightly alcoholic.

The old man studied the layout of the exposed entrails of the bird until the mild liquor and the jargon, with which he worked himself to a frenzy, had had their effect.

He fell over on the ground, voluble in his gibberish, while the group of warriors crowded around at a respectful distance. Only the chief sat beside him, intent on the man's words.

Finally the ceremony was over and there was great rejoicing among the warriors, for the medicine man had assured them that *Yacu-mamam* had promised them his protection.

Reed stepped up to the chief. "Have your medicine man ask your god where the rest of our party is," he said.

THE chief looked at him suspiciously for a moment, then turned to his medicine man and repeated the question. The old fakir repeated his motions, then answered: "*Yacu-mamam* says that the *Christianos* have gone to visit him, and that he will receive them with honor."

The chief flashed a look of warning at the medicine man.

"That old punk is trying to display a sense of humor," Reed said to Pedro. "That drink went to his head."

"Which," Pedro said meditatively,

"I think the chief will have because of his indiscretion. But I think we know now where our friends are headed—although not alone."

But this time the two boatloads of scouts had come from their trip up the tributary stream which the clump of bushes had hidden.

They talked privately with the chief for a few excited moments, then the whole party reëmbarked in their canoes and started up the smaller stream. After an hour's rowing they again beached their canoes and hid them in the undergrowth.

THE party set out afoot, Reed and Pedro near the chief who would not let them out of his sight.

It became a game of bluff with them all. With all the ceremonial politeness of which the native makes much, and equally as much from the two whites, they were still at a deadlock. It was apparent that if they were off their guard for one moment the blacks would have them disarmed and killed, yet they were too cowardly to try it as long as it was certain that the magic that the whites carried at their belts would kill a few of them first. They waited their opportunity, knowing that eventually the whites would become exhausted and have to sleep.

As they marched through what to the whites was an invisible trail, Reed asked Pedro:

"Do you think you could lead us to this Mopoi from here? If that's where they've taken the others we'd better try to get away from this bunch and go help them—if it's not too late."

"I think I could get us there," Pedro replied. "Although I don't know whether it will be in time or not. Evidently it is just about time for the ceremonies. We'd have to beat these warriors there—and they

know the country. But we can try."

Presently the chief halted and addressed the two whites. "It will be better for you to stay here," he said at great length and with much explanation which neither of them believed. "We would not have you run the risk of fighting with our enemies. My brothers will stay with you."

"That would never do," Reed answered. "We must all fight them together, for otherwise would you not think we were cowards?"

He took his gun from his belt and twirled the cylinder. "Our magic shall be of help to you."

This argument went on for quite a while before the chief realized that the men intended accompanying them.

Pedro said: "He thinks we'll warn them."

"There's nothing we can do to stop the attack," Reed said, "so I want to be in on it. They might take some prisoners, and we might be able to find out something from them."

"If we find a chance to make a getaway here, we'd better take it," Pedro advised. "Once these savages smell blood we might not be able to keep them off us much longer."

SO, despite the protests of the chief, Reed and Pedro accompanied them.

The war party got within a few yards of a small clearing before they were discovered, then rushed.

Shouts went up from both parties. The little clearing of the enemy suddenly became filled with Indians, distinguished from the attackers by not being daubed with the black war paint.

Caught unprepared, the defenders rushed for their spears and knives in their shelters, chased by the shouting Mopois.

The forest became a bedlam of shouts and screams as spears and knives cut down the defending warriors who were badly prepared to ward off the attack.

Even women who resisted them were slain.

Reed and Pedro stood on the edge taking no part in the fray. Yet they knew they were expected to do something. The chief would be watching them, and any effort at escape would bring a spear or a blowgun dart unerringly at them. There was little they could do.

"We'd better act interested," Pedro said.

IN the middle of the compound two warriors had knocked a woman down with a spear thrust. The wound had not killed her and she fought valiantly as the two men tried to amputate her head with a dull wooden knife even as she fought them.

Pedro pulled his gun and leveled it.

Then he fired. The woman keeled over dead.

"I was just putting her out of her agony," he said to Reed, "and at the same time that ought to show our good intentions."

Reed drew his gun. "This is a hell of a way to be a Good Samaritan, but you've hit on an idea. Let's keep it up."

And there in the late afternoon, the two of them engaged in as strange a battle as it was ever given a white man to join. Busily engaged as they seemed, merciless as they appeared, they used their guns to the satisfaction of their erstwhile captors, justifying themselves fully in the knowledge that they were not taking the life of a man who was not already doomed, and knowing that they were doing the merciful thing in killing the wounded

and sparing them the torture of having their heads severed while they were yet alive.

The foray was typical of such head-hunters' raids, and lasted only a short while.

The two whites stood aside while the attackers gathered heads, tying them together by twos, knotting the ends of the hair on the heads and swinging them over their shoulders, for these were the gruesome trophies of their victory.

The women who offered no resistance were taken along as the party left, to be adopted into the tribe of the victors and to raise more sons for the warriors who had captured them. Children came along with their mothers, to grow up with the sons and daughters of the killers of their fathers.

"The vilest kind of warfare I've ever witnessed," Reed swore under his breath.

"But there's nothing we can do except witness it," Pedro returned. "We're trying to save our own heads and those of the rest of the party. It's better this way."

The group of warriors returned toward their boats, setting up a noise that was calculated to convince the escaped members of the ravaged village that pursuit was dangerous, owing to their numbers, if noise was the indication.

Reaching their canoes, they went down the tributary stream to the point where the party had left its women and the medicine man.

THE heads, ghastly trophies of their victory, were laid out on the beach for all to see.

"You have done well," the chief said to Reed and Pedro. "You have helped with your magic to destroy those who had put a curse on us."

"We always destroy our enemies," Reed answered. "Whoever they are;

"you haven't seen all our magic yet."

"And I don't think we've seen all theirs," Pedro said in English.

CHAPTER VIII

Heads!

IT WAS nearing sundown when the party settled on the beach to begin the most gruesome task of their victory, the preparation of the heads.

"I wish there was some way to avoid this," Reed said uncomfortably.

"They'll be watching us like hawks now," Pedro reminded him. "What could be a greater final touch to their victory than to add two *Christiano* heads to the trophies for their Festival of Rejoicing?"

Pedro had not spoken wrongly, for the men had smelled blood and, as they milled about the beach, there were many looks in their direction that were easy to interpret. Things were reaching a point where they could not go on much longer as they had been going.

Back to back, so that one man could watch in one direction and the other in the opposite, Reed and Pedro sat about to observe the ceremonies.

The chief put out sentries to guard against surprise attack, careful that no retaliating raid should interrupt them.

Lying face up on the sand, a dozen of the gruesome trophies stared sightlessly at the sky. Behind each head sat the warrior who had taken it from his enemy. Then, while another group built a roaring fire, the medicine man passed down the line of trophy gatherers and inserted a bit of tobacco juice into the nose of each in order, as his chant assured them it would do, that their enemies could not put a curse on them for their success.

Then each of the warriors went into a kind of fit, induced by the tobacco into the tender membrane of his nose and by the excitement which amounts to a hysteria that is induced by the ceremony itself.

As this calmed down the warriors each went to work on his trophy, parting the hair from the crown of the head down the back to the neck, and cutting the skin on this line. Then with quick jerks they had the skin peeled off the skulls, leaving them bare except for eyes and teeth.

They placed the skulls on the sharp end of their *chonta* wood lances and stuck the lances upright in the sand, a row of grinning raw skulls, lidless eyes staring vacantly at the setting sun.

Then the medicine man and drummers took charge again and amid the din of a battle song the warriors danced and tossed their other spears over the skulls to be caught by other warriors in the line across from them.

When this ceremony had exhausted them they returned to the work of shrinking the skulls.

"Here's the thing that a white man has never seen," Pedro remarked. "And though I've seen many things in this jungle, I could get along without seeing this."

BUT there was nothing for them to do but witness the ceremony. There were too many warriors around them who would enjoy the opportunity to add their skulls to those grinning ones that decorated their lances. And as sure as they did not escape, that was what their heads were destined for.

Reed had seen the famous shrunk-en heads of the Jivaros, but neither he nor anybody else, to his knowledge, had ever seen the operation except one white man, an adventurer like himself, a fellow named Upde-

Graff, who had explored this neighborhood. Reed wondered if this civilized and college educated man had been able to witness the ceremony without the sickening sensation he was experiencing.

But it was the lesser of two evils and he made the best of it. It was better to see the heads cured than to furnish the head to be cured.

The warriors seated themselves and took the skin of the heads which they had removed from the skulls. Then with bamboo needles and palm leaf fibers they sewed up the cut from the back of the neck to the crown.

THEN they closed the lips with skewers and string, and closed the eyeholes and filled the nostrils with fiber, making the skin of the head capable of holding the hot sand which they were to use in pro-fusion.

They filled these heads with sand until they were stuffed to their natural size again, and shaped them until they were in natural appearance. Thus when they were shrunk they would have their natural contour.

Other members of the tribe had brought many containers of water to the fire, and the medicine man now came forward with those cone-shaped red clay pots Reed had seen in his canoe earlier in the day.

These were the special ceremonial pots, made by the medicine man with much ado and secrecy, lest the charm of his magic fail. There was a pot for each head, and each pot was too holy to be used for more than one head or even to be used again after its one job.

The heads were placed in the pots amid much chanting, and the pots filled with water. Their bottoms tapering to a point, they were propped up with stones and fire

applied to all sides of them. The fires were tended carefully until the water had reached the boiling point. Then the fires were pulled, not allowing the water to start its boiling.

"For the water to boil would loosen the hair on the heads," the chief explained to Reed and Pedro. "And what is a head without hair?"

Reed felt not in the humor to answer this. It was dark and he was tired, yet he knew that his hours were numbered unless he found a way of escape.

The men were taking the heads out of the pots now, and a remarkable change had come over them. They had shrunk to about a third their natural size.

The medicine man collected the pots and threw them to the bottom of the river, that they might never be used again.

More sand had been heated, and the warriors emptied the wet sand from the hollow heads and filled them with the dry, hot sand. Then, seated around the fires into which many slick stones had been placed, they started a process of ironing the grease out of the heads, picking the hot stones out of the fire with palm leaves, just as a woman might use a cloth pad on a flatiron. The heat of the stones and the hot sand inside the skulls drove the grease out of the pores of the skin and it was wiped away.

THIS long job continued throughout the night with dancing and much drinking of *giamanchi*.

Slowly this repetition of hot sand and ironing the grease out shrank the heads until they were dry and of the texture of leather and could be shrunk no more. They were left gruesome miniatures of their former selves, to be used for a celebration for a day, then thrown to the chil-

dren for toys until they were lost in the depths of the jungle or the river.

It was nearing dawn when the head hunters completed their tasks of drying the heads and made ready to depart.

Reed and Pedro strolled about the camp, alert despite their weariness. In the light of the camp fires the savages watched them with greedy eyes, intent that they should not escape.

PEDRO rolled a cigarette, then spoke to Reed in English.

"Do you recognize the kind of monkeys that are chattering over our heads?" he asked calmly.

"They're just monkeys to me," Reed answered.

"They're *cotos*," Pedro said.

"Oh, the big-jawed babies?"

"Yes. I've known a wounded *coto* to snap at the barrel of a shotgun and clamp it flat in his jaws. They're more vicious than a tiger."

"I don't see what you're getting at," Reed said.

"Just this, Señor. Suppose that, say, four of those monkeys fell wounded into this crowd? What do you think the Indians would do? They fear the *coto* when he's wounded worse than anything I can think of in a reasonable length of time."

Reed looked up into the trees hopefully. In the reflected light of the campfire he saw an occasional dark form moving from limb to limb high in the trees, the monkeys attracted by the lights.

"Not a bad idea," Reed agreed. "At least it won't get us in any worse shape than we're in."

"I would suggest," Pedro said, "that first we shoot the chief. I would be delighted to perform that service, just as a favor to the jungle. Then if we can wound a few of those animals they will fall into the

crowd. It is my opinion that there'll be quite a number of Indians with a sudden desire to swim. And they can't get back and become reorganized without their chief until such time as will afford us a chance to be well up the river."

"Here she goes," Reed said, spotting a monkey. "When I fire at the first monkey you let the chief have a dose—and any of his worthies that might make for us. Ready?"

Holding his cigarette in his left hand, Pedro surveyed the camp of savages as calmly as though they were a group of his fellow townsmen on a feast day. His hand rested in his belt, a few inches from the butt of his gun.

"Yes," he answered. "And be sure not to kill the monkeys. Dead, they'll do us little good. Shoot theirs hips, so they can't run away."

Reed waited until three of the ugly animals whose lower jaws constituted half of their faces were in his sight. Then with a sudden motion he pulled his weapon and fired three times.

The jungle echoed with the reverberation of gunfire. Pedro's weapon took up the roar and the chief of the Mopois keeled over in the sand, his face venomous.

A warrior started to raise a lance and Pedro triggered his gun again. The Indian fell clutching at his vitals. His fellows set up a roar.

THREE black forms hit the ground threshing as the monkeys fell from the trees, wounded until their pain maddened them. They threshed about, stunned for a moment, then set up a yowling that awakened the jungle night with its horror.

The vicious animals, with eyes that blazed fury in the light of the campfires, went wild. Seeing the milling forms of the surprised Indians, they set about the attack,

hopping, limping and darting about in a frenzy that bordered on madness.

The bite of a *coto* is stronger than that of a South American tiger, and the havoc that the jaws of the wounded animals wrought was great. One snap laid open the bowels of an Indian, another ripped the throat out of a warrior.

UTTER panic, deadly fear stampeded the Indians. A dozen of their number had been dragged down by the frenzied animals. Reed and Pedro stood apart, their weapons trained and barking, blowing one warrior after another into kingdom come.

Their chief dead, no one to direct them, they made for the river, dived in in herds like beavers and swam as far underwater as was possible. Quickly the whole circle lit by the campfire was empty of Indians.

"Now for the land path," Pedro said. "It was along this way that I came on my return."

"You didn't tell me we were so near the trail," Reed said.

"No, Señor," Pedro answered. "So there would be no danger of your divulging it to anybody. Some Indians have ways—you understand."

Reed said no more.

Together the two made their way through the jungle, but not until Pedro had appropriated two blowguns and a supply of weapons and poisons.

"We cannot afford to use our guns after this," he explained. "The sound will give us away. And besides, we can get game much more surely with these."

Which was a truth Reed admitted. Too often he had seen the Indians kill every monkey in a tree, with the blowguns, without the animals ever knowing that an enemy was near, whereas one shot with a gun

would frighten everything within earshot of it.

"It is not far," Pedro said. "But we are going to the home of these people we have just left. We have to find our friends and get away if possible before they return to their city. Else—" He shrugged his shoulders significantly.

It was characteristic of both men that they could have taken one of the Indians' canoes and have out-traced them down the river, perhaps to safety, but neither thought of that. Gore and Professor Slater and the girl had been spirited away to Mopoi, if the old medicine man's hint had been right. And Morgan, too. Even as much trouble as he had been to them there was no thought in their minds of abandoning him.

Thus the two, armed with only blowguns, pistols and dulled machetes, set out to live off the jungle and enter the forbidden town of the men whose chief they had just killed.

CHAPTER IX

Mopoi

NIGHT and day for a week, footsore and weary, ragged and unkempt, Reed and the Equadorian trudged on through trails that at times were so dim as to be hardly visible to even the Spaniard whose sight far surpassed that of the white man.

Much of the time they were hungry, all of the time they were bitten by insects. And all of the time Reed was worried—more than worried. For during the long days of the trek and the long nights of their alternate vigil, at times when they slept in trees to keep from being discovered by any passing natives on the same trail, during all

these times the picture of the girl kept recurring to him. He tried to drive it from his mind, he reminded himself with the curse that the girl was not for him, that she was going to marry Morgan. Still the picture returned and would not depart from him.

* * * * *

THEN they came at last to Mopoi. It was just at sunset when Pedro pointed to a thin column of smoke.

"We have arrived," he said, as though it were nothing unusual. "But I think we need rest before we attack!" Spoken simply and matter-of-factly, but it was an illustration of the man's fearlessness. None of the captives were even friends of his, with the exception of Gore, whom he had known around the trading posts. They had treated him as many whites are inclined to treat a Spaniard, but his sense of humor and his poise had kept him from showing signs of being conscious of their attitude.

And now, disinterested, having no concern for their welfare, he was ready to attack a village with his friend Reed, simply because Reed thought it his duty to try to rescue the party.

That night they both slept high in the branches of a tall tree, safely hidden in the foliage. This they did after Pedro had laid a plan.

"There are *huito* nuts here. We had better stain ourselves black. Then tomorrow we can mingle with the villagers with some chance of not being recognized."

They found the large walnuts and scraped the outer shell on rough palm roots, rubbing the fleshy pulp on their bodies from head to foot. The juice stains are even stronger than the North American walnut and pecan.

Thus it was that when the monkeys set up their first jabbering in

the early morning they came down from their trees—both black as the warriors of the Mopois themselves.

They circled the village until they came to a river on its far side, the one down which Pedro had floated in his canoe and sank it in a hiding place that would be easy of access. Then they divested themselves of the ragged remains of their clothes, donned loin cloths stolen from their captors and hid their pistols.

Clad thus they boldly made their way into the village.

Mopoi was a strange place, like no other village that Reed had ever seen among the Indians. Instead of the thatched bamboo shelters the houses were of stone, hewn from the side of the mountain, red sandstone, trimmed with bits of other colors.

It had streets, and they were laid out regularly, due east and west and north and south as far as he could judge.

"That's their temple over there," Pedro said, pointing to a building much larger than the others. "That's where *Yacu-mamam* is held and is worshiped. Señor, he is an anaconda worthy of being a god."

"So they really have a snake they worship?" Reed asked.

"Si, and he's fifty feet long if he is an inch. I suspect that he was an old serpent when the Andes were no bigger than foothills."

THE streets were nearly deserted, and the few people who were about were headed for the temple.

"It looks like the whole town must be in old Yacu's headquarters," Reed observed.

"Yes," Pedro said absently. "But you *spare* here a moment, Señor. I believe the gods are with us."

Reed watched him as the Spaniard suddenly went forward rapidly and caught up with a woman who was headed for the temple. Waiting as

Pedro had directed, he was surprised to see the man address the woman who followed him at a distance to the shelter of a house, where they stayed for some minutes. When they emerged the woman went on toward the temple while Pedro rejoined Reed. His face had lost its usual stoic expression.

"I have found out everything we need to know," Pedro said. "Which shows that women are sometimes the exception to the rule and sometimes have a spark of gratitude, although I must admit that it is usually found in women of the savages rather than those of civilization."

"WHAT is it?" Reed asked after managing to keep from interrupting Pedro's dissertation on the female of the species.

"This woman is of a tribe on the Napoi. She was captured in a raid and is now the wife of one of the Mopoi warriors. I happened to be instrumental in saving her from the ravages of a trader once, and so she is friendly and willing to return the favor.

"She tells me that today is the day of the sacrifice to *Yacu-mamam*, that the white woman is chosen to be the sacrifice."

Reed swore.

"It seems," Pedro continued in a monotone, "that they starve the snake for quite a while beforehand, a little disrespectful to their god, but a sure way to make him devour their sacrifice. Tonight he eats—and the plan is that the white girl shall be his—after the priests have finished with her."

"The priests?"

"You don't think they would pass up the opportunity to force themselves on her, do you?" Pedro asked. "You seem not to be familiar with religious matters."

"But the others? Gore and Professor Slater and Morgan?"

"They are here, too. A small group of the warrior party brought them some days ago directly from the point where we met up with them. They are all prisoners."

"We've got to do something right now," Reed said.

"The woman told me where they were kept. And with most of the people at the temple, we might get a chance at them. Let's go."

Reed followed the Spaniard to a hut back of the temple, which they reached without coming face to face with any of the natives who were concerned with getting to the temple. A heavy hardwood door effectively locked the building which Pedro pointed out as being the place where the prisoners were kept. Barred from the outside, there were no guards in front of it, the Indians no doubt being assured that the prisoners were safe enough to be left while they themselves were in the temple.

Reed and Pedro got the door open. In the dark of the stone room, for it was a building of only one room, they found the professor and Morgan and Gore. The three men were bound with *bejuco* and lay on the floor, their faces haggard and their clothes in rags.

MORGAN was muttering unintelligibly as Reed and Pedro immediately set about cutting their bonds.

Gore recognized them through their black war paint. "Never mind us," he said weakly. "Get the girl. They've got her in the temple and they're going to feed her to the snake. Morgan's gone nuts with fear. The old man's raving with fever and can't live much longer. Go get the girl!"

Reed lifted his partner to his feet

and Gore was able to stand after Reed had chafed his ankles until the circulation returned. Reed handed him the machete.

"You stay here," he ordered, "unless they discover who we are. If they do, you'd better make a break for the river. There's a canoe hidden under the second bamboo to the left of the landing. You'll find our guns in a clump of weeds at the foot of the tree."

"I'm going with you," Gore demurred.

"You can't," Reed argued. "You're not painted up, and they'd stop us all in a minute. We haven't sufficient weapons to try to hold off the whole mob. You go get the boat ready if you have to do something. Wait for us a short time, then if we don't come—shove off. And good luck."

"You look after Morgan here. He needs help."

MORGAN, the light of madness in his eyes, seemed unable to realize his bonds had been loosened. He lay muttering something about snakes, and heads. Reed gave a pitying look at him, felt the rapid pulse in the dying professor's wrist, then nodded to Pedro and they left the building. "Right squarely into the temple," Reed said. "It's all or nothing this time."

"I have an idea that might help," Pedro suggested modestly. "Although I don't know to just what use it can be put."

"Name it," Reed said.

"You know an anaconda goes into a kind of trance—takes a long sleep after he eats. You can go up and kick him and he won't wake up."

"So what?"

"If we could find a peccary or a tapir or something to feed that hungry serpent, he'd at least go to sleep and wouldn't wake up to eat the

white girl. We'd spoil their ceremony, but their god simply wouldn't wake up, medicine man or no medicine man."

"That's an idea," Reed answered. "But we haven't time to go into the woods for an animal to feed him."

"I think, hungry as he must be, he wouldn't object to eating a Mopoi warrior," Pedro observed. "A starving god might be able to stomach one of them."

With no weapons except their machetes, the two men boldly entered the front portal of the temple. Reed gasped in surprise.

THE walls of the temple were adorned with great pictures, done in the colored feathers of tropical birds, great brilliant tapestries of surpassing workmanship and beauty. The whole hall, at least a hundred feet long by fifty wide, was decorated with statues—golden statues, and they took one of two forms—a gigantic snake or a glowing sun with its rays of pure gold.

Many of the statues, most of them in fact, were studded with jewels, gems that shone brilliantly in the bright morning light that poured into the roofless structure. They saw the throne. A great dais was at the farther end of the hall, and on it were several Indians of the priesthood, clad in robes of orange and yellow birds' feathers. Behind them was a cage—with bars of gold!

And in the cage coiled a gigantic anaconda, the greatest of water snakes. Judging by its girth and the great mass of its coils, Pedro had not been wrong in saying it would have measured fifty feet in length. Reed had seen several whose length was at least forty.

From somewhere back of the dais the drums were going, the rhythmic drums they had heard so many times

in the jungle, the cold, poisonous rataplan of the ones in higher keys, and the ear jolting and nerve jarring thumpings of the larger ones. Their sound was joined by that of reed flutes.

THE temple, without seats, was filled with Indians, the men all decorated in the black stain of the *huito* nut, the women in short skirts of white reaching from the bare waist to the knees. They all knelt facing the altar.

As Reed and Pedro stood at the back of the crowd, one of the gaily colored curtains on the dais parted and two men came in, bringing an object that made Reed's eyes bulge.

It was a Christian cross—fully six feet high—and of gold!

And lashed to the cross was the form of the white girl.

The noise in the temple became hushed and Pedro, losing control of himself for once, unconsciously moved his two fingers rapidly from his forehead to his breasts. Reed sucked in his breath.

The air was heavy with a musty incense. The drums and flutes became muted to a soft and distant roll. The priest stepped forward on the dais. His voice started a chant, low and rhythmic. His gestures were magnificent, graceful and his voice was powerful, magnetic.

As his prayer become louder and louder, the roll of the drums increased and the Indians swayed in time to the weird cadence.

The priest turned and faced the caged reptile and his prayer was directed toward the serpent who observed him with glittering eyes.

Quickly the priest took a golden knife from his waist and slashed the bonds which held the girl. The two attendants grasped her arms and started dragging her toward the cage.

There came a sudden and stunning interruption. From the back of the room burst a shouting creature, ragged and wild-eyed, and brandishing a machete. As he ran he shouted.

His steps led him heedlessly through the crowd of worshipers and toward the dais, brandishing his knife.

Reed shouted to Pedro.

"Good God, it's Morgan."

THE two broke into a run down the aisle in the trail of the maddened man.

Morgan leaped to the dais, his machete slashing before him. The priest had just opened the door and his two attendants were shoving the girl toward its opening.

The figure of Morgan came between them and the insane man darted into the cage, the knife flying about his head like a butcher's cleaver.

There was a flash of the shiny black skin of the giant snake and the golden cage was filled with writhing and twisting coils, muscular constrictions that made of the cage only a blur of forms.

Pedro stopped dead in his tracks and the six-foot black tube he carried went to his lips. A slight puff and a tiny bamboo arrow caught the high priest squarely between his shoulder blades. Two more arrows followed and before Reed reached the dais the three Indians lay flat on their backs, to worship no more.

Reed caught the weakened girl in his arms and hastened her off the platform.

A quick look at the cage made him gasp in horror. Morgan, the demented, still had the knife in his hands, but he was powerless to use it now, for the great monster's body was coiled many times around his puny form, slowly crushing the life

from him. He was past all help.

"This way, Señor."

It was old Pedro who had made his way forward.

"I know a tunneled way to the boats—I used it before."

He lifted one of the feathered drapes and thrust Reed and the girl through, standing guard with his blowgun until they were safely in the passage. Then he slammed and barred a heavy hardwood door that was concealed behind the drape and followed them, barely in time to lock out a group of the warriors who had finally recovered from the shock of their surprise to a sufficient extent to give pursuit.

REED stopped short. "We came here for gold and jewels, Pedro, and we've got to get them."

Pedro stopped before an idol and groped behind its base, bringing out two large calabash gourds which he slung over his shoulder.

"A few souvenirs I collected the last time, but couldn't bring with me," he explained cryptically.

The underground passage was dark and musty, but led straight down to the river, emerging in a clump of vegetation which completely hid its mouth.

Reed shouted when he saw Gore not fifty feet from him, seated in the canoe he had raised. The form of the professor lay in the boat's bottom.

One rifle lay across his chest and another across Gore's lap.

"The guns they stole from us," Gore explained as the party got hastily into the craft. "I found the gear on my way here with the prof."

Pedro shoved the canoe off after he had dropped his heavy calabash into the boat.

"There's a rapids just below us, and a big whirlpool. If we get through that without sinking, we'll

be safe. The Indians won't dare try to go down with their boats through it. They always portage at that point." The boat shot forward under the propelling paddles of the three rubber men.

The girl, who had not said a word from the time she was rescued, sat silently in the boat, her father's head in her lap.

"He'll live after all," Gore said.

"How'd you come to be captured?" Reed asked.

"Morgan went to sleep," Gore said. "And those Indians were waiting. They had our weapons and had us gagged before we woke up. A party of six of them brought us directly here and didn't even bother to feed us. Where is Morgan?"

Reed glanced uncomfortably at the girl.

"Morgan won't be going back with us," he said. "He died magnificently—fighting to the last." Reed was certain that in the excitement the girl could not have learned that it was rank insanity that had driven the man into the cage with the reptile.

She would never know.

The canoe had been shooting downstream. Now it came to a point where the river narrowed and took a sharp turn. The water pounded a rocky cliff on one of its banks and shot around into a regular maelstrom.

The canoe dived into the vicious current and shot forward like a bullet while the group in the boat clung to its sides.

BEHIND them a group of Indians rounded the bend in canoes. They shouted and gesticulated, and long black blowguns went to their lips, but their arrows fell short.

The Indians pulled their canoes up short, fearful of descending into the deadly whirlpool. Gore turned

and waved them a gesture of defiance.

Finally they exerted an extra effort and dragged the canoe out of its dizzy whirl.

Now the canoe was shooting downstream at a terrific pace—squarely into the fleet of the canoes of the returning warriors!

The men clattered their paddles into the canoe bottom and picked up rifles. "Give it to 'em," Reed shouted. "They've got it coming!"

The speeding canoe became like a battleship. The blaze of guns roared in a salvo that deafened the river bank. "Attaboy! Give 'em more!" Reed cried again.

Guns cracked with frenzied speed and before them blacks toppled from canoes and disappeared under the surface of the water. Canoes overturned and dumped their occupants out, to fight for their lives.

The fleet of canoes, spread out to intercept them, was in trouble. Panic seized the Indians as their members screamed their death agonies.

Reed's canoe bore down on the fleet with guns roaring. Even the girl, after all she had gone through, became revived enough to pick up an extra rifle.

A TRANSFORMATION came over her. She gripped the gun and settled down grimly, clutching the stock of the weapon to her cheek and triggering it with a deadly rhythm.

The canoe sped right into the midst of its blockade, and its blazing guns brought it through. The panicky fleet of the Indians was left behind. The canoe, still propelled by the raging speed of the current, shot around a curve and to safety.

There was no danger of the disorganized forces of the Indians following them, their casualties had been far too great for them to again try to face the white man's magic.

They were a full day's journey from Mopoi before Pedro, lighting a cigarette, made an observation. He picked up one of the calabash gourds he had brought away with him, then poured a part of its contents into the palm of his hand.

It was filled with more of the jeweled trinkets which sparkled in the sun.

"These, Señors," he said, "will compensate us slightly for our loss of trade goods. I would judge there to be a good twenty pounds in the lot, wouldn't you? I suspect all of us could use them—what?"

THERE was a significant inflection in his last question. Reed looked quickly at the girl to see if she had caught it, but she was busily occupied with her father.

"How did you collect them?" Reed answered.

"The woman who helped us. She gathered them for me the last time I was here."

A great light dawned on Reed. "You never told us how you happened to find Mopoi in the first place."

"A man often gets attached to trifles," Pedro observed enigmatically. "And sometimes makes a fool of himself. In fact, usually does."

Reed paddled and looked at the form of the golden haired girl. She had curled up in the end of the canoe and was asleep.

"I wonder," he said speculatively,

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KILLING HIS

FIRST INDIAN AT THE
AGE OF 12 WHILE TRYING TO SAVE
HIS FATHER, HE BEGAN HIS CAREER
AND BECAME SUCH A GREAT INDIAN
FIGHTER THAT, LATER, HE WAS MADE
"CHIEF OF SCOUTS" TO GENERAL
SHERIDAN. ALTHOUGH KNOWN AS
A DEADLY ENEMY TO THE TREACH-
EROUS, MANY INDIAN TRIBES AD-
MIRERED HIS BRAVERY AND HIS
HONESTY AS A "SQUARE SHOOTER."

CODY BEING A GREAT HUNTER OF
BISON, FIRST GAINED THE NAME OF
"BUFFALO BILL" BY SUPPLYING
MEAT TO THE
ARMY AND
RAILROAD.



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"DEAD SPOT" A
HUNDRED MILES
IN CIRCUMFERENCE,
IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC
OCEAN, IN WHICH NOTHING
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ING TO FIRE AT ONE ON
DUTY WHOSE BACK
WAS TURNED.

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CHAPTER I

The Black Rider

A Complete

By JOHNSTON

SHROUDED by shadows cast by trees which cut off the bright light of the full moon, the horseman bent forward in his saddle to watch and listen.

The little grove in which he had stopped was but a short distance from the barracks building of the presidio.

He could see the troopers sprawling on benches around the door, and hear their talk.

He was alert and cautious, this rider whose form was draped and enveloped in a long black cloak, and who wore a black hood over his head.

His horse was black, too, a huge animal whose bridle and saddle

were studded with silver ornaments.

It was peaceful in the little pueblo of San Diego de Alcala, on this particular evening in the year 17—. Stars burned in a clear sky. A big California moon bathed the town in splendor, and the presidio on the hill behind it, and the dancing water of the bay. A calm, beautiful night—but the black rider soon would change that.

He was listening to the talk of the troopers now. The gentle breeze carried it to him. The beauty of the night did not seem to be bringing peace to the bosom of Sergeant Juan Cassara, the ranking trooper at the

Famous Author of "The Mark of Zorro"



WHIRLWIND

Novelette

McCULLEY

presidio in the absence of the capitán, who had gone to Santa Barbara on official business.

He was a huge man, this Sergeant Juan Cassara, and could be a ferocious one on occasion, and was noted for both courage and skill with a blade. Now he sprawled on a bench in front of the barracks, beneath a smoking torch thrust into a slot in the adobe wall, a mug of wine in his hand.

"What can a man do?" he was bellying at the troopers scattered around him. "Am I more than human? 'Catch me this fellow they call El Torbellino, this "Senor Whirl-

wind", while I am away', our commander says.

"'Have him in a cage when I return,' he orders. And I do not know the fellow's face, or where he hides himself, and he does not come forth into the open to do more of his deviltry. So, how can I catch him? It is enough to make a man take to his cups!"

The troopers nodded assent. The watching horseman chuckled softly, since he was the man of whom the sergeant spoke.

"Who is this demon who calls himself Señor Whirlwind? Who is this El Torbellino, who robs travelers along El Camino Real, the King's Highway, and even dares invade houses and inns?" the sergeant howled. "Where does he hide be-

tween his comings and goings? Ha! Did the fellow but show himself openly, and give me a fair chance at him, I'd reduce this Señor Whirlwind to a mere zephyr!"

The big sergeant drank again, and one of the troopers made haste to refill the mug from a half-emptied wine skin.

Sergeant Cassara lifted the mug toward his open mouth.

But he did not drink.

From the darkness around the small grove came a sudden gust of wild and mocking laughter.

"What in the name of the saints —!" Sergeant Cassara began, putting the wine mug down quickly on the end of the bench and starting to pull himself together.

But he did not have time to pull himself together completely, nor did the troopers around him have a chance to prepare properly for defense or attack.

FROM the darkness by the trees and into the broad light of the full moon rushed a huge black horse with a man upon his back. The moonlight was reflected from a naked blade.

"'Tis El Torbellino! 'Tis The Whirlwind!" one of the troopers cried.

"Ha!" Sergeant Juan Cassara was on his feet now, and was struggling to get his sword out of a scabbard that had become entangled with his legs. "My prayers are answered! One side, and let me at him! If the rogue does not dash away—"

But The Whirlwind did not dash away.

He bore down upon them fearlessly. He did not merely taunt them from a safe distance, then swerve toward the highway to disappear before they could plan pursuit, as they had expected.

Straight at them he rode, the hoofs

of his horse thundering on the hard ground, his sword out and flashing in the bright moonlight, and they scattered before him, some running along the front wall of the building, some darting through the door to get at their weapons.

"Ho, Sergeant! Ho, fat boaster!" The Whirlwind called.

He wheeled his horse suddenly, expertly, and his blade clashed against that of Cassara.

The thing was entirely irregular. It was the accepted rule for soldiers to run a highwayman to earth and attack him. But here was a highwayman deliberately seeking out the soldiery and making the attack himself!

Sergeant Cassara welcomed the clash. He was not without some measure of skill as a swordsman. Some years before, an officer who had taken a fancy to him, and who had been taught fence by a master in Europe, had given the sergeant instruction.

But, when his blade crossed that of The Whirlwind, and the sergeant essayed the first turn of the wrist, he realized that he had plenty yet to learn.

Before the superb skill of the other, his blade was as an unwieldy bludgeon in his hand.

Nor did it remain in his hand long. A mocking laugh, a quick turn of the wrist, a cry of mingled rage and alarm from the sergeant—and Cassara's sword went flying through the air, the moonlight making it a streak of blue flame until it clattered on the rocky ground.

BUT The Whirlwind did not follow up the advantage he had gained. No quick lunge of his blade let out the sergeant's life blood. He made it evident that this attack was not in anger and for the purpose of slaying, but only to mock. Realizing

this, Sergeant Cassara howled his rage, while The Whirlwind's mocking laughter rang out.

"This is but a warning, fat one! Cease boasting how you'll lay me by the heels if ever we meet!" The Whirlwind cried.

The big black horse was wheeled again as two troopers rushed to the assistance of their sergeant, who now was stumbling over the rough ground in search of his disgraced blade. One by one, The Whirlwind disarmed them, laughing at their efforts at swordplay, and their blades flew through the air to crash to the ground.

"Soldiers—you?" The Whirlwind mocked.

Now Sergeant Cassara had his sword again, and came charging back to the fray, bellowing like an infuriated bull.

"Dismount, Whirlwind!" he roared. "On the ground, brigand! I'll give you a fair fight, El Torbellino! Face me, and duel like a man! Out of your saddle, bandit!"

"I am no bandit! El Torbellino rides alone!" the outlaw shouted. His voice rang out, then the mocking laughter came again to infuriate them, and again he was upon them.

IT is true that this time the point of Sergeant Cassara's weapon scratched the hip of The Whirlwind's mount, but it did not touch The Whirlwind. Blades clashed and rang for an instant, and the burly sergeant found himself disarmed again. He reeled back as the troopers rushed to his rescue.

But once more The Whirlwind spared the sergeant, save a wound to his feelings, only laughed mockingly at him and lowered the point of his blade, a thing that wrecked Cassara's pride. The big sergeant rushed forward, waving his arms and howling at the top of his voice.

"Take him!" Cassara cried. "It is an order! Seize me this scandalous rogue! Get pistols and muskets, and shoot him! At him, soldiers!"

The black horse was swerved aside again, and in pursuing, four of the troopers became strung out in a line, some distance apart. Then The Whirlwind turned his horse and rode straight back at them, and caught them one at a time, and sent their blades flying as though it were no task at all.

Over by the door of the barracks room, a pistol exploded. A cloud of black smoke billowed across the doorway, and a slug of lead sang viciously through the air, to shriek its way down toward the plaza.

"Pistol him!" Cassara was shouting. "Bring me a gun! Get out muskets!"

The Whirlwind swung his horse in another direction. "I cannot fight fire-arms with a blade, and I have no wish to shoot you!" he cried. "We shall meet again. Fat Sergeant, *á Dios!*"

As another weapon exploded by the door, and a second slug sought, but did not find him, The Whirlwind bent low in his saddle and used his spurs. Down the hill he went in a cloud of dust, and toward the highway. "Horses!" Sergeant Cassara bellowed. "Pistols! Muskets! We ride after him! We run him to earth! That he should mock us so—the shame of it! Dead or alive, we bring him back! My rage is up. *Dios!*"

CHAPTER II

The Fight at the Inn

NOW it appeared that something was amiss with the mount of The Whirlwind, for he slackened speed as he approached the highway, and could be seen bending in his saddle.

Hope came to the sergeant. He

bellowed for his mount, and for the troopers to hurry with their saddling. They made ready for the trail and started in pursuit, the sergeant leading eagerly.

The Whirlwind got going again, but without much of a lead. Past the edge of the town he went, and along the highway toward the north. And the sergeant and his detachment went after him, to where the road curved over a hill and through a tiny canyon.

For some months now, The Whirlwind had been appearing at intervals, robbing and laughing as he robbed. His identity, no man knew. Like a ghost, he came and went and took his toll.

And the soldiery had been unable to catch him.

With blades out and ready, the troopers made the hill with Cassara at their head. With caution, they entered the little canyon. The Whirlwind, report said, was adept at traps.

"Through the canyon, and we have him!" Sergeant Cassara roared above the pounding of their horses' hoofs. "We can see him then, whether he stays upon the highway or leaves it. We must run him down. The capitán demands it. And I, Juan Cassara—I demand it! *Dios!*"

BUT El Torbellino had not entered the little canyon. At the top of the hill, he had turned his mount behind a ledge of rock. He was in hiding there when Cassara and the troopers swept past, holding his horse's nostrils to prevent a betraying whinny.

Not merely to make a show of bravado had The Whirlwind made his attack at the presidio. It had been to get the troopers to chase him, to lead them astray and get them far from where he expected to do his work.

From behind a rock, where he had

secreted them some time before in anticipation of this moment, he took soft pads, and affixed them to his horse's feet. Then he rode on behind the rocks, kept off the highway, and circled back toward the town. And Sergeant Juan Cassara and his men rode on toward the north, chasing shadows.

Keeping to the patches of darkness as much as possible, The Whirlwind went to the west of the town, and then approached it over a slope, riding behind the scattered huts, the hoofs of his horse making no sound at all.

He stopped in a deep shadow and looked searchingly at the plaza and the buildings surrounding it, particularly the inn operated by a certain Carlos Lazaga and his pretty daughter, Juanita. At the hitching place in front of the inn were no horses that caused him concern.

ON he went, slowly and carefully, still keeping in the deep shadows, and came upon the inn from behind, following a depression in the earth. At a certain place he dismounted and tied his horse to a clump of brush, and crept forward afoot. Without being observed, he got against the wall of the building, and crouched beneath an open window.

He listened a moment, then lifted his head cautiously and peered into the long, low-ceilinged, semi-dark room. Some half dozen men of the town were there, mere loiterers. Carlos Lazaga was hovering about, eager to serve. The fair Señorita Juanita was behind a counter in a corner.

But The Whirlwind gave only a hasty glance at these. His eyes and ears were for a certain Felipe Ruiz, reputed to be a traveling merchant of means.

Felipe Ruiz sprawled on a bench at the end of a long table. Wine was before him, and in him. He talked,

boasted, and the others listened, for Felipe Ruiz had bought twice around already, and could be expected to buy again.

He was middle-aged, tall and well-built, and had a mustache with flowing ends. His arrogance irked, and only the wine he bought so freely allayed a feeling of distaste for him. His talk led one to believe that what he touched turned to gold, and that ladies turned pale and sighed did he but look at them.

The Whirlwind slipped along the adobe wall of the inn to the rear, listened a moment, and entered the deserted kitchen. Through that he swept like a shadow, and so came to the door of the big main room.

There, he stopped abruptly. Into the inn from the plaza had come a robed Franciscan, Fray Marcos.

THE WHIRLWIND hesitated, his plans ruined for the moment. It did not appear seemly to fight and rob in the presence of the fray. Even the boasting Felipe Ruiz became silent when he saw the Franciscan. But Fray Marcos only acknowledged the respectful salutations of those in the inn, and held speech with Carlos Lazaga.

"This Pedro Garzo, the newcomer to the village, who works for you—is he where I may speak with him?" Fray Marcos asked.

"He is not here, good Fray," Lazaga replied. "You know the horse I own, which no man can ride, and which I keep in pasture down the highway? I have sent this Pedro Garzo there with salt for the animal."

"I may see him tomorrow," said Fray Marcos.

Lazaga bent toward him. "Is there something amiss, something that I should know, about this man?" he asked. "Pedro Garzo came to me a stranger, begging for work, and I

took him in. He said he was a wanderer from home and family. He has worked well and kept his place—"

"I know nothing to his discredit," Fray Marcos said. "I but wish to speak to him. You are too quick to be suspicious of your fellowmen."

In the kitchen, The Whirlwind smiled at that. Then he bent forward and gave ear again.

"Word has come along El Camino Real to watch for a certain scion of a good family in Spain," Fray Marcos said. "It is a man who left his home, because of an argument with his father—a splendid man else. Do you let me know, good Lazaga, when young strangers come to your inn."

"It shall be done, good Fray."

"We have an unknown benefactor out at the mission," the fray continued. "A quantity of gold has been dropped into the poor box. It is welcome, and good use shall be made of it. But we would know the donor and thank him. Pass the word, good Lazaga, that we are pleased, and possibly he will hear."

"It shall be done, Fray—the word shall be passed around," Lazaga replied.

THE fray left the inn. The Whirlwind in the kitchen was smiling again. He was the scion of a noble family, and he had come here and got him the place at the inn, as Pedro Garzo. Even now, he was supposed to be out salting the horse nobody could ride—but it was that same big black he had tamed and was riding. An inn drudge one moment—and El Torbellino, The Whirlwind, the next. Thus did Pedro Garzo express the life he preferred—and gave nine-tenths of his loot to the poor.

Those in the big room began their drinking again. Felipe Ruiz resumed his boasting. Juanita Lazaga sat on

a high stool behind the counter, her eyes blazing as she regarded this Felipe Ruiz, who had made certain improper remarks to her. Lazaga himself hovered around the fireplace.

It was a proper moment, The Whirlwind judged. Through the open door he slipped, and beneath one of the reeking torches fastened to the wall.

"Your purse, Ruiz!" he snapped, suddenly.

A cry of alarm came from the first man who whirled around and saw the black-hooded figure shrouded in the cloak, the light from the torch dancing from the naked blade he held. And now his left hand came into view also, and they could see that it held a pistol.

"Into the corner, all of you except this boaster, this Felipe Ruiz!" The Whirlwind cried. "At once—or I fire!"

THEY scattered before him, rushed to the corner, while Felipe Ruiz struggled to get upon his feet, his legs unsteady because of the much wine he had taken. The merchant's face was livid, and his lower jaw sagged, and his eyes were bulging.

Forward, The Whirlwind strode, purpose in every movement. He kept his back to the wall, and saw that none got between him and the kitchen door. He motioned with his pistol toward those in the corner, and they cringed.

"Your purse, Ruiz!" he demanded, again.

A money pouch clattered to the table, and then Felipe Ruiz would have retreated to the corner also.

"Come forward!" The Whirlwind ordered. "You wear a blade at your side, I see."

"I—I am no swordsman," Ruiz stammered. "I but wear it for style."

"You wear it to lead men to be-

lieve you are a swordsman," The Whirlwind told him. "He who wears a blade should be prepared to use it."

"I—I have no quarrel with you, *señor!*"

"But I have one with you, Felipe Ruiz!" The Whirlwind replied.

"You cannot have!"

"Silence! It is known to me how you cheat and swindle when you make your deals, how you squeeze money from those not in a position to protect themselves."

"Why, *señor*—"

"Silence, I ordered! You also insult a *señorita* whenever the occasion to do presents itself. On guard, *señor!*"

"I—I am not a swordsman—"

"On guard, else I run you through for a craven, and afterward cleanse my blade in boiling water!"

The Whirlwind was at him. Felipe Ruiz got his sword from its scabbard. The manner in which he held it told that he knew something of fence. The blades rang.

The Whirlwind began laughing mockingly. Beads of perspiration stood out on the forehead of Felipe Ruiz as he realized his helplessness. He backed to the wall and slid along it, retreating always before the darting weapon that was like the tongue of a snake. And he began howling.

"Help!—Soldiers!—A robber is here!"

THE wild laughter of The Whirlwind drowned his howls, so to any who heard, it sounded like a drunken orgy at the inn. Those in the corner remained there, trembling. Juanita Lazaga had got down from her stool and was back against the wall, her eyes wide as she watched. She did not fear this Whirlwind, since he fought in behalf of insulted maids.

"Hold up your blade!" The Whirl-

wind was taunting the merchant. "At me! Make it interesting, at least!"

"Help!—Call the troopers!" Felipe Ruiz howled.

He continued to retreat along the wall. But The Whirlwind darted in and drove him back toward the corner, where the others were crowding. His blade darted in and out, and slowly he cut the fine raiment of the traveling merchant to ribbons, yet did not touch the skin.

"Leave San Diego, merchant!" The Whirlwind ordered as he fought. "Get you up El Camino Real to some other pueblo. And do not be sure but what I'll follow you, if your conduct is not right!"

"Help!—Help!" Felipe Ruiz continued to shout, expecting each instant to feel hot steel pass through his body.

And help came. A thunder of hoofs sounded in the plaza. Sergeant Juan Cassara and his troopers were returning from their futile chase.

CHAPTER III

An Unexpected Trap

THE sword of The Whirlwind darted forward once more, and there came a howl of fear and pain from Felipe Ruiz as the tip of the blade scratched his arm.

"'Tis but a token of what may come!" The Whirlwind called.

He retreated swiftly to the kitchen door, and they saw him putting his pistol away beneath his cloak. As he disappeared, Felipe Ruiz began howling for help again, his voice ringing out over the plaza, and others in the inn added their cries to those of the merchant.

The troopers stopped their mounts and tumbled out of their saddles, and

with weapons held ready charged inside with Sergeant Cassara at their head.

Through the moonlight behind the inn, The Whirlwind rushed to escape. He could not hope to go unseen. The troopers rushed out into the night again, and some through the kitchen, and they saw him. A pistol exploded, a slug sang past within a few feet of The Whirlwind's head.

Then he had darted into a dry watercourse that ran not far from the inn. His pistol barked just before he disappeared, and a ball came singing back toward the troopers, enough to deter them for a moment.

In the watercourse, The Whirlwind rushed to his horse. He worked swiftly a moment, stripping off the foot padding, and saddle and bridle, and tossing them aside. An instant later, there was a thunder of galloping hoofs on the hard ground, and through the shadows the soldiers saw a horse rushing away.

Cassara was shouting to them, howling for them to take to saddle and pursue. They rushed back to their mounts, and took up the trail. Distant hoofbeats pointed out the way for them to ride.

A babble of excited voices came from the inn. Felipe Ruiz was disclaiming against the outrage. Lazaga was disclaiming responsibility. Men were shouting at the disappearing troopers, offering valueless advice.

But soon it grew quieter. Lazaga made haste to serve Felipe Ruiz with more wine. All but half a dozen or so drifted out and away. The scene became much as it had been before the entrance of The Whirlwind.

AND suddenly Felipe Ruiz began chuckling, and then he laughed until the tears streamed down his cheeks, while the others looked at him in wonder, wondering whether

the excitement had turned his brain and made him mad.

"He slit the clothes from me, the rogue!" Ruiz said. "And why should he not, since he is no doubt a master of fence and I know little of handling a blade? He even scratched my arm. Yet I am in the advantage of him."

"How can that be, *señor*?" Lazaga asked. "Did not the fellow get your purse?"

Felipe Ruiz laughed again. "He got a purse—*sí*! He got the one I carry for such scum. A special purse, *señores*, containing not gold, but bits of metal, so that it rings like money when tossed down."

"What is this?" the landlord cried.

"The joke will be on this *Señor El Torbellino* when he goes to count the gold he thinks he has stolen," Felipe Ruiz said.

"Wine, Lazaga. Serve wine to all, and we drink to the confusion of the stupid fellow. Here is the real purse—see?"

Felipe Ruiz took another pouch from his clothing, a fat one, and held it up for all to observe. He laughed until his sides shook, and the others laughed with him. And, as Lazaga and Juanita hurried to fill the wine mugs, and they stopped laughing to take breath, a sharp voice cut at them:

"I'll take that purse, also, Felipe Ruiz!"

INSTANTLY, it was quiet. They wheeled and looked. There was The Whirlwind again, standing just inside the kitchen door, a pistol in his left hand and a naked blade in his right.

"The silly troopers are chasing my horse," he announced. "He is a trained animal, and will lead them far astray, while I visit you again. So you have tricked me, Felipe Ruiz?"

Ruiz was lurching to his feet, getting back against the wall.

"You have allowed me to steal trash instead of gold—and you boast of it!" The Whirlwind continued. "Now, drop the real purse on the table, *señor*, and back to the wall!"

Felipe Ruiz, speechless with terror now, looked around wildly, and saw no avenue of escape. He was some distance from the door, and feared that a pistol ball would cut him down if he tried to make it. And The Whirlwind was striding toward him, eyes blazing through slits in the hood he wore.

Felipe Ruiz tossed the filled purse upon the table, and The Whirlwind swept it up and stowed it away, but kept straight on, the flame from the nearest torch reflecting ominously from his sword.

"You need a lesson, *señor*!" The Whirlwind said. "I dislike to splatter blood about the inn, and cause the landlord an inconvenience, but it seems necessary."

"Mercy!" Ruiz cried.

"Do you show mercy to those you rob with sharp trading?" The Whirlwind demanded. "Do you show mercy to the maidens you pursue with unwelcome attentions? The world can struggle along without such as you walking about it!"

"It is not fair! I am poor with a blade!" Ruiz cried.

A stern voice from the doorway startled them:

"Allow me to take up your quarrel, *señor*!"

And Sergeant Juan Cassara strode into the inn.

FELIPE RUIZ gave a cry of relief and cringed against the wall. The others hovered in a corner. The Whirlwind stood his ground, and he even laughed a little, but it was the sort of laugh to send chills running up the spines of those who heard.

"Ha, El Torbellino! We meet again!" Sergeant Cassara said. "I had my suspicions, and turned back as the troopers rode on. In the moonlight, it seemed to me that there was no man on the horse that galloped away so furiously."

"So very clever of you, fat one!" The Whirlwind said.

"On guard, brigand! Put up your pistol, and fight like a man. Mine is in my belt."

"I have no wish to kill you," The Whirlwind said.

"Nor I you. But a capture must be made, if you are not slain. I have you, El Torbellino! You have taken your last purse!"

Sergeant Cassara strode forward, blade out and ready. So The Whirlwind retreated a few steps as he put his pistol away, and his retreat brought him swiftly where he would have the advantage of the poor light that came from the flickering torch.

There was determination in the manner of Cassara now. This was a different affair, with both of them toe to toe. And the big sergeant remembered that here was a malefactor he had been ordered to capture and confine.

PERHAPS this El Torbellino was the prettier man with a blade, but the sergeant could be rough and effective. The weapons clashed, and The Whirlwind did not disarm the sergeant instantly this time.

"Ah! You have learned a lesson, it seems!" The Whirlwind said.

"Do you surrender, *señor*?" the sergeant demanded.

"I may be a highwayman, but I am not a fool," The Whirlwind replied. "Any honor you get from my capture, you must earn in sweat and perhaps blood. Ha, Sergeant!"

The last exclamation was because The Whirlwind had got his adversary off balance neatly. Those in the

room wondered why he had not run him through. It appeared that he had the opportunity. But he allowed Cassara to recover, and sidestepped neatly, and when the sergeant pressed the fighting even retreated a bit. But his retreat was toward the open kitchen door.

Then he stood again, and made an attack, and Sergeant Juan Cassara, the perspiration standing out upon him and his breath coming in great gasps, retreated in turn. The blades clashed and rang.

"Your wrist is lame, Sergeant!" The Whirlwind cried. "You are slow on your feet! Too much wine, fat one!"

THE WHIRLWIND circled suddenly, and his left hand went to his sash and got out his pistol. Sergeant Cassara fell aside and made a dive for his own weapon.

"Tis not for you, Cassara!" The Whirlwind called.

He fired as he spoke, and a surge of black smoke half obscured the scene, with a flash of flame through it, and in the corner some man gave a cry of pain.

"Twas the merchant, Felipe Ruiz," The Whirlwind explained, as he darted quickly aside to get free of the smoke cloud. "I saw him preparing to pistol me."

"Tis my fight! All of you hold hand!" Cassara thundered. He threw up his blade again.

But The Whirlwind was not before him. He was over by the wall, and his mocking laughter rang out again. Cassara cursed roundly and hurled himself forward. The Whirlwind darted aside once more, and the sergeant brought up against the wall.

"Stand and fight!" Cassara howled. "I am not fleet of foot! Stand and fight—unless it so be you are afraid!"

"Afraid?" The Whirlwind roared. And now did he live up to his

name. He swept forward like a tempest. His blade seemed everywhere, flashing and darting, yet not once did it bite into the sergeant's flesh. He gave a demonstration of playing with his man, exposing his lack of skill. The sergeant grew furious. He exposed himself recklessly as he made a terrific onslaught, but The Whirlwind only guarded himself and laughed.

Outside in the plaza there was another sudden thunder of beating hoofs. Once more, the troopers were returning from a fruitless chase, tired and angry.

Sergeant Cassara heard them, and the light of victory came into his eyes. Cautiously now, he fought on, retreating before the furious onslaughts of The Whirlwind, hoping only to keep him engaged until the others could get into the inn.

But The Whirlwind also had heard those pounding hoofs, and knew what it meant. Again he attacked. There was a swift clash in a corner—and the sword of Sergeant Juan Cassara went flying through the air, to crash against the adobe wall, dislodge and extinguish one of the reeking torches, and then drop to the floor.

SERGEANT CASSARA fell back, and a single sob escaped him. He loved life, and he supposed that this was to be the end. Yet he raised his voice in a shout:

"Troopers! To me! El Torbellino is here! Enter, and seize him!"

"We shall meet again, fat one!" The Whirlwind cried. "I spare you now, that you may know shame!"

He laughed mockingly and whirled toward the kitchen door. But through it troopers charged into the room, and through the front door also.

The Whirlwind was caught in a corner with only his blade, for his pistol had been discharged, and

there had been no opportunity to load it again.

CHAPTER IV

Regarding a Boot

FAN-FASHION, the troopers were before him, as he stood in the corner with his back against the wall, the point of his sword lowered. Sergeant Juan Cassara strode forward.

"You bested me in swordplay, El Torbellino," the sergeant said. "What I do now is because of my office. I have orders to make you prisoner and confine you at the presidio, to await the return of our capitán."

"Indeed?" There was mockery in the word.

"Surely, *señor*, you can realize that there is no escape for you now. Do not compel us to slay you here. Throw down your sword, and submit."

"To die at the end of a rope?" The Whirlwind asked.

"That is a thing to be decided by my superior. Submit, or I give the word to take you."

"Blood will be let in the taking."

"Even so, these men are soldiers, and expect to shed blood on occasion. And there can be but one end, for you. Even such a rare swordsman as yourself cannot successfully fight us all."

The troopers had advanced until they formed half a circle before him, and were so close together that he could not hope to dart between any two. They held blades, and some pistols ready to fire.

"Throw down your sword," Sergeant Cassara ordered again. "Turn your back, and put your hands behind it, that we may bind you."

"If I do not—?"

"If you do not, we attack at once. Slain you may be, wounded you cer-

tainly will be. Your answer, *señor!*"

Now The Whirlwind took his sword in his two hands and looked at it lovingly, as though bidding it farewell before consigning it to the packed dirt floor. The troopers held their positions, and were cautious and alert, half expecting an attack. Cassara waited, his arms folded across his great chest.

"It is a good blade," The Whirlwind said. He looked up and around the room.

The soldiers were as before. On the far side of the room, Felipe Ruiz sat on a bench and nursed a wounded shoulder, and others were around him. Lazaga appeared frightened at all this turmoil in his inn. Juanita was at the end of the counter, watching bravely.

Since one torch had been extinguished, there was but one more, and that was in the wall not far from where The Whirlwind was standing. But on the end of the counter, near the *señorita*, was a pan of tallow with a lighted wick in it, which cast a flickering radiance.

PERHAPS the *señorita* understood the need, and was grateful to this unknown who had attacked the man who had affronted her, or perhaps it was an accident. But, as she bent forward to watch, her elbow struck the tallow pan, and it was overturned and crashed to the floor.

The sudden clatter startled all in the room. Some of the soldiers turned quickly, nervously, and even Sergeant Cassara jerked his head around for an instant. In that instant, The Whirlwind acted.

He hurled his sword, and it struck the torch and dashed it to the floor, where the flame was extinguished. The Whirlwind followed his sword. Prone on the floor, he grasped it again. The inn was dark. A pistol exploded, fired at random, and the

ball struck the hard adobe wall and ricocheted.

The Whirlwind gave a great spring and came to the open window. He struck and hurled aside a trooper who would have clashed with him. Through the window he went head foremost, while more guns exploded in the room, and bullets sang about him.

Sergeant Cassara was howling like a wild man, bellowing orders that none understood. In the dark inn, the troopers were bumping against one another and accomplishing nothing. Then some rushed for the door to hurry into the plaza.

Through the moonlight, The Whirlwind raced, across a corner of the plaza, a dark shadow darting toward other dark shadows. A native saw him, and gave a howl of superstitious fear. He gained the darkness beside an empty building, rushed on, but with the knowledge that he had been seen and the direction of his flight noticed.

DOWN into the depression he hurried, and circled back toward the inn as Cassara's troopers began a methodical search, some afoot and some mounted. He stripped off his hood, and the enveloping cloak, his sash and sword and pistol, and made a bundle of the whole. Behind a convenient rock he cached them, and went on, trying to reduce his breathing to normal.

He approached the inn from the rear, and now he began singing a lusty song. Soldiers bore down upon him.

"Who are you, fellow?" one asked.

"I am Pedro Garzo, and work for Lazaga at the inn. What is all the turmoil?"

"El Torbellino, The Whirlwind, has been at work."

"Can that be the man I saw hurrying along the arroyo?" Pedro

Garzo asked. "Lazaga will have need of me."

He entered the inn through the kitchen. Somebody had made a light in the big room, and Lazaga was crying orders.

"Time you returned!" he called to Pedro Garzo. "An outlaw has been among us."

"I did not engage to fight outlaws."

"Ha!" Lazaga snorted in disgust. "You are not the sort to fight anybody, *señor*. Get a basin of hot water for Señor Ruiz, who has been wounded slightly."

"Juanita, get cloths with which to bind his arm!"

Pedro Garzo got the hot water, and Juanita the cloths. They met at the door going back.

"I would The Whirlwind had slain him," the girl whispered.

SHE gave the cloths to her father, and Pedro Garzo put the basin of water down upon a bench. Then he stood back and watched while the wound was washed. It was little more than a scratch.

"Twill not leave a scar," Pedro Garzo observed. "That is a pity, *señor*. With a scar, you would be able to tell tales to interest the ladies."

"I'll give this Whirlwind more than a scar when next we meet! He can best me with a blade. But pistols make all men equal."

Sergeant Cassara came swaggering into the place.

"The rogue has escaped us again," he said. "But we'll take him before we're done. No mercy will be shown the next time. His life is forfeit."

"Did he outrun you on his horse?" Pedro Garzo asked.

"My men followed a horse without a rider. A huge black horse," Cassara said. "He ran down the highway and jumped a fence into a pas-

ture. Lazaga, he looked like that beast of yours."

Lazaga laughed. "Then this El Torbellino must be the devil himself," he replied. "No man can ride that black horse of mine. It has been tried, as you know. I keep him only in the hope that some day a fool will buy him from me."

"Tis a matter to be investigated later," Cassara said.

"The rogue got my purse," Felipe Ruiz was wailing. "It was heavy with gold. I had expected to purchase goods."

"Is this your purse, *señor*?" Cassara asked. He tossed one down upon the bench.

"It is, by the saints! How came you by it?"

"The Whirlwind must have dropped it as he got through the window, for it was found there," the sergeant said. "On the ground, at the corner of the building."

"I thank you, Sergeant. You and your men—you are my guests," Felipe Ruiz declared. "Drink wine, and I pay."

"We may drink a lot, for we have been chasing this rogue for hours."

"Drink heartily. Call in your men! What care I about the bill? But for you finding the purse, all my money would be gone. Lazaga, prepare to serve!"

INTO the place came the troopers at Cassara's command. They sprawled on the benches. Lazaga got a new skin of wine, and mugs were filled. Pedro Garzo and Juanita were compelled to help with the serving.

It was good, rich wine, for Felipe Ruiz would pay. It was heady wine, and almost immediately were its effects revealed. The inn became a place of loud song and raucous boast. Soon, some men snored in unconsciousness.

"I take me an oath to catch this

Señor Whirlwind before I am done!" Cassara cried. "Twice have we met, and twice has he bested me. The third time may be a different tale."

"More wine, landlord!" Ruiz howled. "Another skin of it, Lazaga!"

He had tossed his money pouch on the table, and when the drinking was done Lazaga would take pay from it.

And Lazaga could be depended upon to keep a score that would be to the credit of the house.

Pedro Garzo slipped into the kitchen unnoticed, and still unnoticed left the building and hurried from shadow to shadow until he got a certain bundle.

With it, he returned to the inn. He went along the side of the patio in the darkness, to where there was a break in the wall. He deposited the bundle there.

Into the kitchen he went again, knowing that he had not been missed. And into the kitchen came Señorita Juanita, weeping.

"What is it now?" Pedro Garzo asked.

"'Tis that Felipe Ruiz," she said. "I grow afraid of him. He tried to pull me into his lap."

"And your father—?"

"Afraid to affront the *señor*, lest he stop buying wine."

"Keep to the kitchen, *señorita*," Pedro Garzo suggested.

"I shall try that, but no doubt he will call for me."

"Be missing, if he does."

"I wish El Torbellino had slain him! I wish he would come again, and at least drive him away!"

SHE looked straight at Pedro Garzo as she spoke and after the first glance his eyes were busy elsewhere.

"Fray Marcos has been talking of a certain son of a noble family in

Spain," she said. "It is supposed he left home after a quarrel, and came to San Francisco de Asis, and then down El Camino Real, a wanderer far from his homeland. Such a man, no doubt, would know how to defend a maid."

"No doubt," said Pedro Garzo.

"He would be one fine caballero, just the kind who would act as this El Torbellino acts. I am quite sure that he would punish such men as Felipe Ruiz—and give his loot to the poor."

"Think you so?" Pedro Garzo asked.

"And in a case like this he would undoubtedly retrieve the purse that he lost, then he would probably order this Felipe Ruiz out of the pueblo because he is a stench in decent nostrils."

"Undoubtedly!" Pedro Garzo admitted.

"IF I were aware of his identity, I'd guard the knowledge with my life. And, when I knew he was listening, I'd sing a song to him—the love song about the two doves."

"That would be a rare treat," Pedro Garzo observed.

Their eyes met again, and the little *señorita* smiled.

"El Torbellino should be careful of one thing," she said. "I watched him closely. I looked him over well. There is a cut across the toe of his left boot. If others noticed that it might betray him."

"Let us hope," said Pedro Garzo, "that Señor El Torbellino has more than one pair of boots. Now I must hasten into the other room, for Lazaga will be bellowing at me if I do not. And do you, *señorita*, keep out of sight."

The face of Pedro Garzo wore a thoughtful expression as he left the kitchen and went into the big room. He had not thought about the boot.

CHAPTER V

Double Thanks

SOME of them snored, some of them sang, and others quarreled. Felipe Ruiz was making loud and boastful talk. Sergeant Juan Cassara sprawled on a bench, and undoubtedly would be unable to stand without reeling.

Lazaga was watching them, plying them with wine, keeping the score, and smiling to think of the profit he would have. He growled at Pedro Garzo and ordered him to fill more mugs and place them at the elbows of the drinkers and sleepers alike.

So Pedro Garzo worked for a time, and then managed to slip out the front door without being observed. There was nobody near the inn outside. Natives knew enough to keep distant when drinking was being done; they were fair game for any quarrelsome white.

The troopers had tethered their horses in front of the inn, and now Pedro Garzo went among the animals, and untied them, and fastened the reins to the pommels. He slapped some of the mounts on their rumps and got them started away. And suddenly he gave a screech, and flew at them. They snorted, stampeded, flew across the plaza and among the huts, creating a din to which the natives added with their wild screeching.

Pedro Garzo darted around the building before the first man came tumbling out of the inn. Around to the rear he went, and into the patio. Those sober enough were hurrying outside. The cry went up that the troopers' horses were being stolen.

Sergeant Cassara bellowed orders about it, but did not stir from his bench. Some of his men staggered forth to learn the truth of the tur-

moil. Felipe Ruiz laughed, and shouted for yet more wine.

In the darkness of the patio, Pedro Garzo speedily became El Torbellino again. He was chuckling as he hurried into the kitchen, now deserted by all, even the *señorita*. On he went, to the door of the big room, and there he hesitated only long enough to make sure of the scene.

Felipe Ruiz was waving his arms as he made loud talk:

"You are right, Cassara, my friend! This El Torbellino is overrated. When you meet him again, for the third time, you will be victor, no doubt. And when my scratch is healed, I shall seek him out! My business can wait."

A sudden squawk came from Felipe Ruiz as he happened to glance toward the kitchen door.

"*Dios!* It is he!" he cried.

Sergeant Juan Cassara straightened somewhat on the bench. He saw El Torbellino walking slowly toward him across the room.

"It is the third time, Cassara!" El Torbellino said. "On your feet!"

"You—you have returned!" Ruiz mouthed.

"To get the purse I lost," The Whirlwind said. "Do not touch it, or I fire!"

He darted forward and got the purse, and stowed it away, carefully this time. His pistol was not loaded, but they did not know that. Lazaga was leaning against the counter like a man bereft of strength. Ruiz seemed rooted to the bench upon which he sat. The big sergeant was trying to get to his feet.

TWO others were in the room, besides those who slept. And one of them darted out into the night, shrieking that The Whirlwind was back again. So there must be speedy action.

"El Torbellino, one of us dies here and now!" Cassara cried. "You have mocked me long enough! Back—and give me fair chance!"

The Whirlwind retreated a step, laughing softly.

Sergeant Cassara managed to get on his feet, though he kept those feet far apart and swayed. He struggled to get the blade from his scabbard.

"You are too drunk to fight," The Whirlwind said.

Cassara continued working to get out his sword. The Whirlwind wheeled toward the merchant whose wine-bloated face now was a sickly green.

"Out of San Diego de Alcala by the dawn!" The Whirlwind ordered. "If you are not, I'll run you through when next we meet! It is a promise!"

"I—I'll go," Ruiz replied.

"If you do not, all the soldiers in California cannot keep me from you!—Landlord, how much is the score?"

Lazaga cried the amount.

"Tis not more than the half of that! Let us have no cheating, since I am the one to pay." The Whirlwind laughed as he took gold from Ruiz' pouch and threw it upon a table.

He evaded Cassara's first wild lunge, and the sergeant went on past and crashed against the wall.

"Troopers!" he screamed. "To me! Catch the rogue!"

"Tis the third meeting," The Whirlwind said. "And you scarce can lift your sword. 'Twould be the act of a craven to run you through now."

HE darted in swiftly, his blade shot out, and the sergeant was disarmed. Reeling back against the wall, Cassara cursed him.

"Make an end of it," he begged.

"I cannot face my capitán. You have disgraced me!"

"I'll visit your capitán one of these days, and disgrace him also," The Whirlwind promised. "Remember my order, Felipe Ruiz! And you, fat landlord, beware how you water wine and cheat on the score! I shall be near at hand."

From the kitchen, at that moment, came a woman's scream. No woman but Señorita Juanita was in the place. The Whirlwind guessed that the scream was a warning that soldiers were coming at him through the kitchen. They were at the front door again, too, and even at the window through which he had escaped before.

They were drunken, reeling, staggering, but they had arms and could shoot. The Whirlwind did not fear their blades. He ran swiftly to the counter, and got behind it driving Lazaga away.

This last mad escapade seemed likely to end with ruin for him. He darted down behind the counter as a pistol roared. The ball flew among pots of honey on a shelf, and did damage. Another gun roared.

"Seize him!" Felipe Ruiz cried. "Recover the purse he took from me. Half its contents as a reward, to the man who seizes him!"

THAT should bring results, Ruiz thought. This El Torbellino would be killed, else captured to stretch rope. And Felipe Ruiz then could remain safely in San Diego de Alcala, and ply his swindles.

But the offer had the opposite effect. Men left both doors unguarded to rush forward to the attack. Those watching through the windows from outside left the windows and hurried to the door to get in.

The Whirlwind had put his useless pistol away. Now he put his

sword aside for a moment, too. And suddenly honey pots began raining upon those who advanced, cracking against their heads, deluging their faces with the sticky contents.

They swerved aside. More guns spoke and more bullets crashed against the walls. A honey pot knocked down a torch. Another made Sergeant Cassara reel as he started forward. Another torch went out. The Whirlwind seized the tall pan and hurled it at the man nearest him.

Then he was over the counter and at them, his blade in his hand again. He struck, thrust, lunged. He pierced arms and shoulders, but did not seek to wound seriously or to kill. And now they held fire, those who had loaded pistols for fear of shooting one another. "*Señores, á Dios!*" The Whirlwind cried from the kitchen door, and in an instant was gone.

"After him!" Cassara shouted. "A corporal's badge to the man who slays the rogue!"

"And half my purse!" cried Felipe.

EL TORBELLINO rushed through the kitchen and into the dark patio. He stripped off cloak and hood, and again he made a bundle and hid it away. And this time he was careful that the merchant's purse was not lost. Into a water-filled olla he dropped it, knowing nobody would search for it there.

Into the patio rushed some of the troopers, one of them with a torch held high. They beheld Pedro Garzo standing in a door, rubbing his eyes with his fists. "Is a man never to sleep?" Pedro Garzo asked.

"El Torbellino—where did he go?" somebody demanded.

"The Whirlwind? Where does it ever go?" Pedro Garzo asked.

"The man is a fool!" a soldier cried. "He has gone over the patio wall! After him! Half the purse—!"

Pedro Garzo stepped back again into the little room where he had his cot. He dropped upon the cot, relaxed, smiled softly in the darkness. He could hear Felipe Ruiz bellowing for a time, and then it grew quiet in the inn. He could hear the troopers calling in the distance as they gathered their horses. He heard Sergeant Juan Cassara, finally, profanely ordering his men to return to the presidio. Then there was peace.

And then, very softly, he heard singing, and knew that it was in the patio, just across from his room. It was the *Señorita* Juanita singing. She was singing the song of the two doves. She knew! But Pedro Garzo had no fear of her telling.

And the following morning he bent his head to hide a smile, as he was working around the fireplace and old Fray Marcos entered to hold speech with Lazaga.

"It grieves me that your establishment becomes notorious," Fray Marcos said. "Last night, there was a wild orgy—drinking, quarelling, shooting, profanity, obscene song."

"I cannot drive the soldiers from my place," Lazaga complained. "They would ruin me."

"This travelling merchant, Felipe Ruiz, who seems to have started it all—"

"He departed at dawn," Lazaga said.

"Perhaps it is well. I cannot be harsh today, though I should be. In my poor box this morning, I found a quantity of gold. We can do good work with the money. But I wish I could thank the donor," said Fray Marcos. Pedro Garzo suddenly was before him, bowing, handing him a bit of parchment he had dropped.

"I thank you, *señor*," Fray Marcos said. And Pedro Garzo was not sure but what there was a double meaning in the thanks.

The Sheriff Rides Alone



A Gripping Story of Cattle-Rustling in the West and a New Sheriff's Tough Assignment

By OSCAR SCHISGALL

Author of "The Hooded Terror," "Murder at Noon," etc.

USUALLY, on a Sunday morning, the town of Egmont lay hushed under a pall of heat and dust. Its two saloons were closed, and its single street, broiling beneath the Texas sun, was deserted. But on this particular Sabbath, excitement gripped the town. A dozen men—angry cowpunchers from the nearby Circle X—were milling outside the sheriff's office, and plenty of trouble blazed in their bloodshot eyes.

"If he don't do it," one of them rasped, "we'll get us a sheriff who will!"

"An' doggone pronto, too!" somebody else threatened.

The harsh voices stabbed the stillness in the office, where young Sheriff "Lanky" Boll sat, gray of face. He scarcely glanced up at Cy Hamerton, the stocky, white-haired owner of the Circle X, who had come in as spokesman for his waddies. But he heard every word the rancher uttered.

"I know danged well how you feel about it, Lanky," Cy was saying, "an' I'm right sorry. Personally, I wouldn't want to be in your boots for all the money in the state. All

the same, though, your job's gotta be done! You bein' sheriff, it's up to you to go out an' arrest that brother o' yours!"

LANKY TIM BOLL, newly elected to his post—and much too young for the job, according to some opinions—sat at his desk and frowned at his horny hands. His disheveled sandy hair dangled over his forehead, damp with sweat. His long freckled countenance was taut and grim.

"Cy," he said quietly, "when I took this job, I sure didn't figger I'd have to go out an' hamstring my own brother. Right now, I don't mind tellin' yuh, I got a good notion to turn in my star an' go back to pokin' cow-meat!"

"But you won't," Hammerton assured him, tersely. "Leastwise, not if I know you."

"No-o, reckon I won't," Lanky conceded in a mutter. "Still it's mighty tough—"

"Sufferin' toads!" exclaimed the old rancher. "Is it your fault if your brother turns out to be an ornery polecat? He's just a yeller coyote with a—"

"Hold on, Cy!" Abruptly the lean sheriff rose, six feet of bone and muscle, and his narrow eyes flamed across the desk at the thickset cattleman. "I don't want yuh to talk none about Tex that-a-way! Sabe?" His deep voice dropped. "If he's guilty o' rustlin' yuhr stock—"

"He's guilty as hell!" Hammerton vehemently declared. "My boys saw him drive the cows away!"

"So yuh told me once," Lanky said drily.

"An' I'm tellin' you again it's your duty as sheriff to go out an' arrest rustlers whether they're your brother or not! Me, I don't see no call for argument."

"I ain't denyin' my duty," softly

said Lanky Boll. "Come on!" He crossed the office with long strides, a rangy figure who still wore the clothes he had used as a puncher. The only additions were the star on his checkered shirt and the extra Colt .45 that hung on his left hip, balancing the six-gun on the right. He snatched up his battered Stetson, pulled it over his sandy hair, and stepped outside into the glaring sunlight.

Instantly, magically, the clamor of the waddies subsided. A dozen pairs of eyes, sullen and challenging, glowered at him as he stood on the office porch.

It was as if these men were awaiting a speech. Lanky surveyed them all with grim, tight-lipped intensity.

Nominally they were his friends; but he suspected they weren't trusting him much today. He shot out curtly:

"Which o' yuh claim yuh saw my brother Tex rustlin' Circle X cattle?"

ACHORUS of angry voices answered, and five hands promptly rose high in response.

"All five o' yuh, huh?" mumbled Lanky, with a frown.

"Yeah!" Flatface Hawkins, a stubby man with blue jaws, replied for the others. "D'yuh want the details?"

"Go ahead," snapped Lanky. "I'm listenin'."

"Us five was out nighthawkin'," Flatface asserted. "We was ridin' toward Williams' Gulch when, all of a sudden, we spot this hombre herdin' twenty-odd head o' longhorns through Devil's Draw. We were sure surprised, sheriff, seein' as how there ain't been much rustlin' hereabouts lately.

"We crept up on him soft an' easy, like, an' we was within fifty yards o' him 'fore he heard us. It was yore brother Tex, all right! Every

one of us reckernized him! Soon as he saw us, he lit off like a streak o' forked, sizzlin' lightnin'!"

"Which way?" asked Lanky, his voice hard.

"Into the hills," retorted Flatface Hawkins. "We chased him more'n eight miles."

"Sling any lead?"

"Plenty! But he got away. He had a hoss faster'n blazes."

LANKY BOLL'S lips were compressed to a thin slash. With his thumbs hooked in his gun-belt, he asked:

"Where did you lose sight o' Tex?"

"Just this side o' Bent-horn Butte!" said Flatface. "Him an' his hoss, they disappeared like ghosts. We hunted sign o' them for an hour, but there wasn't none in them badlands. Besides, the moon went down over the hills, an' we couldn't see so good."

At the mention of Bent-horn Butte the sheriff had stiffened with a slight start. His eyes widened a little. Now, with a falter in his tones, he repeated: "An'—an' yuh're plumb sure it was my brother Tex?"

"Positive!" maintained Flatface. "There's five of us ready to swear to it!"

For a moment, then, there was silence. Lanky Boll turned his pale face and squinted toward the purple mountains on the western horizon. He couldn't actually see Bent-horn Butte from here, but he knew exactly where to find it. And he knew, too,—he believed—where to find his brother. His bony young features became as hard as rock, and as gray.

"Well?" suddenly demanded old Cy Hammerton, standing behind him. "What're you gonna do about it?"

Lanky Boll's hands abruptly fell away from his belt. With odd fires

in his eyes, he turned to the cattleman. He said in a thick, determined voice:

"I still don't believe Tex is a rustler! But long as yuh got five witnesses against him, I'll go out into them hills an' bring him back to stand trial! As sheriff, reckon that's what I gotta do. An' I aim to do it."

A chorus of approval welled up from the cowhands. They stirred as if a trance had been shattered. A few men moved toward their horses, and Cy Hammerton quickly offered:

"My boys 'll ride with you, Lanky."

"No, they won't!" snapped the sheriff. "I'll ride alone!"

"But listen—"

"When I want a posse, I'll ask for it!" Lanky Boll jumped off the porch and started toward Craggle's Stable, where his horse waited in comparatively cool shade. He walked with long, shuffling strides that flung up clouds of yellow dust.

He knew that a number of uncertain frowns were fixed upon him. Perhaps there were men who thought that if he did locate his brother, it would probably be to warn Tex away; nothing more. Aware of their suspicions, he said stiffly:

"I'll ride alone—an' I'll bring Tex back!"

II

IT WAS noon when Sheriff Lanky Tim Boll reached the badlands, with the purple mountains towering only a few miles ahead. His black stallion, though proceeding at an easy pace, was covered with sweat and lather and dust; and Lanky himself looked as if he had travelled days instead of hours. His young face was hard. The brim of his Stetson was tugged low over squint-

ing eyes, and the two Colts clung tightly to his sides.

If there were strange thuddings in his chest, his bony countenance betrayed no sign of such nervousness.

Lanky continued westward, toward the mountains piled against a white-hot sky. He let the stallion choose its own pace among the boulders that surrounded him, for his mind was absorbed by other matters.

"This is sure a fine way to go meet yer brother!" he mused bitterly.

He hoped Tex would listen to reason, and, being innocent, come along readily. He hoped desperately Tex would not make it necessary for him to draw his Colts.

"Doggone!" he grated. "What's the use o' thinkin' o' such things? I wouldn't draw on Tex!"

HE was moving now through a country of great rocks, jagged ridges, and deep, narrow ravines. Scarcely two miles away loomed the bluish crag known as Bent-horn Butte—a kind of devil's horn rising out of the ground. As he peered at it, he became acutely conscious of those wild thumpings in his chest. His perspiration began to run more freely.

For he thought he knew just where he would find Tex. On the south side of the Butte there was an old cave he and his brother had used as boys. There, in a retreat they had proudly kept secret from other youngsters, they had played "Injun" and "smuggler." Once they had boldly camped there all night, with the result that all Egmont was out by morning to hunt for them.

"If Tex disappeared around Bent-horn Butte," Lanky muttered to himself, frowning, "he most likely hid in the cave!"

So Sheriff Boll didn't trouble to read signs as he rode. He kept his

narrow gaze fastened on the Butte. And presently, when he reached it, he dismounted with the confident air of one who has come to the end of a long journey.

He staked the stallion in the shade of a few cottonwoods. Then he hitched up his belt and started to climb the steep rise.

He had some sixty feet to go before he came to the ledge where a screen of brush hid the mouth of the cave. Funny how well he remembered every detail of this place, after almost twenty years. He stared at the brush and saw, with a quickening of his breaths, that it had recently been trampled.

A grim smile twisted his lips. There was a chance, of course, that Tex had already departed; but this he did not immediately consider.

Standing on the ledge, Lanky turned and sent a slow, keen survey over the country behind him. It was stark in the hot sunshine. He searched but saw nothing. Not even a stirring of wind broke the vast stillness. At any rate, he assured himself, the Circle X boys hadn't distrusted him sufficiently to follow him, and for that he was grateful.

Squatting, Lanky parted the brush with his arms. He squinted keenly into the darkness of the cavern. And instantly, in that gloom, he saw the figure of a man stretched flat on his back!

A BIG man, huge-chested, lay breathing heavily, with his sombrero half-covering his massive face. The sheriff gaped at him, then snapped:

"Tex!"

Tex Boll started out of sleep with a gasp. He sat up blinking, staring. His red hair all but concealed his frightened eyes. But when he recognized the squatting man on the

ledge, a sudden grin of relief creased his countenance.

"By the great jumpin' toad!" he ejaculated. "Yuh—yuh sure gave me a scare, Lanky!"

"What in blazes yuh doin' here?" the sheriff demanded.

"I been waitin' for yuh," said Tex.

"What!"

"Why, sure." Tex, fully awake now, came crawling out into the sunshine. He was still grinning as he squatted beside his younger brother. "Figgered them Circle X waddies would shoo yuh out after me," he explained. "An' when they told yuh where they'd last seen me, I kinda had a hunch yuh'd know just where to come to have a look—see."

LANKY was bewildered. Certainly it wasn't strange that their minds had functioned along the same channels in regard to the cave. But why Tex had deliberately awaited his coming, he couldn't understand.

"What'd yuh want to see me for?" he challenged.

"I'm in a hell of a hole, Lanky. I need help."

"Meanin'—?"

"Look." Tex's grin had vanished, and he became very earnest. "When them Circle X critters was chasin' me, I headed hell-bent out along Indian Gorge. Just alongside the roarin' river. I wasn't figgerin' on comin' here a-tall. I had my mind fixed on the Border. Sabe? But on the edge o' the Gorge my Pinto has to go an' step into a hole. Busted his leg, I reckon.

"Anyhow, he flew over an' down into the water at the bottom o' the canyon. Me, I almost went with him. Dunno how I ever managed to slide outta the saddle quick enough to save my hide. Anyhow, there I was without a hoss, without nothin', an' only half a mile from the Butte. So I lit out this-a-way."

"An'—an' yuh been sleepin' here since?"

"Well, not exactly sleepin'," Tex corrected. "I been watchin' for yuh, Lanky. Figgered if yuh came yuh, could mebbe get me a hoss an' some grub an' let me mosey on to the other side o' the Border, where I got plenty o' friends."

Lanky Tim Boll gaped at his huge brother, half in amazement, half in horror. He gasped:

"Then—then yuh *did* try to rustle Circle X cattle!"

Tex shrugged. "Yep," he admitted drily, peering away across the badlands. "Only it didn't work out."

"Steamin' tarantulas!" hoarsely whispered Lanky, stunned. He had lost all color again, and his nerves were taut. "What—what in blazes did yuh want to do that for, Tex?"

THOUGHTFULLY Tex Boll spat over the ledge.

"I was dead broke," he said quietly. "Lost every cent I had in a poker game Friday night. Even lost my smoke-pole." He tapped the empty holster at his hip. "So I got to thinkin' about a hombre who'd offered me a good price for Circle X beef, if I could rustle it over to him. An'—well, reckon that's all there is to tell, Lanky." He looked at the sheriff narrowly. "How about it, ol' timer? Yuh gonna get me a hoss an' grub?"

Lanky Tim Boll suddenly rose to his six feet of hard muscle. He glared down at his brother.

"No!" he said.

"Huh?"—aghast.

"Tex, listen! Yuh're a rustler, an' I'm sheriff. I got to pull yuh into Egmont an' see that yuh stand trial!"

For a second Tex gaped up as if he hadn't quite heard. Then he caught his breath, scrambled to his feet. "What in the hell are yuh

talkin' about?" he demanded harshly.

"Reckon yuh heard me plain, Tex."

"Arrest me?"

"That's it."

"Yuh—yuh're plumb loco!" rasped Tex, beginning to flush.

"Mebbe so," Lanky softly conceded. His eyes were flashing. "I hate to do this, Tex. I—I'd rather go to jail myself. But I'm sheriff hereabouts, an' I reckon I owe it to these folks to sorta forget my feelin's right now."

"But Lanky! For the love o'—"

"No use arguin', Tex. We're headin' for Egmont!"

FOR a moment they stood silent on the ledge, their stormy eyes clashing. Then Tex's lips receded from his teeth in an ugly snarl. Fury drained the flush from his features, and his fingers curled into fists.

"Oh, yeah?" he whispered.

"Yeah, 'an' we're startin' pronto!"

"Like hell we are!" Tex flung back. "Listen, Lanky! Yuh're only ten-twelve miles from Egmont. Yuh can walk back 'fore dark. Me, I'm takin' yer hoss an' ridin' for the Border!"

Very grimly the sheriff retorted, "Yuh heard what I said. We head for Egmont—right now!"

At that Tex Boll threw back his enormous head and laughed—a burst of harsh, mirthless laughter that trembled with defiance.

It stopped just as abruptly as it had begun.

"All right," he said. "Try an' take me if yuh think yuh can! Me, I'm hoppin' into yuhr saddle!"

Without offering another word, he sprang from the ledge and went scrambling down the steep slope of the Butte. An avalanche of gravel and stones accompanied him. He almost ran, steadying himself by seizing at rocks and brush as he

went down toward the waiting stallion.

"Tex!"

Up on the ledge Sheriff Boll suddenly drew his six-guns. His eyes flared dangerously. He cried:

"Stand where yuh are, or I'll load yuh with lead!"

Lanky's voice was terrible in its shaking wrath. Hearing it, the startled Tex did stop. He caught at a rock and turned. He blinked up at the ledge—up into the steady bores of two Colts that glared at his chest!

"L-Lanky!" he blurted huskily. "Yuh—yuh wouldn't—"

"Wouldn't I?"—savagely. "I'm actin' as sheriff now, Tex! An' I'm arrestin' yuh!"

"But—"

"I'm a-comin' down, an' we're goin' into Egmont, an' that settles the argument!"

AS he spoke, Lanky holstered one of his guns. The other remained in his grip, glowering down at the stupefied Tex. He let himself over the edge of the ledge and started down the slope determinedly. Some thirty feet still separated the brothers, and across that expanse they stared at each other.

Then, of a sudden, Tex Boll hardened. He actually sneered. He rapped out:

"Yuh wouldn't do it, Lanky! Not to me! If yuh think yuh can—well, I'm callin' yer bluff!"

And on that challenge Tex whirled around and continued his downhill dash toward the stallion. He went in deliberate defiance of the gun, not even pausing to glance back at it.

Lanky halted.

His face was suddenly gaunt with resolve. His eyes blazed. He knew he couldn't catch his brother before Tex leaped into the saddle and raced

away. He was sheriff of Egmont, and his prisoner was escaping! He *had* to shoot!

So he aimed carefully at Tex's back. His eyes were flaming slits. His teeth bit fiercely into his lower lip, and his finger tightened around the trigger.

"Go ahead!" he rasped to himself. "Yuh got to shoot!"

It was just a matter of squeezing that trigger. Just a twitch of his finger. He stood rigid, knowing he couldn't miss. The sweat oozed out of his body. His arm began to tremble.

"Shoot!" he grated.

He watched Tex go through twenty, thirty, forty feet of brush. He watched Tex reach level ground and race toward the stallion. Tex looked up over his shoulder and grinned—a grin of triumph and mockery.

"I told yuh!" he yelled.

Lanky Tim Boll just stood there, aiming his six-gun! His mind shrieked desperately that he must fire. Now! Now, before it was too late! But his finger had somehow become paralyzed. It simply would not squeeze the trigger. It quivered—it ached—

Until, at last, Lanky uttered a groan of despair. He knew he couldn't shoot Tex. Just couldn't! And Tex was getting away. He jammed the Colt back into its holster and plunged wildly down the slope.

III

IT WAS the black stallion that decided matters.

The horse had moved about so uneasily that its reins had become tangled in a low-hanging branch of a cottonwood. Reaching the animal, Tex had to fuss furiously in an effort to free the leather. It delayed him.

By the time he was ready to leap into the saddle, Lanky was at his back—breathless, fiery-eyed. Indeed, Lanky crashed into him, throwing the big man off balance.

"Mebbe I couldn't shoot yuh!" he panted hoarsely. "But I—I'm gonna drag yuh into Egmont just the same!"

Tex whirled around, glaring.

"Oh, yeah?" he flung out savagely. "How?"

"I'm gonna beat the daylights outta yuh with my fists!" cried Lanky. "An' when yuh've had enough I'm gonna sling yuh over my hoss an' tote yuh in! Yuh're a rustler, Tex, an' I can't let yuh get away with it!"

Tex stared. Then he straightened, tugged up his pants, and smiled venomously.

"Oh! So yuh figger yuh can lick me that way, huh?"

"I'm givin' yuh a—a chance to put up yuhr paws!" Lanky hurled back.

Again Tex grinned; with eminent satisfaction now. He drew off his sombrero and flung it aside. He was much bigger and heavier than his brother, and a contest of this sort struck him as something of a joke.

"Mebbe yu'd better sling off them holsters," he said. "Just in case—"

TREMBLING in every nerve, Lanky Tim Boll unbuckled his belts and tossed them aside. He was white with impassioned determination. His eyes flared into Tex's, and he demanded:

"Yuh set?"

"Let's go!" Tex chuckled.

It was Lanky who charged first. He raced in, dodged under his brother's gigantic fist, and planted a thudding blow squarely in Tex's stomach.

The big man grunted, more in surprise than in pain. His eyes

widened, and he staggered back. Before he could raise his arms a furious crack smashed against his jaw, sent him reeling dizzily to one side.

"D-damn yuh!" gasped Tex. And then the fight was no longer a joke to him.

He gathered his strength and plunged forward in blind rage, his red head lowered like a charging bull's. He drove out his fists, banging one straight into Lanky's chest. It was a terrific blow. The sheriff felt as though his bones had been shattered. He tottered back in a daze, with Tex wildly following, hurling fists at his head.

A boulder stopped Lanky's recoil. There he stood, and they remained toe to toe, shoulders hunched, swinging away at each other.

BLOOD suddenly spurted from Tex's nose. As suddenly one of Lanky's eyes was shut behind a display of explosive red lights. They labored for breath, gasping. Both were dizzy and staggering. But their fists continued to fly out madly.

As they fought, they edged away from the boulder. On and on, without a moment's respite, their punches thudded heavily, until—

How it happened Lanky Tim Boll never really knew. He must have stepped on something that rolled away under his foot. He stumbled crazily, losing his balance. A hoarse cry broke from him, and his arms rose. But Tex's fist, swinging through a vicious circle, chose that moment to crash against the side of his brother's jaw.

Lanky plunged sideways in a veritable dive. He fell over a rock—banged his head on its jagged edge.

That was the end.

The lean sheriff of Egmont lay in an unconscious huddle, with blood streaming from a hideous gash in his head! It reddened the rock

and the gravel beside it. It continued to pour down over **his cheek.**

Tex Boll, with his own big face splotted crimson, stood swaying like a dizzy colossus. He glared down at his brother in savage triumph.

"Yuh doggone fool!" he grated hoarsely. "Yuh shoulda knowed yuh couldn't lick me! Yuh shoulda had more sense! It's yer own fault!"

As he spoke, fighting for breath, he backed away toward the stallion. He caught its reins in an unsteady hand, turned, and forced his bulk up into the saddle.

A moment he sat there, staring down at Lanky's crimson head. Then he sneered.

"Mebbe I oughta tote yuh into a doctor's house," he rasped aloud. "But why in blazes should I? If I showed up in Egmont, them Circle X buzzards would string me up to the nearest tree! Or else they'd fling me into jail! Why in hell should I risk my neck just 'cause yuh was a fool?"

He suddenly snorted derisively, and jerked the stallion's head toward the south.

"Me," he cried, "I'm headin' for the Border!"

He dug his heels into the horse's ribs, and the panicky mount leaped away like a jackrabbit, galloping furiously toward the distant Border—and safety.

IV

FULLY a half hour dragged by before Lanky Tim Boll opened his agonized eyes. At the beginning, as consciousness returned, he couldn't quite understand **where** he was or what had **happened.** He knew only that he **was rising and falling, rising and falling,** as though he were in the saddle of a walking horse.

And that, he soon discovered, was true!

He was propped up on a horse—his own black stallion! He sat there limply, with his right arm around the shoulders of a man who strode beside him, supporting his weight. He blinked down. And in a tone at once cracked and husky, he gasped:

"Tex!"

Tex Boll, crazily disheveled, grinned up at him. "Feelin' easier?" he asked.

But Lanky could only manage a hoarse, "Wh-what—"

"Easy, easy!" Tex cautioned earnestly. "Yuh're hurt pretty doggone bad. I got yuh head tied up with my undershirt, but it sure looks a mess. Reckon' yuh'll be all right, though, once I get yuh into town an' we see the doctor."

"Into town?" whispered Lanky, aghast.

"Yeah," Tex grunted. They proceeded in silence for a while, the big man glowering. Then he said thickly: "To tell yuh the truth,

Lanky, I—I tried to leave yuh back there. Tried to streak out for the Border!"

"Wh-why didn't yuh?" croaked Lanky.

The red-headed man's mouth twisted in a peculiar, humorless smile.

"I—dunno," he admitted softly. "It's kinda hard to tell. Yuh—yuh remember how yuh felt when yuh tried to shoot me a while back, an' just couldn't?"

"Sure—"

"Well, reckon that's how I felt, too," Tex said weakly. "I wanted to ride an' leave yuh there for the buzzards. I akktchally started off, too. But—I dunno. I just couldn't keep a-goin'. I hadda come back, Lanky. I hadda!"

They moved on in silence for almost five minutes. Then Sheriff Lanky Tim Boll huskily whispered: "But yuh can't go into Egmont, Tex! They'll grab yuh soon as they lay eyes on yuh!"

"Aw, what the hell!" snorted Tex Boll, a little shakily. "What the hell!"

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ST. LAURENT! God, what heat! Slowly Perron climbed the ladder from the steel cage deep in the hold of the ship and followed the line of convicts across the deck to the gangplank. The bright sunlight blinded him at first, and then gradually the objects before him became distinct—the dock, crowded with blacks and a scattering of white officials; the gray stone walls and buildings beyond, and the vivid green of the jungle. A gorgeous sight, that jungle!

It seemed impossible to Perron that the place could be the hell it was reported.

In a large bare room in the prison each man was made to strip, and as his name was called, he was numbered and catalogued like some prize beef.

After that he was given a blouse with a number stamped prominently across the front, a pair of trousers, a wide-brimmed hat of straw, and a pair of sandals.

Perron glanced ruefully at his number and pulled on his clothes. In the beginning it had all seemed so impossible—some terrible mistake.

Someone would surely learn the truth and the farce would end. But no one had, and here he was, a convict in Guiana. The steel-shod door of a cell-room slammed shut at his heels and the last bit of hope deserted him.

"They can't!" he cried aloud. "They can't railroad me like this! I'm an American, damn them—an American!"

"Zut, do not be a fool!" A convict from the boat led him to one of the bunks along the wall. "Your name is French; you speak the language, and since you could not prove you were an American, they found you guilty."

"Damn them, they never gave me a chance! That lying brute swore that I was with him and they would not listen to me."

"But you admit you were struggling with the *préfet*, and that you were drunk besides. What can you expect?"



Perron sent his fist straight at the big man's ugly face.

"I was drunk, but I knew what I was doing. I happened to be passing and saw the attack. I tried to help the old fool and he hit me with his cane. The next thing I knew a *gendarme* had me handcuffed."

"A most unfortunate incident," the convict shook his head, "but I see nothing for you, *mon ami*, but to forget the past and plan to escape when you can. It is better to hope for the future than to poison the brain with the past."

Young, strong, and with the stamp of intelligence on him, in spite of his shaved head and the worried lines in his face, Perron let the words sink in and fought down the frenzy that had come over him. Escape!

Yes, there was still that.

And then, as he lifted his eyes to stare about him, his saner thoughts were again wiped from his harried brain. There before him, arrogant

and brutal, stood the one man in all the world whom he hated most. It was Le Bec, the lying, unprincipled bully whom he had seen attacking the *préfet* of police that night in Marseilles—the man who had falsely sworn that he, Perron, was his partner.

THE small, close-set eyes of Le Bec opened wide. His immense fists opened and closed, and the arteries in his short, thick neck began to pulse with sudden rage. "*Nom de Dieu!*" he roared. "So you are here, too—you dog of a meddler!"

Perron, the accumulated resentment and anger of the past weeks rising like a flood, took a step toward Le Bec and stood there, his breath coming in fitful gasps. "Yes, damn you, I am here!" he raged. "Here because of your dirty lies! Because you are a beastly coward!"

Le Bec seemed astonished at first, then he roared with laughter. De-

liberately he, too, took a step forward; then coloring suddenly with anger, he swung a hairy fist at Perron's head.

For all its terrific force, the blow was like the slow opening thrust of some mighty piston. Perron dodged it easily and sent his own fist straight at the big man's ugly face. Twice more he hit before the huge fist swung again, and as he stepped aside he landed just below the bully's ribs.

With a bellow, Le Bec came at him again, murder gleaming from his blood-shot eyes. His broken lips were open and his round, shaved head was thrust forward, inviting a repetition of the blows.

PERRON knew that if once those ponderous arms closed about him it would be the end, but he accepted the challenge unhesitatingly. He jabbed and ducked, and jabbed again, as Le Bec came on. He realized that he was being crowded against the wall. Perron was good with his fists; he knew how to cover, too, but the fighting he knew was not the brutal trickery of the Marseilles docks.

Tense and wary he waited. As the bully rushed, Perron sent his fist crashing into his eye and escaped under one of the flying arms. A howl of delight went up from the spectators, and a bellow of rage emerged from Le Bec. Perron dodged another wild swing and stepped back a little to catch his wind. The ugly, swollen face before him was twisted with hate and pain. One eye was fast closing. If Perron could land on the other one now the muscle-bound brute would be helpless.

Le Bec, too, seemed to realize the danger in those chopping blows at his face, and his jaws snapped shut with a determination to end it.

Without caution or thought of the consequences, he rushed in, head down and arms spread wide.

Perron was ready. Twice he landed before he ducked, and both blows were close to Le Bec's one good eye. Another roar went up from the onlookers. Le Bec, his arrogant conceit outraged and belittled, discarded the last pretense at skill.

Perron sprang to one side and aimed a terrific blow. But it did not land. He tripped as a foot was thrust in front of him, and lost his balance. The fist he had avoided so successfully was suddenly in front of him and before he could recover, it crashed against his jaw.

II

THE mad yelling had ceased and the men had gone back to their bunks when Perron opened his eyes. He was dizzy and he closed his eyes again in an effort to collect his thoughts. The vision of a driving fist flashed through his brain and he remembered—Le Bec. He recalled the foot, too, that had tripped him, and he muttered an oath. But what could he expect from a room full of convicts—thieves and murderers from the sink-holes of France.

He tried to move and sank back with a stab of pain in his side. He felt of his ribs and found them bruised and sore. The penalty of defeat, he knew without asking. Le Bec had no doubt kicked him until he tired, then spat at him.

Painfully Perron rose to his feet and in the washroom at one end of the dormitory he bathed his face. He had been a fool to fight there before all the others, but his anger had gotten the better of him. Strange he had not seen Le Bec before. And yet it was not so

strange at that. There had been nearly six hundred of them on the boat, locked in a dozen different cages.

He felt the others watching him as he made his way back to his bunk, and the man whose bed of planks was directly across came and sat down beside him. "You fought well," he said. "It was unfortunate you slipped."

"Slipped, hell!" Perron replied with anger. "Couldn't you see that I was tripped?"

"*Sacré*, no! What son of a swine did that?"

Perron shook his head. "I would like to know."

A GROUP had gathered at one end of the dormitory and from where he lay on his bunk Perron could see that Le Bec was the center of it. He was the hero, now, and already the weak were bidding for his favor.

"*Vive le boeuf*—the bull!" a shifty, fat-faced youth shouted his praise. "Look at his arms—big as my leg! Look at his chest—his shoulders!"

Perron muttered with disgust and turned over to ease his aching side. He began to ponder on the one thing that now meant more than all else—escape.

He must talk with Faudre, the grizzled old seaman who had once made a voyage to Paramaribo in Dutch Guiana. Faudre was an ignorant man, but he knew the sea and he had been positive that if he could reach Paramaribo he could find his way to Venezuela. There were others who could advise him, too. Yes, hundreds, and they must all have plans of their own.

Suddenly Perron sat straight up on his boards and stared at the men around him. He had seen numbers on the shirt-fronts of the convicts on the dock that were five and even

ten thousand lower than his own. Why were they still here? Why hadn't they put their knowledge to the test?

There could be only one answer, and the thought left him floundering—desperate.

The roll of a drum announced the end of the midday rest. It was the signal for the guards to herd them down to the river, to beach the great logs of mahogany for the saw mill. Waist-deep in the murky water, the sun beating down like the blast from a furnace, Perron began his five years at labor. After that there would be five years in exile and then Guiana would be through with him—and he would be a worthless, broken old man.

With questions here and there, and an occasional talk with one of the *libérés*, Perron was able to collect considerable information. He learned that there were maps to be had of the jungle—maps made by men who had once been there and, for some unforeseen reason, had failed in their plans; and there were charts of the seacoast. There were also the names of men from the Dutch side across the Maroni, who for five hundred francs would land a convict in Venezuela or Brazil.

FIVE hundred francs! They might as well have asked a million. There were ways of accumulating a little money. There were trinkets one could make and sell to the natives, and there was the gambling. The collecting of a few hundred francs would take many months and the process would be tedious, but it was evident to Perron that escape would be impossible without it. Money he must have. He decided to try the gambling.

He watched the card play for days. The favorite game of the convicts was new to him, but Perron

was not a stranger to cards. An errand performed for a guard finally brought him ten whole centimes, and that night he sat in on one of the games. When the group broke up and crawled off to their bunks, his ten centimes had increased to a franc.

After that his thoughts and energy were entirely centered on accumulating the necessary money. Every sou added to his chances of success, and no amount was too small to interest him. In a month he had saved fifteen francs.

There were others, though, who coveted these sous besides Perron, and one in particular was Le Bec. The big Frenchman, however, used a different method.

HE had gathered about him a handful of followers, and through whispered conferences held in a corner of the dormitory he gave the impression to the others that he had devised some marvelous scheme, some plan that could not possibly fail. If one wished to join this clique he paid for the privilege by handing over whatever he possessed.

Perron listened and scoffed. He had not the slightest idea but that Le Bec would walk off some day with the money he collected and leave the others stranded.

"They say he has a clever idea," a convict insisted.

"Maybe," Perron conceded. "But any thought he might have would be the inspiration of the devil. What is this scheme?"

"No one knows but those who are in with him."

"And who are they—a nigger from Senegal, Faudre, Verdel and that pimply-faced infant that does all his dirty work. It would not take much talking to convince them of anything."

Perron won a few more francs at

his cards that evening, and while he played, he watched Le Bec and his chosen four at their everlasting whispering. Twice his glance met the small, black eyes of Le Bec. Something told him that they had spoken his name.

He carefully concealed his money that night. Nothing else about him could have interested them, he was sure. Faudre would not have robbed him, neither did he fear Verdel, but Le Bec and the youth would not hesitate at murder, to say nothing of thievery. He would need to watch them.

The night passed without incident, however, as did the next and the next, until he began to wonder if his suspicions had not been unfounded. He hoped so. It was not pleasant to harbor the feeling that someone was waiting for a dark night and the chance to slit his throat.

The rains set in and the very walls of the prison dripped with the moisture. All day Perron toiled in the river, drenched to the skin, and at night he lay wrapped in his blanket, fighting the chill and dampness that was creeping into his bones.

He would have made the break then. His luck had been good, but he felt that if something did not happen he would find himself screaming aloud some night, beating his fists against the bars. But he was saved that folly by the arrival of a man who had recently finished his confinement at St. Joseph.

PERRON asked the convict many questions. They all did, though they learned very little. He had tried to escape through the jungle and had lost his way. He had all but died, and then he had stumbled into a Dutch village and the authorities had turned him over to the

French. Six months had been the penalty—six months in solitary confinement.

No, Perron decided, he would not risk that. He would wait until the rains were over and he had more money. He would find something to occupy his brain—something.

Two nights later that help came to him from a source he had almost forgotten. It was well on toward morning or he would not have been caught asleep. As it happened, he had at last worn himself out and the wicked thrust of a knife was the first knowledge he had of the impending danger.

A hand closed over his mouth as the blade bit into his flesh, but he flung it off and sprang from the bunk. He braced himself, ready for the next attack, but his assailant had sensed the failure of that first thrust and had slipped away.

III

PERRON did what he could to stop the flow of blood. In spite of the pain in his side, he could not help wondering who his would-be murderer had been. He had no proof, but somehow the disgusting features of the youth who basked in the favor of Le Bec stood out above all the rest.

With the first streak of dawn Perron removed the rag he held against the wound and twisted his head to examine it. The gash was on his left side, four or five ribs below the armpit, and the blade that had made it must have been all of two inches wide. The thrust had been meant for his heart, but instead of entering straight, the blade had followed along the outside of a rib.

"Not so bad," he muttered. "Thank God."

A thought came to him then—an idea that was like a narcotic to the

throbbing pain. Was such a thing possible? Could he do it? At least he could try, and if he poisoned his blood or weakened and died what difference would it make? It would kill him anyway if the devils got what they were after.

The réveille drum had not yet sounded, and making his way to the *Javabo* he washed the stains from his blanket, bound the wound as best he could and pulled on his blouse. When the roll of the drum echoed through the corridors he pretended to awaken with the rest as if nothing had happened. He watched Le Bec and he saw that the bully was in an ugly mood.

During the day Perron parted with one of his precious francs at the little pharmacy for a vial of antiseptic and another for a bit of vaseline. He also selected a piece of wood, wide and flat, and carefully shaped it. That night he again attended the wound. He inserted the piece of wood into the cut, then bound it up. The pain was extreme, but when it was over he did not mind. The exhaustion helped him to sleep.

Each night after that he patiently attended the wound. It was weeks before it finally healed, before he discarded the piece of wood and the soreness was gone, but the result proved worth the suffering. He had a place to conceal his coveted wealth now—a pocket in his very flesh.

THE dreary down-pour gave way to sunshine at last; the river subsided and the weary toilers of St. Laurent emerged from their gloom. Again there was talk of freedom—escape. "I suppose Le Bec and his gang will be missing one of these days," a convict commented enviously. "They have a good plan. They ought to make it."

"So you have heard what it is?"

Perron inquired of him, curiously.

"I am not certain. They are not doing much talking, but I understand they are going to cross the Maroni, make it through the jungle to somewhere near Paramaribo, then build a boat and take to the sea."

"There is nothing new about that, except the boat."

"True, but that is where a thousand others have failed. They attempt to stow away and are caught. Le Bec will have his own boat. Verdel will build it and Faudre will sail it."

Verdel would build it. Perron had not thought of that, but he recalled now that the man had been a shipwright. That accounted for Le Bec having taken him in. There was no doubt of Faudre's place in the scheme; and the Negro born in one jungle would be at home in another. The youth, Perron could not yet figure out, unless— His hand went to the lump in his side. Yes, no doubt that was it.

WITH renewed interest in their existence, the convicts brought out their cards and the evening games were resumed. Perron played his hand and complained of losses in spite of the fact that he usually won.

A week passed and someone whispered that Le Bec and his gang were leaving the following day. Everyone envied them, Perron included. He lay awake for hours that night, the irony of the thing eating deep into his store of courage. A word to one of the guards would have done for the lot of them, but he could not do that.

He could only bide his time and follow when his preparations were complete.

A movement out in the aisle between the rows of bunks caught his eye and he raised his head to peer

into the semi-darkness. The object moved closer, a man; he stopped, half rose, then advanced cautiously between Perron's and the bunk on his right. Something in the movement of the man was familiar and then Perron caught a glimpse of his profile—the sloping forehead, the long nose, and the receding chin.

Muscles tense, Perron waited. The figure crept closer. A hand reached out and a broad-bladed knife was silhouetted against the faint light from the windows above. Down came the knife and Perron's two hands shot up to seize the wrist that held it. With a vicious wrench he twisted the arm. The knife dropped and he felt for it with one hand while he clung to the skinny wrist with the other.

"Don't! *Bon Dieu*, do not kill me!" the youth pleaded in a terrified whisper. "I had to—he made me—"

The whispering suddenly ceased and the youth fell forward across the bunk. Perron made a frantic effort to get out from under and then something crashed against his skull. He tried to shout—to free himself, but the bludgeon descended again and he lost consciousness.

IV

IT WAS the roll of the morning drum that brought him to his senses—like a roar of thunder at first. He opened his eyes and saw it was daylight. He remembered the weight that had held him and realized that it was no longer there. He sat up and felt of his head. It ached as if his skull would split, but there was another sensation, a dread, that stood out above the pain. His hand darted to his side and felt for the familiar lump. It was still there, untouched.

A crowd began to collect at the

far end of the dormitory, and though Perron had his suspicion of what attracted them, he questioned a convict who was passing just to be sure.

"It's the Rat," the man replied. "He's in a bad way. They've called the guard. Somebody tried to club him to death."

"When did it happen? During the night?"

"Yes. Much can happen in St. Laurent between night and morning."

Perron nodded. So he had learned. He followed the convict to the wash-room, saying nothing of the attack that had been made on himself. The bewildered expression that swept over the face of Le Bec when their glances met was worth the agony of his pretended indifference. He laughed at the bully and Le Bec strode away with an oath.

THE long-planned break for freedom was not attempted that day nor the next. Le Bec held his usual conferences but the third day passed and nothing came of it. Some said they were trying to decide who to take in place of the Rat, but Perron knew better. It was lack of money that delayed them—the money they had hoped to steal from him.

In all those long heart-breaking months not once had Perron found himself alone with Le Bec, until one morning a week after the last attack. An accident in the river brought it about. A convict caught between two logs had drowned, and the guard picked the two of them to carry the body to the cemetery. Without a word or a glance at each other they placed the corpse in a cart and wheeled it away.

They dug a hole and rolled the man into it, as was the custom in Guiana, and filled the dirt back on top of him. When the unpleasant task was finished Perron laid aside

his shovel. His heart was pounding. The opportunity he had awaited was at hand.

"Now, you bully, I am going to show you," he swore. "There's no one here to stick out his foot this time. I am going to beat you within a breath of your life."

For a moment Le Bec stood open-mouthed, then his face turned a mottled red. For all his anger, however, he did not seem anxious to fight. He was not afraid. There was something else at the back of his tricky brain.

"Fool!" he growled, "you could not beat me in a hundred years! Why should we fight, anyway? I am the best man in St. Laurent, and you are next."

"But for you and your dirty lies I would not be here at all," Perron declared. "That is why we are going to fight."

"And if it were not for you and your cursed meddling I would not be here either. For once there is justice."

Perron was not of a mind to argue. "Put up your hands, or I will plant a foot in your middle as you did to me."

"Fool, listen to me!" Le Bec grew earnest, almost pleading. "I am leaving this hellhole tomorrow. We have both suffered long enough. I am to blame for your being here, and for that reason I will help you to escape."

PERRON stared at him. There was not a convict at St. Laurent who would not have jumped at the chance the bully offered, and yet he was not decided. He knew there was a catch in it somewhere.

"Well, what do you say?" Le Bec demanded. "Is that not fair? There was never a better plan of escape than mine. It can't fail. If we fight, tomorrow you will not be able

to crawl, and what is to be gained by that?"

Perron picked up his shovel. As much as he wanted to smash that ugly face he wanted his freedom more. "You are not fooling me one bit," he finally spoke. "But I will accept your offer. What is this wonderful plan of yours and what part do I take in it?"

Le Bec swallowed his anger with an extravagant gesture of tolerance. "We will talk that over tonight. You will pay your share like the rest of us, but that is all."

His share, thought Perron. If each of them put up an equal amount his three hundred francs would be more than enough.

That night he listened to the whispered instructions of Le Bec and the assurances of the others that another month would see them all safe in Venezuela. His presence among them was not questioned. Whatever Le Bec said was law.

When the lights were turned off Perron went to his bunk to lie there the entire night staring wide-eyed at the ceiling and the shadows about him. With the next setting of the sun, the great, iron gates of St. Laurent would close without him, and there was much to think about.

V

"REMEMBER now, one at a time," Le Bec hissed in an undertone as they toiled waist deep in the river the next afternoon. "Verdel and Faudre have gone already. The Senegalese will go next, then you. I will come last. Keep to the brush along the bank and work your way up river until you catch up with the others."

Perron nodded. It was not likely that Le Bec would attempt any treachery before they had actually started. He kept an eye on the

Senegalese and presently he saw him edge toward the bank. The next minute he had disappeared into the tangle of brush and vines.

Five, ten minutes Perron waited, then he worked his way toward the bank as the Negro had done, and when the guard turned his back he took to the brush. With a hundred or more convicts pulling and hauling at the acre of logs, it was not likely that the absence of a few would be noticed until the evening lock-up.

Once he had gained the protection of the dense growth along the bank, Perron felt easier. There was the semblance of a trail and he followed it to a point above the village where he came suddenly upon Verdel, Faudre and the Negro taking their turn at a cigarette.

"Ah, the fourth," Faudre stuck out a welcoming hand. "Now we have only to wait for Le Bec. See, the boatmen are already here."

Peering through the screen of vines, Perron made out a large canoe resting against the bank. There was a shelter roofed with grass running half way back from the bow, and in the stern sat two bush Negroes from the jungle. A canoe could be hired in the village with very little trouble. For this particular service Le Bec had probably promised double pay.

"So you are here, *mes salos!*" Le Bec stepped out of the jungle and stood before them. "And the boat, too—that is good! Come with me, Verdel, and we will purchase food."

THE ex-shipwright nodded and together they disappeared in the direction of the village. There was a store there, kept by a tricky old Chinaman, who would sell them anything they wanted and who could be depended upon to hold his tongue. They were back in a very short time, each with a bag of provisions. Con-

tinuing on to the water's edge, they dumped them into the canoe.

"All right," Le Bec spoke to the boatman. "We go other side—long way up river."

The bushmen grunted, and when the five had concealed themselves beneath the shelter, the canoe nosed out into the river. It was growing dark, and back in St. Laurent the line of convicts was filing in through the prison gate. The keeper would check the numbers, give the alarm and the search would begin.

NO one spoke, not even Le Bec. Each was busy with thoughts of his own. For a long time there was no sound but the occasional splash of a paddle, and then the canoe ceased to move and one of the bushmen announced that they were across. "Money," he demanded, and Perron discovered that they were still several yards from the Dutch bank of the river.

Le Bec did not argue; it would not do to have trouble so close to St. Laurent. He paid the sum agreed upon, and, satisfied, the boatmen paddled them ashore. The Senegalese found the trail while they divided the supplies; and in single file, with the Negro ahead and Le Bec at the rear, they plunged into the jungle.

Free, Perron thought to himself. No, that was foolish. He had heard of men who had been gone for days, weeks, and had failed even then. But they had not been blessed with a guide like the big black from Senegal. How he found his way through that inky darkness was a mystery. Alone, Perron knew he would have been lost before he even started.

"We will wait until daylight," the Senegalese declared at last. "There is a stream ahead. I cannot be sure of the other side."

No one objected, and there in the thick of the jungle, mocked by the croaking of frogs and the screech of night birds, they sat and talked—and wondered. To Perron, no sleepless night he had spent in the dormitory at St. Laurent had dragged more slowly.

With the first misty gray of dawn they breakfasted and then the Senegalese waded the stream and headed on into the jungle. He seemed a different man now from the ugly, sullen black they had known in prison. With his kinky head, broad back, skinny legs, and ponderous feet that pointed straight out, the Negro was indeed in his element.

Their map called for a village of the bushmen on the bank of a river leading down to Paramaribo, and the convict who had sold it to them had declared they would reach there the second night. Thanks to the Senegalese they were not disappointed. Just before dark they stepped abruptly from the jungle into a clearing and stood gazing at a disorderly collection of peaked, thatched huts.

"You talk to them," Le Bec ordered the Senegalese. "Tell them we want to stay here tonight and that we want to buy a canoe—food, too, if they've anything we can stomach."

THE bushmen came forward to look at them; recognized them at once for what they were, and went back to their huts and fires with indifference. Escaped convicts from Guiana were not new to them. The Senegalese spoke to one of the men in a mongrel French and stated their wants.

"There are vacant huts," the bushman answered disinterestedly. "Stay where you please. You might find some of the women who will sell cassava or dried fish, but a canoe—

I think not. Most of the men have gone away in them—hunting.”

“*Sapristi*, they must have a canoe somewhere!” Le Bec grew excited. “If they won’t sell it, the pigs, we’ll take it.”

The Senegalese shook his head. “Wait until morning. They are busy now with their meal.”

“All right, then we’ll collect some food.”

They wandered into the village and Le Bec motioned Perron that he wanted to talk to him. “I’m doing the buying,” he stated. “We have put together all the money we could get and I will make it go as far as I can. What about you?”

PERRON was expecting this. He knew that from then on he would need to use every precaution—to watch like a hawk. “I will pay my share,” he said. “How much did each of you put up?”

“The Negro had the least—two hundred francs.”

Perron smiled to himself. He knew Le Bec was lying, but he did not argue. “Here is a hundred francs. When that is gone I have a little more.”

He took the money from his pocket and handed it over, amused at the anger and disappointment that shone in the bully’s face. He wondered if Le Bec had really thought he would reveal his secret hiding place and hand him his entire savings.

A hundred francs was better than nothing, though, and Le Bec took the money and went to bargain for food. When they had eaten, they selected one of the vacant huts and lay down to sleep. The twelve hours on the heels of the long-legged black had worn them out.

Le Bec, however, had other plans. Before they slept Perron learned that at midnight they were to sneak down to the river and steal a canoe.

“I paid enough for this rotten fish to be worth two canoes,” growled the bully. “They cannot rob me.”

No one seemed inclined to dispute his scheme, so Perron did not protest. Hours later he was awakened by a rough kick and they felt their way down to the river. There were canoes there, but as the bushman had said, the young men of the village had taken the good ones. The craft that remained were either waterlogged or hopelessly battered.

“This one will do,” Verdel finally announced. “It is small, but it will float.”

Le Bec examined the find. There were paddles in the bottom, and he was satisfied. “Get in,” he whispered.

Verdel, Faudre and Perron, each with their bag of provisions, climbed carefully into the dugout. It was evident then that there was room for only one more. Le Bec saw the situation also, but he did not hesitate.

“There is not room,” he turned to the Senegalese. “We will take your bag. You come on foot.”

“*Sacré!*” the Negro swore. “Why should I be the one to walk?”

“Because, fool, you know this cursed jungle like a snake. If you don’t want to walk, you can find another canoe. You can’t go in this one.”

“DOG, if I cannot go, neither will you!” The Negro went suddenly mad, and, seizing Le Bec, he started to pull him from the canoe.

“You black son of a swine!” The bully sprang ashore. In the darkness it was impossible to see what followed, but there were muffled oaths, a groan, then silence.

Le Bec stepped back into the canoe then, and with him he brought the Senegalese’s bag. With a shove on the paddle he sent the boat out

into the river. "Pig! Fool!" he muttered. "We were through with him anyway. There will be no more tramping through this cursed jungle. Three days down this river and we will be at Paramaribo."

It was several seconds before Perron realized the truth. "Through with him." The words of Le Bec rang in his ears and a feeling of nausea swept over him.

Each of them had been chosen for a specific purpose. When their part had been played Le Bec would be through with them, also.

VI

THE REST of the night and all the next day they drifted with the river. There was nothing to do but watch for snags and keep the bow of the canoe headed with the current. Perron wondered if the idea that had struck him had occurred to the others also. Probably not; they did not know the treachery of that swaggering hulk as he did.

They camped on the river bank the second night, and the third. On the afternoon of the third day they knew from the activity on the river that they were nearing Paramaribo. Dressed as they still were, in prison garb, it would not do to approach too near to the village.

"We had better head for the bank," Le Bec decided and, choosing a spot where the jungle was particularly dense, they worked the canoe in between the overhanging branches. When darkness came on, Verdel went down the river to investigate. Upon his return they learned that the town was not more than two miles distant. They were not apt to be discovered, however, if they kept off the river in the daytime.

"Now we will build the big boat for the sea," Le Bec declared. "Ver-

del, you are the boss. Whatever you say, we will do."

The shipwright nodded. His task was not going to be an easy one, but he was not lacking in confidence. "First of all we will need tools. We cannot build a boat with our hands alone."

"What do you need?"

"Zut, everything—an adz, saws, hammers. Later I will need a bit, bolts and nails. I do not like to think of all the things we will need before this boat is ready for the sea."

Le Bec threw out his chest and laughed. "Was I not the most clever thief in Marseilles? You build the boat. I will get anything you need."

In a week the keel had been laid, and Verdel had all the tools he could use. Each night Le Bec took the canoe and when he returned it was loaded. He brought clothes, food and tobacco for them all. Ropes, canvas and blocks would be needed for the sail, and one night he took Faudre and returned with enough gear to rig a schooner. He was delighted with the opportunity to exhibit his sinful ability.

The part played by Perron was unimportant, though he toiled constantly. He wielded the adz and saw until his back ached. But he did not mind it. As the hull took shape he watched it grow, with interest and admiration of the skill of the man who built it. He paid no attention to Le Bec, other than to watch him.

IN two weeks the ribs were in place and the sheeting began slowly to cover them. Faudre had finished with his sail and rigging, and he, too, labored at the beck and call of Verdel. Every timber and board had to be cut by hand, and Verdel chose only the seasoned and dry. He might have been less ex-

acting, but their lives, their freedom depended on this shell of wood they built so laboriously. No single part could be slighted.

Le Bec had been satisfied at first to pillage at night and sleep during the day, but as the boat neared completion he became more and more restless. He grumbled and complained, and finally became impatient with even Verdel.

"It is better to do it right," Verdel maintained with calm, "than to have the thing go to pieces in the first bit of wind. Another week and it will be finished."

"Another week!" Le Bec exploded. "*Sapristi!*"

HE made one more trip into the town that night, and that was the last. There was nothing more they needed. They had food enough for several days, and a dozen gourds for water.

Verdel finished the caulking; filled the cracks with pitch, and finally announced that on the following day they would slide the *Liberté* into the river and step the mast. What name could they have chosen that would have been more fitting?

"Tomorrow!" Le Bec received the news with relief. "Thank *le bon Dieu!*" He questioned the shipwright regarding the launching, and after the evening meal he pondered at length on the possibilities that lay ahead. If their luck held, a few days more would see them safe in Caracas—Venezuela, at least.

It was a startled cry that awakened Perron the next morning, and he sat up to stare inquiringly about him. The exclamation had come from Faudre, and he saw the old seaman down on his knees beside the motionless form of Verdel.

"Dead!" he cried. "*Bon Dieu, he is dead!*"

Le Bec sat up and looked across

at the shipwright with a feeble attempt at astonishment. "Dead!" he repeated. "Too bad—too bad. A snake probably. How fortunate the boat is finished."

Perron got up and went over to look at their dead companion. Outwardly he seemed as calm as Le Bec, but deep within, his blood boiled. He had not forgotten the thought that had come to him with the death of the Senegalese, but yet he had not been prepared for this. He bent over the body, searching for the wound, but there was none, and then he realized the man had been choked to death. His face was black, distorted, and his throat was bruised.

Standing up, Perron faced Le Bec, fighting to control himself. "Yes, it is too bad," he said. "But the boat is finished—we *were through with him*. Is that not so?"

Le Bec understood. His small eyes gleamed and for a moment he was on the verge of some angry retort. The rage passed, however, and his thick lips curled with contempt. He was master here. He would do as he pleased. "Yes, we were through with him," he snapped. "Throw the body into the river."

VII

PERRON and Faudre carried the shipwright down to the river. "We will bury him," Perron declared. "He deserves that at least."

"Yes, by all means," the seaman agreed. "The boat is plenty large. I cannot see why he killed him."

"Then you guessed it?" Perron demanded.

"Yes. There is no doubt. But why?"

"Why did he kill the Negro?" Perron was impatient with the stupidity of the man. "Because he was through with him. The same thing

will happen to us if he has his way. There will be no one left to talk. The money that remains will all be his."

"*Sacré*, I believe you are right! Then we will kill him first. We do not need him, either. I am the one who will sail the boat."

Perron shook his head. As much as Le Bec deserved it, he could not bring himself to actually take part in a cold-blooded murder. "It is no time to start a fight and lose all we have gained. Our best bet is to watch him. There must never be a minute when one of us is not awake. Two against one, we ought to hold him off until we are clear of the Guianas."

"I WOULD rather split his skull with that adz," Faudre muttered. "But maybe you are right."

"I believe so. He is a powerful brute. If we attacked him and failed— No, watch him. Never turn your back."

They buried Verdel, then set to work launching the boat. When that was accomplished, the rest of the day was spent with the rigging and the stowing of supplies. At dark they poled the boat out into the river.

"You are the skipper, Faudre," Le Bec said nervously. "Take the helm and get us out to sea. May *le bon Dieu* help you if anything goes wrong."

Faudre took the helm and very shortly they were approaching the lights of Paramaribo. Their speed lessened as the river widened and the old seaman hoisted the sail. Slowly the lights grew nearer, then brighter, until the whole river seemed aglow. No one spoke. Even Le Bec appeared afraid of his voice. Faudre, one hand on the tiller, his eyes intent on the lights of the channel, was like a man carved from

wood. Forward in the bow Perron watched them both.

Frequently the sound of voices echoed across the water. There were no challenges, though; no other boats came near them, and presently the lights grew fewer, and faded astern.

"Zut, I am glad that is over!" Le Bec spoke at last. "Luck is still with us."

It was a long time after that when the pitch and roll of the boat finally told them they had passed on out of the river into the sea. Their voyage was safely begun.

Faudre continued straight to sea until daylight, then he studied the sun and the distant coast line and set his course. Le Bec doled out a chunk of bread, a piece of fish and a cup of water, and the rest of the day they sat, each in his chosen part of the boat, thankful for every mile that passed astern.

For two days and two nights Faudre held the *Liberté* on her course. Le Bec offered to relieve him, but the old man would not listen.

"British, Dutch or French, the Guianas are all the same," he argued, "and we have not yet passed the Dutch."

"Not yet?" exclaimed Le Bec. "Then we will not have passed the British coast for another week!"

"With this wind, you are right," replied Faudre.

"THEN don't be a fool. You cannot stay awake forever. Give me the tiller."

"When it is daylight. I do not want to awaken and find myself on the beach." Le Bec permitted him to have his way, but he stayed awake the rest of the night studying the stars and the moon, and the old seaman's deft handling of the boat.

This new interest was not lost on

Perron. He remained awake, too, watching Le Bec. He had come to the conclusion that he himself would be the next victim if the bully had his way. His presence was in no way necessary to the sailing of the boat.

He was only consuming food and water that might be badly needed before the voyage was ended.

Still, that would not make it necessary for Le Bec to master the sailing of their craft. There would be Faudre to attend to that until they made some port.

The old seaman gave up his place in the stern when the day broke. He pointed out the course of the sun; the direction of the wind and the course Le Bec was to follow, then dropped down in the boat, exhausted. Perron made him comfortable and settled back in the bow, watching, waiting.

FAUDRE slept through the day and far into the night, and no one disturbed him. When darkness came Le Bec set their course by the moon and stars and held it surprisingly well. The seaman awoke at last, but as soon as Le Bec made sure he had picked the right stars he made him go back to sleep again.

By the end of a week the bully was doing half the sailing, and the longer he remained at the tiller the more he scoffed at any advice of Faudre's.

When the day dawned one morning without the slightest breeze and the seaman expressed a little uneasiness, Le Bec cursed him for an old woman. When that day passed, however, and then another and the sail still hung limp, he lost some of his arrogance. As the calm continued he plunged from one extreme to the opposite. He fretted and fumed and cut their daily ration in half.

"There is no need of starving our-

selves," Faudre tried to reason. "We have food enough for several days."

"And if this keeps up we will need it," Le Bec argued. "If I can stand it, you can, too."

"A day or two and it will be over," the seaman grumbled. "This is not the season for calms."

Le Bec insisted on the reduced rations, nevertheless, even after the air came to life and they were able once more to steer a course. A small piece of bread and a half-cup of water was all he would allow, and then Perron became suspicious. The bully did not cherish each crumb and drop as he and Faudre did. When he had downed his share he seemed satisfied.

Faudre was not blind to this, either, and his protests became more heated. Le Bec only cursed him. The sail was bellied full and he was sure of himself. Perron caught the old fellow's eye and shook his head. He could see that Le Bec was trying his best to anger him.

At the moment Faudre seemed to understand, but later he forgot. It was late that night; Le Bec was at the tiller and the seaman was supposed to be sleeping. Perron was awake, but his thoughts had wandered afar when an oath from Faudre brought him abruptly back to the present.

"You pig! You thief! You eat while we starve!" The old man raved. He had discovered what Perron had suspected from the first. He had caught Le Bec helping himself to the food.

THE bully swore, then he laughed. "The best man eats! If you get any more, you fool, you will fight for it!"

Faudre seized the adz that lay at his feet and sprang toward the stern. Perron yelled a warning and put out a hand to stop him, but he was a

split-second late. Le Bec had his way. He had been hoping for just that move. The seaman gasped and went down in a lifeless heap, and the bully replaced in his belt the knife he had thrown.

Perron stood looking from one to the other, trembling with rage, helpless in his horror and loathing. Why he did not spring at the brute as Faudre had done, he never knew. It was not because of the knife. For the moment life, freedom and all that had meant so much to him were forgotten. He just stood there, struggling against the blind stupor that had come over him, until Le Bec finally spoke.

"Throw the fool into the sea," he growled, "and let that be a warning to you."

Perron did not reply, neither did he obey the order. He went back to the bow and sat down. There had been five of them at the start; there were two now, and in the end he knew there could be only one. The suspense, the constant vigilance, was worse than the guarding of his money back at St. Laurent. He wished Le Bec would show his hand now and get it over with.

VIII

LE BEC eased the body of Faudre into the sea some time during the night. Perron had seen him do it, but when daylight came the details were blurred. He wondered how long the bully would remain at the tiller, and what arrangements he would make when he finally slept. More than likely he would stretch out and sleep without fear, for he must have guessed long since that he, Perron, was not a killer. That, too, must have been one of the reasons why he had been spared until the last.

The wind began to increase as the

day wore on. Gradually at first, then the white caps appeared, and the boat heeled over until the gray-green water lapped at her gunnel. Le Bec tried hard to appear unconcerned. Perron watched him, half amused and half disgusted, until their wild pitching and plunging grew dangerous, then he reefed the sail himself. Le Bec muttered in his beard, but he said nothing aloud.

BY nightfall the ground swell had increased to an ominous procession of hissing, racing seas, and the boat slid from crest to trough like a cork. With the sun gone and the sky blotted out by the low-hanging clouds, Le Bec was lost. He was afraid to tack; afraid to do anything but squat in the stern and hold the tiller.

Perron spent the night bailing the water that washed in on them. How different it would have been had old Faudre been with them! He knew Le Bec must be thinking the same.

They survived the night, the storm-ridden day that followed, and a night not quite so menacing; and then the sun broke through the clouds and the wind returned to normal. Le Bec stood up and gazed out over the tumbling waste, his cruel face a picture of bewilderment. "You got rid of Faudre a little too quick," Perron said with contempt. "You could use him now to advantage."

The small, blood-shot eyes of Le Bec suddenly brightened. "No, *mon salo*, I do not blunder. "See," he pointed, "there is a ship. Now I have only to finish with you."

Perron sprang to his feet. The bully was right. There was a ship not a mile off their starboard. The men on her bridge could not help but have sighted them.

"A ship!" Perron repeated. "May the Lord make it anything but

French! You have waited too long for that finish, you swine. A hundred to one they are watching us."

Le Bec slipped his knife from under his belt, and the grin of a devil spread over his bearded face. "That will be easy to explain. I will tell them you went suddenly mad at the thought of rescue and I was forced to kill you. With your money and mine to buy them off there will be no trouble, even if they are French."

PERRON knew the long delayed accounting was at hand, and he was glad. His money—there was no need to conceal the truth any longer.

"I will signal them now," Le Bec went on. "They will notice that and not the rest. They will not see the start and when I stick this between your ribs they will not see that, either. You will be down in the bottom of the boat."

"And if it is you who goes down it will be the same," Perron retorted. "You are right. The time is well chosen."

Le Bec ceased to grin. He tore off his shirt; waved it above his head, then threw it down and sprang toward the bow. Perron ducked, and seized the descending fist with its gleaming knife in both his hands. He jerked it aside and they fell in a straining tangle of arms and legs to the bottom of the boat.

Perron took cruel blow after blow on his back and shoulders as he clung to the ponderous arm, but he hung on, twisting it with all his strength. At last he saw the fingers open and release their hold on the murderous blade. His own arms were free then, and, reaching back, he seized Le Bec by his bullet head.

In spite of his effort his strength was no match for the hulk of bone and muscle on his back. Le Bec straightened and lifted him to his feet. One hairy arm and then the

other circled his body and began to squeeze. He was lifted still higher, and he realized it was the bully's intentions to throw him into the sea. Perron twisted and kicked, and, planting his feet against the gunwale, he shoved back with a suddenness that threw Le Bec off his balance.

Down they went again to the bottom of the boat and Perron fought free from that crushing hold. He tried to rise, to regain his feet, but Le Bec planted a foot in his stomach and sent him crashing into the bow. In a second the bully was after him, arms outspread, his fingers working. Perron could kick also, and as his opponent bore down on him he struck out like a mule. Twice he caught the man square in the middle, but Le Bec only grunted and flung himself forward with increased venom. With all his strength Perron sent his fists, right and left, straight into the sneering face. Those clawing fingers were reaching for his throat and he knew that if once they gained their hold he could never free them.

DESPERATELY he beat the round, thick skull, but he might as well have bashed his knuckles against the sturdy hull of the boat. The fingers found his throat and tightened, and at last the instinct to survive filled him with the insane desire to kill. It was the only thing that could save him. There was no compromise, and with one last effort he drew one knee almost to his chin and lifted the crushing weight from the chest. For one uncertain moment Le Bec struggled in mid air; then he landed against the gunwale and went overboard bellowing with fear.

It was several seconds before Perron's straining lungs had filled with air and he was able to stagger to his

feet. He had expected to find Le Bec reaching for the side of the boat, but instead, he was quite alone. A dozen yards astern the mighty bully of St. Laurent was thrashing the water and screaming for help. Perron had not known it, but he could see now that Le Bec was unable to swim.

THE fin of a shark cut the water as he stood there stupefied watching the struggle, and the horror of it slowly overcome the murderous inclination that had seized him a minute before. Dazed, he started for the tiller to turn the boat, but the mad lashing of water suddenly ceased. He stared at the fountain of bubbles that broke the surface, then turned away with a shudder. The clear blue of the water had turned to a darker red. A sailor helped Perron over the bulwarks of the steamer and an officer guided him across the deck to the hatch. A cup of brandy was shoved in front of him and he drank.

"That was some fight," the officer spoke. "He damn near had you once. What was the row?"

Perron stared at the man as if he were dumb. He had been addressed in English, the first he had heard in months.

"What's the matter? Don't you understand English? Can't you talk?"

"Yes, yes, I understand. The fight—" The words of Le Bec flashed through his mind and no explanation he could think of sounded more logical. "The fight—why, the fool went mad, I guess. He tried to kill me. Came at me with a knife, then he tried to choke me."

"Yes, we saw him through the glasses. Went mad, eh? Too bad."

Perron gazed from one wind-tanned face to the other. There was something about them and the way they spoke that was strangely familiar. "You—this ship," he asked. "Americans, aren't you?"

The officer nodded. "Yes, American."

Perron sank back on the hatch. He wanted to speak—to tell them how glad he was, but the words stuck in his throat. He had escaped. He was free.

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Military Heels



Conrey seized the Spaniard's shoulder and shook him roughly.

*An Action-Packed Story of Breath-Taking Adventure
in the Wake of a Mysterious Code Message
Received in the Central American Lowlands*

By RALPH R. FLEMING

JEFF CONREY, District Manager of the Imperial Fruit Company, hitched his chair around more directly facing the slim girl seated on the opposite side of the veranda.

His eyes wandered from her sun-tanned face to the shadowy outlines of numberless curved blades in the banana field beyond, then back to the paper that he held in his hand.

The slip of paper was unsigned, and contained only four neatly

typed rows of figures in the center—

852814	732453	751829	613383
558913	444934	992285	381927
392575	892441	915346	666935
194233	3437		

Conrey frowned. He was puzzled—not by the code note—but by the fact that such a missive should be received here in this remote part of the Central American lowlands.

Pamela Chatterton fidgeted nervously as her guest studied the figures.

"Well," she murmured, "does it mean anything to you?"

Conrey shrugged evasively. "Do you know if the major had ever received slips similar to this before?" He paused awkwardly.

The girl's sea-blue eyes clouded at reference to the sudden tragedy that had made her the sole heir to Kirby Farm, the largest of the banana plantations operating on an independent contract with the Imperial Fruit Company. When she spoke her voice was low and throaty.

"I don't know Jeffrey. Dad didn't encourage correspondence from his former friends. But I did notice that several of the letters he received within the last year were postmarked from South American ports. That one is from Rio De Janeiro, isn't it?"

JEFF CONREY scanned the plain envelope that had contained the unsigned slip of paper.

"Yes," he agreed, "but I don't see anything sinister in that."

"Oh, not sinister, Jeff. But doesn't it seem just a bit queer? Dad didn't know anyone in South America, I'm sure of that."

The tall American glanced at Kirby's charming owner with a keen understanding in his gray eyes. "Suppose you tell me," he said gently, "just why you think that this thing might have been connected with your father's death."

Pamela stared at Conrey with troubled eyes. She realized that her one hope of mental relief lay within the alert brain of the man opposite. The American, although not connected with the authorities officially, was the real brain power behind the amazingly successful record of the district police.

"Doctor Gomez said that dad had suffered a stroke," she began. "I didn't understand the medical terms,

but he obviously meant that death had come very quickly.—It was just two weeks ago today—"

Conrey nodded encouragingly.

"Dad and Mr. DeSantos, the overseer, were going over some reports in the library that evening. They were still busy at eleven o'clock when I said good-night and went to my room.

"The heat was suffocating and I remember wondering if we were due for another of those terrible storms that almost ruined the farm during our first year here. Shortly after midnight, I heard Joe, Mr. DeSantos, come up to his room alone, and then I fell asleep.

"It was just two o'clock when the lightning awakened me. The sky was black and rain was blowing in squalls. I went downstairs to close the windows, thinking of dad's books and papers close to that side window in the library."

THE girl's lips quivered—"Oh, Jeff, it was horrible! I snapped the switch at the foot of the stairs and there was dad, lying on the floor—And he wasn't dead yet. He raised his head and tried to speak to me, but he seemed to be partially paralyzed. His lips moved but no sound came. He tried awfully hard.

"I dropped to the floor and took his head in my arms, and his eyes kept moving from my face toward the library and back again. I'm sure he was trying to tell me something. Then the lights went out suddenly—the power house at Puerto Cortez had failed—and dad went limp in my arms.

"I screamed for help and then I must have fainted, for the next thing I remember was Joe DeSantos bending over me with a flashlight, trying to force brandy down my throat.

"Then, hours afterward, Doctor Gomez and that stupid-looking Com-

andante from Cortez came in response to Joe's phone call."

Jeff Conrey's keen gray eyes probed the speaker's face:

"When did you find this paper?"

"While Doctor Gomez and the Comandante were here. I was searching the library, just to keep my mind occupied, and found it among dad's personal letters."

"Did you show it to the Comandante, or tell him of the message your father had tried to convey?"

"No. Somehow I felt that the man would only make a mess of the whole thing. Anyway, he seemed glad to agree with the doctor's verdict, and I let it go at that."

"But you weren't satisfied, eh?"

"Would you have been?"

Conrey did not reply. He tugged abstractedly at his blond hair, frowned.

WERE they making a mountain out of a mole hill? Was it reasonable to suspect that murder had been committed just because a mysterious code note had been found among a dead man's papers? Even though he, Conrey, had immediately recognized that message as a war-time cipher, formerly used by the German Intelligence?

But it was queer, and it wouldn't do any harm to check up on a few things. Quietly, of course.

The veranda door banged suddenly and DeSantos, the overseer of the farm, came gliding across the floor with his peculiar cat-like tread.

"*Buenas noches, Señor Conrey,*" he greeted soberly. "You have heard of our misfortune?"

Conrey nodded, silent, studying the other's face as the man dropped into a chair opposite. Major Chatterton had hired DeSantos on the recommendation of George Belden, owner of the adjoining farm, and the man's former employer. Conrey

had always harbored a feeling of dislike for the Spaniard, although he had to admit that there was no just cause. Despite the series of misfortunes that had depleted the crops since the major had purchased it, the plantation had flourished under the new overseer's management.

The American shifted his rangy figure to a more comfortable position in the wicker chair. He picked a scrap of paper from his lap and handed it to the Spaniard.

"What do you make of this, DeSantos?" he asked casually.

The beady eyes of the Spaniard flicked over the rows of figures.

Baffled, he glanced at the reverse side, turned the paper sideways, studied the figures from different angles.

"Is it a puzzle, *señor?*" His sallow face bore an expression of amused tolerance.

"To me it is," Conrey said. Quietly he related the facts pertaining to the message, omitting nothing.

WHEN the American had finished DeSantos glanced at Pamela uneasily. "Surely, *señorita*, you don't think that—that—" He shrugged "After all, I was the last person with your father before—"

"Don't be absurd, Joe. Of course I meant nothing of the sort."

Conrey chuckled impudently, was silent.

But the American was well satisfied as he followed his hostess into the library. He sank into a leather-backed easy chair that had been the major's favorite and accepted a cup of tea from Matsu, the Japanese house-boy.

Pinkey, Pamela's white Persian cat, strolled majestically in from the kitchen and surveyed the visitor with lazy eyes. Conrey coaxed and the animal sprang up on his knee,

purring. He stroked the silky fur absently.

"It might be a good idea to send this paper to Phil Gordon in the States," he said.

Pamela raised her eyebrows inquiringly.

Conrey explained. "Phil was with the American Intelligence. Clever fellow. Had charge of the code deciphering work and all that sort of thing."

"Then you think it's a code message?"

Conrey shrugged and shot a glance at DeSantos. "One never knows. If so, Phil will be able to read it like an open book."

HE tickled the cat and it squirmed playfully, biting and clawing at his fingers. Suddenly it yelped and slid to the floor, looking up at the American reproachfully.

Conrey paid no attention. Abruptly he turned to the Spaniard.

"Is there a launch going to Puerto Cortez in the morning?"

The overseer shook his head. "Not one of ours, but there may be one passing from the farms up river."

"I was thinking of enclosing the note in a letter to Phil Gordon," Conrey elucidated. "The *Oregon* is sailing for New York at noon tomorrow."

"I could send Matsu down on his bicycle in the morning," Pamela offered. "He'd get there in time."

"Fine. That's settled then." As Conrey reached out to set his empty cup on the serving table, his glance fell on the cat.

"Hello, what's the matter with Pinkey?"

They watched the cat, fascinated. The animal was shuddering convulsively, seemingly unable to move. The American bent down to stroke its head.

"Don't touch it!"

Conrey glanced up at DeSantos quickly, startled by the man's vehemence. The overseer's face was pale and his knuckles shone white with the grip he had on the arms of his chair.

"Why not?"—Conrey's voice held a note of surprise.

DeSantos relaxed with a visible effort. "It might bite," he said lamely.

The American snorted. He reached out and stroked the cat's head gently. Pinkey was breathing in short agonized gasps, and even as Pamela bent over, the Persian gave a final shudder and sagged limply.

Pamela dropped to the floor with a sob and gathered the cat into her arms. Conrey thrust a finger beneath the animal's left foreleg. After a moment he withdrew his hand and patted the girl's shoulder with awkward sympathy.

DeSantos rose and jerkily walked over to the sideboard in the dining room. He poured a stiff drink of brandy from a decanter and downed it at a gulp.

CONREY was watching the overseer narrowly. What was the matter with the man? Why should he be so upset over the death of a cat?

As if sensing the American's thoughts, DeSantos turned.

"I never could stand the sight of a cat," he muttered. "Gives me the shivers."

Conrey grunted.

Abruptly the buzzer in the hallway sounded, and Matsu shuffled toward the veranda door. After a moment he returned, followed by a huge blond man dressed in immaculate whites.

Pamela rose hastily, dabbing at her eyes. She smiled tremulously at the newcomer.

George Belden, owner of the ad-

joining farm, nodded curtly to Conrey and DeSantos, and advanced toward the girl.

"What is the trouble?"

Pamela held out the dead cat silently.

Belden made a little clucking noise of surprise. He took the animal and began probing the limp body with fingers which, the others knew, had had considerable experience in local veterinary work. At length he straightened up.

"I can't tell," he said. "Perhaps it was indigestion, perhaps the heat. Cats are pretty hard to diagnose."

IN the minutes following, Conrey found opportunity to study the owner of the adjoining farm. Belden, unlike the other farmers of the region, carried an invisible wall of reserve about with him. Intimates he had none, and friends few. Conrey, recalling the tales he had heard of the planter's brutal treatment of his employees, found them hard to believe as he listened to the man's conversation.

Belden possessed a positive charm of manner that completely overshadowed the heaviness of his square-cut face, his ponderous body. And Pamela, Conrey realized with something akin to jealousy, definitely responded to the big man's charm.

It was nearly midnight when Belden finally took his leave. Conrey retired to the room in which he had slept many times previous, on his frequent rounds of the district.

The American, however, had no intention of sleeping. From his grip he extracted a notebook and pencil, then spread the mysterious paper out on the writing desk in the corner. He began arranging the figures in definite patterns, searching for the key to the code.

An hour sped by, two. And yet Conrey found no solution. He

grinned, exasperated, thinking of the innumerable times he and Phil Gordon had worked over similar problems in various staff headquarters in France.

He lit a fresh cigarette and tackled the problem from another angle, grouping the figures horizontally in sets of two each. The first set, 85, yielded the letters B, K, and T. The second, 28, yielded H, Q and Z. The third, I and R. Fourth, A, J and S. Fifth, I and R. Sixth, A, J and S.

Conrey's tired eyes lighted. The results of the third and fifth sets were identical. Also the fourth and sixth. He began trying various combinations of letters until the word THIS stood out. The I and S being repeated in the fifth and sixth groups gave IS. THIS IS.

The American worked feverishly, almost satisfied that the key was found. A few minutes more brought out the words THE and LAST. THIS IS THE LAST—

Boom!—A heavy explosion in the distance jarred the bungalow, set the shades on the windows to rattling.

CONREY paused, startled. He glanced out of the north window. He could see nothing. It had sounded like a blast, he reflected, but who would be blasting at this time of the morning and for what reason? Dismissing the improbable thought he bent to the paper again, but his complete attention had waned.

A light knock sounded on his door.

"Jeffrey!"

Conrey raised his head quickly. "Yes, Pam. Come in."

The door swung open and Pamela's tousled head appeared around the jamb. Her eyes were wide with fright.

"Jeff, did you hear that explosion?"

"I sure did." Conrey pushed back his chair and rose. "But what of it? It's probably nothing important."

Pamela shook her head apprehensively.

Together they stood by the window, staring into the darkness that enshrouded the vast banana field below.

Pamela was the first to hear it—a snapping noise, very faint at first, then gradually growing in volume as it approached the bungalow. She grasped Conrey's arm fearfully, filled with a premonition of disaster.

JEFF looked down at her blankly. The snapping noise was growing more distinct. It sounded like wood cracking. *Wood cracking!* The American started. His eyes, again peering out into the darkness, caught the reflection of light on water!

The whole thing came to him with a rush. The heavily laden banana stalks were toppling over and snapping off as a raging brown flood swept through the field. He turned and excitedly grasped the girl by the arm:

"It's the river! Someone has dynamited the retaining wall!"

Pamela moaned. Full realization of the disaster came to her with the force of a thunderbolt. The choice field of the farm, more than two hundred acres of first grade bananas, was utterly ruined!

The north field had originally been a huge shallow basin jutting off from the river. Major Chatterton had erected a retaining wall across the mouth of the basin, forcing the river to travel in a straight line.

The erection of the half mile wall of rough rock and concrete had been exceedingly costly, but the vast area of rich silt reclaimed by this process had more than justified the expenditure. The bungalow was situ-

ated at the down river end of the retaining wall, on the only piece of high ground in the vicinity.

Conrey swore softly. The entire area would inevitably be flooded unless the break in the wall could be plugged immediately. He turned to the girl:

"Is there a speed launch at the landing?"

"Yes."

Conrey made up his mind in that instant. "I'm going up river to locate the break," he said. "Meanwhile, you get DeSantos up. Send him down to the campo marino on the jump. Have him roust out every last man to load the boats with rocks, sand-bags, potato sacks—anything that will serve as material for a dam."

At the head of the stairs he paused. "You might phone Belden, too. Maybe he'll give us a hand."

Pamela nodded breathlessly.

THE American went down the stairs three at a time. Racing across the living room he collided violently with someone coming from the library. He gasped, startled, gripping the intruder instinctively, and in the dim light from the hallway was just able to recognize the man—

"DeSantos! What the devil?"

The Spaniard squirmed from Conrey's grasp, and the American saw that he was fully dressed. In the dim light his face gleamed whitely.

"I couldn't sleep," he muttered. "Came down for a book."

Conrey grunted. But there was no time for discussion.

"The retaining wall is down," he snapped in terse explanation. "Pamela will tell you what to do."

The American turned abruptly and hurried out through the veranda door.

The motor of the speedboat came

to life with a spluttering roar and Conrey eased the clutch in, swung the nose out into the black river. He snapped the bow searchlight on and opened the throttle wide as the motor settled down to a rhythmic hum.

Here the river was narrow and deep, and the American knew that the only danger lay in floating debris. He held the beam of the searchlight almost constantly on the retaining wall, occasionally swinging it to scan the sluggish water ahead.

PERHAPS five minutes had passed and the end of the wall was in sight when Conrey found what he sought. He closed the throttle to idling speed and focused the light on a jagged hole some ten yards wide. Through this the river was swirling hungrily.

The American swore fervently. Whoever had done the job must have made thorough preparation, he reflected. Such a gap would take at least two separate charges of dynamite, well spaced and fired simultaneously. And the spot was well chosen; the bend in the river at this point threw the full force of the current against the bank.

Conrey flipped the throttle open and swung the speedboat in a sharp circle, heading down river. His thoughts kept pace with the racing motor. What was the motive for this dastardly act? Who could gain anything by ruining the best field of Kirby farm?

One of the independents trying to force a sell-out? Conrey spat reflectively. It was possible but not probable. Belden? No, Belden was queer, but his evident feeling for Kirby's charming owner precluded any thought of trickery from that quarter.

Conrey's thoughts went off on another track. DeSantos! What had

he been doing at the time of the explosion? Several things in connection with the Spaniard needed explanation; his actions were certainly peculiar if not actually suspicious.

A searchlight winked into life down river. Conrey swung his own light and made out the hull of the largest Kirby launch with a heavily laden lighter in tow. He sped toward the oncoming boat and circling, came up alongside. DeSantos, standing aft in the cockpit, hailed the lighter craft:

"Did you find it?"

Conrey answered affirmatively and bawled at one of the half dozen laborers, lining the rail, to throw him the bow line. The stout mooring line of the big launch was made fast to the stern of the speedboat and Conrey opened the throttle wide, adding the power of his motor to that of the larger craft.

Within a few minutes the party reached the break in the wall and the struggle began. Conrey and DeSantos worked like Trojans, passing rocks and sand-filled sacks down to the laborers struggling waist deep in the swirling flood. The load was nearly exhausted when a second launch arrived with fresh material.

BUT now the crude dam was beginning to have effect. Already the water on the field side of the wall was starting to recede as the source of supply was slowly choked off. Within a few minutes the top of the temporary wall was well above the surface of the river. The danger was past, but it would take daylight to reveal to the full the extent of damage in the field beyond.

After detailing two laborers to guard the makeshift barrier, Conrey and DeSantos returned to the bungalow in the speedboat. Pamela was waiting at the dock when they ar-

rived. Conrey took the girl by the arm and drew her toward the bungalow, explaining as they went.

Pamela frowned, worried. "But I don't understand, Jeff. Who could have done such a thing?"

"I mean to find out," Conrey growled. He swung his wet bulk into a veranda chair. "Did you phone Belden? He didn't show up."

"I got him just a minute ago. I kept calling every few minutes after you left but couldn't get an answer until just now. He said that he had heard the explosion and thinking that it might have been one of the gasoline drums down at his storehouse, had gone down to investigate."

Conrey nodded wearily. "Well, there isn't a thing we can do until daybreak. Let's turn in and get a little rest."

PAMELA rose. "Jeffrey, I don't know how I can ever repay you for—for—"

"We won't worry about that," Conrey grinned, "just yet. But don't forget that one of my honorable ancestors was a Scot, Pam. The Scotch drive hard bargains, you know." He turned and started up the stairs, chuckling. "Good-night."

The girl grimaced at his broad back. "Good-night, Shylock," she called softly.

Upon reaching his room, Conrey glanced at the half finished code message and wavered between the impulse to finish it and the need for rest. In the end sleep triumphed.

* * * * *

Several hours later when Pamela, DeSantos, and the American guest were seated at the breakfast table, Conrey reached into his coat pocket and brought out a sealed and addressed envelope.

"Here's our mystery, addressed to Mr. Philip Gordon," he said lightly.

"Better have Matsu take it right away. The *Oregon* sails at noon, you know."

The girl's face lighted. "I had completely forgotten it. I'll send him right off." She turned and called to the house-boy, and in a few minutes the Japanese was on his way to Cortez.

"Think you can save any of the crop in the north field?" Conrey inquired of DeSantos.

The Spaniard shrugged.

"Joe thinks we may be able to save most of it," Pamela broke in eagerly, "providing the wind doesn't blow too hard for the next few days."

Conrey nodded affirmatively. "That's possible. The roots may retain their grip until the water dries—if the wind doesn't put too much strain on them."

"There is less than a foot of water on the field now," DeSantos said, "and it's going down rapidly. Fortunately the ground was rather dry and most of the flood soaked in." The overseer rose hastily. "Excuse me. Just remembered something I have to do at the campo marino."

Conrey sipped his coffee thoughtfully as the roar of the speedboat's motor dwindled down river.

AT noon when Conrey returned from an inspection of the flooded field, Pamela greeted him excitedly.

"Jeff, Matsu just came back. Someone struck him from behind, down by the Henderson farm. He was knocked unconscious and when he came to his senses, he found that he had been robbed."

Conrey nodded calmly. "And the letter?"

"Yes, the letter was stolen too."

After lunch Conrey returned to the field where DeSantos was directing the laborers in their work of salvaging what they could from

the flood. The American was determined to force the issue. He sat down on the retaining wall by the overseer's side and plunged into the matter bluntly:

"How long would it take a speedboat to overtake a bicycle traveling on the river road," he began, "if the bicycle had, say, five or six minutes headway?"

DeSantos laughed guardedly. "That is an odd question, *señor*. I have no idea—Why do you ask?"

Conrey watched the other's face narrowly. "Because," he said, "I have reason to believe that you know the answer to that question."

The Spaniard's face had paled, whether in fear or anger the American could not fathom.

"Pamela tried to catch you on the phone fully half an hour after you left for the campo marino this morning," Conrey went on quietly, "and Miguel said that you hadn't been there yet."

"That's right," DeSantos agreed. "I had motor trouble and didn't arrive at the storehouse until shortly after the phone call. Miguel gave me the message."

THE overseer shook his head, searching the American's face with increasing agitation. "*Señor*, things have happened that throw suspicion on me—But you must believe me, I had nothing to do with them!"

Conrey lit a cigarette and exhaled a cloud of smoke before playing his ace in the hole. Then abruptly:

"What kind of poison killed the cat?"

DeSantos gasped. His face went deathly pale.

Conrey seized the other's shoulder and shook him roughly.

"Speak! What was it?"

"*Curari!*" The word was hardly more than a whisper.

That evening a group of people were assembled in the living room of the Chatterton bungalow. Pamela, the hostess, was there, and DeSantos, Belden, Doctor Gomez, Jalapa—the Comandante from Cortez—and, lastly, Jeff Conrey. The American was speaking:

"That is the reason I asked Miss Chatterton to invite all of you here this evening. We're all concerned in one way or another with the blasting of the retaining wall—"

DeSantos coughed nervously.

Doctor Gomez looked blank.

"—but I have reason to believe," Conrey continued, "that the affair of the retaining wall was only one link in a chain of circumstances portending events more sinister."

Belden snorted. "Why speak in riddles? What are you driving at?"

CONREY ignored the interruption. "Before disclosing the real object of this gathering I'd like to ask a few seemingly irrelevant questions." His eyes flicked over the group. "Is it agreeable?"

The American turned to the Kirby farm overseer. "DeSantos would you mind naming your place of birth?"

"Rio De Janeiro." The Spaniard's voice was brittle.

"You still have relatives there?"

"Yes. Two sisters in Rio and a brother in Buenos Aires."

Conrey nodded. "Thanks." He turned to the squat little medico from Puerto Cortez.

"Doctor, are you familiar with a poison called *curari*?"

"Eh? *Curari*?" The medico looked confused. He twirled his mustache furiously for a moment.

"*Curari*. But of course. A powerful anesthesia—paralyzes the respiratory organs. It is obtained from the bark of a South American tree, I believe."

Conrey nodded affirmatively. "Would you be able to recognize the signs of *curari* poisoning after death had occurred?"

"No, I can't say that I would. It's rather uncommon, you know. I'd have to look that up."

"But," Conrey persisted, "you could outline the symptoms before death?"

"Oh, yes. The patient would gasp for breath and rapidly sink into a stupor, perhaps lose the power of speech. It might even cause a general paralysis."

Pamela gave an audible gasp.

The Comandante stared at Conrey stupidly, beginning to get the glimmer of an idea.

CONREY slipped an envelope from his pocket and extracted from it an ordinary sewing needle. He held it by the middle gingerly.

"This needle," he said, slowly, holding it up for all to see, "was the cause of Major Chatterton's death!"

A gasp went up from the startled group surrounding him. The Comandante muttered excitedly. DeSantos, white-faced, tensed in his chair.

Conrey turned and motioned to the Japanese who was hovering in the kitchen doorway. Matsu shuffled to the library and returned with the major's chair, placed it before the American.

Conrey stooped over and pushed the needle gently into a small hole in the wooden upright that supported the arm of the chair. The exposed point extended out horizontally about an inch above the seat cushion. Conrey straightened up.

"Simple, isn't it? Anyone sitting in this chair would only have to move his left leg slightly to touch the poisoned needle point."

Pamela shuddered. "But Jeffrey,

you were sitting in that chair last night!"

Conrey nodded, grim-faced. "Fortunately, Pinkey found the needle first." He turned to DeSantos.

"You knew what was the matter with the cat last night, didn't you?"

"Yes." The Spaniard's voice was barely audible.

The Comandante's gaping mouth closed with a snap. Here was something as plain as the nose on his face. He rose and advanced ponderously toward DeSantos, fingering the butt of his revolver.

"Just a minute, Jalapa," Conrey said: "there is something else."

The American pulled a second envelope from his pocket and held it in his hand unopened. "Major Chatterton had received a series of threatening notes," he explained. "Code notes. Just like the one Matsu was robbed of this morning."

Conrey glanced at the girl. "Fortunately I had made a copy of the note which someone was so anxious to intercept."

He slipped a finger into the envelope and extracted a sheet of note-paper, passing it to Jalapa.

THE Comandante ran his eyes over the array of figures, bewildered until he came to the deciphered message below.

	3	5	1	7	9	6	2	8	4
231'	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
496'	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r
875'	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z	
T h i s i s t h e l a s t									
85	28	14	73	24	53	75	18	29	61 33 83 55
w a r n i n g T h e d e b t									
89	13	44	49	34	99	22	85	38	19 27 39 25 75
w i l l s o o n b e p a i d									
89	24	41	91	53	46	66	69	35	19 42 33 34 37

Belden and Doctor Gomez crowded as close as possible to the Comandante, peering over his shoulder at the

paper as he read the message aloud.

"The first figure in each group denotes the horizontal column," Conrey explained, "while the second gives the vertical column. *Ziemlich einfach, nicht wahr, Belden?*"

"Ja."

The answer came from Belden naturally, and a few seconds had elapsed before the big planter realized that Conrey's question had been in German. He shot a venomous glance at the American.

Conrey grinned. "That cipher happens to be one of the simpler forms used by the German Intelligence early in the World War. Major Chatterton had no trouble in reading it, since he was formerly connected with the British Intelligence." Conrey turned to the major's daughter. "Isn't that so?"

Pamela nodded, speechless.

"THAT put us in the same boat, Belden," Conrey continued. "It seems that we both speak German. I served with the American Intelligence during the war—did you perhaps serve with the Imperial army?"

The planter's eyes snapped angrily. "No, Mister Detective," he sneered, "I never had the opportunity. I was interned at Sidney, Australia, at the beginning of the war."

Conrey lit a cigarette without removing his eyes from the other's face.

"Isn't it a bit unusual," he inquired, "for a man who hasn't seen service to be decorated?"

Belden's huge body seemed to tense without actually moving. His eyes flicked at DeSantos across the room and then returned to the American. When he spoke his voice was peculiarly flat.

"Just what do you mean?"

Before Conrey could reply, a sharp

hiss of indrawn breath sounded from the Spaniard, and all eyes focused expectantly on him.

"Señor Conrey means that I have seen your war medals with my own eyes," he blurted. He leaned forward in his chair and pointed an accusing finger at Belden. The poise of his head and the unwinking stare of his beady eyes oddly suggestive of a venomous snake poised to strike, held the other fascinated.

"I HAVE also told Conrey of your mania for collecting curios," DeSantos hissed, "and of the bottle of *curari* I contributed—"

"Wait!" Conrey broke in sharply. "Let's not go off half-cocked on the strength of circumstantial evidence."

The American glanced at Belden, noting the distended cords of the man's throat and the odd glitter in his eyes.

"Let's suppose," he began, "that someone had a motive for murdering Major Chatterton. That this person had taken a keen delight in sending his intended victim code notes warning of impending death, but giving no hint of the manner in which it was to descend.

"Perhaps by chance the would-be murderer possessed a quantity of the deadly *curari*. Thus he conceived a fiendish plot, knowing that the symptoms of the poisoning would be very similar to those of several more common causes of death."

Conrey glanced at Doctor Gomez and received a corroborative nod.

"Wedging the needle in the chair," he continued, "would be a comparatively simple task for anyone having access to this house—say, a guest or an employee. Retrieving the instrument of murder after the crime had been committed should have been equally simple.

"But apparently the murderer found no opportunity to regain pos-

session of the needle. Or else he didn't bother, feeling secure in his knowledge that the death had been officially attributed to natural causes.

"Perhaps he suddenly learned that suspicion had been aroused after all, and that an investigation was afoot. Then he would immediately seek to recover and dispose of the evidence.

"Perhaps after having obtained the code note, the murderer was unsuccessful in his efforts to recover the needle, until finally he hit on the plan of blowing up the retaining wall. He reasoned that the bungalow would likely be deserted for a time at least, and thus afford him an opportunity to commit his burglary."

CONREY paused, and Doctor Gomez broke in with an apologetic glance at DeSantos.

"But, Conrey, a man living right here in the house wouldn't have to go to all that trouble to recover the evidence." Conrey nodded, apparently puzzled.

Belden grunted in obvious disgust. "And how could a man blow up the wall and get down here without traveling on the river?" he demanded.

Conrey eyed the planter reflectively, knowing, as did the others present, that the river road turned inland at the Kirby bungalow and wound through the jungle for miles before coming back to the river at Belden's farm. And a boat coming down river just after the explosion could hardly have escaped detection.

"A small boat of shallow draught," he said, "might have ridden down with the flood on the inside of the retaining wall."

Belden's eyes clung to Conrey's face in sudden fascination. A dark flush crept upward from his throat.

"A canoe, perhaps," Conrey added quietly. "There is a mark in the mud near this end of the retaining

wall such as the prow of a canoe would make. And from that spot there are a number of footprints leading toward the bungalow."

Belden's lips began moving soundlessly. Conrey continued: "The man who made those prints perhaps did not realize that our rapid repairing of the wall would lower the water level before it had a chance to wipe out the evidence of his visit."

The American turned to the Commandante. "The peculiar part of those footprints is the heel impression. It is smaller than the average man's heel, yet larger than a woman's. A so-called military heel, I believe, imported from Ger—"

"Stop! *Verdammt Yankee!*"

With an amazingly quick flip of the wrist Belden produced an ugly Luger pistol from inside his jacket.

"You have been clever," he growled, addressing Conrey, "but not clever enough!"

THE American stood motionless in the center of the room, silent, eyes riveted on the planter's face. It was with something of a shock that he noted Belden's glaring eyes and mottled cheeks, and realized that the man was in the grip of a murderous rage.

"Your efforts have changed my plans somewhat," the German continued. "But we will reach the climax in spite of that, *hein?*"

"Any fool," he sneered, eyeing Conrey, "might have guessed that it would be simple to bribe a sailor on one of these coastwise freighters to mail a letter from a South American port."

Conrey's face remained mask-like. "But you were right, *Dummkopf*, in thinking that someone had a motive for killing the major."

Belden paused and stiffened his huge body impressively.

"It was I, Baron Otto von

Kurtz." The Comandante coughed and moved his hand imperceptibly nearer to the gun on his belt.

"Bah!" Belden fairly spat contempt for his unimpressed audience. He continued, as if talking to himself, "Can such swine not realize what it means to a von Kurtz to have a brother executed by the *verdamnte* British?"

"*Gott im Himmel!* My little Karl was caught in Paris and shot down like a common thief, by Major Chatterton and his staff of filthy swine. Is it any wonder that I should seek to wipe out the debt in blood?"

BELDEN'S eyes leaped past Conrey to fasten gloatingly on Pamela Chatterton. "It was my intention to marry the major's charming daughter," he sneered. "*Gott!* What a sweet revenge that would have been!"

Pamela turned from his glaring eyes, shuddering.

The man had evidently held the major personally responsible for the wartime execution of a spy, and had nursed the idea of revenge until it had become an obsession.

A number of things were now clear to the American. Belden had undoubtedly had a hand in some of the misfortunes that had befallen Kirby farm in the past. And the German had had a two-fold purpose in blowing up the retaining wall. Besides creating an opportunity to recover the poisoned needle, which he did not know had already been discovered and removed by DeSantos, he had hoped to ruin the best field of the farm. This would discourage Pamela to such an extent that she might receive his intended proposal of marriage with favor.

Abruptly Conrey was conscious of the trend of Belden's wild talk—

"—change my plans and send her to roast in hell with the major—

and now!" The planter laughed harshly. He swung the muzzle of the pistol directly on the girl.

"Wait!" Conrey's voice was like a pistol crack in that tense silence. He must stall the action somehow.

But he realized that the slightest movement would draw a shot from the maddened planter. Out of the corner of his eye the American caught a flicker of movement through the open door leading into the kitchen.

Matsu! They had all forgotten the house-boy. The blood surged with renewed hope in Conrey's veins. Was the Jap loyal? Would he have the nerve to start something?

As if in answer to his thought, a heavy meat cleaver came hurtling in from the kitchen. Belden ducked, as if warned by some sixth sense. He whirled half around, snarling. The Luger cracked once, deafeningly.

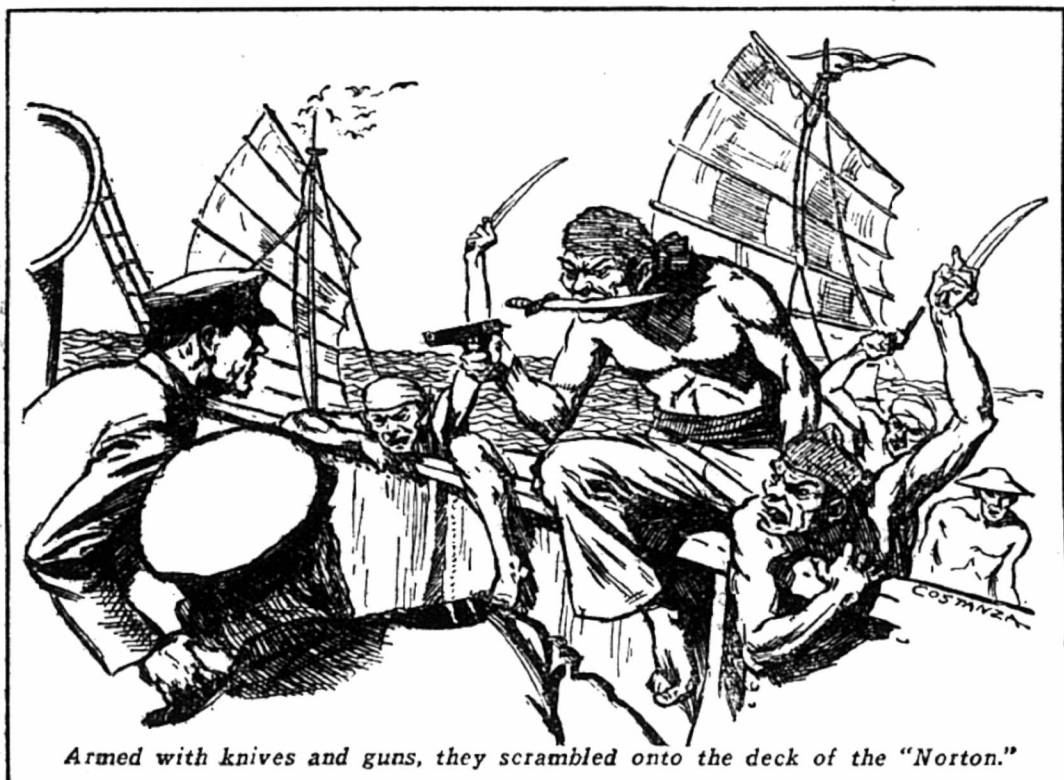
CONREY launched a desperate kick at the German's wrist, and the pistol went spinning toward the ceiling. Almost simultaneously the room rocked to the thunderous roar of the Comandante's ancient .45.

Belden staggered under the impact of those heavy slugs, clutched at his stomach with both hands. Slowly his knees buckled, and the wild flame in his eyes grew dull. He slumped to the floor with a coughing sigh, then lay inert.

Doctor Gomez bent over the Baron Otto von Kurtz. He rolled back one of the closed eyelids, peered for a moment, then straightened up with a characteristic Latin shrug that spoke more clearly than words.

Pamela Chatterton tore her horror-filled eyes from the body on the floor and looked up at the American in mute appeal. Conrey placed a comforting arm about the girl's trembling shoulders and led her out into the soothing tropic night.

PIRATE GOLD



Armed with knives and guns, they scrambled onto the deck of the "Norton."

Desperate Battle Aboard a Tramp Freighter On the Pirate-Infested East China Sea

By **GEORGE ALLAN MOFFATT**

Author of "Pyramid of Gold," "The Devil from Devil's Island," etc.

THE bow of the old tramp freighter, the *Norton*, dipped into a huge wave, disappeared from sight for a moment, and then laboriously and slowly, raised itself out of the green cascade, shooting upward, with water streaming off the rusty sides.

Slowly and painfully, with engines creaking and rivets straining, the *Norton* plowed through the East China Sea, headed for Wenchau.

Inside the cabin Captain Carthy, his weather-beaten old face drawn

and haggard, sat at a table, chewing on a half-smoked cigar. Near him sat Jim Halcom, first mate and part owner, with Carthy, of the *Norton*.

Halcom was a young man, still in his early thirties, with a thin, well-muscled face and a body that had the power and the speed of an animal. He sat slumped in an old deck chair, his face buried in a bundle of daily newspapers, picked up at Java, where they had stopped to deliver a small shipment of freight.

"Hey," he yelled, "this is interest-

ing. This English paper says, the Chinese pirates are still raising cain in the East China Sea and the English and Chinese governments are helpless. A pirate by the name of Fu Chow relieved an English ship of half a million in gold. Got away cold. That ain't bad, is it?"

"They ain't bothering old tramp freighters like this ship," Captain Carthy answered. "And that's one worry we don't have to think about. And when we get to Wenchau, most of our worries, as far as the Carthy-Halcom Shipping Company is concerned, will be over."

"The paper says, this pirate, Fu Chow, is working off the coast of Formosa Island," Halcom announced. "Does his job pretty slick and he stole the half million in gold before the crew of the *Majow* knew what was happening."

CAPTAIN CARTHY'S feet came down on the floor with a heavy thud.

"The devil with stories about pirates," he raged. "I'm thinking about this ship and the life's fortune I got tied up in it. We won't have enough to more than pay off our men when we hit Wenchau, let alone paying Perrins. We're losin' the ship, lad-die. Sure as faith."

Jim Halcom got up and tossed the papers on the table.

He patted Captain Carthy's shoulder affectionately.

"We ain't lost it yet, Captain," he said. "Maybe there is some way out."

With this, Halcom turned quickly and walked out of the cabin. He went up on the bridge and stood, alone, looking out over the green, sparkling sea that stretched to the horizon in every direction. His face was drawn and worried. He knew too well that every word Captain Carthy had said was true.

Five years before he and Carthy had bought the old tramp freighter from the Yorkshire Company, putting down all the cash they had in the world. Five years, before, business had been good and they had secured a tea concession at Wenchau; a small out-of-the-way port on the China Sea, and everything had looked good.

Then came the crash. They held out as long as they could, but their cash reserve was small and finally they had to go to the money lender, Perrins. They had staked all on this last cruise, hoping against hope that the market in tea would pick up by the time they got to Marseilles. It didn't. When they got to this port the market had collapsed completely.

And now they were returning to Wenchau. Halcom knew Perrins too well to hope for a renewal of the loan. They had put their interest, in the *Norton*, up as security and it was a plum that Perrins would greedily grab for.

HALCOM stared out over the green waves that rose on every side. Far in the west the sun was sinking below the horizon. For a long time he stared tight-lipped out into the endless space of green seas.

It didn't matter so much for him. He was young. He could start again. But Jonathan Carthy. That was different, for the captain was old and this was his last chance.

Twenty thousand dollars! The lines around Halcom's mouth tightened. The sun had fallen below the green horizon and darkness was fast spreading over the China Sea.

Suddenly Halcom's body stiffened a little. A smile, cold and desperate, came to his lips. For a full minute the smile remained on his lips and then left abruptly.

And as the smile left, Halcom was

on his way to the chart room, and five minutes later he was hurrying down the companionway ladder to the engine room.

When he got back to the cabin Captain Carthy was sitting at the table, with pencil between his fingers, covering a piece of paper with endless figures.

Halcom grinned and sat down.

"Writing numbers on paper," he said dryly, "won't pay Perrins."

Captain Carthy swung on him angrily.

"Maybe you got some idea how we'll pay him," he roared.

"I have a very good idea," Halcom countered quietly. "It might work if you don't lose your head completely."

"You young whipper-snapper," Captain Carthy bellowed. "None of your crazy tricks—"

"You wouldn't think it crazy," Halcom laughed. "You'd think it pure insanity. If I told you, you'd throw me in irons. But I'm getting twenty thousand in gold out of this sea before we get to Wenchau and after I do that you can do anything you want with me."

"Twenty thousand in gold out of the sea," Captain Carthy gasped. "What are you talking about?"

"I'll explain when I get the gold," Halcom replied. "But for pity's sake hold your head. Something funny might happen before we get to Wenchau."

THE next morning the *Norton*, nosing itself into the Straits of Formosa, hit a calm sea where hardly a ripple broke the endless sheet of green that spread in all directions from the old tramp freighter. No wind tempted the heat which, even early in the morning, was stifling.

In the calm sea the rusty old tramp cut through the water at a speed of seven knots an hour, rising

and falling a little with the natural swell of the sea.

Down in his cabin, Captain Carthy, still grim-faced and surly, was working on his log. From time to time he wet his lips and shook his head sadly. He was thinking far more of old man Perrins and the twenty thousand and the loss of the ship than he was about what his pen was writing.

SUDDENLY the ship lurched a little and the engines died down and the ship was coming to a stop. With a leap he was out of his chair and out of the cabin.

On the bridge he saw Jim Halcom at the wheel, his face set and hard, his hands swinging the *Norton* to the port side along a Chinese junk which carried the Chinese flag upside down at half-mast—a signal of distress.

With a bellow of rage, Carthy thundered: "You damned little whipper-snapper! What are you doing now!"

Halcom grinned and yelled back: "We sighted this old junk a few minutes ago and we can't pass it with that signal of distress."

Hanging on the rail of the junk, pretty much like an ape would hang from a rail, was a burly-looking Chinaman, with a red sash around his head and the loose blouse of the coolie tucked in dirty looking duck pants. The feet were bare.

"Please, Captain," the Chinaman pleaded, "wa-ter for men. They dying."

Carthy grunted as he looked at the Chinaman. After all, there was the law of the sea. Halcom was bringing the *Norton* close against the junk.

The Chinese seaman sprang up on the rail of the *Norton* with the agility of an animal, and then with a wave of his hand, he sprang down

on the deck, his right hand holding a large automatic.

AND in the next second the old Chinese junk was swarming with Chinamen, swarming out of hatches and over the rails, their naked bodies gleaming yellow in the morning sun. Around their waists were dirty, colorless *sarongs* and from these came krisses, and Chinese knives and guns.

Like a swarm of bees, they scrambled onto the deck of the *Norton*. Captain Carthy, his face red with anger and his eyes flashing fire, backed up against the cabin wall. His automatic came out, but he had no chance to use it. Hands—yellow hands—shot out from behind him and knocked the automatic to the deck and then hands pulled him to the deck.

He struggled and cursed, but ropes went around his wrists and ankles and then he was pulled to his feet and propped against the cabin wall.

The junk captain was standing before him, his heavy, brutal face leering at him savagely.

In the meantime the other Chinese had overrun the deck and rounded the crew midship. Halcom was taken off the bridge and brought down alongside the captain.

"Now we talk beesiness," the junk captain sneered. "You have gold on board. Where is it?"

"Gold!" Carthy bellowed. "My God, gold! If you can find it, it's yours. That's just what we ain't got."

"It seems, Captain," Halcom said dryly, "that we have the honor of meeting the great Fu Chow, the Chinese Pirate."

"You have three minutes," Fu Chow snarled. "After that—"

The Chinese pirate shrugged and looked up at the cargo derricks over

the main hatch, braced closely together.

"The Captain no look good hanging up there," he nodded at the derrick with his head. "I give you three minutes to tell about gold."

"You damn fool," Carthy laughed. "This is a tramp steamer and tramp steamers don't carry gold. We have not even got more than enough coal in our bunkers to get us to Wenchau. Gold, God, the joke's on you."

"That," Fu Chow said coldly, "is what captain of *Majow* say. It was tramp steamer like this, and New York banks try fool Fu Chow by sending gold in old ship. You loaded gold in New York and you have gold and if you no tell Fu Chow where gold is, captain and mate hang up there. I give three minutes to tell."

CARTHY looked at Halcom helplessly. The young first mate shrugged and wet his lips and his face was pale.

"The bloat thinks we got gold and if we can't show him gold, we'll likely hang up there and rot in the sun," he said. "The joke may be on him, but it ain't going to be anything funny for us."

"Three minutes I give you," Fu Chow sneered.

And then he turned, shot sharp orders to his men in Chinese. They scattered around the derricks, released the lashing and swung one of the derricks out over the sea.

Then Fu Chow turned to Halcom and ordered: "Get me rope, queek!"

Halcom laughed coldly—brutally. "I'm not getting a rope to have myself or Captain Carthy hung with," he said. "Get the rope yourself."

The savage face of Fu Chow darkened, but he held his temper. Several Chinese came running up with a rope and the next moment the

noose was around the captain's neck and two burly pirates turned to Halcom.

THEY grabbed for his arms and shoulders, but in that split-second Halcom came to life. His right fist shot out with the speed of a piston, caught the leading bandit, flush on the jaw and sent him to the deck with a muffled groan. His left caught the second one full in the stomach and with a howl of pain the pirate grabbed his stomach and stepped back.

And in the next second the deck was a bedlam of yelling Chinese, swinging knives over their heads and charging down on Halcom, who had backed to the rail, his body tense and his fists ready to fly out again in a last few feeble blows.

But suddenly the crowd stopped abruptly in their tracks. Fu Chow was yelling orders at them in Chinese, and with a spring he was in front of Halcom, his gun drawn and ready for use against his own men. They glared angrily at him, backed away slowly, mumbling under their breath.

"You will hang with captain," Fu Chow said to Halcom. "But I give you first chance to talk about gold."

Halcom eyed him closely, his lips pressed tightly together.

"All right," he said quietly. "I'll tell you where the gold is hidden, but first take the rope from the captain's neck and untie his hands and ankles."

Captain Carthy looked at his young first mate as if the boy had lost his mind. His eyes widened a little and his jaw dropped. Fu Chow looked at Halcom a moment and then shook his head.

"I no fall for tricks," he said. "You tell where gold is and I no hang you."

"What a sweet liar you are," Hal-

com laughed. "All right, go ahead and hang us and you'll never find the gold. You won't have time to look. This sea is covered with British destroyers looking for you and before you'd find anything, you'd be captured."

Fu Chow continued to look at Halcom, his savage face leering and his slanting eyes narrowed.

"You show me gold queekly," he sneered. "No trick for waste time for ship to come up."

"I'll take you to the gold," Halcom answered, "and you can walk behind me with a gun in my back. But first release Captain Carthy."

FU CHOW acted quickly. He ordered the noose taken off the captain's neck and his hands and feet released. His men grumbled at the order, but followed it quickly. Three burly pirates stood over Captain Carthy and Fu Chow turned to Halcom.

"Now you show gold queek," he said. "There lots time to hang you if you play trick."

Halcom shrugged, looked quickly at Captain Carthy, who was staring at him bewilderedly.

"There are two ways to get to the gold," Halcom said to Fu Chow. "One way is down the main hatch, but that would take too long. The other way is down in the engine room, through one of the empty coal bunkers."

Captain Carthy, unable to contain himself any longer, blurted out: "What the devil are you talking about?"

Halcom looked at him and spoke quietly:

"You're going to see more gold in a little while than you dreamed was on board."

Fu Chow looked at Halcom quickly and then at Carthy. The captain, catching Halcom's eye, shrugged.

ged and growled: "Okay! I guess we'll have to tell."

Halcom started for the stairs leading down to the engine room. Carthy was at his side and behind them came Fu Chow, with gun drawn and a large part of his pirate crew following him. The remainder of the pirates were left on board to watch the crew, still huddled midship.

THE procession went through the engine room and between the boilers and stopped in front of the coal bunkers. Two of the coal bunkers were closed, indicating that they were empty. The bulkheads were screwed tightly shut.

Fu Chow looked at the closed bunkers and a suspicious look came into his eyes. Behind him his men growled and muttered under their breath. Fu Chow turned on them. Several shot Chinese words at him and he answered them in sharp, commanding language.

"My men think you trick them," he said to Halcom. "They think you stall for time because they say gold no stored in coal bunkers."

"Smart men you have," Halcom answered. "The gold is in one of those bunkers. If you want it, okay: if you don't, let's go back upstairs. You'll spend a long time trying to open that bulkhead."

"Open bulkhead," Fu Chow shot back at him. "Better no waste time because if ship comes up, you die."

Halcom waved the Chinese back and then he went to work on the bulkhead, turning the screw first to the right and then to the left. Captain Carthy, still mystified by Halcom's actions, assisted him. The pirates stood back, their eyes gleaming greedily at the gold they hoped to see when the bunker was opened.

"Hold your head and don't be a damn fool," Halcom whispered to Captain Carthy. "When this is

opened you'll see plenty of action around here, but don't hurry to open it." The heat below was stifling. Sweat broke out on Halcom's face as he struggled with the bulkhead.

Finally it swung open and he stepped back, exhausted, and said to Fu Chow: "Your gold is in there."

The Chinese pirate stuck his head in the opening. There was a little coal in the bunker, but under this could be seen a row of boxes, such boxes as were used to store gold.

LIKE a swarm of bees trying to get through a small hole, the Chinese pirates, their minds inflamed at the sight of the boxes, struggled, two and three at a time, to get through the small bunker hole.

For the moment Halcom and Carthy were forgotten. Grunting and clawing and fighting, the pirates went into the coal bunker. Halcom, his body tight against the wall, watched them go through the hole. Captain Carthy stood near him.

Inside the bunker there was loud talking and arguing. Only a few of the pirates were left outside. Suddenly Halcom's right arm shot out and grabbed Captain Carthy by the shoulder and hurled the captain back into the door of the engine room with a violence that was sudden and effective.

And in the next second Halcom was across the room. From behind a pump two men sprang out, carrying a long hose. Halcom grabbed the hose and yelled at someone behind him. A powerful blast of steam came out of the hose and struck the few remaining pirates still out of the bunker in the back. With screams of anguish they went head-first into the coal bunker.

The hose was turned to the right, the steam lashing against the far wall of the boiler room, and Halcom jumped to the door of the bun-

ker and in a moment it was closed and the bulkhead screwed tight.

Captain Carthy had jumped to his feet and came rushing toward Halcom, his old weather beaten face white with anger. "Look out," Halcom yelled at him. "I had to get you out of the way to get the hose in action. We're going upstairs now and steam every damn one of the remaining pirates off the ship."

FROM inside the bunkers came screams and cries that seemed to come from far away.

Halcom, holding the long hose with the two members of the crew who had jumped out from behind the pump, dashed through the engine room. The guards who had remained in that room turned and fled up the stairs.

But when they went up the stairs they yelled wildly. Other Chinese stuck their heads down the companionway. Guns roared in their hands and bullets hit the iron stairs above Halcom's head and rocketed into the engine room.

The hose went up and the spouting, scalding stream of steam shot up the companionway, hitting the three guards who stood at the opening. They screamed and darted back. Up the iron stairs Halcom and Carthy and the two men pulled the hose. Halcom was the first man out on deck. He dodged low, expecting a bullet or a knife to come through the air at him, but the Chinese pirates, cowed and frightened, had backed away from the companionway and stood huddled together like frightened sheep.

The crew, which up to this time had been guarded by the pirates, suddenly saw that they were free. But Halcom gave them no chance to get mixed up with the pirates. The hose shot its long stream of steam and hot water across the deck.

The Chinese pirates, screaming and throwing their guns and knives on the deck, jumped over the rail and into the junk. The first on board the junk cut the queer shaped boat loose and raised the square sails and the light wind took the junk rapidly away from the *Norton*.

The Chinese left on deck jumped overboard and swam for their departing ship, leaving behind a large assortment of knives and guns. Halcom and Carthy picked up the knives and threw them overboard at the swimming pirates, but their aim was short.

"And now," Carthy finally said to Halcom, "just tell me what all this is about and how it happens that my ship changed its course and happened to be in these waters early this morning. I'd like also to know about those boxes of gold in the bunker." Halcom laughed.

"First, I'm going down and give my prisoners some air and some water," he said. "I wouldn't want them to die on me. And after that I'm going to your cabin to get a drink and if you want to know what has happened and how I got that gold on board, be there."

AN hour later the *Norton* was clipping seven knots an hour through the Formosa Straits, the wheel set two points to the starboard, taking the ship away from the coast of Formosa Island where it had run into the junk of the Chinese pirates.

Jim Halcom, his face wreathed in smiles, sat the captain's table and played with the glass of whisky that sat in front of him. Old Captain Carthy was still white-faced and in a surly, belligerent mood.

"The course of the ship was changed last night," he growled. "This is the first time I knew of a first mate assuming the right to

change the course of the ship and not enter it in the log."

"I told you last night, Captain," Halcom laughed, "that we were going to find gold in this sea to pay old man Perrins. I had to change the course of the ship to find that gold." Captain Carthy grunted unpleasantly.

"I saw more damn pirates than I want to see again," he growled. "And I didn't like that rope around my neck. But what about that gold down in that coal bunker?"

Halcom threw the whisky down his throat and laughed.

"There is exactly twenty thousand in gold down there," he answered. "Just enough to pay Perrins and get our throat out of his clutches."

"Twenty thousand in gold," Captain Carthy bellowed. "You've got some dirty faced Chink pirates down there who will cause us a lot of trouble when we get to port. You might call that gold, but I have another name for it."

"I'VE got twenty thousand in gold down there," Halcom repeated. "And I picked it up out of the sea. Believe it or not." Captain Carthy looked at him helplessly.

"If you don't blow my brains out," Halcom continued, "I'll tell you what I did last night. You'll agree that we needed twenty thousand in gold badly. If we didn't get it, all the money you've saved in your life was gone. The situation was desperate enough for me to do the trick I did."

"If you got the gold, I won't blow your brains out," Carthy grunted. "But it has to be real yellow gold."

"The yellowest gold there is in the world," Halcom laughed. "Gold right out of the vaults of the Bank of England!"

Captain Carthy shook his head slowly, as if he had begun to doubt

the sanity of his young mate and partner.

"There's a lot of yellow-faced pirates down in that bunker," Captain Carthy said, "but as far as those boxes are concerned, they are empty and I suppose that was also a part of your trick. But, listen, you young whipper-snapper, I had a rope around my neck and suffered moments that weren't pleasant because of your rank insubordination and now I want to see gold—real gold. Or damn you—"

HALCOM got up and reached for the bundle of newspapers. He picked one out of the bunch and spread it out in front of Captain Carthy. "If you want to see the gold, Captain," he said, "read this."

Captain Carthy stared at the paper. In large headlines he read:

English Government offers five thousand pounds in gold for capture of Fu Chow, famous pirate working off coast of Formosa Island.

Captain Carthy read the headline several times. Then he looked up at Halcom, grinned foolishly.

"If I'd told you of my plans, you would have put me in irons," Halcom said. "And I don't like irons and I wanted the twenty thousand in gold and so I walked into the arms of Fu Chow with you and this ship and now Fu Chow is down in the coal bunker and we'll take him into port and collect the five thousand pounds, which will be a little more than twenty thousand dollars in American money."

"We can pay Perrins and the Carthy-Halcom Shipping Company will start on a new era."

Captain Carthy bewildered, shook his head slowly, looked at the paper again, and grunted: "You damn little fool. And you did it alone."

The Jungle Trail



He stared into the twin barrels of a levelled shotgun.

An American Secret Service Man On A Dangerous Mission in the Depths of the Colombian Wilderness

A Complete Novelette

By JACKSON COLE

Author of "Pearls of Peril," "Gun Justice," etc.

TRENT halted abruptly and stiffened to attention. He had been hacking his way through the trackless Colombian jungle with an ever swinging *machete*—yet, here was a track bisecting his path!

He stared with startled eyes. It was just such a track as he had been seeking, seeking, it seemed, since the beginning of time. To have run onto it so suddenly almost unnerved him.

It led directly to the banks of the *Rio Magdalena*, whose roaring rush had been thundering in his ears for the past several hours. He could see the rising mists from the swirling waters at the end of this unexpected path.

The trail was no animal run. He could see that the thick jungle had been hacked away by a man's hand, to the bare width of a man's body. In the fading afternoon light of the setting equatorial sun Trent stooped

to scrutinize the rotting, slimy, leaf mold under foot.

Boot marks! The definite impression of a white man's foot showed in the rotting mold. Trent knew of only one other white man who might be in the upper reaches of the *Rio Magdalena*. That was the man he was looking for.

He stood erect again. His thin lips tightened. A cold gleam came into his narrowed eyes as he loosened the gun in the holster at his hip, and turned silently down the hacked-out path to the river.

THERE was more of the look of the city than of the jungle about this man Trent. His jaw was hard and clean-cut, but the reddish bronze of his square-set face was too fresh and pink for one who had lived in tropical climes. And his body, long and closely knit, moved with a jerky swing, reminiscent of the pavements; as he slipped noiselessly through the tangle of rank poisonous growth that pressed in from either side of the narrow path.

A bullet, a spear, or even a knife might have struck him down as he hurried along the path, but he kept watchfully alert for just such an attack, and came out presently where the narrow slit of the jungle broke off abruptly at the river's edge.

The camping spot he had expected to find at the end of the jungle trail was not there! There was nothing but the seething water almost flush with the sharply shelving bank. And the boot marks he had followed vanished abruptly, swallowed up in the tumultuous, foam flecked expanse of the rushing river.

Trent let out a slow exclamation and stood with his hands on his hips staring out over the great expanse of water. There was no way out down that swollen stream. It simply couldn't be navigated.

Wide and deep, the swirling pea-green water seethed furiously between jagged volcanic rocks thrusting black fang-like fingers above the heaving surface. Slow curling eddies, smooth and strong as serpents, indicated where other treacherous rocks lurked just beneath the surface. And the thundering roar that pounded in Trent's ears told him that somewhere downstream there was a mighty cataract.

It was a treacherous, an almost impossible river to cross. Trent knew that. Yet it had to be crossed.

He slung his gaze upstream. Under an overhanging mass of jungle growth that swept the edge of the water, Trent caught sight of the end of a canoe—a crude native dugout. It bobbed and swayed in the current. The hidden end was probably moored to the bank. Obviously someone had used it. Native or white? Trent intended to find out.

He dropped to his hands and knees in the uninviting jungle muck and crawled under the dark curtain of tangled *liana* vines along the bank. After a dozen yards or so he came out into a tiny cleared space. Just visible in the bush twilight was the front end of the hidden canoe, lashed to a stake driven deep in the blue mud of the river bank.

STILL keeping himself hidden, Trent stopped and listened. But no sound came to him, that is, no sound but the deep roar of the river, and the nearer chuckle and gurgle of the water sucking along the bank. He stepped out into the clearing then and crossed to the stake, bent down to look at the painter holding the dugout against the strong pull of the current.

He grasped the painter in his hand, uttered an exclamation. "Rope, new rope—and tied with a sailor's knot!"

That telltale knot could mean but one thing. The man for whom he was searching couldn't be far away. He dropped the painter and straightened.

"I've got him," he said, shifting the heavy pack on his shoulders and easing it, as if he were throwing off a long-borne and unwelcome burden.

"At last I've caught up with him. There can be only one end." He hefted the revolver in its holster and patted the barrel affectionately.

TRENT looked around the clearing sharply. But other than the native dugout and the sailor's knot, there was nothing to indicate another man's presence.

The thick jungle night was falling fast. But his eyes had grown accustomed to the greenish bush dusk and he saw clearly and distinctly, that there was no other trace of the human being who was destined very soon, to be his only white fellow in an area of several thousand miles of almost impenetrable jungle.

Nothing? Trent suddenly sniffed the reeky air.

A little puff of some sickening odor came faintly to his nostrils. His hard square face stiffened. That rank hot smell he quickly recognized. Like a hound, his head jerked upward, alert, while his nostrils quivered.

"Good God! He must be dead!" he muttered. "Dead on the trail."

Trent moved swiftly across the clearing toward the spot from which the nauseous scent came. Here the jungle wall thinned out. He pushed aside the matted *liana* and trailing *arbutus* and was about to crawl through the opening when he stooped suddenly. His keen eyes narrowed unbelievably as they strained to pierce through the thickened twilight. Gradually what he saw ahead

of him took unmistakable form and shape.

Spreadeagle against the gnarled trunks of three great mangrove trees were three figures, firmly lashed and bound with vines, grotesque postures. Mops of thick black hair puffed around their drooping skulls. White skeleton bones gleamed here and there. While over those hanging bodies swarmed and clicked a host of black ants a million strong, in such a way as to give the figures an undulating, quivering movement similar to the motions they once had evoked in life.

But Trent knew that this was a dance of death.

He dropped the curtain of vines quickly, and plumped back on his heels. Death he was used to, in most of its variable forms. But the twists of *liana* vines around those sagging figures was not the work of natives. They were seaman's hitches, cleverly knotted by rope-wise hands.

"Dog!" Trent cursed softly. "As though he hadn't done enough already!"

HIS square face knotted. Hard lines etched the corners of his grim mouth. He turned abruptly and crossed the clearing, where he reached down and pulled the moored boat ashore. His *machete* made short work of hacking through the bottom. Then he jumped out and shoved it out in the water. It filled rapidly and sank as he stood grimly watching.

"There. Now get away from me, Mr. Murderer," he muttered as he turned back to the jungle. "There are just two ends to this trail. One of them this—at the other—you!"

Stepping cautiously, Trent padded back up the slippery path. The rotting leaves slid slimily under foot, squashing into the fetid blue ooze, streaked with crimson. Presently

the trail began to climb sharply, and the way was barred every few yards by fallen tree trunks, waist high barriers buried under the creeping growth of writhing plant life that swarmed over them. Twisting roots masked by the treacherous gummy clay caught at Trent's feet. Concealed rocks shot out sharp spikes to trip him as he climbed.

NO air but the rank exhalations of the jungle penetrated through the towering masses of vegetation that buried him. The cumulative heat that comes only with a setting equatorial sun pressed down around him like a stifling blanket, and Trent's shirt dripped with the rain of sweat pouring from his body. For two full hours he struggled upward, doggedly and noiselessly. Then suddenly he heard something that brought him up sharply. The rasp and clang of metal upon rock struck harshly through the motionless air.

Trent crept ahead cautiously to get nearer the sound. The boom of a voice became audible. Light striking down from the path ahead told him that he was approaching a clearing. As he crawled into the matted undergrowth at the edge of the open space, the voice came to him clearly.

"Gold. Money. Bags full of it!" the hidden voice declaimed hoarsely. "'Where'd I get it?' they'll ask. 'Colombia—the gold fields of Colombia,' I'll tell 'em. And old Harley thinks they're dead—haw-haw! And I'll have a white wife to keep me company. I'll be rich, influential. Haw-haw-haw! 'Bull' Olund has fooled 'em all."

Trent's brow knitted in a puzzling frown as he listened. Bull Olund was talking to himself. But there were certain statements in that monologue he didn't understand—"Harley thinks they're dead—white wife—"

The speaker was certainly alone. That was obvious. In the gloating voice there was that complete letting go, that abandonment of all restraint that comes only when a man speaks for no ears but his own. Big Bull Olund was rehearsing a dramatic scene of which he was the hero.

"Mc, a dirty sailor, swabber of slimy decks? Hell, no! I'm rich. 'You go to hell,' I'll say, when they ask me. 'I can buy you and sell you, and half of New Orleans, too, you dirty scum—'"

Only obscene profanity could express Big Bull Olund's seething contempt for his non-existent hearers. He was a man crazed with money and power and blood lust.

Trent realized that he was in the presence of a madman as he crept to the very edge of the cover. That the man had raw courage, he knew. No one without that cold raw courage would ever have kidnaped old man Harley's son and daughter from the bridge of the Harley yacht with others looking on. True, he had done it with the protection of a leveled gun. But it took positive courage and steady nerve.

THAT the man was cold, ruthless and cruel, Trent knew, too. For only such a man could have collected the \$100,000 ransom money for their return, and then sent back the jeering, mocking note that he did, thanking old man Harley for the money; but informing him very simply that his son and daughter were dead, that he, himself, had killed them with his bare hands.

Big Bull Olund had done all this. David Trent, the United States Secret Service's ace man hunter, had been put on his trail with orders to follow it to the bitter end. That was long months before and thousands of miles behind. Now, the

long trail's end loomed immediately ahead.

Trent crouched with every muscle taut for a spring, his tense fingers tingling as they curled into talons. As he parted the tangle of looping *lianas* and peered through the opening, his right hand hovered over the gun butt at his hip.

HE saw a squat, big-chested man clad only in a singlet and dirty white shorts. Heavy bulging muscles banded the man's hairy torso and arms. He stood leaning on a shovel over a hole in the ground, leering complacently at the ugly thoughts going on behind his beady bloodshot eyes, eyes that were like serpent's, as cruel, as crafty.

If ever a beast demanded shooting down from cover, this man did. Trent felt the short hairs rising on the nape of his neck. His gun came out slowly from the holster. But it stopped in half arc, suddenly, when Trent caught sight of a golden-haired woman, whose face showed momentarily, only to vanish abruptly in a mask of jungle growth behind Bull Olund, the instant he raised his gun.

Trent leaped back to cover again. His alert brain was aflame with a hundred confusing thoughts. Was it possible? Was Pauline Harley still alive? Could it be she, with the golden hair?

He couldn't afford to take chances now. Even though old man Harley had offered a hundred thousand reward for return of the kidnaper, dead or alive, he knew that he would give his entire fortune for the return of his daughter and son. But were they still alive? There was a possibility that the girl, at any rate, was.

It wasn't the added recompense that motivated Trent's subsequent actions. Maybe the son was still

alive, too. If that were so and Bull Olund knew where he was, Trent had to spare the brute's life until he found out.

His job had changed suddenly. This was a spot for tact and cunning as well as cool courage and straight shooting. He had to find out things, so he turned and slipped back the way he had come.

"*Alloa, alloa!* Camp there ahead!" he shouted, climbing back on the path noiselessly and acting the part of a passing jungle traveler. "Anybody there? *Alloa!*"

Assuming full control of his nerves, he walked on coolly and calmly with an air of friendly nonchalance. As he broke into the clearing, he stared into the twin barrels of a leveled shotgun sawed off short. Behind the muzzle was Bull Olund, burly and scowling blackly under bushy overhanging brows. He crouched behind a boulder at the far edge of the clearing. The shovel lay across the pile of dirt from the hole he had been excavating.

"Hell!" Trent said softly. "What's the idea, welcoming a passing stranger with a pointed gun?"

He continued to advance casually, but steadily.

"WELCOME nobody!" Olund rasped, his dark brows beetling while his thick lips twisted into a sneer. "Stand back there! Who are you? You alone?"

"Nobody—that's me," Trent replied. "And I'm alone, so I take it that I'm welcome. Put up that gun, man. That's no way to welcome another white man in this damned country."

Trent stopped and pulled a cigarette from his shirt pocket. He thumbled a match and lit it. Seeing that both of the newcomer's hands were occupied, Olund lowered the shotgun and came grudgingly from

behind the boulder. With apparent abstraction Trent watched him out of the corner of his eye.

"That's more like it," he said, puffing at his cigarette indifferently. "Now we can talk without formality. Lonesome, damn country this, eh? My name—oh, let's forget that. If you ever heard it, you'd know I prefer a country that's—well, lonesome."

Trent's idle, rather vague manner brought a look of contempt into Bull Olund's suspicious blinking eyes.

"Meaning — you're wanted!" he blurted sneeringly. "That's why you come into this stinking country. What you wanted for? What'd you do?"

TRENT let his eyes droop until he looked sleepy.

"Oh, a bunch of things—or more," he answered evasively. "I heard there was gold up here—a lot of it. I thought I might make an honest living. But the gold's a hundred miles or so farther on. You going on that way?"

"Might be. None here, though," Olund grunted. "I've been digging around, got nothing. You're going on through then?"

"But I'd sort of like to get some rest first. You don't mind if I camp around here, do you?" He repeated, "It's a damn lonesome country to be alone in."

"I don't mind," Olund said, but his nod was ungracious.

It was obvious that he didn't want any strangers sticking around. Still, the fellow was stuck there for the night, and he would have to be told some reasonable tale about his camp—and companions.

"I'm prospecting, too," Olund explained extemporaneously. "I came up here with a partner, name of Robinson, he got sick. I should of

shot the pair of 'em back and gone on alone myself. The gold's farther on in them hills." He waved his massive hand toward the hidden hills. "But I let 'em stay and tag along. That's the way I am—soft-hearted. Can't go back on a partner."

Trent's eyes lighted and his head jerked imperceptibly.

"H'm—that's fine," he drawled, keeping his face expressionless. "Fine of you, I mean. It's rotten luck, though. What's the matter with Robinson? I've got some medicine in my pack. They might help—"

"They wouldn't," Olund broke in hastily. "I don't mean he's sick. He's queer in the head. Balmy." Bull Olund circled his forefinger around his right ear. "Come along up to camp, anyway. I can put you up for the night."

His beady green eyes had gone over Trent's person in infinite detail. The pack on his back looked well stocked, and the suspicious bulge around his middle looked like a money belt to Olund. He led the way up the steaming path, talking with a pretense of gruff cordiality.

"It's good to see a white man in this damn country," he grunted hoarsely. "Though there ain't any reason why's they should come here. Gold? Hell! I've dug all around and there ain't any."

THEY'VE found it lots of other places in Colombia," Trent answered. "But you're sure there's none here, eh?"

"Believe me, no!" Olund guffawed. "I'm going out soon's my partner snaps up a bit. Ho, there, wait a bit. Here's camp."

Olund led the way onto a path which opened into another clearing.

Two mud-and-wattle huts elevated on heaps of stones stood on the bank of the stream. The jungle had been pushed back a few feet, but the

overwhelming bush pressed in tightly on the flimsy human structure, seeming to crush and envelop them completely with its violent, malignant vitality.

As Trent looked up the huts blotted out, so quickly had the tropic darkness rushed in. Olund grunted his disgust.

"Hi! Strike a light up there," he shouted. "Come on, hurry with it. I'm here!"

TRENT stood silent and somber for a long moment. He was certain that Olund was lying when he told him of his partner and his sister. Indubitably, they were not that. *They must be Robert and Pauline Harley!* Trent's senses quickened and his pulses throbbed.

A match spurted a dot of light in the darkness. In a moment the glow of a lantern showed through the framed opening of the larger hut and cast a steady beam down the jungle path. Olund led the way and Trent stumbled after him, his eyes riveted on the picture framed in the black doorway.

The shower of lantern light fell on the head and shoulders of a girl. In the luminous glow a bright glint danced on her golden hair. Her broad brow was pallid in the yellow light. And beneath her big steady eyes were dark shadows, proclaiming a fatigue and helplessness the face didn't show.

Trent shivered inadvertently. Beyond question of doubt that face was the face of Pauline Harley.

"Company! Visitor!" Olund shouted. "Stranger going through, stopping just for the night."

Trent caught a momentary flash of hope in the girl's pale face. But the look was only transitory. Fear took its place almost immediately. She stepped out onto the veranda, throwing the light of the lantern on

Trent as he approached. He doffed his pith helmet, baring his closely cropped head.

"I hope I'm not intruding," he said in a clear, quiet voice. He looked at her steadily and smiled. Her eyes met his reassuring gaze. Her rigidity relaxed.

"You are quite welcome," she replied simply, but flames of buoyant hope flared again in her great round eyes.

And the inflection of the words told Trent how deeply she meant them. Ignoring Olund, she led the way into the hut and set the lantern down on a rough board table.

Trent scrutinized the room. Except for such furniture as the lumber from a few packing cases afforded, it was bare. Two bunks were built against the wall. The table was already spread with a primitive meal that had from necessity come out of tins.

A terrible, a rough background, Trent thought, for the girl with the brave mouth and fear haunted eyes.

He wondered how she had stood up under it so long without breaking. An unfamiliar, new sort of anger burned within him. This man Olund was worse than a murderer and kidnaper—he was inhuman, bestial.

"Will you sit down?" she said. "We've only boxes for chairs. And please help yourself to what you see. You must be terribly hungry. I'll call Robert, he's in my hut."

AT mention of Robert's name, Trent's brows lifted perceptibly. He turned penetrating eyes on the girl, nodded slightly, then unslung his pack and tossed it into a corner. Bull Olund drew his box near the table and began shoveling food into his big mouth.

The girl called softly from the door. Footsteps sounded and the

man she called Robert came into the room.

He was tall, gaunt and hollow-cheeked, with moody bitter eyes. None the less, he was surprisingly like his sister, but his face was worn and lined and his manner was nervously morose. He barely nodded to Trent as he took his place at the table and began to eat silently.

The girl, too, seated herself.

IT was a strange meal. Trent attempted to fill the silence with commonplace conversation which the girl answered in faint monosyllables, the others not at all. Bull Olund ate with a greedy enjoyment. Robert with barely concealed distaste. Neither looked at the other, nor at Trent. But he met the girl's eyes more than once and he read in them a wordless appeal—almost a prayer.

She wanted to speak to him, that was plain, but dared not with the others present.

When the meal was finished, Robert left the table immediately and returned to the other hut. Bull Olund leaned back and crammed his pipe with a foul smelling tobacco. The girl went about clearing the table uncertainly, followed everywhere by the ex-sailor's greedy small eyes.

Trent sensed her uneasy suspense, debated whether or not he should move now or wait until later. He could swing and get the drop on Olund, that would be easy enough. The man and girl were accounted for.

Still, there was something else. The ransom money. If he could get that and return Pauline and Robert Harley to their parents unharmed, with Bull Olund in bracelets, his job would be perfect.

"Oh," the girl broke in, suddenly, looking straight at Trent. "Would you be kind enough to get me a pail

of water from the stream? It's so dark down there, I'm—"

"Here, I'm the man for that, young lady," Bull Olund snapped, jumping up clumsily and leering at her. "Why didn't you say you wanted water? I woulda got it for you. This stranger's tired and wants to turn in. Give me that bucket, Pauline!"

The girl's lips tightened at this familiar use of her name. But she handed over the bucket without a word, and he stumped off toward the stream.

She waited until his footsteps had died away, then she whirled around and faced Trent.

"Listen," she whispered almost hysterically, "you're a stranger—but—I—I need you! We need help! That man—killed three native guides who brought us in—just so they couldn't give away our whereabouts. He—"

"I know! Stop talking!" Trent snapped sternly as he laid a steady-hand on her arm.

The girl gasped and struggled to regain her composure.

"Thank you, you're right," she said. "But if you knew how much help means to me—to us. Tell me, do you know this man Olund kid—"

"I know. He's an inhuman savage," Trent broke in. "I came into these jungles to get him. I saw his footprints on the trail. Funny, though, I didn't see yours or your brother's."

"He won't allow us to leave these huts," the girl choked. "He goes to the river every day. We've been here a month."

"NOW tell me quickly," Trent asked, "is there much of the ransom money still in these huts?"

Her eyes flickered dubiously, but just momentarily. Pierced by Trent's unwavering gaze, all doubt

of his sincerity faded from her mind.

"Yes, yes—in my hut," she said swiftly. "But lately he's been digging holes to bury it outside. That's what makes me afraid. He's money mad, full of lust—"

"Ssh!"

The heavy stamp of Olund's feet could be heard stumbling up the path. Trent thought fast and acted just as swiftly. He leaped across the room, ripped the blankets from his pack and threw himself on the floor, pulling the covers over his face.

HE heard the girl slip out into the kitchen-shed at the back, heard her moving the tin plates about out there.

"Humph!" Olund chuckled scornfully as he stepped back into the hut. "Asleep already, the sap-headed chump! Hope he sleeps good. He'd better."

The girl didn't answer. From under the corner of his blanket Trent saw her move swiftly out of the hut. A moment later Robert Harley's tall, gaunt figure appeared in the doorway.

"Where's Pauline gone?" Olund demanded insolently. "What's the matter with her?"

"She's gone to bed," Robert answered shrilly, his face flushing alternately pale and pink.

Trent stiffened at the ring in his nervously shaking voice.

"And listen, Olund," Robert blurted out with a show of force, "don't ever call my sister Pauline again. Don't even annoy her by speaking to her at all. You got what you wanted. You got the ransom money. You—you—" His voice broke off in a gasping sob.

"Aw, kid, don't get sore," Olund said soothingly, though there was an open sneer on his face. "Since when

are you folks too damn good to associate with me? You can't blame a regular fellow like me admiring a damn pretty girl like Paul—"

"Shut up!" Robert was almost gasping. "I told you from the first I would play along with you as long as you kept your dirty hands off her. Understand, that goes!"

Trent expected things to break at this moment. He lay, with muscles tensed, ready to jump. But to his great surprise, Bull Olund only laughed—a great hearty guffaw. Then he heard Olund pull off his boots and roll into one of the bunks without another word.

Awake and watchful, Trent lay in his bunk mulling over the situation into which he had walked. It seemed to him that Pauline Harley did not sense all, or perhaps any of the truth about her brother's association with Olund, or for that matter what was in store for her.

As for what Olund planned, he was well aware. The whole scheme was one of a savage simplicity. He planned to murder Robert as he had murdered the three natives, then induce the submission of his sister. He counted upon his own brutality to reduce the girl to a state of slavery which she would have neither the mind nor spirit to denounce, when they once again returned to civilization.

TRENT knew that the only stumbling block in Olund's plan now was himself. In the fight that was bound to come on the morrow, Bull Olund's first shot would be for him. Trent's grin was mirthless, but not entirely unhappy when he considered that fight.

Lying relaxed, but completely alert, he was already consciously preparing for it.

The lantern burned low, flickered, and went out. Trent could hear

Robert Harley moving restlessly, muttering in his sleep. He wished that the boy would keep still, for the sounds that he made drowned out any sounds that might come from Bull Olund.

With the light burning, Trent could have seen Olund's first move in his bunk from where he lay. But in the abysmal blackness of the hut, he had only his ears to warn him, if Olund pretending to be asleep—were actually waiting to spring a surprise on him in the dark.

The muttering from Robert's bunk grew louder. Words poured from the boy's lips in a meaningless, half articulate jumble. Trent heard him sit up, then the shuffle of his feet on the floor as he stumbled from his bunk.

TRENT rose to his haunches. He could see nothing in the black gloom, but from the sound he gathered that Robert was making for the door of the hut. As Trent sprang up to intercept him, a tall thin shadow smudged the faint dimness that marked the door opening.

"Robert!" Trent called softly, and leaped across the floor noiselessly. Once outside he saw that the man was walking in his sleep. He dared not startle him, for it would be infinitely dangerous to suddenly awaken a man in Robert's nervous condition. The shock of it might completely unbalance him.

Yet, he couldn't let the boy wander off into the jungle bush alone. He could hear him muttering as he stumbled down the path.

"Robert! Robert! Wait, I'm coming with you," Trent whispered softly as he hurried after the shuffling figure in the faint starlit path. Trent moved swiftly, but Robert broke into a run, heading straight for the hole Olund had been digging when Trent had come upon the

camp. With a spurt of speed Trent reached Robert and laid a guiding hand on his arm.

"It's this way," he insisted gently, trying to swing Robert back toward the hut. "We're going this way. Come on."

Robert wheeled swiftly and turned blank staring eyes on Trent, eyes that seemed to look through and beyond him. Suddenly his thin face twisted into contorted lines of horror.

"Look!" he shrieked shrilly. "Look! He's got you!"

Before Trent could turn, something heavy and solid struck on the back of his head. Stars whirled in a seething maelstrom for a split second. Then Trent plunged with a crash into an ocean of blackness.

A long while afterward he stirred and lifted eyelids heavy as lead. He was back in the hut. The first rays of daylight were stealing in at the door. For a moment he thought he must have dropped off to sleep, then awakened in the midst of a horrible dream. But he soon realized it was no dream.

He tried to move, and the agonizing effort brought recurring stabs of pain that quickened his senses. He lay on his side with his body bent backward like a taut bow. His hands were lashed behind him. A snarl of rope bound his arms.

ROBERT HARLEY lay beside him, bound in the same cruel, muscle rending position. His thin face was white. His mouth gaped open, and his rolling eyes fastened on Trent.

Not an external sound broke the morning stillness, nothing but the faint jungle rustlings and the far-away screams of some chattering birds.

"I thought he had killed you," Robert said dully. "Olund's gone."

He took Pauline with him." He jerked abruptly. "Ants are stinging me!" he moaned.

A black undulating stream a foot wide was flowing swiftly across the floor toward them. The head of the stream had reached Robert's feet.

Only then did the full force of Bull Olund's heinous scheme seep into Trent's consciousness.

He realized then why Olund had left them living. They were to be eaten alive by the black swarming ants just as the natives in the jungle had been!

THE poignant picture of those quivering shreds of flesh on the three mangrove trees brought cold sweat out on Trent's body.

He tensed his muscles against the rope bonds—uselessly. A strangled gasp escaped his lips. He knew the sea too well to imagine a sailor making knots that wouldn't hold.

"Don't worry about Pauline," he said to Robert calmly. "Just let me get at your ropes, and we'll be after them in no time. You don't know it, but I'm Dick Trent of the United States Secret Service."

Robert Harley gasped. His eyes went wide. But he didn't say anything.

Inch by inch Trent began to muscle himself along the floor, using his head and cramped knees to push himself forward like a caterpillar that has been cut in two. Gradually he worked around Robert's body, then squirmed backward till the hands bound behind his back were touching the bonds that held Robert.

His fingers were swollen to stiff numbness, but they awkwardly explored the knot that bound Robert's feet to his hands. It was an intricate, clever knot, but Trent recognized it. Working patiently, he fumbled at the knot till all sense and feeling left his stiff fingers.

And still the knot held. It seemed hopeless.

He relaxed for a moment to regain his breath and think up a different means of attack. Painfully, he twisted his body around until his face pressed against the knot. With strong perfect teeth he worried at the rope, tugging and pulling. His lips went red, raw and bleeding. His gums swelled. But the knot finally gave. After that he tore furiously till the rope fell from Robert's wrists.

"That's got it!" he grated through swollen lips. "Now buck up, kid. Untie your feet and get a knife to cut me free!"

Robert shuddered. He sat up and faced Trent, wild eyed.

"What's the use?" he said despairingly. "Olund took all the guns, even yours—She—he—they've been gone an hour."

"Only an hour," Trent snapped. "Then there's still a chance, a good chance. Quick, Robert! We'll catch them! Snap out of it!"

The sharp, incisive command jolted Robert into action. He started tugging clumsily at his bound ankles. Trent grew impatient.

"Hurry!" he urged. "Crawl out to the kitchen and get a knife! There must be one there! It's for your sister—"

ROBERT scuttled across the hut on hands and knees. Hope had come back into his moody eyes when he returned running with a knife in his hand. Instantly he slashed Trent's bonds. Trent stomped the blood back into his feet, then, with scarcely a backward glance, dashed off down the jungle path. Robert pounded at his heels with the rope bonds still around his neck.

Daylight struck through the thick growth as they plunged down the trail Trent had struggled up the day

before. They took the barriers of fallen trees in their stride, sometimes sprawling on hand and knees in the slippery ooze, but struggling again to a renewed foothold and staggering on.

"The river!" Robert shouted. "Make for the river! He'll cross it. The trail is along the other bank!"

FEAR, the acute fear of being too late to overtake the gorilla creature making off with Pauline Harley, hardened every muscle in Trent's lithe body. Behind him, Robert Harley hung on, battling along through sheer will power and desperation.

On they ran. It seemed hours to Trent before the booming roar of the *Rio Magdalena* reached their ears. He flung out an arm to stop Robert when he halted suddenly.

"I sank the boat on my way up," he gasped, gathering his breath. "He can't get out that way. He'll be here at the end of the trail. We'd better take to the bush. Bull Olund's got the guns. We've nothing but our hands. If he's trying to raise and patch the dugout we can jump him."

Robert nodded grim assent, and they slipped into the matted growth beside the jungle path. Crawling on all-fours, they pushed cautiously toward the clearing where the boat had been moored. The jungle bush seemed filled with a thousand ominous rustlings, but no sound of Bull Olund or Pauline Harley reached their ears.

When the clearing was just ahead Trent parted the tangle of *liana* vines and peered through. He motioned Robert forward and they rose and stepped into the open space.

No rope dangled from the mooring stake. The dugout was gone!

"Fool! Damn fool!" Trent swore bitterly. "Why didn't I set it

adrift? But I thought I might need it later. Well, come on anyway."

He turned on his heel and started down the bank, but Robert didn't follow him. The boy seemed stunned to complete hopelessness by the loss of his sister. Trent came back and caught his arm.

"Buck up, Robert!" he commanded incisively. "You've still got all that rope on you. We'll use it on Olund yet! We're not licked, not by a damned sight!"

The boy pulled himself up with an effort, and they crawled back to where the path ended on the river bank. The foam flecked stretch of seething water spread out before them. Halfway across the torrent, far out of reach, they glimpsed the dugout.

Bull Olund was paddling furiously. He was barely holding his own against the terrific force of the swollen torrent in midstream; the dugout was making no headway toward the far shore. The twisting greenish swirls seemed to hurl him back between each stroke, as if determined to batter him to bits before tossing him, like useless debris, over the roaring cataract below. Slumped in the prow of the dugout was Pauline Harley.

Trent gritted his teeth when he noticed that her arms were bound to her sides, while her head drooped helplessly on her breast. At sight of her a harsh cry tore from Robert's lips.

THE girl jerked her head up, and stumbled to her knees. Bull Olund's head swiveled around, and he missed a stroke. The dugout rocked crazily, spun half way around, then darted recklessly toward a spot where the water swirled around a black, upraised head of jagged rock.

"Sit down!" Bull Olund yelled, and resumed his wild paddling. "Are

you crazy? You'll have us both over—"

Before the words were out of his big mouth, the dugout struck the jagged rock and shattered like a top. Trent wrenched at his boots and tore them off. As he slid into the swirling water, his keen eye marked the spot where the girl had gone down, bound and helpless.

A STRONG eddy caught him, pulling at his body with the drag of a mill race. He threshed out with powerful overarm strokes despite the fearful opposition. A surge of water enveloped him. His head came up again and he shook it like a dog, to rid his eyes and mouth of the spray that filled them. The rush of water swung the dugout nearer him.

"Head up stream!" he dimly heard Robert shout. "Up! Up! You're being swept down! *There's a cata-ract!*"

With every ounce of force in him Trent swung around and battled against the mass of water hurtling down on him, beating, pounding, throttling him unmercifully. Undercurrents sucked at his body, dashing him against unseen rocks. With arms and legs moving like pistons he forced himself up and on through seconds that seemed like hours.

Was he gaining? Was it worth while? A shout ahead roused him just when he was on the point of giving up further resistance.

"Here I am! *Here!*"

It was Bull Olund's bellow.

"This way," he hollered. "*I got her.*"

The sailor's bullet head appeared close to a rocky ledge over which the water boiled. One huge arm was thrown around the rock to which he clung. The other hand grasped the girl's hair and held her deathly face above the water.

Trent surged toward her with a mighty spurt, and threw both hands at her shoulders. But Bull Olund beat him off with an oath.

"No, you don't," he growled. "You're not goin' to take her off and leave me stranded."

"You take us both ashore, or you take me alone!" he shouted menacingly. "Don't, and I'll hold her under. You can't stop me. If you tow us we'll all get to shore. Otherwise you go back alone. See?"

Olund's beady eyes flamed madly and the look on his ugly face was diabolic.

Trent said nothing. The current had swept him around the rock. When he grabbed for a handhold he missed and his body crashed against an ugly spike that jutted tooth-like under the surface. He wrapped his legs around it instinctively. Olund roared boisterously as Trent's head went under.

He came up again within arm's reach of the girl. His hold was precarious at best, but he twisted his legs around the slippery underwater log and thrust his long body out at an angle, toward the girl's head floating above the whirling water. His hands just met on the hairy wrist of the hand that held her.

EVERY muscle braced to the strain of his next effort. Slowly, irresistibly, he bent Bull Olund's powerful forearm up, back, over. The huge forearm swelled in its effort to withstand that unbearable pressure and the dilated purple veins stood out like writhing serpents.

A howl of anguish burst from Olund's hate-constricted throat as his shoulder joint cracked with the tearing of ligaments. His fingers relaxed their clutching hold and the dislocated arm fell limp to his side.

Trent reached out and caught the girl as the current whipped her past

him. With a swift thrust he turned on his back. When her head bobbed to the surface again his hands were under her shoulders supporting her body.

Not a word had passed her lips in the moments since Trent's coming had brought renewed hope to her. Now the calmness of her voice startled him.

"Let me go," she said clearly above the din of the rushing water. "You'll never make it in this current *with me*. Go back to Robert. Hurry, or we'll both be swept over the cataract."

TRENT wasted no breath in retort, but he tightened his grip on her shoulders, reassuringly. Swimming on his back as he was, he had no idea where he was going. It was very possible that she was right. But he would not give up.

As the sweep of the current caught their submerged bodies it seemed to whirl them like corks, faster and faster, in an eager effort to tear her from his hold. He continued to kick out desperately, but the ominous roar of the cataract boomed threateningly louder in his ears. The fight to keep afloat made the blood pound deafeningly in his head. His lungs seemed near to bursting.

Then suddenly, when it seemed he could carry on no longer, a shadow crossed his vision. Something had whirled over his head and slashed across his face. Trent threw up a hand, hoping against hope that they had been swept under a trailing *liana* vine that would stay their losing fight. His clutching fingers closed over the end of a rope. Robert, racing along the shore, had hurled it to him.

"Hang on!" he shouted. "For God's sake hang on to sis—and keep up for another twenty feet!"

Trent twisted the rope around one

arm, while with the other he held the girl's head above water. Robert, on the shore, tugged on it, gaspingly drew it in hand over hand against the force of the terrific current.

Both the man and the girl were half-drowned when he finally dragged them out on shore. Trent lay motionless while the boy fell to slashing the bonds that bound his sister's arms.

"I'm all right, Robert," she moaned pitifully.

But the effort was telling. She fell to sobbing quietly. Her head bowed to her knees and her face was hidden in a shower of silky wet hair. Trent turned his head away. His eyes fixed resolutely on the boiling welter of the river.

Across the waters, the cries of Bull Olund still rang hoarsely. His hold on the rock seemed slipping, and his face just above the surface was contorted with terror.

A comparatively narrow strip of water lay between Olund and the life he cried for; but the strip was just as impassable as the wide Atlantic to a man who could not swim.

Trent rose to his feet and picked up the rope Robert had dropped on the bank. For a long moment he cogitated. Then a grim set came to his jaw and the light that glinted in his eyes was like the light reflecting from Polar ice. He ran a loop in the end of the rope and coiled it over his arm. The free end he swung over his head.

"Head up, Olund!" he shouted. "Watch for it. Rope coming. Catch!"

HE gave a mighty heave, and the rope snaked out across the turbulent water. Olund heaved himself upward with a mighty surge to meet the writhing loop. It hovered, fell, and Trent felt it tighten to the pull of the weight on the end.

"Turn on your back and float!"

Trent yelled. "Take a long breath." He began pulling the rope in hand over hand. "Damn you, Olund," he swore. "I'll get you yet—alive!"

The rope cut obliquely down into the water. It came in with jerks and bumps, sliding and halting like a ship dropping her hook. Trent's lithe muscles felt near to cracking as he hauled. Sweat poured from his face and streamed down his back. Foot by foot it came—a leaden burden. With a final heave he brought it out on the bank.

The thing that came up at the end of the rope made Trent glance quickly behind him. Pauline Harley's face was still hidden on her knees.

Bloated and purple, beaten and smashed all out of human semblance was the wreckage of the remains of Bull Olund.

"Good God!" burst from Robert Harley's shaken lips. "What—what—" Trent slowly shook his head.

"See what did it," he explained, stooping down over the gruesome figure with knife in hand.

From around Olund's middle he cut away a money belt, which was not only stuffed full with gold, but

had other bags attached to it by leather thongs.

"My money belt," he said, holding it up. "And your father's gold. It looks like he has it all here. That's what sank him. Greed! Here, wait."

Bull Olund's bloated figure heaved. His barrel chest vibrated spasmodically. Trent's thumb and forefinger thrust to the man's hairy wrist, felt for the pulse. It was still beating faintly.

Immediately Trent leaped erect and went into action, vigorously pumping and rolling the body in an effort to resuscitate the nearly drowned man.

"What's the use?" Robert asked, staring with reluctant pity at the smashed, bloated figure. "It's God's will. Let him die. You can't save him, anyway. You've done all you can." Trent heard him but he didn't cease his resuscitatory effort. Water poured from Olund's lungs, and slowly his flesh changed from purple to pink. Trent smiled, when the man's eyes opened and rolled vacantly.

"It may be God's will," he replied. "But it isn't mine. Like Frank Buck, I aim to bring 'em back alive!"

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A Soldier of the Legion



Harker's face was afire with the fighting hell that blazed in his eyes.

A Tense Story of Heroic Deeds and Marching Men Beneath the Blistering Sahara Sun

By CAPT. KERRY McROBERTS

Author of "The Savage Horde," "Danger Trails," etc.

THE hard-hitting Legion it was called. *Legion des Etrangers!* Fighting men gathered from the far corners of the world. And no man knew his brother-in-arms. Bent beneath the blistering heat of the scorching Sahara sun, their packs cutting deep into their fiercely disciplined backs, the 3rd Company staggered like a column of men who prowl in their sleep.

Sloshing through the white hot sand, stumbling over the scattered half-dead bunches of coarse grass,

the marching men dragged themselves along to the monotonous snarling bark of the mounted officers. Now and then some one growled under his breath in reply, cursing the luck that brought them here to the land of mystery and death.

"Un—deux—un—deux." The voices of the non-coms droned interminably. "March you sons of dogs—or do you want to be white bones like that—?"

Jimmy Harker, his eyes half closed against the glare of the shimmering sand, turned his head mechanically at the question. Others too looked

at the smear of bleached and broken spikes that lay half covered by the shifting desert. Bones! Who was it? Was he a white man or some wandering tribesman caught in the grip of the vast wilderness of white?

A MAN stumbled two files ahead of Harker, and he heard the gruff oath of a non-com. Then the rumbling growl of the legionnaires as they saw the *soldat* fall and an officer swung his horse about to spit vicious curses on the laggard.

"Get up—filthy swine," the voice of Captain deYong snapped like a whip lash. "Drag him to his feet. *Nom de Dieu!* And you call yourselves men."

A rising moan like the hum of a bleak wind rose from the throats of the legionnaires as they saw the captain lean from his saddle and strike at the fallen *soldat* with his riding crop. A non-com jerked the dazed fellow to his feet, and the officer reached out a gloved hand and tilted the man's head back with a snap.

"Cur—," he bellowed at sight of the soldier's face. "The vultures will pick your carcass. It is scum like you—" he brought the back of his hand smartly against the cheek of the man below him which sent the fellow backward into the arms of his glowering comrades. And as the brittle sound cracked the flame hot silence of the desert a new voice rose near the tail of the squad column. It was the voice of Jimmy Harker.

"You hit that man again," shouted Harker, dropping his rifle and moving forward toward the mounted captain, "and I'll rip you outa that saddle and tear you apart, you lousy frog."

For a tense swift instant no man moved or spoke. Harker stood four feet from the legion commander. His slim wiry body rigid, feet spread, fists clenched, his sun-browned face

fairly afire with the fighting hell that blazed in his blue-gray eyes.

Captain deYong stared down into Harker's face while his own quivered and jerked in a spasm of smouldering rage. He was beside himself with a half blind fury. They saw his knees tighten on his mount. It was a hair-trigger moment, a flash that flared up like a rocket. A jump of his horse and the cut of the crop—but the officer did not move. A spark at that moment might have touched a powder blast. The twice-accursed American looked like a savage tiger balanced before him, the kepi flung back from his brow, his mouth a thin hard line of cracked gray lips that showed white teeth bared.

THE cruel smile that came to the officer's face masked the hatred behind it, and with his finger pointed at Harker, he barked an order to a non-com.

"Take that dog's weapons," he hissed viciously, "and tie his hands behind him. He marches under guard and when we reach post the treacherous illegitimate will learn what it means to threaten an officer of the Legion. March!"

Across the broiling spits of sand they went, through the low lying hills and gullies that creased and folded the edges of the great Sahara in its never ending conflict with the uplands of the Atlas range that divides Morocco.

Jimmy Harker, relieved of his rifle, bayonet and ammunition, his hands secured by rope bonds behind him, staggered on, a grim smile of defiance set on his lips. The firing squad for him now, or perhaps, the penal battalion hundreds of miles to the south. The murder colony!

The firing squad! The thought hardly flashed through his heat tortured brain when the rattle of rifle

fire cracked over the vast desert dunes. The voice of Captain deYong from the head of the column barked a command. The column halted. Men looked about them feverishly, with eyes squinting into the sun. The shrill whine of bullets cut the stifling air all around them.

"Berber!" shouted the commander. "Form square!"

ORDERS were hurled back along the column. Men rushed into the famed Legion desert formation. From off on their left flank came the blood curdling shrieks of the savage horde. The surprised, leg weary and sun-parched legionnaires rammed cartridges into their Lebel's. The smashing volley crashed on the desert like a thunder cloud adding to the din of the yelling Berbers who were now swarming down from the hill like ants.

Blood mad Berbers, fangs bared and blades flashing, came plunging at them like a tidal wave. Mounted on frothing horses they came, the hill tribesmen, and on camels rode the fierce desert nomads, their swift ungainly pace bringing the hooded raiders down on the little band of legionnaires like jackals swarming around a helpless dying bullock.

"We're trapped like pigs in a pen," cried a sweat streaked non-com. "Shoot you sons of misgotten cows—shoot them down—or we are lost."

From a corner of the square, a fiery little lieutenant shouted excitedly, pointing. The commander ran to him for the rattle of gun fire made words mere mouthings.

"There!" suggested the under officer. "That hollow over there. We can fall back and stand them off. We'll be slaughtered here in the open."

The order ran around the human fence, from man to man, and, firing as they went, the 3rd Company re-

treated, slowly, knocking the raiding hillmen from their saddles, snuffing the lives of the more daring riders.

Hand to hand they battled now, grim faced, cursing, blue clad fighters of the Legion slamming lead and steel into the rushing killer pack. Here and there a *soldat* tumbled panting into the sand locked in choking death struggle with an unhorsed native, or leaped into the air to drive his bayonet through the slashing bearded villain whose camel screamed in a frenzy of terror amid the carnage. *Soldats* dragged their comrades; the officers shouted fierce commands, shooting right and left with pistols into the swirling horde of white robed devils. Dodging like a hounded wolf whose fangs have been pulled Jimmy Harker, unarmed and defenceless, protected himself by rushing along with the van as the company fought its way toward the depression in the sand.

"HEY!" Jimmy yelled as a non-com brushed past him, "get these damned ropes offa me. Gimme a rifle, somebody!"

But the non-com only shrugged, glancing from Harker toward the company commander. It was a case of every man for himself now.

One of the pack horses fell squealing with his death wound, and two men slashed at the pack cutting it free to drag it with them. Foot by foot they fell back pouring a rain of steel into the oncoming wave of yelling madmen. Then over the edge of the little fort-like hollow they slid to temporary safety. Officers rushed here and there re-organizing the little command.

"Untie me, somebody!" shouted Harker persistently. "Give me a chance for my life."

Captain deYong stood near him, crouched below the edge of the sand hollow.

"You threw down your rifle you dirty dog," he sneered. "Now you would like to be a soldier of the Legion once more, eh? Bah! How can I trust you? No!"

"Why you whiskered pig," shouted Harker filled with rage against the ruthless despot. "Every bullet counts, don't it?"

"When we return to Sihkram you will look into some rifle barrels that you may count," the commandant hissed, ducking a scattered hail of lead that raked the rim of their tiny fortress. "Pray that one of these barbarians wipes your slate clean in this sand."

"You low-down devil," said Harker as he saw the captain scurry away to the far side of the depression.

HE felt a man nudge him cautiously, and somebody whispered in his ear.

"Take it easy, Jimmy," it said. "Keep down an' play safe. If we can hold out until night I'll cut you loose in the dark. S-h-h!"

Jimmy Harker turned his head. Beside him, crouched low under the natural bulwark he recognized Carl Schneider, a rugged, campaign-hardened old timer in the Foreign Legion. Under his breath Harker mumbled his thanks.

While the hours dragged wearily onward the little body of legionnaires stood to their guns, shoving the bullets out in reaper waves as the charges of the Berbers threatened. Men were falling, friend and foe alike. Horses toppled in death, screaming to the brassy heavens in delirium of pain and fright. The merciless sun beat down on it all, on the frenzied fanatics sweeping the rising hills around them, on the tiny stronghold in the sand where the living and the dead waited, one stark and silent, the other grimly, trigger fingers crooked, eyes slanted along

the red-hot barrels of the smoking Lebel's.

And with the hours came the night. The sudden darkness of the desert country. Then holes were dug in the sand and nameless graves were filled. Rations were issued and the fast diminishing water supply doled out by non-coms.

Captain deYong then called his officers and non-coms—what were left of them—to him.

"If we can hold out," he was heard to state calmly, "there may be a chance. It is perhaps only eighteen or twenty miles to Sihkram and the colonel may send a detachment out for us. We were expected tonight. See that a strong guard is posted. Look!"

The others turned where he indicated and saw the camp-fires springing up on the hills, red flames against the blue-black sky. Lieutenant Savoy stared gravely at the sight then faced his captain.

"They are not withdrawing, *mon Capitan*," he remarked gravely, the dim light reflected from the distant fires showing his face ashen. "If they attack in the night, we—"

"We will die like soldiers of la legion," cut in deYong.

EVEN as he spoke one of the lookouts called over his shoulder.

"The filthy vermin are crawling down the hills, *mon Capitan*," he said. "They are coming—see."

Like buzzing insects the air was filled with whining bullets. Men gripped their rifles, set their teeth, and burrowed deeper into the sand. All but one man. Jimmy Harker, his arms bound snugly behind him, was standing now. In the center of the desert grave he stood recklessly, a grin of sudden determination on his face. Jimmy Harker was not going to face a firing squad.

"Down you fool!" snarled the com-

mandant. "Name of a dog and the seven idiots of Marrakech are you mad?"

"Go to hell!" snapped Harker, and laughed openly as a Berber slug tore the kepi from his matted brow. "Vive la legion! A man can only die once."

* * * *

With lead flying from all angles Jimmy Harker stood brazenly. Legionnaires laughed with him and spat streams of deadly fire into the skulking ranks of the dismounted tribesmen. Like ghosts the Berber clan crawled over the sandy desert floor, firelight painting the weird scene in red and black and grayish white, death claiming its victims with volleys of unearthly shrieks, the clatter of shattered rifles, the shrill cries of beasts.

SO the night wore on and the gray-ing dawn saw carnage red on the skirt of the Sahara. Captain deYong, desperate now with the prospect of a second daylight inferno, called to his men for volunteers. Some soldier to break through the Berber ring and escape to the post at Sihkram. At Sihkram there were bombing planes and armored cars—succor for the besieged handful of blue-clad fighters facing death and—what came after at the hands of the savage hillmen.

"Who'll volunteer?" demanded the commandant. "We have two horses left."

The legion rifles ceased firing and *soldats* looked at each other silently while the seething raider lead buzzed hungrily. Then a dozen hands were outstretched—more—twenty of them perhaps—

"Why not get rid of me?" called Jimmy Harker.

"Silence, you scum," barked deYong viciously. "This is a detail for a man I can trust."

Jimmy Harker spat into the sand, felt a tug at his collar, and knew that something had charmed his life, for a comrade who had risen near him fell with a groan as the bullet snuffed his life away. Death! In the dark. A group of close huddled, crouching men were drawing straws from the commandant's fingers. Schneider! Tough old Carl was the lucky one. What luck? A horse and a wild dash for freedom—and a bullet in the spine. Only the careful guarding of Harker in those early hours of the night had prevented Schneider cutting Jimmy's bonds. And now one of the few men whose companionship he had enjoyed in the *Legion des Etrangers* was going out there to ride a death horse.

A sudden quick resolve formulated in Jimmy Harker's brain. Clear and plain it flashed. This hard-bitten, merciless frog captain had cursed him for a traitor, would have him face a firing squad—if the company ever slipped this Berber trap. Well, Jimmy Harker would show him; show them all.

"Wait!" he called out. "Captain deYong, sir, please."

"YOU miserable swine," snapped the commandant on seeing it was Harker. "You dare to address me? Seal your lips or I shall have you shot here and now. Stand back there!"

Harker paused.

"Give me a chance, sir," Jimmy begged. "I've got a plan. You don't have to trust me, listen—" he pointed to Schneider, "he'll be shot like a rabbit. Give my trick a play. Lemme go first."

Captain deYong stared at the disgraced *soldat* silently. He felt the others watching. Something seemed to have crept out over the desert night into the barbaric circle of death that waited, silencing the Ber-

ber rifles. It was a grim tableau that the night covered in that sand hollow.

"What do you mean?" demanded deYong motioning Harker to come closer. "Is this some devilish plot in which you hope to trick me and my men?"

Jimmy Harker ignored the cutting words.

"Wait until daylight," he urged pleadingly. "In the dark a man could make the break and die before he ran a hundred yards. In daylight we can fool them, at least it will give what are left of you, a better chance. Listen. There's two horses left. Give me one with the first peep o' daylight. Give me a horse an' a pistol. That's all I want. I'll take my chances. I'll make a break over that way an' go like hell as far as the horse can keep going. See. I draw them off, an' they'll see me go. They'll come after me to keep me from reaching the post. And when they follow me, Schneider can take the other—"

"YOU'LL never reach it," interrupted Captain deYong. "But it is just as well. It may give him (Schneider) the chance we need. And you will get better than you deserve—death by the enemy. Very well. At dawn."

* * * *

The pale glow of early day broke over the scattered hills of the lower Atlas range, and from their sand hollow the legion saw the Berbers preparing breakfast about their fires. The shooting died out, a temporary pause in the strain of uneven battle. One of the little half-breed Arabian horses had been saddled lying down. *Soldats* stared solemnly at one another, then at Jimmy Harker.

Jimmy was on his knees, flexing his arms from which the ropes had been removed. A non-com hunkered

beside him, a pistol and ammunition belt in his hands.

Crawling toward Schneider on his hands and knees now, Jimmy extended his hand.

"So long, Schneider," whispered Jimmy. "Hope you make it. Here." He slid a ring from his finger and handed it to the stupefied, stolid German fighting man. "You always liked this thing, pardner."

Schneider gripped Harker's hand in a vise of steel.

"Thanks, Jimmy, *mon ami!*"

"Hey, Harker," cried a red-faced, black-eyed soldat, "you won't need that watch, huh?"

Harker grinned and shook his head. He flipped the watch from his wrist and handed it to Pietro Carissi with a smile. There was something grimly suggestive in the brief ceremony that Captain deYong observed. He found himself strangely helpless to snap a command for haste. This American adventurer, derelict, tramp—whatever he might be—was suddenly getting under his skin. He took death in a matter of fact way. Queer people, the Americans. But here. Jimmy Harker made a motion to the non-com, another to the men who held the saddled pony down. The belt was strapped about Harker's waist, and the pistol shoved into the holster. Quick, faultless action, timed like big gun fire. The horse scrambled to its feet. A man was in the saddle. A swelling shout of alarm rushed skyward from the seething Berber camps, and out of the sand hollow, Jimmy Harker rode like a bullet from a rifle muzzle.

YELLING like an American Indian on the warpath Jimmy spun the game little horse around and headed southward for the desert, for the winding age-old trail that fringed the foothills. Behind him echoed

the shrill war cries of the Berbers who flung themselves into saddles and with rifles wildly cracking dashed down the hill sides in pursuit.

"Go, you crazy *soldat*," shouted Captain de Yong enthusiastically, then seeing the faces of his men, "See if you can die like a soldier of the legion."

Away like a streak across the sandy wastes Jimmy Harker put the little horse to a dead run, forcing him to his utmost speed in a frantic dash for the curve of the hills in the distance.

If he could stay alive and in front until he got that far, Carl Schneider would have his chance.

Over his shoulder he saw them racing after him, burnoused horse-men by the hundreds, thousands, shouting, shooting, waving threatening scimitars that flashed and sprinkled the desert with jewels of golden fire.

"COME on you hairy hellions," Jimmy yelled back at his pursuers, glancing also toward the shallow dip in the sand, a mere blur now, where his legion comrades blended with the shimmering waves of the desert floor.

Jimmy Harker's heart went out to the horse between his knees. No animal, not even the desert Bedouin's prized steed, could keep a pace like this for many miles in the heavy sand. Somewhere ahead of him was the end. But if the plucky pony could only make the spur of those hills. Once out of sight of the onrushing Berber wave he might—

"Up, you hero," Jimmy blurted suddenly as the animal stumbled. A quick jerk on the reins pulled the horse out of a fall and on it went, pounding the shifting sand into a whistling, stinging cloud behind

them. "Show 'em some action, baby."

They were closing in on him a little now, settling down to real riding. Still beyond effective rifle range they scattered lead behind him, and Harker risked a fall to take a last look toward the spot where his company was bottled up in the desert. There was not even a trace of blue to mark a legionnaire. Had Schneider made his getaway yet? Were the Berbers all on his trail or had part of the tribe remained behind to guard the trapped handful of men under the tri-color of France? Jimmy Harker might never know.

A mile—three-quarters—a half-mile. Jimmy was making the ride of his life now, nursing the panting horse along, begging, imploring. Now and then he drew out the pistol, gripping it in fingers that were like claws of red-hot brass. Sweat lathered the man and horse alike. The pounding of the hoofs beneath him drummed in his ears like the booming of artillery. Slowly, surely, the barbaric horde behind was creeping up, nearer and nearer.

STRUNG out behind him the army of mad tribal fiends stretched for miles. Jimmy could hear their fanatical shouting, the fierce savage cries that swept along with them, like the surging of stormy seas. Then suddenly the shouting rose, higher. Shrill voices pierced the desert skies with a strange new note. Commotion. Jimmy cast a careful glance backward.

"Somethin's up," he told himself. "Somethin's—Gees—" The Berbers were gesticulating, motioning with their upflung rifles pointing to the rear. "What's wrong?" Jimmy asked the fighting horse. "By damn! They're swinging back—its Schneider. They've let him break too soon,

and they've seen him. By the livin' devil of Tangier."

True. The Berber pack had spun its horses about and were racing crazily back where they had come. Only a lone chieftain hammered the trail of the escaping legionnaire. And Jimmy Harker's jaw set in a grin of fighting joy as he pushed his horse, slowing now with every reach, on the curve that led him around the rocky, sand and grass blotched slope of the hills. Up in there was safety, rest, a chance.

Then as the floundering pony stumbled in the grass humps unable to catch itself it went headlong to the earth, and Jimmy Harker vaulted from the saddle, legs wobbling, dizzy. His feet felt like tons of iron, and his head spun. But he was not licked yet. The gun was in his fist, his finger glued to the trigger.

The hoofbeats of the Berber chief came swinging around the rocky point, and Jimmy heard the sibilant curse of the Mohammedan as he called, on Allah, to see the fool infidel who lay all but dead beside his beaten mount.

TOO late the Berber fiend realized his mistake. Too late to grab his gold banded rifle, or the ornately decorated pistol in his sash. His arm was raised as he came riding on, raised for the slash that would cut the legionnaire through.

"You lousy jackal," sneered Jimmy Harker, raising himself a trifle and pulling down on the bearded raider.

The pistol belched flame and a wisp of smoke that was swept away on a desert breeze. And the Berber devil collapsed, his lips drawn back from huge teeth in a snarl, a dark blot growing suddenly above his left eye.

It was some minutes before man or beast moved there at the foot of

the slope where hill and desert meet. Suspecting a native ruse Jimmy Harker lay still, his pistol covering the pile of woolen garments that was that day at dawn, a Berber killer. Slowly he rose to his feet, stiff in every bone and muscle, for Harker had not been astride a horse for more than two years, and the mad ride had racked him from toe to the top of his brown head.

With the toe of his boot he turned the Berber over cautiously. The knowledge that he was alone came suddenly then and with it, the realization that something had gone wrong.

"I'm free," he mumbled hollowly, staring around. "Free an' alive. That means—Schneider—didn't make it. By the flamin' hell-fire—"

His eyes rested on the horse the Berber had ridden. It was grazing near-by on the coarse grass up the slope. His own was finished. Jimmy gritted his teeth savagely and swallowed a lump as he watched his game mount, its sides heaving, then he turned and stalked the animal with the trailing reins. Its capture was simpler than he expected and hauling himself into the high Moroccan saddle he swung the horse down the slope to halt beside the beast which had enabled him to gain at least temporary safety. He aimed his pistol carefully and mumbled an incoherent word, then pulled the trigger.

WITHOUT glancing backward, he put the Berber's mount up the slope toward the stunted trees and scrub that were scattered among the rocks. This would be shelter of a kind and Harker knew that if he could keep under cover and within sight of the desert's fringe, he still had a chance to reach the military post on the plateau at Sihkram.

As he rode, guiding the horse in

and out between the rocks and trees, he tried to answer the question in his mind. What had happened on the desert back there? What drew the Berbers off his heels like wolves to wheel and ride, howling, leaving him to make his escape that was only a miracle? Had the skeleton of the 3rd Company tried to dash for freedom or a more strategic position?

"Whatever happened," he assured himself, "it's up to me."

With this determination he began booting the horse along. It was he, not Schneider, who must go for help. How many miles separated him just then from the Legion post he had no way of knowing. But it was clear that he must be on his guard every minute, for now the slope grew steeper. He was riding higher into the hills with every hundred yards.

THE nature of the ground, forced him soon to penetrate the darker paths of the cedar forests, that reach down from the towering heights on the mountain sides. Here he might run into the white-robed raiders any minute, for the hills were teeming with Berber clans.

Alert to every smallest sound, he rode on, up and down, through deep shadowy glades roofed by cedars centuries old, through alternate patches of glaring African sun. Always he sought the softest footing for the horse, avoiding the treacherous rock strewn slopes. As he rode he watched for two things; the Berbers and—water.

Jimmy Harker's tongue was thick and dry, his throat burning with a mad desire for a cool mountain stream. The horse, too, was panting wearily, its nostrils distended and red, flecks of thick frothy lather dripping from its bit rings. Once Harker halted and tied the animal to a sapling to hobble painfully about

until he found a couple of pebbles, the right size, which he placed in his mouth. This he knew would help for a time anyway, keep him from choking to death.

How many miles he had covered he could not tell, for the contour of the land carried him first right then left, up and down, with an occasional glance at the sun and a glimpse of the desert far out through the trees, always on his right. Soon he must come to a place that would look across the great sands to the heights at Sihkram.

"If the horse holds out," thought Jimmy dully, "we'll make it."

Little did he know then what the turn of the path held in store for him. Not until he rode into the center of a narrow sunlit gorge was he even suspicious of a trap. And there, directly in front of him and perhaps fifty feet above on the rim, stood four horsemen, white robed, silent, their rifles slung on their backs.

With a shout they swept down the steep side, and Jimmy Harker, blazing a volley of steel at them, spun his tired horse in an attempt to reach the fastness of the forest, at his back.

FIFTY yards, he raced the tough little animal through the rocky path. A hundred yards and he was at the edge of the trees. Bullets whistled fiercely over and beside him. Then he heard the thud, the soft squash of lead in flesh, felt the tremor of the animal between his knees. A squeal of terror. The horse was down.

Jimmy went headlong over the stumbling, struggling beast and heard the wild triumphant yells of the Berbers as they charged down on him. With his last conscious move he rammed the empty pistol

inside his blouse. Then the world went black as something crashed against his head.

Tortured with pain, his head feeling like a ball of molten iron, his first half conscious sense was the vile smell of sweating horseflesh, of unwashed animal. His whole body seemed to throb and dangle, and his eyes, dulled and red, opened on a strange vision. For many moments Jimmy wondered, then gradually realized where he was.

His face was close to a horse's withers. A moving horse. Withers, the edge of a filthy odorous saddle, dangling gear. Now and then something bumped his ear. He was on a walking horse, his body flung across the animal's neck, his head bumping a white-robed knee. The Berbers!

"Torture!" said Jimmy to himself as the full weight of his situation came home to him. "They're taking me to some hill camp."

THE thought almost brought a shudder, for the Legionnaires knew many stories of the horrors that Berber savages inflicted on living and dead victims. The first law of nature however came to Jimmy Harker's rescue, halted the groan that crawled on his lips with the pain of consciousness. He had to stay unconscious, to think fast.

The voices of his captors soon became audible though he could make out no word of their conversation. With a hardly perceptible move of the head he managed to learn that he was riding with the last of the four Berbers. The others were ahead, leading the way. Jimmy's wits searched frantically for escape, for a chance to slip down suddenly, perhaps overpower his captor. The hope of the horse, on which to flee, was too much. Only liberty and a fighting chance.

The weight of his secreted pistol

pressed into his stomach. Was it possible that they had left his ammunition belt alone? Perhaps it was this that seemed to choke him around the middle, jarring his whole body with every uneven step of ground they traveled. He felt he must break in two with the pain that became more and more unbearable, but with the thoughts that crowded his consciousness, came the memory of the little band of legionnaires fighting back there somewhere in the sand, hoping still that aid would come before it was too late.

From the corner of his eye Jimmy slanted his gaze upward along the side of the horse, at the Berber's saddle horn. And there he saw the hilt of the tribesman's long thin knife. In a flash he knew that he was about to risk everything, his life and the hope of reaching Sihkram. The knife!

He could not reach boldly upward and snatch it from its sheath. He had to find some way, something to distract the Berber's attention. Something. Swiftly now Jimmy Harker dug the hard fingers of his left hand into the tender flesh of the horse's chest. Like the steel claws of a crab he snapped them together in a pinch of flesh that lifted the surprised animal with a jerk. As the horse reared and lashed out with its forefeet, Jimmy swung himself, grabbed the knife and without warning, drove it in a desperate lunge through the Mohammedan's throat.

"SILENCE, you dog eater," hissed Harker as he clung for his life to the horse and fought the gasping native out of the saddle.

There came the dull thud of the Berber's body as he toppled to the ground, the flurry of the frightened horse's hoofs, and Jimmy Harker was in the saddle, fighting the animal to jerk it around and race like the

wind down the trail with the shouting trio of furious Berbers behind him.

Weak and dizzy he clung to the saddle horn, swaying crazily with the plunging horse, letting the beast pick its own path. He could hear the bark of the Berbers' rifles and the slit and smash of bullets as they tore through leaves or thudded into tree trunks.

Jimmy knew they were gaining on him and rode, recklessly, with the clatter of hoofs and gunshots booming until the din shook his eardrums. Somehow, he knew he could hang on but little longer and with the knowledge came the idea that sent him hurtling from the back of the racing steed, to land sprawling in thick undergrowth beside the trail.

On and on went the frightened, crazed beast. Jimmy heard its hoofs smashing down through the forest. Then one by one came the Berbers in pursuit. One by one they passed his hiding place.

THEN, bruised and bleeding, half crazed with pain and thirst, Jimmy Harker climbed to his tottering feet and glancing up through the trees at the sun, began running.

Atop the broad, thick walls of the fortress at Sihkram the sentry paced his post, pausing at each turn to scan the desert. From its perch on the broad plateau, this post of the *Legion des Etrangers* guarded a vast area of the Sahara's glistening wastes. And staggering like a drunken man, crawling from where he fell from time to time, stumbling awkwardly to floundering feet, the tiny figure of a man came into view.

Rubbing his hands across his eyes the sentry stared, squinting against the glare of the sun scorched desert. A shout brought other legionnaires running. Anything to crush the fierce monotony of life on this bleak

desert frontier. A man! Bring the glass! An officer hurried from his quarters as the telescope was wheeled over to the rampart. Is it white man or native?

Swift adjustment of the instrument brought a cry from the officer's lips.

"A soldier of the legion!" he shouted, then pressed his eye to the glass again, for the staggering figure had fallen. "He is hard pressed—Wait! Perhaps we should send out an armored car. No! See—Corporal. Bring a signal man with all speed. The man is trying to tell us something."

With a leap, a legionnaire was standing on the wall, signaling flags in his hands. A grizzled sergeant who knew the code, squinted through the glass.

"Yes. It is a legionnaire. He has braced himself on his knees in the sand. *Fouche!* Give him the signal."

The man atop the wall raised the flags straight up, moving them in tiny circles, and the sergeant at the glass called out.

"He is very far away, but he has seen. Listen."

Far out on the desert a thing that had once been Jimmy Harker, *soldat* of the Foreign Legion, swayed weakly. With arms that were numb and stiff, with eyes red-rimmed, half blinded by the glare, he caught the flicker of the distant flags and steadied himself to wig-wag the call for help—help for the 3rd Company.

"Send planes—send planes."

"S—E—N" the old sergeant spelled it out as the weaving figure on the desert fought exhaustion and death to raise his arms, to think, to form the simple words.

RUNNING messengers carried the orders to the hangar where two fighting bombers waited. With eager blasts the motors roared their challenge to the skies. Goggled airmen

climbed into cockpits and down the field they came. Thundering past the quarters the two ships rose. Up—up—up. Over the edge of the Sihkram plateau they plunged, like bullets, bearing straight for the spot where a legionnaire had fallen.

MOTIONLESS, the tiny dot of blue lay like a grave marker in the wilderness, and so far gone was Jimmy Harker that he never knew when the sip of water was pressed between his swollen, parched lips. Nor did he know the mad joy of the winged warriors, who, recognizing Harker as a member of the 3rd Company, had flown the rim of the desert, to come down in twin power dives with machine-guns ablaze in flaming steel, to pour death into the panicked ranks of the Berber raider horde.

Bombs crashed amid screaming, fear-driven tribesmen. Bullets cut them down like wheat before a reaper's blade. From the sun-baked hole in the sand a few parched throats sent up a feeble cry of welcome.

"You see, *mon Capitan*," croaked Carl Schneider, whose horse had been shot from under him that morning, "it was Legionnaire Harker who got through."

Captain deYong stood up, his face pale, his eyes dark after looking into the face of death for hours. He saw the planes from Sihkram wipe the Berbers from his sight, and watched the two ships spiral down to a landing in the sand. One of the pilots

leaped out and beckoned to the commander of the sadly depleted company.

"This soldier," the pilot pointed into the after cockpit where a half-conscious bedraggled looking fellow hung in a safety belt. "He almost reached Sihkram and managed to signal for help. One of your company, Captain?"

DeYong lifted Jimmy Harker's hanging head and looked into the American's face through a smear of blood and dust.

"Who," demanded Captain deYong, "but a man of my command would be capable of such a feat? Of course. It is Legionnaire Harker."

"Well," said the pilot, "the other plane will stay here with you until we can send help, but I'll have to wing back with this fellow. He's due for a bed in a hospital."

A CROWD of the rescued legion flocked around the ship peering in for a glimpse of Jimmy Harker, but the flyer waved them back and climbed swiftly into his seat. He revved the motor, and raised a hand in salute to the infantry commander.

DeYong turned to his one remaining lieutenant, Savoy. There was a queer twitching smile at the corner of his strained face.

"He will yet make a fine legionnaire," whispered the captain. "Much too promising to waste on a firing squad. What do you theenk?"

"Well, *mon Capitan*," replied Lieutenant Savoy, "as this Jimmy Harker would say—I'm asking you."

Don't Miss

WITH LEAD AND STEEL

A Rip-Roaring, Hell-Busting Story of the Leathernecks

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

in Next Month's Issue

The GLOBE-TROTTER



WELL, fellows, here we are again. A whole month has passed since the last issue, and Ye Olde Globe Trotter has been scratching his head in thought ever since, waiting—and hoping with a prayer in his heart, that some he-man adventurer would drop in and spin out a yarn of the north country for the readers of this department to ponder over, something that was different.

But most of the fellows that dropped in had the same old tales to spin. Ye Olde Globe Trotter had just about given up hopes of getting something different when the office door opened. And who was it that stuck his head in the door and hollered at me?

No one but Harry Green, famous hunting guide and wild animal hunter of Kodiak, Alaska. In that instant I knew my prayer was answered.

"Just in time, Harry," I blurted, heaving a sigh of relief. "You're just the man I've been waiting for. Sit down and give me a yarn—"

Harry is a big fellow, weighing about 225 pounds with one sleeve hanging empty from the shoulder. I knew there was a story about the missing arm that once filled that empty sleeve, so I prodded him about it.

The Real Story

"Come on, Harry," I said, when he seated himself in the office easy

chair. "I've heard lots of wild stories about you losing your arm. But they all sound like fairy tales. Every one. That is because you have never told the real story yourself. Why don't you scotch all those wild tales right here and now?"

Harry regarded me silently for a long moment. Finally his lips parted and rippled in a smile.

"Okay, Old Man," he said. "But how will you know it won't be just another fairy tale."

"We'll let the readers of THRILLING ADVENTURES be the judge on that," Ye Olde Globe Trotter snapped in answer, confident that he finally had the old Kodiak guide started on one swell story.

Harry reached for one of my stogies, made a wry face when he smelled it, lighted it anyway.

A Jinx

"THERE isn't much to it," he began, tucking his empty sleeve in his coat pocket. "I was out with a party of bear hunters from your own city here, big shots from Wall Street with lots of *doremi* but darned little woods sense. In the party was a young broker who was a jinx if there ever was one."

Harry's clear keen eyes misted a little. I could see he recalled the incident very poignantly. They cleared instantly, however. He went on:

"We had established our camp at

the north end of Kodiak some twenty miles from our base. It took us about two days to do this. But the young broker was miserable all the time. He had left his pet straight edge razor at the base camp and couldn't shave. He crabbed about it so much that it gave the rest of us *heeby-jeebies*.

"He made such a damn nuisance of himself with his continual crabbing that I offered to trek back to the base camp one night and get the damned thing for him. I knew that I could make the trip overnight and be back in time to take the party out on the bear hunt the next day.

"It was black as pitch the night I started, but I knew the island like a book, all its trails and short cuts. That meant nothing. Because time was pressing, I took the shortest route, making all the short cuts over little traveled territory. I carried rifle and hunting knife with me. Rifle in the crotch of my arm, knife in a leather case at my belt.

Man Against Beast

"I WAS about six miles from camp, cutting through a little gully to reach an opposite ridge, when the ground seemed suddenly to slip from beneath me. There was a sputtering crackle of snapping twigs and tree branches.

"Instinctively, I threw up my arms to catch myself. The rifle clattered in a tangle of branches, stuck there. A deep throated growl reached my ears, thundering ominously. My feet hit solid ground. I felt relieved, but only momentarily. Something soft and furry brushed my hand the next instant. There was a sinister hiss of steaming breath. Then gnashing of giant teeth. Instant action!

"I was bowled head over heels. A giant paw bashed in my face. I knew then what I was up against. I had stumbled into a bear pit—with

a bear in it! There I was, in a closed earthen cell, face to face with an enraged Kodiak brown bear—and I had lost my rifle!

"Man against beast in a pit, blacker than the devil's tomb. Only one was to escape with his life, I knew. Who was it to be, me or the bear? There was no time for thought or studied defense. There was only one thing to do. I did it, shoved my left arm forward when the bear charged, then went to work with my hunting knife.

"Over and over in that fearful black pit we rolled, the snorting brute bouncing me from one wall to another. I lifted my knife hand, trying to smash in a telling blow with the gleaming blade. The Kodiak crunched powerful jaws, sought to rend me body from soul.

A Long Struggle

"PAIN wracked my entire frame. Warm blood spouted, dousing my face and hands. The brute got his paws around me, squeezing until I thought my breath was gone. But I struggled—struggled with all I had. Time and again my right hand flashed up and lunged down. The slim blade finding its mark, every time! Blood splattered on me, the bear's blood mingling with my own, the fetid smell strong in my nostrils.

"How long that hand-to-paw struggle lasted, God only knows! We went round and round, over and over. I was dizzy, sick, reeling. Still, I kept lifting that knife blade, plunging it home. It was my only chance, my only hope. I slashed and slashed, a hundred times or more, before I felt the brute's crunching jaws loosen even the slightest bit.

"Even then they slackened only to tighten again with firmer grip. Then my mind got to playing tricks on me. I didn't care whether I died or not. Purposely, I relaxed. The Kodiak

(Continued on Page 152)

STOMACH DISORDERS THREATEN HIS LIFE SAYS N. Y. PATROLMAN

"I tried everything," says Officer David R. Caldwell, 2309 Holland Ave., New York City. "I suffered from gas in the stomach and heart-



DAVID R. CALDWELL

burn so bad that I could hardly stand it. My case was diagnosed by one doctor as ulcers, another said I had gall stones. One went so far as to tell my wife that I had cancer and had only a short time to live. I suffered much agony and lost weight until one day I saw an advertisement in the New York Daily News, by the Udga Co., St. Paul, Minn. I wrote for their treatment and thanks be to God I did, for today I am a different man. I have no pain, can eat anything and

I am getting back to my normal weight."

Acid Stomach Afflicts Millions

Hyperacidity (acid stomach) is, as every physician can tell you, the curse of millions. It is the most common cause of stomach or gastric ulcers as well as many other distressing conditions and there are comparatively few adults who can truly say it has never troubled them. In addition to stomach ulcers, acid stomach is often the direct cause of gas pains, dyspepsia, poor digestion, pains after eating, bloating, belching, gnawing pains, heartburn, gastritis, sour stomach, constipation, etc.

Double Acting Treatment Needed

To combat these conditions you need a treatment that will first counteract or neutralize the excess acid secretions and then protect, soothe and tone the membranes or stomach lining in order that the process of healing may take place. This is the function of the Udga Treatment and the excellent results it has produced in so many thousands of cases are due to this double acting feature.

Offered on 15 Days' Trial

And now that the merits of this splendid treatment have been so conclusively proved, the distributors invite all sufferers to try it at their risk and are willing to send a full 15 DAY TREATMENT ON TRIAL. So if you can believe what your own stomach tells you—if you agree that freedom from stomach pains, distress and misery are the surest proof of results, accept this liberal trial offer and see for yourself what the Udga Treatment can do for your sick stomach.

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Please send me your 15 DAY TRIAL OFFER on the Udga Treatment. Also free copy of your book on stomach troubles, testimonials, affidavit of genuineness and \$1,000.00 Reward Offer to back it up. This does not obligate me in any way.

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could end the uneven struggle. It didn't matter. Then that odd trick of the mind—I suddenly remembered I had an unfulfilled duty to perform. I had volunteered to get that poor sap's razor. The duty seemed paramount, I couldn't escape the solemn obligation.

"Asinine, you'll think, I know.

"But funny thoughts course through a man's mind when he lingers at the brink of death. I know from like experiences. Don't think this was my first.

Renewed Strength

"With that duty in mind, I was charged with a renewed vigor. I set to fighting again. The hunting knife went up and down like a piston. There was a burbling gurgle, then a hissing gasp for breath. Again a loosening of the crunching jaws. A deep cough, another throaty gurgle and—the Kodiak toppled over on me, dead, pressing me to the blood-strewn earth. My breath went out in a sighing hiss. I squirmed and struggled, managed in some manner to get from underneath. How I got out of the pit, I don't know. In some manner I got back to camp. How, I haven't the slightest idea."

Harry Green had Ye Olde Globe Trotter gripping the chair arms with rigid grasp by this time. I had been following his story intently. Still, I hadn't learned just how he lost his arm, so I asked him. He looked at me curiously, answered smilingly:

"The bear had to have something to set his teeth on. I gave her my left arm at the first charge, then went to work with the knife in my right hand. It was better than letting the bear set his jaw on some more vital spot."

Ye Olde Globe Trotter let out a quick breath.

And That's Not All

"But that's not the end of the
(Continued on Page 154)

A NEW LIFETIME BUSINESS OPENED TO EARNEST MEN



NO HIGH PRESSURE SELLING NO HOUSE-TO-HOUSE CANVASSING INCOME EQUAL TO REQUIREMENTS OF THE HIGH-GRADE BUSINESS MAN

E. Lawson, of Tennessee, clears \$108 profit his first 3 days in this business. He tops off these earnings with \$113 profit on a single deal a few days later. J. C. May, Conn., cleared \$82.35 the first nine days he worked. J. E. Loomis, Oregon, earns \$245 his first nine days. A. W. Farnsworth, Utah, nets \$64.16 his first day, a Saturday. S. Clair, New York, writes he is clearing as high as \$70 a day. W. F. Main, Iowa, cleans up \$291.50 in 9 days. B. Y. Beeton, Kansas, starts out with \$530.35 net for 10 days work! These men are beginners. How could they enter a field totally new to them and earn such remarkable sums in these desperate times? Read the answer in this announcement. Read about a new business that does away with the need for high pressure selling. A rich field that is creating new money-making frontiers for wide-awake men. Those who enter now will pioneer—to them will go the choicest opportunities.

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story," Harry broke in. "What gives it a nice little touch, is that when I got back to camp, the poor sap had found his razor and was busy shaving off two days' growth of beard. He had found it in his pack a few hours after I left."

"But your arm, Harry," I interjected. "Did the bear really chew it off?"

"No," he replied quickly. "But it was useless, hanging only in shreds. Sam Henson, the other guide, borrowed the poor sap's razor and finished the job. The sawbones they took me to afterwards said he did an excellent job. All the doc did was to suture the wound and change the bandages." The old guide had me faint and gasping for breath when he finished. But there it is fellows, that's his story, the real truth about the loss of his arm.

A man has licked a Kodiak bear in hand-to-hand combat, and bears do fight human beings. If that isn't red blooded adventure, Ye Olde Globe Trotter would like to know what you would label it.

Here below is a somewhat milder experience—a letter that came in recently. If you don't like Kodiak bears you might go after gold instead. If you take Johanson's tip you will go to Bolivia. There are no Kodiaks there, but there are pumas. Maybe they are worse?

GOLD IN BOLIVIA

Dear Globe Trotter:

Bolivia has lots of minerals, but gold has never been found in any considerable quantity there. However, a friend of mine went there for gold in 1927. I laughed at him for going.

Three years later he popped in on me when I was up in Canada. Did he get what he went after? I'll say he did! He showed me pictures of the gold country first, then he pulled a poke from his pocket and set it on the table near the kerosene lamp, telling me to look at the contents. I opened it. It was filled with glistening yellow dust flakes!

He told me it was virgin gold. But I was 190 pounds of obstinate scepticism, so he went to the city and had it assayed. It proved out to be exactly what he said it was—virgin gold.

He asked me if I would like to go back to Bolivia as he was starting a company to go after it in a big way. I answered in the affirmative and was supposed to meet him the next day in town. But I got sick with a terrible fever the same night and couldn't leave. He had to go on without me.

Since, I have been wondering if he got his information on that gold via the *grapevine* or underground wireless, I think the answer is both yes and no. He found it in bad country. The last of his trip was covered at the rate of six miles a day.

Paul A. Johanson,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

MORE ABOUT THE LONG DISTANCE MIRAGE

Dear Globe Trotter:

I have a theory about that mirage question which readers have been discussing in the columns of THRILLING ADVENTURES.

Our friend W. H. Gardiner said that he saw the image of the Empire State Building in a bank of clouds. And you said you saw the Statue of Liberty in the mist. You both saw purple around or near them.

Clouds and mists contain small particles of water. When the white sun light hits a group of prism shaped drops a rainbow is formed in the sky.

Now what has that got to do with the mirage? I'll just give you an idea. Light travels 186,000 miles a second. Well, when the reflected light of the sun struck the Empire State Building it flew off in all directions in invisible light rays. The light waves hit the clouds down in South America almost instantly. Said clouds being composed of H₂O (water) reflected the image of the building.

Same with your Statue of Liberty in the mist in France. The purple reflection was probably caused by the light rays refracting through the prism particles of water held suspended in the clouds and mist.

Yours truly,

Lorenzo Morton,
Lincoln Park, N. J.

(Continued on Page 156)

for every man!

THE WORLD IS STARTING ALL OVER AGAIN... *what is your future?*



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Today, millions of men are starting their business lives all over again. Most all are beginning from the bottom. The same chances . . . the same golden opportunities . . . will be within the grasp of every man.

Yet it's certain that only a few will come through with glorious success and riches. The others will be just part of the "crowd" . . . drifting, struggling, plodding, striving . . . always hopeful, but just missing the mark!

What Makes a Man Successful?

It's not a college education! Many millionaires never went to grammar school! It's not money! Ford, Carnegie, Rockefeller, and others were penniless youths! It's not luck! Many have achieved huge success despite one "bad break" after another!

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(Continued from Page 154)

Well, Morton, you've got Ye Olde Globe Trotter scratching his head. Your explanation sounds plausible enough, but darned if I know enough about scientific things to say you've hit the nail smack on the head. Anyway, we'll let your explanation hold until some other reader comes along with one that sounds better.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Globe Trotter:

I have read your magazine for some time and like it very much, especially the department conducted by Ye Olde Globe Trotter.

I have traveled somewhat myself and am never satisfied in one place for long. Have worked in the tropics and in lots of the western states. I have been working with a canning company here for three weeks, but am getting fed up and want to be on the go again.

I have always had the ambition to go on an expedition and I see that you keep in touch with them. I would like information about some expedition that is forming now so I could connect with it.

I am a husky young man, six feet tall and weigh about 180 pounds, so would not be a burden on any expedition. Can do my share of the work and stand up under plenty.

Yours truly,

L. M. Nelson,

San Jose, California.

Answer:

Well, Nelson, things are beginning to pick up in the expedition line now like they are in about everything else. But it won't be like it was in the old days when all a fellow needed to join an expedition was a good strong back and a quick finger on the shooting trigger. Members of expeditions in these days have to be specialists in some line or another. Right now I don't know of a single expedition that is forming where the members going along don't have to be specialists in some line. Either you have to be a geologist, a botan-

(Continued on Page 158)



Never Seen Equal
"Logged several Central American and Mexican stations; short and long wave. Get FYA, France. Never seen anything to equal this new Midwest 16."—T. N. Stewart, Vero Beach, Florida.



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"I am well pleased with the Midwest 16. Sunday afternoon we were listening to a Rugby game between Ireland and England, being broadcast from London."—B. J. Hart, 41 West St., Cromwell, Conn.



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NEW YORK CITY

ist, a zoologist or something like that, or you don't get invited to go along. However, there is one specialty that is open to most any young fellow who wants to put in the time learning it. That is radio operating and maintenance. All present day expeditions are equipped with radio and carry one or more radio operators. So my advice to you is learn radio if you want to connect up with some expedition.

Of course, if you are a darn good cook with a faculty for making tasty dishes out of nothing much at all, you are considered a specialist, and shouldn't have too much trouble connecting up. If you are not, take up radio. One can learn that in a few months, but it takes half a lifetime to make a good cook.

Dear Globe Trotter:

I am a young man who is interested in the Mounted Police, but I do not know where to write in order to get information concerning them.

If you will be kind enough, let me know through the columns of your magazine where I can get information regarding the Mounted Police. Thanking you, I am,

Yours truly,

Maurice Lacasse,

Claremont, N. H.

Answer:

You don't say which Mounted Police you want information about, Maurice, but I'll make a guess and try and give you the correct information. What I believe you want is information concerning the Royal Canadian Mounted Police—one of the finest police forces in the world.

Write to the Inspector General, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa.
(Continued on Page 160)

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tawa, Canada; and he will give you
all the information you want. But
if you are an American you will have
a hard time crashing the force. I
am giving you this tip beforehand.
A few Americans have made the
grade before, however, so go to it
Maurice.

Maybe you can do it also.

Dear Globe Trotter:

I see you run a department of *Questions and Answers* in **THRILLING ADVENTURES**. For a long time I have
been reading stories of adventure set in
the South Seas. Many of them mention
copra as an article of trade. While I
have seen the word many times, I do not
know just what it is but suppose it is
some kind of shell, or something like
that. Am I right or wrong?

There are a lot of other words in for-
eign adventure stories which I don't un-
derstand. Why doesn't your department
list a dictionary of these words and their
meanings sometimes? I think it would be
helpful.

Ferris Dunbar,

Holyoke, Mass.

Answer:

This time you are wrong, Ferris.
Copra is nothing more or less than
the dried meat of cocoanuts.

It is useful as an article of com-
merce chiefly because of the oil that
can be extracted from it. Such oil is
used in the making of soaps chiefly.
Because cocoanuts are so plentiful in
all the islands of the South Seas,
copra is usually the main article of
commerce.

Every native can gather a few
cocoanuts, dry them, and swap the
copra with the island traders for
necessities he can't make himself.
Your suggestion about a dictionary
of foreign adventure words and
phrases is a good one. It will prob-
ably be instituted in later issues of
this magazine. Thanks for the tip.

Well, that's all the questions and
answers for this month. But now
keep your weather eye peeled for the
great January issue—if I were you
(Concluded on Page 162)

I'd run right out and reserve it now, because it's an issue that'll have everything—and then some.

First—the complete book-length novel will be by our old friend Jackson Cole. It's called **CLAWS OF THE RED DRAGON** and is one of the most exciting stories of Shanghai and the sea ever published. Don't miss it. Then there'll be **OUTLAWS ALL**—by Ray Nafziger—a great Western story by a writer famous for this type of yarn. It's a complete novelette, too. And a rip-roaring story of the Leathernecks by Arthur J. Burks called **WITH LEAD AND STEEL**. In fact, 160 pages of the kind of fiction you can't afford to miss.

Watch for more stories in the **ALIAS THE WHIRLWIND** series by Johnston McCulley—they're just swell—and now I'll give you the old parting salute! Don't forget to write—and a postcard will do the trick as well as a letter.

THE GLOBE TROTTER.

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I liked the following stories in December **THRILLING ADVENTURES**.

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WHAT EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW

How to Attract and Hold
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Knowledge is the basis of the perfect, satisfying love-life. Step out of the darkness into the sunlight... end ignorance, fear and danger today! Money back at once if you are not completely satisfied!

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YOUR OWN FOOD PRO- DUCTS AT WHOLE- SALE PRICES

When I send you instructions for making money on my new neighborhood Tea and Coffee Route plan I also give you rock-bottom wholesale prices on your own groceries, about half the regular retail prices. This is in addition to your regular pay, so you make big money in cash and save big money on the things you use in your own home.

GO TO WORK AT ONCE

My plan provides immediate cash earnings for those who need money. I want to give employment to a lot more people at once. You start work right in your own locality right near where you live. There is nothing hard or difficult about this job. There's no red tape connected with it. You don't have a lot of expensive equipment to buy.

EXPERIENCE OR CAPITAL UNNECESSARY

I spent years of time and a fortune in money perfecting business plans that I give you the very first day you start. Part of your job will be to distribute some advertising matter and sample packages. You will deliver all the goods, collect the money, and keep a big share of it as your pay. This provides you with immediate cash to relieve urgent money worries.

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You have probably never worked for a boss who didn't want to limit the pay you got on Saturday night. You have dreamed of a chance to make \$50.00, \$60.00, or even \$75.00 in a week. That's just the kind of unlimited offer I am making. If you are honest, conscientious, and willing to listen to reason I won't put any limit on your earnings. I'll explain all this to you just as soon as you send me your name.

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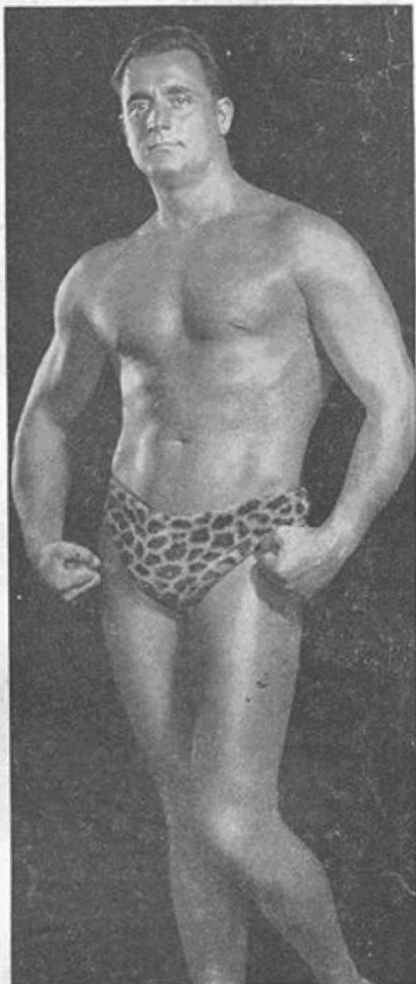
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Charles Atlas As He Is Today

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Photo by Joel Feder

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