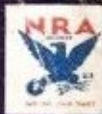


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The New York Times

LARGE WAISTLINE HELD HEALTH PERIL

Middle-Aged Man Who Keeps His Small Lives Longer, Government 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.

"By the time that middle age is reached, these figures indicate, it is a definite advantage to be under the average weight for height," says the report.

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:

Weight Class.	Age Group.			50 and Over
	20-29.	30-39.	40-49.	
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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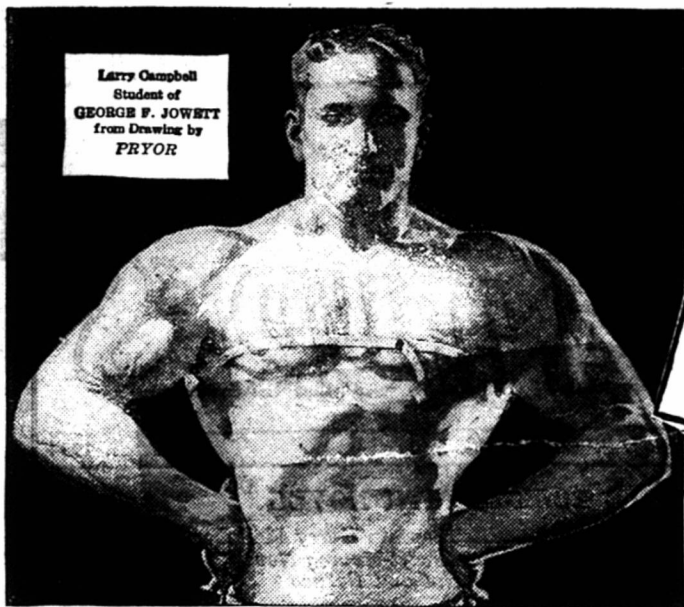
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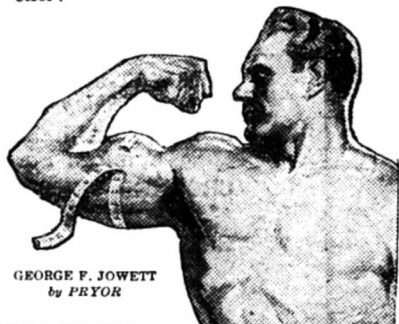


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Vol. IX, No. 1

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

March, 1934

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Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet

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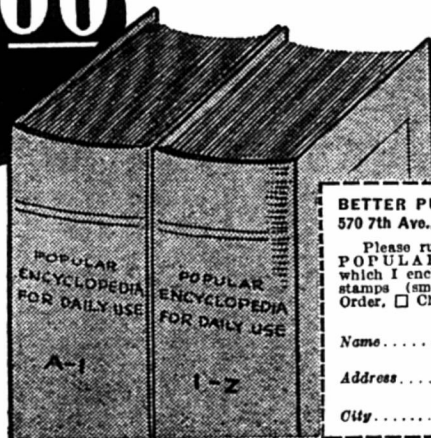
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"Pigs of Satan, get back! Do not

The Sultan

CHAPTER I

Street of Heavenly Light

A Complete Book-

By CAPT. KERRY

Author of "Danger Trails,"

FRED TANDEN turned down the little street that led from the Pagola Square in Kiruchu to the jungle stream flowing along the edge of the town. He walked rapidly, his body leaning forward a little, one hand shoved in the coat pocket of his whites. Darkness—gray, sullen and dank—spread around him as he entered the alley-like thoroughfare.

It was called the Street of Heaven-

ly Light. Narrow and winding and filthy, it was overhung in the daytime by the mists that rose off the jungle river, and at night by the darkness that filtered through this mist. Mud, ankle deep and slimy, sent up putrid, sickening waves of stench.

Tanden had turned down this

Singing Steel and Blazing Guns in a Swift-Moving



use this place to kill a white man!"

of Hell

Length Novel

McROBERTS

"Legion of the Frontier," etc.

street for no particular reason. All the other streets that led through the native quarters had the same ankle deep mud, the same putrid stench, and the same unbearable heat.

The name of the street caused a grim, cold smile to spread over his sharp features. To Tanden, the time he had spent in Kiruchu and

Borneo had failed to disclose anything to him that approached being heavenly.

Mud and filth. A damnable heat that covered everything like a suffocating blanket; fevers that came from the mist rising off the jungle stream, from the fetid and hot smells that emanated always from the jungle and the mangrove swamps; sudden death from the murderous Dyaks; loneliness, more terrible than death or fevers, because with it, stalked the constant dread of a crazed mind.

That was Borneo for you—and

Novel of Breathless Combat in Kiruchu and Borneo



Tanden

Kiruchu. Hell on earth, in perfect reproduction. Tanden knew it and hated it, with a fury based on more than the heat and the stench and filth. The year before he and an American engineer, Fred Morley, whom he met in Singapore, had come to Borneo to look for gold. Far up in the mountains, after months of hard work, they had found it.

But neither of them then realized the power and the ruthlessness of the great unseen hand that struck death so swiftly and so certainly to all that opposed it. The hand of El Karim, the brown Malay Sultan who ruled, thanks to the Dutch, the territory around Kiruchu!

Smiling and courteous and fawning, the Sultan had received them in his palace up in the hills from Kiruchu. He gave them every assistance—until they found gold.

AFTER that Morley had died in the palace from a strange fever. Tanden had escaped from Kiruchu more dead than alive, his body filled with wounds and the doctors giving him no chance to live. For five months he lay between life and death in the hospital in Mallacca, before he started to get well.

And now he was back in Kiruchu, fighting single-handed against the shadowy power of El Karim. A



Grace

hopeless struggle to anyone who knew Borneo; but to Tanden it was a grim, stubborn battle to avenge the murder of his friend and to regain the gold concession which El

Karim had stolen away from them.

As he walked down the little street, his lean face was tense. Thin lines ran away from the corners of his mouth and lost themselves in his bony face. His fingers were clutched around the automatic in his coat pocket. Around him, through the misty darkness, furtive forms moved, forms that would gladly slash his throat for the price of a cheap drink.

But those worried him little, and he continued on rapidly. His intention was to cross the river, where he could hide out in his old cottage until such a time as he had gathered enough evidence against El Karim to force the Dutch authorities to act.

A cold smile came to his lips as he thought of the wildness of this latter hope. It was more probable that the forces of El Karim would discover his presence. When they did, it would be only a matter of hours before a knife would be sent through his heart.

Suddenly he stopped. Not more than twenty feet ahead of him, two furtive, indistinct shadows moved. From the darkness, another came to join the two.

The figures looked ghostlike in the night. From their hands long kris knives gleamed dully. They moved like animals, their bodies crouched low as they crept toward the wall of an old building. Tanden could see nothing against the wall, but he guessed that a human being stood there, waiting for the death that was to strike him.

A native killing!

AS Tanden's eyes grew accustomed to the gray darkness, he saw that the three crouching figures were half naked Dyaks, with sarongs around their waists. Slowly, relentlessly, they were edging their

way to the wall, knives gripped firmly in their hands.

There was no hurry, no excitement, no nervousness in their manner. Their movements were certain and relentless—a slow, deadly narrowing of the semicircle around their victim.

In a few minutes it would all be over. A swift movement of a black hand—a scream of death as the knife found the heart of the victim. And after that the grim, unearthly silence of the night, and the body of a dead man lying in the mud. The grisly death tableau so often enacted on the Street of Heavenly Light!

Then suddenly from the wall came a low, muffled cry. A gasp of surprise and startled alarm.

It brought Tanden's gun from his pocket with a jerk; it sent his body forward with a frantic leap. But even as he leaped forward his mind was dazed, stunned, for the cry had cut through his senses like a rapier.

Again the cry came. Tanden caught a fleeting glimpse of something white moving in the darkness, the end of a long robe. The three Dyaks had closed in on their victim. A knife went up in the air.

TANDEN fired from the hip as he dashed toward the scene of the struggle. A leaping, darting flame of orange red cut through the darkness. Then the knife fell with a splash in the mud, and the tall, black body of a Dyak swayed a moment, then crumpled in a lifeless heap.

But before the body hit the ground, Tanden had collided with an onrushing Dyak. There was a flash of steel over his head. The knife was only inches from his throat. In the split second of action that followed, he had no chance to swing his gun again.

He saw the leering, snarling face near his; he saw the row of ivory

teeth in the black mouth, teeth that glistened in the night.

Tanden's head ducked. The knife cut down across his shoulder, ripping his coat. His right fist shot out



Tar Sonken

like a piston, caught the black body full in the stomach. The man doubled up like a ball, groaned weakly, and then crashed backward against the wall.

Tanden moved with the swiftness of a tiger. There was a *swish* of a knife near him. His gun had dropped from his hand, but even if he still held it, there would have been little chance to use it.

THE third Dyak closed in on him, the long, powerful arms crushing him to the mud. In that powerful grip, Tanden was completely helpless.

His face went into the slimy mud; the sweating, stinking body of the half-naked Dyak was over his head. Helplessly he struggled to get his breath, to lift his face out of the suffocating mire.

The Dyak momentarily released his powerful hold around Tanden's body, fingers seeking for his victim's throat. In that fraction of a second, while the long black arms moved swiftly for a death hold, Tanden came to life.

His legs and his body lurched out in a violent leap, breaking the agonizing grip. In the flash of a second, he was on his feet. The huge body was rising slowly to grapple again with him. But as it came



A Native

upward in the darkness—a grotesque, inhuman looking thing in the night, Tanden's right shot out. With every ounce of strength and weight in his body behind it, it traveled ahead for three or four inches, and cracked against the jaw of the rising native.

The Dyak slumped, fell face downward in the mud. He remained there, limp and unconscious.

From the wall came a low, soft laugh. Tanden stood swaying in the darkness, his eyes fixed stupidly on what he saw.

AGAINST the dark wall was a girl. In the darkness Tanden could only see the white outlines of her dress, the silhouette of a face, hair falling down over the shoulders.

"I am sorry," he heard her say quietly, "that you have interfered. It would have been much better if you had not."

Tanden stared transfixed at the white face, phantomlike in the darkness. He wet his lips and shook his head, as if trying to dismiss an illusion.

The voice he heard was that of an American girl. The American twang was so distinct and clear that there was room for no possible doubt.

An American girl on the Street of Heavenly Light! An American girl anywhere in Kiruchu, wandering around alone at night! The idea was almost fantastic.

A sound at his feet brought Tanden back to his senses with a snap. One of the Dyaks was struggling to get up. Tanden whirled quickly, but the man was already on his feet, running madly down the street.

"Quick," the girl cried, with a trace of hysteria in her voice, "You must run also. You do not understand. You—"

Tanden faced her, his thin face tense and grim.

"Running is something that won't do me much good now," he said. "I'll put a lot of questions in one, to make things brief. Who are you, and what in the name of God are you doing on this street?"

The girl moved away from the wall, took several steps toward him.

"They'll be back any minute," she said quietly. "You might fight three—but you can't fight a hundred. So please leave me. My running won't save me now. Nothing will."

The sucking of mud far down the street broke the black silence. Voices, wild and savage, rang out, and the night was suddenly filled with a horde of dark forms.

Tanden reached out, grabbed the girl's arm, and started up the street toward the Pagoda square. Madly he raced away from the Dyaks who were coming from the other direction.

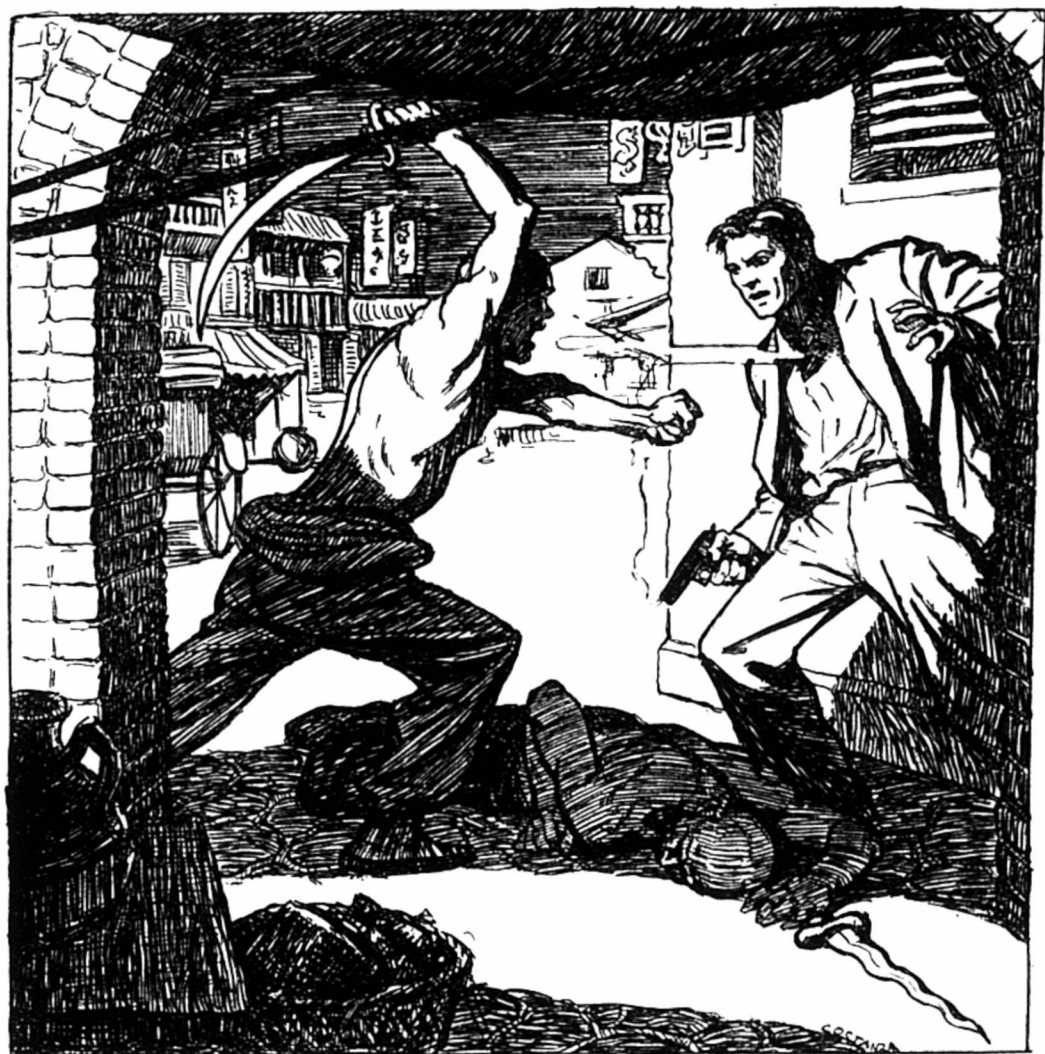
CHAPTER II

A Desperate Game

WHITES spattered with mud, face covered with rivulets of perspiration, Tanden dashed across the little court of Loy Son's hotel at the far end of the Pagoda square. He clattered up a short flight of stairs and into a room that overlooked the court.

The girl was close behind him, breathing heavily. Her dress was now black with mud, and her hair hung over her shoulders in a disordered mass.

Tanden closed the door, locked it, then turned really to look at the girl for the first time. When he had seen that face in the Street of Heavenly Light, silhouetted in its ghostly whiteness against the wall of the old house, the thought had occurred to him that there was a



There was a flash of steel over his head

girl from Tar Sonken's dive, some unfortunate creature who had wandered into that street.

When he had heard the American voice, he was prepared for anything—anything but what he was now gazing at, stupidly and with bewilderment. The girl was young, still in her early twenties. Hers was a strange beauty, a coolness that made one think of flowers and things fresh and clean, yet was at the same time baffling and indefinable.

The face was thin, sharply featured, with somehow the touch of the spinster about it. The wide set eyes were blue and very much alive;

the skin, ivory white and pale; the body slim, delicate in its perfect grace.

She was looking at him and smiling. A very charming smile, yet one that touched her lips alone—not her eyes. These, in contrast, seemed baffling and deep, like windows lighted by some far, unseen source. A strange, bewildering smile, all the more attractive because of the ivory cheeks and the sharply featured face.

"American?" she asked quietly, as if nothing had happened to ruffle her soft, perfect composure.

Tanden nodded, looked at her

through eyes contracted a little. He walked to the window, looked out on the court, then smiled grimly as he returned to her side.

"They have followed us here," he announced, "and we won't have much time to talk. Perhaps I can help you."

"You can't," the girl said quietly, positively.

TANDEN shrugged and said nothing further. He studied the face of the girl carefully, still bewildered at the look he saw in the blue eyes.

"It was kind of you," she hastened to say in her quiet, calm voice, "to have come to my aid in that street. I *should* thank you, but really, it has proved a bit annoying."

"I'm sorry," Tanden replied dryly. "But you see, it is the custom, when—"

"I understand all that," the girl interrupted, "but I am going to ask you not to interfere any further. They are waiting for me outside now, and in a moment I will go to them."

"I prefer it that way."

It came to Tanden very suddenly, with something of a shock, that the girl must be insane—that the look in those deep blue eyes, the strange smile that played on the lips, the ivory color of the face—all were the results of a disordered mind. Yet with this thought came another, more compelling and more convincing.

He felt that this American girl was grimly and hopelessly playing a desperate game, waging a losing fight, against the lurking, unseen powers of Kiruchu; and that somehow and in some way, she was connected with his danger. A fantastic thought, he admitted, yet it stuck in his mind.

"You know that going out there

means your death," he persisted quietly.

The girl shook her head slowly.

"They do not want to kill me," she answered. "They want to take me where I want to go. Oh, I know it all sounds silly—crazy. But it's hard to explain, because there is so little of it I can tell."

"You are an American and so am I," Tanden replied. "I want to help you if I can."

The girl smiled—again with her lips only.

"You can help," she said, "by leaving this room at once. You can go out that rear door and they won't bother you—"

"And leave you alone with these murderous Dyaks!" Tanden shook his head. "That's asking too much."

"Asking a stranger not to interfere with your private affairs is hardly asking too much," came back coldly, sharply at him. "And that is all I ask."

Tanden flushed angrily, bit his lips to hold back the feelings that suddenly surged over him. In the court he could hear the muffled voice of someone talking low, then on the steps outside came the soft sound of a footfall.

"YOU won't have to go out there," he said curtly to the girl. "They'll come in after you, in a moment or so. When they do, it won't be to take you any place."

"If I tell you why I came to Kiruchu and where I want to go," she questioned calmly, "will you promise to leave this room—before it is too late?"

"It would be interesting," Tanden acquiesced.

The girl looked directly at him and in that quiet, unwavering look Tanden sensed a will that was strong and stubborn—a will equal to his.

"I came to Kiruchu," she began, "with only one purpose! Tonight I went to the famous dive of the old Mohammedan, Tar Sonken, and asked him to do what he could for me. I asked him to get me some kind of work in the palace of El Karim—"

"The palace of El Karim," Tanden repeated, in a hoarse whisper. He stared blankly at the girl.

"THAT is where I am going," she said determinedly. "Tar Sonken wouldn't send me, but the minute I stepped out of his place, I was followed. At first I was frightened and then I realized that it was El Karim's men following me."

"In the Street of Heavenly Light I stopped. All would have been well if you had not interfered."

Tanden looked at her, a thin, humorless smile on his lips.

"The palace of El Karim," he mused. "Funny, that is what I came to Kiruchu for. But when I go, I must be prepared. Because it will be his life or mine."

The girl's eyes opened wide.

"You, going to the palace?" she gasped.

"Yes, I am going," he said slowly, firmly, "but you are not."

The girl was on her feet, her face flushed with anger.

"What do you mean?" she cried.

"I mean that you are not going," Tanden replied quietly. "I don't know what foolish—or romantic—idea you have in trying such a thing. But if you went up there alone, you wouldn't want to stay two hours. And when you wanted to leave, they would drug you, a little each day, until you didn't know what you were doing. You'd wind up by either killing yourself or going crazy."

The girl laughed coldly.

"Sounds very dramatic—and exciting," she said. "Really, you must

think I'm a fool, a mere child, to talk to me like that."

Tanden struggled to hold back the impulsive anger that was fast getting possession of him. It struck him that the girl should be taken over the knee and given a good spanking. She was obviously a foolish young woman, letting her stubbornness carry her on to a sordid doom.

But mixed with his anger was the thought that all this strange bluff and front on the part of the girl was not born of stubbornness; that those eyes, blue and silent and baffling, seemed to hold some message they wanted to tell, yet couldn't. With an effort he controlled his rising temper.

"You are going out that rear door with me now," he said incisively. "If we make our escape and live until tomorrow, you are boarding a ship and returning to the States. You're *not* going to the palace of El Karim—not while I am here and alive."

The girl gave a quick, sharp laugh and turned. She moved with a speed that was almost faster than the eye. Before Tanden could jump into motion, she was at the door of the room and out into the night. With a curse he dashed after her.

OUTSIDE that door, on the little balcony that rose a few feet above the court, hell broke around Tanden! Hell in the form of black, snarling bodies and kris knives that whistled through the air. He heard the muffled scream of the girl, from somewhere in the court. Two bodies crashed against him, threw him back against the wall of the hotel. Knives gleamed dully in the night, over his head, cutting the air in sharp slashes.

Twice his gun roared. A black

body crumpled to the balcony at his feet. Again and again his gun belched fire, straight into the surging mass of Dyaks closing in on him.

Then his gun clicked on an empty barrel, and he let it drop to the floor. He ducked with lightning speed, then came up with the same rapidity. His shoulders hit the black legs and arms closing around them in a vise-like grip, and as his body twisted upward, he brought the struggling, screaming Dyak with him.

Tanden stepped backward along the right of the wall, whirling on his toes, using the big body of the half naked Dyak as a human bludgeon. The body crashed into the black forms closing in on him.

The night was filled with curses and howls of pain. As if by pre-arranged signal, the Dyaks moved away from the swinging bludgeon and disappeared downward into the court.

The human club fell from Tanden's arms with a dull groan, and lay inert on the balcony. With a wild leap Tanden was over the bodies lying in front of him, down the steps and across the court.

But in the court all was silent, save for the groans of the wounded Dyaks above, on the balcony.

Tanden dashed out into the street, but the same still, misty darkness greeted him. Nowhere did a form move. There was only silence and the gray night, that had suddenly and completely swallowed up the American girl whose blue eyes had so strangely looked at him.

CHAPTER III

Dolores

TANDEN darted back in the shadows of the buildings along the street. Out of the misty gray that covered everything with the sweltering blanket of heat

came the *sikh*, the native police, rushing toward the hotel court where the shooting and fighting had taken place.

Tanden watched quietly, knowing he had little to fear from them. They would find the bodies of the dead Dyaks on the balcony, and cart them away. That would be the end of it all, as far as the *sikh* were concerned.

DEATH and murder were too common on the muddy stifling streets of Kiruchu to concern them greatly. The customary report would be made to the Dutch authorities and the Dutch, reading that several Dyak killers had been found dead, would file the report and promptly forget about the matter.

But as he stood in the shadows, Tanden realized grimly that now there were plenty of other things to worry about. First and foremost was the fact that, by now, El Karim undoubtedly knew of his presence in Kiruchu. It would be only a short time before the lurking power of El Karim would reach out through the darkness and mow him down.

The totally unexpected entrance of the girl upon the scene was the second source of worry. If El Karim were taking her to the palace, her presence there would be of little aid to Tanden, should he be compelled to play the desperate game of stalking the Sultan in his own quarters.

Tanden's first impulse had been to dash into the gray night, searching anywhere, everywhere, for El Karim's Dyaks and the girl. But common sense showed him the utter futility of trying to find them in the dark muddy streets of Kiruchu, and reluctantly he abandoned the idea.

The strange actions of the girl mystified him. One part of his brain still saw her as a foolish, stubborn

girl looking for adventure; yet in another section of his mind, he re-visualized the strange blue eyes, the hidden secret in them, and the desperate, hopeless look on the white face.

Then suddenly his body stiffened, as if some powerful, overwhelming thought had come to him. A gasp of astonishment escaped his lips.

The native police had left the street and Tanden walked out of the darkness. He turned to the right and progressed quickly, body alert and every nerve taut.

TEN minutes later he stopped in front of the two story frame building, with its latticed porch and queerly shaped roof, that housed the notorious dive of Tar Sonken. In a land where dives abounded in every form—where the lowest scum and riff-raff of the earth foregathered to talk and plan and execute every known crime on the calendar—Tar Sonken's place had the reputation of being the lowest of them all, from Borneo to Wenchau.

For a moment Tanden stood outside on the street, gazing at the building. Lights came from the open windows, and the whining thrumping of a native orchestra broke rudely on the stillness outside. Then he walked up the steps, across the porch, and kicked open the door.

The sweet, sickening smell of opium greeted him as he stalked inside. Mingled inescapably with it, a part of the very atmosphere he breathed, was the odor of rancid ghee and stale tobacco, and the many other smells peculiar to the far East.

A haze of smoke rose slowly to the ceiling of the large room. Through the fogginess, Tanden regarded the motley gathering of humanity that sat around the tables.

Malays, brown of body, naked to

the waists, with their multi-colored sarongs standing out vividly against their brown skins, were there. Dyaks, tall and powerful, with snarling, murderous faces, squatted on the tables like black buddhas, smoking opium pipes.

There were the lithe Singhalese, moving like sneaking animals from table to table; Chinese, their faces expressionless, smoking the ever-present opium pipes; Japanese and Lascars; renegade whites, most of them Eurasians.

Humanity in every racial form—with all that was vile and evil in it.

Tanden walked across the floor, past the tables, his eyes darting keenly to right and left. He knew that of all places in Kiruchu, death would strike quicker in Tar Sonken's dive than anywhere else. It was here that El Karim saw and watched, through the eyes of his numerous henchmen and killers.

At the rear, Tanden sat down and ordered a *stengah*. At a table not far from him, a Malay got up and disappeared into the crowd. Another signaled to someone in the front of the room and followed after the first. There was a sudden movement behind him, a shrill laugh, and a woman said: "Ze Americano! You weel buy Dolores a drink, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

TANDEN turned slowly, grinned maliciously as he looked at the woman behind him. Her type was to be seen in every dive from Borneo to Shanghai. Dark and swarthy, with the slanting eyes of the Oriental, her face was that of some half caste white breed. Hair long and black and straight, parted in the middle and combed back over the ears; teeth ivory white and perfect; black eyes that flashed with volcanoes of hate and passion.

A human dynamo of mixed emo-

tions—sometimes good but usually evil—these are the worst of all women.

In them is the slinking, subtle mind of the oriental, combined with the evil there is in the trace of degenerate white blood.

She slid into a chair beside Tanden, easily and gracefully, her dark eyes watching him closely.

"Ze good *Monsieur* will buy me a drink?" she invited.

THEN her body moved forward a little, with the angling movement of a snake. Tanden stiffened. His hand shot under the table, closed around the wrist of the woman with a twist that sent her body over the table with a muffled groan. A knife fell to the floor and rattled ominously.

"El Karim," Tanden said dryly, "has many strange ways to kill people, but this is not a new one to me."

The body of Dolores still lay across the table, her right arm pulled down straight by the grip Tanden retained on her wrist. Her eyes darted flashes of black hate at him, and he laughed coldly. Gradually he released his hold on her wrist and allowed her to sit up.

There was a lull in the babble of voices around them. Two Dyaks had gotten to their feet and were looking at him suspiciously. There was a sharp order in Malay behind him.

"Where is Tar Sonken?" Tanden said quickly to Dolores. "Talk fast, or a bullet will go through your sweet body."

Dolores sat up, her eyes filled with the terror of an animal that strikes in the dark, fails, and is cornered. Her words came viciously, almost congested with rage.

"You are ze fool," she snarled. "Very soon, you will be dead."

Tanden was on his feet in a thrice, his hand jammed in his pocket as though grasping a gun. The lull, ominous and deadly, continued in the room. A surging mass of humanity was silently moving toward the table. Tanden backed to the wall, remained there grimly, as the tension was suddenly broken by the cries of the surging Malays and Dyaks.

Dolores had jumped to her feet. Loudly she screamed that she had been insulted by the white man, and her cries brought the brown faced Malays to a pitch of frenzied anger.

Tanden sidled to the right, making for a door that led to the rear of the house. He moved slowly, stealthily, unwilling to provoke a rushing attack. As he paused at the door, a kris knife came hurtling through the air, striking the wood over his head. The room became a veritable bedlam of cries and rushing bodies.

And then out of the door came a short, fat man, clad in a long white robe.

"*Peri Pehuimn*," came shrilly from the man. "Pigs of Satan, get back! Do you think Tar Sonken's place is to be used to kill a white man? Back, pigs of Satan, or I'll blast you to Hades."

THE crowd stopped, gasped in fear, and then fell back. Tanden darted through the door and ran down a narrow hallway. He came to another door, opened it, and dashed into a large room. The door closed behind him upon the entering footsteps of another person.

"*Mynheer* Tanden," a voice behind him said, "is like all fool white men—walking straight ahead into death."

Tanden turned and smiled into the round, greasy face of Tar Sonken. The small eyes of the Mohammedan looked at him from behind layers of

fat, with something like a twinkle of humor in them.

Tar Sonken was neither a noble nor a law-abiding citizen. Yet with all his crimes and his reputation, Tanden had always felt a certain admiration, a certain friendliness for the old Mohammedan. Cunning, Tar Sonken was, playing his struggle with life carefully and astutely, taking no more chances than were necessary.

BUT he possessed one attribute that was remarkable in a soul so steeped in murder and lust. That attribute was his word.

Inviolable, he kept it, giving it seldom, but when he did, it was as good as a bond of gold. And Tanden knew that the minute Tar Sonken had refused to send the American girl up to El Karim as a dancer, some cause lay behind it that would make the old Mohammedan a valuable ally.

"I came to see you," Tanden said to him, "and the reception was not very pleasant."

Tar Sonken smiled thinly, without humor.

"You are a fool, my friend," he said, "to walk into my place. You are a fool to return to Kiruchu—"

"We'll admit that," Tanden cut in quickly, "but I risked my life to get into your place. I want to find out, from you, why that American girl is so anxious to get to the palace of El Karim."

"Ah," Tar Sonken said softly, "you are speaking of the one with eyes of the heavens and hair of gold. Charming—exquisite. A jewel of rare beauty."

"All right—all right," Tanden broke in dryly. "We know all that. You haven't answered my question."

"Allah be praised," Tar Sonken raised his hands upward in a weary shrug. "I am but a humble old man

who wishes to help his friends, but you ask a question that only a wise man can answer."

"You're the wise man, Tar Sonken," Tanden laughed shortly. "Answer that question any way you wish, and I'll understand."

"My advice to you, my friend," Tar Sonken said slowly, "is to forget your foolish idea of revenge. You are young, and youth must forget some things. The little wealth you have lost is nothing compared with life and the pursuit of real happiness."

"Thanks for your advice," Tanden replied, "but I am here. When I leave, El Karim and his white advisors will have paid for the murder of my friend—or I shall be dead. This question is the only favor I have asked you—and I am quite sure you also will not mourn the downfall of El Karim."

Tar Sonken smiled craftily, with a cunning that spread over his great face.

"I know no more than you, *Mynheer*," he replied. "Yet Allah gave me eyes and with those eyes I have looked; and Allah gave me a brain and a memory, and with that memory I have gone back over the years. And I have seen that face again—the pale cheeks, the sharp features and the strange blue eyes."

BECAUSE I have used my memory, I know why El Karim wishes to get the girl in his clutches. If you would do the same, you also would know."

Tanden stared at Tar Sonken, not a muscle of his face moving. His eyes were partly closed and the hands at his sides clenched convulsively. Then he smiled, a cold, deadly smile.

"The same thing came to me, a few minutes ago on the street." His voice was hard. "But I had to risk

coming here to make sure. I had to know definitely."

"I am very sorry for the girl," Tar Sonken said, "but there is nothing I can do to save her. Youth is headstrong and foolish. Those who follow its impulses walk quickly to a grave."

Tar Sonken got up slowly and walked to a red covering that hung on the wall. He pulled it back and disclosed a door.

"You are young, too, my friend," the old Mohammedan said. "And I think you, too, are going very quickly to your grave. But depart hence from this door, for I do not wish you to leave this world in my home."

Tanden walked to the door, stopped and patted Tar Sonken on the shoulder, then laughed.

"Thanks for all you've told me. I'll try to repay your kindness—by not getting killed in your place."

CHAPTER IV

The Rule Sinister

LATE in the afternoon Tanden, on horseback, turned a sharp curve in the narrow mountain trail and came in full view of the palace of El Karim. It was a cluster of white buildings, with flags flying from the turrets and soldiers standing guard at the gates.

It was a pleasant place—at least for Borneo—with its gardens, its artificial lakes, and the resplendent luxury made possible by the Dutch government. The chief interest of these worthies was to keep the conquered Sultans satisfied and they accomplished their purpose by allowing the native rulers completely to enjoy themselves.

In the vast territory surrounding his palace, the Sultan's word was law. Because he was isolated, and because the Dutch did not want to

interfere, he was able to rule, when he so chose, with a sinister hand of murder and death. And El Karim could do that in a way that was most neat and effective.

Isolated in a little valley, surrounded by scrawny peaks of a great mountain range, the palace looked regal and stately—from a distance, like a miniature fort. The green of the mountains ran down into the deeper green of the jungle; the buildings of the palace gleamed very white in this setting of brilliant vegetation.

But the beauty of the place did not deceive Tanden. He was completely aware of what lay hidden within those charming buildings. Too well he knew the power of El Karim and the murderous cunning of the brown-faced Malay ruler.

Deep and dark underground passageways honeycombed the earth beneath the buildings. Death in a hundred forms lurked in the luxuriously furnished rooms: death by poisons, by fevers, by hidden traps, by knives thrown from concealed panels in the walls. Death in every form imaginable—and it struck with the speed of a cobra.

In going to the palace, Tanden was acting on an impulse. It was mad, illogical, perhaps, if studied with careful scrutiny; but nevertheless, under the circumstances, it remained the only possible way for him now.

HE realized that his only chance lay in a bold, aggressive front; in direct, swift action. Any cautious tactics, any attempt at evasion or secrecy, would be utter folly. The power behind El Karim was far too great to allow him to fight that way.

The sun was falling beneath the saw toothed mountain range to the west when he rode up to the gate and jumped off his horse. A flaming

tree, with a huge fan-shaped top, threw a hundred different colors over the gate and gave the place an air of exotic brilliancy.

A tall, heavily decorated guard took his horse, and an officer of the Sultan's court came through the gate to greet the visitor. The small brown faced Malay, walking like a monkey standing upright, led Tanden directly across the court. He seemed to have been expecting him, and to have received orders where to take him.

TANDEN knew they were headed for the card room, where the Sultan would be passing the time with his two white advisers. A grim smile came over his face as he thought of these two white men. There was more to fear from them, in some ways, than there was from El Karim.

Van Duren, resident at the palace, was a heavy, flabbily fat man, with the soul of a snake. A middle aged man who laughed a great deal, but whose laugh hid murder as well as humor.

He was in the pay of the Dutch government, but that was only a small part of the money he received for his work for El Karim.

His running mate at the palace was Multao, a half caste Portuguese, a man evil from any standard. This man was the professional henchman and killer for El Karim.

The three men were together when Tanden was ushered into the room. The Sultan, a short dish-faced Malay, with small flashing eyes, threw the cards on the table and rushed to greet his visitor with a great show of affability. He was in evening dress and looked very much like a monkey dressed to order.

"Welcome, *Mynheer* Tanden." His voice was thin and boyish, oddly disagreeable. "It is good to see you

again. It has been a long time since you have visited us."

Van Duren laughed heavily and proffered a huge hand to Tanden.

"We have rather been expecting you, Tanden," he chuckled. "Yes, we rather expected you."

Tanden looked at him, grinned coldly, and said: "I *thought* you'd be wanting to see me."

He turned to the Sultan.

"Your Highness, could I speak with you—alone?"

The Malay shrugged, looked at Van Duren and Multao.

"Why, certainly," he replied to Tanden. "Van Duren, you will excuse us for a moment."

"I'll dash along, your Highness," Van Duren chuckled, his eyes on Tanden. "Be careful, Tanden, if he offers a rubber of bridge. He's a fiend—a perfect fiend—with cards."

He went out of the room. Multao remained standing, his sharply pointed olive face expressionless. His dark eyes stared at the Sultan, as he awaited orders.

"I'll see you later, Multao," El Karim said softly. "In a very little while."

Multao nodded and walked out of the room.

"Your Highness," Tanden began quietly when they were alone, "I intend to be your guest for a little while. It may be for several weeks, or it might even be for only a day."

IF there was any surprise behind El Karim's yellow masklike face at this announcement, he showed it neither by word nor action.

"You are always welcome, *Mynheer* Tanden," he said. "It is a pleasure to have your company."

"I thought it would be," Tanden retorted dryly.

Little lumps of muscles rose on his jaws and his eyes studied the Sultan coldly. El Karim did not

reply for a moment, and the two men gazed at each other in silence. The air was heavy with conflict, between two men whose wills were diametrically opposed.

One, the silent, maskfaced Malay Sultan, deadly as a cobra, shrewd and sinister; the other an American, roughly dressed, ready to fight his battles in the open, carelessly, almost foolishly unafraid of what might happen. Two men that represented the complete extreme of human wills. Neither could ever hope to understand the other; there could never be any common ground for meeting.

IN Tanden's eyes smouldered a hot fire—a fire of impulsive, uncontrolled anger; in El Karim's eyes was only imperturbability. Yet each man knew the power of the other; each gauged and respected the other without illusion.

"I have a very great and very pleasant surprise for you, *Mynheer Tanden*," El Karim said with a cold, vague smile. "One of your countrywomen—a most charming, delightful girl—a Miss Contillo—"

"I know all about her," Tanden broke in curtly. "That is one reason that I came."

"And the other reason?"

"We will wait until the girl is safe, before we discuss that," Tanden snapped. "I am here to see that no harm comes to her—and to take her away when she is ready to leave."

The Sultan made an impatient gesture.

"My friend," he answered, "you speak very foolishly indeed. What harm could come—"

"As a liar," Tanden said easily, "a yellow face is damned hard to beat."

The Sultan smiled, a weary, fleeting smile.

"Perhaps you have not dined, my

friend," he said in his thin, reedy voice. "You have ridden far and this air makes one very hungry."

"I will eat—later," Tanden cut in sharply.

Again the Sultan made an impatient gesture.

"You have spoken about the girl," he said. "Perhaps you can inform me just what you mean to do?"

Tanden smiled grimly and seated himself on the edge of the card table.

"She is young," he said, "but that fact will have little influence with you. She is an American girl—headstrong and with the foolish idea that she can outwit you. That's why I came. It would be very sad if she were stricken with a strange fever—as my friend was, last year."

"A very unfortunate circumstance," the Sultan replied. "The young man was sick when he came here. We did everything possible for him, yet he died. A very sad—a truly unfortunate—case."

"There was a gold concession," Tanden said dryly. "I hardly believe the Dutch government knows the whole truth about that concession."

"Is that a threat?"

"No—not exactly. The matter is simply this, El Karim: I came back to Kiruchu to settle a score with you, and discovered an American girl who had come for the same purpose. My first duty is to see that nothing happens to her."

The Sultan nodded and a smile spread over his face.

"PERHAPS," he said, with an odd wistful twinge to his voice, "perhaps, after you have dined and refreshed yourself, you will return and honor me in a game of cards or a string of billiards. I have always found it very pleasant to deal with an honest man, whether he be friend—or adversary."

Tanden slid off the card table and stood up.

"It will be a pleasure, your Highness," he said. "I may return later."

CHAPTER V

Tense Moments

UPSTAIRS, along a narrow hallway carpeted with a blood red rug, Tanden moved swiftly and silently through the half darkened corridor. His body hugged the wall and his fingers were clasped on the butt of his automatic.

He knew the Sultan was in the card room downstairs with Van Duren and Multao. Tanden was still playing his cards on the aggressive, direct attack. He knew that El Karim would first consult with his two advisers before making any decision toward getting him out of the way.

It wouldn't take the three long to make that decision, but the few minutes it gave Tanden were minutes of life and death to him.

He came to a turn in the hallway, stopped quickly and threw his body against the wall. In front of him was the door to the Sultan's harem, and to the right were the doors to the guest rooms. His body remained hard against the wall, but his hand shot down to his coat pocket and jerked out the automatic.

Fleeting and darting, a mere shadow in the semi darkness, the body of a tall, powerfully built Malay, a syce in the palace, had moved in front of him and disappeared through a door.

Tanden moved away from the wall, crouching, his muscles bunched for a spring. He advanced noiselessly, rapidly, over the thick carpet. He completed the turn in the corridor, making it slowly, head and

shoulders leaning forward a little to see what lay beyond.

There was a whish of air near his head. A knife fell to the floor behind him. His head ducked and from out of the darkness a long, brown arm moved and then a body.

The gun went back into his coat pocket; a shot now would bring the whole palace down on him. Tanden did the only thing he could safely do.

He lunged forward, sending his body through the air in a perfect flying tackle. He had leaped blindly, knowing only that somewhere in front of him, close against the wall, the Malay killer waited. It seemed to him that his body was flying for many long seconds before his shoulders hit the wall. As he landed, he saw the darting shadow of the Malay move.

But the man had been a split second too slow. Tanden was on him, pulling him to the floor, in a thrice. He held his right hand over the man's mouth to prevent him from yelling.

The man was powerful and slippery. Tanden could not use his right or left to deliver a paralyzing blow. He caught the man around the neck with his free left arm and crashed the head to the floor with all the power in his arm and back.

THE man groaned dully and gasped for breath. Before the Malay could realize what had struck him, Tanden had raised himself to his feet, still holding his death grip around the man's neck. He threw the yellow body against the wall and then with a short, vicious uppercut, a blow that traveled with the speed of lightning, he sent the Malay's head back with a snapping crack.

There was no groan from the yellow man this time; only a sagging of the body, a stupid, glassy

stare in the eyes. The man's knees buckled and he went to the floor in an inert heap.

Tanden looked up and down the hall. No other shadows moved in the semi-darkness. With speed and deftness he tore the inert Malay's *sarong*, then tied and gagged the man.

He dragged the body to a small alcove in the wall of the hallway, threw it back in the darkness. Swiftly he moved ahead, crouching now on hands and knees, until he reached a door. For a tense moment he remained still and alert, ear against the panel.

HE could hear someone walking back and forth inside, walking with a soft, pattering step. His arm reached out and opened the door noiselessly, fractions at a time. A wall of jet black darkness greeted him. With the deadly swiftness of a tiger, Tanden was inside the door, still crouching on his hands and knees.

Then his body rose, swung forward at the same time, arms flailing. In the darkness a form stiffened, went backward with a weak grunt, and then crumpled to the floor. Tanden was over it. The butt of his gun crashed down on the head of the dark form. The unconscious man jerked once and then lay still.

Tanden continued on through the darkness, his outstretched arms guiding him. He came to a second door, passed through it, and found himself in a large room, with long windows that overlooked the court of the palace. Through these windows came the soft, misty light of the night that had, by this time, fallen outside. In the gray mist that came in the room, everything looked ghostlike and weird.

He saw a great bed, with a deep canopy over it. The ever present

netting, used to keep out the insects of the jungle, fell from the top of this to the floor, giving the bed a white, phantomlike look. Tanden crossed the room with long strides.

There was a movement in the bed, a short, startled cry. Someone came to a sitting position, stiffly and quickly.

"Miss Morley," he said in a whisper.

"Oh," came weakly from her. "It's you."

Tanden threw the netting back and sat down, looking closely at the girl.

"You certainly got your wish," he said dryly. "Here you are, in El Karim's palace."

With a spring she was out of the bed, fully clothed, wearing a blue sport suit. She stood in front of Tanden and stared at him in amazement.

"You—you," she whispered hoarsely, "know my name. You know now why I came."

Tanden smiled grimly and remained seated on the bed.

"Blue eyes that never smile," he said. "I was a fool not to have understood at first. It came to me after the Dyaks captured you; I went to Tar Sonken's to confirm it. It was brave—foolishly brave for you to have come here, but a girl trying to outwit El Karim is a pathetic sight."

"Fred Morley was my brother," she said softly.

"AND I was his partner," Tanden replied. "He was murdered by fever—and I was shot full of holes in Kiruchu. Last week I came back from the hospital to settle the matter with El Karim. It would have been much easier for us both if we had stopped last night to introduce ourselves."

"You—you—were Fred's partner,"

Grace Morley gasped. "The man he was working with—and you came back to avenge his death?"

"All of that," Tanden said, jumping to his feet, "but we have little time to talk now. What did you come up here for?"

"To find evidence that Fred was murdered," Miss Morley said. "I know he was. If I can find a book I gave him just before he left home, the evidence will be in it."

"A book?" Tanden questioned.

"You see, Fred was sentimental in many ways and a great lover of poetry," she explained. "When he left, I bought him a fine copy of Keats, with a secret cover. I made him promise me that if anything happened, he would write it all out and put it in that secret cover."

"That book is somewhere in this palace. I was waiting until everything got quiet, and then I was going down to the library to look for it."

"El Karim and his white killers are down in the card room now," Tanden said. "We have one chance in a hundred of getting down to the library. But we'll have to take that chance."

"I HAVE it all located," Grace explained. "It is on the floor below. The side stairway leads to one of the doors."

"Okay," Tanden said.

Quickly they quitted the room, walked through the little ante-room and out into the hallway. Grace led the way to a narrow corridor that branched off the main one.

Silently and swiftly the two moved through the semi-darkness. They came to a stairs and went down it rapidly, coming out in a dark hall. They followed this for some distance, came to a door, and went through it into a long, narrow room.

Book shelves lined the walls. Elegant furniture—chairs and tables and smoking stands—filled the room. At the far end, French windows opened out on the court of the palace.

Tanden moved swiftly, on tiptoe, across the heavily carpeted floor to the large double doors that were the main entrance to the library. His body jerked back and his muscles bunched. Outside the door was the sound of someone walking.

THE footsteps came indistinct and subdued. Muscles tense, Tanden waited, but the footsteps died away. Strain his ears as he would, there was only a deadly, ominous silence.

He turned and saw Grace looking through the book shelves. Suddenly she stopped, reached up for a book. Tanden was at her side.

"Here it is," she whispered weakly. "It's Fred's book of Keats."

Her hands went for the cover frantically, nervously. She opened it, pulled out some papers, stared at the writing. For a moment her body swayed, but she caught herself and looked at Tanden, her face pale.

"It is there," she said. "It's his handwriting and I've read enough to know what it is. Evidence to hang the man that murdered him!"

"That is," Tanden whispered, "if we get out of this palace alive. Sneaking down to the library is one thing, and escaping is another. El Karim doesn't care where we go inside the palace, but outside—"

He stopped abruptly and looked at the French windows. His face lightened as he moved across the floor. Opening one of them, he motioned for Grace to go out on the little balcony.

"If El Karim is still in the card room," Tanden said, "we have a chance—a very slim chance."

Out on the court the moon cast

a soft light over the flower gardens and artificial lakes. Grace started out of the window, but suddenly she stopped.

Tanden's body stiffened and he swerved around.

Somewhere behind there had been a muffled step. Someone was walking in the library, walking noiselessly, quickly.

Tanden stopped, facing the door, and his jaws locked with a snap. Coming toward them was Multao, his olive-skinned face expressionless—and his right hand on the gun in his pocket.

TANDEN started to move for his own gun, but halted the motion of his hand almost with the intention. He looked at Multao with eyes grown cold and deadly. Common sense told him that the use of a gun now would inevitably mean his death and Miss Morley's; reluctantly his hand came away from the pocket of his coat, and hung motionless at his side.

Multao's face in the shadowy darkness was immovable. Tanden searched it closely to see if there were any intimation that he had overheard any of the conversation; but on the thin, olive dark face was nothing save the blank, lifeless expression that was habitually there.

"His Highness," Multao said in French, "would see you in his private quarters, *Monsieur* Tanden."

Tanden balanced his body on his toes, looked at Multao for a moment before speaking. The muscles in his face contracted in thin ridges, and his jaws were locked so tightly that the muscles around them rose up in lumps. "*Alors*," he answered also in French. "I will see his Highness in his own quarters—in a few minutes."

Multao bowed and walked out of the room.

"Running would be suicide now,"

Tanden said grimly to Grace Morley. "We'll play their game and see what happens. Remain close to me and keep your eyes open. Say nothing, no matter what happens to me or what I say!"

CHAPTER VI

A Conference

TANDEN and Grace Morley walked out into the hall. A syce was waiting for them. Silently, with bows and motioning arms, he led them through the hall, up a flight of stairs, and then down a narrow, dark corridor. Their walk came to an abrupt end at a great teakwood door.

The door opened slowly and the two Americans entered a large room, furnished with a splendor and grandeur that caught even their breaths. It was the Sultan's private room. Silk pillows, of colors rare and startling, lay strewn over the room; hangings of gorgeous, exotic patterns covered the walls.

Teakwood chairs, hand carved and examples of an art found only in the East, stood around the walls, in company with cabinets of the same wood; silken couches, blood-red and low, were set upon Oriental rugs of priceless value.

And with all this, the soft, bewitching odor of incense and perfumes made the air scented and almost hypnotic.

El Karim himself was seated on a large couch. At his side was Van Duren. The Sultan had discarded his evening clothes and was dressed in native robes of white, with a gold belt around his waist. Tucked in the belt was a curved scimitar, in a sheath of ebony.

El Karim rose quickly and walked forward to greet Grace and Tanden. His yellowish face was wreathed in a pleasant smile.

"Ah!" His thin voice sounded nervous and a little more shrill than usual. "You have brought Miss Morley with you, *Mynheer* Tanden. That is excellent. Now we can all talk together."

Van Duren remained on the couch. He wore clean whites; his round face was all abeam with smiles of friendship.

TANDEN looked at the Sultan coldly, a grim, bitter smile on his lips. He reached over, grasped a black teakwood chair and motioned for Grace to sit down in it. He saw that her face was pale and her body trembled as she looked at the face of El Karim; in those blue eyes flashed a light Tanden had not seen before.

The chin was up a little, but there was no false stubbornness, no cocksureness in the American girl's expression now. Coldly and calmly, with a hatred that sprang from every part of her being, she looked at the yellow-faced Sultan. Looked at him without a tremor of the eyelid. There was no panic, no threatened hysteria in that gaze.

El Karim was conscious of her eyes. The brown man's face went mask-like, as if suddenly the look of the girl had frightened him, made him ill at ease.

Tanden took a chair near her and sat with his legs stretched out in front of him. His hand in his coat pocket gripped his automatic. The silence was oppressive, charged with a ton of high explosive, that seemed as if it might go off any minute.

Tanden saw that the eyes of El Karim were still on Grace and that Van Duren, too, was watching her closely.

Neither of the men was paying any attention to Tanden.

Suddenly the Sultan shrugged.

"We were about to have coffee,

Mynheer Van Duren and myself, Miss Morley," he said, "certainly you and *Mynheer* Tanden will join us?"

"Thank you, I do not care for coffee." The girl's voice was so quiet, so calm, that it seemed to ring in that room of deadly tension.

Again the silence. Somewhere a clock ticked. Van Duren had reached his hand into the coat pocket. Tanden grinned at him and said nothing. The Sultan backed to a couch and sat down near Van Duren, fingering his sword hilt nervously.

"You wished to speak to me, your Highness," Tanden interjected. His words broke the silence rudely.

"Ah, yes," El Karim replied softly. "I thought it would be well—you understand—for us all to have a little understanding."

"I thought I had that understanding with you earlier this evening," Tanden replied. "I told you I was here to see that no harm came to Miss Morley. She has decided she wants to leave at once, and I am taking her back to Kiruchu."

EL KARIM looked at him with eyes that gave no expression of his inner feelings or thoughts.

"Come, now, Tanden," Van Duren said jovially, "we are all grown people, the four of us. This little matter can be adjusted in a friendly manner. Naturally, you understand we know all about the purpose of Miss Morley's visit here."

"We knew she was coming before she left Singapore. His Highness thought it would be best to have her come to his palace, where we could discuss the matter in a friendly, quiet way. If it's reparations—"

"We are quite willing to talk reparations," Tanden broke in calmly. "We are willing to listen to any

terms his Highness wishes to offer."

A sharp gasp came from Grace. Her lips trembled and she started to speak, but Tanden gave her a quick look and then said: "You must excuse Miss Morley, gentlemen. Naturally, she feels very keenly the unfortunate death of her brother."

Grace wet her lips and sat back in her chair.

"I can assure Miss Morley," El Karim said, "that that unfortunate death has been a source of great worry, great anguish to me. Naturally, I wish to make such amends that—er, well—are within reason. Though, of course, I feel in no way responsible for her brother's death."

"MISS MORLEY, I believe, has assumed another name in coming here, but we will forget that name. Her brother stopped over one night, a very sick man. We did everything within our power to save his life, but the fever was too far advanced. There was nothing—"

"Your story," Tanden broke in dryly, "doesn't interest us, your Highness. How much are you willing to pay?"

The Sultan shrugged and looked at Van Duren.

"Really, now, Tanden," Van Duren said good-naturedly, "a bit crude, the term, 'willing to pay.' His Highness feels very much distracted that the young man should have died in his palace, but after all, everything within human power was done to save his life."

"Of course, if you have any evidence that Fred Morley died of anything other than fever, we will be glad to hear it."

Tanden's face remained tense, expressionless. He knew all this conversation and delay was simply an effort on the part of Van Duren and the Sultan to find out if Miss Mor-

ley had any damaging evidence against them.

"Perhaps," Tanden said coldly, "his Highness would be willing to pay, say—well, we'll make it reasonable. Fifty thousand pounds, payable in gold!"

"Not a big price, considering everything, Van Duren—the gold concession and the prospects of your necks hanging at the end of a rope. Rather cheap, I'd say."

"Fifty thousand pounds," Van Duren gasped. "Let's confine our talk to reason—"

"That," Tanden cut in sharply, "is our price. Take it or leave it."

The Sultan gave Van Duren a quick, nervous nod. The fat man slapped his knees with his huge hands and laughed jovially.

"Well, well, Tanden," he remarked. "looks as though you get your price."

"It will be cheap all around," Tanden drawled easily, his eyes on the automatic in Van Duren's coat pocket. The Dutchman had not let his fingers wander once from it during the interview.

"Then it's all settled," Van Duren said, getting to his feet. "Have a smoke, Tanden. A smoke on the successful settlement of an unfortunate affair."

HE handed Tanden a cheroot, a long, spindly-looking cigar, the kind smoked by the Sultan. Tanden grinned as he took it. His eyes wandered again to Van Duren's gun and to the knife in the gold girdle around the Sultan's waist.

"Sure, we'll smoke to our success," Tanden laughed.

He lit the cigar, puffed weakly on it and blew the smoke up toward the ceiling.

"Not a bad cigar, your Highness," he said. "Import them from Holland?"

"A special brand I furnish his

Highness," Van Duren put in. "We Dutch, you know, have a knack about making cigars."

Tanden looked at Grace. Her face was still pale, but she looked at Tanden and smiled.

Suddenly Tanden's face twisted queerly. His eyes went glassy, and his fingers fumbled weakly at his throat.

For a second his body swayed crazily on the chair, then he toppled face forward to the floor.

Van Duren leaned back and laughed, heartily and very boisterously.

"The cigars, your Highness," he said, "work very fast."

ON the floor in front of them, the body of Tanden stretched out on the face, limp and helpless.

Grace gave a startled scream and jumped to her feet. But with the speed of a cat, Van Duren was off the couch, his great hands grasping her slender shoulders.

"No more foolishness, your Highness," he said. "We can put the girl out of the way now without making a great mess. Before Tanden comes to, a knife can finish him."

"It is a very excellent idea," El Karim said quietly. "These white men like Tanden make a great ado and kill many people—unless a little poison puts them out."

Grace screamed again, weakly. She was utterly helpless in the powerful grasp of Van Duren's great hands. The Dutchman threw her on the couch, and brought his automatic out of his pocket. His full face was distorted with the insane lust of killing; his eyes gleamed wildly.

His fingers started to press the trigger of the automatic. And as they did, something hit him, hit with a resounding smack that carried to every part of the room. With a dull groan the killer slipped to the

floor; he rolled over on his face and lay hunched and still.

But before he did that, the body of Tanden had swerved to the right. Catching the brown-faced little Sultan in his two hands, he raised him high in the air, bringing the monkey-like body down on the floor with a crash that sent all consciousness from the Sultan's brain.

Van Duren's body moved and with a bellow of rage the huge man was on his feet. His eyes burned in a pale face. His right hand was still grasping the automatic; the gun came up with lightning speed and filled the room with a deafening roar.

Tanden had twisted to the left in the split second it took Van Duren to bring the gun up. The bullet nipped the side of his shoulder and bored into the wall.

He dropped to one knee, bringing his own gun up, but before he could pull the trigger he heard Van Duren's gun click on an empty barrel. The huge body of the Dutchman sprawled over him, carrying him backward. There was a sickening, deadly crash against his jaw and the next thing he realized he was on the floor, against the wall.

Weakly, he pulled his knees under him, attempting to rise to his feet. His head was reeling insanely and every part of his body felt numb and half paralyzed. He heard a second bellow of rage, saw the body of Van Duren lunging toward him. He tried to raise his right, but the arm refused to respond.

TANDEN fell to the floor, face down. With a feeble lurch forward, he caught the ankles of Van Duren, jerked them toward him with the little strength left in his body. The Dutchman went to the floor, on his back, with a heavy thud.

Tanden struggled to his feet. His

head was clearing rapidly from the effects of the blow to the jaw. Van Duren lay on his back, a pool of blood forming under his head where it had struck the floor. His eyes were closed and his breathing was heavy and jerky.

"Quick," Tanden shouted to Grace, who stood pale and trembling in the center of the room. "Tear enough of the Sultan's clothes off to tie and gag him. I'll take care of Van Duren."

A FEW minutes later Van Duren and the Sultan lay under the great couch, their hands and feet bound and their mouths gagged. Tanden looked down at Grace grimly, his steel-gray eyes cold and expressionless.

His chest rose and fell with his still labored breathing.

The girl smiled at him weakly, questioningly.

"You seem," she said quietly, "to get over poison very quickly."

Tanden smiled humorlessly.

"There are several ways of smoking a poisoned cigar," he said. "I played them for just such a trick. The Sultan likes to do his murders quietly—without too much ado. It was safer to wait and let them play their hand, then catch them by surprise. Any more on my part, before, would have meant death before I got out of the chair."

"All right," Grace said quietly. "That's that. Now, what are we going to do?"

"Get out of this palace—alive," Tanden replied.

He turned and walked to the black teakwood door, Grace close behind him. His hand went to the knob, turned it, and pulled the door open.

But as he did, he jumped back. Grace gave a muffled cry. Standing in the doorway, his dark face leering and murderous, was Multao.

Massed behind him stood a dozen powerfully built syces.

CHAPTER VII

Multao

TANDEN'S shoulder went against the iron door with a bang, closing it in the face of Multao and his Malay killers. Before the enraged group could hurl their bodies against it, Grace slipped the long bolt lock as Tanden held the door shut.

"That's one way we won't escape," Tanden said grimly. "Take this gun of Van Duren's. I've reloaded it, and don't be afraid to use it."

There was a violent pounding on the door, and the muffled cries of the men on the other side came through the teakwood. Tanden ran to the window, drew aside the heavy drape and looked out; then he let the drape fall back into place and returned to the center of the room.

"Sit down," he said quietly to Grace.

She sat in the black teakwood chair she had used before. Tanden took out a package of cigarettes.

"Have one?" he asked.

Grace took one, tapped it on the back of her hand, and then leaned forward to light it from a match in Tanden's hand.

"Sad but true," he said with a hollow laugh. "It's a good twenty feet to the ground from that window. They're waiting for us below, and the minute we show ourselves we'll be dead. So that's that!"

The pounding on the door increased to a terrific din. Suddenly it stopped, and the heavy thud of some object being used as a battering ram jarred the very ceiling.

"It won't take them long to break through the door," Grace said. "Perhaps there is a hidden door leading to the harem, or some such place."

Tanden shook his head.

"If there were such a door," he answered, "they wouldn't be knocking that one down to get in here. A Sultan's private quarters has only one entrance. It's safer that way when he sleeps."

Under the couch Van Duren or the Sultan was moving on the floor. The great scarlet covering waved a little.

"We'd be safer if they were dead," Tanden said grimly. "If we have any chance it won't amount to much if they are freed by Multao."

Grace shook her head.

"I can't do that," she said softly. "You understand."

TANDEN nodded and looked at her. For a long time they gazed at each other without words, each realizing grimly the utter futility of their position.

Finally Tanden said: "There is one chance—and I'm taking it!"

He got up and approached the door. The heavy thud of the ram, which had stopped momentarily, now recommenced. He listened for a moment, then returned to Grace.

"We are only two," he told her. "Two against a palace full of guards. If I were alone I'd try to fight my way out—but with you, it is different."

"I'd rather fight than die—like this—"

"You'll have plenty of chances to die," Tanden interrupted. "Don't let a little thing like that bother you."

"It's silly—and quite useless," she whispered, "for me to say I am sorry to have gotten you into this mess."

He smiled down at her, this time with his eyes as well as his lips.

"This is no time for last regrets," he said. "Now, listen to me. You are going to remain here, while I go out in the hallway."

She looked at him rebelliously.

"You—alone—"

"There is only one chance," he said. "And that is—Multao."

"Multao?"

"Multao is a killer and everything else that can be called evil," Tanden explained, "but he has sense. He *might* listen to reason—"

"Listen to reason?"

"You'll have to let me handle this myself." Tanden was firm. "We can't kid ourselves. That door will break down in a few minutes—and then you know what will happen. I'm going out there alone."

"If you hear more than three shots when I am gone, you can take this pistol of Van Duren's and do what you wish. I advise you to save one shot for yourself."

He handed Grace the automatic he had taken from Van Duren.

She looked at it helplessly, turned it over, and then looked up at Tanden.

"Whatever you say is right with me," she said. "I realize this is no time to be silly, but—it isn't easy to see you go out there—alone."

"If you went with me, it would only make matters worse," he answered. "I can handle the situation better alone."

"But you have no chance, facing those killers."

"The chance is slim—too damned slim, but it will be our last bold stroke. After that, well—"

THE heavy thudding on the door stopped again. Tanden darted across to it, with Grace at his side.

"When I get out, close the door behind me and throw the bolt lock," he said. "I can stop the ram with my gun, long enough for you to do this."

He drew the bolt, pulled the door open a few inches, and slipped out into the hall. He heard the door

slam behind him, and the bolt go back with a click.

And the next second he was conscious that in front of him was a sea of yellow faces. The sudden maneuver of a man slipping through the door caused the Malays to gasp in surprise and wonder. It required only that fraction of a second for Tanden to get into action.

Ten or more syces were carrying a log up to use as a battering ram. One shot from Tanden's automatic, a shot that cut the ceiling over their heads, caused them to stop dead. They stared in fear and wonder, holding grimly onto the great log that was taxing every ounce of their strength.

FROM behind them came an order, uttered in a sharp, shrill voice. The log was lowered to the floor, and Multao advanced swiftly, in the slinking manner habitual to him.

"*Entendez,*" Tanden called out to him in French. "I'm going to give you your choice, Multao, of being a dead fool or a live hero. El Karim and Van Duren are out. Their little play is up and the reckoning with the Dutch authorities is not far off.

"You can go the way they have gone—or get out of this mess with a whole skin. Keep those yellow savages off me for five minutes and at the end of that time you can do what you wish. You know we can't get out of here alive."

Multao's dark, olive face remained cold and expressionless.

"Where is the girl?" he asked.

"In the room. She'll be safe there for five minutes."

Save for the cruel lines of brutality that were always there, the face of the half-caste Portuguese did not show a flicker of expression. He seemed to ponder for a moment, then he smiled craftily, shrugged.

"Fool," he hissed. His right shot out with lightning speed for Tanden's gun. Tanden caught the movement in the split second that Multao's hand shot forward. His gun went up, away from Multao's blow and then the syces surged forward.

TANDEN'S gun roared once. A Malay screamed, grabbed his throat and fell face downward. A sharp blow across Tanden's wrist knocked the gun out of his hand and the sea of yellow faces and yellow arms was on him, snarling and yelling and biting.

Tanden dropped to his knees. He was pushed against the wall, but his right and left shot out with the speed and precision of a steam piston, landing on yellow groins with loud smacks. Yells and screams followed and yellow bodies doubled up and rolled over on the floor, holding their stomachs.

Tanden's fists continued their deadly blows. Though many bodies rolled away from him, yet relentlessly—like a great surging sea, still others came on. Tanden's arms were numb. His back was now tight against the wall. Yellow hands were reaching for his throat and shoulders.

His blows were stopped by the flood of onrushing bodies. His arms were pinned to his waist, and slowly he was being crushed to the floor. He struggled against the overpowering weight over him, struggled fiercely, then with declining powers. The weight of the bodies suffocated him and pinned him to the floor, helpless to move so much as a hand.

Then the crushing load lifted, and he was rolled over on his face. Bereft of all strength, Tanden made no further effort to resist. His mind stopped thinking at this point. He was conscious that his hands were being pulled up across his back and

ropes were tying them together; he felt ropes going around his ankles.

After that he was lifted up and carried along the darkened hallway. He could see the *sarongs* of the syces, who were carrying him, and that was all. He heard Multao giving orders to the Malays and he caught enough of the orders to know that he was being carried to some kind of dungeon.

Then suddenly the air grew damp. The walking syces stopped. He heard a door open, and the next thing he knew he had been thrown into a dark room, his body landing on a cold, stone floor as a door closed behind him.

CHAPTER VIII

Combat

TANDEN lay on the floor, face downward, unable to move a hand or a leg. He lay there for some time, and then slowly his brain cleared. He found by a supreme effort he could move his hips and waist, and after several futile attempts he managed to roll over on his back.

Darkness—jet black and dank—was all he could see. The air was foul and soggy. Lying on his back with his arms doubled under him was tortuous; he succeeded in rolling over on his side and lay partly on his right shoulder and partly on his face.

Grimly and bitterly he reviewed what had happened. There was no time for regrets now; no point in worrying about what might have happened. He had taken the only chance left—and had failed. To him, the failure was ignoble.

Tanden was too far underground below the palace to hear anything overhead, but he knew that by now the teakwood log must have battered the iron door down. Grace

had the revolver; one shell of it would be for herself.

A groan, not of fear or pain, escaped his lips, a groan of desperate anguish at the thought of the girl. What might happen to him was a secondary matter, making little difference now; he gave it little thought. Tanden had lived too long within the shadow of death to worry greatly about it when it finally came. It brought him now a surprising feeling of relief, a feeling of complete forgetfulness.

He twisted his body over on his side a little more and as he did, he felt his wrists give a little. He jerked against the ropes. They were loosening with each jerk. He rolled over on his face to give his hands more freedom; then slowly he worked his wrists back and forth. The flesh tore away, but slowly, surely, his right hand worked out from the rope.

He succeeded in getting as far as the knuckles, and there it stuck. The skin came off as he pulled frantically. Finally the hand slipped out.

Tanden's weariness slipped away with returning hope. He sat up and reached down to his feet, pulling at the cords with his free hand. His left arm was still doubled up against his back, making movements of his shoulders and right arm difficult and awkward. The ropes around his ankles were tied tightly; so he gave up trying to loosen them and went to work on his left arm. He rolled over on his side, using his free arm as best he could.

FINALLY he tore the ropes away from the left wrist and used both hands on the ties around his feet. He had gotten them half free, when suddenly the door to the cell opened.

Tanden fell on his back quickly,

with his arms under him. A light broke into the jet black darkness, a light feeble and flickering, and in its glow he saw the face of Multao, sneering, mocking, very dark in the yellow light. In the half-caste's right hand was an automatic, and it was pointed directly at Tanden's head.

"I THOUGHT," Multao said quietly, "that you would get those ropes loose. I tied them myself and fixed them so you could escape them in time."

Tanden looked at him and said nothing.

"Fool," Multao said with a snarling laugh. "Your proposition sounded fairly good to me. But *mon Dieu*, such pig-like stupidity, to yell it out in front of the syces. Some of them, *mon ami*, speak and understand French."

"What's happened to the girl?" Tanden asked hoarsely.

Multao shrugged and smiled coldly.

"The girl," he said, "might still be in that room—and she might not. I have said that your proposition interested me. Since El Karim and Van Duren are in that room, I am in command of the palace.

"I have seen to several things to enable us to get away—providing, of course, that you agree to my terms. But we will have to work fast. As I came down here I heard the syces battering on the door again.

"The door will hold five minutes or ten—but no more. I have taken the guards away from the bottom of the window out in the court, and you can get her down that way now. I can control the syces only so long, and unless you agree to my terms, you will both be dead in an hour. But I think you will agree to them.

"My price for all this is the girl. You can have the rest."

Multao laughed coarsely. His body

relaxed and he lowered the gun to his side. And then Tanden lurched forward, his body remaining close to the ground. His right hand shot out with the speed of lightning and caught Multao's ankle. Before the astonished half-caste realized what was happening, he turned a backward somersault and landed in a corner of the dungeon.

The old wick lamp fell to the floor, the gun following. Tanden lunged forward, his bound feet dragging. His hand went for the automatic, secured it between his forefinger and thumb as Multao, springing to his feet with the agility of a cat, came plunging at him.

The gun was snatched away from Tanden's fingers, but Multao, unable to stop his headlong plunge, hit the floor, crashing with his full weight against Tanden's shoulder. The American groaned, twisted his shoulder, and barely managed to pull away from under. The half-caste was on his knees, the gun coming up to a level with Tanden's head.

It happened in the matter of a split second, and it was the difference between life and death for Tanden. He pulled his bound legs up under him, brought his body to a kneeling position, and then struck out blindly—desperately with his right. All the weight of his body went behind the blow.

HE heard a crunching of bones. A sharp pain shot through his fist, and then Multao fell backward. The half-caste was unconscious from the blow that had caught him under the jaw, flush on the right side of the neck.

Tanden wrenched the gun from the unresisting hand. He took a stiletto knife from Multao's belt, and with a slashing movement cut the remaining ropes from his ankles. He struggled to his feet,

reached down, raised the oil wick lamp and stood over Multao. His automatic covered the dark, bestial face that leered even in unconsciousness.

Finally Multao moved, opened his eyes, and looked up at Tanden with a blinking, dazed stare.

"Now, Multao," Tanden said dryly, "we will talk business. *Your terms do not interest me.*"

"Stupid pig," Multao muttered. "How long can you live, without my help?"

"TURN over on your stomach,"

Tanden ordered. "I'm going to do you the same favor you did me. I'm going to tie you up, in such a way that you can work your ropes loose in time to make a getaway. I told you up in the hall that the game was up for El Karim and Van Duren—and for you.

"You didn't kill me up there and you made it possible for me to work the ropes loose, but what you intended to do after that is something I don't like. Roll over on your stomach. A shot down here won't be heard."

Multao went over on his face, and quickly, with certain deftness, Tanden tied his hands and ankles with the ropes taken from his own body.

"How do I get out of here without going up into the palace?" he asked Multao.

The half-caste watched him through cunning, half-closed eyes.

"Go out in the corridor, follow it to a little stairs and then turn to your right. You will come out in the court," he said. "I have taken the men away from the window. That is all I could do."

"You can work your hands loose in time," Tanden said, "and by that time I may be dead. If I am, your own chances of living won't be very high. El Karim and Van Duren are

still under that couch, if the syces haven't broken the door; you'd better get out of here before those two are released."

Without waiting for Multao's answer, Tanden walked out of the dungeon door into the jet black corridor. The wick lamp cast a shadowy light before him, falling on walls, old and black with the mold of many years.

He walked quickly. He had no choice but to follow Multao's instructions, and in time came to the small stairs. He went up them to a landing and then turned to the right. Up other steps he went, through a darkness that even the yellow light failed to penetrate deeply.

After what seemed to be hours of walking upward, he finally came out into the open on the court. A pale moonlight cast a ghostly haze over the garden and the artificial lakes.

Tanden stood under the cover of the vines that hid the opening of the underground passageway, his body tense and every nerve alert. The lamp lay at his feet, the flame snuffed out.

Then from overhead came a shot, followed by wild yells. The outburst emanated from a window above him—the window of the Sultan's private quarters—the room where he had left Grace.

HE heard Grace's scream pierce the night air; after that came the recurrent thud of something crashing against the great iron door.

Tanden threw all caution aside. Frantically, though without hope, he went up the vines that crept to the second floor of the palace. The yelling above him increased, but he no longer heard the screams of Grace.

The green ladder protested under his weight. He saw from the corners of his eyes that they were removed some feet from the window,

and that there was nothing but bare wall between the window and the vines. But up and up he went, the vines breaking under his weight, sagging down rebelliously. When one broke, he grabbed another, until slowly he got up even with the window.

WITHOUT hesitation he leaped through the air, throwing his hands out frantically for the narrow sill outside the window. His fingers touched the cold stone, almost slipped as his body fell under them. He gripped desperately, with an almost insane fury. And then he was hanging onto the lower part of the window.

With the same insane fury, the same desperate energy, he strained his body up.

He rested his weight on his right hand after he had risen over the narrow ledge, and smashed the glass with his free left.

Tanden virtually fell into the room, his hands and face bleeding from the broken glass, his body sprawled out in a heap on the floor. For a moment it seemed that the superhuman effort of pulling himself up into the window had taxed his last remaining strength to a breaking point. He groaned a little. All around him was a bedlam—a fury of sounds.

He came to himself with a spring and was on his feet. He held his eyes partly closed, as if afraid to see what had happened to Grace; but when he opened them, he saw her standing in the center of the room.

Her face was pale and her body rigid as she stared at the iron door. She held Van Duren's automatic in her right hand.

Thump! Thump! The great teakwood log was slamming against the iron door. It was finally breaking. Already the hinges were loose, and

from the other side came wild, exultant yells of the Malays.

In the bedlam of noise filling the room, Grace had not heard the breaking of the window. She knew nothing of Tanden's presence until he grabbed her around the waist and carried her to the window.

"We're going out that window," he said grimly. "Don't ask me any questions now."

He turned and ran over to a couch, pulled the huge red cover off it. He threw the cloth out of the window, after tying one end to the massive teakwood cabinet.

"Go down that," Tanden instructed her. "You'll have to drop ten feet. Then run as fast as you can for the stables."

There was a deafening crash behind them, a splintering of wood and steel and plaster as the great iron door fell to the floor. The mob of infuriated syces, their faces twisted with hatred and fury, came rushing into the room.

Twice Tanden's automatic roared. Two of the onrushing syces crumpled to the floor. The others hesitated, staring with terror at Tanden's belching gun.

"For God's sake," he yelled to Grace, "get out of the window and to the ground!"

THERE was a bellow of rage from the sea of yellow faces. A kris knife came through the air, striking the wall within inches of Grace's disappearing figure. Tanden's gun roared again. The man who had thrown the knife lurched forward, stiffened, and then went to the floor.

Tanden was out of the window, his hands gripping the scarlet red cover. Below him he saw the body of Grace hurtle through the air, hit the ground and lay there inert and still.

Down the cover his body slipped. He came to the end, let go with his

hands, and fell ten feet through the air, landing close to the limp body of Grace Morley.

CHAPTER IX

A Race With Death

TANDEN rose to his feet, momentarily stunned by the fall. Grace stirred, got weakly to her feet and stood swaying beside him. In front of them the blue of moonlight cast the soft, fleeting glow of a dream over the court.

Across the court, beyond the artificial lakes and huge flower beds, stood a low, one-story white building, the stables of the Sultan's palace.

But before Tanden could say anything, before his brain cleared and the blood flooded back through his numb body, the air above them was filled with yelling, screaming yellow forms. The syces were following out of the window, sliding down the red silken cover.

A booming voice rose above the yells of the Malays. It was Van Duren, yelling orders from the room. Mingling with his deeper tones came the thin, shrill voice of the Sultan.

Tanden grabbed Grace by the arm and started for the stables. It was a wild, frantic race with death for both of them. There was no time to turn and fight. Every fraction of a second meant either life or death to them.

Around the artificial lakes they raced, following the winding stone walk that took them through the labyrinth of gardens and flower beds. Behind them came the yelling, screaming mob of yellow bodies, knives waving above their heads.

Tanden saw the door of the stable. There would be guards in there. Perhaps not more than two, but two men in front of them with the yelling, surging mob at his back, could easily have the power of a hundred.

He and Grace came to the door of

the stables, gasping for breath, stumbling helplessly forward, with the syces close on their heels. As Tanden leaped through the door of the stables a form moved out of the darkness.

There was the cold gleam of steel as Tanden brought his automatic up and pulled the trigger. He was conscious of a sudden dull pain in his arm, a pain that seemed to numb his right shoulder and the fingers of the hand that gripped the gun.

He knew what it was, but he dared not think of it. The knife had buried itself deeply in the flesh and was still sticking there. A yellow, writhing form was at his feet.

Grace screamed as she saw the knife.

"Keep quiet and *pull the knife out!*" Tanden cried to her.

Her face distorted with pain and anguish, she grabbed the knife, pulled it out and let it drop to the floor.

By that time the horde of charging men behind them had reached the door of the stables. Tanden knew that he was weak; he knew that every part of his body was numb. He felt the warm flow of blood as it dripped out of the wound. But he steeled himself.

"Get two horses," he said to Grace, "and if any guards appear, shoot hell out of them. I'll take care of the men at the door."

GRACE moved away from him swiftly, without a word, without protest. He heard the movement of horses behind him; then all he was aware of was the roar of his automatic, firing point blank in the mass of yellow bodies that was crowding to get in the front door of the stables.

The syces dropped back, as they always did, in the face of lead. Tanden heard the bellowing, roaring voice of Van Duren behind them. He saw the huge form of the fat man, his face distorted insanely in the pale moon-

light, push his way through the crowd. There was a roar of rage from him and his gun jumped in his hand.

The bullet cut within an inch of Tanden's head. His own gun roared. Van Duren stumbled forward, as if someone had suddenly pushed him in the back, fell to his knees. His mouth gaped open, his right hand jerked to his neck.

THERE was a rattle in his throat—the weird, ghastly rattle of death. He toppled head first to the ground, his jerking body gradually going limp.

Behind Tanden, Grace called out. He swerved and, through the gloom of the stables, saw the two horses she had bridled. There had been no time for saddles—and they weren't necessary.

In front of them the brown-faced Malays were staring down at the lifeless body of Van Duren, unable to grasp for the moment what had happened. Tanden backed to the horses, put his hand over one of the animal's neck, but found himself suddenly helpless. Every part of his body seemed suddenly cold and paralyzed from his wound.

A shout from the door startled him. There, surging forward now, knives gleaming in their hands, was the yellow horde. At their rear came the shrill, thin voice of the Sultan, sending them forward with a new frenzy.

Tanden gathered himself together, summoned up every force in his body, and clambered to the back of the horse. Grace was already astride her mount. A knife came hurtling through the air.

Tanden put his hands on the side of his horse's bridle, leaned forward over the animal's neck, and, with a sharp kick, sent the pony through the darkness of the stable. Grace raced along beside him, hugging her horse's neck and sending

him forward with soft words and pats on the neck.

The horses—fleet Arab ponies—took them through the darkness at a terrific speed. Suddenly they were outside the stables, the horses shooting through a door at the rear.

Out into the haze of moonlight they raced, leaving the palace and the court behind them. The horses' sharp hoofs clattered on the rocky ground of a mountain path. Tanden had no idea in what direction they were going.

He hung on grimly, his left arm around the neck of the pony. His brain reeled; there was no sense of feeling in his body. His pony swept around a curve and he reeled dizzily, all but going off headlong. But he felt a little better and his brain cleared.

On over the narrow mountain pass, bathed in the soft moonlight, the horses raced. They cut around the spur of the mountain range and started down into the valley that led to Kiruchu. Far behind them came the sound of pursuing horses.

Then suddenly Tanden's horse slowed and broke into a limping walk. Grace's pony raced on ahead and then it, too, slowed down and walked with short, jerky steps.

TANDEN was off his horse, falling weakly to the ground. With difficulty he raised himself slowly; his shoulder was shooting sharp pains through his entire body. Grace had sprung off her pony and was running back to him.

"The horses," she gasped, "are lame."

"Multao!" Tanden replied grimly. "He cut the muscles of their legs. He figured we would make our escape on the horses, and prepared against that. And by now he is loose, and perhaps—"

Tanden's words came to an abrupt

stop. His hand went weakly for his gun. Directly in front of them, standing in the middle of the road, was the leering, sneering half-caste himself, the gun in his hand pointing at Tanden and Grace.

"I have been waiting for you," he said with a sneer. "I expected you would escape on horseback; I had the horses fixed so that they wouldn't go very far."

HE laughed brutally, his olive face cold and repellent.

"You were very kind, *Monsieur Tanden*," he continued, "to tie my hands so loosely. I was able to free myself and get up here, by taking a secret path, even before you made your escape. And now I have come to take my part of the bargain."

Tanden's body stiffened. The shooting pains had abated to a dull ache. He looked at Multao and clenched his fists impotently.

Multao's part of the bargain! It was very simple what that would be. A bullet would end Tanden's life, and then—

"You need not fear El Karim," Multao sneered. "I did not want that monkey-faced Malay to interfere with my plans, and their horses were fixed the same as yours. I was desirous of completing my little part of the bargain all alone."

"And the first part of that bargain?" Tanden questioned.

"A bullet through your heart, *Monsieur Tanden*," Multao snapped at him. "There is no time to gloss things over. You are a man and you understand."

A muffled scream came from Grace Morley. She sprang forward between Tanden and Multao, her white face quivering and her blue eyes flashing.

Tanden's right arm went out with the speed of lightning, caught Grace around the waist, and threw her

back as Multao's gun roared. Tanden's body dove forward, in a head-long plunge.

The bullet cut over his head, whined dismally among the trees. Grace gave a muffled scream. Tanden's body hit the waist of Multao, driving him to the ground with the fury of an enraged beast.

The gun fell from Multao's hand, but the body of the half-breed twisted, came up with a quick, powerful heave, throwing the weakened body of Tanden to one side. A knife gleamed in Multao's hand. It went up in the air as Tanden struggled to his feet, coming down toward his throat.

Tanden laughed, a cold, desperate laugh.

His right hand went up, caught Multao's wrist, and then he rose to his feet, sending every ounce of weight and strength of his body against the knife.

For one tense, deadly second the hand of Multao, gripping the knife, hung suspended in the air. In that moment the strength of two men met in a grim, bitter death struggle.

Then slowly the hand and arm of Multao went backward, the last ounce of power in Tanden's body behind it.

THERE was a dull cutting thud, a ripping of cloth and then flesh. Multao's face went blank, dazed; a film came over his eyes. Then he sank to the ground, blood gushing from his mouth, fingers reaching feebly for his throat but closing on air.

Tanden stood over him, body swaying back and forth. The bloody knife was in his hand. Behind him Grace sobbed weakly and turned her face away from the last quivering of Multao's dying body.

Tanden stared at Multao. The half-breed coughed weakly and then

his body stiffened and relaxed in death.

"Quick," Tanden cried to Grace as he swerved. "The Sultan's men are coming."

Down the road came the beating hoofs of horses. Tanden and Grace fell into the brush as the horsemen came around the turn in the road, brought their ponies to an abrupt stop, hoofs skidding over the road.

"Come on," Tanden whispered weakly to Grace. "I don't know where we are going or how long I can last, but we have to get out of here."

CHAPTER X

Peace In Kiruchu

HE COULD hear the syces jabbering and moving around excitedly on the road, over the body of Multao. Over this din the movement of Tanden and Grace's bodies through the brush could not be heard.

They lunged on blindly through the darkness. The bush slashed their faces, tore at their clothes, but they went on. Tanden led the way, trying weakly to push the brush away from Grace's face, his body and brain numb.

Behind them the voices of the syces had ceased and they had spread out, fan shape, and were combing the woods. Tanden slowed down. He was far ahead, but any noise now would lead the oncoming Malays to them.

He and Grace came to a little valley and an open space. They raced across it and back into the dense undergrowth again. The syces came on relentlessly, deadily in their purposefulness.

Tanden knew that running was out of the question, that El Karim's men would hear the noise of their bodies and it would only be a mat-

ter of time until they were surrounded.

He stopped, sat down near a little stream, and struggled to keep unconsciousness from overcoming him. Exhaustion and pain—he had fought these for a long time, and slowly they were overpowering him.

"We'll have to take our chances hiding," he said to Grace. "If we run, they'll hear us."

Behind them came the syces, closing in on them. Tanden lay flat on his stomach, Grace at his side. The brush moved and crackled a few feet from their heads. Men moved beside them. A foot scraped Tanden's arm.

And then he remembered no more. Lying down, his senses had reeled and he could no longer control them. When that foot touched his arm, the last thin thread of reason left him.

He came to with the feeling of something cool on his head. He opened his eyes. Arms were around him. He tried to struggle free but consciousness left him.

When he opened his eyes again, his senses had cleared. He heard Grace's voice and he knew that she was bathing his head with water. Moonlight was flooding the ground around him. A few feet ahead was a little stream.

Tanden smiled and sat up.

"You got me here?" he said to Grace.

"THE syces have left," she answered. "They walked right over us and then I dragged you in a little ravine. When they came back they passed the ravine and went back to their horses. The last I heard they were taking the body of Multao back to the Sultan."

"I see," Tanden replied. "And now we are in the woods—without food and with me wounded and a long way from Kiruchu."

"It's been so long since I have had food," Grace laughed, "that I have forgotten all about it. I was afraid to eat in the palace for fear of being poisoned."

Tanden had stood up and was peering through the moonlight.

"It's only fifteen miles and there are native huts along the way," he said. "We can make it back to Kiruchu if we take it slow."

FIVE days later Tanden, shoulder bandaged and face pale, stood in the office of the Dutch Governor in Malacca. Grace Morley was at his side, her eyes flashing in her drawn face. Across from her, surrounded by guards, was El Karim, brown face expressionless and eyes fixed on the governor.

The governor, a short, fat man, with red cheeks and a tight smile, sat behind his desk. Grimly he read the papers that Tanden and Miss Morley had taken from the book of poetry found in the Sultan's library.

He finished reading and looked at Tanden.

"These papers," he said, "give a complete story of a cold blooded murder. So complete, that there can be no question of what happened to young Morley, or of the real ownership of the gold concession."

Tanden started to nod agreement. But in that moment, El Karim came to life with a snarl and leaped from his chair.

"This is an insult," he cried. "I, El Karim, Sultan of Kiruchu, accused of murder. You have taken our lands and now—"

His hand went to his belt with a speed almost faster than sight. A curved blade flashed in the air, and before Tanden could lunge forward,

the knife was coming directly at his heart.

In that split second he could do nothing but swing around, placing his right side in front of the on-coming blade.

There was a swish of air, a tearing of cloth, and then Tanden felt a sharp, piercing pain in his right side, under his shoulder.

A gun roared, the thunderous explosion filling the room. In the blinding haze of smoke Tanden saw the body of El Karim crumple to the floor, roll over on its back, and then lie still.

"Are you hurt?" the fat governor cried to Tanden.

Tanden moved his arm and grinned weakly.

"The blade cut through my clothes and ripped some skin," he said. "Nothing more."

The two men looked down at the lifeless form of El Karim. Over the erstwhile Sultan stood the guard who had fired the shot.

"THE best riddance the Dutch could hope for," the governor said grimly. "Now that El Karim is no more, we may hope for some peace and prosperity in Kiruchu."

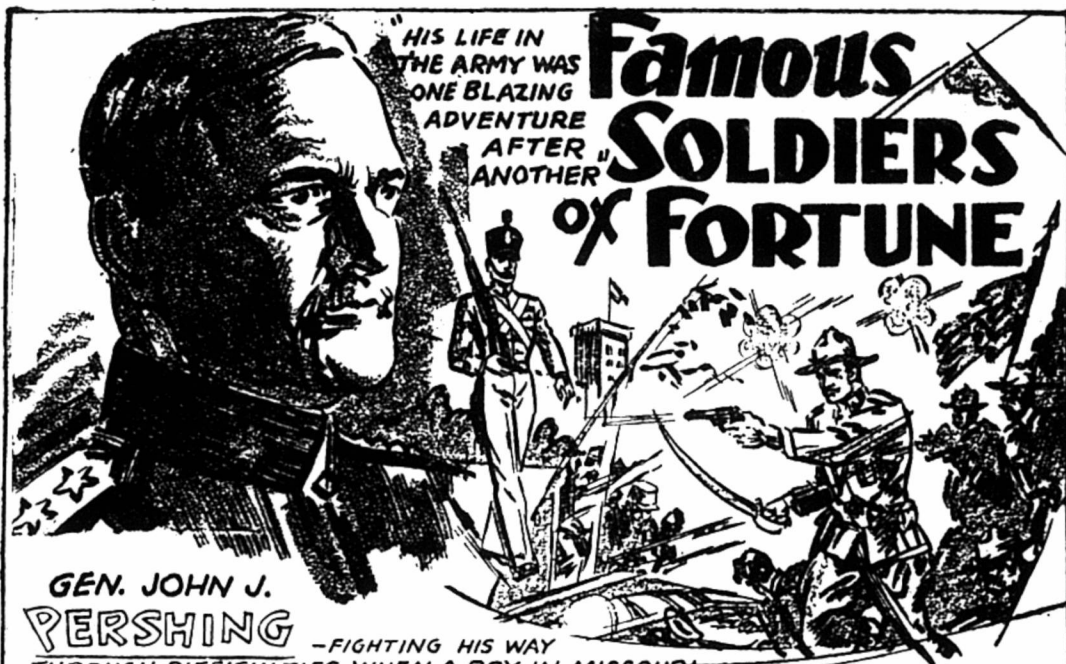
"The only way you would ever have gotten it," Tanden replied.

"And when you decide to work that gold concession, *Mynheer* Tanden," the governor smiled, "you can expect the utmost cooperation from us. We feel under great obligation to you and Miss Morley for enabling us to get El Karim, a thing we tried for years."

"A job I don't want to have to repeat," Tanden laughed.

He and Grace Morley walked happily out of the room.

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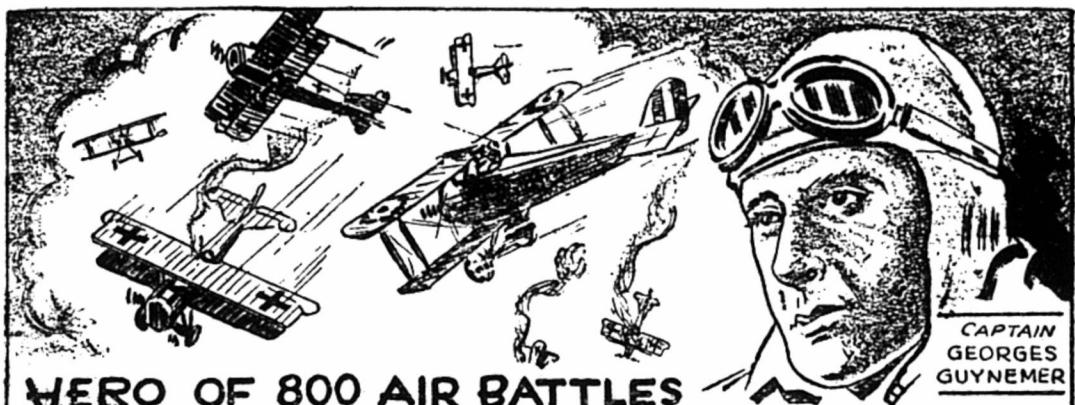
PERSHING FIRST GAINED NATION-WIDE DISTINCTION AS A DARING LEADER WITH HIS 10TH CAVALRY DURING THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR. ONCE WHEN UNDER HEAVY FIRE AT SANTIAGO THE OFFICERS LEADING THE TROOP FIGHTING NEAR HIS TROOP WERE WOUNDED — PERSHING RUSHED FORWARD AND LED BOTH TROOPS IN A CHARGE TO VICTORY. FOR THIS PERSHING WAS RECOMMENDED FOR BREVET COMMISSIONS FOR "PERSONAL BRAVERY AND GALLANTRY IN ACTION." THIS GREAT MILITARY LEADER HAS BEEN CALLED "THE COOLEST MAN WHO EVER STOOD UNDER FIRE."

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MILES STANDISH
WAS ONE OF THE FEW
PEOPLE CORRECTLY
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Author of "The Blue-Eyed Kid," "Bantam
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CHAPTER I

Roaring Gunfire

EDDIE KINCADE, on his blue roan colt, knew as he rode swiftly into the mouth of Vine Creek gulch that something was wrong. The swarms of crows that infested the dense thickets of the gulch were beating the air, scolding at the interruption of their noon-time siesta, alarmed, it appeared, long before Eddie's arrival.

The young Q-B puncher galloped rapidly down the trail, eyes narrowed, every nerve tensed. He had come, hunting for yearling strays from the Q-B herds. He was prepared now, however, for bigger game.

A smile flashed across his bronzed face as he rode.

"A mountain lion, probably," he muttered, a hand dropping quickly to one of a pair of twin holsters.



Another .45 came into view—

"I'll be ready!"

But he wasn't prepared for what happened the next second.

A riderless horse, fiery-eyed, snorting, came thrashing up the trail, brushing Eddie's roan aside. The next instant two shots, fired so close together that the reports almost blended into one blast, thundered in the gulch and two bullets flattened themselves against a huge rock not more than five yards up the slope from Eddie.

The puncher fell from his roan as if he'd been hit.

He wasn't hit, though, but he was thinking fast and acting accordingly. He leaped for the rock, made it, just as another bullet chipped a piece out of it.

Both guns out, hat off, a mumbled challenge on his lips, Eddie peered through a crevice, eager for a glimpse of his assailant. But an-



pointing straight at the startled broker's gaping mouth

other slug, singing perilously near, caused him to duck.

"Ouch!" he grunted, "that hombre is gunning for me!"

Crouching, alert, Eddie stole another glance. What he saw caused him to start in spite of himself. Coming up out of a willow thicket below the trail, straight at him, a gun in either hand, was old Jim Tarey, a valley rancher, famed as one of the crack shots of Colorado.

But Eddie himself was equally famed as a marksman. He was amazed now, but not frightened. He made a swift decision.

"The old coot's gone haywire!" he decided. "If he gets much closer he'll get me. I'll fan him to cover!"

Eddie came up from behind the rock like a jack-in-the-box, except more quickly, and both his .45's belched flame. The fusillade was deafening. Tarey ducked, fired, staggered.

The Q-B cowpunch caught his breath sharply at that.

"Lord!" he exclaimed. "I couldn't have hit him!"

It seemed, though, that old Tarey was hit. That, or playing 'possum. He had sunk to one knee, swaying like a dizzy man, still trying to get one gun up. But even in the act he slumped, sprawled over, partly on his back, partly on one side, and lay motionless.

Eddie, his heart pounding, a wave of terrified guilt engulfing him, stepped out from cover. He was hopeful—even eager—to see the old rancher galvanize into action, leap up, take a pot shot at him. But that didn't happen. Tarey lay still. Eddie thudded down the slope, his hot guns not even covering the man he hoped was faking.

"What if I've killed him?" he thought, as he raced towards Tarey.

The Tarey guns didn't come up, as

Eddie recklessly prayed they might, as the cowpuncher reached the sprawled rancher. Dropping his own .45's, Eddie stooped over the fallen form. One look, one touch, and the blood seemed to freeze in Eddie's veins.

"Dead!" he cried. "Dead!"

There was a bullet hole in Tarey's forehead. The story of the tragedy was told mutely there. Eddie, however, could hardly believe his eyes. He got up, perspiration starting from his face.

"I fired only to scare him—to drive him to cover!" he gasped, "I thought I was firing over him—he must have leaped high in the air to catch one of the bullets in the head. I—I've murdered him!"

MURDERED! The word—the thought—caused Eddie to shiver.

What, he wondered, could he do? Why had old Tarey, a respectable rancher, tried to "get" him? Who would believe the story that the old rancher had fired on him and that Eddie had fired in self-defense, and at that, not deliberately, firing only to scare the old rancher? They would call the story fantastic, weird, wild—a plain, bald lie!

Eddie looked around helplessly, his brain in a whirl. Down the trail, reins anchoring him, waited the blue roan colt. Panic seized the cowpuncher. He ran madly for the roan. He mounted, spun the colt expertly, set spurs, and was off—at breakneck speed—down the trail. He rode as a murderer might be expected to ride, escaping from the scene of his crime—he—Eddie Kincade—who had so recently ridden up that same trail as an innocent, care-free Q-B rancho cowpuncher.

But as he rode his brain cleared. There was just one thing to do, he realized, although the doing of that particular thing might mean that he

would stretch hemp. He must ride manfully into Vine Creek village, seek out Sheriff Joe Daly there, and surrender, explaining, as well as he could, the slaying of old Tarey.

"They won't believe me!" he told himself, his eyes misty. "Who would believe old Tarey would run amuck, popping at me without warning? They'll wonder how come we met in the gulch. They'll suspect old Tarey caught me branding a calf of his—and that I put a slug in him to silence him. They know my record for marksmanship—they won't understand how I hit him if I was trying *not* to hit him—any more than I understand it! I'm a gone goose!"

But he didn't slacken speed. He spurred on, quickly, determinedly. He swung out of the gulch. The scolding crows, circling lower, dropped to the gulch to resume their interrupted siesta.

He struck the Vine Creek road, the roan high-tailing it, a long cloud of dust stretching back behind the flying heels. A mile—two miles—three miles.

The crossroads, finally. A swing to the left—and Eddie pulled the sweating, panting roan almost to its haunches.

A GIRL rider, blue eyes wide, yellow hair wind whipped, barred the way. She flashed a smile of recognition.

"Valerie!" he gasped. "Where—how come you out here?"

"I was looking for you, Eddie!" cried the girl, urging her bay closer. "I had to find you. They said you weren't at the Q-B. I went to town and no one had seen you there. I was going back to the Q-B to wait for you. I—I'm terribly worried—I—I want you to come over to our place. There's trouble—"

Eddie Kincade nodded a white, drawn face.

"There is trouble," he acknowledged, soberly. "I—you see—," but he caught himself abruptly. He hadn't the heart to break the news of the killing to this young girl, the girl he liked best in all the valley.

Her eyes were misty, he saw. She was excited, too. She had worries of her own, apparently. He asked a hasty question. "What's wrong at your place, Valerie?" He put a steadying hand on the girl's shaking arm.

"It's dad!" she answered, hardly above a whisper. "I can't understand, Eddie! He told me this morning that he was in serious difficulties—he looked so frightened—so old, broken—there were tears in his eyes—he said something terrible might happen—it alarmed me so—I tried to question him—but he wouldn't say more—"

The girl lifted pathetic eyes to Eddie.

"So I decided to get you—dad likes you—always has, Eddie—and I thought maybe he'd confide in you—tell you what he won't tell me—so that you—we—can help him! You see, Eddie, I just had to find you. We must get back to the ranch quickly—"

She swung her bay, but Eddie put out a protesting hand.

"LISTEN, kid,—I've got to go on into town—I've got to see Sheriff Daly there—or his deputy—"

Valerie shook her head suddenly.

"I thought of seeing the sheriff," she said. "I tried to—but he'd gone over to the Tarey ranch. There's trouble there, too. The foreman sent word into town that old Tarey had oiled up his guns and gone out early, saying he was going to kill a rat—and he hadn't returned—and they were afraid he might have been hurt, himself—"

A feeling of hopelessness, of utter despair, settled on Eddie. So old Tarey had gone forth to kill a rat, eh?

And he'd been slain. Who'd now believe that Eddie, who had killed him, wasn't the rat old Tarey had gone forth to seek? Eddie slumped wearily in his saddle.

"Come on," he said, hoarsely, to the girl.

The Hawkins rancho, Valerie's home, nestled at the edge of the timber.

Valerie and Eddie had hardly entered the front door of the rambling old log house, however, before the roar of a sudden shot crashed and echoed around them.

THEN came a moment of absolute silence while the girl and the puncher stood horrified, paralyzed. It was Eddie, starting forward, who broke the spell.

He ran down the long hall, thrusting open this door and that—finally halting, spellbound, on the threshold of a rear room.

A man lay on the floor. A six-gun lay near him.

"Father!" came Valerie's agonized scream.

Eddie, advancing gingerly, bent over the still form. He lingered there only a second.

He sprang up, caught the swaying girl.

"Steady, kid!" he pleaded, quietly, his eyes roving. "He's dead. You'd better send for the sheriff. I can't stay now—much as I hate to desert you—they wouldn't understand—you wouldn't—I—"

Valerie, sobbing, went to her knees. Eddie, throwing up his head, drew a long breath. The sound of running feet came from the hallway. Eddie knew the house was full of servants, relatives. He crossed quickly to the open window. He stepped

through it. He ran, pellmell, for the timber.

CHAPTER II

The Outlaw Sleuth

ONCE in the protecting timber he didn't linger there. All eyes, all ears, he skirted around the edge of the clearing, as if he was stalking some wary quarry. Finally, making a swift dash, he reached his roan, waiting at the hitching rail, and swung into the saddle. He was off, like a shot, just as several of the Hawkins hands tumbled out of the house. In a few minutes the pounding hoofs of the blue roan had carried him back deep into the timber.

It was not until then that Eddie drew an easy breath.

"Poor Valerie!" he exclaimed, pityingly. "It'll break her heart to lose her dad like that—they were such pals! And what could have happened, anyway? He may have killed himself. We were in the room a moment after the sound of the shot—and there was nobody there. And still—the window wide open—someone could have gone out as I did. If the hands get to thinking over the way I left there they'll begin to figure I had a part in that tragedy!"

Eddie's eyes grew more troubled at that thought.

"I couldn't stay to face Sheriff Moore there—and get mixed up in a second killing case—after what happened in the gulch!" he went on, worriedly. "If Tarey went out to kill a rat and mistook me for said rat—"

The Q-B cowpuncher shook his head unhappily.

"The rat he was looking for must have resembled me! And if I'm ever going to clear myself of blame there I've got to find that rat, whoever he is, and bring him in—"

Eddie swung his roan suddenly. He slipped down through a tiny, silent valley, splashed a crystal stream, went up the slope of a long hill. Working around the shoulder of the hill he brought the blue roan out on a heavily-traveled trail. It was the way to Conifer, the railroad shipping point for all the big cattle companies of the district. Conifer, a humming little town, would be safer for him, Eddie felt, than the county seat of Vine Creek.

"I'll get some supplies there—some tobacco, particularly—and pick up what news I can about Tarey," he decided, as he pulled the roan down to a walk. There was no use in attracting too much attention by galloping into Conifer, he felt.

No one in Conifer paid him the slightest attention, however.

At the general store Eddie stocked up on tobacco, buying half a dozen different brands to the storekeeper's mild astonishment.

"You trying out different kinds, bud?" asked the merchant.

"Yeah, trying to find one I like," replied Eddie, complacently.

"I got a new brand just in," volunteered the storekeeper. "I get it special for a customer. Maybe you'd like to try it out, too?"

"Yeah, sure!"

The tobacco matter settled, Eddie purchased a supply of foodstuffs, a hatchet, matches, other things he would need for an extended stay in the timber. He rented a packhorse at the Conifer feed corrals. A few minutes later he rode out of town, leading the packhorse, outfitted for the time he figured he would have to hide away from Vine Creek.

ALMOST immediately he ran into trouble. A horseman, tearing in toward Conifer passed him, pulled up, and came back, with drawn pistol.

"Hey there, Kincadel!" bawled the man. "They're looking for you—the sheriff wants you for murder—stick 'em up!"

"Sure!" agreed Eddie, coolly, as he raised his hands. "What's that, a posse, coming down the road?"

The rider foolishly glanced away for a second.

In that instant Eddie's twin guns had leaped to his hands, a growl came from set lips.

"Drop that gun, fellow!"

The gun dropped at once.

"You say the sheriff wants me for murder?" exclaimed Eddie, quickly. "Who did I murder? Who says I murdered anyone? Speak up—"

"Old Tarey was found killed," said the other man, gaping. "A guy on a blue roan was seen in the gulch. Everybody figures it to be you, seeing as how you got the only blue roan hereabouts—"

Eddie motioned with his guns.

"Go along—blow in to Conifer and spread the news, *hombre!*" he ordered. "As for me I got some sleuthing to do. I'm a—an outlaw sleuth!"

EDDIE lost no time after he had sent his late captive scurrying on, breathlessly—and disarmed—into Conifer.

Almost immediately he swung off the trail into the timber. He drove the packhorse ahead of him, using the end of his lariat as a makeshift quirt to urge it on. He allowed the animal to practically choose its own way, for the route now made little difference, Eddie figured, so long as the way lay through the wilderness, away from Conifer, away from Vine Creek, and towards the higher ranges.

"I'll work around back of Squaw Mountain," he finally decided, giving his decision aloud to the horses, as if they understood. "I'll hole in somewhere there—in one of those

old deserted mine shacks—beyond Old Hermit Billings' shack—yes, that's the place for me!"

Finally he looked around at the tall peaks, searchingly, hopefully.

"Guess that one is Mount Baldy," he made up his mind, at length. "Although I never seen it from this side—the Cotter brothers have a summer sheep ranch just below it—if it's Baldy. We'll go see!"

And Eddie's guess proved right. Two miles, and he saw a low adobe building ahead. There were corrals. And two sheep wagons. But no dogs heralded his approach as he rode towards it, cautiously.

The sheepherders, apparently, were all out with the flocks.

But that made small difference to the Q-B cowpoke. What he had in mind was a horse. His blue roan would be recognized. And there were several in the corral. He looked them over with practiced eye, then chose a blocky bay. The shed to the far side of the corral yielded a bridle and saddle.

Five minutes later, still undisturbed, Eddie swung into the saddle on the bay as coolly, as calmly, as if he was swinging aboard a Q-B cowhorse in the security of the Q-B corral, except—that a good observer would have noticed that Eddie's eyes roved constantly, alert for trouble, and that he had one gun holster unbuttoned at the flap. But he had no cause to go for the gun.

He drove the packhorse ahead, rode the bay, led the roan.

WELL back in the timber, however, he dismounted, grinning. A new idea had come to him. He tied up his three horses, stepped away from them, and walked through the brush, a gun in his right hand. It was a hawk he saw first, and his bullet got it even as it spread its wings to soar up from the windfall;

he picked it up, retraced his way to the horses.

There, cutting off the bird's head with his knife, he held the dead fowl above the roan's saddle, so that the scarlet blood dripped onto the leather, spattered the blanket, splashed the skirts, speckled the roan's shoulders.

"Now," he said, tossing the hawk away and slipping the bridle from the roan, "beat it home, boy—to the Q-B—and make it snappy!"

BUT the roan, bewildered, seemed loathe to go. Eddie picked up a rock, threw it. The roan snorted, wheeled, crashed away.

"If they believe circumstantial evidence," grinned Eddie, "that may slack up the hunt for me a little—give me a little time."

Then he pushed on doggedly. The bay he had taken from the Cotter brothers sheep ranch proved worthy. There were no signs of pursuit. And shortly before dusk Eddie, skirting far out around the wretched shack where Old Hermit Billings hibernated, came to the shoulder of Squaw Mountain.

Here, once, had flourished many far-flung silver mines. The old shaft houses, tunnels, mills, offices, miners' huts, were rotting away. But Eddie picked a fairly well preserved group of buildings far up the mountain-side. He unpacked his provisions into a shack that had once been the mine superintendent's office. Above the door a fading sign read "Good Luck Mining Co." Eddie glancing around, shuddered, grunted.

"I hope," he murmured, "my luck is better!"

* * * * *

The Hawkins rancho, nestling at the edge of the timber, looked strangely quiet and deserted. It was the day after the funeral. Eddie, tying up his bay in a place where it

could not be seen from the house, prayed that Valerie might be home.

He had risked a lot to see her; despite his roundabout trip from Squaw Mountain he had feared meeting someone, feared exchanging shots with one or more zealous man-hunters. But he had come through so far unseen.

Now, however, the real crisis was at hand.

Eddie stepped away from the timber, crawled through a barbed wire fence, walked steady, confidently, towards the rambling barns. He passed through them, hearing the voices of men, but avoiding their eyes.

The walk from the barn to the rear door of the house was more dangerous. But Eddie did it, quickly—head up, eyes neither to right nor to left. He looked anything but like a hunted murderer.

"*Senor Ed-deel!*" came a feminine exclamation.

Eddie bowed, courtly, to the old Mexican woman cook. But he did not stop in the kitchen. He pushed through to the front part of the house, expecting to find the sunny-haired Valerie in the big sitting room. He didn't. He met her sooner—in the long hallway.

"EDDIE!" Valerie cried, starting back as if she were seeing a ghost. Eddie smiled at her, reached for her hand.

"It's me, Valerie!" he said, soothingly. "It's really me!"

"Oh, they told me you were dead!" the girl, half cried, half sobbed, as she clung to him. "Your horse came back to the Q-B with bloodstains on the saddle and Tex Leonard, who was with the Conifer posse that chased you, came in with a story that he had seen you and fired on you—everyone thought he'd killed you, Eddie!"

The Q-B cowboy laughed mirthlessly.

"Tex always did have a good imagination," he said, lightly. "He probably shot at a stump—or a steer. But I don't mind his story!"

Then tersely, Eddie told Valerie of his flight, his hideout—and why he had risked the trip to the Hawkins rancho.

"I had to see you, kid," he said to her, softly. "I didn't want you to worry about me being hurt, or dead. The more who believe it for the present, though, the better off I am. If I'm to get the devil who killed your father—"

Valerie's head came up, eyes sparkling, lips parted.

"Eddie! You know who it is?"

But the cowpuncher shook his head sadly.

"I don't know, Valerie—I haven't the slightest idea," he said, unhappily. "That is another reason I came—have you no suspicions?"

"None," said Valerie.

"Has Sheriff Joe Daly?"

VALERIE didn't answer at once. Then she reached up and put her hands on Eddie's broad shoulders.

"I'm afraid that he has—and it's wrong!" she whispered. "You know how foolish excited Mexican help can talk! Some of the hands saw you running for the timber the other day—"

"They told Daly," cut in Eddie, "and he figures I'm the—"

"Yes," said the girl, nodding, tears coming to her eyes. "I tried to tell him how silly that was, how utterly impossible, how you happened to come here, with me, and that you were with me—"

"But he still thinks I killed your father!"

"He said," went on Valerie, "that you were on a rampage—that is what he called it. He accused you

of killing Tarey before I met you. And he insinuated that I was trying to shield you, to lie—"

"I didn't shoot Tarey—intentionally," said Eddie, awkwardly. "You see, I—but I'll have to tell you about *that* later. There's a man in that case—I've got to get him first—and I want to try to get the man in this case, Valerie—I've got twin trails to follow if I can ever pick them up—murder trails, kid, even if one of them is all messed up with my tracks. You're going to remain here—?" The girl nodded slowly—her face going pale.

"For a time," she answered, brokenly. "I—oh, I might as well tell you, Eddie—the rancho is mortgaged, heavily. I don't believe I can save it. Father died very, very poor—"

"Poor, Valerie?" asked Eddie, thunderstruck.

"Yes—I didn't know, didn't realize—how near poverty we were," said Valerie, sadly. "The place is mortgaged, the stock is, too. Father made a poor investment—he bought oil stock that didn't turn out good—put every penny he could raise in it—and—and—"

"Oil stock!" echoed Eddie, amazed.

"Yes, Eddie—oil stock—'The Million Dollar Land and Oil Co.,' it's called!" Valerie smiled queerly. "The bank in Vine Creek says it's quite worthless. I can't understand father buying it!"

"There's a lot of things," said Eddie, "that I don't understand!"

CHAPTER III

The Gulch Phantom

THERE was something "doing" in Vine Creek gulch, it was soon noised about. There was a man there, a stranger on a bay horse, who fled at the approach of anyone along the winding trail.

"It's probably an outlaw wanted in

the lower country, hiding out up there, living on berries and what his gun can drop," said some.

"It's probably Kincade himself," said others, more canny.

If Sheriff Joe Daly thought it was Kincade he said nothing about it. He organized a posse, however, and swept the gulch again, just as he had after old Tarey's riddled body had been found, and with as much luck. He realized, of course, that anyone hiding in the rugged gulch could easily elude pursuit.

THERE were too many untold miles of granite ledges, in steplike formations, along both slopes of the gulch; there were many natural caves, eroded through the ages and making ideal refuges; there were many fine lookout posts, from whence a smart man could detect others in the district—there was every chance, in other words—for an alert fellow to avoid capture indefinitely.

And that was one reason why Kincade was haunting the place.

But Eddie had a far graver reason, too. He wanted to find out, if it was humanly possible to discover, why old Tarey had been in the isolated gulch the morning of the shooting, amuck with two guns.

He wanted to find Tarey's trail in the gulch, before Tarey's progress had been halted—forever—by one of Eddie's own slugs. Eddie always shuddered at that thought. But there must have been a reason, he knew, for Tarey first firing at him as he rode innocently along the trail. Tarey, of course, had mistaken him for another.

But four days in the lonely gulch had brought the tireless Eddie no rewards. He had found nothing, except the unholy spot where he had felled the unfortunate Tarey. He could not trace Tarey's back trail in the rugged territory.

The fifth day Eddie spent in hiding. It was that day that Sheriff Joe Daly's posse wormed this way and that through the gulch in vain. The sixth day, while it brought no alarms, brought no results, either. The seventh day's search was likewise fruitless. But on the eighth day the Q-B puncher's persistence was rewarded. Scrambling around, as nimble, as alert, as cautious as a chipmonk, Eddie, working over a ledge of granite near where Tarey had fallen, but on the opposite side of the gulch, came upon telltale evidence. Here, behind a rocky barrier, someone, perhaps old Tarey himself, had sat and waited—for something—or someone, maybe for Eddie, to come up the trail!

There were six-gun shells, scattered on the rock; burnt matches, too, and, in the crevices of the rock, tobacco ashes!

Eddie, stumbling upon *that* find, stood as if petrified.

"I wonder," he mused, in the long minute he stood thus motionless, "if that old codger did wait here for me, saw me coming, slipped down quickly, crossed the trail, and came up the other side, firing as he came? What advantage would be his from below the trail that wasn't his from this hideout spot? Maybe he ran for his horse, but it got away from him, meeting me as it tore up the trail!"

THE silent rocks, however, could not answer Eddie's questions. The puncher, frowning, lingered over his find, examining the cartridges, the match stubs, the ashes, even, with the most painstaking care. Finally, with mounting hope, he circled out around the spot, trusting to find other evidence, but in that he was doomed to disappointment.

Then he came back to the cartridges, the match stubs, the ashes.

Slowly, deliberately, he picked up the cartridges, pocketing them. There were six—an extra load for a revolver. He picked up the stubs of the burnt matches—many—and placed them carefully in one of the pockets of his cowhide vest. After that he spread out his handkerchief, and with his pocketknife and fingers, managed to recover a lot of the ashes from the crevices of the ledge. He knotted the handkerchief carefully.

CHAPTER IV

Crossed Trails

OLD HERMIT BILLINGS, tilted back in his rickety chair, began to shake his bearded head slowly as Eddie finished his impassioned plea.

"Nope, I kain't do it!" announced Billings, positively, as the Q-B cowpoke finished his request. "I kain't go into Conifer asking no questions about tobacco!"

Great beads of perspiration stood out on Eddie's forehead.

"I tell you, Billings, you got to go!" he insisted. "I can't go to Conifer—it's far too hot there for an outlaw like me—oh, I'm an outlaw in Conifer's eyes, sure enough! I'd be nailed pronto. I don't know another soul I could send in—I don't dare go near Valerie Hawkins, for her ranch is too risky. I don't dare try the old Q-B, either, for the same reason. You're the only one—"

The old hermit brought his chair down to the floor with a bang.

"But this tobacco—why in hades is it so important?"

"I've told you!" cried Eddie, "but I'll tell you again! Up the gulch, where Tarey was slain, I found a place where Tarey—or someone—sat and smoked and waited. I got some tobacco ash there. It compares with ash from a certain tobacco I

bought recently in Conifer—I bought a number of brands—but the brand which ashes compares to the ashes I found in the gulch is a special brand the Conifer storekeeper told me he got for a special customer—all I want you to find out is that customer's name—Tarey, or whoever it was—get me?"

Old Billings blinked like an owl for a full minute.

"If it was Tarey—?" he hazarded.

"I don't think it will be," said Eddie. "If it isn't I'm going to be mighty interested in the fellow it is—I'll be wanting to ask him, personal, what he was doing in Vine Creek gulch, behind that rock—"

The hermit got to his feet. He pulled his hat down over his eyes—they were twinkling eyes now, however. He laid a hand on Eddie's arm.

"Son, I'd go to Hades for you," said Billings, warmly. "So, of course, I can go to Conifer—easier."

Eddie stuck out his hand impulsively.

"You're a friend, sure enough!"

But Billings grinned and shook his head slowly.

"Maybe I'm just a selfish old coot," he remarked, "but I got to thinking, while you were arguing, how easy it might have been for one of them murdering skunks to come up here and get me while they were getting old Tarey or old Hawkins. A lot of people think I'm rich—one of them skunks might still come for me—so if I help you try to get 'em I help myself—I'm going to Conifer for you, son!"

EDDIE, galloping back towards Squaw Mountain, forty-eight hours later, was in high spirits. He had been to the metropolitan town of Gunnison, far to the southwest, and there, by careful questioning of several of the large town's bankers

had learned the answer to a question that had been sorely troubling him. He had found out who, in the Vine Creek country, had been promoting and selling stock in the Million Dollar Land and Oil company—the stock that old Hawkins had sunk his fortune in—and the information cheered him considerably.

EDDIE'S lips set in a hard, firm line. He had made up his mind to call on the stock promoter.

After that he rode harder, but more watchfully. He was getting back in the Vine Creek territory now and he had to keep off the main trails.

"Come on, boy—let's go!" he urged, impatiently.

The bay responded eagerly. They sped along the lonesome trail. An hour, two hours—and the familiar outlines of Squaw Mountain loomed ahead. Eddie, relaxing, sighed with relief.

"It'll be easy from here—," he began, hopefully.

But at that second a rider filled the narrow trail ahead of him. Instinctively, almost blindly, Eddie went for his guns—only to drop them back into their holsters with a grunt of mingled surprise and joy.

"Billings! You scared me half to death!"

"Yeah," said the old hermit, pulling his mule to one side. "I figured to do just that—why, boy, you was riding in a trance! I thought maybe you was asleep in the saddle and that would be bad. You got to be wide awake around here, son! I never realized until I went to Conifer just how bad they want you for that Tarey killing—and some of 'em are saying now that you killed Hawkins, too, and that the girl is lying to protect you—kid, you got to keep under plenty of cover—"

But that was not news to Eddie.

"I know," he said, eagerly, "but what about that special brand of tobacco, Billings—was it Tarey's? Quick, I'm dying to know—"

"It was not," said the hermit, solemnly.

"Then who—?"

"The Conifer storekeeper buys it special for a fellow named Brackett Sterling, a newcomer in Conifer," said Billings, softly.

"Brackett Sterling!" exclaimed Eddie. He took a card from his breast pocket with trembling fingers. On it was the name of the oil stock promoter he had obtained in Gunnison. He looked at his own scrawl on the card. The letters seemed to jump up at him—"B-r-a-c-k-e-t-t S-t-e-r-l-i-n-g" — yes. Brackett Sterling!

CHAPTER V

More Devilment!

THE hermit's spare clothes were illfitting — but they served their purpose well. Eddie got through Conifer without being recognized. He got to the second floor of the Conifer bank building safely.

There, just outside the door with the name "Brackett Sterling" on it, he hesitated long enough to pull a black mask down from under his hat, over his face. He adjusted it hastily, so he could see through the slits he had previously cut into it. Then he opened the door.

"Allright!" he said, as he entered, "lift 'em up!"

The girl stenographer, busy at the front desk, did more—she screamed. But the heavy-set, slick looking man at the big mahogany desk made no outcry. He lifted his hands—but very deliberately. Eddie, his heart pounding against his ribs, seemed to guess his thought.

"Don't go for any gun," he ad-

vised, warily, "for if you do I'll have to plug you—and you wouldn't like that!"

The broker asked a question—slowly, smoothly.

"What do you want?"

"All you got," answered Eddie, tersely. "This is a holdup, in case you ain't sure. Get back against that wall—both of you!"

STERLING got up out of his chair without any show of nervousness. He backed to the wall, his face expressionless, except for the eyes—the eyes, Eddie saw, were smouldering. The stenographer, exhibiting no such poise, backed to the wall hurriedly.

"Now don't move—please!" suggested Eddie.

He jerked open the top drawer of the mahogany desk. A .38 caliber revolver nestled there, as Eddie had suspected. He stuck it under his belt. He ransacked the other drawers, keeping an eye on his pair of captives. But he found nothing he wanted, apparently.

Then he crossed quickly to the safe, which stood open. There was money in a drawer there, stacks of greenbacks, and he took them, stuffing his pockets. There were packets of bonds, too, and he laid them aside, on the desk—and all the time he could hear the hard breathing of Sterling.

"One move," cautioned Eddie, "and I'll shoot!"

The broker, who had been sizing up his visitor, seemed to relax, it appeared to the watchful Eddie. He became less rigid, less tense, less likely to spring, Eddie decided.

"You've got everything," said the broker, finally.

"Maybe," admitted Eddie, stepping away from the safe. "Turn around, face to the wall," he ordered. "I'm looking you over, brother!"

But the broker's pockets yielded slight harvest—a few dollars, a fountain pen, a watch, a sack of tobacco, a pipe—all of which Eddie carefully extracted by reaching around the man.

"Now," said Eddie, jumping back, "you can turn around again!"

The broker swung around. There was an ugly smile on his face.

"You'll pay for this, fellow!" he remarked, quietly.

"The sheriff here can't catch me," said Eddie, suavely, "and I'd like to see you try—now, I'm going—but if you so much as stick your nose out of that door until you count a hundred I'll blow your nose off for you—understand?"

The broker made no reply as Eddie scooped up the packages of bonds. "I'm saying *adios*," said Eddie, backing toward the door.

"You'll pay," came the broker's parting shot as Eddie slammed the door. A second later, making for the stairs, Eddie ripped off his mask, holstered his gun, nodded grimly at a tall apparition waiting.

"Go ahead!" he whispered. "Keep him away from the windows!"

MR. BILLINGS went ahead, as nimbly as a cat. As Eddie struck the stairs in full stride he heard the old hermit's booming voice.

"What's going on here, anyhow?"

"What's going on?" repeated Brackett Sterling, angrily, as he glared at the newcomer. "What's it to you—who are you, anyway?"

"Nobody—much," said Billings, lazily. "I'm just an old hermit from the hills, but I thought you might be in trouble, seeing I just happen to see the lowest, meanest, cheapest outlaw I ever knowed come backing out of your door with a gun in his hand—"

"You knew that fellow?" cried the

broker, hopefully. Billings grinned.

"Knew him?" he echoed with a chuckle as he saw that the startled broker hadn't thought of the windows yet. "Sure I knew him—he was masked—but I know them hands of his, them long legs—the way he carries himself—and he knew me—for he waved a gun at me as much as to say he'd plug me if I tried to stop him—so I never!"

"Who is he?"

"Name's Curtis," lied Billings, solemnly. "I know his hideout, too—he's just a cheap crook, a bluffer—"

The broker made a wry face.

"He isn't so very cheap," he contradicted, mirthlessly. "He got around \$3,000 in currency out of the safe yonder, not to mention a small fortune in bonds—"

"You shouldn't keep so much in your safe, brother!"

"Well, I had it there," snapped the broker, peevishly.

Then he seemed to remember something. He jumped for the windows, whence he could get a good view of the street below. But he saw no sign of his late visitor there. Eddie, losing no time, had already disappeared around the near corner. The broker looked at his visitor again.

"We'll go to the sheriff with this, Mister," he said, smoothly. "You can tell the sheriff who this mug was and where—"

Mr. Billings held up a hand.

"ME and the sheriff here are not friends," he lied again, smiling. "We belong to different political parties—and besides, he's no good. And besides again, I think I ought to get a reward if—"

"I'll pay you a reward!" thundered Sterling, excitedly.

"I'll tell you what!" exclaimed Billings, with a great show of enthusiasm. "You and me can catch

that crook, Mister! Sure we can! He's a bluff. I know where he hides. I'll help you catch him. We can show up that sheriff and get your man and your money—provided you'll pay me—oh, say—about \$10 reward. Is that too much?"

The broker couldn't conceal his satisfaction.

"You help me get him," he said, "and I'll pay you \$50—it'll be worth that much for me to put a bullet through his thick head. I like your suggestion. If the sheriff was along I couldn't shoot him—so we won't take the sheriff. You and I will go just as soon as I borrow a gun—but we won't bring any prisoner back!"

"You're sure right, brother!" agreed Mr. Billings.

CHAPTER VI

Trapped!

IF BILLINGS, the old hermit of Squaw Mountain, had expected Brackett Sterling, the broker, to show signs of distress on the long horseback chase after Eddie, Billings was bitterly disappointed. The broker, renting a horse at the Conifer feed stables, had set the pace, almost, over every inch of the pursuit, constantly urging Billings to greater speed—despite the fact that Billings rode an old mule.

But it was a long trip, just the same. Billings, on pretense of taking several shortcuts, led the unsuspecting broker off on dim, hazy trails where it was impossible to make good time. There was no use in getting Mr. Sterling to Squaw Mountain before Eddie could be all set to receive him, Billings reasoned.

He led the broker off on another rambling, mountainous trail, and finally, pretending an excitement he didn't feel at all, he drew rein at

the top of a long grade and pointed with a shaking finger.

"That's Squaw Mountain yonder," he said, tremblingly. "You see those shacks on the slope there, brother?"

"I see some old mining properties!"

"Well, in one of them we'll find that robber guy!"

BUT if Billings thought the broker would show more prudence, more caution now, he was wrong. Sterling was eager to go straight for the shacks, but Billings led him down into a gulch, over a creek, and into a patch of timber. There they left their mounts, and, with the hermit in the lead, proceeded on foot along a granite ledge, until, at length, Billings stopped again and put his finger to his lips.

"Sshh!" he whispered. "I see him—in that red shack—"

"Yes!" said the broker, nodding grimly. "I see his old hat—I'd know that hat in hades—it's him, sure enough!"

"He sets with his back to the wall reading, often," supplied Billings, confidently. "His hat just shows above the window sill—"

Sterling, lifting a gun he had borrowed in Conifer, grunted.

"Say," protested Billings, "you're going to give him a chance for his life, ain't you? You don't mean to shoot him—"

Sterling let the gun answer for him.

Bang—came the crash of the .45 and the hat in the window wavered, fell out of sight. But it was old Billings who let out the triumphant shout almost instantly.

"Brother, you nailed him—you nailed him!"

"Of course I nailed the dog!" said Sterling, with some heat. "I can use firearms. Now I wonder—"

Billings hastened to put in a quick word of advice.

"Run for the window!" he urged. "I'll be right behind you—I figure you knocked him half-way across the shack—you'll likely find him face down, dead—but it might be wise to pump another slug or two into him—I'll cover the door if you want—"

"Come on!" cried the broker, savagely.

Billings went, right on Sterling's heels. There wasn't a sound from the shack as the pair raced over the rough ground towards it. Billings swung to one side, rushing the closed door, but Sterling, as Billings had hoped, went straight for the window, his gun ahead of him.

What happened when Sterling reached the window and started to poke his gun through the glassless opening, Billings, quick as he was, didn't see. There was a shout, a curse, and the .45 was literally wrenched from Sterling and another .45, not Sterling's, came into view—pointed straight at the startled broker's gaping mouth.

"Don't move—you idiot!" came the sharp command.

Sterling didn't move. He stood as if rooted to the spot for what seemed to Billings a full minute. Then, as if suddenly realizing his predicament, he put his hands up slowly in a gesture of surrender.

BUT at that moment the old hermit awoke to the fact that he had missed his cue. He stepped forward himself now, nimbly for an old man, and poked Sterling in the ribs, none too gently, either, with the muzzle of his long black pistol.

"Step into the shack, brother!" he invited, coldly.

Eddie, in the window, saw the look of consternation on the broker's face at Billings' order—the broker,

apparently, was just awakening to the fact that he had been fooled, led to slaughter, by the old hermit.

"So—you sold me out, eh?" snarled Sterling, recovering his wits.

"I NEVER sold you nothing—nor bought any fake oil stock from you, either!" said Billings, darkly. "Step into the shack, brother!"

Sterling stepped, seeing there was nothing else he could do.

Inside he was rather rudely thrust into a chair by Eddie himself. Eddie, with a glance at Billings, holstered his .45. The hermit, his pistol ready, glared at Sterling.

"He can ride—well," said Billings, enigmatically, to Eddie, "and of course, you saw what he did to the hat—"

Eddie nodded slowly.

"He was eager to bump you off without any urging from me," went on the hermit. "I'd say he ain't got no human blood in his veins—"

"Keep your coyote ravings to yourself, you double-crosser!" flared up the broker, suddenly. "I'm not a robber, anyway—or a robber's assistant. Now that you two buzzards have me here, at your mercy, what is it you want—a ransom, I suppose!"

Eddie Kincade shook his head solemnly.

"For a man who makes his living by skinning others you aren't even half smart," charged Eddie, with a laugh. "We robbed you—we got a lot of your ill-gotten gains, Sterling. But we wanted you—we wanted you out here on lonely Squaw Mountain where we can have a funeral without anyone butting in—where we can bury a rat without witnesses—"

"What do you mean?" cried Sterling, starting to his feet.

But Billings' old pistol waved him back into the chair.

"I mean," said Eddie, "that there

is a lot in that old saying about setting a crook to catch a crook. I'm supposed to be a first class crook, a two-time murderer. Your reputation is somewhat similar, I believe. I've caught you and justice is going to have her fling now. I'm going to kill you, Sterling—kill you as I would any other venomous snake—except we'll do you the kindness of burying you later!"

The white-faced broker licked his parched lips.

"You're kidding me," he said, hesitantly. "You're joking—"

Eddie drew a .45 from a holster with tantalizing slowness.

"You were eager to kill me—and tried to," he said, grimly. "I'm eager to kill you—and I'm going to—say your prayers!"

But the broker had no time for prayers. Instead, he dropped to the floor, pleading, begging, whining, while Eddie and Billings exchanged glances. Then, touching him with the toe of a dusty boot, Eddie tossed a paper to Sterling's knees.

"Read that—and sign it—if it's right—and if you want to live!" he directed. "I'll give you three minutes in which to do it!"

But in less than a minute, it seemed, the broker, gasping, perspiring, was fumbling in a pocket for a pencil!

CHAPTER VII

Hands Up!

EDDIE rode up to the rambling Hawkins ranch house as boldly as if he didn't know it wasn't being watched—for him. The white-faced Valerie met him at the door, wistful, terrified, too.

"Oh, Eddie, you shouldn't have come!" she cried. "They've been here—searching for you—I think they're near—"

But Eddie swung off his horse with leisure and confidence.

"Listen, Valerie," he said, smiling into her troubled face, "I had to come—I've got something for you—about \$3,000 in cold cash—and around \$5,000 in good bonds—"

The girl stared in astonishment.

"Cash! Bonds!"

"Yes," said Eddie, softly. "I got the cash and the bonds from a Mr. Brackett Sterling, a broker in Conifer—the gentleman who swindled your father out of about \$10,000—I'm sorry I only got back around \$8,000—but it should help; Sterling, fortunately, had the stuff in his safe, ready to jump out with it at the slightest scare, I guess—and I took it from him—because it's your money!"

The girl tried to speak, failed. Tears came to her eyes.

"I found out in Gunnison that he was the gent selling that Million Dollar Land and Oil Company stock," went on Eddie, smoothly. "So I called on him, took back what he took from you, kid, and—"

He saw the girl's expression change, heard the step behind him.

"Hands up, Kincade!" came the terse order.

EDDIE obeyed and swung around with a queer smile on his tanned face, to confront Sheriff Joe Daly of Vine Creek.

"Hello, Sheriff—you want me?"

"You know I want you, Kincade!" came the sheriff's quick answer. Eddie saw other men swarming up. "The sheriff at Conifer wants you, too—there was some funny doings over there, a robbery—and a fellow disappeared—and you were recognized fleeing out of town; but they can whistle for you over there, seeing we want you in Vine Creek for the murder of Tarey and possibly for the murder of—"

But Eddie shook his head hastily.

"Don't say it, Sheriff—it isn't true!" he interrupted. "That robbery was on the level—I just took back stuff belonging to Miss Hawkins here—and as for the man who disappeared—he's safe. Also, this paper sticking out of my breast pocket might be interesting—"

THE sheriff snatched the paper, cautiously, suspiciously.

"Read it aloud to the boys," prompted Eddie, "and to Valerie!"

But the sheriff read it to himself first.

Then, with an amazed look, he did as Eddie suggested—he read it aloud:

"I hereby confess that I shot and killed Old Man Tarey in Vine Creek gulch and also shot and killed Hawkins at his ranch as the result of some deals I had with them in oil stock.

Signed,

Brackett Sterling."

"Yes," said Eddie, nodding, and not waiting for any of the hundred and one questions he knew would be shot at him.

"When I heard I was accused of killing Tarey I knew I'd have to get the man who did it to clear myself. I was in the gulch. I shot at Tarey after he shot at me, but I didn't shoot to hit him. But I saw him drop. I saw him dead. The man who killed him did so just as I fired at him.

"Well, before I could start I found out from Valerie here that her father was in trouble. I came here, just as he was killed. But I smelled tobacco smoke in the room—tobacco smoke—not gun smoke—and it was a funny, sweet odor. I'll pass up a lot of details. I got some tobacco in Conifer—tested out a number of brands—found the brand that gave off the aroma similar to that I had smelled

in the room here just after Hawkins was shot—and I knew Hawkins didn't smoke!

"Meantime, searching the gulch, I found out where someone had sat and waited. There were shells there, burnt matches, tobacco ashes—and the ashes compared to the ashes from the same special brand of tobacco whose aroma I had noticed here. I raided the Tarey ranch for samples of his cartridges, matches, tobacco—I got the first two and they didn't compare. I didn't get any of Tarey's tobacco, however.

"Then I found out who had sold Hawkins some fake oil stock. I had a friend find out who was buying the special kind of tobacco in Conifer. It was the same bird in both cases—Brackett Sterling, a broker. I called on him—stuck him up—got his money, gun, papers, tobacco—and found in the papers that he had had dealings not only with Hawkins, but with Tarey as well—and his tobacco was, in truth, the kind I had found in ashes in the gulch, smelled here.

"I HAD my friend lure Sterling to Squaw Mountain, where I was hiding, even if I was a sleuth—I was an outlaw sleuth, having to do it all on my own and keep out of sight, too. On the way out Sterling proved to my friend that he could ride well, shoot well, and had no scruples against cold-blooded killing. We tricked him, caught him, got the signed confession—so I am not guilty of murder, nor of robbery, seeing he won't press the

charge—and the horse I stole from the Cotter brothers is here, to be returned to them."

Sheriff Joe Daly spoke up in a hushed tone.

"Your story sounds right, Eddie," he said, "but where is Sterling—and who is this friend you mention—who can substantiate—"

EDDIE, dropping his hands without asking permission, put his fingers to his lips, whistled loudly. An answering whistle came back from the timber. A second later old Billings appeared, with the bound Sterling. They came walking over towards the house.

"This guy here is sure repentant, Sheriff," was Billings' offhand greetings. "He's sorry he murdered those two men when they got sore after finding out he bilked them in the oil stock—ain't you, Sterling?"

The wan, utterly broken Sterling nodded miserably.

"I got a quick temper," he muttered. "I'm sorry I did it!"

The sheriff, satisfied with the one look at Sterling that he was indeed guilty, turned to Eddie with an apology.

"Eddie, I'm sorry I was so rough—I regret I ordered you to put your hands up—I offer my deepest regrets right this minute!"

But Eddie, with a satisfied smile, was looking hard at Valerie.

"There is only one person can rightly tell me to put my hands up," he laughed, "and that's Dan Cupid—how about it, Valerie?"

The girl blushed, and the crowd understood.

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A Larry Weston Novelette

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Author of "Wings of War," "Avenger of Lo Chang," etc.

CHAPTER I

Sinister Warning

THE Chinese general who commanded the Peiping garrison was visibly trembling. And there was plenty of reason. For he looked down into the stark dead face of the general to whom he had intended reporting. The dead man's throat had been cut from ear to ear. On his chest was a piece of thin rice

paper upon which Chinese characters had been done in red paint.

General Hsa Lo Pe had just translated those characters for the benefit of the languid appearing young American adventurer to whom he intended entrusting the most important—to the general—mission of his career. The general's life hung on the success of that mission. He had just told Larry Weston, free lance of fortune, the meaning of the char-

acters: "This is the Ta Kuei's vengeance. Let all other tyrants beware!"

Larry Weston flicked his trousers leg with his cane—inside which was a razor sharp sword.

"And you were saying what, about the Ta Kuei, that it can have no real connection with this murder?"

"Just that. Our enemies, whom all the world knows, are using other means to bring China to their feet—a reign of terror. General Ya Che is the first to be murdered.

"**T**HERE will be many others, of that I am sure. The warning shows it. I may be next. High officials at Nanking may be next. We may all go at once, as this officer went. And not even the boldest newspaper in the world would dare lay the blame at the doors of our enemy. Why? Because it is so obviously the work of the Ta Kuei."

"Just what, may I ask, is or are the Ta Kuei?"

Hsa Lo Pe shrugged.

"Nothing more than a Mongolian religious dance! How can a dance have anything to do with this?"

"Maybe little, maybe much," said Larry Weston softly. "The dancers in this particular ceremony, if I know anything of your more uncivilized compatriots, will all be masked?"

"Of course."

"And anybody can hide behind a mask!"

"Quite right. You can't tell Mongol women from men. Matter of fact, they are often stronger, greater fighters than men. And they are big people.

"Whoever hides behind their masks, to take part in the ceremony, must be big, too. Smaller men would be instantly discovered. The dance this year, as usual, will be held in the very shadow of Bogdo-Ulla, near Urga—and for an outsider even

to look at the ceremony may mean death."

Weston leaned toward the frightened general.

"You have your suspicions? You have some idea of the identity of the man or men who did this?"

Hsa Lo Pe looked around as though he feared that the walls had ears. Then he whispered to Larry Weston.

"I know of a professional killer, who understands all the arts of the dacoits of India. Nobody knows the number of his kills. He is highly paid, and he commits murder as other men take on an ordinary task for pay. The identity of his victims mean nothing.

"He would even slay his most recent employer if another were found who would pay him more.

"**I** KNOW all this because Ya Che left me a note. I found it in a desk. He expected something like this, which is why he sent for me, instructing me to bring you with me if you were in Peking. In the note was a name, and a description. The name means nothing. The killer may have many names. But his description is something else again. He has saber scars on his face, relics I think, of Heidelberg, but the name he is last known to have used scarcely suggests Heidelberg. It is—Sergei Popov."

Larry Weston sucked in his breath at the sound of the name. He had heard it several times in his life. He had heard it whispered in the secret councils of the Lo Chang of Tibet. He had heard it among the Goloks of the high plateaus, in Manchuria and Korea, wherever in the Orient his adventurous feet had led him. A dread name. The name of a man no single man could destroy, a man who had outwitted a myriad of would-be Nemesis.

"The use of the name of the Ta Kuei is a challenge," said Weston. "At least that's my hunch, and I always play my hunches. I'm taking on the job of getting this Popov. Tell me more about him."

Hsa Lo Pe complied, ending with the ominous statement:

"IF he has taken up with the Mongols, which he might well do since he is known to have a weakness for Oriental women, he will have their power behind him. And that can be terrible. Have you ever heard of the dogs of Shallajai?"

Weston nodded grimly.

"They are tough to handle if a man is thrown to them, bound and gagged, with broken arms and legs, or even if he is merely turned loose on the desert among them."

"I'll take my chances," said Weston. "You will deposit ten thousand dollars to my credit in the Bank of Taiwan at Shanghai?"

"Of course."

"Thanks," said Weston, grinning, "it won't be necessary. I just wanted to see if you would haggle. That you don't proves your sincerity. I don't do this sort of thing for money. I do it because I like adventure—and hate cold blooded murderers. Besides, I have a crow to pick with this Sergei Popov. I'll be on my way. Keep your nose clean!"

From the shadows at the foot of Bogdo-Ulla, Larry Weston, whom not even his friend would have recognized as Weston, stared out at the weird dance of the Ta Kuei, where Mongol men and women moved slowly and sinuously, not particularly gracefully or beautifully, to the strains of weird Mongolian music.

There was hell in the strange dance—hell and death and murder, though on the surface the dance was one which honored the Living God, the Dalai Lama, worshiped in the

flesh by the Mongols of Urga and the surrounding desert.

During the day outsiders had been admitted to the dance, but they had gone with the setting of the sun and the real orgy began. Over the place of the dance rose the stench of unwashed bodies, of skin clothing—for the Mongol seldom bathed and wore his clothing until it rotted from his body. When this last occurred he merely donned a new robe over the old one and waited for the old one to fall apart inside the new one.

Weston tried to distinguish men from women, but found it impossible. He knew that the average Mongol woman was the match for almost any man at rough and tumble, that they were without fear in the usual sense, without morals of any kind, and even looked like men when their faces were exposed—hard, cruel women who asked no odds of any man they didn't make themselves.

IF Larry were discovered here he would be torn to pieces. He knew that he walked close to death. But he wasn't afraid. A thrill of anticipatory excitement went through him.

Hell would doubtless break loose if he were discovered; but somewhere among all the dancers, he was sure, was the man known as Sergei Popov—for the man followed such rituals as these for a purpose: such dances always brought to view the wealth, in jewels and precious stones, of the dancers. And Mongol women—all Mongols were rich—wore their wealth upon their persons. It would take a man with courage to try to steal from the Mongols, but Sergei Popov, by reputation at least, had no fear in him.

Larry Weston, his last work completed on his Mongol dress, straightened. One could never have told him from a Mongol woman, from a

Ta Kuei dancer. There was one thing. He did not know the ritual or the responses, and few words of their dialect. But there would be ways of getting around that, he was sure. He never doubted the surety of his own native wit.

He rose, sauntered toward the place of the dance, down a narrow path which led from somewhere in the heart of Bogdo-Ulla. It was no difficult matter to get into the place, for couples were constantly entering and leaving.

The jungles all about the depression in which the dance was held were given over to secrets at which he could guess with little trouble. A haven of opportunity for a man like Sergei Popov.

A man came out of the woods to Larry's right, stumbled down the trail as one far gone in liquor. He was alone. Larry darted aside, into the woods whence the man had come . . . and found, just off the trail, a Mongol woman, stripped of her wealth, dead, with her throat cut from ear to ear.

Sergei Popov was busy, it seemed! And he had just seen his quarry. Quickly Larry retraced his steps, knowing there was nothing he could do for the woman; that if he were caught near her, he would be accused and destroyed without a hearing.

He all but overtook the tall man at the edge of the dancing space, was so close to him that it would seem the two had returned together to the dance.

LOUND over the place rose the wails and cries of the dancers, which sounded like those of souls in torment. Torsos and hips moved to the strains of hellish music. Faces were covered by hideous masks set in satanic smiles that never changed—huge heads, bulbous noses, earless

horrors, the faces of animals such as had never walked on the face of the earth, faces born of the nightmares of mask-making artisans whose brains must have crawled with the maggots of insanity.

Weston's own mask was a devil's head, with short horns and a fixed leer meant for a smile. He had attained it in Peking, from a temple at the foot of the Western Hills, in the shadow of the Temple of Azure Clouds. There were others here so nearly like it that he knew it would pass muster.

BUT he must make no mistake. He must unmask his man and get him away alive, killing him only if it were absolutely necessary. He had no compunction about killing the man, none whatever. He was so many times a murderer that death constituted but slight punishment.

If for nothing more than his latest killing, done in cold blood on a woman who had been too kind and careless and for the sake of her trinkets, Sergei Popov merited torture and death. Weston didn't go in for torture, but if he were to take the man back to the tender mercies of Hsa Lo Pe—

He tried to imitate the movements of the dance, thankful for a photographic memory. But through the eye slits in his mask he kept his gaze on the man he had followed out of the shadows under Bogdo-Ulla.

He edged his way through the half crazed devotees, inching his way toward the killer who was one with the dancers of Ta Kuei. Closer and closer he came, making plans as he went.

One swift blow to the button, and he would grab his man and try to get away with him, trusting to the suddenness of his action to stun the dancers and give him a few seconds of grace.

The killer's face was covered by the usual devil's mask, and he was taking a chance that the man upon whom his attentions were centered was not the right man—but even as he reached him, the man lifted his hand, moved aside his mask—and Larry Weston saw a white face underneath, scored by saber scars—the face of Sergei Popov!

CHAPTER II

Terror by Night

THEN Larry Weston moved. He never believed in waiting. There seemed no possibility that he could lose. His next move would be dictated entirely by what transpired after the blow was struck. He knew it would have to be a terrific blow, for Sergei Popov was supposed to have a jaw of iron, had in fact once been a fighter of some note. But even the hardest-jawed man would drop if belted by Larry Weston, when he did not expect a blow. The end justified the means.

So Larry faced his quarry and swung a wicked right to the man's jaw, aiming to strike just below the devil mask. His aim was true. His fist spatted against the flesh, and instantly he knew that he had made a mistake. Fist against flesh did not sound or feel like fist against flesh.

The man dropped with a sigh—his devil mask rolled off. The face of "Sergei Popov" also rolled off, to disclose itself as a flesh mask in the form and fashion of the man Weston sought, while under it was the brown skin of a Mongol!

The music stopped with a weird shrieking. The dancers paused in whatever postures the happening found them. A woman, in the midst of the dance, had struck a man with her fist and knocked him out.

Mongols did not, necessarily, use

their fists. They wrestled their opponents down, broke their backs, ripped out their eyes, or mangled them in other ways.

So the savage blow was in itself a give-away. And a man's voice lifted in a sudden burst of dialect. Larry could understand no word—but when, immediately after the words were spoken, they came in English, he knew that he had been unmasked.

"It is not a woman, but a man, a foreigner—and a spy! Take him!"

For a brief moment Larry was bewildered. It flashed across his mind that the man he had knocked out had some connection with Sergei Popov. Popov, expecting pursuit, had laid his plans carefully.

He must have guessed that someone would be sent against him, who would seek him out among the dancers, and so had merely used a killer, instructed him in his own methods—and an innocent Mongol woman, avid for forbidden adventure—only it was not forbidden among Mongols—had paid for curiosity anent a stalwart stranger. Larry was only sorry that his blow had not been brutal enough to cause death.

HIS hands went to his garments, which had been constructed for just this emergency. In a thrice the clothing of Mongolia slipped from him, leaving him in nondescript khaki, with the remnants of "Ta Kuei" in folds about his feet.

His devil mask he did not remove for a moment. As well keep his identity secret for a time. They already knew he was a foreigner and that could not be hidden.

And now a high cry rose from the Mongols. He understood no word, but menace has a tone which is unmistakable, no matter in what language it be couched.

There was a surging among the

dancers. The voice rose again, even as Weston hesitated for a moment, seeking among the Mongols for the man who had shouted in English—which not one in a hundred of the Mongols would understand.

The shouter had depended on the drama about Larry Weston to hide the fact that he too was a foreigner. Besides, he probably had privileges among the Mongols. Sergei Popov had, and the speaker had probably been the slayer Larry Weston wished to lay by the heels.

They hurled themselves at him then, as though a command had been given—which it had—as though all had been puppets pulled by strings in the hands of a single prompter. There was no fear in them.

Gleaming blades appeared from under the weird garments of the devotees, eager all of them to wipe out the sacrilege which the presence of Larry Weston had brought to Bogdo-Ulla, the sacred mountain.

Larry darted away, knowing that his chances were very slight. Out here in the open every Mongol knew the lay of the land better than Weston could possibly know it. He would be tracked down. They were too many for him, would tear him limb from limb. But back among the buildings of Urgan—

THAT was the place. It was a long race, in which he would compete with running men and men on fleet Mongol ponies, but for the moment he had his freedom and felt reasonably sure of keeping it.

He plunged into the woods, while the crashing of brush behind him told him that the Mongols were in swift pursuit, their knives eager for the taste of his blood.

He did not think of himself as running away, but only as picking the place of combat. He was thankful beyond measure for the fact that he

always kept himself in the best possible physical condition.

He ran with the fleetness of a deer. The shout rose again. He didn't understand, but the resultant sounds, the cries of the devotees told him what was happening. While the first pursuers were beating the bushes for him, riders were racing for their horses to surround the woods and catch him if he came out.

HE turned aside, determined to keep to the edge of the woods, to break from cover at the first opportunity. His hands were before his face, so that he should not knock his brains out against the harsh bolls of trees. He hurled aside the devil mask with a sigh of relief.

A huge form came at him suddenly—two of them—he knew that one was a man, one a woman, whom he had all but surprised in the shadows. They had understood the cries from the clearing, knew that a defiler had been unmasked in the shadow of Bogdo-Ulla.

Weston scarcely paused in his running. His left went to the face of one.

He crossed his right even as the one fell—and he didn't know whether it was the man or the woman. The second one—here he did not pause either.

He lowered his head and smashed with all his weight, straight into midriff of his enemy. Both were down, groaning. One was unconscious from his blows. And now a voice pursued him, again in English. He appreciated the guile of the man—whose words could well be taken for those of the man they pursued.

"Hsa Lo Pe chooses his men with little care! You must know that there is no chance for you!"

Larry Weston did not answer. There were too many beaters back whence the voice had come for him

to await the arrival of the shouter. Better try the old Roman trick of scattering his enemies and defeating them in detail.

He ran on. Loud now over the other sounds, rose the stampeding noise of racing horses. The riders of Mongolia were on the way. Scores of horses were in pursuit, scouring the edge of the woods.

Larry kept close to the fringe, racing in the general direction of Urga. Horses passed him, so close he could have seen, almost touched them, had it not been for the woods. He must distance his pursuers on foot a bit further before he made his next move.

He increased his stride, held his racing speed for five minutes. He guessed that he had traveled all of a mile. To his left were still the sounds of many horses, the shouts of men and women who thought they had discovered him among the shadows.

He broke from covert, hiding in the darkness. Out across a plain he could see the horsemen, fantastic figures under a pale moon. Many dashed back and forth, covering every inch of the woods. One must eventually come close to the edge of the woods where he stood.

A horse shied away, smelling him. The rider, understanding that something was amiss, whirled the animal on a dime, lifted a gleaming weapon to strike out among the shadows. And Larry Weston moved.

IT wasn't easy to reach a Mongolian pony, but the animal was held in tight rein by its rider, which gave Larry Weston his chance. With a single leap, arms flung wide, he got his hands on the rider, used the man—or woman—as a lever by which to vault atop the animal behind the rider.

This done, so quickly that none of

the other riders could have seen exactly what had happened, Larry did two things—he snatched the weapon, a gleaming short sword, from the hand of his adversary, and knocked that one from the horse with a savage blow behind the ear.

Then he set himself the task of handling the horse. Fortunately it was already headed toward Urga, and in its maddened fear it had the winged feet of Pegasus. It was away like the wind, running low with its belly to the ground.

Larry leaned over the animal's neck, urging it to speed and more speed. Behind him rose a thin wailing cry, and he knew that his recent adversary had given the alarm.

He looked back. Shouts followed him, shouts which the horse understood, for it hesitated a moment in its stride, as though to slow down, or turn back in answer.

LARRY hated to do what he next did, but between cruelty to an animal and his own life there could be no hesitation as to choice. He pressed the point of his sword against the animal's rump. The brute squealed with pain and surprise—and was again in headlong gallop toward Urga.

His pursuers, some of them, were bunched behind him and coming on like the wind. Others, on fleetest horses, were swinging away to the left, as though to pass and head him off.

Grimly he set his teeth. His lips were a firm straight line, his eyes glowing with excitement. He held the sword point against the animal, and the little brute responded with alacrity. Speed—speed—the sandy plain rolled behind him like a gray sea.

The pursuers were not gaining, he noticed when he looked back—but the swift outriders were distancing

him. If they closed before he reached the doors of Urga, he was done; but they wouldn't, he promised himself that.

Rifles spoke behind him and from the flank, but their noise only served to make the horse travel faster, when already it seemed strained to the limit of its endurance.

Now ahead he could see the sullen lights of Urga, obscured by a strange sort of haze. His heart jumped, for he knew the meaning of that haze—that the winds across the Gobi had turned in the direction of Urga, lifting sand from the face of the ancient desert.

In a matter of hours a sandstorm could rise which would blot out the heavens and the stars, and lash the skin from the bodies of men. But such a storm would be a godsend to Larry Weston. He was glad that they were a frequent occurrence at Urga.

Closer and closer came the houses of Urga. Closer came his pursuers and the riders on the flank. He could see that they would all reach the town's outskirts at almost the same time.

And several times he had heard a shout in English which told him that Sergei Popov was among his pursuers.

That was as it should be, exactly what he wanted, so that events might shape themselves, or be shaped by him, to his advantage. Nothing pleased him more than to match wits and brawn with real fighters.

JUST as he would have swung into the first street which came under his eyes; just as his horse staggered with fatigue, the Mongols closed on him from the side—and his short-sword swung aloft in his hard hand, swung up—and down, and a man toppled from a horse with a thin cry.

Another charged in.

Again Larry tried to use his sword, but it was knocked from his hand. The hand became a fist on the instant to drive full and true to the jaw of his enemy. Then Larry was up, running.

He went through the first door he encountered. Shrieks greeted him as sleepers awakened. But he didn't pause. He went through a window—then through a second window into another house, while behind his pursuers hammered at the door he had entered.

CHAPTER III

The Closing Jaws

LARRY WESTON left the second house, found himself in a narrow alley. There was little difference between alleys and streets in Urga. Both were dark, usually untouched by the glow of light from windows perpetually shuttered against the bite of wind-driven sand.

Through the second house Larry raced away, trying to keep his sense of direction, until he should locate the dwelling where for two days and nights he had hidden, making his plans for the capture of Sergei Popov.

He felt reasonably sure that his presence there had never been discovered. The house belonged to the dead Ya Che, who went there at certain periods to be near his mines beyond Bogdo-Ulla, near the Siberian border village of Altan Buloc, "City of the Golden Key."

Ya Che must have stood in well with the Soviets, for his residence had not been molested. Hsa Lo Pe had told him where to find it, that there he might live while he sought for news of Sergei Popov.

That he had done, with not even a servant—he didn't trust even those

whom Hsa Lo Pe trusted with his life—to keep him company. Through the shutters he had watched the life of Urga. If he could get back there—

He had the sense of direction of the born flyer, though he had never gone in for flying, believing that the greatest excitement was to be found on the ground—and he hadn't the slightest doubt that he would be able to find his house again, given half an opportunity.

HE dashed around the corner, and almost into the arms of a man coming in the opposite direction, with head lowered against the drifting sand which was gaining in velocity as the wind grew stronger. The man looked up, uttering an ejaculation—His mouth opened wide, and his eyes bulged as he noted the white skin of Larry Weston. The man was a Mongol.

Larry drove out with a savage right. It cracked with triphammer force against the man's unprotected jaw. Larry hadn't time for the niceties of sportsmanship.

The man fell, rolled to his back, his hands lifted ludicrously, as though in his unconsciousness the Mongol assumed—too late—an attitude of defense.

Then Larry raced on. Behind him his enemies were shouting, going in to and out of houses, rousing the inmates. The whole village would be at his heels in a matter of moments. It was a race against time—and the rising storm would play its part, too.

And then, out of the night, away to the west and south, came a long-drawn howl, rising into the wind, becoming a part of it — and Larry Weston shuddered, recognizing the sound.

The dogs of the desert, those savage scavengers which some people

claimed were hybrids caused by interbreeding wild dogs and bears, were aprowl in the sandstorm, seeking their grisly feasts of whomsoever the storm might drag down.

Mongols fed their dead to these animals—and threw to their slaver-jaws the living bodies of their enemies.

If Larry were caught those dogs would howl for him, too. But he gritted his teeth grimly—he wouldn't be caught.

He ran with the speed of a great athlete, thankful beyond saying that he was always in top condition, as his hazardous calling made necessary.

The sounds of pursuit died away, but they were still following him. He knew then that he would never be able to hide for any great length of time in the house of Ya Che.

SERGEI POPOV would know of it, certainly, and in the end, even if it were done at the end of a house to house search, the Mongols would find him, drag him forth and tear him limb from limb. It was to the best interests of Sergei Popov that this should happen to him.

He was gaining on his pursuers, and now was out in a narrow street, racing straight toward his objective. Realizing that if they guessed where he was going, they would go directly to the house of Ya Che, he suddenly turned aside and ran to his right for all of a minute, then cut back toward the residence of Ya Che.

Several people met and passed him, saw his face, but next moment he vanished into the shadows, or into the thickening horror of the rising sand—and their shouts rose after him, directing the pursuit, as he desired.

Now he felt that with his enemies looking for him in one section of town, he dared to go to his own hide-

out, and accordingly, taking more care now that none see him, he headed directly for the place.

ONCE he met a man face to face—a Mongol. This one he dropped with a savage blow. From the man's torso Larry Weston yanked his heavy garments, evil with the odor of poorly cured skins and the stench of an unwashed body. He draped it over his own shoulders as a possible disguise, but had gone no more than a couple of blocks before he could stand the odor no longer—and hurled the garment aside with a snort of disgust.

Now, ahead in the gloom, dimly discernible through the screen of sand, he could make out the outline of the house which had sheltered him, must shelter him again for a little time. There were no lights, naturally. The front of the house gave on a busy street. For weeks no human being in Urga had seen anyone enter that place.

Larry Weston had gone in at night, from the back way — and hadn't even opened the windows. It was stale and musty from disuse, but it had served, must serve again.

Larry circled the house, looking carefully at three sides of it, knowing that none would have entered it from the front, else right now the street beyond the house would be packed with the curious.

Then Weston moved up to the window by which he always entered the place. It was just as he had left it on his journey to the ceremony of Ta Kuei. As far as he could tell nobody had meddled with the fastenings. He lifted his hands to them—crawled through the window without sound, and breathed a sigh of relief.

To his left as he entered was a bedroom, but he would have no need for that. He would not sleep

again until his quest ended. Here he would rest for a moment before going out again, long enough only to allow the fever of pursuit to abate somewhat, if ever religious fever abated in the hearts of worshipers of the Living God.

Then Larry Weston came to pause. There had been no sound while he strode forward to the center of what he knew to be a large room; but his scalp prickled oddly. He distinctly sensed the presence of another human being. He listened with straining ears for the sound of breathing.

But the sound did not come. Whoever was here held his—or her—breath, or breathed with the softness of a stalking cat. Larry swung his arms wide. They encountered only empty space.

Again he was safe, for if the skulker were beyond the length of his arms, he was not a menace. Larry stepped quickly aside to make absolutely sure that he was not outlined against the window, and thus an admirable target for a thrown knife or a pistol bullet.

He listened.

Dared he lift his voice? He decided to risk it, hoping for some reply that would give him the location of the one who lay in wait, or would prove to him that his senses, this once, were wrong.

"Who's there?"

HIS voice, low, tense, sounded hollow in the sparsely furnished big room. He waited — while the darkness of the world seemed to creep upon him like a tangible thing, and sand hammered against the shutters outside, against the walls and the roof, like the sound of hard, small, scampering feet.

There wasn't anyone then. He started moving forward again, confident he had been mistaken, despite the fact that his hunch still held

the feeling that he was not alone. And then, the answer came, in surprisingly good English, with the startling suddenness of a thunderclap on a day of sunshine.

"You are looking for Sergei Popov? I heard so. I am here, waiting."

The voice was harsh, savage, with nothing human in it. There in the darkness, Larry knew either close to him or far away, but never beyond the comparatively narrow limits of the room, was the man he had come for—the man who had murdered Ya Che for some person or persons not yet discovered — the man who had murdered many others, who had procured the murder of the woman under Bogdo-Ulla without the slightest sign of mercy.

"Good," said Larry Weston softly, "then you are ready to go back with me, Popov?"

A low chuckle was the answer.

"That depends," said Popov.

"On what?"

"On whether you can take me!"

"That's what I came for."

"I merely waited for confirmation of that. You can't do it."

SILENCE again. The floor creaked. Larry stepped swiftly aside—and something spat into the wall far behind him.

He had stepped aside just in time to avoid a knife thrown by his enemy. And Weston carried no weapons. He did not believe in killing except to save his life, and then only when he was sure that his life did depend upon the life of an enemy.

The affair in the house of Ya Che, in the heart of Urga, became a strange game of stalking. Twice again, within ten minutes, knives zipped past the face of Larry Weston, one of them coming so close that it barely touched the lobe of his right ear.

Then he dropped to his haunches, waiting — waiting for the killer to find him, wondering if he would be able to reach the man's knife hand before his throat was slit from ear to ear. Popov would seek him out without fear, whether he moved or remained still. Popov had caution, but no fear whatever.

THEN, as though hurled at him from a catapult—making Weston think for a moment that his opponent had the eyes of a cat—a huge body crashed against Larry Weston, bowling him over.

He rolled aside as he struck on his back, but was up in a flash. He hurled himself at where he now knew his adversary to be.

His left hand touched cloth, the cloth of a human torso. His left hand moved with unerring accuracy, grasped a mighty wrist that was covered with hair—like that of a great ape.

Instantly he swung into a disarming hold, swinging his right arm under the man's elbow, over to grasp the wrist with his right hand.

Usually one could break a man's arm with this hold—but the best that even Larry, powerful though he was, could do, was to make Popov drop the knife. It clattered to the floor, and then Larry Weston was locked in a back-breaking hug. His eyes bulged. Blood rushed to his head. He had to work fast.

He butted with the top forward part of his head, a trick he had learned from darkies in the South—and the arms about him loosened for a moment.

Then he fought free, driving rights and lefts to the face and body of his enemy, striking off the flailing arms, battering away, knowing that he risked broken bones in his hands if his blows did not go true.

The big man staggered. Then Wes-

ton himself almost went down from a piledriver right, which did not break his neck only because it was a glancing blow. He staggered back. His lips were tightset, his eyes straining to see the outline of his enemy without avail.

His fists were bloody, the skin of the knuckles broken, but he seemed to be making little headway against the big murderer.

He was growing weaker with the extreme effort—while Sergei Popov seemed momentarily to be growing stronger. He put all he had into a savage right. Sergei screamed, made for the window and was gone—with Larry in pursuit.

CHAPTER IV

Gobi Judgment

THAT there might be some trick behind the rout of Sergei Popov, Larry Weston didn't doubt, but that did not keep him from following. He had come to Urga to get the murderer, and there he was, vanishing through the window.

He caught but the barest glimpse of the man's face—as though for a moment the moon had managed to peer through a rift in the storm of sand, and then the murderer had dropped to the ground.

Larry was out and away, after him, carrying no weapon but his fists. If the Mongols were still searching for him he could not tell by the sound, for by now the sound of the sand, driven in a brown wall—which was black in the gloom—before a mighty wind, had risen to a shrill whine.

Sand hammered like hail against the roofs of houses. Not even religious frenzy could have kept the Mongols outside in this blistering smother of sand.

The particles smashed against the face like needlepoints. Larry Wes-

ton knew that his face would be pounded to the consistency of beef steak in a matter of minutes. But he lowered his head against it, made out the retreating form of Sergei Popov through the smother and was away after him, fleet as a deer.

Sergei, for some strange reason, was heading straight out into the desert.

Maybe he had been driven mad by the pounding he had suffered at the hands of Weston. Maybe he, too, was a fugitive from the wrath of the devotees of Ta Kuei.

Maybe—Larry Weston knew that one guess was as good as another, that but one thing was certain—Sergei Popov was heading straight out into the Gobi—out of which, rising with its shriek, part of the noise of the storm, came the ululating baying of the dog-bear scavengers of the waste.

Larry shivered a little, thinking of the food which was customary for the evil brutes that ran in packs across the face of the Gobi.

In his time he had seen them drag down and devour weary pilgrims across the sands. He had seen half destroyed carcasses of Mongols on the evil surface of Gobi, victims of the snarling, roving packs—and now Sergei Popov, for some crazy reason known only to himself, was leading Larry Weston directly into the desert, into the storm, into the land of the dog-bears.

WAS it a trap of some kind? Were there Mongols out there waiting to take Larry Weston and throw him to the black brutes? He shook his head as he ran.

He was sure of his belief that the Mongols would not now be abroad in the storm. They in their turn, ceasing to hunt for him, would believe that he too would remain under cover during the storm, and that

the hunt could be resumed when the storm was over.

No, there was only Sergei Popov and Larry Weston, pursued and pursuer, heading into the waste.

Larry wondered what he would do when he overtook Sergei, if he were so fortunate as to subdue him and make him captive.

But there would be only one thing to do—knock him out, or punch him dizzy, bring him back to Urga, and then find some means of getting him to Peiping and the justice due him for the slaying of General Ya Che.

He speeded up, his eyes peering from under his lowered brows at the broad retreating back of the murderer. Sergei Popov ran with ease almost as effortless as that of Larry Weston himself. His back was visible through the curtain of sand, never dimming, never becoming more distinct.

It was as though Popov intended for Larry to keep him in sight, to follow him, into that trap which Larry's fancy had made him think might await him out in the desert wastes—had not reason told him that such a trap was impossible.

OF course there were the dogs, but they would no more be allies of Sergei Popov—or any other man—than they would of Larry Weston. The animals would drag down anyone, white or yellow or black, and devour their flesh with equal gusto.

But a strong man could keep them off—as long as he remained on his feet and guarded his throat against their slashing fangs. They were somewhat like Alaskan huskies, which devoured the falling loser of a fight among their own kind.

Larry Weston feared the dogs, but he wouldn't turn back from his pursuit of Sergei Popov for all the dogs in Gobi—or for all the gold in Christiandom.

He speeded up. He could not tell whether Sergei looked back, or knew that he had increased his stride, but the fact remained that Popov speeded up, too, keeping just beyond Larry's reach.

Larry began to have a sneaking admiration for the endurance of the murderer—as Urga dropped behind them and the desert grew into being under their feet.

On and on raced Sergei Popov, while now the baying of the dog-bears came from all sides. Sergei must have heard them, but if he feared their warnings he gave no sign.

LARRY all but stopped as a shadow—two shadows—three, suddenly appeared to the very edge of his semi-circle of visibility. Black animals, almost bear-size, they were visible for a second, then were gone.

But like roving wolves they paralleled the way which Sergei and Larry took into the desert. They would not come close to powerful men, but they would trail them tirelessly, until the men staggered. Then they would close in—and when a man fell—their fangs would be buried in his soft flesh.

That was their method of attack, as Larry Weston knew. Strange, the pass to which his hunt for the murderer had come. To follow him into the waste, both of them running like crazy men, their way guarded by the racing packs of the Gobi. Larry laughed into the teeth of the storm.

He glanced back over his shoulder. The sand hammered at his briefly unprotected neck. Urga had vanished into the wilderness of the sandstorm whose crest might have been miles above the desert floor.

This sand, Larry knew, when it traveled toward Peking, often covered the floors of houses in the an-

cient capital to the depth of an inch or more in a few hours. There it was known as Peking dust.

H E'D often heard of dust settling on the decks of vessels, a hundred miles at sea, and countless scores of miles from the desert, yet borne on the wings of the wind from the heart of Gobi. Down the centuries Gobi had scattered her harsh dust to the winds of the world, and almost to its uttermost corners.

He judged they were at least two miles outside Urga. For a moment his heart sank as he thought of what it would be like to retrace his steps. Only a man with his sense of direction could ever hope to return to Urga alive.

He couldn't backtrack, for the wind had erased his tracks as fast as he made them. The same with those of Sergei Popov.

But even that could not be considered until he had had a settlement with the arch murderer. Now he raised his voice in a shout to the killer—but the wind caught at his words, jammed them back down his throat—and he tasted the gritty sand on his teeth.

But Sergei, though he could not have heard the shout of his pursuer, suddenly stopped. Never once had he been out of Larry's sight. Larry had not been duped once, knowing all the time that Sergei Popov had some purpose in leading him into the desert, even though the purpose might be a crazy one.

Larry slowed to a walk, glad of the chance because the sand had been dragging at his feet as he ran—and approached Sergei Popov warily. The noise of the storm was higher than ever. Again and again Larry saw those skulking black shapes of the dog-bears.

Sergei stood with his legs far apart as Larry approached him. And Larry

saw, when he finally stopped, within a stride or two of the murderer, that Sergei Popov was grinning.

Moreover, his chest scarcely rose and fell with his breathing. He had made the long run, into the teeth of the gale, without causing him to breathe faster than normal. And Larry Weston, powerful as he was, in such marvelous physical condition, was breathing with difficulty. He stared at his enemy, noting through the awful gloom the livid saber scars on the man's right cheek, noting the huge bulk of him.

"Well, Popov?" he shouted, to be heard above the storm. "Just what is the big idea?"

Popov raised his hand, signaling for silence—a strange gesture in the storm that could never have been silenced save with the power of the Almighty.

"Listen!" he cried.

Through the storm came the baying of the dogs—a myriad of them by the sound, close in, just beyond the curtain of the walls of sand.

"Get the picture?" asked Sergei Popov. "Get it, Weston? Oh, I know your name. I make it my business to check back thoroughly on any of my little jobs. General Hsa Lo Pe told me before I killed him!"

I F Popov spoke truth, then he had moved with greater speed than Larry Weston, to kill Hsa Lo Pe after Larry had left Peiping, then to have reached Urga—but no, Larry had spent two days in hiding before venturing forth.

"What are you driving at, Popov?" asked Larry Weston.

"Just this, gullible fool! Do you think you could possibly beat me with your fists? I could have killed you any time I liked, with nothing but my bare hands. I intended to do that, but the baying of the dogs gave me a different idea. I like my little

jests, Weston. Here it is—I shall whip you within an inch of your life, until you cannot stand on your feet—and then I shall leave you here, to the tender mercies of the scavengers of the Mongols!”

Larry laughed, even though the thought gave him a moment's pause. What Popov stated was not only possible, but a sure result if he were beaten and left behind. But he was not afraid, even though this man had proved himself of vast endurance and durability.

“I'm ready,” he said, “when do we start?”

Popov answered by hurling himself forward, his hands in an attitude of attack and defense, the sure stance of the boxer. His fists were huge, twice the size of those of Larry Weston. Weston's eyes narrowed. He must beat this man with speed of movement, or lose—and fall to the fangs of the dogs.

He ducked as Popov sent in a pile driver right—and even as he did so he spoke.

“I'm not going to do *you* that way, Popov,” said Larry. “I'm going to prove to you that I can beat you—and then I'm taking you back to Peiping, if I have to start from here, without food or water, and carry you all the way on my back.”

But Larry did not believe in his own words. He knew that the whole thing would be settled, here and now, within the next few minutes—and that only one of them, if either, would go anywhere from this place.

HE sent a straight left to the nose of the killer. Sergei's head snapped back—and quick as a flash Larry darted in and smashed a savage right to Popov's jaw.

The man sagged, tottered, started to fall—and Larry struck again, eager for the kill. Popov dropped to his knees—and out of the gloom

came two black shapes, hurling themselves at the body of the fallen man. Larry jumped in, yanked Popov to his feet, laughed in his face.

“Who do you think now will be fed to the dogs?” he shouted.

Popov straightened, fought out, sending in blows from all angles, trying to land a laming blow to the groin with his knees—and Larry smashed him again. It came to him then that this was fit punishment for the murderer, if he could bring it off.

THIS beat even torture Hsa Lo Pe might have devised—and Sergei Popov had set the trap for himself.

Even as Larry thought this, a numbing blow struck him on the chin and he fell as though pole-axed. Even as he fell, with the roaring world spinning about him, flooded with darkness deeper than dark, Sergei Popov roared with satanic laughter—and several shadows leaped out of the storm at Larry Weston.

As he covered his throat with his forearms, fangs bit into his clothing. He hoped that the cloth would prevent the teeth from touching his flesh. Even that might mean death for him eventually.

Popov jumped in, to give him the boots—and Larry Weston rolled aside, scrambled to his feet, groggy, swaying, fighting with all the desperate fury of the man who hates his prospective conquerer and refuses to be beaten. His fists became mallets at the ends of his arms that grew weary with punching.

And now, as both men staggered from blows that both were too tired to guard against, when blows that were hurled hurt more to land than to receive, the dogs came out of the shadows and did not go back again.

They circled the fighters, their mouths open, red tongues lolling,

and now and again, their eyes glistering with hellish fires, they lifted their noses and bayed at the storm. They were beasts out of some awful nightmare — and Larry Weston fought like a madman, as did Popov, to cheat them of their prey.

Once Larry even considered a truce with Popov, so that both might fight their way back to Urga through the storm, each helping the other against the dogs. But he refused to more than consider it. Popov had started this horror, and here it must end, one way or the other.

They met, chest to chest, their breath coming in sobs through lips that were mashed and bleeding—and their fists working tiredly, but working—on and on.

The dogs were close enough to touch, darting about them. Larry felt a pain in his thigh. The dogs were bolder, knew their meal was ready for serving, and were impatient.

Larry redoubled his speed—and Sergei Popov did a foolish thing. He started to cut out of the fight, to race past Larry toward Urga. Larry struck him again and again.

THE man's eyes, in the midst of a face which had been chopped to pieces by Larry's fists, as Popov's fists in turn had battered the face of Larry Weston, were wild. He chattered with an access of fear, pushed Larry aside when Larry would have grappled with him—got past.

He fell! The dogs charged in. Larry jumped into the midst of them, reaching to jerk Sergei Popov to his feet. He managed it. Popov staggered. The dogs drew back. Larry struck the big man again. Again Popov turned, tried to flee—and again he fell.

This time Larry was no longer fighting off the dogs. He knew he dared not weaken himself too much, fighting the dogs off Popov, for he

would need all his strength to escape the beasts himself.

AGAIN he opened his mouth to suggest an alliance—and dropped in his tracks as Popov smashed him on the temple. He rolled to his stomach, hoping that his clothing would keep off the dogs until he could get some breath into his body.

Popov did not jump on him, as he expected. Larry whirled again, scrambled to his feet, struck out at twin shadows which rose through the air toward his throat—and saw Popov, twenty feet away, in the direction of Urga—flat on his face, motionless. Larry raced to him, turned Popov over.

What he saw reminded him of the throat of General Ya Che as he had last seen it. A dog, emboldened by the man's apparent weakness, must have jumped at Popov just before he had fallen—and the animal's fangs had ripped his life away.

Larry stooped, searched for a weapon in the clothing of the dead man, found none. Of course, if Sergei had retained a weapon he would long since have used it himself.

As Larry Weston stumbled back toward Urga, his strength returning swiftly now that his fight with Popov—the most brutal he had ever had with man or animal—was over.

"Trouble with my business is—there's no excitement in it—"

But when at last he saw the outline of Urga ahead, and the dogs were drifting away, howling their disappointment, he regained control of himself, became ready for any eventualities—for the world would have need, he knew, of the wit and the strength of its Larry Westons in the years to come—and he wouldn't have changed his occupation, even then, for all the wealth the world could offer.

DYAK TORTURE



The lithe body lunged forward

*The Last Remaining White Man in Oma-Laong Falls
Into Savage Hands in this Gripping Story
of Hideous Native Rites*

By HUGH B. CAVE

Author of "The Watcher in the Green Room," etc.

LEUTENANT DAVIS TRENT, B.F.S., sat motionless in a broken-backed chair on the Residency veranda, staring straight ahead of him into the sinister dark of the near-by jungle. A huge white moth fluttered erratically against the glowing oil-lamp on the table beside him. In the river reeds, a hundred yards distant, an unseen *tok-tok* bird shrilled its midnight crescendo.

Trent's moist lips curled into a scowl. His hands clenched stiff and rigid on the chair arms. For eight hours he had been thinking, wondering, and now he was positive that grave danger threatened the lives of the two white men in Oma-Laong.

In eight hours no sign of hostility had stirred the oppressive stillness of the kampong. The sun had risen flame-red into a sultry sky, dropped

again with typical sluggishness; night had fallen, sucking a milk-thick mist out of the river. Yet none of Oma-Laong's Dyaks had invaded the Residency, moaning their usual petty complaints. There had been no *tuak*-drinking, no superstitious chanting, no anything.

Instead, a vicious, death-like silence had taken possession of the village—a silence intensified tenfold by the brooding menace of the surrounding jungle and the whispering mutter of river-water in high lallang reeds.

EVEN now, at midnight, that grim silence still prevailed. And it was hellishly significant.

Scowling, Trent leaned over the table, mixed himself a tall gin-sling from the stuff his native house-boy brought out half an hour ago. Inside the Residency, a light was burning dully. He stared, wondering if Major Anderton had finally sobered up and gone to bed. All day long the major had been nursing a thick-necked bottle of strong whisky, mixing the stuff with *gamuti*-juice.

No sound came from the inner room. With a shrug, Trent paced to the screen door, opened it, and stepped over the threshold, closing the door behind him quickly, lest the Residency be invaded by a horde of buzzing insects. Then he stood very still, and his eyes opened wide. A thick, guttural sound came from his throat.

The room was a small one, boasting a table, half a dozen home-made chairs, an ugly oil-lamp. The lamp was smoking now, because it needed refilling. Beside it, on the table, lay the empty bottle from which Major Anderton had been drinking. And there was something else.

Trent stared, horrified. Stared straight into the expressionless face of the major. A mop of shaggy hair,

reddish-brown, masked those bulging eyes; the thick lips were open, allowing a bloated tongue to protrude. And the face, the head, stood alone on the table.

There was nothing else. No shoulders, no body supported that ghastly gargoyle. Only the head lay there, in a lake of gleaming crimson. Seemingly alive even in death, the hideous face returned Trent's fascinated gaze as Trent paced forward with mechanical strides.

Half an hour ago Major James Anderton, Britisher in charge of Kampong Oma-Laong, had been alive. Drunk, yes, but very much alive nevertheless. Now murder stalked the room; horror lurked in every shadowed corner. The major's chair was empty. The major's body was gone, carried away by the unseen spectres who had slain him.

His severed head squatted there on the table in a ghastly pool of undried blood—as a grim warning to the lone remaining white man in Oma-Laong.

Trent's horror was slow in leaving him. For a long time he stood rigid near the table, breathing heavily, noisily. The death's-head mocked him, reached out unseen fingers to clutch at his pounding heart.

HE had never exactly liked the major, but that did not matter now. Anderton and he had at least been on good terms, even though the Britisher's matter-of-fact stolidity had never harmonized with Trent's Yankee determination to do things. But now—

Slowly, and somewhat dazed, Trent examined the room, seeking some clue to the identity of the murderer. Finding none, he paced into the adjoining room and then into the separate sleeping-chambers. Finally, taking his *solar-topi* from its peg on the wall, he strode to the door and

walked out into the brooding kampong.

If he knew anything about these black-hearted Dyaks, they would not be apt to let such a murder-achievement go untalked about. There would be mutterings and whisperings in some of the native huts. And perhaps Monikoa, the Residency house-boy, who slept in a small hut at the end of the village, would know something.

SCOWLING again now, Trent strode across the darkened amphitheater to Monikoa's hut. On all sides of him the significant silence was more intense than ever. If native eyes were watching him, and they probably were, there was no open evidence of the fact. Murder had struck once. In all probability it would strike again. When it did, Trent would be the logical next victim. Then—

Reaching his destination, he climbed the tree-trunk ladder and thrust aside the hanging *atap* mat at the top. Darkness shrouded the interior of the hut. Standing on the threshold, Trent said quietly:

"Monikoa! You there?"

No answer greeted him. Fumbling for a match, he made a light and held the glowing stick high. The hut was empty.

That was unusual. Monikoa, the little Penihing house-boy was one of the few Oma-Laong Dyaks who could be trusted. Invariably, after leaving the Residency, Monikoa went straight to his own dwelling and retired; never did he go to other native huts to exchange gossip and get drunk on *tuak*. Yet he was not here.

Bewildered, and not a little uneasy, Trent descended the notched ladder and stood at its base, wondering which way to turn next. He was sure now that native eyes were watching him, sure that his every movement

was being scrutinized. He shuddered involuntarily at the thought of his absolute helplessness, and cursed himself for leaving the protection of the Residency.

It would be a simple matter, hellishly simple, for some unseen devil to raise an ebony *sumpitan*, aim it, and send a feather-tipped poisoned messenger of death whirling into the white man's throat.

Trent was trembling when he re-entered the Residency ten minutes later.

Removing his *solar-topi*, he flung it nervously onto the table where Major Anderton's head still sat upright in bloody horror. Then he paced slowly into the next room, carrying the lamp with him.

Just inside the threshold he stopped, stood motionless. The hand holding the lamp began to shake violently, so violently that the lamp-globe teetered on its pedestal and would have fallen had he not leaned back against the wall to steady himself.

The other glow leaped ahead of him. In the center of the room a chair had been placed alone on the circular *sampur* mat. The chair had not been there before; it had been pushed against the wall, and it had been empty. Now it was occupied.

AGORY human head sat upon it, staring into Trent's colorless countenance. Fresh blood, dripping from that unholy stump of flesh through the cane seat of the chair, was forming a sinister pool on the mat beneath. The head itself, like Major Anderton's, had been chopped at the neck, severed crudely from its body.

It was the head of Monikoa, the house-boy.

Monikoa, who had been so faithful in serving the two white men of Oma-Laong, had paid the price for his faithfulness. Again, under cover

of the brooding jungle night, murder had stalked abroad.

Trent, pacing the murder room with sluggish strides, and staring wide-eyed at the bloody thing on the chair, began to realize, then, the enormity of what was transpiring. Murder, as mere murder without additional complications, would not have affected him so deeply; he had seen more than one kind of it since leaving the States, five years ago, and trekking the danger-trails of the Far East. Here in Borneo, in particular, murder was a fine art.

BUT this was something more. It was a deliberate, cold-blooded wiping out of white men, and everything even remotely connected with white men. It would end in the overthrow of Government control and the destruction of British authority on the Merasi. Oma-Laong, despite its isolation and apparent unimportance, was the key-garrison of a black-souled district encompassing more than a hundred miles of vicious "inland."

Now, unless word of this new and subtle uprising could be sent down-river immediately, the thin veneer of Government supervision would be wiped out utterly, and the entire Merasi region would become a terrain of murder and madness.

But how—how could one lone white man, living in the very shadow of death, send word down-river? He could not go himself, without playing directly into the hands of the brown-skinned fiends who sought to exterminate him. He could not send a substitute, because there was no substitute to send. How, then—

Trent strode into the front room. Grimly he pulled open the table drawer, took out a brace of loaded Lugers, and strapped them around him. There was no time now to be thinking about the future, even about

the immediate future. Time had to be measured now in seconds. Even before the cheap alarm-clock on the mantle ticked away its next brief interval, murder might strike again. Murder, or something worse.

But it did not come. Not then. For an hour Trent waited, positive that the unknown menace would strike a third time before the advent of dawn. Back and forth he walked across the room, sometimes pacing through the rest of the shadowed house with the same slow, mechanical strides. He had no stomach for moving the two leering death's-heads which kept him company. The alarm-clock thumped on relentlessly, jangling its way into his morbid thoughts.

Then he heard something.

THE sound was almost no sound at all, yet it stiffened him, made him stand motionless waiting for a repetition. Somewhere at the rear of the house, in one of the sleeping-chambers, a window-screen had been pushed up in its grooves. Now, as Trent stood listening, an almost inaudible rustling sound came from the same direction, as if an intruder were clambering cautiously through the opened aperture.

Trent's right hand dropped to one of the Lugers at his belt. Slowly he cat-footed through the room where Monikoa's head sat hideously on its chair. The bedrooms lay just beyond, between there and the small kitchen at the rear. Even before Trent reached the first bedroom door, he stood stock-still again, every muscle tensed to the sound of cautious footsteps beyond the closed barrier.

He stepped back then, and stood flat against the wall, waiting for the door to open. The lamp still burned smokily behind him, casting his shadow grotesquely over the floor. His face was empty of color, his shoulders

hunched forward, stiff. Then realizing the danger of standing in a room with two doorways, where he could be attacked from two directions at once, he retreated slowly, step by step, holding one of the twin Lugers in readiness.

The bedroom door opened before he had traversed half the room's length. Opened slowly, significantly. He stopped again, holding his breath an instant in anticipation of what was about to happen. Then it did happen, with such amazing abruptness that his over-wrought nerves were unable to keep pace.

IN front of him, a dozen paces distant, a half-naked figure leaped through the widening aperture. For a split second the dim lamplight gleamed on a rigid, brown-skinned shape, as the intruder stiffened with cat-like quickness and gazed into Trent's face. Then the lithe body lunged forward; the countenance above it was suddenly transformed into a mask of vicious triumph. An upraised *parang*, with curved, gleaming blade, flashed toward Trent's throat, hurled by hellishly expert fingers.

Only Trent's knowledge of native methods saved him. Instinctively he spun sideways and down, as the butcher-knife whined from the Dyak's hand. The weapon buried itself in the wall, point first, and quivered there within an inch of Trent's head.

The Luger leaped upward in Trent's fist. Once, twice, he applied pressure to the trigger, aiming the heavy gun point-blank at the murdering devil who surged upon him. The oncoming native stopped short, as if struck by a battering ram. Walls and floor trembled to the roar of the twin explosions.

A lurid shriek jangled from the native's lips. Drunkenly he swayed backwards, clawing at his naked chest

with both hands. The hands were bloody when they came away, revealing the butchery done by steel-jacketed bullets. Dead on his feet, the Dyak fell against the chair which supported Monikoa's severed head.

The chair slid away from him, and Monikoa's head, squatting there, danced drunkenly as if alive. The Dyak sprawled backwards to the floor in a contorted heap, his dead eyes gaping sightlessly at the ceiling.

TRENT, lowering the Luger, paced forward slowly and stiffly, as if the blood in his veins had congealed during the ordeal. Death, whether necessary or not, was not pretty. In this case it had come suddenly and hideously, and Trent's face was still colorless as he gazed down on his victim.

He stared longer than was wise. Too late he heard the abrupt slap of naked feet on the threshold behind him. Too late he realized that the Dyaks of Oma-Laong had sent more than one of their number to murder him.

He spun jerkily, sucking a deep breath through his dry lips. Desperately he strove to lunge backwards, to avoid the sinister shapes that hurtled toward him. The Luger leaped level, roared its thundering challenge. A naked body crashed into Trent's legs, lay there screaming, with one shoulder horribly broken by the bullet. Other naked shapes closed in. The Luger, gripped bludgeon-wise in Trent's fist, rose and fell furiously, taking toll with every downward sweep.

But the odds were too great. One moment Trent was erect on braced legs, fighting with reckless abandon for his life. Next moment he was hurled backward by the weight of his lunging assailants. His stumbling feet tangled in the *taphang* legs of Monikoa's chair. He went

down, writhing. The Luger leaped from his grasp.

Even then he gave the best that was in him. His clenched fists beat a pile-driver tattoo on the gleaming brown bodies which weighed him down. He got to his knees, made a desperate effort to regain his feet. Brown arms encircled his throat, dragging him down again.

Something hard, solid—the carved hilt of a Dyak *parang*—descended mightily into Trent's face. He saw it coming, was unable to dodge it. It struck with a sickening crunch, squarely across his forehead.

Groaning in his throat, Trent went suddenly limp.

HIS head was on fire when he regained consciousness. From somewhere near-by, came a low chanting sound, deep and guttural; but he could see nothing. For a moment he wondered fearfully whether the darkness was real, or whether the Dyak's knife-hilt had blinded him. His body ached. Vicious hammers were beating a relentless tattoo inside his skull.

He lay still then, breathing slowly and deeply in an effort to regain his strength. After a while he tried to sit up, and discovered, with a groan, that the process caused more pain than it was worth. His hands were bound behind him, with a grass rope that cut sharply into the flesh of his wrists. Other ropes encircled his ankles, inflicting excruciating pain when he attempted to shift position.

He wondered where he was, and decided presently that he had been removed to one of the Dyak huts. One thing was certain: he was a prisoner. But why? Why had they not murdered him outright, as they had done to Anderton and Monikoa?

He knew the answer. That near-by sound of chanting, interspersed now with occasional shrill screams from

blood-hungry throats, told him all he needed to know. A prolonged shudder shook him. Again he strove desperately to stand erect, only to fall back a second time, sick with pain.

Then, hearing approaching footsteps very close by, he lay motionless and waited.

The wait was of short duration. In a moment a tentacle of light invaded the prison-room, and Trent stared through the enveloping glare into a face hideous beyond belief. He knew the face was a mask, yet he cringed from it.

Slowly it came toward him. The light, emanating from an uplifted torch of *tou* wood, revealed the room in which he lay—a small room, empty except for an ancient red carpet and piles of accumulated refuse on the floor. The light revealed his captor, too, disclosing a lean, emaciated brown body set atop crooked legs.

Trent stared at the hideous head-dress, and into the snakelike eyes which studied him from behind it. He shuddered. More than ever he knew the meaning of the increasingly loud chanting sound from outside.

THE man before him was Tenagai Zokalu, the village *blian*, witch-doctor. Not in a long time had Zokalu shown any active interest in the affairs of the kampong. He had been content to sit in the bowels of his incredibly dirty hut and direct the religious life of his people.

The fact that he was here now, staring down at the prisoner hungrily, while his people went through the first stages of the dance of death in the village outside—that fact was more sinister and significant than anything which had yet happened.

And Zokalu had not come alone. After staring a moment, he turned abruptly and spoke a guttural command to someone behind him. Dark-

skinned Dyaks stepped forward into the torch-glare. Trent looked up into evil, triumphant faces, and cursed his helplessness. Then his arms and legs were seized by ungentle hands and he was lifted quickly from the floor.

AND Zokalu, holding the torch directly above the prisoner's face and peering down with narrowed eyes, said mockingly:

"Now, *Tuan*, you find out what happen when jungle Dyaks make celebrate for the spirit-gods. You find out very quick, *Tuan*. Yes!"

Outside, in the kampong clearing, crimson flames leaped skyward from the community fire-pit. Huge *berus* and *tengar* logs blazed noisily, adding their crackling din to the chanting dirge of the assembled Dyaks. The dirge became a wild cacophony of triumph as Zokalu's men carried their victim from the prison hut.

Ordinarily, the fire-pit was used for cooking purposes. Now it had a different significance, and Trent's face became chalk-hued as he stared at the flame. Yet they would not burn him, he was positive. Cremation was not a Dyak custom. There were other methods more horrible, affording more entertainment for the onlookers.

His guess was correct. As if at a given signal, the dirge ceased. Zokalu's people crowded forward, forming a grim and silent procession as the prisoner was borne across the kampong. Torches blazed in upraised fists, lighting the way. Eager faces, full of animal lust and anticipation, glowed in the ocher torch-glare.

To the far end of the village Trent was carried, then past the last of the straggling *nipa* huts and into the narrow jungle trail which led up-river. Once again the Dyaks began their strange chant, this time in the belief that the discordant din would

drive away evil spirits of the jungle. Helpless in the grip of his captors, Trent wondered how far they would take him, and what hellish fate awaited him.

Then a moment later he ceased wondering, and shrank back in horror. He knew then that this thing had been planned days in advance of its execution. Before him, in the flickering glare of uplifted torches, the trail came to an abrupt end. A huge pit had been dug there, in preparation. How deep it was, and what lay in the bowels of it, he could not be sure. He did not want to be sure.

His gaze traveled upwards, taking in the rest of the infernal death-device. Above the pit's yawning mouth, a heavy shaft of timber overhung the trail, its ends lashed horizontally in the tangled upper limbs of a giant *meraka* tree. From the center of it, a thick grass rope hung down, dangling suggestively above the pit's maw. No hangman's rope could have been more portentous!

TRENT licked his lips, staring up, then down. In order that he might miss nothing of what awaited him, one of the Dyaks pushed him forward to the pit's edge and held a blazing torch in front of him. One glance was enough.

The pit was a horror trap. Its floor, far below, gleamed dully in the torchlight, and Trent shuddered at sight of the sharpened bamboo stakes awaiting him. No report of this mad orgy would ever go down-river to civilization. No report would ever leave Oma-Laong. Later, perhaps, the Government would become alarmed and send men to investigate; and those men, too, would send no report. From this time on, the Merasi region would become a land of death and horror for all whites who entered it—

Strong hands gripped Trent's

bound arms and dragged him away from the pit's edge. On all sides, triumphant faces leered at him, waiting for the plea for mercy which should have jangled from his lips. But no plea was forthcoming. He stood rigid. Zokalu, the *blian*, paced forward to confront him.

"The white *Tuan* have no words to speak?" Zokalu demanded.

THERE was no answer. Trent's lips were tight-pressed, bloodless. With a shrug, Zokalu stepped back, nodded to some of the watching Dyaks beside him.

Eagerly the savages set about their work.

Holding Trent helpless, they unbound his wrists, jerked his hands up and over his head, and made the wrists secure again. Grimly they pushed him forward, so that the rope dangling from above could be lashed securely to the cruel handcuffs. Again Trent looked down into the pit's depths, and closed his eyes, shuddering. Yet even in the face of certain and hideous death, he refused to plead for mercy. Pleading would do no good now—

His captors stepped back, staring at Zokalu. Absolute silence took possession of the unholy gathering then, while the Dyaks awaited Zokalu's signal. The *blian* gazed straight at Trent and said softly:

"The white *Tuan* even yet have no words to speak?"

Trent glared, muttered an oath under his breath, but made no audible reply. With a casual shrug, the witch-doctor paced forward. A knife gleamed against the bonds which held Trent's ankles. The ropes fell away. He stared down, bewildered. Then he dragged a deep breath, as cruel hands took hold of him and pushed him forward.

The pit yawned before him, waiting for him. His stumbling feet

hung back, fighting every inch, digging deeply into the black earth. Then his feet encountered empty space; he lunged out and down. A sudden excruciating pain stabbed through his shoulders as the rope above him went taut, dragging his upflung arms rigid.

Dangling above the very center of the horror-trap, he looked down and choked back the cry of fear that welled in his throat. His struggles, brought on by his close proximity to death, called forth triumphant howls and shrieks of delight from the murder-mad natives who crowded the pit's edge, staring at him with avid eyes.

Then Zokalu advanced again, to place a blazing torch at the very rim of the trap, where the sputtering glare would reveal every detail below.

"In a little while, *Tuan*, after you hang here alone by yourself," the *blian* murmured, "we come back. Then—"

HE drew a knife and made a significant gesture with it, as if cutting the taut rope above Trent's wrists, to let the white man plunge down upon the sharpened bamboo stakes beneath. Then, still peering into Trent's face, as if knowing that the victim's tight lips would soon be pleading wildly for mercy, the *blian* retreated. Curtly he spoke to his followers, ordering them to follow him back to the village.

Reluctantly the Dyaks obeyed him. Slowly they turned from the prisoner, abandoning him to his torment. Like ghosts they moved away into the dark of the jungle.

Hideous thoughts took possession of Trent's mind then. Hanging there above the torture pit, he suffered from an overdose of hellish imagination. Yet his thoughts were based on grim certainties.

He knew what awaited him. For an hour, perhaps longer, he would be left completely alone, while his body became numb and his brain worked on every tiny detail of the horrible death confronting him. During that interlude, the people of Oma-Laong would hold their obscene dance of death in the village, imbibing great quantities of *tuak* and working themselves in to a frenzy. Then they would return.

They would mock him, taunt him, using every available means to transform him into a gibbering madman. Then they would slash the rope which held him suspended. His helpless body would hurtle down into the pit, where the stakes awaited it. No matter how it fell, how it landed, it would be impaled in a dozen places, stabbed through by the swordlike shafts of bamboo.

Death would come slowly. Before it finally claimed him, something else would come to add to the agony of his mutilated body. Hundreds of tiny black termites would discover him, and feed upon him, crawling over every inch of his flesh, fighting among themselves for the right to devour him. There could be no death more horrible, more prolonged—

Trent looked down at the sputtering torch below him. From far away, now, came sounds of singing and shouting; and listening to the sounds, he knew that the village orgy had begun. How long it would continue, he could not guess. Time meant nothing. Hours or days, the final result would be the same.

BUT would it? Slowly he raised his head to peer up at his bound wrists. For above them, the upper end of the taut rope was tied securely to the horizontal cross-bar. A wild scheme found its way into Trent's mind as he stared up. Then he closed his eyes, knowing that if the scheme

failed, as it almost certainly would, the end would be even more horrible.

But it was the only way. Deliberately he worked his legs back and forth in an effort to start his body swaying. Every movement increased the agony in his arms and shoulders, yet he continued the grim process, steeling himself against the pain. Slowly his twisting body began to swing pendulum-like at the rope's end. High above him, the proper loop made a sucking, muttering sound as the woven strands chafed against the horizontal bar.

IT was a mad plan. By turning and twisting his body at the end of every swing, he would soon gain a momentum which would carry him back and forth in sickening arcs. Eventually the rope above would wear itself through. Then, if his swaying body chanced to be at the extreme end of one of its wild sweeps, there was a remote possibility—terribly remote—that the momentum would carry him clear of the pit's edge when the rope broke. If not—

Below him, as he swung back and forth in ever increasing arcs, the torch sputtered dismally, lighting up the scene around him. Above, the rope groaned protestingly under his weight. From far away, in the direction of the kampong, came sounds which gave grim indication of the mad celebration which was going on there. Desperately Trent continued his exertions. Agony welled through him, reaching to every part of his swaying body. His arms were in danger of being torn from their sockets. His head throbbed viciously. Waves of blackness came and went, filling him with sickness, threatening to destroy his power to think.

Then suddenly he saw something, and ceased his efforts.

At the edge of the torch-glare

stood Tenegai Zokalu, the *blian* of Oma-Laong, watching him.

Zokalu came forward slowly. Without doubt the man had come back to gloat, to watch the agony-struggles of his victim. Alone and unobserved, he had slipped away from the festivities in the village and returned along the jungle trail, for the express purpose of feasting his near-sighted gaze on the doomed man's struggles.

He advanced leisurely, and squatted at the very edge of the pit, beside the burning fire-brand. Triumphantly he gazed up at Trent's still-swaying body. He said nothing, but the very expression of his face told more than mere words could have conveyed.

To Trent, that leering grin was like a red rag to a bull, firing all the rage and hate within him.

Alone, the two men stared at each other, Trent still swinging slowly at the rope's end, Zokalu squatting comfortably on the ground at the pit's rim.

The torch-glare played upon Trent's chalk-colored face, upon the near-naked flesh of the witch-doctor. Then Zokalu leaned forward, drew the long-bladed *parang* from his breech-clout, and grinned tauntingly.

Trent knew what was coming, steeled himself against it. He knew something else, too, which the *blian* did not know. Above him, the upper end of the rope was nearly worn through. The constant friction caused by his swaying weight had cut into it, eating it away strand by strand. At any moment now it would give way. Any sudden lunge would snap it—

ZOKALU stood erect on the pit's edge, holding the long knife in curled fingers. His intent was obvious. Waiting for Trent's swinging body to come within reach of the sharp-pointed blade, he made a short

stabbing movement with his extended arm.

The sharp steel ate into Trent's leg, inflicting agony. Trent cursed bitterly, blindly. The witch-doctor stood motionless, grinning, waiting for his victim to come within reach again.

Again and again the vicious *parang* scored Trent's flesh, leaving crimson gashes on his body, filling his tormentor with huge delight. With every new stab, Trent's rage increased tenfold, driving all reason out of his mind. Then, in company with the madness which took possession of him, came a desperate plan of escape—a plan hinging upon the wearing away of the rope above him.

HE looked up, set himself for the attempt. The knife raked his leg as he came within reach of Zokalu's outthrust arm; then his body swung clear again, toward the far side of the pit.

The next moment, the next movement, would mean life or death. Violently he swung the entire lower portion of his body, giving an added impetus to the return swing. Then, twisting in mid-air, as he swung toward the *blian's* waiting figure, he literally hurled himself out and down.

The rope went taut with a whip-like crack, as the entire weight of his outflung body fell upon it. Up above, the weakened strands yielded with a sudden protesting screech. Zokalu lunged backward too late.

Trent's legs, extended like ram-rods before his hurtling body, closed in a vicious scissor-grip around the *blian's* throat. The soft ground at the pit's edge stopped his fall, sent a shock of intense pain through his bound arms. White man and Dyak rolled together in a writhing tangle, as the torture-knife flew from Zokalu's hand.

Trent's rage flared to the surface then in full force. He was fighting for his life, and knew it. More important than that, he was fighting the fiend who had inflicted hideous torment upon him. Except for his bound wrists, the odds were evened.

Savagely he maintained his scissor-grip on the *blian's* writhing body. Cruel hands sought his throat, locked there, seeking to strangle him. Bared teeth, sharp as filed nails, buried themselves in his leg, tearing the flesh. Zokalu, old as he was, nevertheless possessed the strength and viciousness of an ape.

Yet Trent's grip did not loosen. Deliberately he wormed toward the yawning brink of the death-pit, dragging the *blian's* snarling form with him. Every inch of the way brought torture, hellish, hideous agony intensified a thousandfold by the witch-doctor's gouging teeth and fingers. But there was no other way, no other hope.

And the *blian* realized his purpose. Staring down into the pit, almost directly beneath, Zokalu uttered a lurid scream of terror and redoubled his frenzied efforts to free himself. His hands tore at Trent's legs, striving desperately to loosen them. Failing in that, he beat a furious tattoo against the white man's face with his clenched fists.

Then, suddenly, Trent acted.

ONE moment the *blian* was locked in the relentless embrace of Trent's legs, shrieking in horror. Next instant the legs opened. Trent's head ground viciously into the Dyak's chest, hurling him backward. For a single sickening second Zokalu clawed wildly at the pit's edge, raking the black earth with his hooked fingers.

Then, mad with terror, he toppled over the brink and shot headlong into the depths below. His wild

screaming ended abruptly, hurled back into his throat by the knife-like stab of a sharpened stake. The only remaining sound was the low sob of Trent's breathing, as Trent lay limp on the pit's edge, sick and exhausted from the effort which had brought victory.

A long moment passed before Trent moved again. Inching forward then, he peered down and shuddered. One glance was sufficient. White-faced and trembling, he groped erect and stumbled away, seeking the *parang* which had fallen from the witch-doctor's fingers.

EVEN after he had found the knife and cut loose the bonds which held his wrists, he did not return again to the pit. He had no stomach for what lay there. He himself had been too close to the same awful end.

Slowly he limped away, down the trail which led to the village, where sounds of the Dyak celebration were still audible.

The sounds were louder now. They beat their way into Trent's brain long before he reached the end of the narrow trail, and more than once he stood still, listening. The Dyak's weird chanting had become a discordant bellowing, filling the dark with its wild din. At uneven intervals, shrill screams jangled into the night, uncanny and significant.

Then Trent reached the trail's end, stood there at the edge of the kampong clearing, and stared.

A huge fire blazed in the community fire-pit, hurling great towers of scarlet flame into a spark-filled sky. Around it danced an unending line of leaping figures, their naked bodies gleaming in the firelight. Zokalu's Dyaks had thrown aside the last thin veneer of civilization. Their emotions had bested them. The empty *tuak*-gourds, lying on the ground un-

der their frenzied feet, gave mute proof that they had drunk themselves into a state of near-madness.

A scowl twisted Trent's lips as he watched them. For a moment he considered the several lines of advance open to him; then he made up his mind and turned back again into the jungle. Five minutes later, after prowling along the river shore under cover of darkness, he crept silently, cautiously, toward the rear door of the Residency. The door opened soundlessly, closed behind him as he slipped over the threshold.

Still scowling, he paced into the room where Monikoa's head squatted on its death-chair. From there he strode into the adjoining room, where Anderton's head sat on the table.

When he left the Residency a moment later, as swiftly and silently as he had entered it, he carried two grim objects in his hands. They were the heads of his former companions.

When he returned, more than half an hour after leaving, his hands were empty.

He looked about him then, deliberating on the last and most dangerous stage of his wild scheme. Stiffly he strode into one of the bedrooms, ripped a white sheet from the bunk there, and carried the sheet into the living room. Then he went to work, listening all the while to the unceasing clamor in the village outside.

BY the time he had finished, the night was an inferno. Pacing to the front door, he opened it and stood there, studying the scene before him. Fresh *tengar* logs had been hurled upon the fire. Mighty towers of scarlet leaped skyward. Every man, woman and child of Oma-Laong was taking part in the savage orgy.

Trent licked his lips, hesitated. For an instant his confidence desert-

ed him; he realized the full peril of the thing he was about to attempt. Then he shrugged, walked forward with long, ground-eating strides, straight toward the fire-pit.

The Dyaks did not see him until he was almost upon him. Then suddenly a woman gaped with widening eyes, stood stiff, pointed with a rigid hand. A shriek of terror jangled from her mouth. The others, bewildered by her abrupt transformation, turned to stare.

They, too, gaped in terror. As if by magic, the wild orgy ended. The shrill screams became whispers of fear. Every pair of horrified eyes stared straight at Trent, as if seeing a ghost.

TRENT was a strange figure. Great rings of black paint marred his face, making sunken death-tubes of his eyes, transforming his features into a mask of corpse-like horror. His body was encased in a grotesque white winding-sheet, with significant Dyak symbols painted upon it. He advanced slowly, stiffly, his arms folded on his chest, his feet carrying him forward with mechanical strides.

Even before he reached the fire-glow, he knew his danger was past. The Dyaks, retreating from him, were muttering words of utter terror. Again and again he caught the half-audible name, *Nagah-Besar*—god of the spirits.

Then he spoke. In a booming monotone he addressed them, dragging the words from deep down in his throat, hurling them forth with sufficient force to drown the hissing crackle of the fire. The words were Dyak, and carried a message which put fear into the heart of every listening native.

"The white man is dead, and he is not dead. Do you understand that? He can not die. The great *Nagah-*

Besar released him from the death-trap on the river trail, and put another victim in his place. Go there and look!"

The Dyaks stared at him, afraid to move.

"Go there and look!" Trent bel-
lowed again. "Go now!"

And they obeyed him. Slowly they backed away from him, and turned, and vanished into the dark beyond the fire. In less than a minute they had left him entirely alone. Then he relaxed, exhaled slowly through dry lips, and reached a trembling hand to his forehead to wipe away the beads of sweat which had gathered there.

He knew what they would find when they reached the death-trap. He himself had prepared it for their benefit. First they would stare up at the broken rope which had held his own helpless body. Then they would peer down into the pit and see the impaled body of their witch-doctor, the man who was supposedly immune from death.

Then they would see something else. Horrified, they would gaze at the severed heads of Monikoa and Major Anderton, squatting there at the edge of the pit. They would wonder how those heads had come there. And they would know, then, that the white man was truly a consort of the gods of death.

TRENT was right. Long later, long after he had returned alone to the Residency and posted himself at a window to watch proceedings, the people of Oma-Laong returned to the kampong. There was no screaming then, no celebrating. In absolute silence the Dyaks dispersed to their own huts, leaving the central fire to

burn itself out. Only one man, the village *kapala*, came to the Residency, and he came slowly, faltering-ly, terribly afraid for his life.

Ascending the Residency steps, he knocked timidly on the door. When Trent opened the door, the native shrank back, trembling in every muscle. Brokenly he said:

"Me—me come make peace, Tuan! Dem people Oma-Laong, dem never make trouble again. Dem never again do wrong—"

"Come inside," Trent said quietly. "You're going to deliver a message down-river for me."

THE *kapala* entered and sat down, still trembling, staring fearfully. Casually Trent took pencil, paper and envelope from the table drawer and composed a letter. The letter was addressed to the C. O. at Long Tjuo. It said simply, in part:

"... Right now the danger is over, but I am in the peculiar position of being forced to masquerade as a resurrected corpse. For that reason, I suggest that you send relief up here at your very earliest convenience. I assure you it is no joke to go around looking like a ghost, wearing a home-made winding-sheet, which is too large, and a face streaked with paint. Yours sincerely . . ."

Trent sealed the letter, handed it to the *kapala*, and spoke quiet words of instruction. The letter would be delivered; he had no fear of that. The frightened *kapala* was only too eager to clutch it and get out.

Quietly Trent closed the door again. Mechanically he stuck a cigarette in his lips, lit it, and paced to the table. Then, without any display of emotion whatever, he began to play solitaire.

In Next Month's THRILLING ADVENTURES: A Great Story of the Sea by Jacland Marmur—WATCHMATES. Don't Miss It!

THE WATER TEST



The spectators watched in astonishment

A Colorful Story of Swashing Blades and Stout Hearts in the Glamorous Colonial Days

By RALPH R. FLEMING

Author of "Military Heels," "The Eye of Siva," etc.

A CURIOUS tension held sway over the crowd in Beadle's tavern on the break of the hill overlooking the harbor of Salem. Village louts and idlers clad in leather jerkins and homespun breeches huddled over the rough oak tables, sipping ale and talking among themselves, low-voiced, with many a sidelong glance at the double doors leading to the council chamber beyond.

At a table in the rear of the room Mr. Thomas Beadle, portly, bald and

asthmatic, leaned toward the guest who sat beside him.

"That be John Corey over there," he wheezed, pointing out a pale-faced youth who was hunched over a table in the corner opposite. "Common talk has it that his sister will swing on the gibbet ere long."

The guest shaded his eyes from the glare of the sperm lamps overhead and flicked a keen look across the room.

"Aye," he growled, "and a pity it is. He seems a likely lad, and I've

heard that the lass is all the kin he has this side of the water."

The inn-keeper shrugged callously. "True enough. But the court has proof that Martha Corey be guilty of practicing witchcraft. Within the past fortnight three children have come under her spell, and do be carrying on as if bereft of their senses."

"Sink me!" the other exclaimed, amazed. "Are ye meaning that the court would condemn a lass because of the fool gibberish of a child? I've seen the like among the blacks of Barbados, but never thought to hear of it in the Colonies."

BEADLE glanced at his guest askance. It was not his habit to antagonize a patron, especially one whose dress and bearing proclaimed him to be of the gentry.

Lace fell at the stranger's throat and wrists, lending a dandified touch to his well-tailored suit of blue velvet.

Across his knees lay a sheathed rapier which was suspended from the silver-studded belt that encircled his waist, and from the garter that held his breeches snug at the knee, the jeweled handle of a dirk glinted wickedly.

But the characteristic that fascinated the inn-keeper most was the piercing intensity of the fellow's eyes; deep-set gray eyes boring out above a thin-lipped mouth, the whole topped by a wealth of raven black hair that fell half to his shoulders. Not a man to be crossed lightly. Indeed, no!

Beadle shrugged again, almost apologetically, and waved an arm toward the closed doors opposite. "'Tis in the hands of the Court," he murmured, and rolled his eyes piously. "The Lord's will be done."

Abruptly the double doors creaked and swung open. A hush fell on the

crowd, and all heads turned expectantly as a little knot of men in the somber attire of the clergy came slowly out into the tap-room. Following came a number of prominent citizens of Salem and of towns surrounding. At once a clamor went up:

"The news! The news!"

The leader of the clergy, one Samuel Parris, held up his hand for silence.

"It has been agreed," he said solemnly, "that Martha Corey be given the water test in Dykes' pond at noon of the morrow."

The pale-faced lad at the table in the corner struggled to his feet, trembling.

"No!" he cried. "She isn't guilty! I'll see ye in hell before I'll let—" He broke off and pulled a flintlock pistol from beneath his jerkin and leveled it at the clergyman.

A gasp went up, and from somewhere in the crowd a well-aimed ale mug went hurtling toward the lad. There was a thud followed by a roar as the pistol exploded, and the ball tore into the floor harmlessly. The mob closed in with angry cries of "Down 'em! Kill the blasted murderer!"

There was an agonized shriek as a burly lout sprang forward and drove his fist into the lad's ribs. Eager hands joined in the fray, and John Corey went down under a rain of blows.

SUDDENLY a wiry figure hit the crowd from the rear with the force of a battering-ram. A channel opened up before the smashing drive of his fists until the velvet-clad stranger stood astraddle of the boy on the floor.

He gripped the lad's jerkin and flung him to the wall behind. Next instant his long rapier fairly leaped from the scabbard and flicked out in

a series of lunges almost too fast for the eye to follow.

Howls of pain rang out as the needle-sharp point pricked arm and throat. The crowd fell away under the frantic urge of those within range of the steel.

The swordsman lowered the point of his weapon, and glanced down at the bruised face of the boy.

"Fetch a noggin of rum," he snapped at the gaping servitor behind the bar. "And quick about it; the lad's sore in need!"

WITH the authoritative ring of the stranger's voice the mob fell silent, and yet more so as he turned his hot eyes full upon the group still huddled about the entrance to the council chamber.

"What manner of men are you?" he roared. "Would ye stand by and see the lad trampled down?"

The group of clergymen and civic leaders stood silent, no one among them being able to loosen his tongue.

"Aye!" the stranger growled, lip curling. "Members of the cloth! A court of justice! Christian gentlemen, all!"

At this a buzzing swept through the crowd. A bull-necked fellow from the civic group stepped forward and clapped a hand to the hilt of his rapier.

"The man's a heretic!" he shouted. "A damned renegade! Lay to, men, and club 'im down!"

He whipped out his blade and leaped forward a pace as if to lead the attack. But the mob stood rooted, wary of the glittering rapier again menacing.

The man in the velvet suit chuckled, and, feeling the lad at his feet stirring back to consciousness, reached out with his free hand and took the noggin of rum standing on the bar.

For a moment he lowered his eyes

as he handed the glass down to the youth with a muttered "Drink it, lad." In that instant he sensed rather than saw the flash of steel.

Instinctively he swayed aside and parried the thrust of the bull-necked fellow with a deft flip of his own blade. As the rapiers locked in mid-air, a gleam appeared in the stranger's deep-set eyes. In the tense silence that gripped the mob his words came clearly:

"Aye, renegade!" he hissed. "And heretic! But never a man have I run through without warning!"

To the spectators it seemed that the two blades had become welded together and that neither combatant could draw them apart. But presently the bull-necked fellow fell to panting. Great beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead.

Suddenly the stranger's blade seemed to tremble and lose grip. Like a flash the point dropped and passed under the quillon of the other's guard, deftly pricked his hand, causing a momentary relaxation of the muscles.

Next instant the bull-necked fellow's sword went whirling through the air and stuck in the timbered ceiling, the hilt swaying to and fro like a pendulum.

A GASP of astonishment went up, and when the stranger lowered his blade, seeming not to notice the craven retreat of his opponent, the sportsmanship of his act took the mob by the throat, they knowing full well that he might have run his adversary through in retaliation for that first foul thrust.

"Gor blast me!" roared a burly seaman who was perched atop of a table. "A pretty play! A gallant play!"

"Aye!" the mob assented in one voice. Amid the sudden hubbub of shouts a cry rang out and quickly

swelled to the roar of a hundred throats:

"His name! The stranger's name!"

The man in blue swept the sea of faces appraisingly. Then he coolly sheathed his rapier and flung a gold-piece on the bar. "Drinks for the house on Roscoe Chard," he bawled, and turned to raise up the lad at his feet with no heed of the commotion that mention of his name had aroused.

"Roscoe Chard!" the burly seaman muttered, awed. "Bloody Capt'n Chard!"

NOT a man there but had heard of Captain Roscoe Chard and his forty-gun privateer, *Black Swan*. The tales of his exploits had rung throughout the Colonies these four years past. Breath-taking tales of blood and gallantry from the icy coast of Acadia to the Caribbean.

Bloody Chard! The victor of a hundred battles; the scourge of pirates and French alike; a name to strike terror in the hearts of better men than these who now pledged his health in good red rum.

Captain Chard gripped the youth by the arm. "Come, lad," he said kindly, and steadied the other as they walked the few paces to the waiting clergy. He eyed the group coolly and picked out the Reverend Samuel Parris, the gaunt leader at whom the boy had attempted to shoot.

"Ye'll have something to say?" he challenged.

Parris glared at the sea captain. "Aye. 'Tis a grievous insult ye have offered the cause of justice this night."

Chard continued to stare at the other, face mask-like, silent.

"Do ye realize," the clergyman continued, with a spot of color mounting his cheeks, "do ye realize that this court has been authorized

by His Excellency, Governor Phipps; that we can brook no interference in the way of—of—" He broke off angrily and pointed a bony forefinger at the lad.

Captain Chard tightened an arm about his shrinking charge. "Aye, I realize all that, and more," he said quietly, "but I've no doubt the lad had grave cause."

Parris' mouth tightened. "Enough of this bickering," he snapped. "John Corey must be committed to jail on a charge of attempted murder. A hanging offense! And look you, sir, it will brook ye well to heed the laws of a Christian community." Chard bowed gravely. "'Tis good advice," he murmured, "and I'll profit by it, mayhap."

BEFORE anyone could grasp his purpose, he turned abruptly and strode to the doorway, fairly carrying the lad along on his arm. His move took the group completely by surprise, and the door had banged shut after the pair, before an astonished shout rose behind.

"Quick, lad!" Chard whispered. "Run for it! But come back to the stables, here, within the hour. I'll be waiting."

With a gasping "God bless ye, sir!" the lad sprang around the corner of the building and sped off into the darkness like a frightened hare. Chard spun on his heel in time to meet the first of the mob spewing out of the doorway. At sight of him, alone, they hesitated in confusion.

"Who'll have a drink with Roscoe Chard?" the captain roared out, and coolly pushed his way back into the tavern. He sent a coin spinning across the room toward the bar. "Set up for the house!" he roared again, and the mob turned at heel and followed meekly.

With a rolling swagger the cap-

tain passed by the members of the Court, glancing neither to right nor left.

As he raised his glass in response to the clamor of toasts from the crowd, he chuckled, watching out of the corner of his eye as Parris and his colleagues stalked out of the inn, buzzing among themselves angrily.

But in spite of his swaggering air and apparent mastery of the situation, Captain Chard was fully alive to the danger of his position. He knew that Parris' warning had been no idle threat.

Governor Phipps had in truth endowed this group with judicial powers above the ordinary. And while persecution of witchcraft was the prime purpose of their organization, they were also authorized to mete out justice in more common cases of felony.

A HALF hour later Chard was frowning to himself as he mounted the stairway to his room on the second floor of the tavern. Almost he regretted having told John Corey to come back to the stables.

His defense of the lad had been wholly impulsive—but what reason had he to believe that the boy's cause was just? Excitement was an excellent thing in itself—aye, the spice of life!—but was there any need of running his head into a noose blindly?

New England law was both harsh and narrow, he reflected, and the willful transgressor was apt to fare ill. This was especially so now that the Colonies were aflame with weird tales of witchcraft.

A man had but to look at his neighbor cross-eyed, and lo! he was likely to be clapped into jail as a sorcerer. And the accounts of the judicial activities at Salem, the seat of

the disturbance, were spectacular almost beyond belief.

Chard grinned. That was the reason he had immediately set out on horseback from Boston, the port at which his frigate had put in for repairs on the evening previous. The lure of excitement was a thing he never could resist, be it ashore or afloat.

The captain entered his room and barred the door. His eyes ran over the bare furnishings revealed by the light of a sperm lamp in a wall bracket, and came to rest on a coil of rope beneath the washstand. It was placed there, he knew, as a means of escape in case of fire. This had been in his mind when he had slipped out of the tap-room unobserved a minute previous.

At once he set about securing the rope to the solid bar of the door, thence out through the window and to the ground below.

A rope as a stairway is no novelty to a sailor, hence it was but a matter of seconds 'til Chard was striding through the darkness toward the stables in the rear of the tavern. It would do no harm, he reflected, to hear the boy's story.

"Hist, lad, are ye there?"

In the stable a horse stomped, frightened. Chard stood motionless, listening. He fumbled for the door and opened it noiselessly, peering into the blackness.

"Corey, lad, are ye there?"

There was a muffled grunt from within the stable as of someone trying to cry out through sealed lips.

CHARD stiffened, suddenly alert, and whirled at sound of a cautious footfall behind. Too late! Something crashed atop his head with terrific force. He caught one glimpse of a face, blurred but familiar, even as he struggled to draw his rapier. Then, oblivion.

Out of a flashing, crimson-shot chaos, Captain Chard grew increasingly conscious of a pounding in his head. He blinked a moment and regained his senses with a rush. He started as a voice out of the darkness said:

"Be ye all right, sir?"

The captain flung out an arm in the direction of the voice and caught hold of a leather jerkin. He struggled to a sitting position, shaky. "Aye, right enough," he muttered, confused, feeling of the egg-like lump on his head. Then, leaning forward, following the arm that still contacted with the jerkin, trying to see the other's features: "Who are ye, and what manner of place is this?"

"IT'S John Corey, sir, and we be in the jail-house."

"Humph, so that's it? A pretty pickle! Roscoe Chard in a land-lubber's brig! Was it that red-faced swab who put us here? I glimpsed the dog's face just before—"

"Aye, sir, if ye mean Sir Dudley Hathway, the man ye fought for me. He and Barry Bruce, the sheriff, caught me creepin' into the stable. Bruce had a warrant for your arrest, but they were afeard to go into the tavern after ye. While they were binding me, Sir Dudley caught sight of ye climbing out the window."

"Sink me!" Chard broke in disgustedly. "With the light behind me like a beacon! A fool's trick!"

"I tried to cry out," Corey added, "but Bruce clapped his hand over my mouth and carried me into the stable. And then—"

"And then, a clout on the head," Chard finished dryly.

"Aye, sir, and it's sorry I am."

"Sir Dudley Hathway," Chard muttered. "'Tis a pity I didn't run the beggar through. But now, lad, what's

all this ado about a water test? What manner of foolishness is that?"

In the darkness the captain could feel the lad trembling.

"It be the final test of guilt, sir. Tomorrow they will bring my sister from the jail-house at Ipswich. She will be bound hand and foot and tossed into Dykes' pond. If she floats, she will be adjudged guilty, and be"—Corey's voice sank to a husky whisper—"be sentenced to hang. If she sinks, she will be acquitted, but—but—"

"Blast me for a damned pirate!" the captain growled. "If the lass sinks, she'll drown! And if she floats, she'll grace the gibbet!"

The lad fell to blubbering quietly.

Chard rose in the darkness and stretched his cramped muscles. He ran an exploring hand over his person and paused, incredulous, as he felt the handle of a dirk still protruding from the garter at his knee. His captors had relieved him of the silver-studded belt and rapier, but the dagger had been overlooked.

At once the captain began seeking a means of escape. He groped forward with hands outstretched until he encountered a rough stone wall. Following this around he found that the cell was some ten feet square, with the only means of egress a close-barred door leading to a corridor beyond.

HERE, then, lay their one hope of success. Chard ran his hands over the door from top to bottom and paused as he felt a small hinged section near the base.

This, he reasoned, was the means of serving the prisoners with food and water. For some minutes he crouched motionless, thinking. Then abruptly, he groped back to his cell-mate.

"Hist, lad, is there a guard posted here at night?"

"Aye," Corey responded listlessly. "It be Jonathan Barlow. He sleeps in the cubby-hole at the foot of the corridor."

"Devil damme!" the captain exploded, grinning to himself in the darkness. "Ho, there's luck for us, lad. Heed, now, and mayhap we be free men in a twinkling." And for the next few minutes the captain whispered to his companion excitedly.

Soon a thud sounded as of fist on flesh, followed by a realistic groan from the lad. Chard felt of the boy's nose and brought his hand away wet with blood. "Smear it about," he whispered, and sprang to the cell door with a great rattling of the bars.

"Ho, there, the guard!" he belowed. "The guard!"

THERE was a commotion down at the end of the corridor, followed by a sudden flare of light as the door of the cubby-hole flew open.

The jailer came padding down the hall in his coarse socks, face and hair grotesque in the flickering rays of the sperm lantern he carried in one hand.

"What's wrong here?" he grumbled, halting opposite the cell door and eyeing the captain sleepily.

"Quick, man, 'tis water we need. The lad be hurt and bleeding bad."

As if to prove his words, a moan broken by a choking cough sounded from the cell. The jailer raised his lantern and peered through the bars.

He saw that John Corey lay stretched on the stone floor, both hands gripping his stomach convulsively, blood welling from mouth and nose and frothing over his moaning lips. He stood for a moment, jaw sagging, hesitant. Then his eyes narrowed with sudden suspicion.

"How did it come about?"

"Fool!" the captain snorted. "'Tis a hemorrhage the lad has. His vitals have been sore injured in the fight at the tavern. Would ye see him die for lack of water?"

Without another word, the jailer turned and padded off down the hallway. The captain flicked a sly glance at the string of keys jingling at the fellow's belt.

After a moment the guard returned with a jug of water. He set the lantern on the floor and knelt to thrust the jug through the hinged section of the door.

Like a flash, Chard swooped down and seized the extended wrist with steely fingers, jerking the arm inward until its owner lay flat against the bars. In the same instant he plucked the dirk from his garter and set it against the other's throat.

"One struggle," he hissed, "and I'll slit your gullet! Reach up, now, and unlock the door."

The jailer gulped and hastened to follow instructions with his free hand. As the lock clicked open, the captain swung the door inward and called to the lad to hold the dagger against the jailer's throat while he loosed his hold of the fellow's arm. In a trice the pair stood free in the corridor, looking in at the guard secure behind his own bars.

IN high good humor the captain caught up the lantern from the floor and flung a last glance at the prisoner, knowing that the thick walls of the building would deaden any outcry he might make. "Come, lad," he said, "we've plenty to do this day."

In the cubby-hole Chard sought in vain for his rapier and personal possessions. The place was bare of everything excepting the jailer's personal comforts. True, a flintlock pistol hung upon a peg on the wall, but this he passed over disdainfully;

a good rapier was worth a dozen of those miniature carronades.

Then, too, the loss of his prized Damascus blade was a hurt that rankled even deeper than the memory of his ignominious capture at the stables. Could he return to the *Black Swan* minus his sword, and nursing a cracked pate besides?

Chard grimaced at the picture conjured up by the thought. He was in this affair with a vengeance now. It had become a matter of personal vanity. He was bound to champion the lad's cause through to a finish, and, mayhap, teach these landlubbers that Roscoe Chard was not a man to be bandied about lightly.

THE captain cut his reflections short as a clock in the village struck the hour. Four A. M. Another hour would see daylight. He turned and eyed John Corey appraisingly. The lad was well grown in spite of his frail appearance, tall and broad of shoulder, albeit a bit scrawny.

"Strip off those clothes," he ordered suddenly. "I've a mind to play the village lout while ye're away to Boston."

Corey gaped at his companion, astonished.

"Aye, Boston," the captain grinned, beginning to shed his suit of blue velvet. "I've a hired beast stabled at the tavern and 'twill be no thievery to make use of it."

Twenty minutes later two shadowy forms crept into the stables at the rear of Beadle's tavern. Presently they appeared in the open again, but now the smaller of the two sat astride a saddled mare. His companion led the animal out into the roadway and away from the tavern.

"Mind, lad," he said when they were a safe distance from the inn. "Lieutenant Jock Sutherland is the man ye're to see. The velvet suit

will be proof enough of your story. Now, off wi' ye!"

The lad clapped heels to the mare's flanks and was off like a shot.

Some five hours later a wiry figure rolled out of a thicket on the outskirts of Salem. He rose, yawning, and shaded his eyes for a look at the clock on a steeple in the distance. With a satisfied grunt, he hitched up his homespun breeches, and wriggled deeper into the leather jerkin which was patently too small for his broad shoulders. Next he shifted the dirk in his belt so that its handle was well concealed.

Bethinking of the tell-tale hair that hung half to his shoulders, he caught it up at the top of his crown and jammed his cap down over it, tucking the stray wisps under. When these simple preparations had been completed, Captain Roscoe Chard set out for the village in quest of food and news.

The town was alive with all manner of horse-carts, and folk come afoot from the outlying districts to witness the test at Dykes' pond. Strangers and villagers alike stood about in little groups discussing the coming event.

Chard slouched along with cap pulled down over his face, eyes and ears alert, confident that it would take more than passing notice to identify him as the swash-buckling swordsman of the tavern brawl.

AT a baker's shop he purchased a loaf of bread with one of the two gold-pieces which had been stitched into the waistband of his velvet breeches, the lad having taken the other to use in case of emergency.

He dropped into an ale house and established himself at an obscure table with a tankard of brew to wash the coarse bread down. At the bar a burly figure was holding

forth loud-voiced, tongue well loosened with ale.

"Aye, lads," he cried, "John Corey has won himself a stout champion."

Chard glanced up at the speaker and hastily bent over his ale again. It was the seaman who had stood atop of the table at Beadle's tavern.

"Where is Bloody Chard this minute?" the seaman flung at his audience triumphantly. "The jail-house stands empty. His horse is missing from the stable at Beadle's." He lowered his voice ominously—" 'Tis my opinion we've not seen the last of Capt'n Roscoe Chard."

A SILENCE fell at this, and the boom of a clock striking eleven rang clear. The seaman tossed his empty mug to the bar. "Time to be off," he grunted, and turned to the door. The crowd fell in behind and moved out into the roadway.

Chard stuffed the remainder of the loaf into the pockets of his jerkin, and rose to follow a few paces in the rear.

At Dykes' Pond, which was in reality a flooded quarry, the captain marveled at the number of people assembled. And a steady stream continued to pour in as the hour of trial drew near.

He pushed through the crowd until but a row or two separated him from the group of officials who were seated on a rough-hewn bench near the water's edge. His eyes darted over their faces—

There was the Reverend Parris, gloomy visaged, and aye! Cotton Mather from Boston, a well known man of letters, but one who was a bit stupid to the captain's mind, especially on such subjects as witchcraft, sorcery and the like. The rest of the group he passed over lightly, recognizing here and there a face he had seen at Beadle's.

Then, suddenly, Chard's eyes

flamed as they fastened on a silver-studded belt and rapier worn by a thick-necked dandy who was standing a little apart from the judges.

Sir Dudley Hathway!

The captain growled deep in his throat so that those nearest him glanced at his grim face askance.

Abruptly a roar went up from the crowd, and a path opened for a high-wheeled cart to pass. Chard flicked a glance at the driver—the sheriff like as not—and passed to the slim figure of a girl clinging to the swaying bars behind. A thrill of admiration shot through him.

A comely lass! And mettlesome, too! No hint of fear stared out of those dark eyes in spite of the deathly pallor of her face. Amid the chorus of jeers and cat-calls, the captain's "Courage, lass!" boomed out clearly.

For an instant Martha Corey's eyes clung to her unknown champion's face. Then a smile parted her tight-pressed lips and her head went up with renewed spirit.

Chard pushed his way to the front rank as the sheriff hauled the girl out of the prison cart and stood her before the judges.

The Reverend Samuel Parris, presiding magistrate, rose and towered over the prisoner like a gaunt, black-garbed specter of death.

"Martha Corey," he said ponderously, "do ye still deny that ye be possessed of Satan?"

A BREATHLESS silence held the crowd expectant. Every eye focused on the slim figure before the bench.

She stiffened, head erect, eyes level and unflinching—

"I do!"

A flutter swept the mob, and from somewhere well back a cry went up. Instantly it swelled to an insistent roar.

"The test! On with the test!"

The presiding magistrate signaled to the sheriff, and at once that worthy began to bind the prisoner's hands and feet preparatory to tossing her into the pond.

In the front rank of the crowd, Roscoe Chard turned to stare anxiously out over the sea of heads, over the low-lying hills toward the harbor of Salem.

A dozen times within the half-hour had he stared so, but now his heart leaped in sudden relief at sight of a frigate standing in for the harbor under full sail.

WITH no sound of warning, the captain hurled himself forward and dealt the sheriff a powerful, slicing blow at the base of his throat, using the edge of his hand.

The law officer gasped, stricken, and sagged at the knees. Almost in the same instant Chard tore at the bindings on the prisoner's hands, still unfastened, and whirled to face the astonished judges.

His eyes raked the line scornfully and fastened on the livid face of Sir Dudley Hathway. The dandy alone seemed to recognize the grim face beneath the madman's cap. He mouthed a single word, stiff-lipped.

"Aye, it's Roscoe Chard," the captain roared. "Unbuckle that sword, you thieving dog!"

For a long moment the eyes of the crowd held on the two men, the one seemingly under the spell of the other. Then, with a visible effort, Hathway tore his eyes free. He whipped out the rapier and lunged forward, mouthing a foul oath.

Chard's right hand darted to his belt. There was a lightning-like snap of his wrist; a momentary flash of sunlight on steel. Sir Dudley Hathway staggered and dropped the rapier to clutch at the jeweled

handle of a dirk protruding from his throat.

The captain swooped to retrieve the fallen blade, and with the feel of live steel, the lust of battle surged yet hotter in his veins.

"Ho!" he challenged, eyes flaming. "Ye've been clamoring for the blood of the lass, but who among ye will be the first to try and spill it?"

It was a magnificent stand; a desperate play for time; and not one among that crowd, save the Reverend Parris, had courage to meet it.

"Citizens of Salem!" he thundered. "This madman, aye, murderer! dares defy the majesty of the law with his puny sword! Are ye cowards and weaklings? Are there no sticks and stones within reach?"

Under the lash of Parris' scorn, the mob took heart. There was a sudden bedlam of shouts; a scrambling about for stones to cast.

Chard flung a quick glance over his shoulder at the lass. His bluff was called. Now indeed were they in a tight corner. So long as they remained in the open, a rapier would be useless. They would go down quickly under a rain of hurled stones. Their one hope of survival lay in close fighting, in giving the mob no opportunity to cast their missiles.

MARTHA COREY met his glance with steady eyes, unafraid, ready to follow him through hell itself. Chard thrilled to the quiet courage of her smile.

"Follow me, lass!" he cried, and seizing her by the hand, sprang at the thick of the crowd.

At once the front ranks bellied inward before the charge, frantic. The captain leaped into the gap and the rapier seemed a thing alive in his hand.

Swaying, whirling, lunging with a

bewildering change of pace, he pricked a throat here, ran through a threatening arm there, controlling his thrusts precisely, displaying the superb skill of a master swordsman. The flashing blade seemed to be in a dozen places at once, but with never a fatal thrust.

Steadily the mob gave way before the relentless drive of the rapier. And as steadily, Chard pressed forward on their heels, ever retaining his grip on the hand of the lass.

But now his breath was coming in great gasps. The arm that wielded the sword was fast losing its spring. The circle about them was gradually widening; the stones beginning to fly through the air.

Abruptly a great shout went up on the outer fringe of the crowd. Above the sea of heads Chard caught the flash of sunlight on naked steel. A hoarse bellow of triumph broke from his lips.

"This way, hearties!" he roared, and fell to the attack with renewed strength.

BUT the mob had no more stomach for strife. Panic swept them like wind rippling over wheat. They broke, shouting with terror, trampling one another in haste to escape the solid line of seamen who came charging in with swinging cutlasses.

"Avast!" the captain roared out hastily:

"No slaughter, lads!"

In a twinkling the crowd had scattered to the four winds, leaving

the burly crew of the *Black Swan* in possession of the field. A velvet-clad youth leaped from among them and flung himself at the captain's feet.

Chard flushed, and raised the boy up with no gentle hand. "Tush, lad," he growled. "Have ye no word of greeting for your sister?"

MARTHA COREY stared at the pair, bewildered, but as her brother gasped out his story, she turned to her rescuer with a light in her eyes that shook him strangely.

"Ye've the likeness of Christ," she said simply.

Bloody Chard gasped, taken aback. "That be sacrilege," he muttered, and suddenly he knew that this woman had pierced through his outer shell of blood and bluster, that the quivering, kindly soul of him stood revealed. Impulsively he dropped to one knee before her and tore off his cap—

"Will ye come with me, lass? There's never a home for ye in Salem after this affair. I've a sister in Virginia who will welcome ye with open arms. Aye, and the lad too. Will ye come?"

For a long moment Martha Corey smiled down into his eager eyes. Then—

"Aye, Captain," she whispered, "I'll come."

Roscoe Chard rose up with a jubilant shout.

"Back to the frigate, lads," he belted. "Up anchor and southward ho!"

Next Month: An Unusual Western Short Story

HE'S MY BOY

By OSCAR SCHISGALL

Author of "Six-Gun Justice," etc.

—and Many Other Gripping Stories of Adventure

Benson Wipes *the* Slate



"Now you get over in that corner and keep still"

*An Action-Packed Story of Desperate Struggle in
Famine-Swept South Africa*

A Complete Novelette

By FERDINAND BERTHOUD

Author of "Black Mamba," "Diamond Cut Diamond," etc.

RECENTLY subdued rebellion had seared Matabeleland. Far to the saw-toothed hills on every horizon, the veld was burned off the black. Only the gaunt skeletons of buck and cattle broke the monotony of the scene. From Zambezi to the Cape, every ox had been taken by the plague of rinderpest;

from the Indian Ocean to Angola much of the game had been swept away. Twenty-one months running no rain had fallen, and starvation held native South Africa in its maw. Even the vultures had left, and the dried bodies of Kaffirs lay unmolested and mummified in the paths.

The huge, bearded, sun-tanned man

in gray-back shirt and riding breeches banged a bottle on the empty beer-case-built counter. The air in the wattle and daub trading store reeked of dry rot. Fine dust from wood-borers sifted from poles in the grass-thatched roof.

"Whisky, Mac!" Musters laughed raspingly. "You, too, Benson?"

The man called Mac poured a good four fingers of blood-hot liquor, held it up and peered grimly through it. Pondering, he reached for a sweating, steam-covered stone water pitcher.

"Better to take it neat, eh, Musters?" he said. "Say, Benson, you're a medical missionary, and ought to know. Shouldn't whisky kill the germs in this filthy green-scum-covered water?"

THE huge bearded man, half drunk, jerked a thumb over his shoulder. At one end of the store was a doorless doorway and mud-built alcove. "No, Mac. Hear him singing?" demanded Musters. "That's what's got Tompkins in there. Filled him up with raw liquor to kill black-water fever, and he's singing himself gaily to hell.

"Damn quiet, aren't you, Benson?" Musters leered. "Afraid to drink?"

"No," the little man quietly denied. "I'm not scared to drink, and I never was. A little liquor's good for anyone in this intolerable climate, but it doesn't fit today."

"Why?" Musters asked.

"Because it doesn't seem right to be liquoring up and getting half shot and merry, Musters, with all the thousands of poor devils around us starving and suffering the tortures of the damned. Because when poor Tompkins in there finishes his singing he'll go to sleep and never wake up again."

"Tortures be hanged!" the big man scoffed. "Tompkins dying? What

the hell does one dead man count? You're squeamish, Benson, just as you were back home at school before you went to Christchurch College."

"No, I'm not," the medical missionary asserted. "Far from it. But take a look outside, Musters. There are hundreds of pair of eyes on top of still living skeletons gathering about out there, and men dying from hunger have little conscience. A mass of living corpses still has some strength. There are not more than half a dozen or so of us whites left in the district. Some of us have got to keep our heads."

Utterly uncaring, the huge man looked past the ramshackle doorway. His long, prematurely gray-streaked pugnacious beard shouted defiance.

Glowing, cavernous eyes of scores of knife-ribbed Kaffirs stared covetously in at the almost empty shelves and the scant provisions they carried. So scarce was food that well they knew nothing possessed by any Kaffir could buy further means to keep him alive.

OUTSIDE two living black wraiths were dragging a dead Matabele man away.

"Lucky beggar," said Benson as he stood gazing out.

Musters frowned as he gazed at the smaller man.

"Lucky beggar?" he cogitated. "What do you mean, Benson?"

Benson's eyes bored into Musters'. "I meant it was far luckier to be dead, Musters than to be sold into lifelong slavery just for the sake of immediate food."

Instantly the bearded man's face was furious. "What in hell are you driving at, Benson? Trying to start something? You lousy interfering medical missionaries are the curse of Africa!"

"I admit it," Benson agreed. "But my curses can't do everything. If I

had the power, Musters, I'd stop you recruiting gangs of Matabele and Barotse natives, and running them over into Portuguese Angola where our laws can't help them or get them out.

"You're collecting the poor starving devils under promise of food, and selling them into indented labor for life in an alien colony. There's only one dictionary term for that. It's common slave dealing."

"Slave dealing?" the huge man squealed. "You dare to tell me that?"

STOLIDLY in front of him the little man stood. "Yes, Musters. Whatever other sweet name you care to call it by, you're a slave dealer. I've no reason to mince matters with you; I came over here for Tompkins, not to flatter you. You're just the same domineering, ungainly brute that you were when you and I were at school, Musters, but that doesn't scare me. Just one of England's aristocratic natural wasters. Because I was the smallest boy at school you tried to make a slave of me then. I've never forgotten it."

"Whe-e-e!" Musters abruptly roared, and stooped and chucked the other under the chin. "Little Gulliver, we used to call him. Used to put his little fists up and want to fight. Does he recollect taking boxing lessons, and the instructor wanting to put him in the girls' class?"

Benson's arms folded, and his fingers felt muscles that Africa had turned to steel. "Yes," he meekly agreed. "And now for the ten years I've been medical missionary I'm sorry to say the ethics of my profession haven't allowed me to fight, even had I wanted to. But, Musters, before I die I would like to get sufficient excuse to take one good crack at you. Just for the sake of some of the natives you've sold into penal servitude."

"Crack at me?" Musters bellowed. "I couldn't tackle you. I'd be accused of assaulting children."

The man in the alcove howled, and the medical missionary dodged past Musters and to him. Tompkins' cracked lips slavered blood that dripped onto filthy blankets that almost steamed. Benson lifted his head and wiped it and tried to soothe him. Bottle in hand, Musters followed him. Benson motioned, and waved him back. "Give him peace, Musters."

Mac, almost as drunk, gripped Musters to restrain him, but Musters came on.

"Get away from him, Benson," he rasped, laughing. "I know ol' Tommy. I know how he'd like to die. Let's give him another drink."

"Take that away, you fool!" Benson dissuaded. "This man's your partner, not a swill tank. He's burned out as it is. It's only a matter of a day or so."

"I know," Musters still laughed. "But d'you think Tommy'd want to go to hell thirsty? Get out of the way!"

FURIOUSLY he threw Benson to one side, and let Tompkins' head fall. Arm around the man's neck, he stooped and lifted the head again. The neck of the bottle clicked on Tompkins' teeth as it tipped to his mouth.

"Just a wee Deoch-an-Doris," he coaxed. "Then—"

Abruptly, savagely, Benson rebounded. His left hand pushed the bottle aside, then sent it hurtling. His right slid behind Musters and jerked away his gun. A shove with the hip sent the bearded man sprawling.

"Now you get over into that corner and keep still!" Benson ordered. "I won't kill you if you jump me, Musters, but I'll maim you! I'm go-

ing to do my best to ease Tompkins, then I've got to go on to attend some natives. Mac, I'll leave some medicine, and you stay here, if you will, and see he gets it."

In the battered doorway the mountainous Musters stood frothing. Menacing him with the gun, the little medical missionary backed away over the sand.

Standing near, a tall, well-fleshed, lizard-skin and potion-bedecked native, who should have been smooth-faced, pulled at ribbon-trimmed plaits of beard and looked from man to man. His presence there, and the cringing awe of the Kaffirs about him, couldn't bode any good.

A hundred yards away, and the little man turned. The gun, emptied of shells, flew back twisting and twirling. "If you need me again, Musters, just send for me," he called.

Staggering, Musters trotted forward and retrieved the weapon and venomously shook it. "Ye lousy rat!" he called. "Gulliver! What I do to ye when I get ye'll make what happened at school look like a silly fool!"

II

FROM a neat round hut behind the corrugated iron mission Benson came running. The dejected, sweating skin-covered frames that were mules attached to the Capecart shivered. The lined face of the man sitting next the emaciated Cape half caste driver grimaced.

"Met you again already, eh, Gulliver?" he greeted. "Bet you're pleased to see me."

The medical missionary swerved back toward the hut. There was no need for any comment. "What time did he die, Musters?"

"Daybreak," the big man told him. "Flopped cursing you 'cause you'd stopped his drink."

Standing in the mat-hung doorway, for once putting on a collar, Benson queried: "Got a grave dug?"

"Yes, Benson. Blasted a hole in the rock under the sand with dynamite. Herded some of those damned Kaffirs to clear it. Made a coffin out of two or three empty beer cases. I'll gamble they'll bust when we carry him out.

"MAC and four other men are there, and we've got to make some sort of a stab at making the motions. You've got to come over and wangle a prayer.

"Get a move on! Make haste!" Musters admonished, as Benson disappeared.

From outside of a sudden came the snap of a gun. A loud guffaw, then four further quick reports. Now fully dressed, the medical man came out leaping.

"Stop it!" he bit, as he hit the sand. "Put that gun down!"

Standing up in the Capecart, chortling, Musters took more careful aim. His gun pointed toward the end of the mission building. "Three shies a penny!" he shrilled like a mischievous boy.

Up alongside him quick as a monkey, Benson caught the man's wrist. Already one side of the foot of the tin cross on the roof was shot away.

"You stop that madness, Musters!" Benson demanded. "I built this place ten years ago! It's mine! I won't have this!"

Startled alive, the Capeboy dropped out of the way to the ground. Musters' right elbow butted Benson, and his left fist thudded him and tried to hurl him backwards.

"Yours be damned!" he mouthed. "Sit down and be good, Benson! Want to spoil the fun?"

Of a sudden he caught Benson and jerked him toward him, twisted him about and got his back bent over the

driver's seat. Benson's hands loosed and but wildly clutched for a throat that was out of reach. Fist and one knee holding him, Musters raised the gun once more. "Three shies!" he piped a vapid jeer.

In the sand at the foot of the wall the tin cross tinkled. Benson writhed free and wriggled out and struck the earth.

Lips tight, face set, he picked the battered thing up. Still not speaking, he stepped round to the back of the building. The ladder he produced was of his own making.

"Musters," he called, very seriously, and beckoned with a finger, "come down here and climb up and tie this cross back on again. Fix it so that it'll stay there until I can get home again and solder it firm."

THE big man jammed shells into the gun, then brought the weapon down pointing. "Not me!" he spat. "Drop the messing junk, Benson! Don't be a cry-baby. What in hell's a bit of tin to make a fuss about? Come on! Get aboard!"

A taunting bullet zipped close to the medical man, and bored through the tin wall. Benson laid down the ladder, and stepped into the hut and hid the cross away. Unflustered, he came out again and climbed into the Capecart.

"Musters," he began with grim certainty, as he took his seat beside the big man and they started, "you're half drunk today, and not worth arguing with. It's waste of breath."

Of a sudden his calm reserve broke and momentarily went into the discard.

His brows lowered.

"Arguing with? Not you! Damn you! you lout, you're hopeless! But I will tell you this, Musters. I'm open to bet my whole life that you'll eventually be the man who puts that cross back up! You wait and sec!"

III

GLOWERING, hollow-eyed brown-black men stood around in silent knots. On every slight mound or rise in the sand squatted groups of sullen ox-hide-blanketed, shaven-headed Matabels. All about the veld was dotted with hundreds more. Against the dilapidated rough pole fence around the store, and close to the door, lolled a well-fed Kaffir, who toyed with his ribbon-trimmed beard. The semi-circle of living skeletons before him watched his every move with the envying, admiring awe of abysmal fear.

Out through the door swayed a procession of six men of uneven height, the pathetic makeshift coffin on their shoulders slewed and canted. The huge man at its head abruptly let the coffin down into the crook of his arm.

"Can't you be more careful, you damned fool, Mac?" he snarled back. "Want to bust the beer cases and empty him out?"

The smaller man behind him fumbled for the support of the rotting doorpost. The eyes of the bearded Kaffir gleamed derisively.

"I'm doing my best, Musters," Mac snapped. "I ain't such a professional at totting corpses."

"Corpses?" Musters bitterly scoffed, and cackled at his own wit. "You've made corpses of many a thousand drinks and toted them!"

Swinging, zigzagging, the little band left the now unoccupied store. The medical missionary drew up and walked alongside it. As it passed him the bearded Kaffir moved round it, as if to get out of its way, then drew back in again. Hundreds of pairs of famished eyes kept steadfastly on him.

At the edge of a shallow hoe fifty yards away the seven men stopped. Benson kicked away fragments of

blasted rock for a level place for the coffin.

"Put him down gently, Musters," he cautioned. "Tough life like this in the Back of Beyond in Africa brings out all our bad spots, but Tompkins had some good traits. We can never do anything more for him. Be decent with him."

Musters dropped his end with a thud, a man lurched sideways, and to save himself, sat on the coffin. The big man commenced knotting together three or four halters for ropes.

"Decent be damned!" he jeered. "Let's shoot him in, and get the ashes to ashes stuff over and get done, Benson. Fred, here, and I need another drink."

"When you get him lowered I'll be ready enough," Benson advised. "You won't have to wait so very long."

BOOK in hand, waiting, Benson glanced swiftly around. On the thin air and in that African silence which can be heard he noted whispering footfalls. Natives crouching near him had risen, as if out of curiosity, and were closing in about them.

Groups of Kaffirs at the far side of the store and everywhere were pressing in and becoming a solid mass.

Before the store door stood the Kaffir with the ribbon-trimmed beard. That man fondled his prized adornment, and stared straight at the eerie proceedings.

Sloping, sliding, the beer-case coffin bumped and rattled to the uneven bottom of the grave. As it came to a stop nails in the strained lid gave way, and through a gaping crack a wide-eyed, ghastly set face stared stolidly up. A man next to Benson gasped and teetered and lost his balance, and clutched at the medical man's arm.

Musters jerked and tugged at the ropes to get them cleared. "Ye're down there for good, Tommy," he grimaced, as they stuck. "It's no use holding on."

"He's acting natural," Mac shuddered. "Like him, we none of us want to let go at the very end."

In the middle of the vast, rolling, lonely desolate veld Benson read a prayer. Spoke over a grave that from then on would be unmarked and lost forever. The mourning of the six bearers was a pitiful farce, the strange quiet of the horde of natives was but a doleful part of the scheme.

The medical missionary closed the book over a finger, and reached down and picked up a pinch of sand. "Ashes to ashes," he solemnly commenced, and began to sprinkle.

Reeling, Musters checked him, and stooped forward. As he came up, both Musters' hands held wedges of rock.

"T'hell with sand!" he hissed, and hurled a rock down on the flimsy coffin. "T'hell with ol' Tommy, too! Let's send him off with a kind of whang!"

Instantly, with a bound, Benson was round the grave to him. His hands gripped the wrist of a still filled fist.

"Drop it, Musters!" he ordered. "Don't you dare throw that! If you do—!"

IV

FROM the store came a whooping shout from a lusty lunged man. Fluttering ox-hide blankets, all rushing in on one point, made a whirr as the wings of a plague of vampires. From beneath the blankets came shortened stabbing assegais, native-made battle-axes and iron-hard knobkerries. Bellowing orders, distinctly inspiring and goading them, was the man with the ribbon-trimmed beard.

Musters jabbed the missionary aside with the fist holding the rock. Almost lightning-like, the huge man was sober.

"Raiding me?" he gasped, already moving off. "In after my stock?"

In a bunch the six charged for the tiny back door. Benson, clearly fathoming it all, ran with the rest.

"Don't do any shooting yet, Musters," he counselled as they ran. "It's that Witch Doctor who's started it. First time they ever found the store with no one in it. Perhaps we can get them away by argument."

Musters' gun sent a couple of bullets over the heads of the section of the ring of men nearest him. Milling about, the men divided.

"No killing yet!" Musters hissing-ly agreed, as he passed between them and hurled himself through the doorway. "But we'll have to kill soon. Or shoot ourselves."

STOLEN whisky bottle held high, the bearded Kaffir dodged out through the front as they came in. Behind the counter was a muddle of armed men snatching at foodstuffs. Plunging into them, snapping up a hippopotamus-hide whip, Musters laid about him; the other five whites came on.

From outside came the clink of a broken bottle neck and the gurgling of swallowing, then a rasping bel- lowed order. The Kaffirs inside, backing, suddenly stood still. The crude weapons in their hands mechanically worked with the pantomime of stabbing and tearing. The famished eyes alone spelled murder.

Benson pushed himself in past the other whites. Six revolvers now were visible and threatening. Pressing the foremost whites back, he addressed Musters over his shoulder.

"Hold on a minute," he urged. "For God's sake, don't fire into them and start them, Musters! We never

can tackle and lick all this mob. Let me talk to them. A show of blank disdain may surprise and cow the poor devils."

The mountainous Musters, cursing, brought his gun up. Benson's hand closed over the muzzle. "Quiet, you fool!" the missionary snapped.

Right against them, Benson peered over the shoulders of a smaller man next him. Waving one hand to the vast crowd outside and the other to the almost non-existent remaining stock, he vigorously explained that the whole wouldn't form one single meal for a tenth of the ravenous host. Some who knew him, some who had heard of him, listened, but with obvious sullen disbelief.

Musters' twitching lips presently, impatiently stopped him. "You cow 'em?" he jeered. "Like cowing charging buffalo, isn't it?"

Of a sudden those just inside the door were souged on in. The head of the bearded native, leering, peered past the doorpost. In savage, virulent Matabele he cursed.

"Crush the white dogs who fatten and let us starve!" he slavered. "Make carrion of the white sons of snakes who sell us into slavery!"

THE tense lapse broke with a yell. A heavy wooden knobkerrie jabbed Benson in the chest, and he careened and doubled up sideways. Bare feet walked right on over him.

A thrown knobkerrie caught the man behind him in the forehead, and split his skull evenly as with a saw. A solid, evil-smelling black mass pressed in so tightly that friend and foe soon were wedged and unable to strike.

Edging away, jabbing at faces with the gun butt, Musters backed toward the alcove. The bearded Kaffir's head again appeared, and he fired at random and seared an ear-ringed ear. The man squealed shrilly. The in-

furiated crowd hissed. Sensing the calamity of it, instantly the other whites opened out together, and blazed at men so near them that the firing scorched their flesh.

At the door a man collapsed with a hole through his brain. A thrown, twirling battle-axe caught Mac in the gullet, and blood coughed up as he fell. Before the remaining whites grew a pile of writhing corpses, and the famished attackers sprawled over them as they staggered on to charge.

Of a sudden the bearded Kaffir screamed again. As one man, for an instant the Kaffirs halted, rigid. Abruptly, as one they broke and once more came on. One white man whimpered, one sighed, one whined his life out, drooling as he crumpled and limply sagged.

Alone, gun empty, Musters leaned against the post of the alcove doorway. Beaten, for the moment his mind almost ceased functioning, and he dropped the gun. His huge fists hopelessly clenched and opened and clenched.

BY his side was the crowbar he levered lids off cases with. Hardly knowing it, he gripped it and dived ahead again. Bleeding from half a dozen skin scratches, he once more weakly sagged back against the post. This was the end, he felt. This was the last.

The beard-trimmed man abruptly emitted another scream. Suddenly as scared rabbits, swift as scurrying baboons, the fierce mob turned about. Scrambling over the counter, dodging round it, shoving, the rabble turned tail. In only one brief moment the store was empty of men.

Dumbfounded, Musters looked to the seething crowd beyond the door. The rasping screams of the liquor-crazed Witch Doctor drilled in to him. Terror-stricken, his gaze dropped to the faintly twitching muddle

of slashed, bleeding whites and natives that slopped over onto his feet. Somehow, it presently seemed, he saw the heap writhe like a mass of uncoiling snakes.

Then right before him the whole heap quivered. The two uppermost dead natives slid wriggling. The limp body of Mac pushed over. From the bottom of the pile slowly emerged a shaky little white man. But for his clothing, the blood from his head to his feet formed a full disguise. Rocking, Benson levered himself to his feet and peered about him.

Blood-blinded eyes at last made out the big man by him. "Musters," the little man came to and, puzzled, asked him, "what happened? What's the mob doing now? Do you think we'll still be able to fight ourselves out?"

Musters' fist indicated the mound of corpses, his mind saw only coming hideous torture. "I might," he acidly jeered. "You don't stand an earthly chance. You'd better get back where you were, Gulliver, and bury yourself beneath dead men."

V

THE wall at back of the store suddenly shivered. Front, sides and all about its walls jarred and cracked. Broad, gleaming, assegai blades stabbed through the mouldering wattle and daub plaster, battle-axes hacked at the rotted timbers and wedged them apart.

For just one instant, bewildered, Musters watched the attack in a score of vulnerable places, then leaped forward. A hand snatched up one of the few remaining hidden bottles of whisky, and he knocked off its neck.

"Take some of this, Benson," he hissed between ponderous gulps. "Bust a bottle. Better to die howling mad from this stuff than howling in fire. The devils are going to get in

in every direction. In the temper they're in, if they get us there'll be worse than hell itself. Lots of good your 'blank disdain' did, didn't it?"

Benson reached for a bottle and broke its neck and, shuddering, took a drink. Well knowing its futility, he strove to express a morsel of hope.

"Somehow I fancy I can stop them yet, Musters," he muttered. "I've often attended some of these very men before this."

Benson put down the bottle and, puzzling, unconsciously doubled his right arm and felt the muscles Africa had so toughened. The action caught Musters' eye, and he continued to jeer. "Suppose you taught 'em shadow boxing, eh? Your boxing prowess is useful now, isn't it?"

THROUGH the crumbling plaster came an arm, and a hand grappled along an empty shelf. From under the counter Musters produced more cartridges, then picked up the gun and, grimacing, loaded. A bullet drilled through the arm, and a native howled. Furious, Musters leaped at the widening hole, and blazed into the crowd.

"You crawling rats!" he called. "You'll come along if I go!"

Vast gaps broadened out, natives were visible everywhere beyond them. Assegais rained through the holes and stuck quivering in the counter and floor. Musters kept busily firing, then knelt behind the dead and pulled empty boxes and bags about him. Among the pile of slain a half-filled revolver showed, and Benson worked it out and pulled himself alongside Musters. It could only be one last useless dash now, and a final bullet for himself.

The beard-trimmed man, shrieking and dancing, of a sudden flashed past a hole. At his rear a band of living skeletons raced with him. Abjectly

obeying him, the band rushed to the outspanned heavy Cape cart, turned it about and manned either side its disselboom; its pole. Propelling it as a battering ram, they charged and hurled its weight against the front wall.

Time and again the ram pulled off and hurled back at it again. Gradually, the entire native-built store shivered. Soon its walls trembled. Slowly it canted backwards and started to give.

Pulling apart, the grass roof shifted. Tottering, the four walls crumbled. Flat on the sand beneath it all, Musters and Benson stretched, pinned out and inert.

All over the wreck chased a hunger-excited mob of searching men. At a shout from the Witch Doctor, who'd carefully watched, they halted above the prisoners. Viciously they tore away the thatch of the roof and dragged the two stifling white men out.

Bound, sweating, hatless, clothing half torn from them, Musters and Benson stood out in the open. The Witch Doctor, drunk till venomous, lurched around them and prodded them and gloated.

"Sons of snakes!" he hissed and yammered. "Palsied white hyenas!"

Laughing men rose up from the mess with alluring bottles and paltry foodstuffs, and he autocratically beckoned them and took their bottles.

"Dogs!" he finished. "When the sun sets the ants shall eat them, as the white men have eaten all the food left in the land!"

VI

BLACK boulders edged in the kraal at the top of the kopje. The jagged rocks formed the lip of a bowl, and shielded the huts of the village. Flat on their backs, eyes seared by the blinding sun,

lashed viciously, cruelly, hand and foot, lay storekeeper and medical missionary.

Half-jackal Kaffir dogs came timidly and sniffed at them, and howled and showed yellow teeth. About the wide flat yard squatted and crouched hundreds of disappointed, hungry natives. Topknotted women worked gaily at a smouldering fire, and with the setting out of pegs.

The sun had but an hour to go, the Witch Doctor, slaving, tripped and saved himself as he came over. Nudging the huge Musters with a foot, he spat on him, then lunged a kick at the man close at his side.

"SONS of dogs!" he jeered in Kaffir. "Even the jackal dogs which eat carrion won't eat their own kind."

Cackling, he waved an empty bottle, and pointed to chattering, glorying women clearing the rubbish away from the foot of two blackened posts, and unknotting strips of ox-hide.

"Yes, as the sun goes down, the ants shall feast, but first the fire and the lash cut from the river-cow shall work."

Many wondering eyes looked questioningly to Benson, but the fear of the Witch Doctor held them. Grimacing, that man called to several of the squatting men.

Musters' horrified gaze went to the approaching men, then to an unguarded gap in the rocks at the side of the hill. There, he sensed, the way they had come up called and was open, if he but got the chance.

At command, the natives undid the tight lashings about hands and ankles. With knives and assegai points, they goaded the two whites up onto their feet. Staggering, reaching for non-existent support, the whites found their legs refused to carry them.

The Witch Doctor seized a hippo-hide whip from a native. Hissing, he

flogged at the backs of the unhappy men. A line of blood oozed across the shoulders of each. From by one of the fires an old hag dared reprimand.

"No, Father!" she shrieked, and her wrinkled features spoke fear of the loss of fiendish sport. "If the Father draws too much blood, the white dogs will go out before the sun!"

The Witch Doctor snarled and threw down the whip. Kaffirs beside them gripped the whites and hurried them, stumbling on. At the fire-blackened posts they separated them. Ropes round their necks and ankles, arms about either post, they fastened them so firmly they couldn't so much as squirm.

Two more muscular natives threw the blankets they were wearing to the ground. Huge hippo-hide sjamboks in hand, they measured their distance to strike. As the whips whirled in the air, Benson held his breath and shut his eyes. Musters groaned, and sweat dripped from the end of his beard.

Amazed, terrified, Benson's eyes opened. Again the sjamboks whirled about to lash. Whistling, the strips of hippo-hide flashed round to tear them. An inch from their skin, and the lashes were jerked away.

THEN the medical missionary saw it. Then Musters realized it. As cats playing with mice, the Kaffirs were enjoying the torture of hideous suggestion. Meting out long-drawn horror worse than any ten thousand real deaths.

Gabbling like an idiot, of a sudden the Witch Doctor dodged round the post before Benson. His eyes came close to the white's as the post would allow. Right there was the end of hope already gone.

"Rat! Snake!" the drunken savage hissed, and in his anger he screamed out his jealousy. Benson's vagrant

efforts to discredit Witch Doctors to his colored patients flashed home to him. "Does the white rat who tries to take my people from me and make them disbelieve me and scoff at me like the death dealt out to vipers?"

At a word the torturers unknotted the strips of hide. Pushing them, jerking them up as they fell, they trotted the two men over to the women with the pegs. Tripping them, they stretched each man's hands and feet out to the driven stakes. In his agony Benson noted the anthill close by him, the teeming ants not far from Musters' head.

Shrieking, laughing, the women ran honey from each white's mouth over to an anthill. Squealing, they brought tiny boxes with warrior ants, and dropped the ants onto each man's naked chest.

Gradually the ants in the hills crawled further and further along the lines of the honey till they bit the white men's chins. Benson's brain froze. Musters piped a piercing wail.

Abruptly men tore the lashings away. Knowing from experience, they lifted the fear-paralyzed men up and carted them off. In the centre of the yard of the kraal, right opposite the way up the hill into it, they dropped them crashing. Bandyng taunts, they again tied them hand and foot.

VII

THE rocks on the edge of the kraal threw lengthening shadows. Musters stirred and looked to the calling pathway, and his dry tongue found rasping words.

"Why the silence of the Kaffirs, Benson?" he queried in a whisper. "Benson, are you alive?"

The medical man opened his eyes, and moved a frame that seemed petrified. "I don't know what it means, Musters. I dread to think. It seems hours that we've been here."

"Wish to God I could release my hands and finish myself," the big man whined under his breath. "I'm going to try. There are two or three discarded weapons lying about."

All around the hundreds, now strangely silent, sat watching. The concerted inaction was ominous. Musters, now working at his lashings, of a sudden gave an extra tug. "Am I loose?" he burst, then tugged again.

Wide-eyed, Musters felt the knots slowly give. Careful to hide every sign of exertion, he worked on at them. The hands came free, and his feet jerked and he felt their looseness. Bit by bit he rose the feet beside him until he could touch them. The knots came undone.

FOR just one-thousandth part of a second, Musters stood upright and still. The feet throbbed and burned, but he scarcely knew it. One swift glance at the little man lashed prone and helpless short yards from him, one look at the Kaffirs rising lazily about him, then at the open road. Then, weapons forgotten, he was off.

Staggering, stumbling, he dashed for the pass through the rocks at the edge of the hill. Dodging odd natives who made gestures of stopping him, ducking, guarding his head and face, he was to it. A leap, and he was over the brow and bounding down the path.

A dozen yards down, howling, bitterly laughing, starving natives charged up and met him. Sticks, thongs, whips lashed him and thudded him up again. Squealing, shrieking to Heaven at the joke of it, the women and the huge waiting mob greeted him. Flogging him, the mob drove him across the yard, and crashed him down and tied him where he had been.

Sick at heart, Benson saw him come in again. The thought of the

trap of the apparently loose knotting to enable him to get away and be caught again nauseated him. But the knowledge that Musters had sought to escape without helping him, and had left him to suffer hell alone, saved him whispering a compassionate word.

AND now Benson felt his own bonds were loosening! Little by little as he worked them, he found them slowly giving. The same hideous trick had been played on him. Presently, still holding them as if lashed together, Benson knew that his hands were free.

Working cautiously, soon his feet, too, were undone and separate! Not a thing held him prisoner. Only the crowd of hungry human jackals, he sensed, waiting to drive him back to more of the doom of the accursed.

Loose, free, for a whole minute the medical missionary lay still. The blood in his feet tingled, but ran again. Almost all the worst of the torture had been mental and he felt his physical being yet held reserve strength. Soon, by nearly imperceptible degrees, he moved his head so as to see the waiting Witch Doctor and the exulting crowd.

Then he more fully saw Musters. At once his gorge rose again. Full escape was impossible. In ten minutes both he and the big man would be dying in agony. Musters, it came to him, would be going out before he ever had had the satisfaction of punishing him for so many despicable personal things. And two yards from where Musters was lying was a dropped, neglected blood-stained assegai blade!

Could he do it? He hesitated and breathlessly pondered. Could he give Musters that thrashing now, and at the same time perhaps put the fear of God into the relentless gang of native vultures? Could he perhaps

get himself and Musters away before the Kaffirs regained their wits and went on with their devilment? Would they be so cowed by his supposed audacity and disdain for them that they wouldn't interfere?

Like a flash, Benson was on his feet. A jump, and he had the ugly blade. Deftly as a butcher, he slashed away Musters' bonds and had him unbound. His strong little hands and shoulders helped jerk him up so that he stood.

A sigh of arrested movement ran through the host of waiting, expectant Kaffirs like muffled thunder, but Benson never heard it. The gap in the rocks behind him called, but he never listened to it.

Before him now stood a huge man who'd always bullied him, and who'd just sneaked off to save his own carcass, and had left him to fend for himself. He'd die happier if he gave him a couple of long-owed cracks!

Benson pulled Musters about, so that he squarely faced him. The tip of Musters' beard touched the little man's forehead. Roughly he pushed the big man from him.

"Here's a bit off the old account!" was all he said.

LIKE a little bantam, the medical missionary jabbed up a fist and jumped with it. The huge man caught it on the jaw, and tottered back a pace in dismayed wonder. Two savage, piston-rod fists followed after him and caught him everywhere like steel-filled boxing gloves. Then Musters came to.

Wild as a bull, the huge Musters came in. Clumsy, strong as a gorilla, he flailed and slashed. A swinging punch caught Benson on the side of the neck and staggered him, but he bounded back.

Vicious, suddenly furious to madness, Benson dived at him. Rained blows at Musters' stomach, dodged

under his fists, jabbed into his ribs. A crack over Benson's heart made him cough, but he bored back again.

The flowing blood in his before numbed feet seemed to have set the man on springs.

A sliding punch twisted Benson half round. Head down, the big man came on. Whizzing, the little man swung about again. The jab under Musters' whiskered chin made two teeth crack, and sand spurted in a cloud as he rolled.

CRAZED, venomous, the Witch Doctor recovered from his paralyzing surprise and broke from the vast ring of bewildered watching Kaffirs. Howling, cursing, he charged at the busy Benson. That man, fists still working back and forth mechanically, was standing over Musters and waiting for him to rise.

Battleaxe in hand, shrieking, the drunken beard-trimmed man dashed toward him. The axe swirled round and round like a flaming sword. Blood mad, for a faint instant Benson hardly noticed him. Then abruptly he raced backwards, stooping and shoulders hunched as cowed.

Swift as a striking cobra, the little man reversed and came forward. The battle-axe cut circles high over his head. An iron fist shot up under the muddled Witch Doctor's chin and collided with his whiskers. The man left the earth, and landed back on it flat and out.

Snorting, audibly hissing through their noses, the utterly thunderstruck Kaffirs pressed closer in in a wall ten deep. Spitting, the big Musters rose again. Fierce as a trodden-on adder, he barged forward. A couple of Benson's annoying, jiggling steps, some irritating feinting, a dance away once more, and he was fuming.

"Cissy again?" he slavered through bleeding gums, and followed. "Gulliver! Learning to dance?"

Finished, instantly Benson's mind shot off the job. The Witch Doctor hadn't been reckoned on as part of the fight, and he boded certain calamity. Horrified, back to himself, of a sudden sensing it all, the medical man looked around at the mystified natives, expecting instant annihilation. Utterly at a loss, just as he, hundreds of pairs of eyes but stared at the miracle of bearded white man and bearded Kaffir laying stiff and asleep side by side.

Dreading worse than ever, Benson glanced at the closest bunch of watchers. Taunting, bluffing, he asked them, "Why don't you pick up your maker of spells and wonders and tend to him?" But the lopsided fight had possessed them. All else momentarily had gone out in a mist.

To his amazement, not one native moved towards the vanquished Witch Doctor. Instead, myriads of closed hands went up to dusky foreheads in abject salutation. Nodding heads indicated veneration for a man more unexpectedly powerful and fearsome than any they'd ever known. The Witch Doctor might have been out of the picture for all the attention he received.

"Inkoos! Chief!" rose a murmur of awed respect which echoed right over the kraal.

MUSTERS' arms and feet twitched, and Benson stooped over him and lifted his head. In a moment the man was squatting, then he was up, though in a trance.

"Come on while the coming's good, Musters," Benson whispered as he straightened. "Don't make any fuss. Do just as I tell you. Let's saunter off. I think we can make it now. This fake contempt for 'em has got 'em puzzled."

Scarcely understanding, Musters looked around expecting fresh devilment. A couple of groggy steps, and

he half turned and shot a jumpy glance behind him.

"What d'you mean, Benson? What has happened? Am I crazy?"

"Come on, Musters!" Benson insisted. "Don't argue!" Natives close in pressed back as Musters lurched dizzily toward them, Benson clutched his arm and commenced steering him. "Play the part," the medical man went on. "We're going to make a break for it, if you keep your nerve."

MUSTERS' limp lips hardly had strength to come together. "Keep it? I haven't got any nerve to lose."

Together, feigning contempt, the pair started deliberately. Arm in arm they walked through a lane of men who cringed out of reach as Benson got near them. Quite obviously none of them yet was sufficiently collected to dare risk touching a man who might do any terrible, marvellous thing.

Holding their distance, to the gap in the rocks the abashed, hunger-stupefied horde kept pace with them. As losing something they didn't understand, yet valued, they watched them fade away. Half way down the hill Benson stopped and looked back up the unhappy path. From every rock and stone heads thick as flies stared in semi-worshiping preplexity after them.

"God!" Benson presently burst, as they went further. "We did it! It's real! That was getting out of hell all right, Musters, wasn't it?"

On the level both shaking, nerve-wrecked men halted. Sores and welts burned and ached in every direction. Musters reached out a hand and stroked Benson as if to make sure he was a living being.

"IT seems real, right enough, Benson. It must be. That certainly was a miracle, if ever there was one."

For an instant he stopped and struggled to organize himself, then peered away to the empty veld about him and back behind him. "Flopped that blasted Witch Doctor, too, didn't you?" he took up, still shuddering. "That was a good one. The boxing lessons at school didn't do you any harm, Benson. But what's the next move going to be? That's what I want to know. No store to go to now. I wonder what I'd better get at?"

Over years of bullying and indignities the little man's mind shot back, then over the last fierce minutes. There was small need for argument or discussion, or to waste any time thinking out a trifling matter like that. Benson took the lead and hurried on.

"Come on before they wake up," he said. "I can soon settle that. You needn't let that worry you. First thing you're going to do is to put that cross back up, Musters. That's what you're going to get at. D'you follow me?"

"What's more, you're going to solder it on!"

*Next Month: Fox and Shimel, Those Hell-Busting Marines,
Are Back Again in*

DRUMS OF DANGER

A Complete Novelette

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Author of "Bare Fists," "Honor Bound," etc.

DON'T MISS THIS FAST-MOVING, EXCITING STORY!

GODS *of* BALI



Bart lashed out with his swinging fist

Bart Cardigan Faces Infuriated Natives and Poisoned Darts in this Smashing, Quick-Moving Story

By REX SHERRICK

Author of "The Battle of the Chairs," "Trailing Death," etc.

OLD STEVE BAINEY stumbled in the hard-packed sand and fell on his face to the ground. Bart Cardigan, who had been carrying both their packs and canteens for the past twenty-four hours, unslung the heavy burden and leaned over the older man.

"Come on, Steve," he begged. "Get up. It's only a few more miles."

The old man shook his head.

"No," he replied. "I'll never get up. I know it, but I'm not afraid."

Bart Cardigan unscrewed the cap

of his canteen and put the mouth of it to the old man's white and trembling lips.

"No, save it for yourself," old Steve mumbled. "I don't need water where I'm going."

His hands shook as he pushed the canteen away. His whole frame shook in the grips of a muscular paroxysm. He gasped for breath. With one trembling hand he felt for something that was tucked in his pocket.

"I ain't told you about this, Bart,"

he muttered. "I ain't been holding out on you, though. I been saving something for an ace in the hole."

The old man's eyes grew glassy. They blinked and filmed over suddenly.

"What—what you talking about, Steve?" Bart asked anxiously.

The old man pulled a piece of white paper from his inner shirt pocket.

"THE Big Sandy licked us," he said. "We didn't find any yellow stuff there. We lost out in our search for the remote island where the Bird of Paradise nests. We got licked twice, Bart. But I always kept an ace in the hole. Here—here it is."

He handed the paper over to his younger companion. It was a worn envelope, doubly sealed with wax. Bart started to tear it open. The old man grasped his hand.

"No, no," he said. "Not here. You can't open it until you get to Bali, and you got to get there before the twenty-first day of March. That's why I was rushing you along so, Steve. There's only one boat leaves Port Darwin, and it leaves on the fourteenth. I had to make it or lose a whole year. I knew I wouldn't last another year."

The old man was getting excited. Talking frantically, excitedly, between hectic gasps for infrequent breaths. Bart smoothed his brow and tried to press the canteen between his lips. Old Steve pushed it away again.

"Now I know I won't last to get to Darwin. You take the envelope and carry on. You've got to catch that boat. It's my heritage, son. You've been good to me. I'm leaving it all to you." Old Steve's brow became feverish, then suddenly cold. He went limp in Bart's arms.

"But remember," he said with his

last breath. "Don't open the envelope until you get to Bali."

That was all.

Bart buried him there in the Big Sandy Desert, and then shoved on toward Port Darwin.

He managed to stagger into the coast town just in time to catch the little inter-island steamer that would carry him to Bali—one thousand miles and five days away from Darwin.

But the boat never reached Bali. Four and a half days out of Darwin the slow-moving tramp was struck by one of those swirling hurricanes that sweep up without warning from the Indian Ocean.

The plates of the aged vessel were none too tight and they were loosened by the first mighty surge of the typhoon. They buckled and ripped with the second surge of the cyclonic wind. They fell sheer apart when the mountainous wave swept over the bridge deck and engulfed the whole ship.

Bart Cardigan found refuge on a convenient chicken coop, and the wave that swept over the vessel carried him off. Night fell at the same moment with the dramatic suddenness of a dropped curtain—like night falls in the tropics. Light one minute and pitch black the next.

HE hung on grimly to the fragile chicken coop while the wild seas tried to hurl him to oblivion. Bart Cardigan was a fighter to the full extent of the one hundred and ninety pounds of hard flesh and muscle that was draped on his square, raw-boned frame.

He held on all through that night and the next day, while the angry and free-running seas broke in billowing white caps around his perch.

Night came again and he held on until consciousness fled.

The next morning he lifted him-

self from the bit of shingle that was so hard and inhospitable. The sea had calmed during the night. And now a rising sun hunched its red shoulder over a mountain headland to the east, flooding the dreary sea with warming, welcome light.

Bart Cardigan rose on his haunches and surveyed the unusual scene. He swayed as he stared, for the surging waves were still lifting up and down. A stave of the chicken coop was still in his hand. He unfolded his other hand. A wadded, white and water-soaked paper lay exposed in his palm.

HE looked at the paper, then he looked at the surf breaking on the shingle. The sea further out appeared motionless and glassy. He turned about again and stared at a jagged high reaching pinnacle that trisected the blowzy arc of the rising tropic sun.

"Humph," he mumbled. "This is a mountainous land. *It must be Bali!*"

The last was uttered with somewhat of a gasp, as though the evidence had just filtered through his numbed and aching mind.

He shook his head despondently. Water and seaweed tumbled down on the barren shingle. He looked down again at the paper in his hand. Hopeless!

Bart Cardigan mumbled something inaudible under his breath, and swung about on his heels in a slow circle. His probing eyes ranged the headlands and the jagged minarets beyond, over which the rising sun cast a brilliant aura.

"Lombo and Sumbawa are comparatively flat," he said, half aloud to himself.

He referred to the islands lying east of Bali toward the Timor Sea.

"And it can't be Java. I'm certain I couldn't have floated that far.

It's Bali." He grasped the sealed paper between thumb and forefinger of each hand. "Anyway, I'm taking a chance."

He broke the seal and spread the paper out flat.

There was writing on the inside, a message in faded, antique script—but in English. He read it slowly, carefully:

*He who would solve this cryptic
riddle
Must begin at day's end and not
the middle.*

*Just when the sun swallows the
highest peak,
Where the shadow lingers last is
what you seek.*

*There the treasure lies, if you
look
With vernal eyes.
But he who reads this riddle
wrong,
Dies—dies—dies!*

Bart Cardigan blinked when he finished reading the odd doggerel. A puzzled cleft appeared in his bulbous brow. He read it again and again until the lilting chant became fixed in his mind. Then he began to check up on his fingers the number of days it had been since he had left Port Darwin.

FOUR and a half days on the tramp. One and a half days on the floating chicken coop—making six in all. For the first time since the hurricane struck he smiled.

"Yes, I'm in time," he said.

The smile broke into a chuckle.

"I left Darwin on the fourteenth," he laughed. "And made the last lap under my own power. Vernal eyes, eh?" He chuckled again and blinked. It was evident he was regaining his confidence. "Cinch for a

wise guy. March twenty-first is the vernal equinox. No wonder Old Steve said I would have to hurry—or wait a whole year to try it again.”

He folded the paper and put it in the one pocket that remained attached to his water-soaked and ragged trousers. The other had been ripped off with the left trouser leg when he had been torn from the floating chicken coop.

THE tide was running close to the land by this time. Bart Cardigan slipped off the shingle now, climbed up a trailing arum vine that hung from a ledge above, to find himself on a grassy plateau. Fifty or sixty feet from the ledge a dense forest began. Banyan and mangrove trees, heavily interlaced across the tops with climbing vines.

Cardigan stood for a moment gazing into the depths of the matted forest and then at the high mountain peak beyond. Then, coming to a decision, he started toward the woods. He halted a few feet from the edge of the trees when monkeys dropped down from the branches and ran out on the grass to chatter and spit at him.

He whirled his chicken coop stave right and left and sent them scurrying, then approached the woods again.

He was about to part the matted growth of underbrush with his hands and push through when a voice called over his shoulder.

“You go somewhere, *Tuan*? Where you go?”

Bart wheeled, startled, and looked back the way he had come. The stave was clenched tight in his hand. His knuckles showed white. His lips were tight.

He saw no one. But unerringly he sensed the presence of something or somebody. He walked back toward the shingle, peered down from

the ledge. A bird fluttered overhead, but no human was in sight. He turned back to the woods again, and instead of trying to push through this time, he trekked along the edge of the trees.

“You go somewhere, *Tuan*? Where you go?” came the same, hoarse, rasping voice from behind his back. It was an odd voice, distinct enough but with a strong accent.

Cardigan turned again—and still saw nothing.

“What in hell do you want!” he shouted, in sudden anger, partially because he had to do something to break the tenseness of the moment.

“Damn! Hell ‘*Sacre*’ . . .” broke in bold expletive, right against his ear, and something brushed him on the cheek.

Cardigan jerked around with his stave upright in his uplifted arm, ready to send in a paralyzing blow. A gaudy colored bird with a hooked bill flapped over his head and perched on a near-by branch.

It was a parrot.

Cardigan relaxed, wiped cold sweat from his brow.

The monkeys came out again and spit at him. He threatened them with the stick. They scampered away, chattering.

“NO do, *Tuan*,” he heard in a soft voice, and looked up at the parrot, but the bird was motionless. It hadn’t spoken.

He turned around—gasped!

A snake, or something that looked like a snake, coiled around a long stick, was exposing its fangs right under his chin. He threw his head back.

A strange man, whom he hadn’t seen before, an oddly attired native with a hideous mask over his head from which dangled four separate strings of dried human ears, cackled raucously and shoved the menacing

stick further forward. Cardigan retreated in fear.

Another native who had sprung like magic out of the woods, muttered something in native dialect, appeared to interfere. The man with the hideous mask turned swiftly on his heel and thrust the fang-pointed stick into the interfering native's face.

The native shrieked, clenched his jaws, then sank inert to the ground, the deadly poison on the fangs of the wooden snake having acted instantly.

THE brown man with the mask cackled again, weirdly, unpleasantly.

Cardigan stood transfixed, staring at the unusual deadly weapon that was shoved under his chin again.

"You come just right," the man in the mask said in *bêche-de-mer* accent. "Sea god, him send you for sacrifice to eternal Bali gods of mountain peaks. Him send me white man 'cause he no want me sacrifice on burning pyre, Bali maiden who not yet been marry or spoil.

"Me good to Bali gods. Bali gods good to me. They send me you, white man, so I have Bali maiden for self. In lone temple on mountain peak where live Auruk of All-Seeing One Eye."

The gaudy parrot on the near-by branch preened its wing feathers proudly, then squawked:

"You go somewhere, *Tuan*? Where you go?"

Cardigan acted almost without thinking. The ironic retort maddened him. The chicken coop stave hurled in arrow-like flight from his hand. It caught the talking parrot flush on the head, and the bird toppled off the tree limb to fall dead at his feet.

The brown man in the big mask put a long, thin flute to his lips,

blew it shrilly. The whistle was sharp and piercing. It made the short hairs on Cardigan's neck stand on end. He whirled with his fist poised, ready to annihilate his tormentor, but drew back sharply when the native flashed the striking serpent stick within inches of his head.

The brown man with the weird mask was shouting sharp commands in his native tongue, and almost instantly there came from the depths of the woods a multitude of natives, all armed with the deadly sticks. They formed a ring around Cardigan. Their sticks were extended like lances, with the snakes' heads to the fore and the tails dangling like pennants.

There was another sharp command from the brown man in the hideous mask. Several natives broke from the rear of the fixed ring around Cardigan and leaped upon him. Cardigan's fists went back and forth like pistons, as he heaved and plunged.

But the natives were too many and too powerful. He finally sank to the ground, overpowered by superior numbers.

Within a few minutes they had him bound hand and foot. Then they lashed him to a stretcher made of poles and covered with the skin of a water buffalo.

ANOTHER sharp command issued from the throat of the brown man in the macabre mask. The stretcher was lifted to the shoulders of four husky stalwarts. At the same moment a drum began to beat in slow, marching rhythm.

The natives formed in a double column. The brown man with the big mask took his place at the head of the column. The four stretcher bearers fell in behind him. Then the men with carved snakes on the

sticks took their places at both sides and to the rear.

The distant drum-beats increased in cadence.

Then another command. The group moved off along the edge of the woods in a slow dog-trot until they came to a clearing in the trees. Here an open path had been cut through the forest, extending in a straight line to the base of the high mountain that Bart Cardigan had glimpsed earlier on that eventful day.

THEY marched all morning, through the woods and around the base of the high mountain, until they came out at last into a broad valley. Then they halted when the sun was almost directly overhead. Cardigan's stretcher was lowered to the ground by the four stalwarts. The natives with the striking serpents ringed around him. The man in the big mask broke through the ring carrying a goat skin filled with water.

"You care drink, Tuan?" he spoke in a husky, cracked voice.

Cardigan curtly refused, knocking the goat skin container from the other's hand with a sudden jerk of his head.

The brown man cackled, put his reed flute to his lips and blew shrilly three times.

The bearers came and lifted Cardigan again. The rolling drum, which still seemed far distant, began to beat once more in a monotonous, fearful cadence.

The eerie procession continued at a dog-trot across the broad valley. They came to another dense forest, plunged into it. Though it was just after midday, the heavy trees and clinging foliage cast a gloom dark as evening.

Here their course abruptly took an upward turn, for Cardigan felt his head being lifted higher than his

feet, while the litter he was strapped on jounced on the heaving shoulders of his native bearers.

Hour after hour they trotted on and up through this dense growth. It seemed to Cardigan as though they would never arrive at their remote destination. But they broke out suddenly upon a sunlit plain, from which he could look far across and down at the distant sea below.

And as soon as they broke out on the plain, the drum beats, loud and booming now, surged into greater intensity. The sun, round and full as a bronze disc, was sinking low in the western sky and casting a lengthening shadow that swept slowly across the plain just slightly in the rear of the marching band.

The bit of doggerel went chiming through his mind.

*"—when the sun swallows the
highest peak,
Where the shadow lingers last is
what you seek."*

He groaned, then struggled to burst his bonds. They held.

"Hot chance," he mumbled. Then: "But he who reads this riddle wrong—Dies—dies—dies!"

He groaned again, and sneered in the face of one of the snake bearers to show his angry scorn. The snake bearer shoved his forked stick forward. The fangs of the striking serpent almost sank its poison fluid in Cardigan's cheek, when an abrupt command from the masked leader brought the native up short.

THE mountain road led up a steep winding incline. The stretcher bearers grunted as they scrambled up. The rough jouncing and weight of Cardigan's body against the lashings loosened his bonds, but he was careful not to indicate the fact by any expression or action.

Once up the last steep incline the entourage emerged into a flat, narrow shelf in front of a grotesque, temple-like structure. The booming drums roared into a rising, piercing crescendo, then stilled abruptly.

The brown man in the hideous mask uttered a sharp command. Cardigan's stretcher was lowered to the ground and two oddly attired natives leaped over to it and released his bonds.

"Up, *Tuan*. Dog of a white man who kills the holy bird of *Auruk*, the All-Seeing One."

THE brown man bent over him and pursed his red, betel-stained lips. Then he hissed and Bart felt the warm breath on his face. He reacted instinctively, leaped up in an impulsive movement and lashed out with his swinging fist. It thudded flush on the brown man's jaw. He sank to the ground. The hideous mask rolled from his shaved head, exposing the face of a wizened old man with only one eye—a white man!

The snake bearers swept in, their forked sticks with dangling snakes thrust forward. Cardigan raced madly toward the grotesque temple set against the mountain side. A low wall of human skulls encircled a huge green carved statue just in front of it. The head and shoulders were bright and glistening in the light of the setting sun. The torso was in a shadow. Cardigan hurdled the wall and emerged inside the temple garden—the sacred plot of *Auruk*, the All-Seeing One.

A woman, young and beautiful, and bound hand and foot to the base of the statue, screamed.

The natives stopped in a dead line at the skull wall, stared with amazement at Cardigan as he swept across the sacred spot—still alive. It was beyond belief that such a thing could

happen; unless the one who stepped across that *tabu* line was a young maiden to be offered up for sacrifice, or the high priest of *Auruk*—the little old man who writhed on the ground now.

"Get him. Kill him. Let your snake sticks sting him ear to ear!" the high priest cried in native dialect.

But the snake bearers hesitated. Fear showed in their brown faces and gripped at the tendrils of their hearts.

To break a sacred *tabu*? No! Not even at command of the high priest himself. Death could be their only store. Yet, the white man lived! The natives were plainly puzzled.

The little man rose and climbed the skull wall. The menace of sudden death showed in his single flashing eye. His thick red lips were snarled. The woman screamed again, then whispered something in a beseeching tone in native dialect. It sounded like a prayer.

Cardigan hurled himself at the base of the statue to where the girl lay bound, and ripped her bonds loose. She fell with clasped hands at his feet. The old man leaped, with a heavy, jeweled, beheading sword whirling about his shaved head. Cardigan twisted about just in time to confront him, and ducked. The blade clattered against the stone base of the green statue and was snapped in two.

THE little man whined, then leaped again. Cardigan lashed out with a murderous straight left. It caught the high priest square on the jaw. He slumped to the ground inert. Cardigan picked him up bodily and hurled him over the skull wall.

A young native, a snake bearer, taller and handsomer than the others and haughty in mien, stepped over the body of the unconscious priest

and hissed in his ugly face. An audible sigh escaped from the other natives. The handsome youngster strode up to the skull wall. He spoke to Bart.

"You great one, *Tuan!* You prove it at risk your own life. High priest of *Auruk*, he fake, I know. I tell others. They no believe. They see now. You High Priest now. They accept. Look!" He pointed at his fellow snake bearers.

THEY had dashed on the wizened old man and were stabbing their striking serpents at his head. Already the ugly face was swelling with the venom. The muscles jerked impulsively once or twice, then remained still. Other natives came up, lifted him between them, and hurled the body over the cliff. It went crashing down just as the sun was about to sink behind the high mountain peak in the west.

The girl was crouched at Bart's feet, sobbing brokenly. He stood puzzled for a moment, then looked around at the awed natives. The huge green statue was behind him. The pointed shadow of the setting sun was gradually creeping up the chest to one side of the face. Then the wretched bit of doggerel came flashing back to his mind—the cryptic riddle:

*"Just when the sun swallows the
highest peak,
Where the shadow lingers last
is what you seek."*

A sudden light seemed to dawn on Bart in that instant. At the precise moment the light of day began to fade, he watched the creeping shadow as it swept up the idol's face, jaw, cheek, ruby-red eye. How it glittered in the fading light!

Now the sunlight went suddenly out. The idol's eye was deep in

shadow—as was the whole mountain side. The last trace of direct sunlight had faded from sight.

Bart scrambled up the face of the idol, stood with his feet in the idol's mouth as he reached for the ruby-red eye. That was the spot where the shadow lingered last. He reached up and wrenched it out. Then his heart sank. It was only glass—the bottom of a cheap red bottle. He threw it to the ground and climbed dejectedly down.

The girl pointed with her finger at the empty eye-socket from which Bart had wrenched the bottle bottom. The young native snake bearer just outside the skull wall made probing gestures with his fingers and clenched and unclenched his hands.

"Reach in," he said. "Reach in, *Tuan.*"

The girl nodded her head affirmatively.

With renewed hope Bart climbed up the idol's face again. He stood on the lower lip and reached his left arm far into the empty eye-socket. It came out grasping a green lacquer box.

The young native was smiling, so was the girl, but there was a haunting sadness about her face. She kept looking from Bart to the young native on the other side of the skull wall.

BART opened the lacquer box when he stepped down on the ground again. It was filled with perfect red rubies, pigeon-blood in hue, gleaming—a vast fortune in gems.

The smile faded from the young native's face, and a look of subdued resignation showed in his flashing black eyes.

"They yours," he said to Bart. "She, too, she yours, *Tuan.*" He indicated the girl, again suppliant at Bart's feet. "You save my people

from fake priest. He rob us all time for self. He made us poor. He make self rich. He steal our jewels. He steal our woman.

"He say for sacrifice, but he no sacrifice for god who is *Auruk*. He take for self first, then sacrifice after he through. That no satisfy *Auruk*. It satisfy only him, the false priest. He take my girl, too. There, that she."

He pointed again. "But she yours now. All yours. You, high priest of *Auruk*. Me, I chief, after high priest. Me, my people obey you. You take everything."

He made a gesture.

"Ullah! All yours. Take."

BART CARDIGAN stood transfixed for an instant. He looked at the rubies in his hand. He looked at the man kneeling against the skull wall. At the beautiful girl at his feet.

"The hell you say!" he snorted finally. "Come and take her yourself. She's yours. She isn't mine. And these, too." He thrust out his hand holding the green lacquer box of finest pigeon-blood rubies.

The young native appeared surprised. He shrugged.

"Me, no. I no can cross *tabu* line. Death come to Balinese who do. *Auruk*, true god, but high priest false prophet. I good Balinese. I believer in own god, *Auruk*. You take all. Stay. Be prophet."

Bart lifted the girl and swung her over the skull wall.

"Take her," he said, and his voice held the power of command. "We split fifty-fifty. You take the girl. I take the rubies. Okay, eh?"

The young native nodded.

But a ripple of apprehension was apparent in the eager faces of the other natives. Their eyes ranged from the young chieftain holding the girl to Bart and the green lac-

quer box of pigeon-blood rubies in his hand.

They began to whisper, and the tom-tom which had been silent began to beat again—slowly and monotonously in a dreary, death-like cadence. Bart felt the short hairs at the base of his skull begin to stiffen again.

The drum beats worked up gradually to a staccato tempo. The natives began to dance and chant. The poison snake bearers started to advance on the skull wall.

The young native chieftain put the girl down and held up his hand, said something in native dialect.

The snake bearers ignored him. One of them leaped over the skull wall and climbed up the face of the idol. He stood on the protruding lip and reached his arm in the eye socket from which Bart had extracted the pigeon-blood rubies.

He brought it out empty. Glared down at Bart menacingly.

"*Tabu! Tabu!*" the young chieftain cried out, as more of the snake bearers made to leap over the skull wall. They paid him no attention.

The man standing on the lower lip of the idol moved over and stuck his hand in the other eye-socket. There was a quick hissing sound. A stick carved like a snake's head with fangs on it shot out and caught the native right in the throat.

HE shrieked, clenched at his gut, then fell off the idol's lips to die in agony on the ground.

Sudden pandemonium seemed to grip the natives then.

They went berserk. The young chieftain could not control them. As one man they leaped over the skull wall and dashed at Bart, their snake sticks probing eagerly for his face.

But Bart didn't wait to meet their attack. He ran, ran with all his

speed directly toward them. But just at the instant he would have been jabbed by their murderous weapons if he had remained upright, he dived. Dived under their probing snake sticks and came clear on their rear, knocking the attacking natives over like ten pins, and completing a complete somersault to come up on his feet in sprinter's position when he landed.

Two, three strides, and he was at the cliff's edge. The astounded natives hadn't yet recovered from the surprise of his daring feat. They stood immobile—indecisive.

Another stride and jump, and he went sliding down the face of the cliff. One hand gripped the green lacquer box tenaciously. With the other he tried to protect his exposed face and eyes as his falling body plunged through vines and creepers.

A convenient bamboo bush softened his fall at the bottom. He scrambled out hurriedly and con-

tinued right down the mountain side.

Three hours later, panting for breath and tortured with muscle cramps, he pulled up on the shore of the sea. And just off shore was a welcome sight. The lights of a yacht were shimmering through the night. As he plunged into the welter of surf to swim through it to safety, the last lines of the doggerel cryptogram Old Steve had given him came back to his mind vividly.

*"But he who reads this riddle
wrong
Dies—Dies—Dies!"*

He was thinking of what would have happened to him if he had read the shadow falsely, and thrust his hand into the wrong eye-socket.

"Well, anyway," he said, threshing out with bold overarm strokes and still clasping the box of rubies in one hand, "I read it right and won—at last! The heritage of Old Steve."

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Crooked Vengeance



The sharp, menacing hatchet was slowly rising

“Skid” Pedler, Ventriloquist, Strikes Gold—and then Things Start Humming

By SAMUEL TAYLOR

Author of “Atom’s Eve,” “That Heel Achilles,” etc.

UNDER THE FORCE of the grizzled veteran’s hammer, the sizzling steam point nosed through the frozen gravel. “Skid” Pedler tossed the sledgehammer aside, poked the fire under the boiler, then took off his mitten and filled and lighted his pipe. He squatted on his heels, groaning a trifle with the acute bend to his knee joints, then he carefully unwrapped a small soft arctic-hare skin blanket, and disclosed a battered but carefully kept mechanical doll.

“Ike, we’ll hit that strike some

day,” Skid said. “Then we’ll up and leave this dog-goned country.”

“Right, Mr. Pedler,” came back the nasal whine. Underneath the tiny fur parka of the doll, old Skid’s hand manipulated from the back the lever which made the manikin’s huge red-painted mouth move with the words. “Yes, sir, Mr. Pedler! But don’t let your hopes get too high.”

“You’re right, Ike, but ain’t no harm hopin’. An’ how long’ve I been a-waitin’ fer just sich a break?”

“Didn’t we both come here in the fall of ’99 when you got the gold

fever and quit the entertainment troupe? Such a choice!"

Anyone watching the dialogue would have been forced to admit that old Skid knew his stuff. When the manikin was supposed to be talking Skid's withered old mouth was absolutely motionless, and every gesture of his eyes and head was calculated to throw attention to the doll. It was good stage business.

Skid sat the doll on the hare-skin blanket and grinned. Talking to the manikin had helped pass many a long lonely arctic night. And the grizzled old fellow was proud of his ability to mimic and to "throw" his voice, with lips stationary and immobile.

His shovel bit into the area of soil thawed by the steam point. He tossed the gravel into his crude cradle. On the next bite his shovel upturned a yellow mass of gold nuggets, packed thick.

Skid's withered lips half parted and his breath came fast. "Gad!" he breathed. A pocket at last. The dream of the prospector!

THE two men heard the jingle of the lead-dog bells and they were standing in the door of their cabin as Skid pulled up.

"Hello, gents!" roared Skid heartily. "Howdy!"

The pair stared at him suspiciously. Finally, "Outta grub?" grunted the smaller of the two.

Skid's wrinkled face wreathed in a tolerant smile. "Danged if ya' ain't the cordialist cusses! No. I don't want nothin'. I'm payin' a farewell call on all m' friends. You two bein' the furthest, I'm here last. In the mornin' I hit fer the outside."

"What's th' matter?" rumbled the bigger of the pair. He was a massive creature, with hulking shoulders and a heavy black steel-wire beard. The smaller of the two kept his

sharp eyes darting over Skid's outfit.

"Yeah, why you goin' out now?" Fox Wilson said sharply.

"Jist got tired o' it all, boys," remarked Skid guardedly. This pair appealed less and less to the old miner. He changed his mind about prolonged farewells and: "I reckon I'm sort of anxious t' git out, too, now I'm started. Guess I'll jist mosey along," he told them. "Better be puttin' miles under my runners right now."

"Hell no!" snapped Fox, and revealed sharp white teeth in a forced grimace of his thin lips. "Tend to them dogs o' his'n, Biff! You're a fine sort of a neighbor, Skid. Why, you've lived three hundred mile away an' ain't seen us in nigh a year! Course you'll stay t'night!"

AS the night wore on Skid more and more had a feeling that everything was not what it should be. During supper the shifty black eyes of Fox Wilson darted restlessly, searchingly. Biff's brooding orbs kept a steady watch.

Skid unrolled his sleeping bag on the floor in a corner of the cabin. He had traveled forty-seven miles behind his sledge and his old legs were tired enough. He fell asleep immediately.

It was pitch black inside when he sat bolt upright. Something had touched him.

"Sorry," mumbled the high voice of Fox through the darkness. "Gettin' a drink an' kicked you, Skid."

The veteran grunted and lay down again. But not for sleep. He knew a hand had touched him, not a foot. A hand had traveled inside the sleeping bag carefully enough that only haste in pulling it out had awakened Pedler. The hand perhaps had found time to feel the two heavy, bulging caribou-hide money belts around his middle. Skid cursed the fact he had

no revolver, and his rifle was in the lashings of the sledge.

His straining ears heard Fox shuffle noisily to the other side of the room and climb into the bunk. Eyes wide open, Skid controlled his breathing, gradually lengthened it until the breath was a regular, rumbling snore.

Perhaps an hour passed, then from the other side came the faintest of rustles, a slight scare, a muted hiss. Skid wormed out of his sleeping bag and got to his feet. Two heads, forming a dark silhouette against the dim whiteness of the small oil-paper window at the front of the cabin. Then came the creak of hinges and Skid saw a rectangular white patch as the door opened. The lithe wiry shadow of Fox Wilson passed through, followed by the hulk of Biff, then the door was carefully closed. Footsteps sounded in the snow crust, hushed.

Skid stood in his position for fully five minutes, then he groped for his mukluks, pulled them over his heavy socks, rolled his sleeping bag. One thing he was decided upon: he was leaving, regardless.

THE bite of the cold air outside hit his lungs like smoke. A slight haziness was over the sky, covering the stars, but everything was illuminated icily. Skid made his way through the shapeless dim haze towards the shed where his sledge outfit was. His footsteps creaked slightly with each step. He stopped dead at the sound of voices emerging through the slab walls.

"Oughta kill 'im now, Fox," came Biff's rumbling voice. "Then we're sure."

"No!" piped Fox. "You're a fool and a dumb one. What happens if we kill him, huh? Ever'body knows he was leavin', headin' our way—"

"Hide the body."

"Ye-ah! Hide the body! Y' don't know them Redcoats well enough—an' what with your experience with 'em, too! How do we know but somebody knows he stayed here t'night. An' then he jist won't be seen again. They'd—"

"But hell, this way—"

"IT'S the best, I tell you! It's a safe bet nobody knows about Skid's strike. He's too cautious t' go tellin' it around. They'll jist find him and his outfit out there, stiff, with no signs of foul play. And we'll leave him a little gold on his body, t' look right. C'mon, let's git back 'fore the old fool wakes up again an' finds us gone."

Skid sprawled in the snow by the shack wall as the two emerged and made their way cautiously to the cabin. As the door closed behind them Skid got to his feet and slipped inside the shed.

"Goin' t' find me dead an' with no signs o' foul play, huh?" he muttered to himself. "Well, fer two cents I'd go in there an' clean them two out, hang 'em up in the air an' dry 'em fer jerked dog-meat!"

But he had everything to lose and nothing but a certain satisfaction to gain by such an act. He checked the impulse and examined the sledge load.

In the dim reflected light he could see the pack had been molested, perhaps by a thorough search. But dog-fish and man-grub were there.

He pulled the sledge out of the shed, then made his way to where his dogs were chained. He silenced growls with hissed orders and harnessed in silence.

"Mush!"

His voice cracked sharply through the cold air and the dog whip snapped like a rifle shot. The dogs leaped against the breast straps, bells jingled, sledge runners cracked out

over the hard, granulated snow-crust.

Looking back, Skid saw the cabin door swing open and the two men rush out. The bigger bulk stopped, then the smaller leaped toward him and apparently knocked a rifle down, for a flash drove into the ground at their feet, then sounded a report. The two figures struggled together, floundering in the snow.

"That's one thing I always noticed," Skid grinned. "Crooks never can agree 'mongst theirselves."

His dogs rounded a low hill and cut the cabin from sight, then they straightened into a racing line, the hairy backs bobbing rhythmically. The temperature was the arctic ideal of thirty below, when sledges glide easiest.

Miles slipped beneath the runners. Skid hugged the ravines, swinging with each step ever nearer his objective, seven hundred miles away, where there would be entertainment and liquor to last until the ships broke out in the spring.

DAYLIGHT came, then the sun, showing pale and clear near the southern horizon. Skid did not stop, but pushed on without rest during the whole day. It was dark before he brought his team to a stop at a clump of spruce, and prepared camp.

He unharnessed his team, tossed each dog a good sized fish, then built a fire and erected a canvas fly. Spruce branches covered the snow under the fly, and while his pot of grub was heating over the fire Skid sat in the reflected warmth with his manikin-doll. "Well, Ike, did we show a coupla ugly mugs a trick or two about gittin' out while the gittin' was good?"

"We did, Mr. Pedler, we did," came back the nasal whine, with Skid's hand at the back manipulating the lips in perfect unison. "But what do you think about them

getting real sore and following us?"

"Let 'em, Ike. If they want to race with me they got a lief t' try."

"Then what do you think, Mr. Pedler?"

"I think we're lucky as hell, but safe. They might be far behind, but—"

Skid stopped short and leaped erect as the air was knifed by a wild frenzied howl from one of the chained dogs.

"Meg!"

It was the lead dog, big and strong. Now she was writhing, snarling, snapping the air with frothing mouth.

SKID ran to the sledge and jerked his rifle. His hands trembled slightly as he raised the weapon. Meg was his favorite of the team.

He shrugged, drew a bead, pulled the trigger. The hammer hit with an empty click. He pumped the mechanism, pulled the trigger again. Another click. Skid shoved his thumb on the magazine feed and in the starlight examined the gun. There were no bullets; the magazine was empty.

Another dog shivered, yelped frantically against the chain leash. Yet another followed suit. Soon the entire string were lying prone, twitching, the spasmodic jerking of tortured flesh gradually getting slower—

Skid blinked moisture from wrinkle-encased eyes, then turned toward the north. His jaws jutted out like a rocky cliff on the skyline.

"You lousy, dirty, dog-poisonin' wolverines!" he gritted. "So that's yer game, huh? Well, I'll git you—all if I hafta come back after I'm dead an' ha'nt you!"

The food over the fire was bubbling. The odor rose maddeningly to his hungry nostrils. He kicked the pot off the stick above the fire and watched the hot stew splatter to the

snow and sink through it, leaving a brown coloration.

"Can't risk it," he mumbled. "Ten t' one they poisoned my grub too. Ye-ah. That's what they meant when they talked o' me bein' found dead without evidence o' foul play."

He slumped on the spruce branches under the canvas fly and stared into the fire embers. Mechanically he picked up the doll and fumbled his hand beneath the tiny fur parka.

"Well, Ike, looks like we're in a hell of a fix."

"Right enough, Mr. Pedler. A man can't live long in this country without gun or provisions."

"Yeah. And if my guess's right we'll soon be havin' visitors."

THE second dog-team was following in the runner tracks made the night before by Skid's sledge. The small wiry Fox held the handles, while Biff lumbered after like a bear.

"Hell've a chance that slow pair'd have tryin' to ketch me, if they hadn't spiked the dog-fish," Skid grunted. He carefully made his way down from the tree he was in, descended the hill and surveyed his camp.

"Uh, huh. They don't want me. They want my gold. So if I leave it—they'll figger I'll die anyhow—"

He jerked up his parka and the skin undershirt beneath it, then undid the thongs binding the two heavy gold-laden belts. There was a lot of heavy red metal in those two fat pouches. Skid shrugged and tossed them both to the bough-covering beneath the canvas fly. He picked up his sleeping bag and the doll manikin, then tossed the doll back upon the two gold pouches.

"Sorry, Ike. But ever' ounce counts now."

He cut through the timber up the rise of the hill, then stopped in the underbrush some hundred yards

away and burrowed in the snow. The two men would be able to see his footprints leading away from camp, but Skid hardly thought they would follow, when the gold was at the camp. From his position on the hill-side he could see the camp through a space between the trees.

It was a half hour before he heard Fox's sharp voice, then the little man came into view by the campfire. Fox held his rifle in readiness and the sharp black eyes looked at the overturned pot of stew, the huskies frozen stiff beyond. Then attention riveted on the two gold pouches, lying half hidden by the doll manikin.

"It's a gift!" Fox said joyously. His voice carried sharp and clear in the cold. The hulking bulk of Biff had come into view between the trees.

"Don't!" Biff bellowed, and jerked the little man away when in the act of stooping for the gold.

"Leggo me, do you hear, you lunk-headed bear!"

BIFF retained his grip on the other's arm. "Don't fool with that! Yuh see that jinx?"

Fox jerked away impatiently. "Hell! That doll!"

"Indian sign, that's what! We can't move it and take the gold until we go through the ceremony—"

Fox kicked the manikin and scooped up the gold pouches before the slower man could stop him again.

"There's yer ceremony, Biff. An' fer all the dog-goned superstitious caribous, you're it!"

"Bad luck," mumbled Biff. "Wait an' see."

"Git dinner an' shut up that ugly face!"

"We ain't lettin' old Skid go loose?"

"He's prob'ly runnin' as fur as he can away from this place. No use

wastin' good time huntin' him. An' he'll never come back around here."

Biff went about gathering wood for a fire, while Fox hefted the two gold filled pouches into a corner.

"Cut cards, Biff. All or nothin'."

"No."

"This's some pile fer jist one man—how about shootin' dice?"

Biff tossed his armful of wood beside the ashes of the fire. "Say, ya' tryin' to grab all that gold? I'd tear yer guts out with m' bare hands!"

Fox stiffened. "Listen, feller. How long since you got makin' threats to me? Huh? You been gettin' entirely too fresh lately. Now you git a-makin' that fire an' do it plenty dam' quick!"

Biff stooped surlily and began making the fire. It was plain to the watching Skid that the little man controlled his huge companion. But those deep brooding eyes, their submerged smothered gleam—Skid wondered when it would flare out in a wild, animal-like frenzy.

OCCASIONALLY a wafted scent from the cooking meal assailed Skid's nostrils, sending sharp pangs to his shrunken stomach. It was now noon and he had not eaten since the previous day. He watched Biff heap two tin plates, then Fox handed tin cups across the fire.

"They's a creek down there. Chop through the ice an' git some good water fer a spell. This melted snow's flat as hell."

Biff made no sign he had heard; Fox spoke sharply again, then leaped to his feet.

"You go git some water, savvy?"

The big man shrank from the other's wrath. He held out a hand for the cups and plodded through the trees to the bottom of the ravine. Soon there came the sharp sound of his hatchet hacking through the ice of the creek.

The hulking figure had hardly disappeared when Fox fumbled inside his skin clothing and drew out a small tin can. He pulled off the lid, leaned across the fire and sprinkled his partner's food plentifully with a white powder. When Biff returned with the water Fox was casually eating.

Biff squatted cross-legged and scooped a spoonful of food from his tin plate. Then the hand holding the heaped spoon stopped an inch from the black matted beard. Biff sniffed, hesitated, sniffed again, then lowered the spoon.

"Here, Fox"—he extended his plate across the fire—"let's trade!"

THE small man was on his feet, fumbling under his parka. Biff leaped at the same time, the hatchet in his huge hair-covered hand. Fox's revolver glinted.

"I'll put you—"

The hatchet crunched into wrist joint. Fox dropped to the snow and fumbled for the gun with his left hand. Biff's big mukluk stomped on the hand.

"Don't do it, Biff!" Terror in that shriek. Groveling, pleading fear.

Biff hesitated, then finished his job with a careless sweep of the hatchet. Skid watched curiously from his position on the hillside while Biff carefully slid a stick beneath one of the gold pouches, took hold of the stick on each end with the gold poke hanging between and tossed it on the sledge. He handled the other in like manner.

"Well, I'll be a froze-footed Indian!" Skid muttered. "If that big moose ain't no-foolin' a-scairt they's a jinx on that gold 'cause Ike was a-lyin' on top it! Prob'ly got the idea that's why Fox was kilt—touchin' it."

Biff did not stop to finish his meal. He left Fox lying there and turned

the dog outfit about. As the sound of the sledge became dimmer old Skid straightened up, stamped his cramped legs, descended the hillside to camp.

He picked up his ventriloquist's doll in passing. "Dunno but what you'll be worth somethin', feller," he mused. "Seein' as how you're Indian sign to that black Biff."

Old Skid had no intentions of letting Biff get away with that gold. And the poisoning of his dogs caused the grizzled veteran to boil. He trotted along the backtrail after the jingle of Biff's sledge bells. The fact that he, Skid, was unarmed, and that his old stomach had been a stranger to grub for forty hours, did not enter his head as a disadvantage.

HE felt his knees twinge like rusty hinges with each step. His shoulders seemed to have become heavy weights dragging on his chest. It was hunger biting through the marrow of his bones. The exertion of jogging along the crusted trail made him slightly sick, light headed.

It was dark and Skid was reeling groggily when he became conscious that ahead of him the rhythmic metallic tinkle had stopped. Skid continued cautiously. Soon he rounded the curve of a hill to see Biff's black blot of a form hunched over a starting fire.

"Huh! Lets his dogs wait while he gits warm," grunted Skid in contempt. Biff set food on to cook, then unhitched his dogs and chained them to separate saplings. He stacked an armload of frozen fish from the sledge and tossed two fish to each husky.

"Holiday t'day," he rumbled to the animals. "Double eats."

He went back to his fire. Skid watched the dogs tearing at the frozen fish. The animal nearest him was a big black and gray brute, show-

ing wolf blood. Skid began edging towards the husky—

The dog did not notice him until he was six feet away. Then it snarled, the long white canine teeth showing in the darkness.

"Shut up!" growled Biff from the fire. Skid crouched low on the snow crust, but Biff did not turn around nor come to investigate. In the brightness of the fire glare he could not have seen far through the saplings in the darkness anyway.

The dog was getting onto the last of one of its fish and soon would start on the other. Skid retreated a few paces, then straightened and walked casually so as to pass near the dog. It stopped eating and raised the hair on its neck in a low rumbling growl but Skid apparently paid no attention.

THE husky bent again to its meal. At the same time Skid stooped, snatched the untouched fish and flung himself backward. The dog leaped, snapping, and ripped a chunk out of Skid's parka sleeve before it was brought up short by the chain around its neck. Skid scurried out of sight while the animal strained at the chain, rumbling vicious growls. Then Skid heard the dogs yelping as Biff wielded a whip.

Skid munched at the frozen fish while he crept up the hillside and looked down on the camp from the low summit. Biff finished his meal, then crawled into the sleeping bag. In one huge hand he grasped the revolver he had taken from Fox's body.

There would be no chance of creeping up on him in the night. Nerves on edge, the big fellow would sleep lightly. He kept turning his head this way and that, peering into the darkness outside the fire's glare from the top of his sleeping bag. Then finally as the form relaxed and

started to doze off, Skid pursed his withered lips and:

"Don't do it, Biff!" he called sharply. But the voice he mimicked was the high cracked terror-stricken squeak that Fox had used to plead for his life.

Biff stiffened as though he had been stabbed, scrambled to a sitting position and glared nervously around, revolver gripped tightly. Behind a bush on the hill above, Skid grinned. Biff had been thinking about those last frenzied words of the man he had killed. And coming sharp and clear when he was on the borderland of sleep—

BIFF shook his matted black head, then edged into his sleeping bag like a child getting under the bed covers after reading a ghost story. It was some time before the shoulders and neck relaxed again. Then: "Don't do it, Biff!" came Fox's tone again.

Biff leaped to his feet, peered wildly into the darkness, shot twice, blindly, at shadows outside the rim of light. Then with the revolver in one hand and the hatchet in the other he advanced cautiously into the trees.

Skid could hear the heavy blows of the hatchet. Biff reappeared with a huge armful of wood, which he dumped on the fire. As the flame crackled high Biff sat with his back to it and with the revolver in his hand, nervously peering into the encircling darkness. The big man feared the dark.

Skid grinned to himself, burrowed out of the cold into his sleeping bag and watched. Only once during the night did Biff's shaggy head drop to his chest, and at that instant again came the last pleading words of the murdered Fox.

Biff was red eyed and shaky by dawn. Skid munched the remains of

his frozen fish in his hideout on the hilltop and watched the big man pack up. He was warm and comfortable inside the sleeping bag, drowsy with a well filled stomach of raw frozen salmon. A pleasant laziness suffused his old limbs. Skid heard the low growls of the dogs as Biff began harnessing them.

Full belly—warm—drowsy and contented—Skid chuckled softly at thought of the terrified Biff—sleepy—

SKID awakened with a start, every nerve-end tingling, warning. The force of his subconscious shock brought him to a sitting position.

Towering above him was the fur clad hulk of Biff. The sharp hatchet dangled in one unmitten ham-like hand. Mechanically, Skid squirmed half out of the sleeping bag and stood up. Without realizing it he grasped in one hand his doll-manikin. Then he noticed that Biff's eyes were on the doll.

"Ya' was here all night," growled Biff. Almost without thinking, Skid slipped his hand up beneath the manikin's small fur parka to the mouth lever.

"It wus you which was a-scarin' me! But I follered yer track up here!" The big fellow was close to Skid, and he towered above on the snow crust while the veteran stood in the soft snow around the bush.

Skid's mind clutched at anything to stave off that menacing hatchet that was slowly rising. His eyes glanced at the doll; his lips were motionless as he spoke from his diaphragm:

"You stole my gold, Biff!" came the nasal whine, apparently from the doll's moving painted mouth. Biff tensed, low forehead wrinkling. Apparently he had never encountered a ventriloquist before.

"Give me back that gold, Biff! Put

down that hatchet and *give me back my gold!*"

Sweat pearly on Biff's forehead. The lips showing through the black whiskers twitched, making the matted beard writhe. He took a half step backward, then something seemed to snap. He bellowed savagely and flung back the hand with the hatchet.

"Don't do it, Biff!"

The high terror-stricken tones of the dead Fox cut through the still air like a whistling scythe.

Skid Pedler put forty years of practice into that mimicry. He stiffened to attention, opened his eyes in a darting look over Biff's shoulder, recoiled slightly as if seeing something surprising.

That is all anyone can do. The actual "throwing" of the voice is a myth. It is all done by well-timed suggestion of body movements from where the voice is supposed to come.

Biff whirled. In the instant Skid swung his arm holding the manikin with all his might. Biff lurched back again in time to catch the hard wooden head of the doll square in his whiskered face. Skid leaped aside at the blind swoop of the hatchet. Then Biff rolled in agony with a wide-split knee. The hatchet slithered from his relaxed grasp. He

fumbled under his fur parka for the revolver. Skid made a dive for the hatchet—

"WELL, Ike, did we git outta a close shave?" grinned Skid Pedler to the doll on his knee. He was forty miles of the seven hundred down the trail. The dogs were growling over their fish and meat bubbled in a pot over the fire. "We did, Mr. Pedler, we did," came the thin whine of the manikin. "But you sure cracked my head on Biff's big nose."

"Fixed 'er though, Ike. Fixed 'er up good as new. An' now with this gold we'll git outta this dam' country to the outside!"

"We-ell, Mr. Pedler—"

"Huh?"

"I was thinking. Maybe this country isn't so bad—"

"You tryin' to talk me into stayin' here, dog-gone you, Ike? I'm tired of workin'."

"Well, Mr. Pedler, we could take a little vacation, stoppin' in at MacDonald's for a spree—The country's not so bad, Mr. Pedler. You're not so old, at that."

"Mebbe you're right, Ike," grinned the grizzled veteran. "Mebbe you're right!"

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Ken caught a slug in his left shoulder that spun him around

Ken Harlan Was Tired of Railroading in Alaska—And Decided to Quit, But . . .

By JOHN A. THOMPSON

Author of "That Gilsum Guy," "The New England Angel," etc.

WITH a practised hand Ken Harlan eased the air a little, rolling his short ten-car freight drag to a perfect stop in the yards at Shelton. Climbing off his seat, he stepped to the deck of the puffing, sturdy low-wheeled mogul.

"Take 'er, Ed," he said to the fireman. "I'm through."

Ed Gardner raised his eyebrows. "Quittin', you mean?"

"Nothin' else but."

Harlan fished his lunch box from under the seat. Without a glance behind him he descended from his engine and started to go across the tracks.

Gardner stood in the gangway and stared at the retreating broad-shouldered figure moving briskly away. Harlan was hatless, but the shimmering thatch of tightly curled red hair surmounting his bullet head bobbed

up and down like a halo of fire as he disappeared in the distance.

"Him a red-head, too," muttered Gardner sadly.

Ken cut straight across the yards, heading for town. He meant what he told his fireman. After a season of Alaskan railroading he was through.

He liked the north country, liked the adventurous, hard-bitten bunch of he-rails he worked with. But hell, a fellow had his future to think of. Ken knew he could never afford to get married while he was still bucking the extra board on a wooden axle frontier pike a million miles from nowhere.

A GIRL—the girl—was waiting for him back in the States. And a steady job on the P. N. and K., his old road. Mary's father was road foreman of engines of the Merkle Division.

Deciding to go home was one thing. Getting there presented a problem. Ken knew to a dollar how woefully short he was of the amount needed to take him back to the States.

He knew that within two or three days at most the last boat of the season would steam out of the open roadstead at Nome. After that the slush ice in the Bering Sea would freeze solid and it would be late in the following spring before steamer traffic with the outside could be resumed.

Ken smiled to himself. It was like him to make his decisions first and devise a means of carrying them out later.

Even as he smiled he had thought of an idea.

Shelton was the northern terminus of the Nome and Kougarkok railroad, a single track line that pushed its way valiantly a hundred miles across the tundra from the bleak shores of

the Bering Sea to the busy gold camps inland.

A mining town, a rip-roaring young Helldorado of the North, Shelton. Drinking, gun-fighting, fist frays were considered prime amusement. Gambling was wide open. And Ken knew he could play an astute game of poker when he had a mind to.

Picking out the first brightly lighted spot, Harlan bought a drink at the bar, then sauntered over to the gaming tables. He hung around until there was an empty chair at a poker table.

He nodded affably to the solemn group as he sat down. Chips purchased, coat removed, shirt sleeves rolled up, he concentrated on some really constructive work with the pasteboards.

"Right here," he mumbled to himself as he glanced at his first five cards, "is where the great Harlan Refinance Plan gets into operation." He discarded two little ones, holding out a brace of jacks and a bullet.

Throughout the evening Ken played his cards closely. By midnight he was doing nicely. Far too nicely to suit Skagway Dan at whose table he was playing. Skagway centered all his attention on the railroader, and mysteriously Ken's pile of hard-won chips began to dwindle.

A NEW tenseness gripped Ken, a look of cold steel crept into his usually mild blue eyes. Finally he caught the professional gambler red-handed, slipping himself a pair of kings from the bottom of the deck. Jumping to his feet, the hogger shouted a direct accusation. The gambler's eyes flashed.

"You're a damned liar!" he snarled.

Ken lunged forward, overturning the table.

Skagway made a swift motion hip-

ward. There was a spurt of flame, the bark of a six-gun. Wood splintered from the table top. General pandemonium broke loose.

"The railroader started it!" someone shouted. Everybody's venom seemed to center on Ken. A dozen men lunged for him at once. Ken felt the stinging impact of his knotted fist against the nearest jaw, heard a bone crunch, saw a figure go sprawling to the floor.

LIKE every other boomer who worked on the Nome and Koug-arok, Ken was aware of the fact that the townspeople were not partial to railroad men. Buck Howard, the marshal, was their open enemy.

Harlan realized that unless he made a swift escape, he would most likely wind up in the local hoosegow, charged, regardless of facts, with being a disturber of the peace.

His great Harlan Refinance Plan had suddenly gone a-glimmering. It was a cinch he would never make the last boat out for the States locked in an iron-barred jail house.

He looked about him hurriedly. The nearest means of egress was a window boarded up with thin wooden slats. Without a moment's hesitation the hogger plunged through it, head first, shattering the thin barrier like a circus horse diving through a paper hoop. He landed face first on the ground outside.

As he picked himself up, shots and sounds of hastily organized pursuit impinged upon his ringing ears. He darted around the back of the building. Sheer instinct directed his feet toward the tracks of the Nome and Koug-arok Railroad.

"There he goes!" cried a pursuer eagerly. Several guns spat in rapid succession. A bullet whistled by Ken's head, and he redoubled his speed.

Harlan contacted the N. and K. at the outer yard limits. Luck was

with him. A freight came thundering up the tracks, gathering momentum rapidly for a running start at the steep grade outside of Shel-ton by means of which the little railroad climbed the tortuous defiles of Posthole Canyon to the crest of the rugged Koug-arok divide.

Ken risked a single glance behind him. The next moment he was sprinting up the roadbed parallel to the string of freight cars, and feeling frantically for a handy grab iron. He let a box car slide by. Behind it was a locomotive coupled "dead" in the middle of the train. Leaping for the steps, Ken pulled himself into the gangway.

Panting heavily, he peered out the side window of the engine cab and a slow grin crept over his features as he watched his baffled pursuers shake irate fists at the receding cars before they turned back toward town.

Within a half mile the freight slowed down perceptibly as it struck the first rise of the divide. Looking about him, Ken immediately recognized the locomotive in which he had sought refuge.

She was the old 544, a hog built with low drivers and a boiler head that seemed out of proportion to the rest of the engine.

It filled the cab almost to the roof. Boiler and firebox were both empty now, of course.

THE jack intended for hard work on mountain grades had thrown a side rod on a former trip to Shel-ton and was being hauled back to have the necessary repairs made at Nome, where the road's machine shops were. Both side rods had been removed so she would roll freely. Ken saw them, noticing particularly the broken one, lashed securely to the deck in the coal space on the tender.

Moving over to the right-hand seat

box, he leaned out of the cab and for a while he watched the road ahead. He was quite comfortable. Later would be time enough to drop in on the boys back in the crummy and announce his presence. There was no hurry since he had decided to accept Fate and ride the freight clear into Nome anyhow.

His final pay check, a meager one, was waiting for him at the main office. With that shoestring for a financial start he still had to solve the problem of making the last boat out for the States. His first try had boomeranged disastrously. Ken smiled ruefully.

The freight climbed steadily, making the rock walls of Posthole Canyon ring with the booming exhaust of the engine. Up ahead the glare from the firebox alternately illuminated the beetling crags of the narrow gorge with a dull red glow, then dropped them into darkness again as the tallowpot worked and sweated over his fires. Unconsciously Ken found himself criticizing the handling of the train by the hogger on the front end.

HE listened to the timing of the exhaust beats. "Ought to drop his Johnson bar a notch and get a longer stroke," he muttered to himself. "He'll slip his drivers on Vanadium Cut if he ain't careful."

However, the train continued to pull up the grade. Ken felt tired. He had had a hard run up to Shelton. Then the excitement following his unfortunate card game. And no rest. He slipped off the seat box onto the deck, propped his head against the seat cushion, braced himself against the jar and sway of the train's motion, and dozed off.

When he opened his eyes again the freight had stopped. He heard voices outside the cab window.

"Droppin' down the mountains is

a hell of a place for a freight drag to make time, if you ask me. Speedin' on them short radius turns is dangerous."

"Brother," rasped a second voice, "I only work for this road the same as you. Those are the orders, and you can do what you like with 'em."

"O KAY, up!" A pause. Then, "What's the idea? Despatcher gone daffy?"

"They're all nuts." The second voice lowered. "There's an important extra freight behind you tonight. A dummy drag. Ten box cars. Nine of 'em empty, and the tenth carrying enough gold to make you and all your relatives rich. About a quarter million in yellow metal from the mines around Shelton racing to the coast to catch the last boat out. It's being shipped to the United States Mint at 'Frisco."

"A fine way to ship gold," mumbled the first man whom Ken guessed correctly to be the conductor of the train on which he was riding.

"Not so dumb. They got the last shipment that went through when Con Kelly was wrecked on the Nome flyer." Again the voice was lowered. "Between you and me and the lamp post, Lane, the same gang might make a try for this stuff, if they knew when and how it was moving. Anyhow, that extra's crowding you, and it's your job to keep ahead of her all the way in."

Ken started to his feet. Might as well announce himself now as later. The train began to take up slack with a clatter of banging drawbars. As he rose the "dead" engine took the strain with a jerk that nearly threw him to the floor plates. He clutched for a hand rail to steady himself, but by the time he reached the gangway the freight was already in motion.

Directly in front of Ken a light

shone in the little bay window of the isolated telegraph shack at the crest of the Kougarok divide. The operator whom he had been listening to was just entering the door.

Ken glanced down the track. Lane, with his back toward the front of the train and his lantern swinging in the crook of his elbow, was hurrying past the rolling cars. A moment later he swung himself aboard the crummy.

"Well, I'll go back later," mused Ken. He resumed his place on the seat box of the crippled 544, and settled himself for a swift descent on the far side of the mountains up which the freight had so laboriously climbed. The train gained speed rapidly.

KEN felt a hard lunge as the "dead" engine was whipped around the first bad curve. Instinctively his hand reached out for the air valve.

Then he laughed to himself. After all this wasn't his train.

Still he didn't approve of the reckless way the engineer up ahead was taking the drop. "Better give her an air application, big boy, or you'll have this string in the ditch," he muttered to himself.

Nevertheless, the freight negotiated the next turn, and several successive ones.

In a way Ken was forced to admire the steel nerves of the hogger on the head end. The man was certainly carrying out his orders. Neither the gold train nor any other would have much chance of crowding him the way he was dropping down the grades.

Suddenly above the roar and clang and bang of the racing train Ken heard an insistent humming overhead. He leaned out of the cab window and looked up. Like pin points in the distance the night lights of a

plane passed overhead and disappeared.

"Mountains don't mean a thing to those birds," muttered Ken.

Harlan braced himself for the next violent swing. And he did so barely in time. As the car ahead of the "dead" locomotive swung around, it whipped the drawbar after it, and the sudden tug on the heavy engine proved a greater strain than the metal could bear. There was a snap, a hiss as the air hose parted. The freight had broken in two.

For a moment Harlan thought the old 544 would climb the rails and pitch headlong off the tracks. Miraculously the jack hung to the steel ribbons, lurching madly.

Ken was on his feet now, scrambling back over the tender and onto the top of the box cars behind him. Regardless of his own safety he ran rearward the length of the train, hopping the perilous, swaying dark gaps between cars with a sure-footedness that came from a lifetime of railroading.

He burst into the caboose as the rear brakeman was coming out.

"We're broke in two!" he shouted at the astonished shack. "Gimme a brake club. We gotta tie these cars down, or we'll crash into the first half—if we don't turn over on a curve."

Inside the crummy, Lane, the conductor stood white as a sheet. His mouth opened wide, his lower jaw hung slack and unhinged as he gazed saucer-eyed at Ken Harlan. He was too scared to comment on Ken's sudden appearance.

"**W**E'LL never get 'em tied down," he babbled. "Can't hold the 544 when she gets to rollin'." The conductor brushed past Ken, who had already snatched up a brake club.

"Where you goin'?" Ken's hand reached out for Lane's arm.

Lane tore loose from the grasp. "You can be your own dead hero," he snarled. "Me—I'm going to jump while there's still a chance. Before we hit the lower gorge."

"Don't be a fool! You'll kill yourself," snapped Ken. He made another grab for Lane, but the man eluded him.

With a frightened scream the terror-stricken conductor dashed onto the rear platform and leaped into the night. Ken heard the dull impact, saw a huddled form roll sickeningly in the red glow of the swiftly receding marker lights.

THE brakeman was two cars ahead of Ken as the latter reached the top of the train again.

"Where's Lane?" he asked.

"Bailed out," said Ken laconically. "Go up forward and tie 'em down, working back. I'll work toward you from here."

The brakeman nodded, and moved off. Ken inserted his brake club between the spokes of the nearest hand wheel. He began tightening up on the brake chains. One car as tight as he could make it, he moved ahead to the next.

In spite of the efforts of Ken and the brakeman, the runaway still raced on. The two men were working closer together now, both panting, exhausted from straining every ounce of muscle they possessed in their desperate efforts to bear down on the hand brakes.

Suddenly the train gave a lurch around a steeply banked bend. For a moment the car on which Ken was riding seemed to float through space. Its spinning wheels lifted from the rails. Then it settled with a jar and a screech as the wheel flanges bit into the steel ribbons again.

Ken heard a shout. Though the cold wind stung his cheeks and bit into the marrow of his bones, sweat

broke out in great beads on his forehead. The brakeman, thrown off balance, was sprawled on the car roof, clutching wildly at empty air, clawing for a hand-hold he couldn't find. Ken rushed forward, though even as he did so, he knew he would be too late.

With a final cry, the brakeman rolled off the swaying car. Ken shuddered. Then he looked about him at the dark pines hurtling past on the high side of the cliff, at the menacing black void on his right. When he listened he could hear the dull roar of surging water far below mingled with the thunder of the flying cars. The runaway was in the lower gorge.

If he could only slow those cars down enough to make the next bad curve, Ken felt he would have a chance to finish his wild ride all in one piece. Beyond the next turn the grade diminished and the tracks left the gorge to run down the lower slope of the mountains in a straight line.

Ken worked frantically at the brakes. Grinding, sliding, bumping, the runaway gradually slackened its speed. Ken could see it was no longer right on the tail of the front half of the train.

There was a wild jerk as the 544 took the final bend, careened madly. But she held to the rails. The runaway straightened out. As the grade flattened it bucked and rocked, fighting the increasing grip of the brakes. Ken saw the sparks from the engine on the forward half of the train pull away swiftly. He gave a long sigh of relief, and crept back to the cab of the 544.

"PHEW!" he muttered. "Talk about your Casey Jones!"

The next instant there was a crash. The front end of the old 544 lifted, the cab swayed dizzily, and

the jack dropped over on her side. Behind her piled up splintered box cars in a jumbled heap. Ken's world went suddenly blank.

When Ken came to, his first instinct was to reach for his Brotherhood card and present it to the Keeper of the Pearly Gates.

There was a throbbing lump the size of a hen's egg on his head. Matted blood where the scalp had been cut. He was badly bruised in numerous places. But he was still in the land of the living. And his first superficial examination disclosed no broken bones.

MOTION was painful. Climbing out of his iron prison was not going to be easy. He roused himself for the effort. Snatches of the conversation he had overheard back at the crest of the divide ribboned themselves across his memory.

The gold extra—nine dummy cars and one treasure-laden—was close behind. Up to him to flag that train before it crashed into the wreck already strewn across the rails. Lane had jumped. The brakeman had fallen. He alone was left to flag that extra. Ken scrambled to his feet and thrust his head through the broken cab window above him. He saw red flames licking the timbers of the crummy, ignited from the stove that had been in the car. He heard the crackling of dry wood.

Harlan started to pull his aching body through the broken window. Half way out he froze and listened—tense.

Figures were moving about the wreckage. In the light from the blazing caboose he could make out three men, masked and heavily armed. Their raised voices were clearly audible. "Sure, it's the gold train. Followin' right behind that freight, wasn't she?"

"It don't look right to me. No

headlight on the engine. We just get the n ties on the track when we hear her coming around the bend."

"Start workin' on them box cars, and stop arguin'. I'm goin' to take a look-see around the engine. Find out what happened to the crew."

Ken dropped back into the dark recesses of the overturned cab. That last voice had a familiar ring to it. He searched around for the brake club he had been using, but failed to find it.

He barked his shins on the firebox door which had slammed open when the 544 overturned. Plenty of room inside the firebox. A safe refuge in which a man might hide. But those were not Ken's thoughts. Hiding was not in his make up.

Another question raced through his whirling brain. How about the real gold train thundering down the mountain? It wouldn't be very far away now. Would the hogger see the flames of the wreck soon enough to stop in time? Not likely. The bend above the wreck was a rock wall against his vision. He would be rolling fast—on a down grade.

KEN set his lips grimly. It was his job to fight through the bandits and flag that train. On the other hand that would immediately warn the gold thieves that they were wasting time on the wrong cars.

"Hell," muttered Ken, "whatever I do is goin' to be wrong. If I hold them crooks here, the gold train'll be wrecked sure as shootin'. If I flag the train, the bandits'll get it." Another thought came to him. "Yeah, and maybe the crew'll get suspicious and plug me for tryin' to flag 'em down."

The problem was taken out of Ken's hands by the sound of someone walking around the overturned cab. A fist, gripping an automatic was thrust through the broken cab

window directly over Ken's head. Ken crouched. A head and shoulders filled the broken window.

"If there's anybody in here, stick 'em up and climb out," commanded a voice that Ken would have sworn he recognized.

KEN lunged upward, one hand grabbed the gun wrist. He caught the bandit's head in the crook of his free arm, pressed it close against his chest to prevent any warning outcry and pulled the struggling gold thief into the cab. The revolver clattered into a dark corner.

Ken tried to find solid footing on the lower cab window frame. The thief jerked a hand free. In the narrow beam of moonlight that streaked into the cab, Ken saw the flash of glistening steel. He tried to parry the first swift knife thrust, but the blade bit viciously into the fleshy part of his forearm.

For a moment Ken loosed his hold. The next instant all his strength was behind the short, stiff uppercut he whipped to the bandit's face. With a moan, the man went limp.

Ken stumbled on the firebox door again. He cursed, then smiled as an idea struck him. "Reckon he'd keep safe enough in there," he muttered.

The next moment he was unceremoniously stuffing his captive into the empty firebox. He closed the door, fastened the heavy iron dog. "That'll hold him," he murmured, looking for the bandit's revolver. After a while he found it, a heavy caliber, short-barreled automatic.

The knife gash on his arm burned like fire, but he had not time to attend to it now. The gun, gripped firmly in his right hand, felt reassuring. He thrust his head through the broken cab window.

The blaze from the crummy had spread to the nearest box car. Tongues of flame shot skyward, to

lose themselves in billows of thick, rolling smoke. There was an acrid tang in the air.

Ken was startled to see his prisoner's two confederates almost directly below him. A brawny, bulky, bull-necked giant of a man looked up suddenly.

"I told you this wasn't the train," he began querulously. Then he jerked his head toward his partner. "Cripes! That ain't Dan."

His gun flashed. A bullet sang past Ken's head. Another. Ken fired. With a horrible curse the bull-necked man's partner staggered, fell backward and lay still. More bullets were coming at Ken. But he had to get out of that cab, or be trapped there like a rat in a hole.

He fired twice at the big bandit. Then heedless of everything, pulled himself through the broken window and jumped to the ground. He landed not ten feet from his assailant—a point blank target. He crouched, and squeezed the trigger. There was a dull, metallic click. The automatic had jammed.

AN orange dagger of death flashed from the muzzle of the giant's revolver. Ken caught the slug in his left shoulder with a wallow that spun him around, nearly knocked him over. But somehow he managed to keep coming toward his enemy. Momentarily he expected another shot—the bullet that would be his last. But it didn't come.

In the fitful glare of the burning wreckage, Ken saw that the man had paused to reload. And at that instant he jumped. His hunched good shoulder caught the huge bandit square in the chest, knocked the wind out of him. Together the two men crashed to the ground.

Kicking and clawing, the bandit tried to roll out from under that single fist that hammered with such

telling effect on his coarse, unshaven face.

If he could just get out from under that rain of blows. With a tremendous effort he heaved up on his elbows, rolled over. He was on top now, and he sent a smashing blow to Ken's face.

The bandit knelt over Ken, his heavy fists seeking the hogger's stomach. Pain shot along Ken's nerves with excruciating persistence.

DULLY in the back of his brain he seemed to hear the roar of a train coming through the lower gorge. He exerted all his strength in a last effort. His right fist landed with the force of a pile driver on the leering face above him, caught the big man a stunning blow behind the ear. The huge fellow gave an astonished squawk, his upraised fists dropped limply to his side and he rolled, inert—out like the proverbial herring.

Ken staggered to his feet. He was sure of the sound of the oncoming train now. He circled around the flaming box cars, located the rails, ran up them twenty yards, staggered and fell.

When he came to, Ken found a group of men hovering over him. Railroaders, armed guards. And he recognized, kneeling beside him, the grim, gaunt form of Superintendent Slawson. "The first thing we've got to do," Slawson was addressing the conductor of the gold special, "is get this man into Nome and get him proper medical attention."

"That's Ken Harlan, sir," said a grimy-overalled fireman. "He said he was quittin' to go back to the States."

The super snorted. "I know who he is, Gardner. We haven't many red-headed hoggers on this line, but by gad, we need all we've got."

Ken tried to raise his head. "Ed's

right, Mister Slawson. I'm through—if I can just catch that last boat out for the States." He tried to sit up and look around. "Is the extra freight all right?" he asked.

"Safe and sound." Slawson's voice was crisp. "We picked up the brakeman that jumped from the runaway. He warned us, so we came down the grade carefully."

"Got here, found a wreck, a fire, one fellow that has already been identified as a member of Skagway Dan's gang, dead, and another knocked out." Slawson paused. "If you had only gotten Skagway himself, it would have been a perfect job. Skagway was here—his plane's on the tundra about a quarter of a mile away behind the woods. That was evidently his getaway scheme, but something must have gone haywire."

Wheels were beginning to whirl in Ken's head. "Skagway Dan," he muttered. Hell, that was the bird that skinned him out of his winnings in the gambling hall at Shelton. Suddenly he burst into laughter. No wonder that first bandit's voice had sounded so familiar. Skagway Dan, huh! He chuckled again.

"Off his nut, I guess." Ed Gardner shook his head sadly.

"Shut up," snapped the super. "What's so funny, Harlan?"

Ken told him. "Skagway's shut up in the firebox of the old 544."

THE superintendent whistled. He detailed some of the armed guards to bring back the man. A deputy marshal who had been riding the gold train went with them.

The super turned to Harlan again. "The front end crew of the freight is here, just ahead of the wreck. After they got clear down to Iron Creek and found the runaway wasn't behind them, they backed up. I'm

(Concluded on page 161)



At parties everyone seemed to be able to add to the fun, while I was just a wallflower.



I received fewer and fewer invitations. Only long, dreary evenings seemed to be in store for me.



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The GLOBE-TROTTER



"ANOTHER month, another dollar," so the old saying goes. But Ye Olde Globe Trotter has to change that saying a bit. It should be *another month, another deluge* of applications for membership in the *Globe Trotters Club*, recently announced in the columns of this department.

Sorting and listing the various applications has taken so much time that it is impossible to begin printing the lists of charter members until a later issue. But, that doesn't mean that you fellows who haven't signed up yet, shouldn't do so immediately.

We want all of you, fellow adventurers, young and old, to join up. So far the oldest member to enroll is a man 61 years of age, and the youngest is a young junior high school student in California, aged 12.

AND THERE'S NO DUES!

Whatever your age, whatever your nationality or religion makes no difference. We have members of all creeds and all nations. The only requirement for membership is a longing for adventure and the desire for fellowship in a great world-wide organization of kindred souls, the central clearing house of which shall be this department in **THRILLING ADVENTURES**. Remember there are *no obligations* and *no dues*!

Sign the membership application appearing on page 154 of this magazine, send it into Headquarters here,

and your membership card, entitling you to all the rights and privileges of the *Globe Trotters Club*, will be forwarded to you at the earliest possible moment.

So many suggestions and proposals have come in from the various members already, that I am going to turn over the columns of this department this month to a discussion of those suggestions and proposals.

A TIME-OLD ARGUMENT

ONE member, A. W. Davis, writes in and asks that Ye Olde Globe Trotter settle once for all the time-old argument as to whether wolves travel in packs or alone. I am going to disagree with Davis, who admits, however, that he is no authority on the habits of the wild wolf, but gets his information from others who claim to know from personal experiences just what they were talking about.

Davis' letter appears later on, but I'm diving into the controversy right here and now, giving my high and weighty opinions, then ducking out until next month when I will have to come back and answer all the brickbats and rotten vegetables that dissenters have hurled at me. So, here it is, fellow adventurers. If I'm wrong, why not shoot me and put me out of my misery? It may be fun to be fooled, as one of the clever cigarette manufacturers ballyhoos in his advertisements throughout the nation, but Ye Olde Globe Trotter

"The Boss

was Stumped"



"HE WAS trying to figure out a way to speed up the machines. I could see he was stumped and I asked him if he would let me try my hand at it.

"Go ahead," he said, "but I don't believe you can help much. Looks like an outside job to me."

"So I started right in and pretty soon I had the whole thing worked out. The boss was watching me and I could see he was surprised.

"How did you learn all that?" he asked in that quiet way of his. And then I told him I'd been studying at home nights through the International Correspondence Schools.

"He didn't say anything more and I thought he had forgotten all about it until he called me in his office a few weeks later and said he was going to make me foreman and increase my salary \$75 a month.

"Keep on studying," he told me, "and you'll get another promotion soon. You can't beat those International Correspondence Schools text-books for good, sound, practical knowledge."

That's a true story of what spare-time study has done for just one man. There are thousands of others. Why don't you take up a home-study course with the International Correspondence Schools and prepare yourself to earn more money? At least get the facts.

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personally believes it is a whole lot wiser to be right, especially where wild animals are concerned.

And right here and now, let me remind you fellow adventurers that there was only one big, bad wolf who was worrying the three little pigs—and not a whole pack of them. Walt Disney knows his onions, as well as his silly symphonies. So—

IS THE WOLF PACK, FICTION OR TRUTH?

SINCE time immemorial the wolf pack has figured in story and song, and there has been an eternal argument between the romanticists who wish to believe there is such a thing, and the realists who believe there isn't, that the wolf, like most predatory animals of its type, travels alone.

Who is right?

A. W. Davis, who occasioned this discussion, strings along with the romanticists and believes that wolves do travel in packs. Lambert Fairchild, who occasioned his ire, says the wolf pack is just so much *boloney*; that wolves travel and hunt alone, or at most in twos or threes at specific seasons of the year, but never in a pack, such as a herd of caribou, a band of sheep, or a pack of wild dogs.

I am no great shakes as a hunter, but I was born and raised in the north country where there were plenty of wolves, and although I have killed a great many of them, I have never seen more than three of them together. Nor have I ever talked to any hunter or trapper who has ever seen a pack of them hunting or stalking together.

The wolf is a colossal egotist, a great individualist; every instinct he has is against his traveling with a pack. The only time, what may remotely resemble a wolf pack may be seen, is when one has brought down

a deer and others who scent the kill with their keen nostrils come in to partake of the feast. I have talked with hunters and trappers who have seen as many as twelve wolves gathered around the carcass of a single deer. But, even then, they show none of the characteristics of the pack.

Each wolf looks for himself and snips and grabs as much of the carcass as he can, then gulps it down greedily, so that he may get another tid-bit before the others have taken it all.

Even so, with fresh raw meat in front of them, most of the wolves at the carcass spent most of their time snapping and growling at one another.

When the carcass is stripped bare, the wolves leave, never in a pack, but each one going his separate way, and that usually as far away from the next as he is able to do.

THE LONE WOLF

PRACTICALLY every wolf is a lone wolf. During the mating season male and female travel together in a pair for a short time. When the pups are born, the vixen is through with the male and sends him on his way alone. When the vixen has taught the young pups to fend for themselves she sneaks away and leaves them to their own resources. The pups remain together for a short while, until their individual egos bloom, then they too, go on their separate ways.

One wolf, sitting on its haunches and baying at the rising moon, can give the impression of a whole pack of demons, wolves, ghouls and what not rolled into one. And to a person hearing a wolf's howl for the first time, there is no doubt that the unearthly, blood curdling howl is made by a pack.

When another single wolf sitting

"Stop Worrying..."

NOW I CAN TELL YOU THE TRUE FACTS ABOUT

SEX!



WOULD YOU like to know the whole truth about sex? All of the startling facts that even the frankest books have heretofore not dared to print are explained in clear, scientific manner, vividly illustrated, in the revolutionary book—"The New Eugenics". Here at last, the naked truth stands forth, stripped of all prudery and narrow prejudice. Old fashioned taboos are discarded and the subject of sex is brought out into the bright light of medical science by Dr. C. S. Whitehead M.D. and Dr. Charles A. Hoff, M.D., the authors!

SEX ATTRACTION I

Sex appeal and sex satisfaction are the most powerful forces in your life. To remain in ignorance is to remain in danger of lifelong suffering. It is the purpose of this great book to show sex-ignorant men and women how to enjoy safely the thrilling experiences that are their birthright. It not only tells you how to attract the opposite sex, but also how to hold the love of your mate throughout a blissful married life.

DANGEROUS!

... Unless you know the true facts about sex! Ignorance leads to shame, despair, worry and remorse.



Do you know how to add variety to your love-making? The most innocent kiss may lead to tragedy if you are ignorant of sex relations.

WILL FEAR

grip you on your wedding night? ... or will it be the tender, thrilling experience that is your birthright?



SEND NO MONEY!

You send no money—just fill out the coupon below and then when it arrives, in plain wrapper, pay the postman \$1.98. Keep the book five days, then if you are not satisfied send it back and we will refund your money immediately and without question. This book NOT sold to minors.

98 VIVID PICTURES!

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Dept. TG3 1270 Sixth Ave., New York, N.Y.
Send me the "The New Eugenics" in plain wrapper. I will pay postman \$1.98 (plus postage) on delivery. If I am not completely satisfied, I can return the book within five days and the entire price will be refunded immediately. Also send me, FREE OF CHARGE, your book "The Philosophy of Life".

Name _____

Address _____ Age _____
Foreign Orders \$2.25 in advance

Banish Fear and Sex Ignorance Forever!

SEX IS NO LONGER a mysterious sin, mentioned only in the conversational gutters—it is the most powerful force in the world and can be made the most beautiful. Thanks to this bravely written book, it is no longer necessary to pay the awful price for one moment of bliss. Science now lights the path to knowledge and lifelong sex happiness.

LOVE MAKING IS AN ART!

Are you an awkward novice in the art of love-making or a master of its difficult technique? The art of love-making takes skill and knowledge. The sexual embrace as practiced by those ignorant of its true scientific importance is crude, awkward and often terrifying to more sensitive natures. Normal sex-suited people are torn apart because they lack the knowledge that makes for a happy sex life!

Sex Facts for Men and Women

Twilight Sleep—Easy Childbirth
Sex Excesses
The Crime of Abortion
Impotence and Sex Weakness
Secrets of the Honeymoon
Teaching Children Sex
The Dangers of Petting
What Every Man Should Know
The Truth about Masturbation
Venereal Diseases
The Sexual Embrace
How to Build Virility
How to Gain Greater Delight
What to Allow a Lover To Do
Birth Control Chart for Married Women

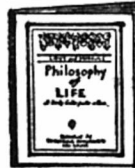


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This astonishing book, telling frankly and clearly the difference in construction and function of man and woman, is sent without cost to all who order "The New Eugenics" at \$1.98. All about the thrilling mystery of Sex! FREE!

PIONEER PUBLISHING CO.
Radio City
1270 Sixth Avenue, New York



on another hilltop some several miles away takes up and answers the first howl, the uninitiated will swear that the universe is dotted with wolves, one for every square foot.

A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

THAT'S probably where the poets and authors got their inspiration for the wolf pack—also the painters, I must not leave them out.

For one of my most distinct childhood impressions is of gazing at a picture in our schoolroom, a picture depicting a Russian three-horse sleigh racing across the Siberian tundra in a blinding snowstorm.

Mother, father and child are in the sleigh. The mother is hugging the child to her breasts in abject fear.

The father is lashing at the pursuing pack of wolves with his long whip while the horses with distended eyes and fear trembling nostrils run their hearts out in feeble effort to escape the ravening wolves.

I don't remember who the artist was that painted that picture, but he was one famous in his day, but I will wager that he never even saw a lone wolf, let alone a pack of them.

A wolf pack makes for drama, that's why the story writers use it so frequently.

If you back them up against the wall and ask them the real facts of the case they'll usually admit them; that they never saw a wolf pack, nor ever talked to anyone who actually had. Carl Lomen, in charge of the government's Alaska reindeer herd, who ought to know as much about wolves as the next man, simply because his wards are their common prey, says that he has never seen or heard of a pack of wolves, or of wolves running or hunting together.

Harry Green, a famous Alaskan guide, says the same thing. But he admitted to me once when I talked to him that the opposite belief is a

popular fallacy and generally accepted by most people.

So, take the above as fact, fellow adventurers. If any of you have contrary opinions and the facts to back them up, Ye Olde Globe Trotter will be more than glad to publish them in this department.

Maybe wolves have changed since my days in the north, but I doubt it.

Now, on to the next topic.

It isn't often that we get letters like the one following. But this reader actually found his name in one of the stories printed in an earlier issue of THRILLING ADVENTURES. What is more he found out he was a hero. As the late Clare Briggs oft depicted, it is a "thrill that comes but once in a lifetime." We are publishing the reader's letter, also the author's reply.

DARK DAYS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Ye Olde Globe Trotter:

A few days ago I had the pleasure of reading in the January issue of THRILLING ADVENTURES a story by Arthur J. Burks entitled: "*With Lead and Steel.*"

I enjoyed this story for several reasons; one being that I served with Arthur J. Burks when he was a lieutenant in the U. S. Marine Corps on duty as Brigade Intelligence Officer in the Dominican Republic, when the events related in the story took place. The second reason being that the author featured me as one of the leading characters of the story.

This is just one of the many like tales I know he could write, based on actual accomplishments of Burks himself, and others of "Brigade Intelligence."

In the hopes that he may see this letter I will ask him to write a yarn about the night he and I lay under a house in Santo Domingo City waiting to capture an escaped murderer named Juan de la Rosa, also telling what happened when the folks came home about 3.00 a. m. What about it, Arturo?

Yours for adventure,

Daniel E. Shimel.

Detroit, Michigan.

(Continued on page 152)

I saved 1/2 by buying direct from the Midwest Laboratories

Yes, and it gives you WORLD-WIDE Reception!

Amazing New
SUPER Deluxe

16-TUBE ALL-WAVE Radio

9 TO 2,000 METERS

30
DAYS
FREE
TRIAL



BEFORE you buy any radio, write for this big new FREE Midwest catalog... printed in four colors. It has helped thousands of satisfied customers save from 1/2 to 1/3 on their radios... by buying direct from the Midwest Laboratories. You, too, can make a positive saving of 30% to 50% by buying a Midwest 16-tube deluxe ALL-WAVE radio at sensationally low direct-from-laboratory prices. You'll be amazed and delighted with its super performance! Broadcasts from stations 10,000 miles and more away are brought in... "clear as locals". You get complete wavelength coverage of 9 to 2,000 meters (33 megacycles to 150 KC). Now, you can enjoy the new DX-ing hobby... and secure verifications from world's most distant stations.

These bigger, better, more powerful, clearer-toned, super-selective radios have FIVE distinct wave bands: ultra-short, short, medium, broadcast and long... putting the whole world of radio at your finger tips. Now listen in on all U. S. programs... Canadian, police, amateur, commercial, airplane and ship broadcasts... and programs from the four corners of the earth. Thrill to the chimes of Big Ben from GSB, at Daventry, England—tune in on the "Marseillaise" from FYA, Pointoise, France—hear sparkling music from EAQ, Madrid, Spain—listen to the call of the Kookaburra bird from VKZME, Sydney, Australia—etc. Never before so much radio for so little money! Write for FREE catalog.

... 40 NEW 1934 FEATURES ...

Try this Midwest radio... in your own home... for thirty days before you decide. See for yourself the 40 new 1934 features that insure amazing performance. Other features include: Automatic Select-O-Band, Amplified Automatic Volume Control, 16 New Type Tubes, Balanced Unit Superheterodyne Circuit, Velvety Action Tuning, Super-Power Class "A" Amplifier, 29 Tuned Circuits, New Duplex-Diode, High Mu Pentode Tubes, No-Image Heterodynes, Full Rubber Floated Chassis, Variable Tone Blender, Centralized Tuning, 7 KC Selectivity, New Thermionic Rectifier, Automatic Tone Compensation, Auditorium Type Speaker, etc. These features are usually found only in sets selling from \$100 to \$150.

DEAL DIRECT WITH LABORATORIES

Increasing costs are sure to result in higher radio prices soon. Buy before the big advance... NOW, while you can take advantage of Midwest's amazingly low prices. No middlemen's profits to pay! You save from 30% to 50% when you buy direct from Midwest Laboratories... you get 30 days FREE trial—as little as \$5.00 down puts a Midwest radio in your home. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back! FREE catalog shows sensationally low values. Write TODAY!

**SAVE
UP TO 50%**

WORLD'S GREATEST
RADIO VALUE

\$49.50
with New
Deluxe Auditorium Type
SPEAKER

TERMS
AS LOW AS
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NEW STYLE CONSOLES

Write quickly for your FREE copy of the new Midwest catalog. It pictures a complete line of beautiful, artistic de luxe consoles and chassis... in four colors! Sensationally low prices save you 30% to 50%. Also shows performance curves that prove Midwest radios out-perform most of the \$150 sets. You can order your Midwest radio set from this catalog with as much certainty of satisfaction as if you were to select it personally at our great radio laboratories. Write TODAY!

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Without obligation on my part send me your new FREE 1934 catalog, and complete details of your liberal 30-day FREE trial offer. This is NOT an order.

AGENTS!
Make Easy
Extra Money
Check Here
for
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Name _____
Address _____
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**AMAZING
FOREIGN RECEPTION**

ARMON, OHIO—My Midwest-16 is a real go-getter for distance. Received 200 stations on regular wave band, including U. S., Canadian, Mexican, Cuban and Italian stations. Also many police, airport and "ham" stations from all over the country. Have logged England, France, Germany, Madrid, Rome, on 15-30 meter band. South American stations include Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, Yucatan... L. H. MORRIS, 793 N. South St.

MIDWEST RADIO CORP.

DEPT. 455 — CINCINNATI, OHIO, U. S. A.

Established 1920

Cable Address: Miraco. ABC 5th Edition

P.S.—Am now a Patrolman, Detroit Police Department. Formerly Seaman, U. S. Navy; Gunnery Sergeant, U. S. M. C.; Lieutenant, Dominican National Police; Federal Prohibition Agent, and Lieutenant, U. S. Customs Border Patrol.

We managed to catch Arthur J. Burks with a few moments to spare, and tried to get him to tell us the story Shimel hints about in his letter. But—no go!

ARTHUR BURKS ANSWERS AN OLD FRIEND

Dear Dan:

Care of Ye Olde Globe Trotter.

I have often wondered what became of you, and whether you still stretch your ugly mug all out of shape by filling it with the vilest chewing tobacco to be found anywhere—this side of Hades or beyond! Any guy who can chew *anduga* and like it ought to have plenty of hair on his chest!

I have a black crow to pick with you for putting me on the spot. You know darned well that I can't write that story. You know I have to consider what the editor will print and what he will not. There are certain things that one can't write about—even in this day of freedom and frank expression.

But I haven't forgotten your silent laughter as you flopped about under that house, not daring to guffaw, because if we had got caught, we'd have had some explaining to do, while I was wondering what the dickens to do with a ruined straw hat. The hat was bad enough before that happened, but afterward ! ! ! ! ! No, Dan'l, it can't be done. You see, facts seldom sound authentic in fiction, and if I wrote that up, readers would say that it couldn't be true.

If the same thing happened to them, though, they would have burned the blasted house down.

I'll be writing you direct ere long. I think there are other stories about you in the works, probably a series with you as sort of a lead character. But get this!

I don't maintain that you did everything I say you do in the stories, so don't get to imagining you actually did them all. After all, these are fiction stories, you know. But Lord knows, you had your share of adventures before we met, and we had a few interesting ones afterward.

So,

With kindest remembrances,

Arthur J. Burks.

Even though we haven't yet had time to list and print the names of those members who have already joined the *Globe Trotters Club*, letters and suggestions concerning same come in in every mail. A charter member of the club has made a suggestion which sounds interesting. Time and the response of other members will tell whether it is practicable or not. Nevertheless, we're giving you Kersch's letter below.

A GLOBE TROTTER'S EXPEDITION (?)

Dear Globe Trotter:

I bought my first issue of *THRILLING ADVENTURES* an evening or so ago, and liked it so well I read it completely through in one sitting.

And now I have a suggestion to make to you and Harry Palmer in regards to his planned trip to South America. Why doesn't he raise members from the *Globe Trotters Club* and form an expedition that can go down there and make something of it? In my opinion there are plenty of fellows, good fellows, that would be glad to go. Those who are able could contribute what they could and others could solicit aid from some one else, possibly.

Sincerely,

Lincoln Kersch.

Well, I am going to leave it up to Mr. Palmer and the other members of the *Globe Trotters Club*. Ye Olde Globe Trotter will lend his aid in any manner possible. Members who are interested are invited to use this office as a central information bureau. So, up and at 'em, fellow Globe Trotters. Has Kersch got the right idea, or is he all wet? A. W. Davis of New York City is another who sings the praises of the newly formed *Globe Trotters*. His hobbies are boats and wild animals, and he has plenty to say about the latter.

AN ENTHUSIASTIC MEMBER

Dear Globe Trotter:

Count me in as a charter member of the *Globe Trotters Club*. In order to

(Continued on page 154)

Page by Page this

FREE BOOK

Tells YOU How to Get a GOVERNMENT JOB



ARTHUR R. PATTERSON

GET ready for a government position. Prepare yourself NOW! I have shown thousands of fellows like you the way to get the well-paid Civil Service jobs. And the very FIRST step they took was to send for this FREE BOOK of mine. Get your copy! It tells you exactly what I would, if you came to see me here in Rochester.

Page by page this book tells you EVERYTHING you want to know about getting a Government Position . . . tells you all about the different departments, what they pay, vacations, and pensions. But that's only a part of the good news. Get my book and get the whole story. Here are a few "high spots":

Page 6—Tells What Uncle Sam Pays

He's the finest, squarest boss in the world. His people get an average of \$200 a year more than other workers. Railway Postal Clerks start at \$1,850 a year—can work up to higher paid jobs. My book gives salaries of every branch.

Page 11—How You Pick Your Job

Select NOW the job you want. I'll help you to be READY for openings when they are announced. You can work in your home town, travel, or work in Washington, D. C.

Page 20—How I Prepare You

For eight years I was Official Examiner of the Civil Service Commission, so I know the kind and class of questions that are asked. You can depend upon me to coach you to help you pass HIGH, and be offered one of the FIRST jobs open.

Page 27—About Raises Every Year

You don't have to take the boss's vague promise of a raise—and never get it. You can depend on getting whatever increase Uncle Sam provides for. The minute you start with him you have a definite future for yourself. Read all about this BIG ADVANTAGE in my FREE BOOK.

Page 7—About Vacations with Pay

In some branches of the Civil Service you get up to 30 days' vacation with full pay every year, and up to 30 days' sick leave (also with pay). Not like some other jobs—where you're lucky if you get a week off, and then have to take that at your own expense!

Page 12—About Civil Service Pensions

Uncle Sam doesn't chuck you out when you're "too old." He doesn't forget you when you've passed your prime—or make you shift for yourself, or fall back on relatives. He retires you on whatever generous pension is set aside for your branch of service—Independent, happy, contented. Get my book and read all about this.



BE READY!

When openings in these branches are announced!

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERK
\$1850 to \$2700 a year. Extra travel pay.

POSTOFFICE CLERK
\$1700 to \$2100 a year. Special clerks at \$2200 and \$2300. Eligible to promotion to higher paid positions.

CITY MAIL CARRIER
\$1700 to \$2100 a year. Promotions to bigger pay.

R. F. D. MAIL CARRIER
\$1800 to \$2300 a year. Fine job for men in rural districts.

POSTMASTER
\$1200 to \$2300 a year.

INTERNAL REVENUE AND CUSTOM HOUSE POSITIONS
\$1140, \$1680 to \$3000 and up a year. Extra pay for overtime.

DEPARTMENTAL CLERKS
\$1440 to \$1620-\$1860 a year and up to \$3000 a year. Work in Washington.

They Mailed This Coupon—Now YOU Mail It!



Now Making
\$2633 a Year

"After two promotions, salary now \$2,633 a year. I get paid vacation, sick leave with pay, time off for Sundays and holidays, work only 44 hours a week. Good pay, clean work, protection against old age—your help certainly has paid me dividends!" MAXWELL C. REED, 4552 Baltimore Ave. Phila., Pa.



Doubles Salary
with Government

"On June 22nd, after getting your help, was appointed to regular position in Railway Mail Service—and now my pay for 1 week equals 2 weeks' earnings at local factory before. Felt like a King on parade when I gave notice I was leaving!" A. L. GREGORY, 22 Starr St., New Britain, Conn.

If you're an American citizen, 18 to 50, let me tell you how to be READY when the announcement is given out of new jobs in the Civil Service—jobs as Railway Postal Clerk, Postmaster, Customs Service Man, Post Office Clerk, City Mail Clerk, or any of the other positions described in my book. Send for it NOW and find out how I help you. Get ready NOW. Be prepared for the job you want! Mail the coupon today! PATTERSON SCHOOL 90-3 Wisner Building, Rochester, N. Y.

Arthur B. Patterson,
PATTERSON SCHOOL,
90-3 Wisner Bldg., Rochester, N. Y.

Send me your big FREE BOOK telling how I can get ready for a position with the U. S. Government paying from \$1850 to \$3300 a year, with excellent chances for advancement. This doesn't obligate me in any way.

Name.....

Address.....

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

PATENTS

FREE BOOK

TIME COUNTS IN APPLYING for patents. Send sketch or model for instructions or write for free book. "How to Obtain a Patent" and "Record of Invention" form. No charge for information on how to proceed.

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A remedial factor in system - Stuart's Plapao-Pads - that has proven amazingly effective. Patentably different from trusses. No straps, buckles or springs attached. Easy to apply - inexpensive. Plapao Co., 73 Stuart Building, St. Louis, Mo., is sending FREE Plapao to all who write now.

Tillie and Mac

Maggie and Jiggs, Dumb Dora, Boss and Bubbles, Peaches and Brownie, French Stenographer, A Bachelor's Dream, A Model's Life, Adam and Eve, Kip and Alice, Harold Teen and Lillums, Toots and Casper, The Gumps, Winnie Winkle, Gus and Gusie, Barney Google and Spark-Plug, Boob McNutt and Pearl, Tillie the Toller, Cave-men Love, Chorus Girl Love, Turkish Love, Apache Love, Old Maid's Love, Papa Love, Sailors on Shore, What Tom Saw Through the Keyhole, When Hubby Comes Home, What the Window Washer Saw, Mabel and the Iceman, A Turkish Harem, Mexican Love, and 80 Snappy French Girl Poses. 5 full size French Love Pictures, French Men and Women in Passionate Love Poses. Also Hula-Hula Dancing Girl. All the above will be sent you prepaid for only \$1.00. SEA-BREEZE NOVELTY HOUSE, P. O. Box 1456, New Haven, Conn., Dept. G9-1-TC.

FROM OUR SANCTUM

- Our companion magazines for March are packed from start to finish with exciting, worth-while fiction.
- Just pick up **THRILLING DETECTIVE** and read **THE TRAIL OF BLOOD**, by Robert Wallace, one of the most gripping detective novels in years. Also, Johnston McCulley starts a new series of stories of Danny Blaney, free-lance avenger of crime, full of tense thrills. Short stories by famous writers and unusual features. 10c at all stands.
- In **THE LONE EAGLE**, read **MENACE OF THE SKIES**, by Lieut. Scott Morgan, another zooming full book-length novel of the rip-roaring, hell-busting air adventures of John Masters, Secret Service Ace. Other stories and features, the best to be found in any air magazine. 10c at all stands.
- SKY FIGHTERS** for March features **GANGWAY TO HELL**, by Owen Atkinson, a full book-length novel with air-war thrills on every page. Also **FALCON FURY**, by Arthur J. Burks, a novelette, and other exciting stories. Many unusual features. 10c.
- THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE** contains another exciting full book-length novel from the case-book of Richard Curtis Van Loan, **THE TICK-TACK-TOE MURDERS**. Also short stories and features. 10c.
- Don't miss **THRILLING RANCH STORIES**. Featuring a complete book-length novel by Forbes Parkhill—**COLONEL COLT'S DAUGHTER**—this magazine is packed with action and romantic love stories of the West. 15c at all stands.
- For sis and mom: Bring home **THRILLING LOVE**—they'll love it. This month's featured complete book-length novel is **HEARTS FOR SALE**, by Ruth Anderson.

THE PUBLISHER

(Continued from page 152)

avoid the rush I am sending along my filled-in coupon and self-addressed envelope for my membership card, which I know I will cherish and value very much.

I am going to ask you if you will give some little comment on Alderman Fairchild's letter to the *New York Sun* on wolf packs. Personally, I think he is all wet. While my adventures have all been laid in trips to warm and hot climes, and therefore preclude my knowledge of the big bad wolf being extensive, I have frequently met up with other men of the open who have told of encountering wolf packs.

I believe it would be of interest to many of us if you will just sketch out the facts about the habits of the wolf, especially to prove or disprove the statement of Fairchild's, that wolves do not hunt or roam in a pack.

Yours very truly,

A. W. Davis.

New York City.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Globe Trotter:

Where is the best spot for placer mining? And is it true that the government

(Continued on page 158)

LONELY HEARTS Join our Club. World's Greatest Social Extension Bureau. Happiness awaits you, correspondents everywhere, seeking congenial mates. Quick results. Confidential service. Particulars **FREE**. **STANDARD CLUB, Box 607-J, GRAYSLAKE, ILLINOIS**

Application for Membership

The Globe Trotter,
THRILLING ADVENTURES,
570 Seventh Ave.,
New York City.

I wish to be enrolled as a member of the *Globe Trotters Club*. I am interested in adventure and will endeavor to answer all questions asked me by other members regarding the places with which I am familiar.

(Print name plainly)

Address

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

My hobbies are.....

..... Age.....

To obtain a membership card, enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope.



"MY FIERCE FOOT PAINS STOPPED ... AND I THREW AWAY OLD FASHIONED ARCH SUPPORTS THAT I WORE FOR 15 YEARS"... says M. SCHEUER

Here's a New Guaranteed Way to Banish Foot Troubles Forever

Here's a new principle for correcting flat feet and fallen arches . . . just a common sense application created on the fact that a bridge is only as strong as its foundation. With the new ORTHO-TRED system quick relief is offered to you . . . you may enjoy the same happiness of M. Scheuer and others who suffered because of the many pains caused by fallen arches until they found relief through ORTHO-TRED.



Quick Relief from Pain . . . Nothing to Wear

You rightfully ask, "What is Ortho-Tred?" . . . I will tell you. It is a scientific device which permits proper exercise of fallen arches and flat feet . . . which rebuilds the muscles and the bony structure. Through an absolutely new principle, Ortho-Tred removes lime or chalky deposits gathered on the Metatarsal, the phalanges and the bones adjoining the Scaphoid cuneiform . . . reshaping arch as nature intended it, correcting posture and carriage of body. Removes pinched effect upon the Tibial Nerve and its branches, giving you full relief from that tired, worn and depressed feeling . . . chasing away forever those fierce, hot poker-like pains that make foot sufferers cross, irritable and unhappy and all of this is done without wearing any type of device whatsoever.



Many Pains in Hips, Thighs, Back, Knees, Legs Are Caused by Foot Troubles . . . Correct All with Ortho-Tred . . . Or No Cost

Even if you have tried dozens of different methods and treatments, such as supporters, arches, braces, bands, special shoes, etc., without relief, I want to impress upon you that there is nothing else on the market like ORTHO-TRED. You owe it to your health and to your disposition and to your own personal comfort to try Ortho-Tred . . . you will find that Ortho-Tred gets to the bottom of your troubles . . . rebuilds, not temporarily, not just a relief . . . but PERMANENTLY.



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Don't go on suffering! Here's an easy and sure way to rid yourself of foot pains forever. SEND NO MONEY. Sign your name and address to coupon and send it to us. We will ship your ORTHO-TRED by return insured mail. Deposit \$2.95, plus postage, with postman. If not entirely pleased after 10 days' trial, you may return ORTHO-TRED and get your money back. If you prefer to send post office money order with coupon, We will ship by return mail and prepay all charges.

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Send 1 ORTHO-TRED and full instructions for using by return mail. I will pay postman \$2.95, plus postage. If not entirely satisfied, I may return after 10 days and get my \$2.95 back. (☐ If you enclose money order for \$2.95 just check here and send name and address below.)

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City State

NOTE: If you live outside of the United States, price is \$3.50, cash with order.

CALIFORNIA REDWOOD BURLS

This Burl is a growth of the famous CALIFORNIA GIANT REDWOOD TREE and when removed from the tree and placed in a bowl, in about one-half inch of water, it starts growing and sends forth the BEAUTIFUL REDWOOD TREE FOLIAGE and brings the FRAGRANCE OF THE WOODS into your home. Changing the water once a week and being careful they do not dry out is all the attention they need. You will enjoy watching them grow. As a house plant they have no equal. They are extremely hardy and will grow for years anywhere. They do not need any sun. The one illustrated is two years old.

The Burls are graded and sold according to size and thickness. The smallest size is about 2 inches long, weighs about 4 ounces and sells for 25c. The next size sells for 50c and is somewhat larger and thicker. The next size is still larger and sells for \$1.00. The largest size at \$1.50 is quite thick and heavy, is 6 to 8 inches long by about 6 inches thick and averages about 2 pounds in weight. We cannot give exact measurements as no two are exactly alike in size or shape. Shipped prepaid. Johnson Smith & Co., Dept. 730, Racine, Wis.

A Very Charming Horticultural Novelty

25c
50c
1.00
1.50



Will grow for years.

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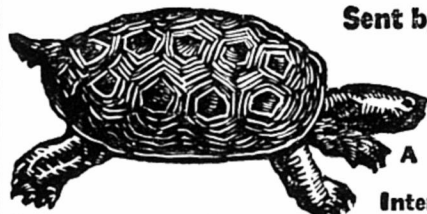
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(Continued from page 154)

supplies land and equipment to the unemployed? Is there a chance for making much money in the game?

I will greatly appreciate an answer from you regarding these questions, for I want to get started on the job as soon as possible. I am 25 years old, and able to take care of myself anywhere.

Respectfully,

E. DeLury.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer:

Well, DeLury, I am not going to try and tell you the best spot for individual placer mining. That is almost impossible to ascertain in advance, but the best opportunities for making money now are found in the western states, namely: California, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Colorado.

The government does not furnish equipment, but all government lands are open to prospectors. Mineral rights do not go with the soil, and if you discover gold and stake out and file your claim properly, all gold taken from it is legal.

Dear Globe Trotter:

I have been in ill health for two years, have been lying up here in Saranac all that time with nothing much to do but dream and plan what I am going to do when I get out of here next spring.

My trouble has pretty well cleared up, but even after I get away from here, my doctors say that I will have to live an outdoor life, so I have been planning a canoe trip across the United States. I am wondering if that has ever been done before? I mean in an east to west direction. Of course, it is simple enough to go from north to south. If it is possible, which is the best route, if there is any at all?

Yours very sincerely,

Dan Butterick.

Saranac, N. Y.

Answer:

That's quite an idea, Dan. But it has been done before. Way back in 1916 some lone adventurer made a

(Concluded on page 160)

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Very curious. Produces fruit same size and shape as a nest egg. Matured fruit does not crack. Will serve for years as a nesting place for ornamental purposes, etc. Seeds 15c pkt., 3 for 40c.

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Very Curious

Produce fruit same size and shape as a nest egg. Matured fruit does not crack. Will serve for years as a nesting place for ornamental purposes, etc. Seeds 15c pkt., 3 for 40c.

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(Concluded from page 158)

trip from the Pacific Coast to New York.

He followed the Columbia River from Astoria to where the Spokane empties into it, then he paddled up the Spokane through the Couer'd A'lene lakes to the St. Joe River, which he followed to the source. Then he had a portage of some twenty or thirty miles across the Continental divide until he came to the headwaters of one of the streams forming the Missouri River.

Thence it was a simple trip down the Missouri, up the Mississippi, through the Chicago drainage canal, thence across the Great Lakes and into the Erie Canal and then down the Hudson to New York. You could reverse the directions, but let me warn you here, it is not any job for a sick man, unless you take it very slowly.

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EXTRA FREIGHT

(Concluded from page 144)

sending them in with orders to rush out a wrecker—then they are to race you right into Nome—to the hospital. Think you can stand the trip?"

Ken was certain he could. New strength of the spirit rather than the flesh seemed to suffuse his weary body. "Maybe I can make the boat for the States yet, Mr. Slawson."

"We'll talk about that later," snapped the super. "Here, some of you, give me a hand and we'll carry him over to the train."

Ken was swathed in clean bandages, resting comfortably in a white hospital bed, paid for by the N. and K. The super had offered him a steady run, even promised to find a job for Mary. The N. and K. needed reliable brass pounders.

A pioneer pike like the Nome and Kougarak, though largely a boomer road, needed a leaven of home guard, of steady workers to keep it functioning smoothly, pleaded the super. He had taken a personal interest in the case. He wanted Ken to stay.

Ken was willing. But there was one thing that worried him.

"With no boats in till next spring, it'll be a long time before Mary can get here."

The superintendent smiled. "Hell, the reward money you'll draw down for the capture of the Skagway gang will make it easy enough for you to have her come up by plane."

"Say, that's an idea!" Ken reached his right hand over the crisp sheets, gripped the superintendent's hand enthusiastically. "Will—will you attend to the details for me, Mr. Slawson?" The superintendent nodded, and rose to go. But Ken didn't see him. He was looking toward the south through the window that opened on the Bering Sea, and a slow smile spread over his tired face.

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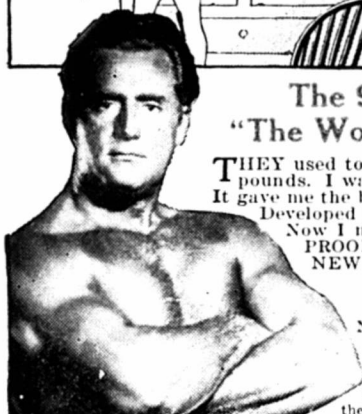
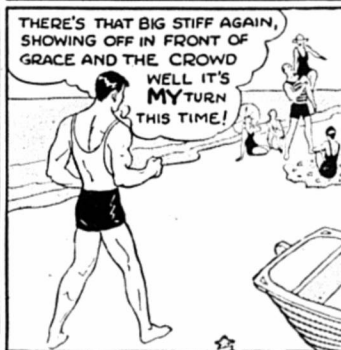
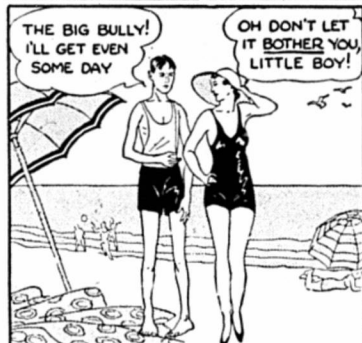
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