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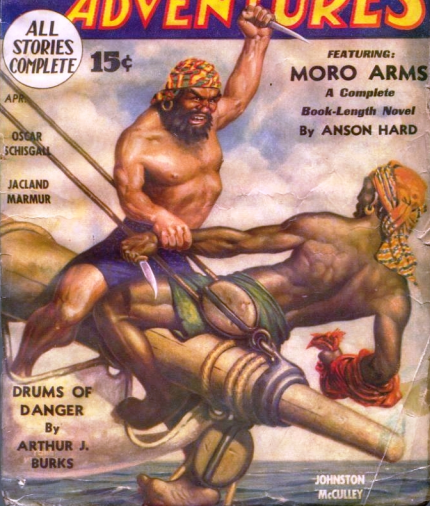
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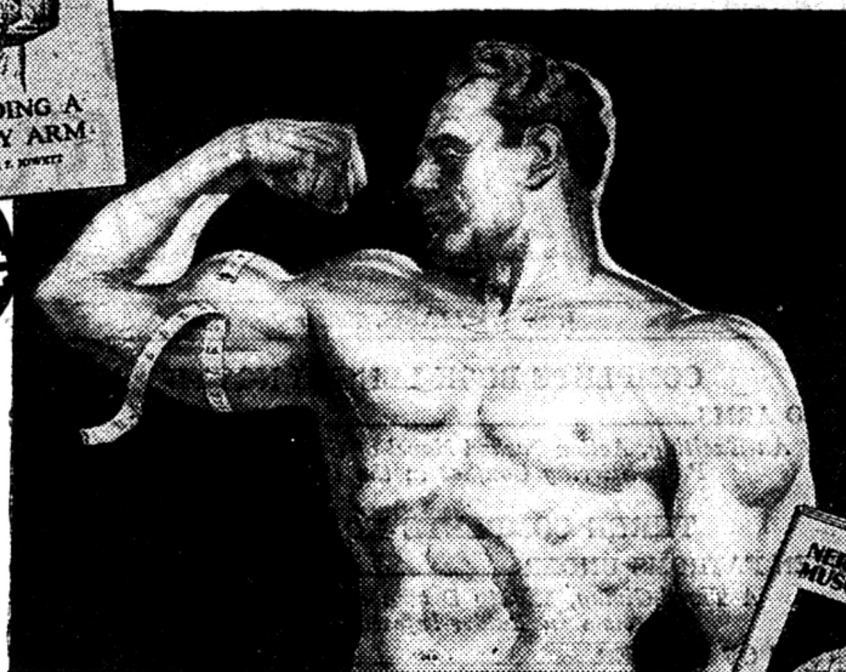
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THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. IX, No. 2

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

April, 1934

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*An Exciting, Action-Packed Novel of Savage Perils and
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*Follow Fox and Shimel, Those Hell-Busting Marines,
On the Perilous Jungle Trail of a Rebel Chief*
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Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet

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Dr. L. C. Charland

French Doctor Praises Cystex

Doctors and druggists everywhere approve of the prescription Cystex because of its splendid ingredients and quick action. For instance, Dr. L. C. Charland, Graduate of the Laval University of Montreal, recently wrote the following letter:

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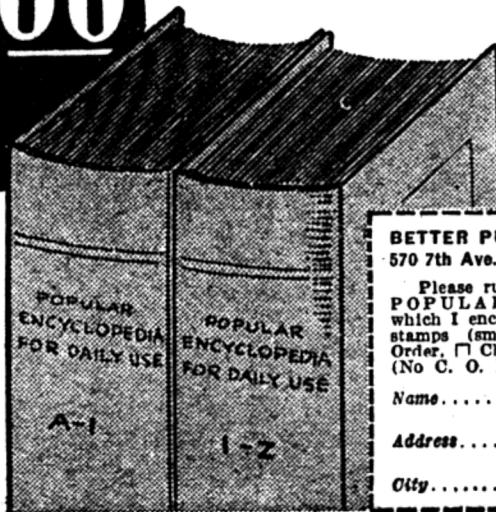
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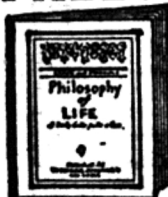
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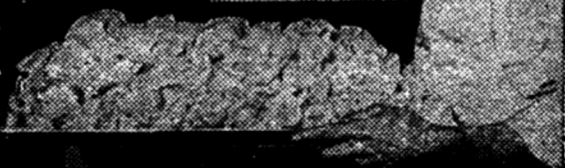
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Stomach Disorders Threatened His Life Says N.Y. Patrolman



David B. Caldwell.

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ting back to my normal weight."

Acid Stomach Afflicts Millions

Hyperacidity (acid stomach), is, as every physician can tell you, the curse of millions. It is the most common cause of stomach or gastric ulcers as well as many other distressing conditions, and there are comparatively few adults who can truly say it has never troubled them. In addition to stomach ulcers, acid stomach is often the direct cause of gas pains, dyspepsia, poor digestion, pains after eating, bloating, belching, gnawing pains, heartburn, sour stomach, constipation, etc.

Double Acting Treatment Needed

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*With the suddenness of the attack,
There was a loud clang of steel as*

MORO

CHAPTER I

"Juramentado!"

THE cry of "Juramenta'o! Juramenta'o!" rose from the market place in Zamboanga like a wail of fear, gathering in volume and terror as it spread from mouth to mouth. The cry was caught and carried through the space in front of the sheds, past the Ayuntamiento to the Chinese shops that jammed its east side, and on to the Calle Guardia Nacional.

A chill grip of fright for a moment paralyzed the people; then there was a running for every avail-

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able shelter. The shopkeepers tugged at specially constructed doors, drew heavy shutters of plank and iron across the fronts of the stores, closing them against the hacks of slashing steel. No sound stirred the town like the cry of the Moro running amuck.

Lieutenant Phil Gorman, Philippine Constabulary, stood in the little

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the brown man was made helpless.
he found a grip on a cord-like wrist

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court between the market and the custom house when the cry started that terrorized the town.

He had been gazing out into the strait at a motor sloop that lay anchored between the long T wharf and the crab-fishing grounds off Cawa-cawa. There was something sinister and repellent about that sloop like a gray ghost of the sea,

its flecking paint and unvarnished spars giving the impression of dirt and slovenly seamanship.

The gray craft was the little copra trader of Jan Towry. Phil had suspicions of that whiskered, fly-by-night skipper, Jan. Crooked as a swimming eel and as slick, Gorman thought, but the Constabulary had never yet pinned anything on him.

But the young lieutenant's reflections were cut short by the shouts that split the air to the right of him.

A hubbub arose among the crowded stands and tables in the market place. The aisles were filled with people intent on their evening buying. Fishing *vintas* of the Moros were at the

Pulse-Stirring Conflict in the Philippines



Phil Gorman

every sale in the Orient; shouts, laughter, quarrels about prices. Then all that had changed, stopped, going out in a single wheeze of sound like a punctured bellows, followed by a wild and terrible scramble for safety.

IN the gathering twilight a strange *vinta* had slipped to a mooring place beside the wooden wharf. The brown-skinned, almost naked fishermen, busy with the sorting and unloading of fish, paid little attention to it.

From its hold a man suddenly arose, clad in a draping garment of white, his head covered by a twisted turban, and leaped with agility upon the damp planks. From beneath his trailing garments he drew a long, and glittering *barong*, its evil, polished length glinting in the rays from the kerosene lamps that had just been lighted. With a single wave of it about his head he had begun to slash right and left, charging into the crowd.

The coming of the *juramentado* had been almost simultaneous with the arrival of Lieutenant Gorman in the little court.



Ormsby

Phil made a quick grab for his service automatic, then remembered he had left the weapon in his quarters. He almost never carried the gun in

seaside being unloaded of the day's catch.

Over all had been the hum of high-voiced bargaining, the haggling and dickering that constituted

Zamboanga City except when in direct charge of troops; and he found himself in this sudden crisis with no means of offense but his hands.

People were pouring from the broad market shed, tumbling and sprawling, many of them in an effort to get away. The fishermen, at the first glint of steel, had dropped their flat baskets and leaped for the water. The stall keepers dropped to the cement floor and crawled beneath the tables.

Gorman charged in against the out-flowing crowd. He knew the terrible frenzy of a Moro running amuck. The *juramentado*, vowed in his religion to slay until he dropped, would take a bloody toll. Color, sex, creed would make no difference. Everyone he could reach would be a victim to the swishing steel. Often a score fell before these maniacs could be stopped.

PHIL shoved to right and left, stiff-arming his way through the terrified people. Already the aisles were jammed near the exits. He leaped upon a counter piled with fruit and green vegetables and made his way toward the rear.

Gorman had no time to weigh the elements of danger. The whole affair had started in a twinkling, and the period elapsed from the first wailing cry until he was charging back over the stands was but seconds. He saw an old Filipino *tao*, too slow to push outward with the crowd, go down before the swishing blade.

With the fall of the old man the aisle leading to the east exit was clear. The mass of the shoppers were at the north and west sides of the building. Yet the white-clad killer was running up this east side directly at Lieutenant Gorman. Phil at the time did not notice the unnatural direction of the Moro's move.

Gorman's eyes shot right and left in search of some weapon. Bare-handed he could scarcely hope to grapple with the armed maniac. Arms and fingers could be clipped off by that razor-edged blade like weeds before a scythe. His eyes lighted upon a bamboo pole swung from the ceiling on slender *bejuco* strings and used as a rack for displaying bananas. He gave a leap for this, his weight ripping loose the *bejuco*, and he dropped into the aisle with this ten-foot pole in his hands.

"BRING more poles, you men!" yelled Gorman, his voice rising above the scuffling. "Bring more of them. Get around him."

He had no time to see if his words were comprehended. The white-robed killer was upon him!

The pole had but one value—to hold the *juramentado* away so that he could not reach Gorman with the *barong*.

The insane fury of these killers had made history in the Southern Philippines. Attacked American soldiers had often tried to hold them away with rifle and bayonet, but the *juramentados* would seize the bayonet and thrust it through their own bodies in order to get close enough for one last killing slash. Bamboo poles had been found the best protection.

The *barong* clipped a wedge from the end of the pole. Phil gave another yell for the natives to bring more bamboo. The pole in his hands would in a few seconds be hacked and split, shortened until the killer could no longer be held away. Once within reach, the *barong* would clip through neck and shoulders with a single snick.

Phil, gripping the smooth pole with all his strength, kept it aimed at the other's chest. Hack, chip, swish! The steel was eating into the

tough bamboo. The blows of the heavy blade knocked the pole aside, and Phil had all he could do to keep the length of it between himself and grisly death. Where were the native men? Why didn't they bring more poles?



A Moro

The speed with which the brown man was hacking right and left gave Gorman small chance to see his face. The white robe was whipping around the dancing figure like the garments of a dervish. The loose ends of the turban dragged across the fellow's chalked countenance, but above these trailing ends Gorman could see two eyes like wild, brown points of fire.

"Hai-ah-hai-e-e-e!"

The screech-like yell rose and echoed from the tin roof of the market shed, strident and nerve-rasping as the squawk of a hornbill. Phil stepped back, and, as he did so, the Moro ducked, wove under the bamboo pole and, seizing it with his left hand, thrust it aside. He was back along it in a leap, raising the *barong* above his head for a skull-splitting downward sweep.

PHIL at that instant felt a cold terror grip him.

And simultaneously he got a look at the fellow's face. The half-opened mouth showed no *betel* stain, no drooling of *arica* and raw opium. These sworn men were nearly always self-drugged, stimulated by powerful con-



A Native

coctions for their gory job. And the skin was clayed white, flatly ghoulish in the lamplight—but through the set expression of the countenance Phil got the idea that the man was completely sane.

Even as these thoughts raced through his mind, Phil acted. The fellow had got at him under the pole, but Gorman still had the leverage for moving him to one side. The lieutenant whirled with all his might in a side-sweep. The Moro was shoved from his course, inches to the left, and the blade whistling down missed the khaki shirt, carried on until the tip of the *barong* rang with the ting of tempered steel upon the concrete floor.

PHIL loosed the pole and leaped. The impetus of his charge knocked the fellow against a fruit stand, sending a shower of green-skinned oranges and *lanzones* rolling across the floor. Crushed against the stand the brown man could not swing the *barong*, and Phil's left hand, shooting before the other's face, found a grip on a lean cord-like wrist.

The advantage of the fight was suddenly transferred. Phil had not been the best wrestler in the Seventh Regiment for nothing. His right arm went twisting about the turban for a pinching back headlock. He dragged the squirming, kicking man away from the stand and into the center of the aisle. His left arm came down, down, twisting at the corded wrist. He could feel the shoulder joint give, and he made one more heave downward on the wrist.

The *barong* dropped ringing on the floor.

The white robe had been thrust back in this hand-to-hand struggle, and Phil saw a long yellow-white scar that angled lividly across the

brown elbow. He was to remember that scar.

The killer became suddenly a wild-cat of energy. The twisted turban slipped over the close-cropped head, breaking the lieutenant's grip. Phil felt a jab on his lower ribs that sent a sickening, paralyzing pain along his spine, robbing him of strength and will power. His head-hold was now loosened, gone. The corded wrist tore from his fingers. Through a haze he saw the fellow backing away.

Phil doubled for one more leap, but the oranges, squashing and rolling beneath his boots, sent him forward unbalanced. His fingers reached the white robe, gripped it. Then he was flat down among the crushed fruit with only the discarded sheeting his hand.

Gorman heard the sound of men running. He got to his hands and knees, blinking his eyes to snap away the daze. The nausea of that nerve-jarring rib-jab was passing. He got to his feet, holding against the fruit stand for support, and the haze solidified into a tangible world again.

Two municipal policemen from the station near the Ayuntamiento came at a run. The foremost had a revolver and the second carried a riot gun. "Injured, Lieutenant?"

"No. Where the thunder have you fellows been? Does it take you forever to get here from the station?"

"We came fast, sir, as soon as we heard. Very quick. See, sir, all the people have not yet got out of the building."

PHIL, his gaze sweeping around, saw that this was true. The fight—that had seemed so long to him—had been no more than a struggle of seconds. And the supposed religious fanatic, slipping from his robe, had disappeared!



He glanced about quickly as a man materialized from a darkened wall, and a thin glitter of steel plunged toward him

"Get after him!" snapped Phil. "He got away."

"Run away? A *juramenta'o*?"

The policeman's doubt was genuine; a real religious killer would not have run away.

The old *tao*, the single victim of the *barong*, was trying to get to his feet. A great splotch of red dyed the back of his cotton singlet. The *barong* had laid open a slash deep as the clavicle. The man was seriously but not fatally wounded.

Heads were beginning to bob up from beneath the stands. A few of the men from the outside were again venturing into the shed.

"Get after him anyway," ordered Phil.

"Where, sir?"

A shout came from the natives near the east entrance. "There, there!" Arms pointed toward the southwest corner of the building where the fish wharf ran on beside smaller buildings. The policemen leaped forward in pursuit. Actually Gorman, an officer in the Insular Constabulary, had no authority over the municipal police, but in a *juramentado* scare all armed men joined forces.

The frightened natives were again coming back into the building. The

wounded old man was lifted carefully and borne away toward the Public Health Dispensary. A chatter of excited conversation arose.

Phil walked back again toward the open court, his mind a medley of conflicting thoughts. Now that he had time to go over the affair, he saw that the *juramentado* was not genuine. A religious killer, vowed to slay until he himself was slain, would not have run away. He would have been drugged, insane, tortured; and he would have charged into the thickest of the crowd and not at Phil alone.

A poignant, sickening realization swept Gorman. The whole affair looked like a framed plan to kill him! Why?

CHAPTER II

Falling Death

THE lights of the Zamboanga Club were blazing as Phil came up the steps. He had walked rapidly through the deserted section about the Custom House, made his way by the tree-shadowed Provincial Building, and reached the club without encountering a person.

He had noticed, too, that the long T wharf was deserted, and at the far end the tramp vessel, the *Banda-ree*, lay isolated and dark, a few lights dim on the bridge and in the forward cabins.

There were few in the main room of the club. Two men from the rubber plantation on Basilan saluted Phil as he stalked past their table. Tom Ormsby, his red face scowling, was at the bar.

"Did you get him, Gorman?"

"No, he got away. Fix me a *stengah*, boy."

The old-timer, Ormsby, was irritatingly voluble. He had come to Mindanao in the days of military

occupation, and he had no faith in anything but the Regulars.

"It's a hell of a note," growled Tom, "when you can't be safe even in Zamboanga. This is the second time one of those damn natives has cut loose in the last six months. They're getting out of hand. By Godfrey, we need a regiment from Fort McKinley."

"Yeah? I suppose none of 'em ever ran amuck against a Regular."

"They didn't for years after the army had cleaned 'em out. What do they care for your Constabulary? The whole center of Zamboanga Province is lousy with *magahats*, and Indang up there is gettin' cockier every minute. No little Constabulary patrol is going to clean him out."

Phil turned from the drink the boy had set upon the bar. "How'd you know I was taking a patrol out against Indang?"

"Huh, know? It's purty common knowledge. Hell, you can't get him."

Gorman was in a none too pleasant frame of mind himself. Old Ormsby was always caustically critical, forever harking back to "the good old days," and right at this moment his words were ruffling to the Constabulary lieutenant. "If he can be got, I'll get him. Mark that, Ormsby."

"Yeah, and I'll bet you whisky and soda for a month that you can't lay hands on him. And you can mark that."

"All right, that's a bet."

PHIL left his drink half consumed and walked into the next room where there was a telephone. Zamboanga was proud of its newly instituted service.

"Municipal Police Station."

Phil frowned as he waited for the number. He had hoped to keep quiet the fact that he was starting for

Sibuguey on the morrow, heading a patrol after this Indang; but you couldn't keep news down when you had a bunch of native soldiers.

But what was Ormsby driving at in connecting the *juramentado* with Datu Indang? Or was he connecting them? Hell, Indang, a mountain robber a hundred and fifty miles away, would have no connection with a Moro running amuck in Zamboanga. Still, things were bad enough in the center of the province.

GORMAN had never seen this Datu Indang, the fox of the jungle, but he had heard tales in plenty. This datu, so it seemed, had collected about him not only malcontents from his own nation, but scores of the half savage mountain people, Manobos, Bukidnons, Ates, and renegade Visayans who had fled from justice in the northern islands. Moro and pagan, an unholy mess.

A voice clicked from the other end of the line.

"Your men reported on that *juramenta'o*?" asked Phil.

"No, sir. Not yet."

"This is Lieutenant Gorman. Have your chief call me either at the club or my quarters if they find anything."

"Very good, sir. I tell him."

Gorman then rang up his first sergeant at the Constabulary barracks. "Listen, Sergeant Malabanan. That *juramenta'o* in the market place got away. I got a hunch he's hiding in Zamboanga. Get out three squads and search this town. Understand? Maybe that's butting in on the police jurisdiction, but I take the responsibility."

"Yes, sir. We shall start immediately, sir."

"And, Malabanan, send an orderly to me. I may have need of him."

"Yes, sir."

Phil walked back to the main room

of the club. Through the broad windows that opened on the north and west sides the noise of activity came up from the streets below. Shopkeepers were dragging away the shutters; persons were again venturing on the thoroughfares.

Ormsby was still at the bar. Gorman took up his half-finished drink. From the street below he heard the clatter and squeak as a *calesa* drew to a stop. Two men came up the steps and into the main room.

Phil knew one of them: the Reverend Amos Caruthers, head of a Protestant Mission School, a well-liked man despite the irreligious character of some members of the white colony in Zamboanga. The other man, judging from the Moslem fez he wore, was a Moro of the better class.

Ormsby scowled deeper as Caruthers and his apparent protege came to the bar. Phil observed them with interest. "Hello, Reverend! Have a drink?"

Caruthers smiled amiably. "Certainly, Lieutenant, if I may choose my regular brand—a limeade. Lieutenant Gorman, meet Prince Alus Tigami. He's from Brunei. He introduced himself to me this afternoon, and meeting him on the street a while ago I brought him up."

PHIL responded to the introduction, extending his hand. Prince, eh? One of the Sultan of Brunei's fair-haired boys. Phil's eyes narrowed. The Moro's features were slightly familiar; yet there was nothing in that. These Malays were like the Chinese—hard to tell one from the other.

"How're you, Lieutenant?"

Prince Tigami spoke English, slightly blurred. But it was the grasp of the hand that sent for a moment a racing suspicion through Gorman's mind. Had he touched that

hand before? Surely not. He did not recall ever having met Tigami.

Ormsby responded to the introduction with a grunted, "Howdy?" Then the old-timer turned from the bar. "Guess I'm movin' back to the house. Figure it's safe enough to go out on the streets now—if I move fast."

Phil took this parting gibe with a chuckle. The old die-hard would never be satisfied with anything but the Regulars and a corporal's guard in every *barrio*.

"Let's sit down," said Caruthers. "Limeade for you, too, Prince? Fine. That's one credit I must give to you Moslems; you don't guzzle liquor."

GORMAN observed the Moro closely. He was dressed in a white suit, with the jacket cut Dutch fashion buttoning to the neck, a style that obviated the necessity of wearing a shirt.

"I hear, Lieutenant, that you are going on a dangerous mission, to Sibuguey, I believe."

"Damn—excuse my Chinese—if the whole town doesn't seem to know. Yes; I am."

Caruthers shook his head sadly. "It isn't bullets those people need, but proper instruction. Those mountain people, so I hear, are frightfully pagan; go through all sorts of heathen rites, believe in innumerable devils, and—"

Gorman cut him short. "What people in the Islands aren't riddled with superstition? Of course, they have devil chasers, but what of it? Devils don't turn bullets."

Tigami leaned forward. He had an unctuous and, Phil thought, insincere manner. "Are you not afraid, sir? Those men are fighters."

"Yeah? I'll admit that in the right mood they'll fight to death at the drop of a hat; manage them right and a child could handle them."

"Perhaps. They may be different

from my people." A supercilious hauteur. Phil inwardly grunted.

Sergeant Malabanán came clicking up the steps. Phil, seeing him, went to the door.

"We can find nothing, sir. I have the squads still searching. Shall we continue?"

"Yes; keep at it. If he's in Zamboanga, rout him out. Check up on the boats and *vintas*."

"Very well, sir."

Phil went back to the table, but Caruthers and the Prince were walking toward the veranda, or rather balcony, that overlooked the street. Gorman hesitated. He had a hunch to inquire more about this traveling prince; but what of it? He had plenty of work if he were to get ready for that expedition tomorrow.

"If anyone comes for me, I'm at my quarters," he called to the bar boy.

Gorman went rapidly down the steps toward the street, the framework of the stairs vibrating under his rapid tread. He stepped down onto the pavement. Something went whizzing by him, raking his right sleeve, to thud with a resounding whack on the flagstones.

Phil leaped back instinctively. "What the—"

A flower pot incased in a heavy brass jar had fallen from the rail of the veranda. Had it hit him squarely, it would have brained him.

"Look out up there!" he yelled. "Trying to kill me?"

NOBODY responded. Gorman stepped back to observe better. The broad balcony was vacant. Somebody—well, now, maybe his own shaking of the stairs had unbalanced the pot. No use getting heated about an accident. The thing hadn't hit him. He strode on across Rizal Plaza and down the street toward his own quarters.

A Constabulary soldier rose to salute as Gorman came into his own sala. "I was ordered to report, sir."

"Oh, yes. At ease."

Gorman sat down at the table and reached for a cigarette. He was convinced that the things happening were not altogether accident. Had there been two attempts at his life? One? None at all? Were these attempts connected with the expedition to Sibuguey? Hardly possible—yet everybody seemed to know his plans.

DAMN this Datu Indang, anyhow, cutting loose up in Sibuguey and necessitating a patrol to round him up. Lucky the beggar didn't have guns, or it would—as Ormsby declared—require the Regulars to corral him and a long bloody war at that. That would mean disgrace for Gorman, an incapacity to control his own district, a stain upon the Constabulary. Phil could see his inevitable resignation.

Gorman reached for a piece of paper and wrote a note. It was instructions to Lieutenant Alvarez, his junior officer. Alvarez was a Filipino, a Tagalog, and a good soldier.

"Proceed with the twenty man patrol to Sibuguey after Datu Indang within twenty-four hours. You will have complete charge in case I am not there to take command."

"In case I am not there." Why did he write that? Was he expecting to get "knocked off" just because some lunatic had gone wild with a *barong*? Or a flower pot had toppled off the club veranda? Rats. He crushed out his cigarette. Might as well send the note, though; it wouldn't do any harm. An anchor to windward in case of the unexpected. He placed the note in an envelope and sealed it.

"Here," he commanded the orderly, "be sure to deliver this personally to

Lieutenant Alvarez. He should be back from Labuan tomorrow morning. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The orderly was gone. Phil paced the sala. Couldn't find hide nor hair of the *juramentado*, eh? Funny. The bird couldn't evaporate, and a check-up on the *vintas* would tell if he had skipped to sea.

He ought to get a good night's sleep before starting tomorrow; but sleep was impossible now. He was restless. Well, he'd take a walk, take a look around himself. He might find something. He changed rapidly from his khaki uniform into a suit of civilian whites, picking a slightly soiled suit so as not to be too conspicuously white. He traded his campaign hat for a cork helmet. This time he slipped an automatic into his pocket.

Gorman skirted the Calle Guardia Nacional and plunged through the adjacent unlighted streets. He came out on McGay Street that ran between the main part of town and the Moro settlement of Cawa-cawa. If that *barong* slinger was hiding anywhere, it would be down this way. McGay Street was walled with Chinese shops, now all closed and dark. Only here and there did a shaft of light fall out upon the sidewalk.

Something ticked in Phil's mind. He did not know what it was. He was not psychic, but a nearness of peril warned him. Almost as if someone had shouted, he knew danger was near.

HE certainly did not hear anything; he did not see anything, but the acute prescience of trouble tingled him like an electric shock. He glanced about swiftly just as a man materialized from a darkened wall, and as a thin glitter of steel plunged toward his back.

There was no time to turn, no

time to reach for the heavy automatic. He dropped as if clubbed, letting himself go flat to the dust. The downward sweeping blade missed him. Gorman's arm, swinging hammer-like around, tripped the assailant.

Catlike, Phil was upon his feet. But the other moved like a wary lizard, squirming away before Phil could jump upon him. Almost like a wraith he was into the shadows again.

But just for one brief moment was an arm extended in a rectangle of light, and Phil saw. There was the scar!

CHAPTER III

Gun and Knife

MC GAY STREET, stretching away to the beach, lay in perfect quiet, dark beneath a moonless sky. The scar-armed assailant dodged among the shadows, then came out to race boldly away. He was just a blur, too uncertain to risk a bullet on, and Phil jammed the automatic back into his pocket. Gad, how that brown devil could run! Gorman sprang forward in pursuit.

The footrace was lost from the beginning. The fellow had got away to a fifty-yard start. But why should he race in that direction? The open country along the beach would offer no concealment, and Cawa-cawa was a kilometer ahead.

Then Phil saw the object of the move. On the sickle of sand east of the Moro settlement were a dozen outriggered canoes, or *vintas*, pulled above the wash of the surf. He saw the fellow seize one by the brace and shove it into the water.

Gorman was momentarily nonplussed. Should he continue this wild chase farther? The brown man might paddle for Santa Cruz Island

or even for Basilan. He could lead a pursuer on endlessly among the smaller islands.

THEN from the black expanse of water came a rippling provocative curse. Phil knew the Moro dialect sufficiently for ordinary conversation, and the meaning of the words he now heard brought a flush hotly to his temples. Insult heaped on injury!

Maybe Ormsby was right; the natives were getting out of hand.

Gorman ran along the row of *vintas* seeking one that contained a paddle. The owners ordinarily removed the paddles, but he found one, a worn and splintered bit of wood, too valueless to be removed.

The beach was damp and slanting, and Gorman ran the canoe down it as on greased rollers, wading with it into the water for a dozen steps until the sharp keel floated. Then he swung into the stern and seized the paddle. He could see the other *vinta* as a smudge ahead, an irregular blot that lifted and dropped with the swells of the current.

Phil found the handling of the outriggered dugout ungainly. He had never acquired that deft twist and turn that the natives used in shoving these *vintas*, a movement that never lifted the paddle from the water. Phil could but dig and lunge, but the blunt-ended bamboo that formed the outrigger blocked his efforts. The *vinta* had a perverse tendency to go around in circles.

Out in the strait, dim as the glow of a firefly, Phil could see the anchor light on Jan Towry's sloop, and nearer inshore the greater bulk of the tramp freighter. The waters of the strait were like a great black carpet that seemed to be lifted and shaken by mighty hands. The shift of tide that formed the currents was setting in strong, and even those

larger ships tossed with the resurgent swells.

The little native bark under Phil was as unsteady as a chip, tilting now at a perilous angle, now slopping with a gurgle of the outrigger into the shallow troughs. The farther Gorman got out into the strait, the greater the sweep and hammer of the waters.

YET Phil never lost sight of that *vinta* ahead. The stinging epithet that had been hurled across the water had spurred him on to reckless action. Like many men, he could never tolerate fighting words. "That brown devil can't get away with that!" he mentally growled. "I'll meet him on the level if he wants to fight, but he can't cuss me out."

Gorman thought he was gaining. He dug the tin paddle with renewed force. It was hard work. He paused to slip off his drill coat and loosen the knot of his tie.

The pursued *vinta* loomed up almost in front of him.

"Hold there," yelled Phil. "I want you."

"Sure you want me?" The fellow could speak English! "*Hola*, you pukky faced white devil!"

The two *vintas* had drawn half their length alongside. Gorman reached for the gun in his hip pocket, hesitated, then drew it. He was chary of pulling firearms except in absolute necessity; besides, he wanted to take this fellow alive. He'd make him talk and find out what was back of all this. There was too much rottenness afoot.

"Climb over into this boat," he ordered. "And no monkey business. I got a gun on you."

"No need shoot me," responded the other. "I paddle back all right. No lose *vinta*."

"Get over here, I said!"

The brown man's hand struck down-

ward. Gorman thought he was reaching for the outrigger spar in order to ease himself aboard. Then Phil's *vinta* gave a lurch and jerk that hurled him sideways, almost toppling him into the water.

He grabbed at the brace with both hands, though still clinging to the gun. The sharp-keeled dugout went half over, shipping the sea in a mighty gulp. There was a rip and splinter of wood, the sound deadened in the splash and suck of water. The *vinta* went under as if stomped by a heavy foot.

Gorman dropped the gun and struck out, kicking away from the submerged craft. In a flash, too late, he understood the other's maneuver. The hand striking downward had slashed with a knife the *bejuco* strings that bound the outrigger to the spar. Then the bamboo had been ripped loose from the other spar, either by the force of the current or by the Moro himself. Without the balancing pole, the *vinta* capsized instantly.

PHIL'S head came up. The world of water changed as his point of view lowered. Above him the other canoe towered, magnified in size, bearing down from the crest of a small wave like a sea monster. Everything was distorted, enlarged, and he himself reduced to pinhead significance. He was lost in the black expanse.

Phil's hand touched something floating. He clutched and drew it near him. It was a piece of the ripped outrigger. He held it before him as a buoy, steadied by its support.

A Moro word hissed and ended with a gurgle. Phil caught but a vague image of the brown man rising in the stern of the *vinta*, his arm waving past his head. Something snicked into the bamboo Phil was

holding just at the waterline, whirling the smooth cylinder around in his grasp. Then a wave rolling down completely submerged Gorman, and he went under, dragging the uncertain support with him.

PHIL knew what had happened. A hurled knife had been caught by the bamboo; otherwise it would have buried itself hilt-deep in his neck. He released the bamboo and stayed down stroking away under water. The fellow was dead set on getting him, for some sinister purpose not yet revealed. Now he must think he had succeeded. All right, let him think so. He'd try his own trickery against that blood-thirsty devil.

Down, down he stayed until his lungs nearly burst, till his head began to hum and ring. He eased over and came up slowly, exposing only his face. He sucked in his breath in one grateful gulp and went down again. Twice more he did this, each time coming up farther and farther away. At last he raised himself far enough to look; there was no visible trace of the other *vinta*.

The salt water smarted in Gorman's throat and nostrils. Like the *vinta*, he had shipped sea on that first submergence. He blew his head passages free, grinning wryly. He didn't make a good porpoise.

But Phil's mind was humming. He was now more intrigued than angry; some devilish scheming was afoot, something that demanded his removal—or that fellow would never have gone to such extremes to kill. He must get to the bottom of this. The problem faced him like a puzzle to a mathematician, demanding a solution.

One factor was now strongly in the lieutenant's favor; the other would think him drowned and proceed with whatever plot was afoot.

Gorman lifted himself higher in

the water. He could see the bulk of the mainland almost a mile off to the north. The current at that hour of the tide was running at a six-knot clip to the southeastward.

The swim was not beyond his distance, but Zamboanga lay on the point of a peninsula. The current would carry him beyond the last headland before he could make the shore, and he would be swept beyond salvation into the Moro Gulf.

Low to the southwestward he could see the riding lights of the sloop. There was a chance. He'd make Jan Towry lower a dinghy and row him to shore.

The current was almost in the direction of the little vessel, but Phil was compelled to angle across to the southward for three hundred yards. He must be careful to keep himself pointed correctly or he would be swept by, and once by, he could never turn back against the force of the water. He oriented himself from the single blinking light, ducked his head, and began to swim with long strokes.

The sloop loomed up before him sooner than he expected. He must edge farther over or he would be swept by. The current was tough to buck, and it was a test of his strength to cut across it. A few more strokes and he would be within hailing distance.

GORMAN raised himself slightly to let out a shout, but paused, lips curved. A smaller shadow disengaged itself from the larger bulk of the vessel and floated away. The tilt of a wave threw the end of an outrigger and the sharp nose of a *vinta* above the waterline. The shout died before utterance. Someone had just boarded the sloop from a *vinta*!

Voices sounded faintly on the trading vessel, followed by a shout from the aft deck. The words were not

distinguishable to the swimming man, but he had a quick realization that the man he was pursuing was now on board the sloop. A train of conjectures tumbled in his mind.

Phil, too, must go aboard. If the scar-armed devil was in league with old Jan Towry, then the most dangerous place in the world for Gorman was on that sloop. He was between the devil and the deep sea for a fact. In his fatigued condition he was lost if he remained in the water. He had to make a choice and a quick one. The sea would play no favorites.

Already the current was bearing him by. Thirty yards more and hope would be gone forever. He had to take a chance, and he took the chance of pitting himself against other men rather than against the cruel impassivity of the sea.

CHAPTER IV

Hidden Cargo

PHIL buried his head ear deep and plowed forward. He came into the deep shadow of the hull. The deck was little more than six feet above the water, but it might as well have been six hundred. The sides of the vessel offered no handholds, and he could by no possible effort climb high enough to reach the rail.

If he called to the men above, he would last just long enough for the scar-armed man to recognize him. Yet a terror of the deep water was creeping over Phil; its awful blackness welled around him, weighing his legs, dragging him down. The strain of keeping afloat was cracking at his heart, ripping at his lungs.

He heard the passage of someone on the deck above, the shoes clipping dully on the caulked planks. The fellow paused near the forehatch and called: "How yuh makin' out down

there?" Gruff American utterance. Old Jan Towry, eh? Phil could not hear the reply from down in the hold; but Towry spoke again. "Keep at it, yuh bozos. We'll be right down." A few more words too low to hear. Phil thought he could hear Jan and someone else move aft and go down a companionway. Did that mean the deck was clear? Maybe.

The anchor cable dropped near the port bow; a few yards away if he could breast the current and grab it. He began to stroke the water with all the force left in his muscles. It was a hard fight, but at last his hand closed on the twisted strands, and he ceased his efforts with a tremendous gasp of relief.

Slowly Phil pulled himself upward. His eyes came above the edge of the rail. He saw no person on the stretch of deck visible to him. He did see the cluttered, unshipshape disorder; provision cases; bits of rope and hawser; wood and canvas hatch covers; jute and sacks.

He rolled over the rail, groggy after his swim, incapable for the moment to stand upright. From the hold came voices. He crawled to a rumpled square of canvas used as a hatch cover and slipped under it.

SOMEONE passed not a pace from where he lay concealed, continued around to the other side of the hatch. The man apparently seated himself at the other side of the deck opening. After a few minutes another joined him.

"For a Moro, Balatgas, yuh're smart. That little fracas you started over in the market place sure dragged 'em off the pier. You ought to seen 'em run. The boat slipped over from the *Bandaree*, an' we had the cases unloaded in less'n fifteen minutes. Purty slick I call it. Not a bozo wiser."

Jan Towry chuckled. Phil knew

the voice. The crooked old codger, tied in with the scar-armed killer.

"Bozo? What kind man that?"

"Hombre, feller, guy; savvy? Just a Yank word. Polish off that tin soldier?"

"Polish? No, I do not polish."

"Naw, I mean did yuh kill that lieutenant?"

There was a cruel interrogation in those words.

"That lieutenant? *Yaowa*, but I kill him. Bad fighter, bad, very bad. One, two, three times; but I lead him to the water. Zip, he swallow the knife right in the neck. I watch; he never come up. The *tiburón* sharks will eat now."

"GOOD. He won't be buttin' his nose into Sibuguey and queerin' our little game. Everything's jake now. You bet your life that Gorman was a scrapper. The patrol won't be goin' out now. Even if it does, that Alvarez, he ain't nothin'."

"No?"

"Naw. An' say, that hemp trick was slick. A corporal an' a couple of soldiers came out to look us over, flashed their lights right down in the hold."

"Yes? Find anything?"

"Naw, they was lookin' for a man—for you."

Phil felt the sloop swing around with the current. There was a throb and drum of the deck planks as the auxiliary motor caught and began to revolve. The churn of the propeller gave the little vessel vibrant life.

The episodes of the evening clicked into place in Gorman's mind. That *juramentado* scare had been obviously double in purpose: first, to scare the people from the long pier and permit boat passage between the freighter and the sloop unobserved; and second, to kill or wound Phil himself. These men were after his

hide just to keep him out of Sibuguey.

But—cases had been loaded. Cases of what? Cases that even the Constabulary searchers had not noticed. The sloop was destined for Sibuguey. Then it must be guns, firearms for that devil, Indang. He'd pay, and pay high, in native gold. All firearms were contraband in Mindanao, forbidden by law to the Moros and pagans. Jan Towry wasn't above smuggling—and apparently not above murder—not if it paid good money.

Gorman lay motionless, scarcely daring to breathe, and thought—or tried to think—hard.

How long he remained there he hardly knew. In his situation five minutes could stretch into hours. A thought came to him suddenly: suppose they decided to cover the hatch! He must seek a better hiding place, and now was the time to do it, in the darkness. He cautiously raised the corner of the tarpaulin and peeped out.

The two that he had heard talking had left. Near the hatch he saw no one.

He raised the canvas higher. A native deckhand slouched across the bow rail, peering beyond the short bowsprit.

THERE would be this lookout on watch all night; furthermore, there would always be a man at the wheel. Small chance to move unobserved. Where could he go?

The sailor continued to slouch at the port rail, his back toward the open hatch. There was a slender chance that Phil might drop into the hold unobserved. Already Gorman was getting stiff from lying wet and cramped. One quick slide over the foot-high lip of the hatch and drop—into what? No matter.

Gorman eased back the canvas covering him. Even as he did so the

lookout turned, stared back along the deck. Phil's heart missed a beat. He was half revealed, and his white clothes were in contrast to the dirty canvas. He gathered himself for a quick spring upward if the man advanced.

FOR a full half minute the man gazed back, a half minute that stretched into infinity. Then indolently the lookout turned to stare again over the water, idly tapping the forerail with his knife.

Phil moved. He slid an arm over the hatch rim, rolled with a quick turn over the edge, and—dropped. Everything went black, as if he had fallen into a well of ink.

Gorman had control enough to lie still after he landed. The fall had not been great, and he seemed to be sprawled on some sort of irregular objects.

The sickening smell of copra spread around.

No sounds of movement came from the deck above. Turning his head, Phil could see the square of gray light through which he had fallen. He crawled slowly forward until he was no longer under the opening. So far, so good; but he was still trapped like a rat in the enemy sloop.

He grunted in disgust.

Gorman's fit of despondency was but temporary. With every moment that went by without evidence of discovery, his resourcefulness returned. He had a prime point of advantage in the fact that his presence was not suspected; even more than that—he was supposed dead.

At one end of the forehold was a door that led back amidships. Gorman dared not venture through this. He could hear from somewhere the muted explosions of the motor and now and then fragments of conversation.

A little exploring and he found a place where he could squirm down among the bales of hemp and stretch himself full length. He lay there trying to put all parts of the situation together.

Finally he dozed off into a fitful sleep.

Gorman awoke in torment. The little hold was suffocating and hot. At some time during the night the crew had thrown the canvas over the hatch and weighed it with a few planks. The dirty cloth stretched yellow gray, crossed by opaque bars. That yellowness meant daylight, sunshine. What time was it? Thirst pinched at Phil's throat, and there was a vacuity in the pit of his stomach.

Besides, copra bugs were racing over his entire body, making him squirm with irritation and disgust.

He would have to make some kind of a move.

If he must come to a clash with these men, let it be while he was still strong enough to fight.

Gorman's arm, reaching out to draw himself up from the opening among the bales, slipped between the strands of raw hemp fiber. The abaca was not packed tightly.

HE became suddenly stiff with attention, forgetting for the moment the annoyance of thirst and bugs. His exploring fingers struck something hard, smooth, polished. He felt along the object for a few inches, then knew what it was—a rifle.

The last necessary fact had clicked into place. He knew now what the men had been doing in the hold the night before; carefully concealing the guns within the bales of hemp. No wonder the corporal's men had seen nothing incriminating. The wooden gun-cases had undoubtedly been tossed overboard and were now

part of the flotsam of the Moro Gulf.

Guns for Sibuguey!

Trouble on the Margosatubig!

CHAPTER V

Sea Devils

PHIL GORMAN straightened up. He was again on the job. He was a Constabulary officer and under orders, one of which was to "intercept and confiscate smuggled firearms." Here were the arms all right, and the guilty parties were the men on board.

What was the best move? He could hardly hope to overpower the entire crew; and, if he did, he could not navigate the sloop alone. Besides, as far as he knew, he was on the high seas and completely without authority. If he was to have real evidence, he must catch these men within territorial waters and, if possible, in the actual act of landing. A tough problem.

As his mind raced, he squirmed quickly from bale to bale, testing each, and in each he felt the hard core of guns. Mixed with the copra was ammunition, and in one of the sacks he found automatics.

All the figuring in the world could not assuage thirst. As the sun mounted and beat more directly on the deck over his head, the more insistent the demand for water became. His throat, cloyed and dry, resisted the very act of swallowing. Finding a few coins in his pocket, he thrust a five-centavo piece in his mouth. This helped some, but the crying demand for water went on, relentless, persisting.

The lieutenant grew reckless in desperation. Inaction palled. The increasing heat of the cargo hold added to his torment. Reason told him to lie low. The sloop could not make Indang's territory in less than

twenty hours, maybe thirty, and that meant one more night at sea. If he could hold out until darkness fell, he might venture in search of water. Could he weather it?

The muted putting of the motor grew slower, died; the vibration from the propeller's churning ceased. Quick, sharp commands were snapped out above him. He heard the slip of ropes through pulleys. The crew was running up canvas. Evidently a breeze had freshened, making possible the use of sails.

A quick determination obsessed Phil. Now, if ever, the crew would be on deck. He slipped noiselessly over the bales of hemp and reached the door of the hold. It opened to his touch.

Before him was a narrow passageway, darker even than the hold. It turned at right angles from the door, rose by a couple of steps to an alleyway that ran along the side of the hold. Halfway back of this was a small stair or companionway that dropped down to the motor room. The engine well was empty as far as Phil could see, and the smell of oil that came up from it was a welcome change from the musty, sickening copra odor.

AN idea struck Gorman. There might be a can of fresh water somewhere for use in cooling the motor. He was thirsty enough to take a risk on any liquid that was fresh. Not until he was at the bottom of the stairs and had turned to the right into the engine room did Phil see the man. Beyond the combustion engine, down on his hands and knees sorting at some bolts and fixtures of the motor, was the mechanic or *capataz*!

Surprise and frustration froze Gorman stiff. He could see the other was a native mechanic, Filipino probably, and one turn of the brown-

skinned man, one glance of the eyes upward, and the world would end for Lieutenant Gorman. At his first quick glance also, Phil had seen two *frascos* of clear liquid that looked like water on the shelf not two feet above the mechanic's head.

GORMAN did the quickest thinking that he had ever done. Discovery was fatal. Retreat up the companionway and on the passage would arouse suspicion. Almost any move would bring about a knowledge of his presence and, consequently, a quick finish fight.

On the top of the tool cabinet near Phil's hand was a piece of jute sacking and some bits of waste. Gorman knew the instinctive superstition of the Filipino, his firm belief in spirits, a belief that run into a variety of kinds—*auswangs*, *wakwaks*, *balbals*, *anitos*, supernatural beings ever present in varied malignancy and form. He'd be a spirit.

Phil's seizure of the sacking and his leap forward was a single movement. He whipped the jute down over the brown man's head, uttering at the same time a stream of ejaculations and syllables that had neither sense nor connection.

A choking wail of terror went up from the *capataz*!

Gorman had one of the *frascos* in his hand and was speeding back toward the forehold before the amazed and terrified mechanic could tear the sacking from his face.

Phil paused, now back again among the hemp bales. He did not hear the bare feet of the Filipino go up the stair to the deck, but he did hear the sudden shouting that rang out near the poop. He had already tried the contents of the glass jug. It was water, tepid and slightly cloudy, but water. He took two deep and grateful swallows.

"What the devil's goin' on?" He

heard Towry's voice. "Has that bunch of bozos gone crazy?"

"The *capataz* have been hit by a spirit," returned a native sailor earnestly. "One never knows when devils are about. It was big, with wings like the *murcielago*, the bat. Now he fear, fear to go down to the engine room."

"Hell's bells, he's full of *tuba*! I try to keep you coconuts from bringing that rotten egg *tuba* aboard, but he must have got some in Zambo. I'll go down and see what's the matter." Phil, below the hatch covering, was chuckling. This was more like it. He had scored a bull's-eye in that quick impersonation. There opened up to him now a course of action that might solve everything.

A few minutes later he heard voices from the direction of the engine room; then there were steps sounding along the narrow passageway. Phil made one dive for his hiding place among the bales, carrying the precious *frasco* of water with him. The hold door opened. Gorman could feel the presence of men, although he could not see them. The slight hiss of their breath carried in the small inclosed place.

"You damn fools are crazy!" growled Towry. "There ain't nothin' down here. If we turned this tub inside out, there wouldn't be nothin' but rats."

"BUT the *wakwaks*, sir, you do not see them except when they want you to see them. Very bad, sir, very bad. I have heard things before. Last night one of the crew he see something white on the deck and then very quick, sir, it was gone. Ah, sir, you must not say there are no spirits. It make the *wakwak* very angry."

"Yeah? What we got in these bales, hombre, is the best medicine against spirits ever known."

Phil heard Jan step forward, ap-

parently thrusting his hand deep into a bale.

"Ha, ha, good old Mausers! Enough there to arm a battalion."

Towry was not two yards from Gorman. The lieutenant held himself motionless, an automatic he had taken from a copra sack ready in his hand. The scoundrelly sloop master never dreamed how close he was to red-spitting death.

"If that nosey *consejal* at Olutangi," continued Jan, "comes aboard, he can look in the hold all right. He won't see any more'n them soldiers did. By the time I've put a couple shots of Whyte and McKay whisky under his belt, he'll never believe us anything but honest traders. And listen, *capataz*, if you want that double pay, you get that motor tuned up so we can use it when we need it. Savvy?"

They were gone, the hold door closing behind them. Phil relaxed with an audible sigh of relief.

His thirst assuaged, he could do some constructive thinking. A plan was formulating, growing more definite and plausible as he turned ideas in his mind, a plan that might catch these rascals right where he wanted them, and, at the same time, keep the guns from Datu Indang. What a plan he might work out, he grunted inwardly, if he just had a cigarette.

CHAPTER VI

Dark Waters

THE small vessel was slipping along, barely two kilometers from the jagged south shoreline of Zamboanga Province. It was now night. Overhead was a cobalt sky dusted with stars. The great hulk of Western Mindanao lay black on the northern skyline, darkly formidable in its tangled and unsurveyed depths. Even the government maps, of which Phil had a careful in

his quarters, marked the long interior of the province as "unexplored."

The man at the bow was sharply alert. There were dangers of the sea as well as the land. The waters east from Zamboanga City were but partially charted.

A government cutter was plumbing the depths about Jolo and Basilan, but it would be years before the sea bottom about all the seven thousand odd islands of the Philippine Archipelago had been accurately charted for reefs and banks and currents. Only recently a passenger steamer of the Hermanis Fernandos line had gone on an unmarked reef west of Santa Cruz Island, with all souls aboard lost.

The lookout peered closely for white water, so intent that the terrifying, misshapen form that slipped from the unbattened hatch was upon him before he was aware. Headless, great wings like an enormous bat, thin white legs like a heron, terrible verification of all the demonology of the Orient.

THE brown sailor's blood turned to ice, his bones melted to water, his lungs tightened so that no breath could come. He went down limp with just enough energy left to bury his face against the deck. And the malignant spirit—so the lookout averred afterward—sailed right out over the water like a great, brown albatross.

Gorman hit the water in a clean dive and went under. The three copra sacks that had constituted his disguise he shook off. He had merely thrown a sack over his head and tucked it in around his shirt collar; then with each arm thrust into an empty sack he had made himself wings. On the starlit foredeck he must have looked, to the surprised brown sailor, awe-inspiring enough.

Phil came up just long enough to get a lungful of air and go down again. He was using the same trick he had used successfully with Balatgas after the *vinta* fight. His whole ruse had been merely to prevent pursuit and to keep Towry and the scar-armed devil from knowing he had ever been on board the sloop. All the white man logic in the world would never convince the sailor that it was a man who had gone over the rail, and Towry would discount the tale as native imagination.

GORMAN had figured time and location as well as he could. Sibuguey should be near. By piling the bales only a little differently, he had been able to reach the lip of the hatch and pull himself up. Peeping from beneath the loose hatch cover, he had seen the land. If he could get overboard undetected he could make a swim for it. Once ashore he could operate to trap the smugglers with the guilt on them.

The little play on Malay superstition had done the trick. The crew would believe unswervingly in the existence of the spirit and would thank their *anting-antings* that it had left for the dark waters. The slight rearrangement of the bales would hardly prove to the more sensible ones that a stranger had been in the hold.

The sloop continued to slip along with the main and triangular jib bellying. Gorman lay back, only his face exposed, easily buoyed up by the salt water. The vessel did not swing around; no boat was lowered from the stern davits. Then they had not suspected. He watched the sloop grow slowly smaller. He was safe from the men on board at least.

Gorman felt an exhilaration as he began to stroke slowly, powerfully through the water. The past twenty-four hours had unfolded the queerest

turn of incidents that had ever confronted him. He had been in tight places since he had been in the Constabulary, but none quite as aggravating as that hiding in the hold. The next time he met up with those fellows—and he'd see to it there was a next time—he wouldn't have to hold back and hide. There'd be a hot time. Still, that little trick of impersonating a spirit had been good. He wouldn't have missed that for anything. He chuckled as he thought of that adventure.

Phil had been along these waters before. He had crossed them in the Constabulary launch various times. He knew, before he plunged into the sea, that he would encounter no appreciable current. It would be a long, but a direct swim to land.

To land? Had he misjudged the distance across these inky waters? He swam steadily, strongly, but the mental strain of swimming in the dark began to tell. Had he become over-confident because he had swum to the sloop the night before?

THERE was nothing to mark either time or progress. Minutes became hours and still he was, apparently, in the same place where he had started. The long black cloud of the mainland continued to be—a long black cloud, no nearer. "Like running on a treadmill," Phil thought, but he got no consolation from the comparison.

Now and then he lay over on his back and rested, staring up at the silver stars. The vast infinity of the sky, coupled with the seemingly endless stretches of water, was disheartening. He remembered from his reading somewhere a remark of Admiral Nelson, "It's dogged as does it!" and he would roll over again and continue forcing himself through the water.

He remembered the words he had

overheard on the sloop. They admitted he was a scrapper, eh? Then he wouldn't be licked by a stretch of salt water.

But this was not like fighting another man. It was the loneliness of the struggle plus the realization that he was tiring, and the shore was far away. Kick, stroke, kick; he gritted his teeth and determined to keep going.

Damn this Datu Indang who wanted smuggled guns!

PHIL knew the deceptiveness of gazing across water. He had paddled *vintas* in toward land in the daytime, and would paddle for an hour without noticing a change in the shoreline; then suddenly discover that he was near land. He was up against the same thing except in an exaggerated degree. All he had to do was to keep going and eventually his foot would touch bottom.

Touch bottom? Alive? Don't lose your head; keep going.

Phil discovered with a start that he was heading into a deep inlet or bay. That was why the shore had kept drawing away before him, why he had misjudged the length of the swim. He could see the land coming abreast of him to the right—but how far away?

Ahead of him the slowly heaving waters stretched interminably. The inlet might be miles deep; it might be only a few hundred yards. What to do? Keep straight ahead or turn toward the headland on the right?

With his legs leaden and his hands heavy, this unexpected problem struck him as tremendous to solve. The fatigue of his muscles had extended to his brain. His energy seemed to drain away, leaving him cold and helpless. He had come through this adventure so far by luck and quick thinking. Neither would help him now. He felt with

a sudden fatalism that he couldn't make it either way. Was this the end?

In that moment Phil Gorman knew despair. The whole twenty odd years of his life ran vividly through his mind, a comprehensive picture. Had it been lived merely for this? Just that he might become fishfood within gunshot of land?

With no realization of profanity Phil spoke aloud, "I'm damned if it is!"

He turned toward the headland at the right and began to swim with all his remaining strength.

His hand struck something that jabbed and raked along the side of his little finger like a stab of fire. Instinctively he jerked away; but he had struck something. Then he knew what it was: coral!

Phil let down an exploring foot. It hit a solid umbrella hump not three feet below the surface. He drew himself up to rest, relief filling and strengthening him. That last determined swim toward the headland had brought him to the edge of a submerged reef. He'd make it now.

MORNING on Mindanao was like the lifting of a silver curtain. The thin fog that had settled on the inlet and the low-lying coastland rose in a tangible piece to melt out in a sky of pure cerulean.

The sea crinkled pearly gray, changing to sapphire and pale green as the light grew stronger, like a jade setting to the island. And to the very edge of the sand the jungle came, a mighty back curtain, dark and green and cool, guarding what lay behind it in majestic silence, keeping its secret with all the merciless serenity of tropical nature.

Phil Gorman, from his bed upon the sand, looked at that tangle of trees and vine with unmixed feelings. There was no thrill to its barbaric

beauty in his breast. He knew too well its inimical nature, its cruel, relentless hostility to human life, its eternal reeking with the poison of fang and fever. Yet he did not hate it; like the dark waters it was only another obstacle to be fought.

GORMAN got to his feet. After his rest upon the coral reef, he had made the last kilometer to land with ease. The few hours sleep on the warm sand strengthened him. Now, on to the next move. He was on a lone man adventure. His mind took up the problem at hand.

Unkempt, with clothing wrinkled, a day's beard darkening his face, his hair awry and matted from the salt water, he still remained an officer in the government's forces—and under orders.

Gorman had one outstanding quality—and that was a sense of duty.

The sloop had disappeared. No sail, no smoke, nor tiny craft broke the skyline of the Moro Gulf. Here was infinite isolation. All along the three hundred miles of the south shore of the province, from Zamboanga City to Malabang, were but a few native fishing villages, a few jungle *campongs* of minor status. Of white men practically none. And behind this uninhabited coastland, behind this tangled jungle, rose a spine of verdure-clad mountains—the home of Datu Indang.

Phil could guess well where the sloop would land. The Margosatubig River, tumultuous child of the mountains, came down to twist as a brazen snake through the jungles of Sibuguey. It was an open portal to the Indang region. In its broad mouth the sloop could hide until the arms had been delivered to the Datu's men.

Gorman took a quick inventory of his personal possessions; the automatic he had taken from the sack of

copra, one box of ammunition, a pocket knife, money in coins and a few sodden peso bills, a single handkerchief.

His first job was to clean the salt water from the automatic, wiping it as best he could with the handkerchief. The cartridges were supposedly waterproof. He tried one to make sure, and the cracking detonation caused a *callao*, like a great red and black buzzard, to flap away from a *marang* tree. Good enough, yet he would have traded the gun at that moment for the indispensable jungle tool, the bolo.

Pocket knife in hand, Gorman started along the beach. After a few minutes he turned into the tangle of the jungle. He soon found a trailer of rattan and hacked off a section ten feet long.

Taking it back to the strip of sand, he cut off a foot length of the trailer and tilted it over his mouth. A thin stream of water ran out. It had a slightly milky taste, but it was safe and pure to drink, a beneficent source in a land where every stream was contaminated. His thirst was satisfied, as the trailer contained a full pint of water.

Now for his one-man expedition.

HE had had time to go over the situation. He knew the success of the smugglers' cruise rested on a matter of time. The guns had to be delivered to Indang before a Constabulary expedition arrived in Sibuguey. Without guns the wily *maga-hat* was powerless before a small party of riflemen; but with guns he could defy a regiment of American Regulars—the regulars that Ormsby had so passionately desired.

The Constabulary couldn't handle the situation, eh? Let Ormsby think so; but here was one officer in the field, and he could do something.

The Margosatubig River was to

the east. Phil knew his geography from previous scoutings. Farther around in the inlet was the smaller stream, the Cabanay. And on the Cabanay was the *campong* of a Subano chieftain, Mohammed Ali Pinon.

Gorman had thought about Pinon as he lay contriving a plan in the sloop's hold. Compared to Indang, Pinon was a peaceful Subano. His half a hundred fighting men could not contest three hundred or more fierce fighters from the mountains.

Yet Pinon was peaceful only through fear. Had the man-power been reversed, he would have been as ugly and trouble-making as Indang. Phil did not trust him; yet through him might lay the help Gorman needed. At least he could get from him food, and Phil was now feeling the weakness of hunger.

Looking more like a drunken beach-comber than an officer in the Constabulary, Phil started walking rapidly westward, keeping to the beach, and headed for the mouth of the Cabanay.

CHAPTER VII

The Secret of the Scar

AN hour later found Gorman at the shallows where the muddy Cabanay emptied over sandbars and silt banks. A trail led inward along the river bank, a path beaten deep by the patterings of bare feet. Phil turned into it, the shadows of the jungle closing around him. Above, high in a *molave* tree, a pair of monkeys squealed and chattered at his intrusion.

Phil strode doggedly ahead. He might run into anything at Pinon's *campong*. The old Subano would be alive only to his own interests, but Gorman had managed men like him before. A little craft and an understanding of the situation were often more powerful than a regiment.

The throbs came to him at first no louder than the churn of water over distant rapids. But there were no rapids in the Cabanay. The little jungle stream slipped between banks of mud, slimy with rotten leaves and forest refuse. Phil paused in wonderment, then recognized the sound. He had heard it before, but never without uneasy twitches of alarm. Drums, huge *calingtons* arranged in a series of nine, tuned to savage throbs.

What was up? *Calingtons* were presages of trouble, instruments to arouse the spirits of the gods, calling down the warlike *busaos* to aid the earth men in combat. Such sounds from the compound of Pinon were ominous.

Phil came within sight of the *campong* from a hundred yards down the river bank. In this forest capitol of Mohammed Ali Pinon, excitement prevailed. Women and children were screaming and chanting. Smoke from cocoanut fires spiraled upward. Men in red and blue tribal uniforms danced with their wooden shields in front of them, shaking long war spears, ducking, bobbing, contorting behind the crude bucklers, mimicking actual combat.

The whetted spear blades glistened in the sunlight, sending spots of reflection to dance among the *luan* trees. Everyone seemed to be yelling his loudest.

THIS might be some native festival, but the scene to Gorman spelled trouble.

"That bunch of Allah praisers is stirred the wrong way," he grunted, "but if you wanted a little necessary fighting you could hardly pull them out of the *campong*. This may be a poor time to brace that tricky old betel-spitter."

There was no time for more cogitation. Phil was seen by sharp eyes,

and a yell, shrill and alarming, rose above the chants of the women.

The capering stopped. The fighting men surged out from the center of the bare space in front of the compound, glaring in surprise at the strange white man.

PHIL stalked forward. Retreat would never do. Success with these half-savage islanders was fifty percent Yankee bluff. Nothing impressed them like audacity. He halted a dozen paces from the knot of fighting men.

"Hayah-ho!" he snapped out in Moro dialect. "What is the meaning of this? Is this the way to greet an American officer, with spears in your hands and shields hiding in your hearts? By the beard of the Prophet, your datu Pinon shall be taught a lesson. Lead me to him."

For a moment the men stared, their crimson-stained mouths gaping. Then one let out a derisive shout. "Yah ani, Americano, yes. Dog of a begging beach-comber dragged from the waves. The women will beat him with sticks."

Phil had forgotten his unkempt appearance, forgotten he did not wear the red-piped khaki of the Constabulary. A beach-comber, eh? He knew the contempt of the natives for the outcast white man.

The automatic snapped into his hand. "You witless mob of dog-eaters, who recognize nothing but brass buttons, here is something you will recognize. In this piece of steel lie dead men. Which ones shall it be?"

It was a colossal bluff, but he knew the men. They stepped back, parted, a lane opening between them. Through this he could see the gate of the stockade, and beyond this a street leading to the house of Pinon. One of the men sped through the

gate, running to inform the datu.

Gorman walked between the serrated spears, glancing neither to right nor left. He had an inkling why this war mood was up. If he played his hand right, all might be worked to his advantage. He must see Pinon. He had no great personal fear, no time to think of danger. It was true the heads of Constabulary men had decorated the gates of stockades, but the memory of too many battles against riflemen had disciplined these river Moros.

Yet they did not believe him to be an officer, and the life of a lone white man a hundred miles from the nearest military post was precarious.

Gorman walked up to the broad porch where Pinon sat with three of his head men. The Subano chief did not rise from the grass mat. At the sides of the porch, guards stood with *barongs* ready. Phil had diplomatically slipped the automatic back into his pocket.

"B'ism 'Illa, greetings," said Phil, "and the blessings of the Prophet to the Datu Pinon."

PINON sat motionless, no flicker of emotion on his seamed brown face. In his lap lay a sheathed *barong*. He turned after a moment to spit a comet of red betel juice through the cracks of the split-bamboo floor.

"What insolence is this? What wandering beggar of the beaches dares to walk into my compound? Speak quickly, you infidel dog!"

"If the datu had no better eyes than a pig-tail monkey," returned Gorman dryly, "he would recognize me, Lieutenant Gorman of the Philippine Constabulary."

Pinon knew him and Gorman knew that he knew him. The datu's speech had been but customary arrogance to make a show of power.

"Perhaps," went on Phil sarcastic-

ally, "the Datu Mohammed Ali Pinon would like a visit from a hundred riflemen who would resent discourtesy to their officer in command. By the Prophet, I believe you have been hiding so long from fear of Datu Indang that you can no longer see in the daylight. Think quickly, you chief of hiding dog-eaters, and tell me why the men dance with the shields of war."

THE speech was gallingly insolent, but it brought the result Phil expected. Pinon rose to his feet, his fingers resting on the carved handle of his weapon.

"The *Subanun* have been deceived. The Lieutenant with bold words promised us protection when last he visited the humble compound of Pinon.

"But, is the Lieutenant a magician that he comes single-handed to save us from the *magahats*?"

Phil's guess had clicked correct. He had guessed Indang's men would be at the Margosatubig waiting for the sloop, and Pinon had interpreted this detachment of mountaineers as a raid against himself. The wily old trimmer was probably correct: a raid—but not until the rifles had been landed.

Should he explain to the crafty *Subano*? Hardly. If he mentioned the guns, he might get Pinon's aid to disperse the detachment of *magahats*; but what would then keep Pinon from seizing the rifles himself?

He could not be trusted if a chance to become lord of Sibuguey presented itself. He would supplant Indang and the situation would be no better than before. It would mean the Regulars and disgrace for Phil. More than disgrace: his head would part company with his shoulders if Pinon got those rifles.

"Yes, single-handed, Mohammed

Ali Pinon, since you and your men fear to leave the shelter of your compound. Faugh upon the *Subanos* who dance the dance of war to guard their fighting cocks and their *camote* patches.

"Trail behind me like dogs, and from the tree tops you may see me disperse the men of Indang."

Phil's gibing thrusts had gone home, but the clever river chief was not convinced. "But, *Sidi Americano*, the *magahats* are many in number. I have but fifty fighting men. We shall defend our homes and our honor, but we cannot go against them."

"Men who dance to please their women should hide behind the stockades with them. I have done. If the great chief will give me food, I shall eat, and then go alone to clear the jungle. I shall make it safe for the proud *Subanos* to venture from their stockade."

Gorman knew just when to cease. He had them hovering between anger and humiliation. He turned and walked calmly to the far end of the broad veranda. Pinon clicked orders. In a few minutes a servant brought rice, fish, native coffee and bananas. As he ate, Phil watched the old chief conferring in whispers with his head men.

GORMAN was playing with a situation delicate as the time works of a bomb and, likewise, loaded with high explosive. Actually he did not want to lead the men of Pinon against the mountain marauders; such action might start a jungle war that would dye the Margosatubig red. What he did want was a show of numbers. He would trust to his own ingenuity to frustrate Indang.

In twenty-four hours or less Alvarez should arrive with twenty crack riflemen; then the situation would be in hand—if too much did

not happen within those twenty-four hours.

Phil got up and, without a look toward the conferring men, started toward the gate of the stockade. Pinon came down from the porch.

"The *Subanun* are not cowards; we but follow the counsel of the *officiales Americanos* to refrain from war." An expression of pride and hauteur stamped his bold, brown features. "I myself have met Indang in the forest. He will carry forever the mark of my spear on his left elbow."

The mask dropped from Gorman's face; for a moment incredulity sagged his lips into weak lines. He felt like a schoolboy surprised in a gross stupidity.

"Indang has a scar here?" he ran a finger along his own elbow in interrogation.

"Most assuredly, *Sidi Americano*."

"Great governors' God!" exploded Phil in English.

The colossal insolence and cleverness of the mountain *magahat*! Then it was Indang who had wielded the *barong* in the market place; Indang who had struck with the knife in the darkness of McGay Street; Indang who had wrecked the *vinta*; Indang, the tricky fox of the jungle, who was managing his own importation of arms.

PHIL'S mind was racing. The tide would delay the sloop in entering the Margosatubig, but the tide was coming in. There might yet be time—one chance.

"Give me a boy to show me the jungle trail to the Margosatubig."

"Ay-ee, Lieutenant."

Gorman started toward the stockade entrance at a run. He heard but did not interpret the snapping orders of the datu behind him. A young *Subano*, armed only with a sheathed bolo, sped past him, pushed

through the gaping crowd and turned into the jungle. Phil was but a few steps behind him.

At the gate of the *campong* old Pinon was barking orders like a major-general.

CHAPTER VIII

Baleete Magic

THE sun through the jungle was a trial of Gorman's speed. The sun, now halfway to the zenith, was beating down upon the coastlands with equatorial fury. A visible, steamy heat rose in the forest. Phil was soon drenched in his own perspiration; but the slender youth slipped along with ease, his skin dry as dusted bronze.

They came to the broad, muddy expanse of the Margosatubig, its silted, dark-brown surface flecked with patches of amber where the sun's rays shot through the trees. No sign of human life was visible.

"Down stream," commanded Phil, and the boy slipped ahead, picking a none-too-well defined trail to the sea. The smell of salt air mixed with the steam of the jungle. They drew near to the broad mouth of the river. The boy held up a warning hand and dropped behind a clump of wild hibiscus.

The sloop lay at anchor off the sandbars, in the distance showing gray as an armed destroyer.

"Hist, look." The boy pointed. A *vinta* was nosing its way over the shallows, pointing toward the sloop. Phil could no more than see the two occupants.

But the boy crouched rigid as stone, like a dog at point. "Indang, in *vinta*!"

"What? You must have eyes like a buzzard. Are you sure?"

The boy made no effort at proof. "Indang," he averred again.

The discovery confounded Gor-

man. "Do the *magahats* have *vintas*?"

"Only a few. They come on foot, from there." The boy made a motion back toward the mountains.

"Where are Indang's men?" asked Phil. "There?" He indicated the stretch of bank between them and the sea.

"No, no, *tuan*." The boy pointed back up stream. "Yonder, I heard, at the baleete tree."

"Baleete tree?"

"Ah, yes, *Sidi Americano*. One must please the spirits or not go to war."

PHIL nodded. Superstitions about the baleete, the cannibal tree of the tropics, was rife in all the Islands. From Luzon to Suragani, all believed it the abode of malignant spirits, evil powers that must be placated.

Gorman quickly pieced the affair together. With plenty of *vintas*, the *magahats* might easily have paddled to the sloop and taken off the arms; but with few canoes it was better for the vessel to enter the Margo-satubig. Indang had been ashore to visit his men who were now, according to the boy, performing certain rites before the baleete tree.

Good, the raiders were without their leader and would be easier to disperse. Indang, back upon the sloop, would be smugly ignorant of any interference.

A daring plan clicked in Gorman's mind. If it worked—well, certain busybodies would not be howling for the Regulars.

"Come," he ordered the boy, "take me to that baleete tree."

From behind an immense cotta, or cluster of living bamboo, Phil looked down upon the men collected about the baleete tree. He and his guide had crept to this position unobserved by the *magahats*.

The "spirit" tree stood a hundred yards from the river bank. A cleared space had been made at its base. Fires of green wood burned on either side, sending up spirals of smoke like incense before a giant altar.

In front of these fires the men sat, gaudily resplendent in their red and blue and yellow garments. Phil could set them off by the style of dress, by the twist of the head rag. Not Moros alone, but Manobos, Bukidnons, Ates, made up the array of Indang's band.

"Find out how many *vintas* are tied at the bank," Gorman ordered the boy.

Phil was struck by the silence of the whole affair. No beat of drum nor chant of many voices; such things were potent to call down the mighty *busaos*, but the baleete *auswangs* must be soothed by softer sounds. A single *baliang*, or medicine man, capered before the fires, chanting in a voice so low Phil could not hear.

THE picture was barbaric, unreal. There in the mighty hush of the jungle was this weirdly capering form dodging between the smoke columns; there, the silent men in their reds and blues and yellows like a cluster of enormous butterflies; and there, behind it all, the twisted mockery of the baleete tree.

Phil could see the divided trunk of this forest cannibal. Parasites starting in the top of some massive *luan* or *marang* had sent their creepers earthward, wrapping and folding about the parent trunk. Once to the ground these creepers had taken root, had grown and tightened until they had killed the parent tree.

The dead trunk had then rotted away, leaving the baleete a mass of twisted and interlaced trunks, snarled and contorted like fighting snakes.

No wonder the natives thought the tree the abode of evil spirits.

The boy was back at Gorman's side.

"Four *vintas* only, *tuan*."

"Good. Did any of Pinon's men come?"

THE boy's face expressed surprise. "They are here. There." He pointed back along the river trail. Phil saw nothing. "They wait to see what you do."

Clever, the way they could conceal themselves in the brush.

"Waiting to see what I do, eh?" mused Phil. "Fine lot of help they are."

But that was Pinon exactly: waiting to see which way the cat jumped before he took sides.

Gorman knew these Manobos and Bukidnons to be the most superstitious of all the island tribes. All right, he'd fight fire with fire. He'd feed their superstition. A few tricks, worked right, would send them chattering in fear; worked wrong—there was no use thinking about that.

Phil pulled from his pocket the spare ammunition that he had brought from the contraband supply on the sloop.

Fifty cartridges. He could spare half of them.

"Listen, boy, can you make a sound like a wood dove?"

"Yes, *tuan*, like this."

Gorman clapped a hand over the other's mouth in time. "No, not now. I shall tell you carefully. I am going to creep around to the back of the baleete tree, understand? You are to go back to your own friends. Give three notes of the wood dove very loud; then wait a little and give two more. If Datu Pinon wishes to see me disperse the Manobos, let him come at a run. Now, go."

Phil circled to the back of the baleete tree easily. The multiple trunk offered perfect protection. The natives, so intent on the pagan ritual, saw nothing but the gyrations of the priest. The fires to the right and left of the tree were but a few feet from Phil.

Each had burned long enough that there was a base of glowing embers.

The rigamarole of the *baliane* continued. He was working himself into a foaming frenzy. His fantastic head-dress of feathers and colored yarn was askew; his body, half naked and greased with oil, shone as if burnished; his deep-set black eyes glinted with fervor. Apparently the *auswangs* gave no hint of being pleased.

The *baliane* leaped into the air and came down, half squatted, his greasy breech-clouts not a yard from the right-hand fire. The men watching him were enthralled, their mouths open and drooling. What may have been the next gyration, Phil never knew, for the thin, wavering note of the wood dove sounded on the morning air!

A NECROMANCER'S wand could not have frozen the men more completely. Then all heads swung in the direction of the note. Again and yet again the piercing bird call wailed through the silent jungle.

Three times! An omen of evil!

Phil, behind the twisted trunk, smiled grimly. His hands made quick, accurate tosses to the right and left.

A composite sigh of disappointment and fear wafted upward from the half circle of men.

Then clear, cool, vibrant came the call twice more. The *auswangs* were enraged!

Crack, crack! The fire behind the *baliane* sprayed like a rocket. Sparks

and coals fell upon the priest's back, lodged within his sash and breech-clouts. Crack, pop, crack! The left hand fire shivered into explosive life.

The priest emitted a startled yell and clawed frantically at the searing coals. But the fire was sprinkling him from another direction. He clawed, jumped, tore in contortions more violent than he used in religious rites. But to no avail. With a wailing scream he plunged into the forest.

The terrified natives, so rudely awakened from their emotional orgy, saw no safety but in flight. Each man for himself, they leaped for the shelter of the forest. Pinon's men, plunging through the brush, came in upon a vacant space.

Phil chuckled. Those cartridges tossed into the fire had done the work.

Had Indang been with the men, he would not have been fooled by the trick; but these mountaineers were of weaker stuff.

Pinon's men, brave enough now, started to pursue. Phil called them back.

"By the Prophet's beard, did I not do as I said I would? I, single-handed, dispersed them." His voice was bitingly sarcastic. "And Mohammed Ali Pinon crouched with his men in the thicket.

"Go back to your women in the stockade."

PINON'S hauteur was gone. He had lost face. He offered his *barong*, handle out, to Phil.

"Command, Elder Brother, and we shall obey. If I falter, strike off my head."

Phil reached out and shoved the weapon back into its sheath. The old *Subano* might be worth something now.

And there were still Indang and the rifles!

CHAPTER IX

Battle

GORMAN remembered his words to Caruthers: "In the right mood they'll fight to death at the drop of the hat; manage them right and a child could handle them." By quick seizing of opportunity he had managed them right—so far.

Now came the real task, one that would not bend to tricks or superstition. Indang would not be panicked by popping shells nor the calls of the wood dove. To put his hands on the jungle fox was another matter.

The sloop should be chugging up the river. The Margosatubig was too broad to constitute a trap. At the first sign of trouble Indang or Towry could put the ship about and head for open sea.

Only one plan was feasible: surprise.

"Quick, O Datu Mohammed Ali Pinon, if you would help me. Seize the four *vintas* and hide them in the back water. Man them with your stoutest fighters. Your enemy, the dog-eating Indang, comes up the river on a white man's sloop."

"A *prau* with devil engines?"

"With engines, yes, and with sails for the wind. You could never catch him with your fleetest paddlers. Are your men brave enough to board?"

"Command, Elder Brother."

The sound of the motor exhaust was now audible, smacking across the flat water like a skipping stone. The vessel was yet hidden beyond a curve in the bank.

"Indang will be watching here to meet his men. He will stop the devil engine. Then we attack. Understand? Command your men not to kill unless necessary."

Phil crouched in the center of a long dugout. In the stern and bow were husky paddlers. A quick shove

from the bank and they could be beside the gunwales of the sloop.

Slowly the little vessel chugged upstream against the sluggish current. It came around the bend like a great gray beetle, the water spreading chocolate-colored in the wake. Incongruous, out of place it looked, against the vast background of the jungle.

"Careful," Phil cautioned Pinon. "No move until I give the word. Quiet!"

PHIL felt a peculiar exhilaration. He had had his hands on that scar-armed Indang once. He'd have them on him again, and this time the fox would not get away.

"Be ready. When it comes abreast of that *molave* tree, we go."

From somewhere upstream came a ringing yell, splitting the air over the river and rising above the chug of the laboring motor. "*Hay-a-a-ah-ah-e-e!* Turn back, turn back, O master! The *Subanun* and a pig-eater of an *Americano* set a trap. Turn back, turn back!"

One of the Manobos had recovered from his fright at the baleete tree and come back to warn Indang.

"Let's go!" yelled Phil.

The paddles dug, and the four *vintas* shot out upon the brown water.

A guttural yell of surprise went up from the sloop. The gray vessel which was being nosed in toward shore was swung hard to starboard, pivoting broad abeam in the current. The warning yell from the Manobo had come just in time.

Phil cursed audibly. Thirty seconds more and the sloop would have been abreast, not forty yards from the hidden *vintas*. Now, swung around, with the aid of current and propeller, it could pull away from the paddlers.

"Bend into it, you fellows! Cut

across there, *there*. Catch it on the down swing."

There was still a chance. The flat, triangular paddles drove the water like whipping fins. Another *vinta* pulled ahead of Phil's. It contained Pinon, and the leathery old Moro had seized a spare paddle and was aiding in the task.

"Atta boy, Pinon!"

Three men were at the rail of the sloop as it came around. Phil was now so close under the stern and the swinging dinghy that he could not even see the helmsman. He saw the *Subano* chief drop the paddle and seize his weapon. The six-pound *barong* swung back over Pinon's shoulder, then whizzed through the air simultaneous with the crack of a revolver.

Now, it was a fight!

Phil stood up, judged the distance across to the rail, and leaped. He felt the dugout bob and shove away, killing the power of his leap. He had one shattering moment of despair; but his right hand reached the rail and held. He swung himself sideways and rolled to the deck.

Gorman got to his feet just as a brown sailor, clad only in a head rag and cotton shorts, sprang at him, a knife drawn back for an upward plunge. He felt also the throbs of the motor increase, and the sloop gain in speed.

PHIL had no time to draw a gun. He had left the automatic in his pocket that he might have both hands free for boarding. Now he saw the whetted steel starting upward on a slice that would rip him open.

Quick as a flash he stepped aside, remembering a trick he had learned from a Marine captain. He grasped the up-plunging wrist, swung his left arm under the sailor's knife arm, fist back against the brown chest, his own arm rigid, and brought the

knife arm sharply down across his own. The man writhed, but did not yell; the knife dropped to the deck. Phil gave it a kick that sent it skittering overboard.

The Malay tore free. Phil neatly tripped him. Then, seizing him by the belt and arm, he bore him squirming to the port rail and tossed him over. One less.

THE little sloop was now churning down the river at ten knots. The helmsman still crouched behind the wheel. As Phil turned from the rail he saw the *vintas* dragging behind, the men paddling furiously, but losing ground every minute. One canoe was empty. Pinon and his paddlers had made the deck.

One sailor lay huddled, coughing, in the scuppers. Gorman saw the wily Pinon retrieve the *barong* he had thrown. More men rushed at the brown invaders. Steel clicked there beyond the aft cabins.

Then on the port deck was Jan Towry coming toward Phil with a revolver in his hand. Gorman made a grab for his automatic.

Phil had an army rating of a pistol expert, and he fired with a quick, deft movement that was pure habit. He did not want to kill Towry, crook and scoundrel though he was. It was more to the point to bring him back alive.

Gorman had selected a point under Jan's right shoulder as he pulled the trigger. The whining burr of a deflected bullet accompanied the crack of the automatic. The gun that Towry had lifted to sight flipped from his hand as if it had been jerked by a rubber band. Jan had lifted his own gun squarely in the way.

A look of stupefaction showed on Towry's dirty, whiskered face. A curse exploded from his thick lips. He turned to pick up the revolver,

but fear fumbled his movements. Phil sent another bullet snicking under his collar bone. Jan doubled back with a wheezing grunt, fell to his knees on the deck; then, crawling, he slipped beyond the low cabins and plunged into the fore hatch.

Where was Indang? Phil hadn't seen him. Why was he not in the fight? The old fox was no coward.

Gorman ducked as a black object whizzed over him. The *capataz* had slipped up the aft companionway and had hurled a steel spanner at his head. Phil had caught the movement of the man just in time. The automatic barked again—and this time with a clean miss!

A twist of the rudder had lurched the vessel. Phil went backward onto the deck just as he fired. The *capataz* was upon him.

Phil doubled his feet. He had sent more than one plunging wrestler off the mat by footwork. His boots caught the Malay just at the top of his cotton shorts. Gorman rolled back and straightened his legs with a powerful thrust. The little brown man was turned end for end, struck with his back and shoulders on the port rail, and went over clawing frantically at the air.

THERE was still the helmsman who had stood through the fighting staunchly at the wheel. Phil, half doubled on the deck, raised his gun. But this Malay had seen enough; he ducked and slipped over the taffrail into the water.

From the foredeck came an unmistakable crack—a rifle. Something zipped with an air-splitting wheeze. A shout went up from the starboard deck. Pinon and one of his men went over the rail in straight dives.

Phil had the cracking realization that he was alone against the men on the sloop, and that someone—Indang or Towry, or both—had unbaled

rifles and opened fire from the fore hatch!

Gorman had one major advantage: he held the poop deck and the wheel. The motor continued to chug. What to do? Run the sloop into the mud bank and trust to Pinon's men to come? Would they come? The way the old trimmer had gone over the rail at the first crack of a rifle didn't indicate his returning to face more bullets. Better to head for the sea.

Gorman crawled across the narrow deck and got behind the wheel. He dared not rise to his feet as his head and shoulders would be exposed above the cabins. If he kept down, he had some chance against those rifles.

THERE was little view for steering; but at least he could keep the sloop away from the bank. The silence on the foredeck was disconcerting. What were the rogues up to?

Chug, chug, chug. The echo of the exhaust came volleying back from the jungle walls. No other sounds; not even the chatter of a monkey or the squawk of a hornbill. Chug, chug. Minute after minute. The towering *luan* trees with their trailers of liana and rattan slipped by like a moving panorama.

Phil felt the acuteness of reaction, the tenseness of waiting, of expectancy. Live or die, let's have this over with.

The sloop dipped with the first swell of the sea. The land drew away on either side. Phil jerked at the helm. The craft, obeying the rudder, swung to starboard. Better keep in near land.

Gorman flinched as a bullet whipped over him, accompanied by the crack of a high-powered rifle. It had sped high, higher than the wheel. As long as the superstructure of the cabins remained between him and the others, let them waste

ammunition. He still had control of the sloop.

Wham! Another one. Still high. If they wanted to get him, they'd have to raise themselves high enough to be seen. This was an even game. He kept down, silent, ready.

He saw the end of a rifle come up and waited for the head to show. Crack! He knew he had missed. Again the rifle came up from near the mainmast. He'd be more careful. It was Indian fighting; the mast was like the trunk of a tree. The fellow couldn't keep entirely hidden. He recognized him now: Jan Towry. The bullet in the shoulder wasn't keeping the old scoundrel from operating a rifle. Phil's bullet ripped splinters from the mast. Towry sent a third slug singing between the spokes of the wheel.

As the rascally sloop master jerked back the bolt of his rifle, he exposed an elbow. Phil fired. He must have burned him. Towry jerked forward with a curse, exposing head and shoulders for one brief moment. Gorman fired twice rapidly. Then his gun snapped empty. Had he got him?

"And is it not unfortunate," said a cool, insolent voice, "that firearms must be reloaded?"

Rising from the aft companion-way, holding a rifle that bored steadily upon Phil, was the man he had met in Zamboanga as Prince Alus Tigami!

CHAPTER X

The Fox

TIME stopped in that appalling second. The menacing rifle was but two yards away, and in its black muzzle Phil saw disaster. One twitch of the brown trigger finger and all would go out in a blast of ripping lead.

It was like a tableau, so still the

two men remained. The Constabulary lieutenant, unkempt, dirty, crouching behind the wheel, an empty pistol in his hands. The smooth, insolent Moro, again dressed in white, his Moslem fez slightly tilted, his Dutch jacket buttoned to the chin, an arrogant disdain for the white man burning on his face.

Every fact now clicked into place in Gorman's mind, each event fitting in like parts of a scrambled puzzle. The scar-armed man, Indang, Prince Alus Tigami—all the same person.

NO wonder the *juramentado* had eluded the searchers. He had gone to the one place that would not be searched, the Zamboanga Club. Right under Phil's nose.

Indang, the fox!

It was all so amazingly simple. With clothes hidden in a dark place, it would take but a minute to jerk on shoes and trousers, wipe off the face chalk, slap on a fez, and button up a jacket. The fake killer was then Prince Alus Tigami, self-introduced acquaintance of Amos Caruthers. Everything set, planned, foolproof. Indang had cunning.

And in this last fight he had shown his character. Let the crew do the battling. Let the wounded Jan Towry contest Phil with a rifle. He, Indang the fox, merely waited in the companionway until Gorman's gun was empty. He played safe, sure, a winning hand. Now, with a cargo of rifles, he was in truth lord of Sibuguey. Brave when need be, crafty, cruel, unscrupulous. Too much for the Constabulary?

"And now," said Indang at last in his carefully spoken but blurred English, "you may get hold of the wheel and steer the sloop back up the river. The motor runs well, is it not?"

Anger rose to cover Phil's despair. "And suppose I don't?"

"A high-powered rifle makes quite a hole at close range. You ought to know, Lieutenant. They say one can feel the bones crunch as it goes through. Of course, it is your choice, *Señor*."

Though his words were calm, the blank cold cruelty of the Orient, its manifest indifference to human life, lay over Indang's stolid face. He would not hesitate to pull the trigger.

"You have the nine lives of a cat, Lieutenant. I congratulate you. This time I get you. You would not expect me to miss at six feet."

Hope dropped to zero for Phil Gorman. Indang had him. After all this wild chase, to end with a gaping hole in the chest. Had he been a crazy fool to think he could take Indang? Maybe it was a job for the Regulars.

The sloop had chugged by the headland and out into the mouth of the inlet where Phil had come ashore. He remembered. The reef! One last ace in the hole. Play the break, play it.

"All right, Indang."

PHIL grasped the wheel and swung hard to nose the sloop landward; then reversed to bring the vessel circling in a broad curve. How big was the hidden reef? He didn't know. His orientation might be faulty. It ought to be due north from the headland, four hundred, five hundred yards.

Gorman continued to bring the sloop around. The motor, unattended, continued to throb below deck. Indang came up the remaining steps of the companionway and now leaned indolently against the cabin structure. But never did the black eye of the rifle waver from Phil's chest.

Around farther, farther. The blue waters of the inlet slipped below the keel. Farther. In a few moments

they would be into the open sea again. Missed? Where was that reef?

Something picked the sloop up by the bow as if it had hit a greased incline. There was a crunch and shock and grind. The propeller continued to churn. The full momentum of the craft carried it ripping onward, tightly upon the reef.

AT the first shock Phil dropped to the poop deck. Indang's finger had convulsively tightened on the trigger. The bullet tore through a spoke of the wheel and went onward, to be lost in the blue expanse.

Gorman was on the insolent, brown devil before he could jerk back the bolt.

With cold steel Indang might be a master, but man to man he could not meet the fury of Phil Gorman. The lieutenant tore the rifle from his grasp, hurled it down. Phil had the fox where he wanted him. Jammed against the low cabins, Indang could not retreat. Gorman's hard fists crashed into him, again and yet again.

"You stopped me with your jiu-jitsu once, you brown devil, but you don't do it again. Fox, eh? But no wolf;"

But Indang, the *magahat*, was not to go down at once before the battery of rights and lefts. He could not match and return the blows of the fighting American, but he was an eel at getting away. He squirmed from his cornered position against the cabins. Phil's last driving blow glanced from the close-cropped skull.

Indang leaped for the rail.

Gorman was in no position to strike, but he moved quicker than a flash in a wrestler's trick. His legs slipped across the deck, and his body went flat down. But the out-thrust feet shot past the other's calf, caught and twisted. Indang, tripped

unexpectedly, was thrown face downward on the deck, his hands just missing the rail.

Gorman's hold doubled the Moro's leg up and backward, exerting a torturing pressure on the foot and ankle. It was Gorman's trick drop-toe-hold—and a finisher. Few wrestlers had ever got away from it before the galling pain compelled them to pat the mat.

"Try to get away, eh? You don't get away. Not this time. You're going back to Zamboanga if I have to break your legs and carry you!"

Indang's face was contorted with pain. Here was a type of fighting he did not understand. Face down on the deck, he could not reach with his hands the taunting American.

"I give up. I am lost. *Allah poonia krajah*, it is the will of God."

Let him up? Not yet. Phil had faced too much to get his hands on him; he would not let him go.

Gorman squirmed across the deck, dragging the brown man with him, never for a moment releasing his leg hold. He reached what he wanted—a bit of rope. In a minute's time he had the Moro bound.

PHIL, now on his feet, stared down at his captive. Nobody could get him but the Regulars, eh?

The motor had choked, gone dead. The sloop settled slightly to one side. Gorman grabbed up the rifle and ran forward. Towry lay against the mast, alive but unconscious, his wounds making a small pool of blood on the deck. Phil carefully eased the old man over. In the repose of unconsciousness, the rascally sloop owner appeared a different person, the acquired viciousness of his face fading into the bloodless gray of an old man, ill and in pain.

Gorman straightened the bent limbs that had crumpled under Towry as he fell and made him a rough pil-

low out of some pieces of jute and cordage.

The sloop master opened his eyes, blinking uncertainly. "Jim," he murmured.

Who was the one he called? Gorman did not know. Son, brother, friend that in his half delirious state he remembered and wanted? Phil could not help feeling compassion for him, rascal though he was, old and wounded, and now a prisoner who must answer for his crime.

"Take it easy, old-timer. There, that feel better?"

THE faded blue eyes opened again, clearer. Blood flushed back to the face to dye the ashen lips. Anger and chagrin drew the mouth lines down. "Oh, it's you, huh? Where's that Balatgas Indang?"

"So his name was Balatgas, too, eh? He's taken care of, Towry. That fellow had more names than a Mexican bigamist. But he'll have one more. It'll be written in numbers and he'll wear it on the back of his shirt—in Bilibid Prison."

Towry grew stronger, his irascible nature asserting itself. "How the hell you got here's more than I can say! That damn Indang musta croaked somebody else. If he did, I had nothin' to do with it. You can't hold that against me, Gorman."

"No? I figure there'll be charges enough. Gun-running is a pretty serious offense."

"Yeh, I took that risk an' lost. I'll give yuh credit for bein' a scrapper, Gorman. No other hombre in Mindanao could'a stopped us, an', damn my luck, I had to run against you. Yeh, you win. I ain't got nothin' more to say."

Phil peered down into the hold. No one was there. Two brown sailors and one of Pinon's men lay in the starboard scuppers, motionless.

The lieutenant dropped into the

hold and ran back along the passage-way to the engine room. If there were any of the crew left, he must get them now. The reeking little motor room was empty. Phil came up the aft companionway, knowing that he had full possession of the stranded sloop.

Indang was not where he had left him. Squirming and rolling he had traversed a quarter of the deck, trying to get to a knife that had fallen from the hand of the dead sailor.

"Oh, ho, still up to your tricks, eh, fox? I'll tie you to the mainmast with a rope around your neck. That's the way we tie up foxes."

Indang's lips curled in anger. Unlike Jan Towry, he gave no credit to his captor. The same stinging, condemning imprecation that he had hurled at Phil across the water at Zamboanga hissed from his mouth. Phil's leg twitched to kick the cursing lips; but his anger faded into disgust, almost pity.

"You were born too late, Indang. As a Sulu pirate you'd have been a whiz, but those days are over. Get that through your head."

WITHOUT malice Gorman picked up the cursing and beaten chief-tain, tethered him securely in the shade of the cabins, and went to work. There was much to be done. One brown sailor was dead, but the other sailor and Pinon's man were still breathing. With material he found in the cabins, Phil went about giving them and Jan Towry first aid.

An hour before sundown, the sharp putt of the Constabulary launch sounded across Sibuguey Bay. Phil watched the little boat grow from a smudge on the horizon to its full proportions. But it was the sight of a figure standing in the bow, a figure not dressed in the red-piped khaki of the Constabulary, that drew his attention.

Tom Ormsby!

The florid old-timer, his face redder still from his trip across the glinting sea water, wore the scowl that characterized him. "So here yuh are, Gorman? We been huntin' all over hell and Zamboanga for you."

"Yeah? Well, you ought to have known where to come. I told you I was coming to Sibuguey."

Lieutenant Alvarez, his smooth, intelligent face shining at sight of his chief, drew sharply to attention and saluted. Phil gave some quick orders. Sergeant Malabana and half a dozen riflemen clambered aboard. Tom Ormsby, puffing, swung himself over the rail.

"I never expected to see you here," said Phil.

"Thunder and mud, when you absolutely disappear, what you expect a fella to do? Twiddle his thumbs? I camped on your sergeant's trail until he had the whole company out huntin' for you. But that Alvarez, he said your orders were for him to come to Sibuguey, and, by thunder, he come to Sibuguey. I made him fetch me. Say, this is old Jan Towry's sloop. What's it doin' here? What's it all about?"

Phil felt a glow of satisfaction. Rough, tough old Tom Ormsby, who never did anything but quarrel with Gorman, had tried to turn the province inside out when Phil had disappeared. It was good to have friends.

"Come here, you old leather-liver, I want to show you something."

ORMSBY'S mouth dropped open at the sight of Indang. "That's that there Prince Tigami!"

"Also better known as Datu Indang. The hold is full of rifles that he and Towry were smuggling in. He was the same fellow that played *juramentado* and tried to croak me. I got on the trail; there he is and down below are the rifles. That's the story in a nutshell, Tom."

Ormsby was beyond words; he could only stare in disbelief. Phil had a strong impulse to say, "Better send for the Regulars," but he restrained himself. Instead he said, "Figure I'll be pretty thirsty when we get back to Zamboanga, Tom."

The old-timer turned and, for the first time in his acquaintance with Gorman, he grinned in generous agreement.

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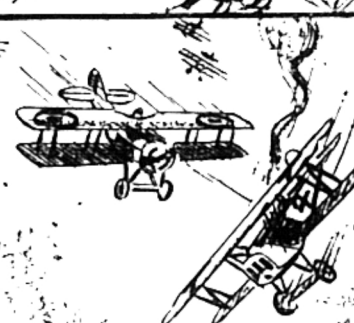
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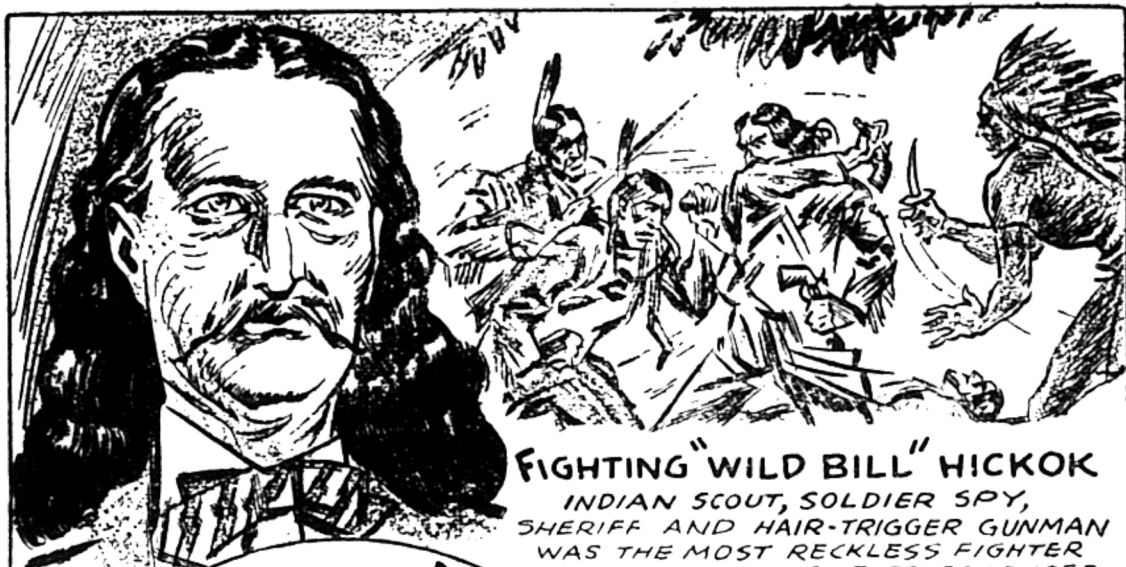


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FAMED ACE OF THE CIGOGNES ESCADRILLE, WHOSE RECORD IN LESS THAN A YEAR AT THE WESTERN FRONT HAS BECOME ONE OF THE EPIC TALES OF THE WORLD WAR, WON 24 AIR VICTORIES AND EVERY MEDAL THAT FRANCE COULD GIVE — THE LEGION OF HONOR, MILITARY MEDAL, AND THE CROIX DE GUERRE WITH 9 PALMS. HE WAS CALLED "DORME THE IMPENETRABLE". HIS ADROIT MANEUVERING AGAINST ENEMY PLANES ALWAYS KEPT HIM OUT OF THE RANGE OF THEIR GUNS. AT THE CONCLUSION OF HIS 10TH VICTORY HE HAD ONLY TWO BULLET HOLES IN HIS PLANE.

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FIGHTING "WILD BILL" HICKOK

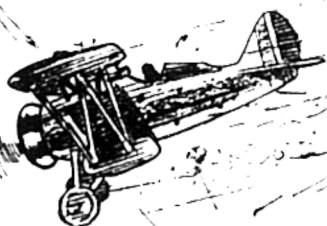
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Heroism in Raider-
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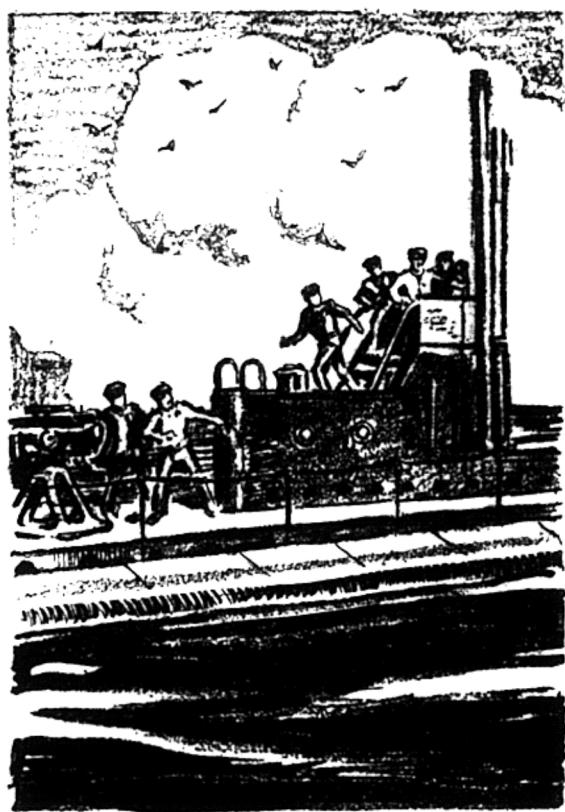
Author of "Ghosts of the Mighty," etc.

OUTWARD bound at sunset on a blazing August day, the *Stormy Petrel* dipped her rusty bows deep into the heavy ground swells rolling in past the ancient Spanish fort of Point Loma.

The vessel's clearance papers named her first port of call as Socorro. This unfrequented and wave-lashed island lay a thousand miles south of San Diego, off the barren west coast of Old Mexico.

It was 1918. The whole world was plunged in war. An hour previous to their sailing, the little Mexican steamer *Benito Juarez* had put into port, with mysterious tales of finding ships' wreckage along the waters outlying the Gulf of California, on the route charted by the outgoing *Petrel*.

It was strange, this blockade to the south of San Diego. Weeks would pass while ships would slip



With gleaming, fiery eyes Norton

through unmolested. Then suddenly an unseen death would strike from out those heaving, untenanted waters.

A sinister silence enveloped the ship. The air seemed charged with uncanny, stark horror. Every man aboard was asking himself one question. Would the *Stormy Petrel* be able to run the blockade? Or would she, too, be doomed to an oozy grave, along with the others disappearing under those azure tropical waves?

To Lieutenant Norton there struck an additional peril, baffling his every reasoning. This was the presence aboard, as cargo, of five hundred steel drums of high explosive gunpowder. Each drum was labeled:

"To Socorro Island Silver Mining Concession, Socorro Island, Mexico."

The gunpowder was not the usual blasting type of powder, heavy and black.

In peace time this might not have been cause for attention. But Nor-



swept that deadly fire down the surfaces of the "U-40"

ton was a Navy man; he thought in terms of war and intrigue. Further, this amount of gunpowder was enough to blow the island out of the sea. What significance lay in their strange cargo?

Did "Wolf" Jackson, the *Petrel's* owner and captain, have any hand in this mysterious cargo? Norton stared at their one bow gun, jutting like a gaunt, lone finger of prophecy out toward the southern horizon.

He shrugged his shoulders uncomfortably as he paced the bridge. He couldn't say why, yet he felt a creepy premonition of impending disaster. It was awaiting them, he felt, off there somewhere in the hazy distance.

Although Norton was serving on the *Petrel* as navigating officer, or second mate, he was attached to the ship through the Navy Department. His official duty was in a naval capacity, in charge of their navy crew and bow gun.

For a moment his thoughts drifted

back to his recent days in the submarine service, from which he had just been relieved. As much as he had disliked underseas service, he believed that here he had found another branch of sea duty boding even greater danger.

On the opposite end of the bridge, Wolf Jackson paced the wing. He flung a bronzed hand toward starboard, saying:

"We'll take our 'departure' from that sea buoy, Norton. Git a bearin' of it."

"Right."

NORTON uncovered the pelorus which he had brought aboard as part of his own navigating equipment. As the buoy came abeam he noted the time with his watch. He saw the skipper watching scornfully while he maneuvered his efficient instrument. Then he walked into the chart room to record his findings in the ship's log book.

"Will you 'stream' the log here,

Captain?" asked Norton from the chart room windows.

The skipper flung his navigating officer a scaring stare.

"Huh? Log? *Me* use a log? Lissen, I got no time fer them Navy jee-jaws. I kin tell right t' th' knot—without any jee-jaws—what ole *Petrel's* a-doin'! One squirt o' to-bacca juice oversides an' watchin' it drift aft is all Wolf Jackson needs. Log, huh!" he grunted spitefully. "Navy styles, thet's all 'tis."

Norton ground his teeth.

"Well, what do you allow her, then, for speed?"

"Nine knots, a little more or less, grantin' 'er th' set o' th' sea, currents, an' a little leeway."

Norton made out his position data. Being shipmates with this erratic old walrus, he could see, was to be no picnic. Still, one had to make allowances for these veteran sea dogs. It was the likes of this grizzled skipper that had placed the Stars and Stripes over the seven seas.

HE was the last of the old, old school of grizzled tramp skippers owning his vagabond ship. His attitude, though, to Navy men and Navy efficiency, Norton recognized, was most unfavorable. This would not lend itself for co-operation.

Walking out on deck, Norton tossed the strap of his high-powered Navy binoculars over his neck. Then he swept the distant horizons for any signs of unusual vessels. Wolf Jackson eyed him evilly, glaring at the trim glasses. As if in silent contempt he spat viciously into the scuppers with splashing brown tobacco mist.

Beside the skipper, Norton quietly asked:

"Captain, what sort of a place is this Socorro Island? I suppose you've been there. And what about

this silver mine where our cargo is consigned?"

Wolf gave his navigating officer a sardonic glare.

"Huh! Sure I bin there. Socorro, w-aal, she's jes' a little good-fer-nothin' sandpit belongin' t' Ole Mexico. A little cactus, a little pearl shell, a few buckets o' brackish water, an' a lot o' rattle-brained yarns spun about 'er havin' buried treasure. No good fer nothin'. Kin lie-to behind 'er in a sou'easter, an' that's 'bout all.

"As fer thet silver mine, huh!" he grunted derisively. "I ain't never seen ner heard o' no silver ever bein' brought out o' Socorro. Maybe thar ain't no mine."

"HAVEN'T you thought it strange," asked Norton, "to be carrying five hundred drums of high explosives to a small island like Socorro—in times of war?"

The old skipper ran his thorny hands over his chin bristles oddly.

"Lissen, Mister Navy Man, when Wolf Jackson gits cargo, he never has 'thoughts.' Cargo means money. I gotta have cargo; it means coal, an' thet means more knots down th' ole lanes fer my *Petrel*."

"I see," acknowledged Norton passively. "But after all, Captain, you wouldn't want to be carrying gunpowder to the Germans, helping the enemy to win the war against your own kin, would you?"

Wolf Jackson spat into the white seas churning beneath his bridge wing. He chewed his wad with hard, irate rollings.

"W-aal, no. Damn-me, I wouldn't thet. Not t' help thim Huns. But we got th' cargo now, ain't we? What kin we do about it now? Huh?"

"We'll see," parried the Navy man.

"Humph! Ha-ha!" laughed Wolf

raucously. "You Navy fellas sure do have high'n mighty ideas!"

Apparently disgusted with the companionship his bridge afforded, the skipper shuffled down the companion-ladder to his rooms. Overhead the purpling skies became shattered with a wild disarray of silver, as tropical night settled down.

Norton was left alone with his thoughts. Wolf's statement that there might not even be a silver mine on Socorro burned into his baffled mind.

From below, in the engine room, there came the maudlin wheezings and wailings of the *Petrel's* pistons and bearings. The ship screeched complainingly toward the "little sandpit" a thousand miles down the lonely Mexican coast. As he paced the bridge through the quiet night, Norton foresaw strange perils ahead.

II

EIGHT bells struck on the midnight watch four nights later, arousing Norton from his slumbers. It was his bridge watch. The night was hot! He rubbed his eyes, sticky and smarting, and wiped the sweat from his forehead. The dull thrum of the sea boomed a monotonous rhythm against the side of the ship—a beam wind and sea, he reflected.

Rising to a sitting posture, he closed his single port and made sure that the black cardboard which concealed every chink of light from within was tightly in place. Then he dropped his legs over the edge of his bunk and, with a sigh, kicked the alleyway door closed.

Cupping his hands over a match, he lighted a tiny ship's "baby lamp" using oil.

He had given orders that no lights be shown from any part of the ship. He didn't want Hun raiders, or subs,

tracking them down in these lonely waters.

The faint glow from the baby lamp cast a sickly pallor over his room. The cabin Norton had come to term his "rat hole," because of its cramped interior. Even in submarine service, he recalled, he had seen better.

Climbing over two Lewis machine-guns, ammunition drums and a pile of .45 pistols and clips which he had brought with him, he hurried into his clothes. He blew out the lamp and stepped out on deck. A warm but fresh southerly breeze fanned his cheeks.

Walking up the boat deck toward the bridge, he passed the captain's quarters. He was amazed to find the door wide open, and the skipper's full-power electric light burning in complete abandon.

A surge of anger leaped into Norton's blood. He stared into the spacious cabin. Wolf was lying comfortably on his back, reading a magazine.

"You know it isn't safe—burning that light, Captain!" Norton blazed. "You read the orders suggested by the Navy Department. Up here, high on the boat deck, your light is like a beacon to the wide seas!"

"Humph!" snorted Wolf angrily. But he snapped off the light.

Norton hurried on up the bridge ladder. The incident worried him. It meant that one could never depend on having the ship in complete blackness. And showing lights was seeking trouble in raider-infested waters.

ALMOST behind him the radio operator followed as Norton was relieving the third mate. The lieutenant stared at the man apprehensively.

"I just picked up loud radio signals ahead," stated the operator. His

face was white. "It's government code—foreign. Resembles German. Sounds straight ahead. I—"

"You haven't used your set, have you? You didn't answer him?" demanded Norton breathlessly.

"No, sir!"

"Very well! Don't. Keep absolute silence. Try to take down anything you can make sense of."

"Yes, sir."

THE operator dropped down the ladder and was swallowed in the darkness. The blood thumped at Norton's temples. A dull anxiety burned through his being. He drew a small metal whistle from his pocket and blew a sharp blast on it. Shortly, in answer, one of his gunners came clattering up the bridge ladder.

"Bates!" ordered Norton. "Get Walker and Perry up. Get ammunition on deck. Uncover the gun. Have everything clear for action forward!"

"Yes, sir!"

For the next hour Norton searched the starry horizons with his night binoculars, searched them until his eyes were blurred and aching. A low, blue haze, particularly common to those Baja California waters, made visibility poor, although overhead the stars shone out like polished crystals.

He was about to forsake his vigilant watchfulness when he suddenly caught sight of a darker patch of haze in the distances beyond the starboard bow. He screwed down his binoculars viciously and stared again.

Was he dreaming? One's eyes saw strange things after a while through strain, when actually there was nothing.

Yes— He continued to gaze at that mysterious patch of lumping haze. There was no mistaking it!

A ship was looming through the night. Not a light showed from her decks!

It was a sinister sight. Norton could feel the blood booming against his head. A raider? She was almost dead ahead on their course. To the quartermaster he called:

"Port the helm! Two points!"

He would try to run a bit wide of her. He wondered whether she had sighted them through the use of hydrophones and was, perhaps, bearing down on them at that moment. Or perhaps she had not sighted them at all.

She was coming up rapidly. There came a shower of sparks from her funnels; he could see them now, two of them. She was cleaning her fires, possibly getting everything set for a chase if it should become necessary. He must call the captain.

AS he turned from the bridge and stared below, his heart missed a beat. Again a regular flood of light poured from the captain's cabin! His light must have been a complete revelation of their presence in those waters!

Fury welled within Norton's being. With his all-absorbing interest in the shrouded ship ahead, he had utterly forgotten the danger of the captain's room.

"Captain!" he bellowed wildly, "for cripes sake, turn off that light! I think we've got a German raider ahead! And come up here on the bridge!"

A clatter of chairs and low cursings came from the skipper's cabin. The light snapped out. Once more the ship was obscured in blackness. Norton grabbed his glasses and shoved them to his eyes again. Yes! There she was! He could make her out clearly now with the glasses. Two masts! Twin funnels! She would

pass them at less than a quarter mile.

NO use trying to run! She was cutting across their course. To Norton's naval experience that scene boded trouble—perhaps death to all.

The stranger was lying-to, there on the ocean crossroads, for no good; not at anchor, but not under power. Like a tiger at a jungle crosstrails she waited, ready to spring upon her prey.

He recalled the German raiders that had been cruising in those waters in the past: the *Leipzig*, and her black mates, the *Nurnberg*, *Dresden* and *Bremen*. Naturally Germany, by now, must have other raiders in those waters to replace the ones destroyed.

Heavy footfalls sounded behind him; it was the skipper.

"Where's that ship, Norton? I don't see no ship!"

"Over there to starboard. She's almost abeam now!"

"Huh?"

Wolf stared. His body stiffened. He leaned forward tensely. His neck muscles stood out.

"Sufferin' swordfish! There is somethin' thar! I kin see it now!"

Flash! Blinding light! A searchlight beam stabbed the night.

The *Petrel's* bridge, and the decks below them were flooded with white, blazoning light. Norton, his leg muscles tense with the strain, scarcely breathing, stared through his binoculars toward the mysterious ship.

He could see her forward deck under the flare of her searchlight. Two cannons jutted over her white decks. Other smaller cannon, on either side of the fore deck, were reflected through the lights and shadows. The muzzles of the two were swinging toward the *Petrel*. A small group of men stood behind each one!

Norton groaned. Cold sweat stood out over his body. They were in for it! There was practically no use to man the one small gun they possessed, although his crew was standing by. They would be literally blown from the sea by a man-of-war of that size and power.

Seconds dragged by like hours. The searchlight raked them from stem to stern. Then, as mysteriously, it flicked off.

Darkness, even blacker than before!

"It looks bad!" breathed Norton hoarsely. "Bad!"

FROM the slanting cant of her masts and the general silhouette of her hull, he recognized that the stranger was no American man-of-war. Vaguely, Norton felt Wolf take his glasses from him and stare off into the black-and-purple haze of the night.

"Looks like a gunboat—a small one!" commented Wolf.

"They'll probably sink us," answered Norton bitterly. "They could, easily enough. Why in *hell* did you have that light burning?"

"Dunno! Never bin used t' readin' in th' dark!" the captain replied testily.

The seconds dragged into minutes. Norton continued to search the waters. Again he clamped his glasses to his eyes, riveted them there. A smaller shadow at the stern of the strange ship? It appeared so!

He remembered how the giant U-boats frequently lay in hiding astern of the raiders, waiting to dart out with their deadly torpedoes. He knew, because he had been at the periscopes of submarines himself, and used their selfsame tactics. Was a U-boat perhaps at that very moment directing a torpedo straight for their slow-moving hull?

The harrowing shadows of the

night slowly dropped astern. In those few minutes Norton felt that ten years had been added to his life.

But what had happened? Had the U-boat fired a torpedo at them, and missed? Why had they escaped? It was uncanny. It was a mystery. That submarine-appearing shadow, had it been a submarine? That was mystery crowded onto mystery.

Norton drew out his pocket whistle and sounded two sharp blasts through the night. To the skipper he commented:

"Perhaps now, Captain, you can see better what I meant by a mysterious blockade!"

"W-aal," admitted Wolf grudgingly, "it was plumb queer about that ship, all right!"

The bared head of the radio operator pushed up the starboard bridge ladder.

"Yes, sir!"

"Did you get any messages, Sparks?" asked Norton anxiously.

"No, sir! Not a thing. All foreign code, sir."

"Very well. Take this message! Code book C-2."

"Yes, sir."

"Naval Headquarters,
San Diego.

Position thirty-two miles north-northeast Socorro Island. Passed mysterious ship hove-to, without lights. Appeared to be German raider, but no shots fired.

Norton,
Petrel."

Tapping his fingers on the bridge rail for a moment he hesitated thoughtfully.

"That's all. Send it right off!"

"Yes, sir."

III

DAWN showed a purple blotch jutting through a blood-red horizon — the blunt form of Socorro Island.

Gaunt and rocky, the surf-fringed island rose several hundred feet from out the glassy tropical seas.

After two hours' sleep Norton had resumed his vigilance on the bridge, allowing the first mate to attend his deck duties. Constantly scanning the seas with his glasses, the lieutenant's gaze was arrested now by a new and gripping sight. This time it was a small, white speck rising and falling on the long Pacific swell. He fixed his glasses on it excitedly.

An open lifeboat!

He scanned the seas around it. Wreckage was strewn everywhere.

THE captain had been taking a cat-nap on the settee in the chart room. He leaped up at Norton's yell.

"Hey! Huh?"

"There's an open lifeboat floating in the east'ard, Skipper. Want to run over and pick it up? There may be some one in it, you know."

Wolf ambled out on deck in his slippers, rubbing his eyes, and grumbling.

"Let me see them glasses, Norton."

"You mean mine—these 'navy style' ones?"

"Yeah! They'll do, *this* time!"

Norton passed them over, a dour grimace wreathing his face.

"Thar's a boat, 'll right!" grunted the skipper. "Uh-huh, we'll run over. Wolf Jackson ain't never yit denied aid to sufferin' sailorfolk!"

Turning to his helmsman, Norton called out the compass course:

"East, a quarter south!"

In a few moments the *Petrel* was riding down on the large open lifeboat. Everywhere in the water was wreckage; stateroom doors, spars, bits of chairs, tables and crates. Half a dozen dead bodies floated gruesomely on the surface.

"There's been a torpedoing here,"

said Norton, "or a shelling—or both!"

They came alongside the lifeboat. On its bow was the name:

"EATON CASTLE"

To his mate the skipper bawled: "Mr. Henderson, git our stern boat overside! We want t' have a look at that lifeboat!"

"Yes, sir!"

Dropping down on deck, Norton hurried aft and into their stern boat. In a few moments they had pulled alongside the floating wreckage. Norton stared into the open boat.

Six men lay huddled in various poses of death on its floor gratings. Seats were splintered. A large chunk of the bow had been torn away. Parts of mangled bodies lay strewn across the ends of the boat. One pitiful figure, his back and shoulders ridged with sun blisters, appeared still to have life within him.

Norton leaped into the boat. Stepping down beside the half-prostrate figure, he lifted the head. The eyes rolled around piteously. Blood spurted from the mouth. The man made a weak effort to clutch his side.

NORTON looked; a puffed, green-and-black cavity gored his left side under the armpit. He steadied the half-dead sailor a moment. The figure coughed blood.

"What happened?" demanded Norton anxiously. "Tell me! What happened?"

"U-ugh! G-g-er-m-an. Ug-hh. Eng-l-ish—"

"Yes, yes!" encouraged Norton. "Tell me! Hurry!"

He eased the head falling low onto the chest.

"Eng-l-ish-h! G-ger-man r-er-aid-er. S-s-s-sub-mm-ar-i-ne. Sh-sh-ell—th' p-pp-ain—Oh-h—" With a dull

gasp the stark figure crumpled over the lifeboat's thwart, fell forward toward the floor gratings.

Norton caught the body, let it down gently. A pool of blood gushed out into the bright sun from the stricken sailor's lips. Norton bent over him and listened to his heart. He straightened slowly.

"He's done!" he said to the mate. "The last to go!"

"English sailors," affirmed the mate. "Their ship must have been torpedoed, eh?"

"Yes," answered Norton. "And then the savages shelled the open boat!"

"Looks that way."

THERE was nothing to be gained by taking the dead bodies along. With heavy hearts the men rowed back to their ship.

The *Stormy Petrel* turned toward the harbor of Socorro Island. In a few minutes the anchor was rattling through the hawse-pipe, down into the blue waters of "Blackbeard's Cove." Inshore, a group of snow-white tents, obviously new, revealed a temporary camp.

A motor launch towing a lighter put off from the rocky ledge of the bay and started for the *Petrel*. The exhaust of the little launch echoed noisily against the barren walls of the landlocked cove. It resounded like the explosions of a one-pounder, so quiet and secluded was that lonely island.

A tall, half-breed Mexican swung up the gangway from the launch, his workmen following him.

"Halo, Capitán Jackson! You have thee gun-powdair, no?" he inquired. His tones were hoarse. His lips twitched nervously.

Norton studied the fellow's face. There was marked anxiety in his eyes.

"Yes," answered Wolf. "It's all

for'd in one and two hatches. Will yore winchmen handle it?"

"Si, Capitán!"

In a few minutes the hatch tarpaulins had been rolled back. The *Petrel's* winches swung the barreled gunpowder over the rusty sides and onto the big steel barge alongside. It was hazardous work, with the barge rolling and banging against the side of the ship from the heavy swell rolling in from seaward.

The best part of the morning was consumed in discharging the powder. They were on their last few drums, handling the work impatiently and roughly, when one of the winchmen dropped a drum exceedingly hard onto the barge.

"Hey!" bawled Norton viciously. "Go easy with that! If you don't know it—that's gunpowder! We don't want to go to kingdom come—even if you do!"

"Don't you wor-r-ee!" grinned the Mexican winchman, with an insulting leer. "Verr-ee soon thee *Americanos* worr-ee no more!"

"Eh? What do you mean, you beach rat!" barked Norton angrily.

"You see—soon! Plent-ee soon! *Ave María!*" The half-breed crossed himself mockingly.

"Yes?" flared Norton. "You seem to know a lot about it!"

"*Quien sabe!*" muttered the breed. His eyes were fiery, vengeful.

"For two centavos Mex," spat Norton, "I'd break your scrawny neck!"

THE Mexican shrugged his shoulders, but a paleness crept into his cheeks. There was something in the *Americano's* voice that warned him to hold his tongue.

As the last load of gunpowder pushed off from the *Petrel's* side, Norton studied the beach. There weren't more than a dozen men in all, at the desolate camp. The

thought of that meager band of cut-throats operating a silver mine was ludicrous, preposterous.

For whom was that cargo finally destined?

Her engines once more groaning and wheezing, the *Petrel* cut a white circling wake through Blackbeard's Cove and put out to sea. A fresh breeze blew from out the west. It was a gorgeous noonday. The water was a deep blue, and as Norton took several deep draughts of the invigorating air, he was glad to be clear of that darksome island cove. It was queer, though, about that gunpowder.

PLAYING his glasses over the hills of the island, his vision was suddenly held by one narrow and secluded valley. Two thin poles poked their lean lengths skyward. A white object moved before a pair of small shacks.

He stared. A radio station! He could see the white-shirted individual watching him with his glasses now; then he disappeared into the realms of his signal shack. Norton's blood was thumping through his heart. A strange apprehension gripped him. To Wolf Jackson he snapped:

"Has that radio shack on the hill always been there?"

"Huh? Radio? What radio shack?"

Norton pointed out the signal base. Wolf followed the direction through the binoculars, his legs spread far apart on the bridge to meet the swaying of his ship. For several moments he studied the wireless houses.

"I ain't never seen *that* before!" he exclaimed. "'Course, I never paid Socorro none too much attention. Jest the same I'm tolerable sure that them buildin's wasn't thar last viy-age."

Norton clenched his teeth.

"That's a dark discovery, Skipper."

His eyes drew down to narrowed thoughtfulness. "Did you hear what that breed said back there about 'soon you worry no more?'"

"**A**YE, I heard. But these damned half-breeds is always makin' signs, tellin' portents, an' givin' threats."

"I'd like to put a shell ashore there," murmured Norton, "and riddle that damned radio station. There's not a doubt in my mind but that it's being worked hand in hand with the German raiders operating in these waters."

Wolf's face paled.

"Yuh couldn't do that! Socorro belongs t' Mexico. That would be a-makin' war on a neutral country!"

"True!" answered Norton. "But either the Mexican government doesn't know what's happening on these desolate islands of hers, or else she isn't so 'neutral' as we give her credit for being!"

"Aye! Maybe, Mister Navy Man, but it ain't up t' us t' worry 'bout governmentints. As fer me, I got plenty worries a'runnin' th' old *Petrel*!"

Norton, however, scarcely heard. He was thinking of the black shadows which had loomed through the murky haze the previous night—and that radio station.

Was that white-shirted operator on the hill, even at that moment, notifying the raider of their position and course? Could that gunpowder be for the raider?

A sheet of spray swept across the bridge and showered off behind him in iridescent crystals. As if to find the answer to his churning thoughts, Norton stared ahead across the lifting seas.

The blood seemed to freeze in his veins.

"Skipper!" There was icy brittleness in his tone.

"Huh?"

"Look!"

Norton pointed over the port wing of the bridge. On the same instant he drew out his pocket whistle and blew a shrill blast.

Wolf Jackson took a sharp intake of breath.

"Sufferin' swordfish! What is it, Norton?"

"A German sub!"

The long projection of a submarine's periscope was rushing to the surface, a ribbon-like white wake trailing off behind it. Then came the gray-black conning tower with the letters, "*U-40*." She was not more than a thousand yards distant.

In answer to Norton's whistle his three gunners sprang to life on the fore deck, from out their quarters.

"Man that gun! Ammunition up! Quick!" barked Norton. He flung to Wolf Jackson: "Keep her swinging on a zigzag course, Skipper! Try to hold your stern or bow toward the sub, to protect your broadside. I'm going forward to man the gun!"

IV

FROM the *Petrel's* bow, a high explosive shell slapped home in the breech of her long-range gun. Norton shouted out his range, gave the order to fire. The *Petrel's* naval gun spurted lurid flame.

Simultaneously, the dark form of the sub's back, a gun jutting from her forward deck, raised from out the depths of the sea. Her conning tower cover was hurled back. Sailors poured from her interior like wasps from a disturbed nest.

Norton followed the *Petrel's* shot with his eyes. A wild cataract of water leaped skyward just ahead of the sub's gray nose. Black smoke poured from out the *Petrel's* rusty funnel. The old packet fairly jumped under her strain of forced

speed commanded by Wolf Jackson. Her decks throbbed. She was zig-zagging in lively style.

Norton judged his shortness of range.

"Shorten fire, three yards! Left! Five degrees! Fire!"

Another blast from the *Petrel's* gun. Vaguely, in his mind, Norton saw it all now! The raider had let them slip through the blockade with that gunpowder in order to get it landed on Socorro! It was for their own use!

That radio base, then, had signaled their course to the sub! It had all been a ruse! They had been marked with the death sign since the raider had sighted them—probably from the moment they had sailed from San Diego.

The injustice of it all, a man-of-war attacking a practically defenseless merchant ship, sent the fires of hatred leaping through Norton's blood.

Bel-ast! Lurid flame seared overhead. *Clatter!*

A SHELL from the U-boat had exploded just above their smoke-stack. The *Petrel's* topmast and radio aerial came crashing to the deck.

Norton cursed. With his fingers as tense as steel calipers he whirled the bronze sighting reel. A little more elevation—she was dipping into a hollow. Over a bit on the tangent sight. The breech block slammed home.

"Fire!"

The gun spat her death flame with a recoiling rumble. The *Petrel* lurched forward on a heavy swell. Norton's eyes darted up and off toward the sub anxiously. The dark shadow of the shell seemed to fairly graze the turtle-backed deck of the U-boat. A human form hurtled off into space. With a terrific torrent of water the shell exploded not a

dozen feet away, on the opposite side of the hull.

Wher-am! Crash!

A BLAST of flame leaped blindly before their startled eyes. Explosive white heat smote Norton's cheeks. Something clipped into his right knee, hot and slicing. He groaned with the pain. One of his men was thrown to his face on the sun deck; he staggered a moment, then swayed to his feet. Norton stared. A chunk of the *Petrel's* stem had been blown away!

"Close!" shouted Norton. "They're getting our range. Hurry, for cripe's sake! Another!"

In a circle of tumbling foam, the U-boat was swinging her nose toward the *Petrel*. Norton gasped. She was getting ready to let go a torpedo at them! The *Petrel* was zig-zagging desperately. Another detonating *crash!* A ton of water ripped skyward up the side of the *Petrel*. In falling spray and solid water, the forecastle-head was drenched. The men were nearly swept from its slippery surface.

"That was a hit—at our waterline!" croaked Bates.

"Never mind!" barked Norton savagely. "Another shell!"

Fighting for his foothold he struggled with his sighting apparatus. He could feel warm blood trickling down his knee. Walker passed up the shell. Perry slapped it home. Bates swung the breech to, and with his hand on the firing pin lanyard, waited the signal. Norton spun his sighting reel.

"Fire!"

Cer-ash! The gun barked, recoiled. Simultaneously a heavy shell struck the muzzle of their gun, ripped it to a splintered thing with twisted lips. Water sloshed over Norton's feet.

Not half a dozen feet away he

could see the frothing white wake of a torpedo racing toward them. The *Petrel* was swinging! Would she clear it? Was the dread torpedo timed to explode at their bow? If so, they were already as good as in kingdom come!

Like a racing arrow the giant torpedo passed to view under their bow. Cold sweat stood out on Norton's body; the blood seemed to ooze from his forehead. He heard the rush of the sea somewhere under their bows, as it poured into their forward hold.

They were up to their knees in water. The *Petrel* was sinking fast. Norton flung frenzied eyes to starboard.

Grace be! The white wake of the torpedo was speeding off into the south! Another moment of life breath! He flung a desperate glance at their gun. It was utterly useless. His heart seemed to turn to stone within him as he realized all hope was gone.

"Come on, men!" he ordered bitterly. "We'll have to abandon her!"

AS he and his three gunners dropped down to the well-deck, which was half-filled with water, Norton saw that Walker had a dirty gash across his forehead. Blood was streaming from it. The man hesitated a moment, running his finger over the wound. His touch met something hard. He drew out a piece of steel. "Dirty cut!" he exclaimed. "It'll feel better now."

The four navy men raced for the boat deck and the lifeboats. There came five hoarse blasts from the *Petrel's* whistle, her order to abandon ship. The crew came tumbling on deck from engine room, galley and various other parts of the vessel.

Lifeboats were being swung out. Norton thought of the broken and shattered bodies of the English

sailors, shelled in their open boats. He and his men had killed at least one of the U-boat's crew. They could expect no quarter from the sub captain. The Germans would be out for blood.

"Perry! Bates!" he called sharply. "Come with me!"

Dashing up to his cabin on the boat deck, he plunged into his room. He stared over his machine-guns and fighting equipment.

"BATES! Take that Lewis gun down to the skipper's boat! You man it. Perry! Grab up those extra .45's! Distribute them among the officers, with ammunition; keep one for yourself and Walker. Get all the Lewis drums you can tote! Quick!"

"Yes, sir!"

In a few moments they were alongside their lifeboats. Norton looked for the captain; he was nowhere to be seen. He stared up at the bridge. Wolf Jackson peered down at him from his kingly domain. Norton dashed back up to the bridge, and confronted the captain.

"Hurry, Skipper! The *Petrel* may go down any minute!"

Wolf Jackson's face was hard and unremitting as he replied:

"I stay with my ship!"

"She's sinking, Captain! Don't be a damned fool! Save yourself!"

"The *Petrel* is all there is in life for me," answered Wolf doggedly. "I stay with my ship!" There was steely threat in his words.

Norton realized that seconds counted. He had to think fast. He whipped his .45 from his pocket.

"You'll come with me!" he commanded. "I'm in charge of this situation now!"

"Go ahead and shoot, Mister Navy Man!" growled Wolf Jackson fiercely. "I'll still stay with my ship!"

Reaching out he drew down on

the long white whistle cord. A throaty blast came from the whistle. It was the signal to lower away the lifeboats. From the white, drawn face of Wolf Jackson, Norton realized that the old sea dog would stand his ground. He jabbed his .45 into his holster, thrust out his palm. Wolf gripped it.

"You're brave, Skipper, but foolish!" said Norton. "Good-by!"

Seas were washing completely over the *Petrel's* forward well deck now. Norton raced down the bridge ladder and off to his boats.

"Lower away, all!" he shouted. "The skipper is staying with his ship!"

With the creaking of blocks and a hoarse medley of sea commands, the lifeboats raced down for the open sea. With splashing oars, four lifeboats pushed off from the ship's side.

NORTON and his men manned number one lifeboat, the starboard side forward. His boat lifted over the rolling seas that were battering the submerging bows of the *Petrel*. Suddenly there came a loud report just to his left. Something shrieked over his head, ominously close.

Crashing explosions! Splintering wood!

The horrible screams of wounded and dying behind him. One of their lifeboats had been blown to bits. It was incredible, it was inhuman—but it was true!

The gray and black form of the U-boat came slinking out from under the salt-caked bows of the *Stormy Petrel*. It was not a dozen feet from Norton's boat. He could see them whirling their sighting reels, could hear the voices in thick, guttural German. Oily smoke from their Diesels drifted down the seas.

Venom leaped into Norton's heart.

He plunged through his men from the stern and crashed to the bow where his Lewis gun was lodged. He grabbed it up and jabbed its stock to his shoulder.

"Row! Row!" he yelled hoarsely to his men. "We'll give 'em all we've got!"

OARS bent to the breaking point. Oarlocks creaked.

The Hun gunners tried to bring their gun to bear in range on the up-rushing boat. It was too close to the side of their own vessel! They stared wildly. Gruff German commands cut the air. The lifeboat had shot out unexpectedly from the bow of the *Petrel*.

Norton released the trigger on his Lewis gun. Rata-tac-atac-tac-taca. With gleaming, fiery eyes he swept that deadly fire down the sea-sloshing surfaces of the *U-40*. Like a stream of water from a garden hose did that livid line of lead streak across the bodies of the Hun gunners. Blue-clad sailors staggered forward, clutching their stomachs.

"Schrecklich!"

"Herr Gott!"

"Yeah!" cursed Norton viciously. "This is different, eh? You swine!" Screams of terror rose skyward from the U-boat.

Number one lifeboat ran its sharp prow up onto the curved side of the sub. Norton leaped to its deck. Two sailors behind him, .45's in their hands, followed.

From the stern of the *U-40* the Lewis gun again shrieked its death jibber. The sub's decks were leveled off men. Several bodies floated off onto the surface of the sea.

From the conning tower, the barrel of a rifle glinted suddenly. A gold-braided cap was behind its sights. Rata-taca-taca-taca. Something bored piercingly through Norton's ear. He jerked his head up

with the pain, but he had swept his outpour of lead toward the ledge of the tower.

His sight was veteran. The gold-braided cap rolled off onto the steel deck of the U-boat. A white hand clutched for the tower rail, missed, and slid lifelessly down into the control room.

Another hand shot up and across for the lid of the tower, to close it. Norton raced forward to the tower plunged the heavy muzzle of his machine-gun over its ledge.

"Not yet—you don't close that!" he flamed savagely. "Not yet!"

The heavy steel cover dropped down onto the barrel of his Lewis gun with a crash. From below there came an increased therum-therump of the U-boat's Diesels. The giant sub was forging ahead. Her nose lowered. Her decks vibrated and throbbed. She was submerging!

They would try to wash him off and into the sea, eh? To down him!

The sea water rose. He could hear the heavy thump of the Diesels stop, and the light whir-whir of the electric motors cutting in. She was preparing to dive! But her conning tower was partly open. To his two men behind him he shouted:

"Jump up onto that gun! They can't get far below the surface. Their tower is open!"

THE sub was plunging full speed ahead now. At fourteen or fifteen knots, the water whipped around Norton's body and threatened to tear him from his position. He grappled with the Lewis gun in his right hand and struggled to hold on with his left, while his legs were braced like iron rods against the conning tower bridge rail-work.

The seas beat the breath from his chest, almost the life from his body. Water rose over the top of the tower. With white, frothy bubblings

it poured down into the open tube—but for seconds only!

Norton knew they couldn't keep that up! Below, they would be drowned like rats.

His shirt was carried away, then his breeches. Only a few tatters of underwear whipped from his beaten body. He was a numbed frame of battered flesh. His right knee had certainly been sterilized with sea water, he thought vaguely, but it throbbed with a searing pain. Water drove down his throat, half choked him. He felt his senses reel.

THROUGH it all he apprehensively remembered his men back there on the slippery sub's gun, and the others in the open boats. They would be murdered like defenseless kittens in the U-boat's revengeful rifle fire! They could be sure of that!

For seconds he turned his head away; he felt his skull would be whipped from his shoulders. He was becoming giddy. He cursed like a madman. He *must* fight, he told himself, must force himself to hang on a little longer! Then he stared forward. Was it? Yes! The nose of the U-40 was lifting. The light whirring of the electrics was diminishing in rapidity.

Confusedly his ears caught the heavy therump-beroomp of the Diesels—and the sound of voices under the conning tower lid! He must shake himself from his dizzy state! He flexed his body muscles with battling senses, and backed a bit. He was washed hard against the bridge tower rail.

With the desperation of a cornered wildcat, Norton gripped his Lewis gun with trembling hands. He flung a fast look behind and a sharp chill raced through his veins. His two sailors had vanished.

A hand was slipping over the

tower ledge. The lid flipped back with an abrupt suddenness. Surely they figured him dead, or at least drowned, by now! Two automatic pistols, however, warily rose over the tower's coaming. They were right under Norton's nose! Dark hair and gray eyes came next.

Puffing and gasping for breath, Norton drove his Lewis gun down into the tower. On the second he let go with his trigger. Had the sea water clogged his gun? He waited for the worst. Rata-taca-taca-taca. More hideous screams hurtled skyward.

The U-boat rose to the surface. Something hurled shadowingly upward. *Wher-oof! Wham! Bang!* It was the dark and deathly shadow of a hand grenade! Another! One to the right, another to the left.

Norton stuck to his post like a mongoose at the hole of a cobra nest. The Huns cursed vituperously. Couldn't they shake this maniac from their tower? This lone American maniac who threatened to massacre the whole crew with his death-positive machine-gun fire? Like rats in an underseas lobster trap, they fled to the safety of their steel bulkheads below.

THERE came infuriated shouts and wild commands from under Norton. He listened with grinding teeth. A white, close-cropped Hun head appeared at the top of the conning tower. Viciously Norton bore down on his trigger.

Dull, metallic *click*. Silence! His magazine was empty! He felt his blood turn to ice. It was the end! He fought for his wits.

"Come up!" he bawled in a commanding voice. "Come up! Or I'll drill you all!"

Had the Hun heard his hammer fall on the empty chamber? Would the ruse ever work?

That white head, and below, a whiter face, continued up and over the top of the tower tube. Norton, with narrowed, beady eyes, jerked a thumb over his left shoulder.

"Out here! On deck! All of you!"

Exclamations followed. The tow-headed German was apparently ordering his mates to follow him out onto the deck. One after another, with wild, scowling faces, the Hun crew filed out onto the deck. Norton counted them. Nine, there were, in all. Only one officer. He wondered.

A STRANGE figure he made there, standing in tatters on the narrow bridge of the German U-boat. His Lewis gun before him, blood streaming from his knee, he was for the moment victorious. The Huns stared at him, awe-struck, and then toward his Lewis gun. It gaped at them ominously—with a record of appalling death behind it.

Silence now, just the lap of the sea and the hard breathing of the men before him.

"All right! Wait there!" ordered Norton tersely. "Just take it nice and easy! My lifeboats will be up in a minute!"

With low, apprehensive mutterings the men glared. What was this mad-cap American saying? Standing to one side of the conning tower, Norton kept a wary eye on its opening. Were all the men on deck? Were there only nine left? He couldn't be sure, couldn't afford to take any chances.

The lifeboats were pulling valiantly alongside now. With excited clatterings of oars the boats bumped the hull of the *U-40*. They had witnessed the miracle and were rushing to the aid of their leader. Norton shouted:

"Toss me one of those round ammunition drums! Step on it!"

One of the sailors curled a fresh drum over to Norton. It rolled across the deck to his feet. He stopped it, grabbed it up. With a flip and a deft turn, he had taken off the empty drum and lodged the full one into place. A low, astonished murmur rippled down the line of Hun sailors. The gun had been empty!

"Here, you, Perry!"

"Yes, sir!"

Perry scrambled up onto the deck of his lifeboat to his chief, .45 dangling from his right hand.

"Take this machine-gun!" ordered Norton. "Stand forward of the conning tower. Watch the opening of that tube! Don't let a single Hun get near it, and stand by for trouble from any that may come out of it! I'm going below and have a look-see. Give me that gat of yours!"

Perry passed his gun over, and manned the Lewis, backing off toward the U-boat's bow. For a dramatic second Norton stood on the small conning tower bridge and stared over his strange command.

"Now, on your toes! All of you!" he warned sharply. "When I go below, watch everything!"

HIS two gunners nodded grimly. Norton swung his bloody right leg over the conning tower tube and slipped a few rungs down the iron ladder. Jabbing his .45 under the ledge of the sea deck he let fly a single shot.

In fiery answer there came a crashing report. A piece of lead thudded sharply at his feet. He could feel the wind of the bullet as it narrowly missed his right foot.

Quickly he swung his feet up the tower again. Dropping his head, he ranged his eyes over the decks below. Then he saw them. Two big feet, standing stolidly unmoving to the port side.

There was but one course open. Norton lowered his gun under the ledge again. Another shot crashed past his hand. He fired once, twice, the shots blasting the air in rapid succession. A body lurched forward under the conning tower, in full view, writhing in death struggles. An officer!

Was it safe yet? Or, was death still lurking for him down there on those glinting steel decks?

WELL, he must take a chance! Like a lithe panther Norton dropped onto the steel floor. Crouched, .45 in hand, he swept his automatic around him desperately, fully expecting to stare into the gaping bore of a machine-gun or pistol.

No signs of life. Just a pyramided pile of human bodies at both side of the conning tower, where his own machine-gun had wrought its devastating havoc. Fully a dozen dead, he estimated, cluttered the floor.

Cautiously, apprehensively, he darted forward to the alleyway ladder that led deeper to the quarters below. A narrow corridor opened before him when he had slid down the ladder. He turned the knob on the door before him, kicked it open with his foot. The radio room, empty.

He hurried on and through into the next compartment, the officers' quarters. Ducking into corners, looking under berths and through them, he raced on into the torpedo firing chambers, and lastly into the engine room. She was clear!

He roved his eyes over the big Diesel engines and the shining, powerful electric motors. She was a powerful thing. He turned to hurry back on deck. *Crash!* Something ripped through the bulkhead at his face, not an inch from his right

temple! Norton dropped to his knees as though he had been struck.

From somewhere low behind that starboard engine had come the shot. He saw a heavy fire extinguisher near at hand. Lifting it, he hurled it across the tops of the engines. With a clattering bang it sank over the end of the great motor.

There came a vicious snarl. A gold-braided cap jutted angrily over the engine's rocker arms, behind it the blue bore of a pistol. Norton fired, point blank. He couldn't have missed at five yards. The Hun fired. Twin pistol crashes!

ONE shot went ceilingward, and rattled along the metal plates in sharp staccato. A scream of pain tore from the Hun. Norton saw a blue dot perforate the German's forehead. Gray eyes rolled. The sub officer shot forward over the bright-metaled engine.

Norton leaped to his feet and raced on through the bowels of the great U-boat. He searched out every nook and cranny that might hold hidden death for himself, and later his men. Everywhere he looked, until he was positive that the *untersee* craft was cleared of all danger. Then he hurried back, up the conning tower tubes to the outer deck.

Nine staring German faces strained forward with bulging neck muscles as Norton dropped onto the conning tower bridge. Could it be? Yes! It was the wild American who stood before them, his black eyes shining with the desperate gleam of defeated death in them!

The nine fairly wilted in their tracks. It was not the outcome that they had expected! Their last ruse had been outwitted! Their greatest hope, their last hope, had faded! The roulette of fate had stopped on a new number!

Norton stared out over his band

for a moment. There was a significant silence among them all. He laughed sardonically. To a lifeboat near at hand he called:

"Four or five of you sailors! Go below and bring up the dead bodies. Get them all out. Heave them overboard!"

The *Petrel's* sailors jumped like men awakened from a dream. They had heard the shooting below, but they, too, had figured a different end for Norton. They leaped onto the sub, and hustled down into the conning tower tube.

In a few seconds the dead were being brought up and were dumped with noisy splashes into the sea. As they came up Norton watched his German prisoners with cold, analytical eyes. They were vociferating excitedly among themselves. Then he called to Bates and Perry, still holding the decks with their machine-guns:

"Back onto the stern here! One of you at each end of this line of prisoners—in front of them!"

"Yes, sir!"

The two navy gunners moved down on the sailormen. Norton commanded the Germans into stiff line. Their faces paled to a milky whiteness. Was the American going to mow them down like wheat with his machine-gun?

So it looked! To his gunners Norton snapped:

"Clear your Lewises a couple of bursts!"

THE machine-guns at each end of the line barked out their raucous death chant, five to six shots of a burst, to warm them. Norton stepped down from the bridge, in front of his prisoners, glared at them with merciless, blazing eyes. He asked curtly:

"Any one here speak English?"

A significant pause.

"Ja, mein Herr! I speak a leetle," croaked the tall, lone officer finally.

"So?" smiled Norton dourly. "At last, eh? Well, 'Lifeboat Sheller,' tell your men this! I'll take you all prisoners of war—if you will obey my orders and assist me to run this lousy U-boat of yours into port. Or," he jerked his thumb over his shoulder toward the two gunners, waiting with poised machine-guns, "you can go to Kaiser Heaven—right now! Your answer?" he barked at him coldly.

The German officer bellowed out a fast flow of German to his men. A few hoarse chatterings raced back and forth.

"Sehr gut!" answered the German with angry eyes. "We will go, as prisoners of war."

Norton stared from one to the other of the Germans.

Ugly glances leered from their desperate faces. It was hardly a scene to evoke trust or confidence in Norton's mind.

The U-boat had drifted down on the noonday breeze. Suddenly Norton stared, stared like one in a dream out on the seas ahead. Were his eyes deceiving him? No! It was the *Stormy Petrel*! She was still afloat!

HER propellers were completely out of the water, and her fore-castle-head was still half-sea under, but she was afloat. After that space of time Norton knew that her watertight bulkheads would continue to hold.

A new note of happiness surged through his tired and battered body.

To the German officer he called: "March your men up here—to the tower!"

"Forwards!" ordered the Hun.

The Germans marched up and straight for the tube, all of them.

"Halt!" barked Norton. He grinned dourly. "You—torpedo-director," speaking to the officer, "into the magazine room! Take three of your enginemen with you. The others of your men, overside, into the lifeboats!"

There was a rumble of dissent from the German's throats. The face of the Hun officer shriveled to an angry snarl.

"You heard me!" snapped Norton, and whipped out his .45. "Make it snappy!"

THE Hun paled, but his lips protruded in an infuriated grumble. He ordered his five remaining sailors into the waiting lifeboat. It was evident to Norton that some foul plan had been frustrated, that those mutinous leers were not without import.

"Bates!" called Norton. "Into the engine room! Take your machine-gun, and keep a life-and-death watch over these men!"

"Right, sir!"

The engine room five went below. Norton looked out onto the seas around him and examined his boats. Number four lifeboat was missing—the third mate's.

It had contained the galley force and several oilers.

He called for the chief engineer, the third assistant engineer, half a dozen sailors, and a few of the engine room force to aid him in manning the *U-40*.

Distributing the remaining automatic pistols among them, he addressed the mate.

"Mr. Henderson, will you return to your ship, using the German sailors where you can.

"See if you can't get up steam on the *Petrel*! I'll be along with the sub soon."

"Right, sir!"

The lifeboats moved off. The new

commander of the *U-40* gathered his resources for his next move.

V

A THIN smile flitted across the face of Lieutenant Norton as he stood on the trim bridge of the *U-40* and headed for the grotesque form of the wounded *Petrel*. The U-boat puffed smoothly along the surface.

Norton had always rebelled against submarine service when it had been billeted him, but now he was thankful that he knew their secret workings. Perry, too, with his one service stripe on undersea craft, had developed into a valuable man.

To Norton it was good, this being on a naval vessel again. He drew the telegraph back to "slow speed" on the dials, and then to "stop." The *U-40* coasted along the gaunt sides of the *Petrel*, sides that appeared like the weather-beaten walls of some ancient fortress.

"Ahoy, Skipper!" bawled Norton.

Wolf Jackson, eyes wide, stared out over the railing of the boat deck.

"Propellers are clean out!" he shouted. "Can you tow me?"

"Tow, hell!" snapped Norton. "Why not flood your after hold? That would bring your stern down! Can't you open the sea cocks aft?"

"W-aal, all right! And then what?"

"Proceed back to San Diego—half speed, on the same course, reversed, that we came down on. I'm running this tin-pot over to Socorro right now. I'll see you shortly."

"All right! All right!"

"Starboard, to steer eighty," Norton called down. "We've a job to do at Socorro!"

Perry acknowledged. The hazy heights of the island showed through the purple distances over the U-boat's bow. "Hold her there! We'll try to

dive. Tell the chief to shut off the Diesels, and start up the electrics."

Norton drew the conning tower cover down over him and dropped into the control room under the periscope. There was a flash of doubt and concern in his heart as he heard the dull theroomp of the Diesels fade, and the smooth hum of the electric motors commence. Would she do it? Or was she prepared, by evil hands, to hurl them all to some horrible death beneath those blue Pacific waters?

Darkness enveloped them below, save for the flickering lights along the alleyways. A pale ghoulisgray light slanted down the periscope from the world above.

NORTON slipped his periscope higher. The U-boat straightened to level keel. That was better. Norton was breathing hard. His knee was throbbing painfully, his body becoming a thing aflame with weariness and soaking perspiration.

The musical thrum of the electrics with their rhythmic vibrations rippled down the air pipe lines. She seemed okay. Norton breathed easier.

"Pump the tanks! We'll take surface." The dull ber-oomp of the pumping lines. Slowly the *U-40's* periscope cut the blue sky. Norton swept his 'scope all around the horizon with a practiced hand. Clear!

"Port to steer seventy! There! That's well! Hold her there!"

Socorro Island showed clearly in the 'scope. Norton grinned. What a surprise he would hand that black crew of Hun accomplices on the island!

"Surface, Perry! Tell the chief to cut in the Diesels!"

"Yes, sir!"

The *U-40* poked her long silvery periscope out of the depths of the sea, ribbons of spume spreading off fanwise behind it. The therumpity-

thump of the Diesels recommenced. Norton threw back the conning tower lid, and drew the telegraph to "stop." The U-boat drifted along on the surface and came to a full stop.

Norton picked up a pair of binoculars from the control room shelf. Carefully he scanned the shores of the island cove and the gulleys.

He was less than a quarter mile off the beach and still in deep water. As he stared up at the German radio base he realized that the operator must have witnessed the capture of the U-boat. He would immediately advise the raider to their northward.

"Perry! Get four of your men up on deck. Man the gun!"

"Yes, sir!" eagerly.

The four clambered up and out the tower. Norton unlocked the ammunition door on deck and whipped the gun around. It was an efficient looking, long-range Krupp, of apparently a six-inch bore. He drew back the breech.

"In with a shell!"

HIS men slapped home a big bronze shell. Norton swept the breech block closed, and took aim. The waters were calm there under the lee of the island.

"Fire!"

Crashing report! The gun recoiled. White smoke licked off from the cannon's lips. Tense, Norton followed the shot with his binoculars. From the distances, in the gulley, there shattered skyward a black cloud of wooden boards and brown dust. Two radio poles tottered and flung hurtlingly off into the blue.

Another shell followed on the first. Another! Norton stared again. A black, gaunt hole, like a cave of doom, cupped where before there had been life. Norton clicked his teeth together.

"That's well," he said. "Another shell. Get going!"

Slap! Click. *Cer-ash!* Lurid flame. The recoil!

The white outline of tents rose in clear silhouette behind Norton's sighting vanes, the base of the Hun's gunpowder in Blackbeard's Cove. Straight in between the two promontories that jutted out from Socorro's lone cove swung a deathly, hurtling shell!

SCARLET flame burst from the low lying cove of Socorro. A horrible explosion blasted into unbelievable brilliance. The island itself seemed to fairly lift from the sea. Trees, tents, makeshift buildings, iron drums—a million fragments of everything literally blackened the skies before their staring eyes.

The U-40 trembled in a deathly shuddering. Norton let his hands fall to his sides. It had been a direct hit—a bull's eye!

"That," he said dryly, "is one invasion into neutral territory that Germany will have a hard time explaining!"

"Cover up!"

The gun was once more secured for sea service and diving.

"All below," said Norton. "Perry, tell the chief we'll run on the Diesels until further notice."

"Yes, sir."

The men dropped down the tubes. Norton slid over onto the bridge of the conning tower on deck.

"Steer north," he called below to his helmsman.

Sunset saw the U-40 trailing northward, directly behind the *Stormy Petrel's* swaying stern. The white wake of the half-submerged tramp disguised the U-boat's presence.

Norton, hair disheveled, a gray German greatcoat wrapped around him, leaned back onto the railing

of the sub and drew on German cigarettes with harsh, pondering puffs.

His nerves were tense, and many strange forebodings clutched at his heart. He knew that his grim passage was by no means past danger.

VI

STARLIT night glittered overhead, clear and bright. The haze of previous evenings had vanished in a new spell of cooler, dryer weather. Norton stared forward toward the gleaming stern-light of the *Petrel*. The old ship lolled along on her lazy course, lighted up like an ocean-going passenger steamer in peace times.

Norton was using the *Petrel* for bait, yet he wondered with harrowing doubts whether they would be able to bag their "fish" with the bait after they "got their bite!" It was no child's play, he knew, toying with a German raider! It might mean a watery grave, with death for all before they finished!

Not far on the starry horizon that reeled up ahead of them, the dull outline of two ships' masts swayed madly toward them. Black smoke poured from the twin funnels. Their crucial moment, the crucial moment for all, was approaching. The black hull of the German raider was crashing down toward them with flying speed.

The salt spray from the U-boat's dipping bows flipped up into Norton's face and stung his cheeks. He drew his weary body to a ready attention and stood nearer the control telegraphs where his voice could be better heard.

While his crew was far inadequate, and he might expect failure in an emergency, still Norton felt he had a workable submarine in his power. If only the goddess of good luck

would ride those lonely seas with him for a short time—

"Tell the chief to be ready to shut off the Diesels in five minutes!" he commanded. The order was given.

Norton could hear excited voices up on the deck of the *Petrel*. He grinned dourly. Old Wolf Jackson might not have seen much of war for four years, was his passing thought, but he was certainly getting an eye-full this voyage.

The black raider was not more than a half mile away now and coming like the wind. There came a lurid flash from out the darkness. *Crash!* A shell screamed overhead.

"Wowie!" barked Norton. "Long range! He's nervous!"

WITH a veteran eye he noted the angle and direction of the raider's course. Then he leaped for the conning tower.

"Shut off the Diesels! We're diving!" he yelled.

At the same moment the long finger of a searchlight swept the darkened sea.

"Dive her! *Quick!*" shouted Norton tensely. "Flood all the tanks!"

With a vicious leap, he was under the conning tower and sweeping down the lid with him. A second before the lid was closed, however, he caught a gleam of the searchlight across the top of their tube.

His heart missed a beat. Were they discovered? Dropping deftly down the tower into the control room, he slid onto the little seat at the control board.

"Steer three-twenty," he ordered calmly.

"Three-twenty, sir."

The heavy throb of the Diesels stopped, and the light whirl of the electrics vibrated again as the *U-40* slipped beneath the darkened waters

of the night. With tense, cold fingers Norton moved the 'scope around before him. Dim lights blinked down the shadowy alleyways.

"Are the men standing by the firing tubes?"

"Yes, sir. All ready. Bates is on the job himself; he left one of the sailors in his place in the engine room, and is at the starboard tubes."

For a second Norton's heart chilled. Perhaps it was all right, but he didn't like the idea of the Hun officer in the engine room without Bates. The merchant seaman *might* be all right with the aid of the chief, but the chief was too busy with strange machinery to be able to watch his Hun workers every minute. They couldn't afford—

There was no time to think of that now! They were running for it! The raider was bearing down on them; their radio operator had reported that from the hydrophones. Norton stared at the U-boat's clock, counting the seconds.

"Hold her at twenty-five feet!" he ordered as his eyes roved over the glinting dials before him.

"Tubes are flooded, sir! Firing tanks in readiness!"

NORTON was staring at the clock with tense eyes. He seemed not to hear, but every word registered with indelible strength. *Now!* He reached down and pulled the switch, starboard tubes.

A massive torpedo was lifting toward the sea's surface! The U-boat shook slightly with its final release.

"Starboard bow! Fire!" commanded Norton again. He was glad that Bates was forward; perhaps, after all, that was best. "Sixty feet!" he commanded sharply.

"Sixty feet, sir!"

Another death-dealing torpedo had

been sent on its way. They were diving, and running to get clear of the awful explosion.

"Hard a'port!" there was a tensity to the words.

With straining eyes Norton stared at his instruments. His ears felt as if they would break under the strain of listening for that explosion. Then his eyeballs seemed to freeze in their sockets.

SHE was forging ahead—straight ahead! Straight for that blasting explosion which would bring a horrible, swirling death to all of them! He leaped at Perry.

"I said hard a'port!" he screamed.

"She *is* hard a'port, sir! Won't take her helm! Something's wrong!" Perry's face was pallid. He held his steering wheel rigidly.

Norton stared toward their dials. The needles remained on a steady, unfluctuating tremble!

It was their end! What had happened? She was diving, though! He shot another frantic glance over his instruments. Sixty feet—sixty-five—

"Hold her at sixty-five!" barked Norton savagely, the cold sweat pouring out over his body. "What's the matter? Can't you hold her?"

"No-o, sir! She won't h—"

Below, from the bowels of the engine room, there came a series of pistol shots. Norton groaned helplessly. There was mutiny in the engine room—that he knew!

Wher-amm! Cer-ash!

Norton was flung to his feet. Lights blinked out. His head reeled. His eardrums felt as though they were bursting. Warm blood oozed from them.

The boat was diving now, like a barbed steel arrow—diving to the ocean's floor and their final resting place! Darkness! Complete and opaque.

Hell's fire! Something *had* hap-

pened? The acrid odors of chlorine gas smote Norton's nostrils. Somewhere he could hear water trickling. She was leaking! Water was pouring in over her batteries! They would have to do something—fast.

He staggered to his feet. His head crashed against a steel girder and he felt throbbing pain.

"Perry!"

"Yes—"

"Try to blow the auxiliaries! I'm going to the engine room!"

Feeling his way along the jet-black alleyways, Norton rushed for the engine room. It was there that black treachery lay—the intercepted controls.

He could feel the giant U-boat diving recklessly down, down, down. His being throbbled with the awful pressure. Was it yet possible to avert disaster?

Lunging and careening along the alleyways, he reeled into the engine room. A small emergency lamp burned over the port motor. Near at hand came the sound of trickling water. The sea pouring in!

HOARSE shouts, and desperate screams. Death was shouting in his ears. Tools and heavy metal equipment went crashing through the U-boat. Lurid flame! Crash! A pistol barked, as Norton dove into the engine room.

Norton ripped up his own .45. In the dim light he saw the Hun officer, desperation written on his face, leap toward him across the great smoking motors. Something heavy hurled toward his head, crashed with clattering impact against the bulwark behind him. Norton fired. Red flash! A horrible scream. Another Hun leaped before him. Again Norton, sure of his aim, fired.

The remaining Hun, who had rushed up behind his officer, hurled

himself at Norton's feet, dropping a heavy wrench to one side. Staggering upward, grabbing a pipe-line over his head, Norton swept his .45 ahead of him.

He connected.

He had quelled the mutiny—but for what? To go on and on, hurtling to a watery doom in that giant steel trap?

Footsteps crashed behind him. He flung around. Bates!

"Cut off the diving tubes, Bates!" Norton yelled desperately.

HE leaped for the engine room control board, Bates with him. He stumbled over the body of the chief engineer, an ugly gash staring from the dead man's head.

With a heaving, breathless struggle, Norton flung over the motor switches, jammed up the elevating controls. Safety fuses crackled overhead.

Through what seemed an eternity he waited. His knees bent with the changing pressures. Another emergency lighting control blinked in. He knew, then, that Bates was hard at work. The electric motors commenced to hum again—but for how long? That escaping water sloshing throughout the U-boat! Could they make surface?

There came a hesitant throbbing along the keel of the big U-40. Her death dive was slowing. With bulging, aching eyes, with veins standing blue on his face, Norton stared at the glassy-faced instruments before him.

The black needles danced back and forth like fingers of death, pointing to the zero line. He stared at their diving dial—two hundred feet! She was leveling now! The light came on a bit brighter. The air was foul. He tasted the blood that had streamed from his ears.

"Bates!" he called hoarsely.

"Empty the diving tubes, now—completely!"

Slowly, the black needles crept toward normal as the air pounded through the pipe lines and drove the water from the diving tanks. Norton stared along the port alleyway toward the conning tower control. With rigid, cold eyes he watched the water climbing at his feet. Water was sloshing over the motor bases now. Seconds only until it reached the batteries—and they would again be sinking! He hoped no air was escaping. That was all he could do there.

HE raced into the conning tower room. Perry was battling with the controls there, valiantly doing all he could to bring things to rights. The *U-40* was rising now, but sluggishly. They were running a death race with the sea below, to reach the sea above! With desperate eyes he stared at the diving dial. Thirty feet, twenty-five, twenty, ten— He whirled his 'scope hard around, and stared with pounding blood.

"Surface!" He fairly shrieked the words, hurling them along those death-ridden alleyways to his men.

With an upward leap he flung the control tower-lid back, drove upward, and stared out. Fresh, life-giving air poured down the tube. Men drank in the precious stuff.

Outside the skies were aflame with a blinding glare. The Hun raider, her thin nose high out of the water, her rakish masts on a parallel with seas ablaze, was rushing with a deafening sizzle and a hideous crackling of broiling steel plates, down into the dark depths of the Pacific.

There came an ear-crushing, hurtling explosion! Huge tanks of steel and a single smokestack blasted off into the night! Then the scarlet scene was swallowed within those

lonely seas, beyond the coasts of Baja California. A strange, tomb-like silence ensued. Norton stared behind them. The *Petrel*, he could see, was lowering a lifeboat for them. A part of her bridge was hanging over the side of her hull, both masts were shot off at their step. But she was still riding those blood-scarlet seas.

"Steer due east!" commanded Norton. "We'll try to make the *Petrel*!"

The *U-40* slowly swung her nose toward the coast and the *Petrel*. With the momentum of her speed she was forging ahead.

"Up on deck—all of you!" shouted Norton at the top of his lungs.

All those living raced for the tiny exit of the *U-40's* conning tower. Raced knee-deep through those death-lurking alleyways within the giant U-boat. On the shallow turtle-back of the *U-40*, Norton and his men leaped off into the waiting lifeboat.

Water was up to their knees on the deck of the U-boat before all were able to leap clear. Barely had the *Petrel's* boat pulled away when there came a wild rushing water.

In a white, churning whirlpool of phosphorescence, the tail of the gaunt *U-40* reeled upward, pointing like a finger of doom toward Heaven. Then it dove with a slicing splash; down, down into the black seas below.

VII

ON the bridge of the *Stormy Petrel*—or what was left of her bridge—sat Lieutenant Fred Norton propped up in a deck chair. His right leg was wrapped in white bandages. To him, his body seemed but a frame for weary, aching flesh. A fighting smile wreathed his face, however, as he watched Wolf Jackson sighting behind his pelorus in the wing of the bridge.

"W-aal," said Wolf reflectively to

his second mate, "we knows, now, the mystery o' th' blockade! Them gets through what has cargo fer the blasted enemy—but when them same fellas starts fer home—the grateful enemy sinks 'em. Eh, Norton?"

"Yes," answered Norton grimly. "But I say—what are you doing with that pelorus of mine, Skipper?"

"HUH? Me? Uh, w-aal, I'm a-takin' a bearin' o' th' 'Tres Padres' light over thar on old San Lucas."

"What? With my 'navy style jee-jaw'?"

"Yep!"

"But I thought you didn't like 'them navy jee-jaws'!"

"Humph!" snorted the skipper defiantly. "A smart sea-dog ain't never too old to larn new tricks! An' after what I seen o' navy style this viyage—w-aal, maybe they ain't quite so bad's I first figured 'em, Norton! That is—American navy styles!"

The land breeze, sweeping down off the dry Baja California foothills, carried with it a new fragrance of strange foreign odors and swept it across the bridge of the old, plodding *Petrel*. It was an age-old flavor of adventure off foreign coasts and of the glamour of the sea. As the old sea dog stared off into the night ahead, he said in tones more kindly than his wont:

"If yuh kin stand t' make another viyage with a hard-shelled ole lobster like Wolf Jackson, I'd like t' tear out that partition a-leadin' int' th' pilot's room, next yor'es, an' make yuh a double room. Yuh'd have more space fer yer machine-guns, an' a mite more comfort, Norton."

Norton grinned. The night wind fanned his cheeks.

"Sure, Skipper. This old *Petrel* is getting more and more like a home every watch!"

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CHAPTER I

Shimel and Fox Again

THE Camp Cole parade ground had baked all day under a burning tropic sun. Its heat had run into the roofs, so that it continued on in the night. The Intelligence office was stifling.

Gunnery Sergeant Daniel Shimel, whose bunk was under an end win-

dow, opposite the desk of the major in command of Intelligence—at the other end of the building—rolled over with a sigh. Sweat poured from his taut body. His eyes were wide open.

He stared through the window, automatically unaware of the inevitable surrounding net which was supposed to keep away mosquitoes—and didn't—but seemed instead to make the cot over which it was draped

more oven-like than if there were no net at all.

He sat up in bed.

Instantly a pair of bare feet across the aisle "hit the deck" with a soft thud, and Shimel caught the glint of steel in the dappling of moonlight and shadow in the barracks.

"Steady, Fox!" said Shimel softly. "It's only me, Shimel! Put up the gat!" Fox laughed uncertainly.

"Nerves, I guess," he said. "Dreamed I was being attacked. I ought to be used to them by now. Those drums, I mean."

"Yeah, I know," said Shimel. "I wonder how Morgan is making out."

"THAT'S what worries me, Dan," said Fox, padding over to stand beside the gunnery sergeant. "Morgan had a bad case of nerves. I don't think the Old Man should have sent him into the Cordillera Centrales."

"Morgan was a marine, wasn't he? Marines can do anything!"

Fox shivered.

"Morgan is a marine," he said, "not was! I wonder why you said was? I don't like it."

As though to emphasize the words of slender, white-skinned Private Fox, the far note of the tom-toms in the Cordilleras, away above Manogwayabo, rose to a high pitch.

Shimel stared at Fox in the darkness. He twisted his eyes to squint at the white face, even as he turned his head toward the open window in deference to the necessity of expelling a natural accumulation in the mouth attendant upon the chewing of *anduga*.

Strange chap, this Fox. He was slight, thin, slender and not very tall. He always looked pasty.

Shimel, on the other hand, was brown as a nut, with deep sun wrinkles around his eyes, and skin as tough as a shark's underside. He had hair on the backs of his knuckles,

gray eyes that could be hard and dancing at the same time. In one thing only was he like Fox; neither knew the meaning of fear.

"I wonder—" began Shimel, after a brief recourse to the window again. "If Morgan—"

As though in answer to his very words there came a strange sound from one of the far doors, always open, which gave onto the office end of the barracks. It sounded like the stumbling feet of a man who was trying to enter the barracks and had misjudged his steps. Heavy shoes fumbled with the five steps leading up to the door. A gasping intake of breath with a shudder in it—then Shimel and Fox were racing for the door in their bare feet, forgetting the splinters in the wooden floor. Shimel pressed the electric light switch beside the door.

Even before they reached the door they somehow knew it was Morgan.

He had managed to negotiate three of the steps. Then he had fallen forward, face downward, across the doorsill. His breath rasped through his lips. His body rose and fell with his shuddery breathing. Moans came through his lips.

"Grab a canteen, Fox!" snapped Shimel. Fox darted to obey. Shimel heard him shake several canteens, one after the other, which hung at the feet of iron cots in the sleeping quarters. Shimel stooped and turned Morgan over.

WHEN he stared into Morgan's face his eyes became gimlet sharp, hard and cold as arctic ice. Morgan's face was not nice to gaze upon. It looked as though it had been clawed viciously by the talons of some great bird of prey.

But in Santo Domingo there were no such birds. A condor or an eagle might have done it. Shimel examined the wounds, while Morgan tried to

look up at him through eyes that were filled with misery. But the eyes were all but swollen shut.

Morgan was black with perspiration, dust of jungle trails, and dried blood—blood which thorns of the "bundocks" had torn from his skin. He must have smashed through the jungle like a madman, Shimel thought.

Morgan's white teeth were visible as though he snarled. But he didn't snarl. The talons had done things to his lips.

"A man," whispered Morgan, "a man—with claws!"

"What sort of a man?" demanded Shimel fiercely, shaking Morgan in his eagerness to know more. "A white man? Black? Brown? Or piebald?"

MORGAN'S answer was a mumble which contained no intelligible words. That he had traveled fast, far, and a little madly, was plain from his appearance and his behavior. Shimel shook him again.

A heavy tread sounded on the steps. "What's going on here?" demanded a voice heavy with authority. "Don't you birds know that taps went two hours ago?"

"A man is dying, sir!" snapped Shimel, who never forgot the deference due his superiors. "I felt he should have a light to die by, taps or no taps."

The Officer of the Day stared at the face of Morgan and his own went white as a sheet. It was his first tour of duty since his arrival from the States, where he had just been graduated from Annapolis.

"What shall I do?" he said miserably, appealing, as wise young officers usually did—if they really were wise—to a high ranking non-com of real experience.

"Telephone the commanding general and tell him that Gunnery Ser-

geant Shimel and Private Fox are on the way to his house, so that he can be on his porch to receive us!"

"What? A second lieutenant get the commanding general out of bed at midnight, to tell him two enlisted men are coming to see him?"

"Exactly! The Old Man understands such matters. A man is dying—no, look! He's dead! Fox, you were close beside him while I talked with the lieutenant. Did he say anything you could understand?"

"Yeah, Sergeant—several words. They sounded like 'look out for the drums; they're drums of jeopardy!'"

Shimel snorted, spat out his *anduga* and filled his jaw again.

"He wanted to be an author!" he said. "He talked like some of the characters I've met in stories when I had time to read. Into your marching duds, Whitey—we're on our way to see the Old Man. And after that—"

"Whitey" Fox grinned.

At the commanding general's gate a sentry faced them with rifle at port.

"Let them pass!" came a testy voice from the shadows of the Old Man's veranda. The sentry stepped aside quickly, shouldered his Springfield and continued his rounds. Shimel straightened and, with Fox at his heels, marched straight to the porch, where he could see the white of an undershirt to indicate where the Old Man stood to await his coming.

CHAPTER II

"Find Out What He Means!"

NO enlisted man of the Intelligence office, or any other office, ever saw the commanding general officially, without requesting permission from his own immediate superior in command, after which he had to go through the

brigade adjutant, the brigade executive officer, or chief of staff, and maybe an aide-de-camp or two.

So Shimel cut the gordian knot of red tape with a single stroke—and he didn't even take the cud of *anduga* out of his mouth. But he spat before he reached the veranda.

"It's Shimel, sir," he said formally, "and Private Fox."

AGAIN the far drumbeats came across the jungle tops beyond Guibia, the Caves of Santana, Manogwayabo—down from the Cordillera Centrales, seeming now a bit closer than before.

"Say, Dan," whispered Fox, "Morgan spoke a Spanish word just before he croaked. I wonder—"

"What was it?"

"*Maco*."

Shimel gasped, a harsh intake of breath. "I thought so!" he said. "*Maco* means 'frog'."

Letting Fox make whatever he might of that, Shimel stepped upon the veranda, while Fox stood at the foot of the three steps leading up. The general snapped on a porch light. Fox grinned to himself. The Old Man's jaw protruded belligerently, too.

His wife had never been able to cure him of chewing tobacco; but he'd never have been able to manage *anduga*. He was a little thick about the middle, his hair was gray; he wore white trousers and shoes, and above them a white issue undershirt. His single stars of rank were not in evidence.

"Well, Shimel?" he said. "You're behind this getting me out of bed at this hour?"

"Yes, sir. Morgan's back, sir. Badly cut up. He died a few minutes ago from wounds. They were queer wounds, as though a great cat had mauled him about the face."

"The wounds killed him?"

"Yes, sir, but they wouldn't have if—"

"If what, if what? Don't be dramatic! Let me know the whole thing."

"No ordinary weapon was used on Morgan, sir," said Shimel. "The cutting edges that made those deep wounds in his cheeks were poisoned. If he got them in the woods where those drums are beating, it's a miracle he lived to get back to camp."

"What kind of poison?"

Shimel shrugged.

"Don't know, sir. Might be the venom of black scorpions. Old Herman, the old herb doctor of Barahona, once told me it *might* be fatal—especially to a fellow in as bad physical condition as Morgan was."

"He wasn't in such bad condition that he couldn't get back with a report!"

"No, sir; he's a marine. He was supposed to get back—so he did."

SHIMEL was all sincerity, implicitly believing in his own words. He felt that marines could do anything. He himself had proved it. So had this general, when he had been a young man—and had been one of the dauntless company which had made the historic march across Samar.

"What's next, Shimel?" demanded the general.

Neither thought it strange, apparently, that a general should ask such a question of a gunnery sergeant. Shimel hadn't the Old Man's education, but both were men who did things, talking little—and between them was a bond of sympathy.

"Morgan spoke the word *maco* before he died," said Shimel. "Does the general know what that means?"

"Somewhere I've seen the word. In one of your intelligence reports, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir. It's a man's name, or a

name he has taken for himself, Julio Maco. My report said that a mysterious individual had appeared somewhere in the Constanza, with a program whereby Haiti and Santo Domingo would unite under his leadership to drive the American marines into the sea to the sharks.

"I've never seen the man, didn't know for sure that he existed, until tonight. Morgan had some information, but he died before we could get it. If Maco has started—"

"He has to be stopped!" snapped the general. "If I were twenty years younger—"

"You have men who are young enough and ready enough, sir," said Shimel. "Leave it to Fox and me! We'll be going. We'll bring back this Maco to face a *guardia* firing squad, and when we do—well, sir, I'd like to make a request."

"Yes—yes, but don't you think you'd better produce him first?"

"We'll do that sir. And I'd like to have charge of the firing squad that pays him out for murdering Elam Morgan!"

GENERAL HINES stared at Shimel—then at Fox, who shifted uneasily, not knowing what to do when a general looked at him. The general's lips parted in what might have been a grin, but wasn't. His eyes narrowed.

"I'd like to go—" he began. "How soon will you be ready to start?"

"We're on our way now, sir," said Shimel, "just as we stand."

"You'll be back when?"

"When we get the man, or men, who killed Morgan. Better look for us when you see us coming. If we don't come back—well, listen to the drums and get your Haitian cook to tell you what they're saying."

"My Haitian cook," said the general slowly, "vanished from the house day before yesterday."

Shimel started as though someone had slapped his face.

"That means," he said, his voice suddenly hoarse, "that the drums are calling the natives together—and even here the blood of the Congo is plentiful among the malcontents. Good-by, sir."

The general answered the snappy salute with a wave of his hand. His eyes were a little misty as Shimel marched smartly into the gloomy road, followed by Fox, who walked with a strange shuffle. Fox's pants had been washed almost white, and General Hines thought what a good target the white stuff would make in the dark.

But his face was wistful as he turned off the light. A general couldn't go rampaging off into the woods, even when one of his men had been killed. He was responsible for the thousands who were left.

Shimel strode along at a great rate, into the northwest, with Fox at his heels. Already the drumbeats were louder. Fox studied the broad back of his superior, and grinned.

Shimel was thinking as he walked. You could always tell when he was thinking, for he shoved his broad-brimmed campaign hat so far forward that it rested on the bridge of his nose—and under that brim the keen eyes of Shimel missed nothing at all.

Fox doffed his own hat, lengthened the string which held it on his head, then fastened it around his neck, so that the hat hung against his back, between his shoulder blades.

SHIMEL'S march ate up the yards and rods and kilometers along the trail, which was snaky and in many places so topped by trees—ceiba and guayacan and bayohunda—that the moon was blotted out and the trail was an ink-black tunnel.

They came to a great hole in the ground. "Caves of Santana," said

Shimel. "Natives say his ghost haunts it."

"Wouldn't be surprised," said Fox. "Step out, will you? We've got a long way to go. How many extra cartridge clips you got?"

"Plenty."

"Same here. Know where we're going?"

"Yeah—on and on, until we come to the drums."

"Golly, I wish I knew what they're saying!"

"Good thing you don't or you'd probably turn and run. Make ants run up and down your spine, don't they?"

"Uh huhn! They *pull* you; make you feel that almost anything might happen. Know any more about this Julio Maco than you told the Old Man? Good egg, ain't he?"

"Who? Maco?"

"No, the Old Man."

"Yeah, regular leatherneck. And Maco's a killer, a spellbinder with the eloquence of Satan, so I've heard. His face is as white as yours and covered with freckles like a turkey egg, yet he's a Haitian. Know what that means?"

"No."

"**N**ATIVES believe that once in a hundred years a man with fair skin is born of Haitian parents—and that such a one, when he comes, will lead his people out of bondage. This Maco must be that man—and he's been guarded all his life, until the time is ripe for him to declare himself. I think he's done so."

"What're we going to do?"

"Get him and take him in."

"And wade through hundreds of his followers to do it? Simple, isn't it? Are you sure you need any help, Mr. Shimel? I could be busy at more important matters, if you could do it alone—"

"Can the sneercasm! We're going to do it!"

"How?"

"Just do it, that's all."

Shimel shoved his hat a little further forward, pulled his belt around until his holster swung above his right leg. It snapped briskly with each step he took, leather against khaki. His right hand, moving back and forth as he walked, was never more than a few inches from the black ugly butt of that Colts .45—with which Shimel could split the stem of a twig at twenty-five yards.

THE drums were still going, louder and louder. Fox's eyes roved the jungle on either hand. Now there was no trail, but Shimel found a way as easily and surely as though there had been. Fox almost stepped on his heels.

Now and again fireflies darted through the ebon green of the jungle. They looked like the headlights of darting automobiles. Once the men passed a stagnant pool—and just as they passed a frog began a raucous croaking—as though jeering at them.

Fox shivered. Maybe it was an evil omen. He wasn't sure whether he believed in omens; but he couldn't forget the face of Elam Morgan.

He wondered again what the drums were saying. If he had known he would have shivered again—but he wouldn't have thought of turning back or of slacking his stride. His hand, too, swung close to his holster, that jerked as he walked. The leather-necks headed straight for the sounds.

"Hadn't we better try to sneak up on 'em?" asked Fox.

"Why? They knew we were coming the minute we quitted the general's gate! Yes, and who we are! To sneak would be to waste time."

"Oke," said Fox. "Step out a little, Sergeant!" Suddenly Shimel paused, almost stopped.

"Hear that?" he demanded.

"Yeah. Another drum," said Fox.

The sound was muffled, indistinct, yet filled with menace.

"Right," said Shimel. "and that drum comes from the Caves of Santana, which we just passed."

"Maybe we oughta go back and collar the tom-tom artist?"

"We could turn out all the marines in Santo Domingo and search every inch of Santana," said Shimel grimly, "and we wouldn't find even a footprint! Come on! Can you guess what the new drum is saying?"

"Yeah. It says: 'get the pot ready for company, all nicely filled with boiling oil!'"

Shimel chuckled, strode on.

"Can't say that it makes me feel hungry," was his sole comment.

CHAPTER III

Maco

IT was a strange gathering, there in the jungle clearing on the side of the Cordillera Centrales. The clearing slanted so steeply that those who came in answer to the summons of the tom-toms had to lean, and one leg of each seemed shorter than the other.

Maco himself sat on a huge boulder, his long legs dangling. His feet were huge and splayed. His head was bare. His wide nostrils flared, and quivered as though he tested the air, like a hunting animal. His brow was high and white—and the big freckles on his leathery cheeks seemed to move as though they were alive, with the crinkling of his nose.

All about was the jungle—and the leaping fire behind the big man cast his shadow against the jungle below, a monstrous thing. His great hands opened and closed as though he gripped in his harsh palms the bodies of his enemies. His eyes were filled with intelligence. His enemies would

have given much to know—and would have been surprised and startled to learn—all about his background.

For he had not always lived in Constanza. He had been sent away as a child, where careful tutors had prepared him for his great mission in life. That mission was now the breath of his nostrils. He loved it, lived for it—and for the confounding of his enemies.

From the jungle on all sides came natives of many colors, like ghosts out of the shadows. Fearfully, each as he came, they bent the knee to Maco as though he had been a king.

Down below, at the edge of the jungle, a man kneaded the head of a tom-tom with knuckles and fingertips—a rolling of sound that throbbed across the jungle, in all directions, and seemed to cause even the leaves of the trees to sway in time to the sound.

The people all about Maco, kneeling, sitting, or standing—swayed back and forth from right to left, keeping time to the thrumming of the tom-tom.

MACO smiled—and his smile was grim, masterful, menacing. He held these people in the hollow of his hands. He could mold them, shape them to his ends, inspire them, sway them—work his will with them. They were his pawns.

Suddenly the tom-tom ceased. The swaying ceased. Maco lifted his great black-thatched head to listen. From far away to the southeast came a throbbing of sound.

"It is the tom-tom in Santana," said someone, close under Maco. "It brings a fearful message."

"What is this message?" asked Maco. His voice seemed to have no expression in it, nor compassion, nor feeling. The man did not answer.

"I asked, what is this message?"

Maco's tone did not change. Yet the

man to whom he spoke lifted his head fearfully, as though expecting a blow, and Maco smiled to himself. Yes, he certainly could mold these people.

"It says," said the man in a low voice, "that The Chewer is coming."

"The Chewer? What do you mean?"

"The Sergeant Chewer. He is a marine, master, a brawny fighting man. No ten *Dominicanos* can stand against him, even though they be armed with *machetes* and he have only his bare hands. And the tom-toms say that the pale skinned one comes with him.

"This pale skinned one is called '*blancito*', 'the little white one', and he seems to be weak and sick. But he can march and fight for days without end, without food, drink, rest or sleep."

"PFAUGH! Are we children to be afraid of but two? One would think, when you speak of fearful tidings, that an army came to attack us, though even an army would fail against us."

"An army, yes, master, but The Chewer, and *Blancito*—they are wily, and do their labors with guile."

"Are you afraid?"

Still Maco's voice did not change, but the man who had spoken became terribly white of face, and looked about him with fear as the eyes of Julio Maco stared balefully down upon him.

Maco was a great cat, setting himself to spring. He was capable of rending and destroying; everyone knew that. But this man who had spoken remembered Elam Morgan, the man who had been allowed to escape and make his way home, so that his people should see, and be afraid.

The man gulped, and hid his face. For he had followed Morgan to see which way he went, and he'd never

forget how the marine had dashed through the jungle, banging his body against tree trunks he should have seen, fighting out at invisible enemies with flailing, bloody fists—fists which were bloody because often he smashed them against the trunks of trees.

MACO stood on his boulder, and none saw how he had risen, so graceful and easy and lithe was his movement. All eyes were lifted fearfully to him. He raised his head and stared at the yellow orb of the high riding moon. His huge hands went to his blue denim tunic, pulling it away from his chest, hairy and scarred—scarred with a tattoo mark, a coiled green serpent, emblem of his faith.

Presently he looked down at his people. Others were coming in from all directions still. There were hundreds in the clearing, and again the drum was thrumming. Even as Maco raised his voice to speak, the tom-tom kneader continued on, sending messages through the hills and the jungles, bidding men gather to Maco's clearing.

Maco began to speak, his voice still unchanged, yet somehow charged with menace and terror.

"We do not fear any two who come," he said, "nor any two thousand, for we have weapons greater than they can bring. We have terror. Have you, my people, never heard of the great Le Clerc, own brother-in-law to Napoleon? He sent thirty thousand troops to Haiti, to regain for France the land which the French had lost to our forefathers.

"Only five thousand of them returned to France. The rest left their bones in the soil of Haiti. They died, because of terror, because of fever, and fear and sleeplessness. Have our people forgotten how, without ever coming to grips, without ever firing a shot or using a knife or *machete*,

our people defeated the great Le Clerc?"

The natives were swaying back and forth, not looking at this man who commanded such strange eloquence. Maco's nostrils quivered. His eyes were filled with triumph.

"How did our people destroy the army of Le Clerc? That army pursued them through the jungles of Haiti, seeking to come to handgrips with them. But our peoples' leaders were wily, and refused open combat.

"But the Frenchmen were beaten. They were never allowed to sleep, because the tom-toms roared and thundered around their encampments always. When they charged upon the sound, the sound ceased in one place and began in another. Always the French were in fear of an open attack which never came, never would have come.

"THE tom-toms beat upon their eardrums, their courage, upon their very souls—and in the end many of the Frenchmen went mad. For lack of sleep their nerves were raw and torn—and they fell easy prey to malaria and yellow fever—and died like flies, or like rats in a trap!

"And so, my people, again we mass our armies, without weapons in their hands, to drive out the invaders. We shall place over Haiti and Santo Domingo such a reign of terror that it will never be forgotten. Wives will urge their soldier husbands to send them home. They will be fearful of danger, of destruction, and once in a while we will send someone to them—as we sent the man from *intelligencia*, with his face all scarred and terrible—so that they can see of what we are capable.

"And always we shall elude the soldiers, tire them out, harass them, keep them from sleeping. In ten days, all this island will be a-throb with

tom-toms, until our enemies will go mad to the point of self-destruction!"

And as though to emphasize the oratory of Julio Maco, the single tom-tom at the edge of the clearing increased its tempo to a savage threnody of sound. Then the drummer stopped it by placing his palms flat on the drumhead—and everybody in the clearing listened.

From Manogwayabo came an answer, from Sabana de los Muertos came yet another, while from still further away, mere hints of sounds from Cotui and Bayaguana came still others, answering the drums of Maco.

"You hear?" cried Julio Maco. "Already our people are heeding the summons, now that the drummer has sent out the message concerning the fate of the man who went back to his encampment to die! In less than ten days the island shall be a bedlam of tom-toms!

"Listen, you, drummer! Send out this message; that the man known as Sergeant Chewer, and the one called the Little White One, are coming to take Julio Maco. Tell my people that these two shall be destroyed as evidence that I have the power. Promise them in my name that this shall be so! If I fail, then I shall not ask them again to follow me, for I am not worthy to lead them!"

His voice rang now with confidence, for Julio Maco was not afraid.

THE drummer hammered out the message frantically—and the sound went rolling across the jungle, to be picked up by other drums and hurled on and on.

Miles away to the southeast, Fox spoke softly to Shimel.

"I've got a feeling, Sarge," he drawled, "that a reception is being prepared for us."

"And I," said Shimel grimly, "wouldn't be surprised."

Maco, of course, could not hear

these words—but now a terrified man was suddenly dragged into the clearing.

"Who is he?" demanded Maco.

"Merely a dog of a *paisano* (farmer)," said Maco's sentry. "I caught him spying!"

"Send him along the trail to meet The Chewer and *Blancito*," said Maco instantly. "To them he will be merely a *paisano*, too. He shall discover whether the two men come in anger or conciliation. He will know by the way they treat, or mistreat him—and he will return to tell us.

"Whether they come to attack or to beg they shall be treated exactly the same. Think you not, my friends, that our enemies will grovel in fear when we send the savage Chewer back to them as we sent back the man from *intelligencia*? Fools, these Americans—to think themselves all powerful. They shall grovel before us!"

The *paisano*, roughly handled when he tried to protest, started into the jungle to meet the two marines who were coming.

"And if you warn them of anything," said Maco to the *paisano*, "you shall die within five minutes—and your lips shall be sent to your family as tokens of your betrayal!"

CHAPTER IV

Badge of Courage

FOX, trudging behind Shimel, studied the broad back of his superior. He knew that no better man could be found to follow. Shimel looked like a bull preparing to charge. Shimel had seen the face of Morgan, must know that he himself might have the same treatment, but it didn't worry him. He took things as they came.

Julio Maco or his minions had slain Morgan, therefore it was up to Shimel, Morgan's immediate superior,

to take Maco or his minions in for punishment.

It was as simple as that.

Fox could see, in his mind's eye, the play of muscles under the back of Shimel's shirt. That shirt was supposed to be olive drab, but it was really pea-green, old issue. It was no longer "regulation" but Shimel liked it and wore it.

Oddly enough he wouldn't have allowed one of his men so to disregard regulations.

Shimel himself had repeatedly been told to wear regulation shirts—but somehow he always "forgot." His superiors kept on reminding him—conveniently forgetting that they had reminded him before—and Shimel kept forgetting. Shimel was too good a man, too good a soldier, too perfect an intelligence agent, for his superiors to be too insistent.

THE menace of the drums hung over all the jungle. It was like some great intangible, invisible monster, everywhere crouching to spring. But Shimel only shoved his hat a bit further forward, kept his automatic under his hand, and trudged on. Fox grinned, lengthened the string on his own hat, brushed his dry blond hair out of his white face and kept on Shimel's heels.

In their belts each carried an extra automatic, hurriedly snatched up on leaving the barracks. Each knew how to use two automatics at once, holding the left-hand gun high so that its recoil, upward and to the right, wouldn't throw off the right-hand gun.

Only, there was a joker in their use of guns—if they happened to shoot anyone, even in self-defense, they would be court-martialed! Contradictory orders from Washington often caused such absurdities.

"You know," said Fox, "I've got a feeling that a million eyes are star-

ing at us from all sides. Gives me the screaming meemees."

Shimel grunted and spat under his uplifted right arm, thus drawn momentarily away from his automatic.

"There are plenty of eyes. I can feel 'em on the back of my neck. Or have you been staring at me?"

"Why should I stare at you? I see enough of your ugly face when I have to stare at you. Think there'll be a fight?"

"Yeah, the usual. Two good marines against a mob of Spicks. Either of us can whip ten with his campaign hat!"

"But suppose there are more than twenty?"

"There will be! Then we'll have to surround 'em."

FOX chuckled. His heart was pounding with excitement. Whatever the thing was that had clawed Morgan, it would have a swell time trying to claw Shimel, or even Fox. Fox took pride in his handsome face and—

"Claws won't hurt *your* face, Shimel," he said. "It's too tough; the claws would break off."

"Yeah? Maybe I'm no beauty, but we're not going to any *baile*, old son!"

"Wonder what made those marks on Morgan?"

"I don't. I got an idea. Claws—dipped in black scorpion venom. Ever hear of the African Leopard Society?"

"Uh huh. Think it's sent an expedition to the Cordilleras for research work?"

"Something of the kind."

"I always marvel at the way natives pass news along. You say that they knew we were coming, up there in the hills, when we started?"

"Yeah. They knew it, by guess, when they sent Morgan back, at least a day before we knew it ourselves.

They read minds. But it's easy this time."

"Why?"

"Them ice cream pants of yours!" said Shimel petulantly. "They're as white against the jungle as a tablecloth. You might as well have a flag wrapped around you equipped with electric lights. I only ask you one thing: when the going gets tough, don't come close to me with them pants. They're swell targets and if I'm close I don't want to get hit with bullets or *machetes* meant for you!"

"Don't worry about my pants. Say, how about a chew of that *anduga*?"

Without a word, and only a chuckle in answer, Shimel passed back the smelly plug without pausing in his stride. Fox held his nose and bit off a big chew.

"Now," he said, "I can whip *twelve* Spicks, *without* any hat!"

Shimel didn't answer.

A minute later Fox, his face whiter than ever, opened his mouth and dropped the *anduga* as quietly as he could. Shimel laughed aloud.

"I heard it!" he said. "I can hear mosquitoes walk, didn't you know that?"

Fox didn't answer. He had gone suddenly taut. They were following a snaky trail, steadily climbing upward toward the drums. Ahead of them, where the moonlight came through the overlapping branches, a native in washed-out denim was coming to meet them.

FOX sensed, rather than saw, that Shimel had tilted his hat back a bit from his eyes, and his whole body seemed tensed for a spring—as though he sensed some deep danger in the simple oncoming native.

"Just a *paisano*," said Fox hoarsely. "They don't take sides in jobs like this."

"No?" gritted Shimel. "Think they

love us, eh? Well, maybe this chap is innocent, maybe he's a victim of circumstances, but I'll bet a plugged *clavajo* that he's just come from Maco. He's to look us over and circle around back to give Maco a report. Follow my lead, buddy! We'll give those tom-tomming gooks something to think about."

The native was now quite close. They could almost see his pop-eyes in the darkness. Simple enough, he seemed, yet Fox knew that Shimel was right, that this man, willingly or against his will, represented the enemy—the enemy that had murdered Morgan. Here was the first contact. Much depended on how Shimel carried it off.

THE native was plainly trembling, but he didn't give an inch of the trail. He had his orders. People gave the trail to The Chewer. Shimel spat. Fox brought out a piece of chewing gum and doubled it up, shoved it between his lips. It would take away some of the scalding taste of the *anduga*.

"*Que hay, amigo?*" called the native, using the conventional mode of greeting.

If either of the leathernecks heard him they gave no sign, nor did the native give ground as Shimel barged toward him. If Shimel gave the road, circled the *paisano*, it would be a sign of weakness, of fear. Shimel had nothing against the native, wouldn't hurt him for the world.

But he walked right through him as though he hadn't been there! He took one short side step when he would have collided with the *paisano*, jerked his hip to the left, and the native went spinning off the trail, to measure his length in the underbrush, his feet flailing out for a place to grip.

"Pay no attention!" said Shimel grimly, striding on.

Fox followed, not even looking back. He heard a gasp of fear and surprise from the lips of the *paisano*. Then silence. He fancied he heard a crashing among the underbrush as the native scrambled off the trail, but whether he did or not did not matter.

He knew, and Shimel knew, that off to the right or left, the *paisano* was circling around them in the jungle, to beat them to Julio Maco—with word that The Chewer and *Blancito* were in a fighting mood.

Shimel chuckled.

"He'll make it sound as though we'd bitten the muzzles off our automatics and spat them in his face!" he said. "If that ain't good p-psychology, I don't know what is. We've landed the first punch, Whitey, in spite of your ice cream pants!"

"Lay off my ice cream pants! I've got something all figured out about that."

"I'll do the figuring for this job. All I ask is that you don't get in my way when the fighting starts. I'll have enough to do helping myself without being hindered by you."

Fox snorted.

"I asked you if you really thought you needed me!" he said. "I could still go back, you know."

He was grinning as he spoke.

"WOULDN'T dare let you," said Shimel. "You'd get lost in the dark and the *Kukura* would get you."

"Humph! The Dominican bogey-man can't be half as ugly as a sergeant I know. If you could make Maco believe you were *Kukura*—"

"Aw, shut your face; you'll need your wind when you get ready to run!"

Fox didn't answer. Shimel fell silent. The whole world had become more tense with expectancy. Now and again Shimel moved slightly aside as they passed the white trunk of a ceiba tree. Fox knew why; na-

tives with *machetes* sometimes lurked behind such trees.

Lieutenant Shively had been found near one, with his head missing. Shimel was remembering, for now and again he flung his left arm up as though to guard his throat, when he passed a big tree. Fox kept on his heels.

The air now trembled with the sound of the tom-toms. Drums of jeopardy, Morgan had called them. Would they prove to be that for Shimel and Fox, too?

"We're being watched, plenty," said Shimel tersely. "We can't stop to talk or they'll think we're hesitating, afraid, which we aren't—are we?"

"Not I," replied Fox. "But if you're weakening—"

"Can you tell where those drumbeats come from?"

"SOME, yes. From dead ahead. From Sabana de los Muertos, from Managuayabo and Santana, from the little towns along the Camino Real. This Maco will have every drum in the country booming if—"

"That 'if' is us, Whitey," said Shimel grimly. "Just keep remembering something—"

"Yeah, I know: Morgan! I'm going to do some smearing of faces tonight to make up for him."

"You mean you will if the Spicks don't cut you off at the pockets of those ice cream pants first! We're getting closer."

"Aren't we going to reconnoiter?"

"Why? The tom-toms tell us where they are, and they know where we are. We'll just go right in, get Maco and come out again."

"Simple, eh? Gimme another chew of *anduga*—I may get a chance to bite somebody!"

* * * * *

Meanwhile the *paisano* had flung

himself into the encampment of Julio Maco, gasping and afraid.

"They're coming," he said. "The Chewer is made of solid iron. No *machete* could cut through him. He almost walked through me. Didn't even see me. *Blancito* is his shadow, and his white face is like a ghost. No living men can prevail against them."

"Kick the dog of a *paisano* out of camp," said Julio Maco. "Have your *machetes* handy, but be careful how you use them. These two *Americano* dogs must be taken alive—with slashed legs and arms if you will, but alive."

Maco's followers watched him fearfully, as though he had been some grotesque idol miraculously endowed with life. Slowly he drew onto his hands the most cruel pair of gloves ever devised by the twisted brain of a savage man.

The gloves were of cowhide, and skin-tight on the hands of Julio Maco. The fingers were a strange departure—for each was an adaptation of the razor-sharp steel spur which natives fastened as weapons to the natural spurs of their game cocks.

When the gloves were on, the hands of Julio Maco were as terrible as the claws of a tiger.

He dipped the weapons into a tin can on the rock by his side. The can gave off a strange odor—the odor of crushed black scorpions.

A COLUMN of white appeared at the place where the trail entered the clearing of Maco from the southeast. Beside the white column was a darker one, hands held stiff from the hips, spread like ugly talons. Words came from the black column like bullets, in Maco's own language.

"I am the Sergeant Chewer! I come for the slayer of Elam Mor-

gan! I shall not return without him!"

Instantly Maco made answer, his voice unchanged, yet carrying a horrible note of mockery.

"With or without him, Chewer," he said, "you do not return at all!"

The two columns, the black one and the white one, side by side, stooped forward, moved instantly into the clearing at Maco's answer. The black column turned its head aside as Shimel spat contemptuously.

CHAPTER V

Claws and Drums

AS Shimel and Fox moved into the clearing, the tom-toms dropped to a measured steady beating.

"Spick radio announcers!" said Shimel.

Fox snorted. Neither missed anything. This was easy, too easy. The dull gleam of metal in the firelight and moonlight spoke of *machetes* unsheathed and ready for business.

The natives were awaiting orders from Julio Maco, who crouched on his rock, his lips spread in a satanic grin which neither Fox nor Shimel missed.

And nobody molested the two.

But behind them, as they crossed the clearing to face Maco, the natives shifted in from right and left to close their way of exit. Between them and escape in any direction were the natives, followers of and believers in the power of Julio Maco. Only a terrific fight could free them now, if the natives had courage.

"Brass does it!" said Shimel. "Even this sort of business needs a front!"

"Oke," said Fox. "When you've finished with the dramatics, let's do this business we came to do."

"Right. Watch my back."

"Who," said Fox, "will watch mine?"

"Figure it out for yourself!"

Off to the right the moon shone dully on a pool of jungle slime, where the natives perhaps, when things were quiet enough for their women to be present, had their skimpy laundry done. Shimel made a mental note not to fall into that mess.

He stopped under the rock on which Maco now sat on his heels, tensed, as Shimel well knew, for a spring. The tom-toms drummed and thrummed, and Shimel and Fox could guess what message they carried out across the jungle tops to the minions of Julio Maco:

"The Chewer is here, facing the master! Harken and we shall tell you who wins the duel!"

Shimel stopped, his legs wide apart, his hands close to his hips. Fox stopped, too, his back to Shimel's, his eyes playing over the natives back the way they had come.

Fox was grinning, showing his white teeth, enjoying himself. He never was afraid of tight places until he began to think about them afterward, and even then they troubled him little.

He didn't worry about his own back, for Shimel was there.

"Make it snappy, Maco!" grated Shimel.

"You have a date with a firing squad, back in the Capital. The *guardia* riflemen on the squad will all insist on using live cartridges."

A SORT of chuckle came from the parted lips of Julio Maco. He half rose from his position, like a monster spring uncoiling. His hands rose well above his shoulders, and Shimel saw them, stark against the moon. His blood ran cold for a moment. They were hands out of a nightmare, devil's hands, condor's talons.

Maco rose, and jumped.

He was like a leopard springing.

"Here he comes, Whitey!" said Shimel. "Every man for himself. He's loaded for bear!"

Maco seemed to leave the rock with strange, horrible slowness.

Shimel, as the man launched himself from his advantageous position, did two things with lightning speed. With his left forearm he flung his campaign hat from his head. With the same movement, almost, his hands darted to their appointed places. His left snaked out, gripping the butt of the automatic in his belt; his right brought forth the automatic in his holster.

His hands were like two serpents coiling to strike.

"Look out below, Whitey!" he snarled. "I'm stepping back."

"I'll look out for myself," replied Whitey Fox. "You handle Maco and I'll clean up the rest of 'em."

SHIMEL had to grin. Fox was a little fighting cock, afraid of nothing, with supreme confidence in himself.

Maco landed, clawing for Shimel's face.

His feet struck the ground as his two taloned hands swooped down and forward to rake across the face of Shimel. The gunnery sergeant, solid as a rock, breathing a sigh of relief that he hadn't stumbled when he had stepped back—struck with both guns at once.

A yell of pain and terror broke from the lips of Maco as the muzzles of Shimel's automatics crashed against his wrists with battering-ram force. Shimel had struck with all his power, short powerful blows. Among other things he was a good boxer, only now his hands were armed with pistols instead of padded gloves.

"How," grated Shimel, "do you like them potatoes, Maco?"

Through gritted teeth, shut down tight on further cries of pain, Julio Maco made answer.

"These hands shall yet rip your body to ribbons."

"And these pistols will make them change their minds!"

MACO was lithe and swift on his feet.

He began to circle Shimel, reaching for his face with those talons, in short swift lunges. Each time he came in Shimel smashed at the gloves with his automatics.

He could smell the odor of black scorpion, which he had often smelled before on jungle trails when his mule's hoofs had crushed the ebon horrors. The venom wouldn't kill a healthy man—but if he got some of it the medico would insist on giving him anti-tetanus injections, and Shimel feared a hypodermic needle as a woman fears mice.

Maco lunged in again.

Shimel side-stepped, smashed at the hands. The claws were dangling and Shimel hoped he had broken the wrists of the renegade. Now Shimel stepped in, lashing out with his left.

The automatic muzzle crashed across the face of Maco, leaving a red weal. His right weapon banged against Maco's temple, but even as Maco started to fall he was fighting with flailing arms and twisting body to remain erect.

Shimel stepped in again—and out—and another red streak appeared on the face of Maco.

The tom-toms beat an accompaniment to the scuffling feet of the fighters. Far away—Shimel was conscious of it as a sound in a dream—thrummed the other tom-toms, insistent, questioning. The far drums were asking for details, the near ones were giving them.

Shimel thought he caught a note

of doubt in the tom-toms in the clearing.

Maco fell when Shimel crashed his right automatic against his temple again—and as he fell he shouted, a choking shout:

"Charge them! But take them alive!"

From the crowd of natives rose menacing shouts. Shimel heard the clanging of steel against steel as *machetes* were unsheathed. Then, like the sound of an oncoming tidal wave, the natives charged.

"Keep going, Sarge!" yelled Fox. "I'll handle these babies!"

Shimel struck again as Maco half rose, but the big man regained his feet and lunged in, clawing wildly. Shimel could see that the man's wrists and hands had now swollen until they all but burst the gloves of the cruel bestial claws.

He struck again, and Maco went down—just as a flood of natives poured over Fox. Shimel whirled to help the slighter man. Fox was yelling.

"Come on, you sons of grasshoppers! Take that and those and them—and may all your children be acrobats!"

FOX was wielding his two automatics with all the skill that Shimel had used in handling his. But natives were slashing at him from all sides, swinging their *machetes* for disemboweling strokes—and the two marines dared not shoot.

"Remember, though," said Shimel, panting, though Fox had said nothing, "that it's better to be court-martialed for shooting a flock of Spicks than to be dead! But stave it off as long as you can!"

They charged fiercely into the ruck of the fighters. The natives gave back, gathered their forces, charged again.

In spite of themselves the two

marines had to give ground. Then, out of the corner of his eye, Shimel saw that Maco had regained his feet and was renewing the attack. He whirled, leaving Fox to his own devices, and resumed the fray with the leader.

Almost at once he heard a splash, and a gurgle—and the yells of Fox could no longer be heard. A *machete* from somewhere struck him alongside the head. Fortunately the weapon turned, but the flat of it struck him a terrific blow that made his head ring, caused the whole clearing to sway and heave and buck like a subchaser in a quartering sea.

Yet he kept his feet, though he staggered—and Maco yelled, realizing how much of prestige he had lost.

"Get back! There is now but one—and Maco is a match for that one, even though he be The Chewer!"

Shimel's heart sank into his boots. The tom-toms seemed to be stuttering, keeping time to the uncertain steps of Shimel himself as he fought bitterly with Maco.

The *machete* wielder did not strike again.

But as Shimel darted in, after beating Maco back for a moment, someone thrust a *machete* between his legs—and Shimel sprawled forward on his face. Instantly, realizing he was doomed if he did not regain his feet at once, he rolled over on his back. Poised above him, like a swooping eagle, was Julio Maco, feet off the ground in a great leap as the killer saw his chance and jumped to take advantage of it.

SHIMEL held up his hands. Somehow he seemed to have dropped his weapons. Maco landed on him, knees smashing into the pit of his stomach. Past the huge man Shimel could see the top of the rock whence Maco had first jumped—and now a

weird, black, grotesque figure poised there, materializing out of nowhere. It might have been a smaller replica of Maco himself.

Maco's claws reached for Shimel's face, disregarding his upflung hands, which were weak because the knees of Maco had knocked the wind out of Shimel. From the barrel chest of Maco came a chuckle of derision, of gloating.

The claws started down—and at that exact moment the black figure on the rock jumped, legs and arms outspread.

The whole thing landed on Maco's back, rolling him off Shimel—who scrambled to his feet, gasping for breath.

The black apparition was atop Maco, and both its hands were going, and those hands still held automatics—though neither man nor guns could have been recognized as such—for they were covered, in every part of them, with stinking slime and mud. It was Fox, and his automatic muzzles, rhythmically smashing at the head of Maco, were working with terrible effect. Fox gasped.

"Don't stand there, sailor!" he said to Shimel. "The gooks will soon see I've got this buzzard on the hip."

"GOOD grief!" said Shimel. "What happened? I thought—"

"Yeah," said Fox, "you thought I oughta do something about these ice cream pants so they wouldn't be so easy to see, didn't you? Well, I did it, didn't I? And the gooks thought I was cut in two when I nose dived into that mudhole!"

Now both men crouched above the motionless Maco.

"Bind his wrists behind him, Whitey," snapped Shimel. "Be careful of those spurs!"

While Fox got busy, using his hat string for bonds, and not being too

careful about how tight they were, Shimel snarled at the natives:

"We're taking this man out. If you molest us you'll lose him, for we'll shoot him full of lead, and tomorrow an army of marines will be scouring the woods for you! Get back!"

"He's no good to you dead—and without him you're so many sheep! Ready, Fox?"

"Yeah—"

"Then slap that buzzard awake and let's get going!"

CHAPTER VI

Those Funny Marines

THE sun was well up over Camp Cole. Several companies of leathernecks were being mustered for an hour of close order drill.

They looked smart and neat, despite flowing perspiration, in their bleached khaki. Immaculate officers barked commands.

Men and officers were curious, for there had been whispers—whispers of a dead man in the hospital. A coffin had been sent in from the quartermaster, and all knew what that meant.

But nobody knew exactly the truth.

There were whispers that there might be other coffins, other dead men. For all through the night the tom-toms in the Cordillera Centrales had sounded.

But around three o'clock in the morning the drumming had strangely changed. It had been hesitant, sobbing, fearful. Before it had been menacing, boastful, sneering. Before it had been a challenge; later it had been—well, almost begging, beseeching. Things were happening back in the high hills.

What?

Nobody knew, but there were

whispers of two republics joining in an uprising.

"Squads left, MARCH! Company, HALT!"

Company commanders swung their companies into line and halted them, then allowed them to stand at "rest" so that they could speak of the strange thing that was happening.

Out of the palm grove at the west side of Camp Cole, toward Guibia, came a queer trio. Everybody knew Daniel Shimel, The Chewer—and now his cheeks were pouched with *anduga* and he spat masterfully into the dust of the parade as he prodded at the back of a staggering, spent native with the muzzle of his automatic.

NOBODY knew the native, but he was a big man, and his face was fair, covered with freckles. He was big enough to have handled three of Shimel. Yet Shimel prodded him along.

The third man was hard to recognize. He was covered from head to heels with dried mud, but through the grime on his face he grinned, showing white teeth—and his campaign hat was missing. Several recognized him, and called his name:

"Fox!"

They had recognized him by his shuffling walk.

There were always natives at the edge of camp, to watch the leather-necks drill, and muttered words ran round among them:

"It's the Sergeant Chewer—and *Blancito!* And—and—"

There were gasps of fear as some recognized the grim big figure with the hands bound at his back. But they dared not whisper the dread name aloud, else spies might hear and wonder how they knew the name of Maco.

Straight across the parade ground toward the office of the commanding

general, through the very ranks of the marines, strode Daniel Shimel and his prisoner, trailed by the shuffling, grimy Fox.

There was a furor in the office when the trio entered, dirty and smelly. The gray eyes of Shimel narrowed.

The aides of General Hines jumped forward in all their immaculateness when Shimel and Maco and Fox entered the outer office; but he didn't seem to see them. The adjutant and chief of staff jumped to their feet to protest. They were scandalized. People only visited the general in immaculate uniform.

But they stood back, wondering, when Shimel disregarded them and marched his prisoner right into the general's office.

The general looked up.

"What's this? What's this?" he demanded testily.

"Maco, sir," said Shimel, shifting his chew of *anduga* without apology. "He confessed on the way here that he killed Morgan."

A colonel sat in a chair beside the general's desk. Shimel recognized him as the native officer commanding the *Guardia Nacional Dominicana*. Without apology the leatherneck barked at him in Spanish:

"I've a prisoner for you, a murderer!"

The colonel nodded. Fox leaned against the door. Hines looked at him and wrinkled his nose with distaste, but he changed the grimace to a grin.

"Got evidence to convict?" snapped the general.

FOR answer Shimel roughly turned the sagging prisoner around. The ghastly clawed-gloves were still on his hands because they were so badly swollen he couldn't have removed them.

"The medico can fit those spurs

into the wounds on Morgan's face, sir," said Shimel.

The general considered. Unconsciously he reached for his hip pocket, bringing forth a plug of the finest chewing tobacco. Fox grinned. Shimel grinned—and hurriedly offered his plug of *anduga* to the general. The general's face went grim.

"For that," he said hoarsely, "I should grant your request of last night to command the firing squad that executes Julio Maco—"

It was Shimel's turn to whiten. In his mind's eye he could see it all.

The condemned man, his chest bare, with a black patch over the heart as an aiming point, holding aloft a crucifix—of course he'd want a crucifix—while the officer in command of the firing squad barked out the fearful orders.

Shimel couldn't do it, even to

Maco the bestial. The adjutant came to the door.

"The officer of the day, sir," he said, "to be relieved."

SHIMEL had an inspiration. He grinned as the young lieutenant who had yelled at him last night about lights after taps, came in smartly with his relief.

"It's an officer's job, sir," said Shimel. "Might I suggest the lieutenant there? He needs the experience!"

The general shrugged.

"It's up to the *guardia* after all," he said. "I wouldn't wish that job on my worst enemy. You and Fox may go. Get some sleep, get cleaned up and come back—and maybe I'll have something really hard for you to do."

"Colonel Carvajal, take charge of your prisoner!"

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The WHIRLWIND'S RED TRAIL

*El Torbellino Matches Wits with an Impostor in this
Swashbuckling, Glamorous Story of Clanging Swords*

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Author of "The Mark of Zorro," "Alias the Whirlwind," etc.

AS José Blanco rode his mule slowly over the hill and down the slope toward the little pueblo of San Diego de Alcalá, the sun was setting over the sea, streaking the tumbling water with scarlet and orange. Long shadows were creeping down from the distant hills, and a big moon was peeping over the horizon.

It was a scene of beauty.

José Blanco admired the scene, though he had been riding for hours along El Camino Real, the King's Highway, in the thick dust, with the perspiration trickling all over him, and stinging gnats in swarms tormenting both him and his mule.

He had disposed of his business in Santa Barbara, and had with him the money he had obtained for it. And in San Diego de Alcalá he would start in business anew, for he visioned that it would become a great city some day, having such a splendid harbor.

Moreover, it was the place where the great mission chain had been started.

So, tired and dirty and hungry, José Blanco nevertheless felt that the world was not a bad place at all. Before long, he would be at the inn in San Diego de Alcalá, and

could bathe and eat and drink much wine, listen to the gossip and start making new friends.

He kicked his mule in the ribs to urge the beast to greater endeavor, now that the slope was before them and the sun had gone down and taken the heat of the day with it. The mule spurned the ground with his hoofs and churned up a gigantic cloud of dust, which the breeze wafted inland.

"Oh, sluggard!" José Blanco cried. "Let us get on to our destination!"

HE would have said more, but his words died away in a peculiar squawk. From behind a jumble of rocks a short distance ahead, a horseman had emerged.

The horse straddled the highway in a narrow spot, and José Blanco was compelled to throw weight on the reins and skid his mule to a stop to avoid a collision.

"What, *Señor*, is the meaning—?" José Blanco began.

He stopped speaking, and gave another squawk, this time of terror. He could see now that the rider who confronted him wore a mask over his face, and held a pistol in a menacing position.

"Welcome to this beautiful South-



"A liar is generally a coward—hand me your purse!" The pistol suddenly barked and kicked

land, *Señor!*" the masked rider said.

"I thank, you, *Señor!* But what manner of man are you, who covers his face in such a fashion?" José Blanco asked. "Are you one of those unfortunates who has encountered the dread smallpox, and has had it leave its mark on his countenance?"

"I AM known hereabouts, *Señor*, as El Torbellino, which is to say 'The Whirlwind'."

"A bandit! A highwayman! An outlaw!" José Blanco cried. "Ah, I have heard tales of you, *Señor!* Ah, *Señor* El Torbellino! How happy I am that I am but a poor man not worth the robbing."

"Were I a man of wealth, I should have a bad few minutes with you now, I doubt not."

"So you are a poor man not worth robbing?" El Torbellino asked.

"*Si, Señor!*" José Blanco replied. "Had I the necessary courage, I'd turn highwayman myself, and make the rich share their wealth with me."

"A liar is generally a coward," the masked rider observed. "Hand me your purse, *Señor*. It is a fat one, I happen to know. You have been loud in your boasting of selling one business at a big profit and carrying the proceeds to San Diego de Alcala to start another."

"I swear to you, *Señor* El Torbellino—"

The pistol held by the masked rider suddenly barked and kicked. It shot forth flame and smoke and a missile.

José Blanco gave a great cry of mingled fright and pain and reeled in his saddle, and his mule swerved aside in fright and almost unseated him.

"You have slain me!" José Blanco cried.

"I have only put a bullet into your shoulder, *Señor*, to teach you manners. I asked for your purse,

and you lied to me. I carry a second pistol, *Señor*, and if you compel me to bring it forth, the next shot will find your heart."

"My purse—take it," José Blanco groaned, and brought it out of the wide top of his boot, where he had hidden it.

The masked rider jumped his horse forward and snatched the purse, then swerved his mount aside again.

"Now ride, *Señor!*" he ordered. "Ride swiftly, so that a pistol ball cannot catch up with you."

Bending low in his saddle, sick and weak and dizzy because of his wound and very badly frightened, José Blanco rode.

Down the slope the mule rushed in great bounds, somewhat frightened himself at the shooting and loud talk.

At the bottom, there was a level, broad trail which ran straight to the plaza in San Diego de Alcala, and the mule tore along it.

AS he neared the pueblo, José Blanco began shouting and calling for help. He was in a state of semi-hysteria. He clutched at the pommel of his saddle, and kicked the mule in the ribs, nor tried to guide him.

Into the pueblo they dashed, and the mule skidded to a stop in front of the inn, probably because other beasts were tethered there. The wild cries of José Blanco had been heard, and a crowd had gathered.

"I have been robbed! I have been shot and am dying! The highwayman—!" José Blanco moaned.

Strength seemed to leave him and he reeled from the saddle, to be caught by bystanders and carried into the inn. They propped him on a bench in a corner, and the fat landlord came running with a mug of wine.

Some man hastened to get good

Fray Marcos, who knew how to treat gunshot wounds.

Carlos Lazaga, owner of the inn, urged the wounded one to talk. Somebody cried that Sergeant Juan Cassara, in charge of the presidio and its detachment, was coming swiftly.

Pedro Garzo, a man Lazaga hired to do work around the inn, brought a basin of hot water, and cloths, and began tearing away the blood-drenched garments.

"What is this?" Sergeant Juan Cassara cried, as he came hurrying into the inn. "There is talk of violence. Who are you, *Señor*?"

"I AM José Blanco, a merchant from Santa Barbara. I have been shot and robbed. It was just at the top of the hill. He wore a black mask."

"What did the fellow say?" Cassara asked.

"He declared that he was El Torbellino, The Whirlwind."

"Ha! So that one is abroad again!" the sergeant cried, blowing out the ends of his enormous mustache. "I shall pursue him immediately with my troopers. There is a rich reward offered by His Excellency, the Governor."

"He rode from behind the rocks on his white horse—"

"But this El Torbellino always rides a black horse," the innkeeper protested.

"Perhaps he has changed mounts," the sergeant suggested. "No doubt, the rogue helps himself to a horse whenever he sees one that takes his fancy."

"Death to the outlaw! He is a thorn in my flesh! This time, I pursue until I take him!"

Sergeant Juan Cassara rushed out of the building and started toward the presidio, shouting in his great voice so the guard at the door would hear and have the troopers commence getting ready for the trail.

"More wine! I am growing faint again," José Blanco muttered.

"Fray Marcos will be here swiftly, *Señor*, to care for your wound," Lazaga assured him. "The good fray knows exactly what to do in such a case."

"It is an outrage!" Blanco howled. "Now my money is gone. How can I start in business? I am ruined!"

"Softly, *Señor*, else you may start a fever in your blood," Lazaga warned.

"This El Torbellino—he is a scourge! He should be caught and hanged," the victim declared. "Is he to ride the highway forever, unpunished?"

"You are sure that the fellow was El Torbellino, *Señor*?" Pedro Garzo asked, as he bathed the wound again.

"He said as much. He boasted of it."

This was rather astounding, as far as Pedro Garzo was concerned. For he, the drudge of the inn, was The Whirlwind.

And he was quite certain that he had not been riding, on a white horse or any other—and just as certain that he would ride that night, to learn what man had stolen El Torbellino's identity, and why.

II

WITH much raucous shouting of commands and much jingling of accoutrements, Sergeant Juan Cassara and his troopers took to the trail. They dashed out of the pueblo in a cloud of dust, and to the top of the hill, where they started searching for tracks which would tell them in which direction their man had gone.

It would be a difficult task, this chase in the moonlight, and well did Sergeant Cassara know it. He did not hope to accomplish much, but he and his men could ride and make a

show of trying to do their duty. At a certain *hacienda*, they would stop to eat and drink, and make a sort of holiday of the chase.

Fray Marcos attended to the wound of José Blanco, and the man endeavored to make a hero of himself, sitting in a corner of the big public room at the inn and guzzling wine as he recounted, time after time, the harrowing narrative of his trying experience.

IN a corner men diced at a table where the play was heavy, traveling merchants and traders and those who made living with dice and cards.

Came a series of screeches out in the plaza, and the sound of men running, and into the inn dashed a native, his eyes wide with terror, panting from his exertion, the perspiration streaming from him.

Lazaga made for him.

"Wretch! How dare you come in the front door of the inn, shouting in this manner? I'll put a lash across your shoulders!"

"The soldiers! I want the soldiers!" the native cried. "El Torbellino—"

"What of him?"

"This is one of Juan Sandoval's men," Pedro Garzo put in, at Lazaga's elbow.

"We were coming to the pueblo in the big carriage, *Señores*," the native wailed. "This El Torbellino stopped us.

"When Don Juan Sandoval made resistance, the highwayman shot him, *Señores*. Then he took Don Juan's purse, and stripped jewelry from the hands and throat of my mistress, and shot both the horses."

Those in the room crowded around, listening to this tale of horror.

"I ran ahead to get help," the native continued. "Somebody must go, please, and bring my mistress to the town. Only a mile out the road."

"The troopers are out chasing The Whirlwind," Lazaga said.

Men hurried to get horses and go to the rescue of Don Juan Sandoval's wife, and to bring Don Juan's body into the town. And others armed themselves, their intention being to pursue.

"'Tis a red trail this El Torbellino leaves," Lazaga said. "We must make an end of him!"

The game in the corner began again, and more men bought wine. The Whirlwind, they were saying, never had killed before. He had used the blade, but more for the pure fun of vanquishing his opponents.

Undoubtedly, the highwayman had turned violent. If so, he must be exterminated. Men had sat back and laughed at his robberies of the rich. But, if he took to wounding and killing on the slightest provocation, that was another matter.

Pedro Garzo's face was grim as he went about his duties. Scion of a noble family in Spain, he had come to California after a quarrel with his father. He had taken the job of inn drudge, and played The Whirlwind on the side, for his nature craved excitement and thrills.

HE had robbed only those who deserved to lose, and the most of his loot had gone into the poor box at the chapel.

But here was another man playing The Whirlwind, and killing. It was a thing that must be settled, else Pedro Garzo could ride as El Torbellino no longer. He did not care to be caught when there were murders chalked up against his name.

He went into the kitchen for hot water, and there met Juanita, Lazaga's fair daughter, whose eyes twinkled at sight of him.

"So this El Torbellino is abroad again?" she asked.

"So they say, *Señorita*."

"And he is shooting and killing men. That is something he has not done before. He rides a white horse, too, instead of a black."

"Wild tales of highwaymen are not for such pretty ears as yours," Pedro Garzo said.

"OH, but I think The Whirlwind is wonderful!"

"You do, *Señorita*? And why?"

"He is so brave to stop travelers on El Camino Real and take wealth from them. And he always leaves gold in the poor box at the chapel."

"He is a thief, due to be hanged."

"Perhaps there is some reason behind his acts," Juanita said. "Perhaps he is not the ordinary sort of highwayman. If I knew his identity, I'd not betray him."

"Do you think you know him?" Pedro Garzo asked.

"Perhaps," she said. "But one thing is puzzling me, Pedro. How can a man be in two places at the same time?"

"Such a thing cannot be," Pedro Garzo assured her.

She smiled at him, and began singing softly, and Pedro Garzo went on to the stove for the hot water. In, out of the night, through the kitchen door, stepped a figure wrapped in a long cloak and wearing a black mask.

"Attention!" he barked.

Pedro and Juanita whirled at sound of the voice.

"Make no noise!" he warned. "I am El Torbellino! Into the big room ahead of me! Make haste!"

He held a pistol, and his eyes glittered through the slits in his mask. Voicelessly, the two in the kitchen obeyed.

They slipped through the door with the masked man at their heels, and darted aside.

And the intruder suddenly stood in the doorway, his pistol held high.

"*Señores!*" he thundered. "Here is

The Whirlwind! Put your hands up high!"

There was a chorus of cries, of both astonishment and fear. Hands went up. Lazaga squawked, and was about to start a protest, when he remembered what had happened to José Blanco and Don Juan Sandoval.

The masked man strode across the room to the table where men had been dicing, and those there retreated before him to the wall, and stood with their backs against it.

"Gold for the taking," the intruder said. "You would have lost it in time anyhow. Let this teach you, *Señores*, not to gamble with dice."

He swept up the gold with his left hand, watching them carefully meanwhile, and stowed it away. And then he started backing toward the kitchen door.

"It was kind of the troopers to chase away into the hills, and leave the pueblo at my mercy," the robber said. "Give my respects to the big fool of a sergeant."

One of the men standing against the wall had a pistol in his sash. Now he brought it forth, prepared to fire.

"Don Juan Sandoval was my friend!" he cried.

BUT the masked man had been watching too closely to be caught off guard so.

His own pistol barked, and the friend of Don Juan dropped his weapon and reeled to the nearest bench, to sprawl across it.

The masked man brought forth another pistol quickly, and held the others in the room under the menace of its muzzle.

"I regret the necessity of taking life," he said. "He brought it upon himself. *Señores, adios!*"

Then he was gone through the kitchen door, and an instant later those in the inn heard the pounding

of a horse's hoofs, and knew that the highwayman had ridden away.

Pedro Garzo, standing at the kitchen door, was trembling, but not from fear. He had been observing things with his keen eyes, and had noted some things that he would remember.

Into the inn rushed townsmen. The dead man was taken away. The dice game stopped. Lazaga was howling that he was ruined because of the tragedy.

"And you!" he barked at Pedro Garzo. "Shiftless one! Did you carry salt to my black horse in the pasture?"

"But I have been busy continually, *Señor*," Pedro Garzo protested. "Not a moment has been my own since this José Blanco came here wounded."

"What a night!" Lazaga mourned. "Salt the horse. Then mingle with those in the town, and see what you can learn. Say a word here and there that what has happened is no fault of mine. I'll clean up the blood, and Juanita shall help me."

BUT others entered the inn then, and went to a table. The fat landlord hurried to attend them. One was a certain Rafael Murillo, lately come from the north, supposed to be a gentleman of means seeing the country. He was a guest at the inn.

Pedro Garzo was compelled to aid in serving the group. He hovered near the table, watching them all, and especially this Rafael Murillo. His eyes narrowed and gleamed when Murillo's glistened at sight of Juanita.

One thing did Pedro Garzo notice in particular—that Rafael Murillo had a peculiar scar across the back of his left hand. And the masked man who had entered the inn had also had one such.

"This Whirlwind seems to be a tempest tonight," Rafael Murillo was saying. "Fortunate for me that I

was not here when he called. But I doubt I would have handed him my purse without making a fight."

"One made a fight," somebody reminded him.

"Let us hope, *Señores*, that The Whirlwind is done for the time and has ridden away," Lazaga said. "Let us hope that the troopers pursue and catch the rogue."

"And, above all, let us hope that he does not ride again tonight along the north road."

"And why hope that?" Rafael Murillo asked.

"The tax gatherer is due early tonight. I had word of his coming, to prepare a room for him and his escort. He has been gathering taxes between here and San Juan Capistrano, and will be carrying much gold."

"But he has an escort, has he not?" Murillo asked.

"Two men, *Señor*, and neither noted for bravery. 'Tis but a show. If El Torbellino encounters them, there will be grave trouble. The tax gatherer undoubtedly will fight, and perhaps his escort will try it also."

Rafael Murillo emptied his wine mug. "A pest on such turbulent times!" he said, getting to his feet. "Song and laughter are more to my liking tonight, and mayhap a comely wench. 'Tis in my mind to ride out to a certain place I know—" He ceased talking, and laughed a little, and strode from the inn.

Pedro Garzo's eyes gleamed strangely as he watched Rafael Murillo go.

III

A MOMENT later, Pedro Garzo left the inn with a sack over his shoulder. He hurried along the rim of a coulée and away from the town.

Some time before, Lazaga had

made a trade for a huge black horse, a splendid animal to open the eyes of men. But he had found, after making the trade, that the beast was not to be managed.

Hence he had turned the animal to pasture, waiting for a time when somebody would come along and the horse could be traded again.

Carrying salt for the horse, and at times soft food, Pedro Garzo, who had a way with horses, had tamed the animal to riding. And on this night he quickened his steps when he came to where he knew the animal bedded.

HE called softly, and through the moonlight came the big black, to rub muzzle against Pedro Garzo's shoulder.

Pedro Garzo led him to a bunch of rocks, where riding gear had been stowed. He put on saddle and bridle, and left the reins hanging while he brought forth a long black cloak, a hat and mask, and a pistol and blade.

Soon Pedro Garzo was gone, and in his place was El Torbellino, The Whirlwind. He mounted, and rode through the night.

Skirting the town cautiously, he went out the north trail, paralleling it a short distance to the right, riding slowly and listening for sounds which would tell of travelers along El Camino Real.

He knew in which direction Sergeant Juan Cassara and his troopers had ridden, and had no fear of them. Over a hill he went and stopped again to listen.

In the far distance were hoof-beats, and faintly to the ears of The Whirlwind came the voices of men as they talked to one another loudly, so as to be heard above the sounds their horses made.

The Whirlwind traveled forward at a swifter rate of speed now. It was the tax gatherer and his escort

coming, he guessed. And he guessed also that somewhere along the trail the bogus El Torbellino would indulge in his work of robbery.

It was the intention of The Whirlwind to get behind the tax gatherer and follow him, and make a sudden showing when the spurious El Torbellino struck. He judged that the latter was in ambush in the rocks at the top of the hill.

But there came to his ears a sudden tumult, loud cries and curses, and the sound of a shot. Blades clashed, and another shot sounded. The Whirlwind put spurs to his horse.

Down the highway he dashed, through the thick fine dust. An instant he had a glimpse of a white horse in the moonlight, and saw the flash of a firearm. Then the white horse darted to one side of the highway and disappeared.

The Whirlwind did not give pursuit, but kept on. Up to the scene of the crime he dashed. One horse was down, and two others stood near, waiting. Three men were stretched on the ground.

"Help, *Señor*, for the love of the saints—" one mouthed.

"What happened?"

"Highwayman—El Torbellino—attacked us—got tax money."

THE tax gatherer was dead of a pistol wound, and one of his escort also. And this man speaking was propped up against a rock, weak from loss of blood, a sword thrust having pierced him.

The Whirlwind had no time to help, nor could he have done much. He heard a vehicle approaching, and knew that some traveler along El Camino Real was hurrying to get to San Diego de Alcala for the night. He would hear this man's story and take the alarm to the town.

So The Whirlwind wheeled his horse and rode away, back along the

highway. At the top of the hill he stopped. He saw no white horse in the moonlight, nor did he hear the sound of hoof-beats.

The bogus El Torbellino, he supposed, had a hiding place for his white horse, and there would leave it and undoubtedly depart on another. The Whirlwind rode on, leaving the road and circling the town. In time, he was in the coulée which ran behind Lazaga's inn.

IN the darkness in a depression, he dismounted and tethered the big black to a clump of brush. Crawling up to the level, he surveyed the terrain cautiously. Assured that he was not being observed, he stripped off The Whirlwind's cloak and hat and mask, and put aside pistol and blade, hiding them all among the rocks.

Then Pedro Garzo shuffled toward the rear of the inn, whistling softly a tune of Old Spain.

Juanita Lazaga was at the back door, looking out at the moonlight. From the patio came the strains of guitar music and a soft voice, as somebody indulged in serenade.

"A fair night," Juanita said. "Is it not, Pedro?"

"A bloody night," he replied.

"Regarding this El Torbellino, who slew Don Juan Sandoval—"

But she stopped speaking when there was a tumult in the big room. Pedro Garzo sprang into the kitchen and rushed with her to the other door.

Men were surging excitedly into the hostelry from the plaza.

A carriage had arrived, the horses lathered, a badly wounded man stretched across the driver's lap. The tax gatherer and one of his men had been slain, and here was the other at point of death. El Torbellino again!

Enraged men began muttering. The tax gatherer, despite his official position, was a jovial fellow and well

liked. His violent death, coming on top of the other events of the evening, infuriated the citizens.

"A red trail he leaves!" Lazaga cried.

"The soldiers are gone in futile pursuit," one said. "Some of the men have gone riding also. It is time for others to do the same. Mount and ride, we must, until this murderous rogue is brought down or captured for the rope."

They shouted and ran for horses. The inn grew quiet again. Lazaga cared for the latest guests, Pedro Garzo and Juanita aiding him. At the table in the corner, men began playing at cards once more.

Time passed, and there was no further trouble. Then Rafael Murillo returned.

"More violence, I hear," he said. "His Excellency, the Governor, should send extra troops to run down this rogue. He has taken unto himself the tax money, I understand."

"And slain two more men, *Señor*, and possibly a third," Lazaga told him. "There will be no rest, now, until the fellow is captured or slain."

"THERE is no suspicion as to his identity?" Rafael Murillo asked.

"Who can say, *Señor*? Nothing is known of him except that he is an excellent horseman and expert with a blade. He may be some man of the town, some renegade living in the hills, some young man of noble blood gone wrong and forgetting he is a caballero."

"Perhaps he has done enough for one time," Rafael Murillo suggested. "He has taken a quantity of gold to-night, if the reports be true."

"And some rare gold," Lazaga added. "He got Don Juan Sandoval's purse, please to remember. And in it Don Juan always carried, for good fortune pieces, three coins of Old Spain, coins of soft gold,

Señor, with Don Juan's initial letters scratched upon them."

"Ha! The fellow should be careful where he spends those," Rafael Murillo said.

Pedro Garzo, pretending to be cleaning in a corner of the room, had been listening to this. Now he slipped from the inn unseen, and hurried through the shadows to where he had left his horse.

He stripped saddle off him, and hid it in the brush. He allowed the bridle to remain.

Then he got into the garb of El Torbellino again, and buckled on his blade and put his loaded pistol in his sash.

Through the shadows he went again, cautiously, toward the rear door of the inn.

Nobody was in the kitchen. Juanita had gone into the patio, possibly, to listen to the music. Nobody witnessed The Whirlwind's advance as he went noiselessly across the kitchen and to the door of the big room.

Lazaga was leaning against the counter, yawning. The front door had been closed, but one of the windows was open. Rafael Murillo was playing at cards with four others, and winning, laughing at their wry faces as they lost, generally making himself unpopular.

The Whirlwind hesitated an instant longer, then draped his cloak to suit him. held pistol ready, and stepped through the door.

"Attention, *Señores!*" he cried.

IV

ACHORUS of cries greeted his appearance. Under the menace of his pistol, those at the table elevated their hands. Lazaga, squawking his fear, trotted across the room and joined the others when The Whirlwind motioned for him to do so.

Rafael Murillo's eyes bulged, and he licked at his lips as though they suddenly had become parched.

"The Whirlwind again!" one of the players said.

"The Whirlwind, *Señores*, but not again. This is my first appearance this evening. You have nothing to fear, *Señores*, if you make no hostile move, and listen to me."

"S-say on," Lazaga gulped.

"There have been robberies and murders this night," The Whirlwind said, "and I have done none of them."

"But the victims have said as much." Rafael Murillo put in.

"The guilty man said that he was El Torbellino, but he was not. He rode a white horse, and I ride a black. He has across the back of one hand a long scar—and I have not. I rob, but do not kill. This man has taken my name and committed foul wrongs. And I am going to unmask and punish him!"

"A pretty yarn!" Murillo said.

"*Señor*, you have a scar across your hand, I notice," The Whirlwind told him. "Look at it, some of you."

MURILLO reeled back against the wall. "What of it? Many men have scars across their hands, especially those who have used a blade."

"You were always absent when the crimes were committed, and I doubt you can explain your absence. Your means of sustenance are unknown, yet you spend money freely and squander it at dice and cards. I ask you, *Señores*, to seize this man now, and empty his pockets and purse, and let us see what we may find."

They hesitated, and The Whirlwind threatened them with the pistol. So they seized Rafael Murillo against his protests, and held him against the wall, and went through his pockets.

They tossed gold upon the table before them, quite a sum, but no more than the man might have been

carrying, since he gambled so much.

"This is an outrage!" Rafael Murillo cried.

"Look at the gold," The Whirlwind instructed the others, in his deep voice. "See if any of Don Juan Sandoval's good-fortune coins are there."

They uttered exclamations at that, and surged forward to the table, fumbling with the coins as they were tumbled from the money pouch. Lazaga gave a cry of unbelief as he held up a coin.

"Here is one! . . . Stop him!"

FOR Rafael Murillo was making a dash for the front door of the inn, knowing his guilt and fearing the consequences. But The Whirlwind was before him.

"Back, *Señor!*" he cried. "You make no escape! There is a penalty for such crimes as yours, and the soldiers will be returning soon to seize you."

"Let us slay him!" one of the gamblers howled.

Rafael Murillo snapped his blade out of its scabbard.

"Out of my path, Whirlwind!" he cried.

But The Whirlwind did not step aside. Nor did he use the pistol he held. Giving a cry as though of gladness for this chance of combat, he stuck the pistol in his sash, and whipped out his own blade, and so met the wild charge of the other.

Off balance, Rafael Murillo swerved to one side, regained his proper footing, and strove to remove this man who stood between him and escape.

Blades clashed and rang. Not without skill was this rogue of a Murillo, but The Whirlwind was a master of fence. He drove his enemy backward slowly, maneuvering so the light from the smoking torches was to his advantage. A dozen times he

touched his man, but did not run him through.

Perspiration popped out on Rafael Murillo's face in great globules, and that face was drained of color, for he knew that The Whirlwind held him helpless. One wild charge he made, and The Whirlwind only laughed and darted aside, and allowed Rafael Murillo to crash against the wall.

"Here I am, *Señor!*" The Whirlwind mocked. "Come to me, murderer! So you would play Whirlwind, and get the genuine Whirlwind a bad reputation, eh? Have at you, craven rogue!"

Murillo screeched his rage and charged again. The Whirlwind did not step aside this time, did not retreat, met the charge with blade on blade. So they held an instant, then The Whirlwind gave a quick twist to his wrist, and the blade of Rafael Murillo went sailing through the air to crash against the wall.

The Whirlwind's blade darted forward, and came back red.

"'Twill not be fatal, but it will hold you here until the troopers return," The Whirlwind said.

AND just then the troopers returned.

There was a wild tumult in the plaza, the sound of horses galloping, raucous commands from the throat of Sergeant Juan Cassara.

"Help! . . . Help! . . . El Torbellino is here!" Rafael Murillo cried.

No doubt he thought that they would come charging in and mistake the scene, and that he could make an escape before the truth was learned. Failing in that, he might have yet the satisfaction of seeing the genuine Whirlwind taken prisoner also, to stretch rope for his robberies on the highway.

The door flew open, and they charged into the inn, troopers and

townsmen. The Whirlwind darted toward the kitchen door. His pistol was out of his sash again.

"Back, Señores!" he cried.

"'Tis The Whirlwind! Take him!" Sergeant Cassara roared. "There is a reward—"

"Attend to that man!" The Whirlwind cried, pointing to Rafael Murillo. "He did the killings tonight. I have unmasked him for you."

"Capture him!" Cassara shouted again.

THEY surged forward, and The Whirlwind fired his pistol. He made no effort to slay or wound, and the ball went into the ceiling, to send a spray of plaster tumbling down.

Then The Whirlwind darted back into the kitchen, with the mob after him, and some, he knew, outside the building, and starting to circle it to cut off his retreat.

Through the kitchen he dashed, and out into the moon-drenched night. From shadow to shadow he darted. But some of those in pursuit could see him. Firearms barked, and slugs flew near him. Past the rocks he fled unscathed, and down into the depression where the black horse was waiting.

He ripped bridle off the animal, slapped him on the rump. The black had been trained for this. He dashed away down the coulée, the thunder of his hoofs reaching the ears of

those who pursued The Whirlwind. He would be safe in pasture, The Whirlwind knew, before any could take after him.

The troopers rushed back to the inn, running to their horses. Sergeant Juan Cassara was cursing and bellowing orders. The Whirlwind stripped off the garments which marked him, and stowed them away in the rocks.

And, an instant later, Pedro Garzo, the humble servant, went slowly toward the inn.

He entered the kitchen door, and passed through and into the big room, where his absence had not been noticed. Rafael Murillo was being held prisoner in a corner, guarded, though his cut had left him weak.

PEDRO GARZO suddenly found the little *señorita* beside him.

"So this Rafael Murillo is the rogue," she whispered. "The murderer and robber."

"So it seems," Pedro Garzo replied.

"And the real Whirlwind—he got away again."

"So it seems."

Pedro Garzo turned his head and looked down at her, to find that her eyes were twinkling, and she was smiling and dimpling.

"The Whirlwind is a man!" she said softly. "I could love one such."

And Pedro Garzo looked up, and quickly away.

You Can't Afford to Miss

THE ISLAND OF MAGIC DEATH

A Complete Novelette

By FREDERICK C. PAINTON

—In Next Month's *THRILLING ADVENTURES*

MEN *of* STEEL



Behind him, a pistol cracked

A Gripping, Tense Story Proving that Railroaders Stick Together—At no Matter What Cost!

A Complete Novelette

By MAJOR GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

Author of "Africa Wakes."

JIM MARTIN stood facing a hard-jawed official across an office desk. The young man wore the sack-like gray uniform of a convict; on the back of his jacket was stenciled the number which had taken the place of his name. That was what he had become: Number

9324. Not Jim Martin; just 9324. Only another convict.

The pen scratched its last. The deputy warden leaned back in his creaking chair and looked at Martin. His eyes were dark and hard, relieved by no flicker of humor or human understanding.

"Ninety-three-twenty-four," said the deputy in his soft, slurring voice. This apparent gentleness had deceived more than one convict, to confidences and their ultimate undoing. "I'm just calling you in here for a general warning. You've been sending out kites, haven't you?"

"No, sir!" lied Martin instantly, though his heart went sick. He had been sending out messages to his friend Frank Curtis.

Martin had been framed by a gang that had been caught dead to rights in a jam. Someone had to be sent to prison. They had lied on the witness stand, framed Jim Martin and sent him to the pen for five years. Martin had merely been taking a short cut through the Brewster train yard. All of the real gang of car thieves had either been given suspended sentences or never been tried at all.

DURING the six months that Martin had been in prison, he had been busy. He had talked to the other prisoners and listened to them. Gradually he had managed to get the information he wanted against the gang that had sent him here; against the gang of politicians they worked with, who sold the goods the gang stole. He had discovered that there were some high officials taking thieves' money.

Martin had managed to get word to Frank Curtis, a railroad fireman, that he was ready to talk. Curtis had waited until the governor was away for a few days and then had gone to see Lieutenant-Governor Bradhurst.

It was no secret in the state that the lieutenant-governor was not in love with his job. He had been a rail executive with a record for efficient organization, and had been swept into politics—and into office—on the crest of a reform wave which

had demanded "business efficiency" in the state government.

Unfortunately, once the torchlight of election day had faded, the governor and a majority of the legislature had remembered that they were professional politicians. This left the lieutenant-governor rather helpless, except in the rare intervals when the governor was absent from the state.

After hearing the story of Jim Martin from his friend Curtis, the lieutenant-governor had phoned the prison. He requested that Martin be sent to him at once under guard for questioning. The deputy warden had told him over the phone that Martin was in the prison hospital, too ill to be moved at present.

There was nothing further that Bradhurst could do at the moment. He did not feel it advisable to leave the capitol and go to see the prisoner himself.

Jim Martin knew nothing of this as he stood facing the deputy warden. He knew only that the appeal to the lieutenant-governor had evidently miscarried.

Curtis and Martin had foreseen this, and decided that if the appeal failed Martin must try to escape. And they had made plans to that end, as far as plans could be made. Their means of communication were pitifully inadequate.

Whatever happened, Martin knew, he mustn't anger the deputy; to be sent to the "hole" now would be fatal.

ONLY that morning the south-bound way-freight had set in a car of cement on the spur track in the prison yard. Her fireman had been—Frank Curtis. She'd be back for the empty at about three-thirty—in twenty minutes or so. And then—

Curtis' appearance on the way-freight was the signal. The time was

fixed. And Martin, working on a yard gang, unloading and stacking the cement, must be ready!

This summons to the deputy—what could it mean?

"Don't bother lying, I know you have," the soft voice continued. "And you've been around asking questions, stirring up trouble generally. Now, I don't want trouble-makers in this prison. So I've decided to give you something else to think about, something to occupy your time."

"**T**OMORROW, you go on the quarry gang. If you don't get out your quota of stone each and every day, you know what will happen."

The quarry gang, reserved for incorrigibles—hell within hell.

"First time, the black hole for the night on bread and water," continued the deputy, as though taking actual joy in recounting his inhuman punishments. "Second time, you spend the night on tiptoe, chained to the door; third time," the deputy smiled faintly and licked his lips, "third time, we'll have to try the paddle on you."

The paddle. It didn't sound formidable, but Martin knew—the whole prison knew—what it meant. A thick leather strap, pickled in brine and honey-combed with round holes. At the first blow on the naked flesh of the victim, there was a blister for each hole; at the second, the blisters broke. And thereafter—

"Now," purred the deputy, "get back to your gang! And be in the quarry lineup tomorrow morning. That's all."

Martin turned and left the room. Had relief flared in his eyes? He could not know. But he knew that the deputy's gaze was boring into his back as he walked across the office to the door.

Outside that glass door, he walked down the corridor to the barred gate which gave access to the cell-blocks from the administration building. At any moment he expected a summons to return. But none came.

The guard on duty unlocked the gate and let him through. He walked down the central hall between two cell-blocks, passed the guard captain's office, and came to the big door opening into the prison yard. Here was another guard.

"Yard Gang B to the deep and back," grunted the guard as he examined his pass. "Lucky you came back, ain't ya? Most don't. Awright, g'wan."

Martin walked unhurriedly into the yard. His gang was working in the cement shed, stacking the cement taken from the box car, which the way-freight was to pick up. The car itself stood on the track near the shed, close to the high, windowless brick wall of the new powerhouse.

Martin walked from the cell-block, rounded the corner of the powerhouse. The structure cut him off from the sight of the guard in the door. His own gang guard was inside the cement shed.

The wall guard, in the tower overlooking the big gate where the tracks entered the prison yard, was leaning over the rail looking outward. Outward, to where smoke rose and the exhaust of an approaching engine could be heard.

THERE was no eye to see as Martin stepped quietly between the box car and the powerhouse wall, clambered into the car through the open door, and stepped to one end of the dust-filled interior. He sat down on the floor to wait. Above his head, the end door was slightly ajar. He himself had seen to that during the unloading.

He heard the exhausts of the coming engine cease, heard a clanking of wheels over rail-joints as the engine rolled in between the double wall. There was a loud clang; the outer gate was closed. Standing up, Martin peered through the crack of the end door.

He saw the great inner gate, with its close-set upright bars, swing open; saw the end of a box car backing slowly toward him, and beyond, the white steam plume of the engine. On the end ladder of the car clung a brakeman; the same who had been helping Curtis with the notes, a good egg named Keeler.

KEELER was flagging the engine back. Closer and closer came the car; with a ker-lunk the couplings gently met. As they did so, Keeler reached swiftly and pulled open the closed end door, which moved silently on well-oiled rollers. Then he dropped down and began hooking up the air.

He did not look up as Martin opened his own end door, peered out cautiously, then fairly flung his slim body across the intervening space and into the newly arrived car.

Once inside, Martin dropped to the floor and closed the end door behind him. He found himself in a very narrow, dark and dusty space between the end of the car and a false partition, erected flush with the end of the car and on the inside arranged carefully to resemble it. This had been built in by Curtis and a friend of his from the car shop. The car itself had been quietly awaiting the propitious moment.

Martin, scarcely daring to breathe, remained very still. He peered through a tiny crack between two boards of the false end; he could see the sun pouring through an open side door.

With a slight jerk the car began

to move. He could hear the soft chug of the engine, the rumbling of wheels underfoot. Gray walls cut off the sunlight. They were through the inner gate.

Now! Now for the search!

The car squeaked to a stop. For a moment there was no sound save the panting of the air-pump. Then feet grated on gravel. A guard's head was thrust in at the side door, twisted this way and that. The whole interior of the car was visible, both side doors being open; it must have seemed to the guard that a mouse could not have escaped his scrutiny. Martin fought with his dusty throat; he had a terrible fear that he was going to cough.

The head was withdrawn. The guard crouched to look underneath, then crunched on to inspect the cement car.

A moment later—

"All right, Mac—let 'er go!" the guard shouted, his voice echoing cheerfully between the walls.

Martin held a hand over his mouth. In a minute he could cough his head off if he liked. Then—

"Wait!" called another voice, carrying clearly, the tone of one accustomed to command. "I think I'd better make a *thorough* search of those cars. I've got a hunch I'll find something interesting!"

The deputy—he'd guessed! He'd followed Martin! Or perhaps it was just his devil's luck. He'd find him, too.

MARTIN felt about in the blackness, hoping for some odd bit of two-by-four with which to make a fight of it, force them to kill him. Better to die fighting than by torture.

There was nothing—nothing.

Well, he had his fists. He'd fight 'em barehanded. To the death.

The car lurched suddenly forward.

Steam from open cylinder cocks roared against the concrete walls. There was a crash, a loud metallic report; the rattle of wheels, ever gaining speed, mingled with the accelerating exhausts of the engine.

The sun streamed again into the open door; the walls were left behind.

Down the long spur track raced the engine with its two cars, faster and faster. They thundered over a culvert, swept screaming on rusty rails round a slight curve, clattered through a cattle guard and straightened out on the quarter-mile run to the main line switch.

Now, behind them, the prison siren bubbled, whooped, howled its fury to the surrounding country. But of immediate pursuit there could be none—no roads ran this way, there was no chance for motor cars.

II

THE switch clanked underneath, brakes took hold. The little train shuddered to a stop.

The next instant Martin saw Keeler swing through the door into the box car. After him someone tossed an ax and a bar—then climbed in. Curtis! His pal, Curtis!

They were tearing at the boards of the false car-end, tearing them down. A moment later the hands of the two friends met. There was no word that seemed adequate. So they stood for a moment; then Martin turned to Keeler with outstretched hand and a stammer of thanks.

"Aw, what the hell," said Keeler, grinning. "We're all railroaders, ain't we? C'mon, get into these overalls 'n things. We gotta get rid o' that gray junk."

"What happened back there? How'd you get out?" demanded Mar-

tin, peeling his convict garb with hasty fingers.

"Crashed the gate," answered Curtis, as he helped Keeler tear away the last of the partition. "You'd oughter see the gate guard scam when the old 817 come jumpin' at him. Boy!"

"Yeah, you damned fool!" snarled a voice at the door. "I'll say you crashed th' gate! Shoved me away from my own throttle, yuh young whippersnapper, and pulled it wide open! How 'bout my job? How 'bout my family, huh?"

MARTIN saw a wrinkled old face beneath the long peak of a greasy cap; a face convulsed with senile anger. It was old Dad Conger, the oldest engineer in point of service on the Brewster division. He ran the way-freight by choice, as a nice easy job. No high-wheeled passenger flyer for Dad. He knew when he was well off, or so he said.

Curtis wasted no time in argument. "Well, you're in it now, Dad," he said. "Back up and hook on to the rest of the train. Let's be pullin' out from here."

The old man swore bitterly.

"Wait'll we get t' Brewster," he threatened. "I'm gonna turn yuh all in, so I am."

He went, nevertheless, toward his engine. Keeler dropped out to throw the switch, and a moment later the two cars had been backed to a coupling with the half dozen more that waited with the caboose on the passing-track.

A high-ball waved from the crummy. Keeler, yelling: "I'll fire her 's far as Three Pines," ran ahead and climbed into the cab. The train jerked into forward motion, clattered out on the main line, slowed up while the rear man closed the switch. Then the little mogul panted into her highest speed.

Martin, looking out from the door, could no longer see the prison. A slight ridge and some woods intervened. But he could hear the wail of that siren, like the voice of all the lost souls within those walls. Throbbing and shrieking, it carried the word to all the countryside that a prisoner had escaped.

"What now, Frank?" he asked, as he fastened the strap of his overalls and settled a cap on his head. It was good to feel like a railroader again instead of a slave. "They'll be telephoning all over—"

"Got it all figured out," interrupted Curtis. "We gotta meet with Number Four at Three Pines. She stops there for water. You know her fireman—Jarvis. I've talked to him. You'll ride her engine into the capital.

"Three Pines isn't a time-table stop, so no cops'll be likely to guess that you're on her. And no more stops for Number Four right into the capital. You drop off in the yard, cut across to Ma Flynn's railroad boardin' house, an' lay low till I get there. Got it?"

"I GOT it," answered Martin. "But look here, Frank. You're takin' an awful chance for me. This gate crashin' act's changed things a lot. They'll know, now. Ain't they liable to pinch you at Brewster, charged with aidin' me to escape?"

"Not a chance," chuckled Curtis. "You see, I'm not the reg'lar fireman on this run. I'm takin' a three-day lay-off, an' I got people that'll swear I'm home in Brewster all this time. The reg'lar fireman is Hinky Malone, an' he's hoppin' on at Brewster yard limits while I'm hoppin' off.

"When this train gets in, 'course hell 'll be poppin', cops all over the place 'n' what not. But we're chuckin' this partition into the drink off

Pine River trestle. There won't be no proof that you got away on this train, or at least that any of the crew helped ya."

"How 'bout Dad Conger? An' the rear man? An' the con?"

"I'll make Dad see that he's an old fool if he admits anythin', don't you worry," Curtis answered. "The rear man and the con know that me 'n Keeler were plannin' somep'n, but they don't know what an' don't wanna know, see?"

"As for Malone, he's got a brother a cop, an' he's been sittin' all afternoon playin' checkers in Brewster police station. So, 'f they grab him, he'll make fools of 'em in the end. An' with Dad keepin' his old mouth shut, how'll they ever prove who was the fireman on 817 this here trip? Boy, we got 'em goin' an' comin'. A real railroad alibi. They c'n suspect all they want, but they can't prove a damn thing."

"They'll dig it up, sooner 'r later," predicted Martin. "I'd rather go back 'n' take my medicine now than have you in with me for that — to be tortured."

"Sooner 'r later won't do 'em any good," Curtis said coolly. "Tomorrow mornin', boy, you'll be talkin' to Actin' Governor Bradhurst, tellin' him your story. I hope you got everythin' dead to rights?"

"Bradhurst!" gasped Martin. "But I thought he turned ya down?"

Curtis quickly explained what had happened at his interview with the lieutenant-governor.

"I knew that dep was lyin'," he wound up. "So, as I told the old boy, somep'n had to be tried 'at wasn't in the rule book."

"I GOT the dope, all right," said Martin soberly. "God, Frank! If Bradhurst'll string along with us, if he'll bring in some people I can name an' put 'em on the grill, I'm

damn' sure I can prove that I was framed. And that some people that are drawin' salaries from this state are makin' a damn sight o' extra money by protectin' the biggest gang o' thieves you ever heard of.

"Frank, you don't know what it means to me, what you tell me 'bout Bradhurst. I thought that was all off. I thought we'd both have to scam outa the country. Now—now—oh, boy, oh, boy! Bradhurst was my one hope. The governor's playin' ball with the wrong crowd, but Bradhurst—ole Dynamite Bill Bradhurst—whoopee!"

HIS face a blaze of joy, Martin whirled his pal up and down the floor of that rattle-trap box car in a crazy dance.

A moment later the train started slowing down for the stop at Three Pines.

The way-freight clanked presently into the clear and stood there, the ancient mogul wheezing peacefully. But her engineer was far from peaceful.

His cracked voice could be heard telling Keeler just what he thought of "crazy, hell-whoopin' kids," as Martin and Curtis hopped out of the box car and walked toward the engine.

"What'll happen to me?" Dad wailed. "You young fools don't care. You c'n allus git another job. But *me* to get fired an' maybe jugged, 't my age—"

"Be yourself, Dad," growled Keeler. "You'll be all right 'f ya just keep that mouth o' yours shut tight." Further argument was cut off by a distant chime whistle. The Limited was coming.

Martin and Curtis shook hands again as the Limited came thundering along the main line, brakes gripping her wheels as her engineer applied the air for his stop.

Quite alone, Martin walked along between the train, passed the caboose of the way-freight, kept on till he was opposite the tender of the Limited. On her tank, her fireman was swinging down the spout to fill up.

"Hello, Jarvis!" called Martin.

"Hello, Mart!" replied the passenger fireman cheerfully. "Dead-head-in' in with us, hey?"

"Sure am." Martin climbed up into the gangway of the big Pacific. He didn't know the engineer, but the hoghead nodded a greeting. It was plain that he had expected, if not Martin, at least somebody to ride his cab in from Three Pines.

Martin climbed up on the left-hand seat-box. Soon the roar of water ceased. The fireman came down over the coal, shook hands with Martin as the engineer tugged at the throttle.

It was almost dark when they passed the prison, a dark blotch on its hills. A searchlight was nervously flickering from one tower, as though in search of the fugitive who might be lurking near-by.

Of course, at the capital things would be tough. By the time the Limited got there, the way-freight would have arrived at Brewster, would have been searched. Inquiries would have been made of the dispatcher, and the pursuers would know of the Limited's meet with the freight at Three Pines. There would be plenty of cops to meet her in the terminal station at the capital.

But—again, they'd not find Martin. Good old Frank Curtis had thought of everything. They couldn't guard the whole yard. Ma Flynn's was a perfect hiding place.

MARTIN leaned back in his seat, feeling victory almost within his grasp. Victory won swiftly, easily, neatly—railroad style. He turned to speak to Jarvis, to offer to

relieve him on the shovel for a while.

There came a terrific grinding crash.

Martin was hurled with savage force into the narrow space between the boiler and the left-hand side of the cab. Picking himself up, dazed, gasping, bruised, he realized that the train was stopping.

"Emergency stop!" his brain told him. Instinctively his gaze snapped to the engineer. That stocky individual was lying face down on the cab floor. Over him Jarvis, bleeding from a cut on the head, was just dragging himself forward to shut the throttle.

"Wha' happened?" choked out Martin.

Jarvis, shutting off the steam, reeled toward the gangway.

"Dunno—somep'n cut the air, I guess—"

III

THE train had stopped. Martin, still dazed and scarcely knowing what he was doing, tried to shake the engineer back to consciousness. But the man's stertorous breathing and limp muscles told their own tale. He'd been knocked out—hit the boiler-head with the top of his own.

"Car's off, back there," Jarvis announced. And Martin became aware that the night was clamorous with the cries of human beings in fear and agony.

Following Jarvis, he half clambered, half fell out of the gangway, stumbling back along the ballast toward the rear of the train. From open baggage car doors, from open, lighted windows, heads were thrust. Passengers were swarming out of the vestibules, crowding toward the scene of disaster.

As Martin and Jarvis pushed through this excited, panicky crowd

of men and women, they saw what had happened.

The rear coach of the Limited, a heavy observation-lounge car, had jumped the track and lay at a crazy angle in the drainage ditch. From within came the shrieks of pain Martin had heard—and a red and increasing glare.

MEN with axes and bars from the emergency kits were tearing at one end of the wrecked car, ripping open windows. Martin seized a bar from an excited passenger and fell to with the others.

"Broken axle," panted a man at his side, an elderly man in brass-buttoned coat. The conductor. "And now the damn electric stove in the buffet's set her afire, I reckon. Lot o' women and kids in there."

At the other end of the car a brakeman and several passengers were battering at the jammed platform door.

Now it yielded, splintering. From door and windows men began helping—or lifting—out the trapped unfortunates within.

But the extra draft helped the flames. With a roar, these suddenly lifted high their scarlet crest of menace. A woman inside screamed horribly. The wrecked car lurched, settled.

Martin worked with the others—worked in the firelit gloom, forgetful of everything but the helpless passengers. He was aware of a voice yelling in his ear.

"Dat's all, boss. Yo' got the las' one." It was the negro porter, sticking gamely to his post to the end.

Now Martin took time to look about him.

In the light of the flames, he saw several human forms lying on seat cushions near the track. Over these bent a tall, spare man.

"Hey!" exclaimed the conductor as

Martin came up. "Who're you?"

"James, fireman," Martin answered. "I was dead-headin' in with Jarvis."

"Hot dog!" said the conductor. "C'n you run this train into town?"

"Why—" began Martin, his brain suddenly alive with fear.

"'Cause," the conductor went on, "the engineer's dead to the world, an' we gotta get goin'. That car's clear o' the main line. We've sent a man to phone the dispatcher from that farm house over there, but it'll be an hour before they can get a relief train out to us. An' an hour, the doc says, 'll make all the difference to some o' those poor folks."

"Hurt bad inside, a couple of 'em; one's a woman. An' there's a kiddie got burnt—"

"WHAT'S the matter with Jarvis runnin' her in? An' I'll fire," Martin cut in. Then, he figured, he could still jump off in the yard.

"Jarvis won't run nothin' for quite a while," the conductor answered grimly. "He was under the car when she settled just now, tryin' to get a woman out through a hole in the floor. Broke both his legs. Whadda ya say, man? I got a husky baggageman c'n keep steam in her for you, but there's nobody else that c'n run one o' those big hogs for forty miles."

It was all in the game. After all, Martin was a railroader. The burned child wailed in torment.

"Okay, cap," Martin agreed in a dead voice. He turned toward the engine. He knew well enough what it meant. Once he opened that throttle, he'd start something that could only be finished when he had brought the big Pacific to a stop in the brightly lighted terminal station at the capital, under a thousand eyes. There would be, for him, no hope of escape or of mercy from those who must destroy him to save themselves.

But there was no help for it. He

couldn't let folks die, or suffer agony unaided, when he could take them swiftly to succor. No railroader could refuse—no matter what the personal consequences.

As he settled himself on the right-hand seat-box, the signal whistle was already demanding that he test the air. He did so. The roar of his chimer thundered out into the night, calling in the flag. The baggageman climbed up, shed his coat, grabbed a scoop in businesslike fashion. He told Martin that the engineer had been carried to the baggage car, still completely out.

The wavering needle of the steam-gauge began to move back toward its pin as the baggageman built up the fire under Martin's direction.

"Eck! Eek!" squealed the signal.

"Highball!" called the baggageman from the gangway.

Martin's hand tugged gently at the throttle. An exhaust thundered in the squat stack. The great drivers turned under the thrust of steam unleashed. The Limited moved forward into the darkness.

Forty miles—less than an hour of freedom—and then a man-made hell yawned for Jim Martin.

Yet, as he drove the great engine roaring through the night, he thought that the memory of that hour would be always with him, whatever came afterward. It had been the goal of his ambition, as it is with most young firemen—the right side of a passenger cab on a fast run. Now he had it, if only for an hour.

THE wind whipped at his set young face. The hard steel of the throttle was like velvet under his hand. A crossing board flashed past; again he sent the clear warning of his whistle out across the fields. The white sword of the electric headlight went ever before him down the gleaming rails, like a gesture of defiance to his enemies.

And despite the terror that lay in wait at the end of his run, for a little while Martin, railroader to the soul's core of him, was happy.

Now the sky glowed with the lights of the capital city. Houses appeared, and the white ribbon of a concrete road alongside the track.

The yard limit sign with its yellow lantern warned Martin to slacken speed. The green eyes of witch lamps became more frequent. He passed a signal tower, slid under a high road bridge, saw ahead of him the signal bridge and lights of the terminal station. For one instant his eyes strayed to the darkness of the coach yard. Then, as the engine lurched into a cross-over, heading for her assigned berth in the station, he set his teeth hard and eased her ahead carefully. Steam off, now, and a gentle hand on the air once more.

GOD, what a crowd on the platform! Doctors and nurses in white—fellows with stretchers—and cops in blue and gold! Must be a million cops there.

The air hissed sharply through the valves. On—and off—

The Limited rolled to a perfect stop, her pilot five feet from the bumper. Martin's work was done. His duty.

Now the buzz of excited humanity rose about his ears. Already the police were clearing a space for the stretcher bearers. Somewhere outside the station, ambulance gongs were clanging. They were carrying the poor devils out.

There went Jarvis, his white face a mask of pain. And the burnt kid, with an interne trotting at the side of the stretcher, unrolling yellow, soothing bandages. But no passengers were emerging. There were cops at each vestibule.

Cops were moving toward the engine, too. Three cops—and a man

in civilian clothes. From his high seat, Jim Martin looked down into the cruel eyes of the deputy warden; eyes that recognized him instantly, despite dirt and grease and smoke.

The thin lips of the deputy curled in a smile—a terrible smile, a smile that gloated over the torments to come.

"Come down here, Ninety-three-twenty-four," purred the deputy gently.

Martin nodded. The deputy moved toward the gangway. Martin stepped from his box—and leaped for the opposite gangway with the swiftness of desperation.

The deputy shouted. Martin, swinging clear, grabbed a chunk of coal, flung it straight into the deputy's face. He dropped to the ground and ran along the narrow space between the train and a string of dark coaches on the next track.

Behind him a pistol cracked. A bullet whizzed overhead. Trapped in that narrow space, he must prove an easy target. He dived under one of the empty coaches, scrambled up on a deserted, unlighted platform. At its end a flashlight winked.

A man shouted, "I see him!" Pursuing footsteps clattered on the boards as Martin fled along the platform at the top of his speed. Again a pistol cracked. Martin, reaching the end of the string of coaches, jumped to the track and ran there, shielded for a moment from bullets.

HE was almost at the end of the train shed, when a man tore open a vestibule on the inner side of the Limited and leaped out, yelling. A cop. Martin straight-armed him without losing a stride, tore on, his heart hammering against his ribs.

Ahead was the darkness of the yard, with its myriad twinkling switch lights; a maze to the sidewalk-pounding cop, a haven of refuge to Martin. He sped along, dodg-

ing from track to track, leaping low switch stands, heedless of the crackling of pistols behind and the shouts of his pursuers.

He was in the coach yard now. In an open vestibule he crouched, catching his breath, watching the flickering flashlights of the police. Mustn't give 'em time to throw a cordon round the yard.

Martin dropped from the far side of the coach, trotted ahead between two strings of cars, crossed behind a silent switch shanty. He climbed over a coupling in a row of milk cars, gained the loading platform beyond and stood quite still, listening again. No one about.

He walked around the end of the milk shed, dropped to the cobbled alley where the dairy trucks came in and scurried through its shadows. From behind a brick wall at its end he reconnoitered the street. Only a crawling taxi, a couple of girls strolling, the lights of a lunch cart. No cops.

Martin walked swiftly along, turned the next corner. Keeping close to the wall and avoiding notice, he broke into a trot as he saw the block deserted. Far away the siren of a police car shrieked. Martin grinned as he rounded another corner and hurried up the steps of Ma Flynn's boarding house. Let 'em look for him now.

The door opened. Ma Flynn's fat Irish face beamed at him in the light from the hall bracket.

"Come in, lad. Quick wid yez!"

And the door closed, shutting out the wail of the siren.

IV

AN hour later Ma Flynn called him. Bathed, shaved, re-clothed and fully fed, he came slowly down the stairs. Frank Curtis was waiting in the stuffy little parlor.

"Maybe you think hell ain't poppin' in this man's town!" Curtis announced. "I come up on 16, the local passenger, and I never seen so many cops in a depot in my life as they got down here. An' more cops all over town; dicks peekin' outa doorways, police cars runnin' back and forth—boy, somebody's all het up over your getaway. Somebody big, I reckon."

"Everything all right at Brewster?"

"Yeah. They were gonna pinch Keeler, but he bluffed 'em cold."

"Dad Conger kept his mouth shut?"

Curtis' face darkened.

"That old blankety-blank!" he snapped. "He kept his mouth shut, yeah, but he's still scared. He kep' hangin' round, hangin' round the station in Brewster an' when he spotted me gettin' on 16, he insisted on comin' along. Said he felt scared to stay home."

"I was scared to rile him, so I let him come. He's outside in the kitchen now; Ma's feedin' him. Didn't dass go home for supper, the damn' fool. 'Fraid the cops'd be layin' for him."

"**H**UH!" said Martin. "Well, anyhow, Frank, you got clear all right, an' that's somp'n. Where do we go from here?"

Curtis grinned.

"Right to the Capitol, boy," he announced. "Right now, too. When I saw all the tearin' around I got scared to wait for mornin'. So I called up Bradhurst at his home and asked him if he was by any chance goin' to be in his office tonight. He said he'd be there in half an hour, and he didn't ask no questions. He's heard of your escape, o' course. We're set, Jim! I know that old geezer! He'll see us through!"

"Frank," said Martin, and he spoke

from the heart; "Frank, you're the best friend a fella ever had!"

"Aw, nuts," answered Curtis, embarrassed. "I ain't done nothin' you wouldn't do for me. I'll call a taxi."

"I'm goin' along," said Dad Conger, coming in from the kitchen. "I wanta know what's gonna happen. I'm scared, I am."

It was not a time for argument. He went along.

THE echoing marble corridors of the Capitol were deserted save for a floor-swabbing janitor and a single state trooper who stared curiously at the hurrying men. The door of the lieutenant-governor's anteroom was open. Beyond, in the private office, a green-shaded desk lamp threw the stern features of William Bradhurst into prominent relief as he rose to greet his visitors.

"Shut the door, Curtis," he ordered. "Who are these gentlemen?"

"This is Jim Martin, sir." Curtis ignored Dad Conger.

"I'm sorry you brought him here, Curtis." Bradhurst's tone was very grave. "I've just had news from the governor. He is on his way home."

There was a death-like silence. Martin himself broke it.

"When do you expect him, sir?"

"About midnight. He started by plane late this afternoon. He'd have been here now, save that his plane had a forced landing at Juniper. They flagged the fast mail on the Allegheny Midland for him. She's due here at eleven-forty-five, but she's reported a trifle late."

"Then—then he's across the state line now, sir."

The lieutenant-governor glanced at his watch.

"Not yet. But he will be within an hour."

Martin looked at Curtis. This was the end of all their hopes, of all

their planning. The gang had moved swiftly through their political allies. They, too, knew Bradhurst—and feared him.

Nothing remained but the slim chances of flight.

Apparently the same idea had occurred to old Dad Conger.

"Lemme outa here!" he squealed suddenly. "There's gonna be trouble here, an' I don't aim to get caught with you idjits."

He rushed out of the room. They could hear his scurrying footsteps die away down the tiled corridor.

"I guess," said Curtis in bitter tones, "we'd better be goin', too."

Martin did not turn toward the door. He heard other footsteps in the corridor, and some instinct told him what they portended.

"Governor," he said swiftly, "I'd like, at least, to give you the information I've collected. There may come a time when you can use it. Will you listen?"

Bradhurst nodded.

"I'll be glad to," he said, and drew toward him a pad of note paper.

The footsteps in the corridor paused, then tramped across the floor of the anteroom. Unceremoniously the door of the private office was thrown open. Across the threshold strode—the deputy warden.

HIS eyes were wicked above his bandaged face. Behind him was a prison guard in a baggy blue uniform.

"Thought I'd catch you here, Ninety-three-twenty-four," the deputy said to Martin. "Come along; the prison car's outside."

"Just a moment," cut in the lieutenant-governor. "Who are you, and who asked you into this office?"

"I'm the deputy warden of the State Prison," was the cool answer, "and I am here in pursuance of my

duty. This man is an escaped convict."

"Very well. But at present, as the acting governor of this state, I am taking down certain information which Mr. Martin is giving me. You will kindly wait in the anteroom." Bradhurst was as cool as the deputy but his voice had a sharp edge to it.

The deputy nodded.

"I can wait," he purred. "The governor will be here soon. I won't have long to wait."

So he knew, too, of the governor's return.

"I'll be seeing you, Ninety-three-twenty-four," the deputy smiled. "I've a score to settle with you."

HE fondled his bandaged face, smiled again and went out.

The door closed.

It was true, thought Martin with an inward shudder. He'd pay that score, in the end. Pay in blood and agony, under the lash. But first he'd tell his story. In the little time that remained before the governor came.

He told it. Told it to the accompaniment of the lieutenant-governor's scratching pencil, of the lieutenant-governor's muttered exclamations of astonishment. Told all he had learned, all he suspected.

At last he had finished.

The lieutenant-governor looked up from his notes.

"Martin," he said, "I believe you've told me the truth. Some of the things you say check very closely with facts that have come to my notice from other sources. And I believe in you, Martin. You're a man. Your bringing the Limited in proves that."

"If I had the power I should be very much inclined to issue you a full pardon, restore your civil rights and so permit you to testify for the state in the criminal prosecutions which ought to be instituted. God—if I had two hours more! But I'm

afraid that even now the governor is back in the state. My act would have no legal effect."

"Then—I must go back to prison, sir?"

"I'm afraid so, Martin. I'll hold you here as long as I can. But it'll only be a matter of hours."

Despair clutched Martin's heart with icy fingers. So near to freedom! It was very hard—

The telephone rang.

"That'll be the dispatcher's office of the Allegheny Midland," the lieutenant-governor said, reaching for the instrument. "I asked them to report to me when the governor's train entered the state."

"Hello—yes, this is Bradhurst—what? What's that? Are you sure? Have you checked it with your tower at state line? All right. Call me when you've news. Thanks, Craven."

He hung up, lifted his eyes to meet Martin's—and grinned.

"Your lucky night, it seems, Martin," he said. "The fast mail, with the governor aboard, is tied up in the next state by an engine failure. No roads, either. Woods and swamps all through that country. The governor's stuck and you win, Martin."

"What—what do you mean, sir?" Martin could scarcely speak. The sudden reaction was too much.

"I'LL show you. I needed two hours—and I've got 'em. I'll tear this state up by the roots! There'll be headlines in the morning papers, boy!"

He grabbed the phone again. "Operator! Get me the Headquarters of the state police. Hello—hello—Lieutenant, this is Bradhurst. Send over half a dozen of your best plainclothes men. I want 'em to pick up a few persons I'll name, and bring 'em in for questioning. And send somebody to the home of the pardon

clerk and have him over here on the run. He's needed. Right."

"Attaboy!" breathed Curtis softly. "Ol' Dynamite Bill in action! Whee!"

There was a gentle knock on the door.

"Come in!" invited Bradhurst.

The deputy warden entered.

"Mister Governor," said he in his soft tones, "your voice carries far. Do I understand that the governor is detained?"

"You do," snapped Bradhurst.

"**A**ND that it is your intention to pardon Martin, here, and to investigate certain matters which he has brought to your attention? Employing him as a state's witness?"

"Correct! And I'll have that investigation so well under way by morning that the governor won't dare try to stop it."

The deputy nodded.

"In that case," he remarked, "may I inquire whether you would be willing to promise immunity to one who was in a position to give you facts, where Martin has only conjectures and rumors?"

"Getting out from under, are you, you rat?" Bradhurst shrugged. "All right. Talk—and talk fast!"

The deputy sat down and began to talk.

An hour later Jim Martin—once more a free man, with the pardon of the acting governor folded in his coat pocket—walked out of the Capitol. Curtis was at his side.

The Capitol itself hummed like a beehive. Gray-clad troopers scurried in and out. State detectives, alert reporters, people from the attorney general's office, lawyers hastily summoned from their beds to the aid of frightened clients! And already furtive-eyed men were slipping into the great building to seek a chance to save themselves by betraying others.

Fast and far had the rumors of upheaval spread—and the governor's train was still not reported at state line tower.

Bradhurst was tearing things up by the roots, as he had said. Uprooting evil things. He was washing clean the escutcheon of a great state.

"They won't laugh at Dynamite Bill any more, these damned politicians!" said Jim Martin, drawing in a deep breath of the air of freedom. "Or at railroaders in politics, either. He'll show 'em."

A shadow detached itself from a pillar, moved toward them.

"Things all fixed?" asked a querulous voice. "Gosh, I been awaitin' fer hours, seems like."

It was old Dad Conger.

Martin clapped the old fellow on the shoulder.

"Everything okay, Dad," he said. "The governor's train got tied up—"

"Yeah," interrupted Dad. "I know."

"You do? How?"

"Well, you fellers was allus sayin' that us railroaders oughta stick together. 'S good idea, too. An' 'Black Johnny' Poole, the hogger on the fast mail tonight, used to be on the extra board with me back on the old Dakota Central. Reckon I saved his life onct in a smash-up."

"I knew his run. I figgered the time-table close, got the agent at Smithfield on the long-distance just in time to ketch the mail still in the depot."

"He got Johnny to the phone. I talked to the old rascal—and—and—well, there y'are."

"Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle!" exclaimed Curtis. "Dad, you old son-of-a-gun!"

"When us railroaders stick together," chuckled Martin gratefully, "we sure get things done! C'mon, you birds—I betcha Ma Flynn's got some pie in the ice-box!"

WATCHMATES



"You blarsted rat, you!" The cockney pounced on Gillespie

Mutiny and Desperate Combat Aboard A Coal-Burning Tramp in A Quick-Moving, Stirring Story of the Sea

By JACLAND MARMUR

Author of "Wind-Driven," "Double-Edged Mutiny," etc.

YOUNG Bill Halliday and his watchmate, "Cockney" Joe Sheldon, swung out of the Wheel-and-Anchor Pub. The two headed down the East India Dock Road toward where the coal-burning tramp *Monadna* lay berthed, awaiting her pilot and the turn of the morning tide.

A few moments later the odd friends marched side by side toward the ship's gangplank; Halliday, tall

and husky, Cockney Joe, short and lean. In the feeble circle of light thrown from the hurricane lamp at the gangplank's head, Sheldon stopped and poked one of the two bottles of Bass Ale he carried at Halliday's stomach.

"Y'know, Bill," he confided earnestly. "A bloke like you—you ought to sit for your engineer's papers when we get back to New York from this trip. Firin' a coal-burnin' tramp

alongside the likes o' me ain't getting a strappin' young feller like you no place."

Bill rumbled the forelock of his flame colored hair with a grease-streaked hand.

"Who told you I wanted to get any place in particular? I'm having a time, Cockney! Work on a license? Bah! You get tied down too much that way."

"CHIEF'S job is better'n scalin' boilers and 'eavin' coal at forty-five a month, ain't it? And gettin' 'auled out through the manhole by the legs, like that trimmer of ours, Gillespie."

"Gillespie's no good, Joe—yellow."

"But, Bill—"

"Yeah, all right." The other cut him short. "Some day I'll go up and get me a license. When I got nothing better to do. Now hoist yourself aboard with the First's ale. He was decent enough to let us come ashore for a drink, so we better hurry and finish that boiler job. We—"

A guttural growl, coming from behind them, arrested the pair abruptly. They whirled around to face the man who lurched toward them out of the shadows of the dock.

"Pete Gillespie's no good, hey?" he mouthed.

"Yellow, am I?" he swayed slightly, half drunk. "I heard you. I'll show you who's yellow!"

Bill shrugged his broad shoulders.

"You don't like scaling rust on the inside of a boiler, do you, Pete?" he bit off levelly. "When we dragged you out by the heels an hour ago, it was good for you the first assistant's back was turned."

"I've seen too many men go cold, Pete, on a job like that not to know when it's on the level and when a man's sodgering! You were no more unconscious than I was. Better get aboard now, before that skinful of

whisky you're carrying gets you into a heap of trouble."

Halliday started toward the ladder, his back to Gillespie. The latter, enraged now beyond all restraint, launched himself bodily through the air. He struck Halliday's back, knees digging into the other's ribs like an old man of the sea. There he clung savagely.

The force of the impact sent Bill staggering to his knees. Swift as a flash, he straightened up. Wrenching himself sideways, he fairly flung the half drunk coal passer from him.

Little Joe Sheldon leaped to the dock, waving his two bottles of ale gleefully as he danced in excitement on the rim of the fight.

"Finish 'im off, Bill! Finish 'im off!" he urged. "The first assistant's gettin' bloody thirsty an' 'is ale's gettin' warm. Hurry it up!"

Young Halliday waited calmly for the other's next charge. The fight was being forced on him. He had no desire to tangle with a drunken man, but there was no other choice.

"You been ridin' me all trip," Gillespie growled. "Makin' a name for yourself! 'Blow - her - off - Halliday', they call you, an' you're proud of it! Ain't you? Best coal-burnin' fireman afloat. Ridin' hell outa us in the bunkers is what does it for you. What do you think I am, you—"

"A lousy coal passer!" Halliday snapped. "That's why I've been ridin' you. You're one expert at stalling—"

SUDDENLY Gillespie let out a throaty growl. His right hand dropped like a flash for his trouser leg. He whipped the dungaree up and tore at the sheath knife strapped there. Steel flashed.

But from where Halliday stood he saw only a dark crouching shape; and then the swift upward lunge as Gillespie started forward with bared teeth, the blade of the knife in his

fist hidden at the small of his back. With a savage snarl in his throat, the drunk came upright. His mouth opened for a shriek of triumph. But it died in his chest.

"You blarsted rat, you!"

Little Joe Sheldon leaped forward at sight of Gillespie's naked blade. At the instant Pete had started forward, the cockney pounced on him from the side. Halliday saw the swift upward and downward lunge of an arm. Then he heard the shatter of broken glass. Without so much as a groan, Gillespie collapsed to the dock. Halliday sprang forward.

"Joel!" he barked angrily. "What'd you do that for? Two against—"

"Two to one be blowed!" the other snapped. "Look down here!" He kicked the knife into the light. "That's what 'e was after."

HALLIDAY looked down at it in silence for a moment. He knew what it meant and what Sheldon had saved him from. Then he laughed softly, a quiet laugh in which his keen blue eyes played no part.

"Lend a hand, Cockney," he muttered.

He lifted the inert form to his shoulder and climbed the gangway to the ship's deck in silence. Little Joe Sheldon came after him, grumbling to himself. Halliday headed for the forecastle with his limp burden. But when Sheldon climbed the fiddley ladders to the fire room floor plates, Halliday had already peeled off his boiler jacket and, bare to the waist, was mopping at his face with a sweat rag.

"Bli'me, Bill!" Sheldon exploded in his thin voice, waving the solitary remaining bottle of ale he still held in his hand. "What did you leave 'im 'is bloody knife for? Why didn't you 'eave it over the side?"

Halliday grinned broadly and reached for the bucket of oatmeal

water that hung under the ventilator.

"What knife?"

It was the first assistant, George Macrae, who spat out the unexpected question as he came swaying toward them, the deep grooves of his tired face smeared with sweat and coal dust. "You two've been a mighty long time after a cold drink. What knife you talking about, Joe?"

"Me—?"

Sheldon shot Halliday a sharp look. Neither of them thought for an instant to betray Gillespie's murderous assault.

"A new jackknife me and Cockney were having an argument about," Halliday interrupted quickly as he hung up the water pail.

"That Pete Gillespie, Bill," the first assistant went on, his mind intent on his own responsibilities, "he's no good to your watch at all. I'm going to swing him to day work. I'll give you the kid wiper for a coal passer, instead of—"

"Don't do that, First!" Halliday stepped up quickly. Removal of Gillespie from his watch was the one thing he did not want. Pete would think Bill afraid of him—that the change had been made deliberately. "Gillespie's all right, First," Halliday went on rapidly. "Don't swing him off my watch—not now. He—"

"What's up?" The engineer looked sharply at his fireman. "You—"

"NOTHING. Gillespie and me—we're pals! We—" he hesitated, then finished with a broad grin: "we're going up to sit for second assistant's papers together in New York this trip."

"You—well, I'm damned!" The first crossed his forearms over his chest and stared intently at the red-haired fireman. "I'd hate like blazes to have that Pete Gillespie for a watch engineer! You," he ended gruffly, "you should have been eating

in the engineers' mess long ago, Bill."

"Me?" Halliday asked innocently.

"Yes, you!—Joe, where's the two bottles of cold ale you were to bring me?"

Joe Sheldon scraped his feet awkwardly on the floor plates.

"Well, First, y'see—" He said no more, but simply held out the one remaining bottle, his puckered eyes twinkling furiously.

"He stumbled, First," Halliday explained over his shoulder from the iron door leading into the engine room. "He stumbled on the dock and busted one of 'em."

The first assistant plucked the bottle from Joe's hand.

"Warm! What'd you do? Keep it under your arm so it wouldn't catch cold?" he growled sarcastically. "Stumbled on the dock and bought yourself a nice new jackknife!" he went on scornfully as he uncapped the bottle. "Yes, like hell you did!"

"C'mon, Joe!" Bill called from the passageway. "Let's get finished scraping the insides of this boiler!"

THE eighth night from the Lizard Light found the *Monadna* riding high out of the water, throbbing steadily on the calm sea. The wind slept. There was no moon; it was very dark on the water.

Bill Halliday and Joe Sheldon stood outside the fiddley door, smoking after their coffee, waiting for eight bells to go for the morning watch. Suddenly, without warning, a harsh jangling of bells sounded from the engine room. Halliday looked sharply at Joe. The second assistant, finishing out his watch below, answered the startling telegraph. Several moments later the *Monadna's* hull trembled furiously as she fought for sternway.

"Goin' astern, Bill!" Sheldon snapped.

Halliday nodded, tensely alert.

Sheldon sprang for the rail, Halliday close beside him. Together they strained eyes into the darkness. Ships don't start lashing furiously astern for nothing, in the middle of the north Atlantic!

The next instant the *Monadna* trembled violently. A jarring crash shook her from stem to stern. She heeled far over on her side. From the bridge there came the sound of shouted orders. The bulky form of the mate could be seen diving for the forward deck ladder, sounding rod in hand.

Then, before their startled eyes, a ghostly mass drifted slowly past the ship's rail to be swallowed by the black sea astern.

"Gawd bli'me, Bill!" Joe gasped. "It's a damned berg!"

BILL grunted. There could be no question of that mass of frozen ice.

The engine room telegraph jangled again. The *Monadna's* main engine stopped altogether. Heeled far over on her side, a strange quiet descended upon the drifting ship, making startlingly clear the voices of the master and his officers far forward on the bridge.

Then in the absolute silence eight bells clanged with brutal violence from the long bar in the engine room. The men who had gathered on the after deck stood motionless for the fraction of a moment.

Then Pete Gillespie, snapping his head wildly from side to side, shouted:

"They've flogged the clock! I ain't goin' below to drown like—"

Bill Halliday came suddenly to life at the sound of that voice. He stepped forward with slow deliberation, until he stood directly in front of the thoroughly frightened coal passer.

"Our watch, Pete," he cut in soft-

ly. "We got our job to do. Let's get below."

"Who the hell are you to give orders? I tell you I ain't—"

"Get below!"

"Go to—"

Bill's hand shot forward with the speed of light to the other's throat, cutting short his oath.

"Below! I said." With the words, he thrust Pete toward the fiddley door and turned on the rest of the watch. "That goes for the rest of you, too!"

GILLESPIE'S eyes blazed. Halliday advanced threateningly and the coal passer ducked for the ladder. He had felt the force of those fists before. "Kinky," the black, hesitated for a moment on the top rung, the whites of his eyes rolling in his jet face. Behind them came Sheldon, and Halliday himself brought up the rear. The mid-watch stood ranged already half-way up the ladders, eager for relief. They had heard that fearful crash as the *Monadna* struck and sensed now the dangerous angle of the vessel in the water. But at sight of the new watch coming below they took heart.

"What's up, Bill?" one of them demanded.

Halliday shrugged his shoulders.

"I ain't the skipper. My job's firing—and I'll fire till the hooker sinks! You leave me dirty clinkered fires again like you did yesterday," he growled, "and I'll tell you soon enough what's up!"

The relieved watch climbed hastily for the deck. The iron door of the engine room opened and Mr. Macrae, the first assistant, stumped into the stoke hole, eyes snapping.

"All here?" he barked.

"All here," Halliday replied grimly.

"Well, listen, you men," the first went on icily. "We've run foul of an iceberg. Mate was just down. The

forepeak's taking the sea like a sieve. But we're high out of the water. If it doesn't blow up a gale, we're running for Ambrose Light. It's up to you." His eyes darted swiftly to each man of his watch, gauging their courage, their endurance. "You understand that, all of you? Remember! There's nothing I hate worse than a yellow streak!" He turned abruptly toward young Bill Halliday. "Bill, you—"

"We're all here, Mr. Macrae," Halliday interrupted meaningfully through clenched teeth.

The first looked sharply at him. Then he nodded in silence and, after a moment's hesitation, turned on his heel for the engine room door. The telegraph jangled. Halliday turned to face his gang.

"Get moving!" he snapped to Gillespie. "Into the bunker with you!"

GILLESPIE bared his teeth, his face an ash-gray. The ship lurched heavily under his feet. He knew what the first assistant's terse words meant. The *Monadna* was filling up forward.

It was a gamble against death, running the ship for harbor, a gamble against the odds of the whole wild Atlantic. But whatever Gillespie meant to say, he thought better of it at what he saw in Halliday's eyes. Without a word, he disappeared through the bunker door, followed by his watchmate.

Little Joe Sheldon grinned; Halliday peeled off his jacket and hitched at his dungarees. Kinky, the West India negro, taking courage, showed his teeth in a half hearted smile and reached for a shovel.

Bill's eyes flew to the steam gauge. The needle fluttered around the hundred-and-twenty mark. Halliday's job was firing the ship; that job he meant to do!

"Damn that mid-watch!" he roared.

"Look at the gauge! Look at it, Cockney!" He spun about and bel-lowed at the bunker bulkhead. "Let's have some coal in there! This ain't a school ma'am's picnic!"

The webwork of wrinkles on little Joe Sheldon's face deepened at that old familiar cry of his friend. His eyes twinkled brightly.

"Cow-al!" he echoed in a shrill shriek. "Cow-al, ye bloody trimmers! Let's 'ave some bloody cow-al!"

MEANWHILE, the *Monadna* went hourly deeper down by the head. As the sea seeped slowly but surely into her forepeak, she listed farther and farther on her side.

The pumps worked continuously. It was like trying to bale out the whole Atlantic Ocean. As the water gained, the ship's list shifted the cargo in her half empty holds. The crippled *Monadna* crawled toward Ambrose Channel on her side.

In the engine room the watches went about their work grim-lipped and haggard, clinging to iron rail expecting any moment to die without hope of escape.

The deck gang at least were in the open. They could see the sky and the sea, could face their enemy. In the bowels of the ship they had to fight out their battle amid flashing steel and sucking pumps. When she took her last dive, for them there was no escape!

Big Bill Halliday ruled the stoke hole. The needle of the steam gauge still held its place. The water in the glasses danced bubbling up and down, just showing and not too high. The fire doors clanged open. Livid yellow beams of light and heat leaped out upon the bare sweated chest of Kinky, the negro, half bent before the boiler, a huge slice bar in his hands. It etched his black skin sharply, streaked with sweat and coal, only his eyeballs showing brilliantly

white. Little Joe Sheldon chewed the end of his sweat rag in proper Liverpool fashion and fired silently, grimly.

Bill Halliday plunged his slice bar into the water cask against the bulkhead. It hissed loudly, a cloud of stinking steam rising in a wave to join the dust and fine coal that clouded the shaded lamps. Then he turned toward the empty bunker chute. "Coal!" he roared. "Let's have some coal in there!"

A SNARL and a curse answered him. The ship lurched heavily on her side. A shovel slid across the slanted floor plates and fetched up with a loud crash.

Gillespie let out a muffled shriek of terror. The next instant he came diving out of the cross bunker, hair wildly dishevelled, eyes wide with fright. He stopped his headlong plunge for the ladder and froze suddenly where he was.

Bill Halliday blocked the lower rung. Kinky stood before the closed fire doors, his body leaning tensely forward from the waist. In the bunker doorway Pete's watchmate, Martin, stood irresolute.

"Get into the bunker, Gillespie," Halliday commanded with ominous softness.

Gillespie's head snapped from right to left. Hate poured oil on the smouldering fire of fear. The ship trembled under his feet. The vessel's ominous lurch set the spark to the violent explosion.

"Who in hell are you?" Gillespie shrieked. He flung his skinny arms wildly about, appealing first to Kinky and then to Martin. "Who in hell does he think he is?" he demanded again, his voice cracking in sheer terror. "What right's he got to ride us? The damned hooker's goin' over on her side in a minute!"

"We're men! We ain't rats to drown in a stinkin' bunker. Rush

him! Bash his skull for him! Get topside to the boats while you got a chance! To hell with him!"

He advanced a pace. Kinky straightened up under the impassioned lashing of words. Martin stepped swiftly into the fire room. Little Joe Sheldon, sensing battle, edged sidewise away from before the boiler. Halliday alone had not stirred from his position before the ladder, blocking the way to freedom for the infuriated men.

"Back into the bunker, Gillespie," he bit off levelly, "or by God, I'll break you in two!"

GILLESPIE dropped into a crouch. Swift as a flash, his shovel lifted above his head. At the same moment he leaped forward, snarling, his gruesome weapon swinging savagely.

Halliday leaped to one side. Little Joe Sheldon, launching himself through the air, caught the infuriated coal passer a clout on the side of the head that half spun him about. That blow alone saved Bill from the full force of Gillespie's attack. The sharp edge of the weapon just grazed the fireman's cheek, baring a livid gash. The sight of blood broke down the barriers of command that had held Kinky and Martin in leash.

Gillespie spun about to face Joe Sheldon. Kinky came at Halliday, arms weaving at his sides. Martin leaped at him from the other side.

The strain had told at last! They wanted only to be clear of the walls of the fire room of that sinking ship, wanted to fight their way to the deck before the ship drowned them all like helpless rats in the *Monadna's* bowels.

Young Bill Halliday took a step backward and found the lowermost rung of the ladder. He had to keep them at their work; had to give the ship a chance for her life. He alone stood between them and mutiny.

Bracing himself there against the

bulkhead, he met the charge of the two fear-enraged men. The hand rail on one side gave him some protection. The deep slant of the *Monadna's* floor plates placed him slightly above his attackers.

They came at him in a rush. Kinky's powerful arms swung forward, but a smashing fist to the point of the jaw drove the black back with a hollow groan. He staggered upright, charged again.

Meanwhile, Martin, swift to seize his opportunity and seeking only the ladder that led to the deck, hurled himself at the hand rail and drew himself up by the arms. With a heave of his body he was above Halliday. Before he had time to climb a single rung, Bill half turned, seized him about the middle, and with a quick levered thrust, hurled him bodily forward. He came crashing down on Kinky. The two tumbled in a struggling mass to the floor plates.

GILLESPIE, his lips bloodied, the shovel wrenched from his hand, had leaped away from Sheldon, and stood crouched like a cat against the bulkhead. Halliday, realizing that this man alone was at the root of the mutinous trouble, leaped clear of the two men before they could rise. Sheldon jumped at once to take Halliday's place at the foot of the ladder, barring escape.

Gillespie tore his knife from its leg sheath and advanced. Suddenly and without warning he hurled himself forward, knife upraised, his lips curled back on glittering teeth.

Two staggering blows landed with sickening thuds just below his heart. Even as he twisted off balance, the glistening steel blade descended in a swift arc. It ripped a bloody wound on Halliday's forearm.

Before the blade could be used again, Bill stepped in swiftly. A savage uppercut felled the coal

passer like a log. The force of the blow sent the limp body sliding, to fetch up at last with a thud against the bulkhead. Halliday, the blood dripping from his wounds, spun to the aid of plucky little Sheldon.

"FOOLS!" He tore Martin off. **"You rotten fools!"** he bellowed; and Kinky turned his head at the roaring voice of command. Halliday shoved him brutally to one side. **"Following a yellow cur like that!"** he went on, spitting out the words with sharp incisive commands. **"Get back to your fires, Kinky! You, Martin! Into the bunker with you!"**

They stared at him, dumbfounded for an instant. Kinky's head turned mutely from side to side, as if he just then realized what he had been about. Slowly he turned for the fire doors. Martin, glancing at the unconscious Pete Gillespie, slunk away toward the bunker. Halliday had quelled the mutiny.

Mr. Macrae, hearing the savage sounds of the struggle and then the booming voice of Halliday above the pound of his engines, came bursting into the fire room, revolver in hand. He stopped short at the gruesome scene that met his eyes, then advanced grimly.

"What's going on in here?"

"Nothing."

The first assistant jabbed the muzzle of his Colt in a pointing gesture toward where Gillespie lay, still inert and unconscious. Then his eyes took in the naked knife blade lying on the floor plates where it had clattered from the coal passer's nerveless fingers.

"Nothing, hey?" he snapped tersely. **"Who ripped your forearm open, Bill?"** Halliday looked up swiftly. He knew what a charge of mutiny would mean for the men of his watch.

"No one," he breathed. **"I—"**

"Y'see, First," little Joe Sheldon

cut in, still panting heavily, **"Bill got to playin' wi' that jackknife we was tellin' you about in Lunnon. An' 'e cut 'isself—accidental."**

Macrae stepped up to Halliday.

"Bill," he said quietly, **"you're a damned liar. Here,"** he went on, holding out his Colt. **"Take this. You might need it before we get through Ambrose Channel."**

HALLIDAY looked down at the gleaming gun and then grinned broadly.

"No thanks, First," he said dryly. **"Any time I find I need a gun to make steam with—I'll quit going to sea and take up farming."** He turned brusquely on his heel. **"What I need is coal. Coal!"** he thundered at the bunker bulkhead. **"Let's have some coal in there, Martin!"**

The first assistant's hand dropped to his side. In the engine room, the telegraph jangled imperiously. Without a word, he turned and started for the door in rapid strides. Before it clanged closed behind him he heard Joe Sheldon's shrill and triumphant echo of his watchmate's bellow.

"Cow-al! Let's 'ave some blarsted cow-al!" There was a grim smile on the first assistant's gaunt face as he answered the stand-by bell.

Six hours later the *Monadna*, in tow of three puffing tugs, was nosed into drydock. Young Bill Halliday and Joe Sheldon stood at the well deck rail, waiting for the gangway to go over the side. The East-end fireman lifted his dry wrinkled face to his friend. **"Third assistant's quittin', Bill,"** he insinuated softly.

"Yeah? Well, what—?"

"I was just thinkin' what a blarsted shame it'd be if that dog of a Gillespie was to get the job."

Halliday whirled on him.

"What do you mean, Cockney? He hasn't any—"

"Engineer's license? No. But I

'card 'im tell the chief 'e was sittin' for it soon's we get tied up."

HALLIDAY'S hand gripped the little fireman's arm till he winced. "You telling me straight goods, Cockney?" he said harshly.

"Sure I am. 'E's got oiler's time an' water tender's time the same as you 'ave. 'E can sit for 'is ticket all right. 'E's—"

"Shut up!" Halliday snapped. Then he straightened up and looked savagely down the dock. "Damn it, Cockney! I can't let that rat get ahead of me. Imagine me firing—and him the engineer of my watch! But how in hell can I write, with a slashed arm all tied up till—"

"You don't write wi' your bloody left arm, do you?"

"Wait here, Joe! I'm gonna hunt up my discharges. We're going up to the Custom House."

He turned and darted for the fore-castle door. Joe Sheldon looked after him, grinning broadly. Then, walking swiftly amidships where the engineers' quarters were, he muttered to himself: "I gotta talk to the First."

He was back at the rail, however, when Halliday returned. Together the pair set off ashore, a sly grin on Sheldon's wrinkled face, an air of grim determination on Halliday's.

For three days they had young Bill Halliday on the rack behind the closed doors of the Steamboat Inspector's office. Late on the third afternoon, little Joe Sheldon sat on the steps of the Custom House Building, his battered shore hat in his lap.

He recognized Bill Halliday's unmistakable swinging stride even before he came out of the shadowy building into the sunlight. Sheldon waited for his watchmate to come down to him, a strained expression in his little squinting eyes now.

"Bill—!" Joe Sheldon asked huskily. "Did—did you make it?"

Solemnly, Halliday reached into his pocket and drew out a neatly rolled square of paper. Little Sheldon took it, unrolled it carefully.

"Bli'me, Bill!" he exploded in a hoarse whisper of exultation. "You're a officer an' a engineer now! Bli'me, I knew you could do it!"

They walked down the steps in silence. "Y'know, Joe," Bill said, his youthful face deep in a frown of puzzlement, "I never saw that rat Gillespie in there at all. I guess maybe they had him sweating his brains out in another room."

"I don't think so, Bill."

"What d'you mean?"

"Oh, 'e signed off an' beat it for the sticks, an' our after we tied up," Sheldon grinned expansively. "The chief said to hurry back wi' your ticket as soon's you got it. 'E wants you to get your official appointment as third assistant of the *Monadna*. You see, 'e—"

"You—you little runt! You mean—?"

"Aw, listen, Bill," Sheldon pleaded. "I 'ad to do somethin' to make you get some sense, didn't I? Ain't no sense in you livin' like a crumby coal-dust eater all your bloody life—like me. Is there? You're orficer stuff, you are."

HALLIDAY looked down on his friend in silence for a long time, as the truth of what little Joe Sheldon had done sank home.

"That—that was white of you, Cockney," he breathed at length. Then, staring blankly into the busy traffic of the street, he added huskily: "Let's find a drink, Cockney. I want to stand you a toast."

Sheldon looked up wistfully.

"I'd like to be in your watch, Bill. Bli'me, but I would."

"You will be, Cockney," Halliday said. "A man needs a good watchmate, plowing the North Atlantic."

HE'S MY BOY



"Get down off'n that hoss!"

Old Matt Russell Sets Out to Prove His Son's Innocence in this Unusual Western Yarn

By OSCAR SCHISGALL

Author of "Gun Justice," "Murder at Noon," etc.

IT was twilight when old Matt Russell strode out of the Longhorn City jail, and his bearded face was as hard as rock. He uttered no word until he had swung his tall figure into the saddle of his nervous cayuse. Then, with dust rising about him like smoke, he glared down at Sheriff Ed Weaver, who had followed him out of the 'dobe lock-up.

"Ed," he said thickly, the beard seeming to muffle his voice, "he's my boy, an' I know he didn't do it! He's as innercent as you or me!"

Sheriff Weaver, gaunt as a cadaver,

spat tobacco juice into the road and shook a sympathetic head. "Sorry, Matt," he answered, "but the evidence is all against the kid. You know that. I got to hold him for trial."

"Damn the evidence!" old Russell shot out hoarsely. "My boy wouldn't lie to me! That lad is as square as they come, and his word is plenty good; he just couldn't have done it, I tell you!"

"For you," the sheriff acquiesced. "But he ain't gonna have twelve dads on the jury. As for me, I got to go by the evidence. After all, we've

got two witnesses who swear they saw—"

"A couple of ornery, thievin', yeller-bellied jailbirds!" Matt furiously declared. "How can yuh believe 'em?"

"Well—they're witnesses."

"I'd sooner take the word of polecats!"

"I ain't sayin' I don't agree," muttered the sheriff, with a frown. "All the same, Hoghead Marsh an' Joe Lacey swear that when they rode through town last night they saw your boy Pete robbin' the bank. Saw him inside, workin' on the safe. They claim they was just gonna hop in an' hamstring him when the kid spotted 'em an' pulled his smokepoles. He blazed away through the window, they say; but they kept him inside till the rest of us, hearin' the excitement, came up the road an' made the arrest."

"THAT'S *their* story!" snapped Matt Russell, so savagely that his startled pony reared. "But my Pete told me the *truth* just now. This is what happened."

The old cattleman leaned over his saddlehorn and pointed an emphatic finger.

"Pete was comin' home from Mabel Leffert's birthday party," he asserted. "As he rode through town, he spotted *Hoghead an' Joe in the bank!* Pete says he fired pronto to attract help. Then he saw that Hoghead an' Joe was tryin' to make a get-away through the back door, which was open. So he hightailed around there to keep 'em in. But when he got to the back he saw that Hoghead an' Joe had changed their minds an' was bustin' open a window.

"So he ran in to stop 'em, but them critters got out just as you fellers came thunderin' down the road. That's how-come you found my Pete *inside* the bank, while them two

ornery toads, Hoghead an' Joe, was outside! They cooked up this here story about—"

"Hold it, Matt, hold it," the sheriff cut in wearily. "I know the whole thing backwards. All I can say is, there's two to one against your Pete. An' that's bad."

Matt Russell straightened in the creaking saddle. He sat for a moment as rigid and imposing as a general's statue, glowering at the drab jail that imprisoned his son. Then, suddenly, his bearded face became grim, and his voice fell to a determined note.

"Ed," he said, "I'll get him free!"

The sheriff raised dubious brows and spat again into the dusty road.

"If it's the last thing I ever do," old Russell vibrantly promised, "I'll prove them two coyotes is lyin'! I'll prove what my boy says is the truth!"

On that final avowal he swung his cayuse around and sent him galloping away in billows of yellow dust. He himself continued to sit erect, even proud. His lips were clamped tight, and his narrowed eyes were fixed on the jumble of the purple Sierras that marked the horizon.

IT wasn't only his unshakable faith in his son that convinced Matt of young Pete's innocence. There was something else: the fact that he had excellent reason to distrust both Hoghead Marsh and his partner, Joe Lacey.

Those two men had drifted into Longhorn City together, almost a year ago, bringing jail records from another state. They had come, as they said, to "git camped permanent." But if the Circle T, a shady outfit at best, had not been desperately short-handed at the time, they might never have landed jobs.

As it was, however, both found work—and within two months had

been accused of rustling mavericks from Matt Russell's own Box R! Unfortunately, the charges had never been proved, because of insufficient evidence; yet every waddie on Matt's ranch still yearned to crack an outraged fist on the jaw of either Hoghead or Joe.

Consequently, in this new emergency Matt might have commanded the willing help and guns of all the cowpokes on his payroll. Even forgetting their hatred of Joe and Hoghead, the boys would readily have gone to war, he knew, to save young Pete from jail. Yet Matt decided, as he planned his campaign on the way home, to handle this affair alone.

"After all," he muttered grimly, "he's my boy!"

MATT RUSSELL started things the following night—a soft night, still and rich with stars.

At eleven o'clock Hoghead Marsh, mounted on a lazy pinto, was wandering to the south of the far-scattered Circle T herd. Working at night and alone wasn't, as a rule, to Hoghead's taste. But this evening he didn't mind it. He rode slowly, humming and musing over the array of warts on his hands.

He was a queer, repulsive man; short, thickset, with a huge globular head—a head that seemed much too large for his barrel-like torso. Just now he was in dire need of a shave, so that his fleshy jowls looked black and gave him an ominous, ugly expression.

This, however, caused him no concern. The state of his appearance, like the state of his morals, seldom troubled Hoghead.

He had been drifting about for several hours and was just skirting a clump of cottonwoods when the shock came.

Directly in front of him a figure stepped out from behind the trees!

A tall, rugged, bearded figure—the figure of Matt Russell—that appeared with all the suddenness of a ghost! And Matt was levelling a six-shooter straight at Hoghead's chest!

"What in blazes—!" the mounted man blurted. He might have reached for his gun, had not that steady muzzle been glowering at his heart.

"Easy!" rapped out Matt. "Yuh ain't been asked to make a speech!"

"What—"

"Get down off'n that hoss an' grab at the stars!"

Hoghead was about to gasp a protest. But the abrupt leap of Matt's gun and the dangerous flash in Matt's eye persuaded him to slide out of his saddle in silence. Dumbstruck, his eyes round, he raised his arms. "Turn around!" Matt ordered.

And when Hoghead had faced his horse, old Russell stepped forward and took the gun out of Hoghead's holster. He thrust it into his own.

"WH-WHAT'S the idea?" Hoghead ejaculated.

Instead of replying, Matt whistled softly through his beard, twice. A moment later his cayuse came out of nowhere to rub its nose on his shoulder.

Matt snapped, "All right, Hoghead! Now yuh're gonna climb into yuhr saddle an' ride ahead of me. Mind yuh stay close to me, too. 'Cause if yuh try to get away, I'm gonna have lots o' fun pumpin' lead into yuhr spine. Savvy?"

"What the devil is all this?" cried Hoghead, a quiver of fear in his tones.

"Yuh'll find out soon enough. Meanwhile, get goin'!"

"But—"

"Yuhr ears ain't clogged, are they?" Matt demanded sharply. "I said get goin'!"

"Where to?"

"We're headin' for the river at

Rocky Point Gorge. If yuh feel like dyin' before we get there, just try bein' balky—*just try it!*"

And so, with Hoghead bewildered and terrified, with Matt grim and implacable, the two men rode toward Rocky Point Gorge, four miles away. The bearded old cattleman, following like a Nemesis, remained some two yards behind Hoghead. And his long, hard hand constantly gripped the six-shooter.

"I—I don't get this!" Hoghead stammered, turning stunned eyes over his shoulder.

"**C**LOSE yuhr trap an' keep ridin'!" Matt actually barked.

"I'll talk to yuh when the time comes!"

"If it's on account o' that—that bank robbery—"

But Matt Russell refused to explain. They rode on, first through crackling brush, then into a stark country of boulders and gravel, with only the starlight to illumine their way.

Presently they heard the subdued roar of the river as it crashed through the depths of the gorge. Somehow it seemed a horrible sound tonight—a snarl of menace—and as it grew louder, Hoghead Marsh became visibly more terrified. His round face lost all its color. His thickset body stiffened.

Again and again he tried to make Matt explain the purpose of this expedition; but the bearded countenance behind him remained as grim and uncommunicative as the six-shooter.

And as threatening.

It must have been close to midnight when at last they reached Rocky Point Gorge.

There, on the very brink of the chasm through which, a hundred feet below, the river thundered, Matt snapped: "All right. Get out o' that

leather!" So Hoghead, trembling, dismounted. And Matt did, too, rigidly. In the darkness the cattleman's face looked merciless and stormy. He said:

"Now listen to me careful, Hoghead. I could've dry-gulched yuh back there, without goin' to all this trouble. But if I did, yuhr carcass might be found 'fore the buzzards finished it. An' mebbe that would mean trouble for me. So I aim to kill yuh here. Yuh'll flop down into the river, an' that's the last anybody 'll ever see o' that lump o' grease yuh call yuhr body!"

Hoghead, with his back to the chasm, gasped. His eyes widened in horror. He shot a swift glance over his shoulder. Almost at his heels the cliff dropped down a hundred feet into appalling blackness. Far below the river raged, throwing up a mist that dampened his face even here.

"Wh-what are yuh talkin' about?" he blurted hoarsely. "Why—why do yuh want to—"

MATT, his eyes afire, his gun levelled, his bearded chin drawn down, said slowly:

"Yuh an' yuhr ornery partner, Joe Lacey, tried to rob the bank t'other night.

"When my boy Pete saw yuh, the two of yuh tried to shift the blame into him."

"We didn't!" Hoghead cried wildly. "We—"

"I'm talkin' now!" Matt rasped. "Yuh an' Joe Lacey are the only lyin' witnesses against my boy! Coyotes like yuh could never be made to tell the truth. So I'm figurin' if I get rid o' yuh now, an' then get rid o' yuhr partner the same way, there'll be nobody to lie against my Pete!

"Without witnesses he can't be convicted. So—"

"Yuh—yuh wouldn't do that!" Hoghead flung out hoarsely. He was, of a sudden, violently shaking. He crouched as if in pain, and sweat oozed out of his forehead. "Yuh—yuh couldn't—!"

"Couldn't I? Watch!" The gun rose.

"But listen, man! For God's sake, listen—!"

"THERE'S only one thing c'n save yuh," Matt Russell flatly declared. "An' that's up to yuhrself!"

Hoghead blinked rapidly. Half hysterically he cried: "What? What is it?"

"This," Matt's left hand dug into a back pocket and emerged with paper and pencil. "Yuh'll write a confession o' the truth!" he said quietly.

"The—the *truth*?"

"An' yuh'll do it before a minute's up," firmly insisted Matt. "I'm gettin' doggone nervous standin' here like this.

"If yuh don't want to write just say so. It's all the same to me which way I save my boy. Fact, I'd sooner plug yuh and rid the country o' rustlers. But if yuh'll write—"

Hoghead all but screamed, "*What* do yuh want me to write?"

"How yuh tried to rob the bank with Joe Lacey! An' how my boy stopped yuh!"

"I can't! I won't! I—"

"All right," snapped Matt. "Suit yuhrself!" As he spoke he raised the six-shooter and aimed it straight at Hoghead Marsh's heart. Scarcely ten feet separated the two men, and a miss was impossible. His arm stiffened.

"*Wait!*" shrieked Hoghead.

Matt peered narrowly at the shaking man. He saw a face white with terror; eyes that bulged crazily; arms extended in a kind of prayer.

"Don't!" Hoghead sobbed. "*Don't!*"

"Will yuh write it?" Matt demanded.

"Y-yes! For God's sake, yes! Gimme that paper!"

Breakfast at the Box R, the next morning, was a feast and a celebration. For young Pete Russell—tall, sandy-haired, keen-eyed—was home again, and *free*!

He sat at the table with his bearded father; and over the coffee old Matt chuckled:

"Son, it would've done yuhr heart good to see Hoghead last night! He was scared yeller, what with me in front o' him an' the gorge behind. Course, I didn't figure to murder the coyote. That was just bluff. I never yet shot a man, 'less he had a gun in his hand. But Hoghead, he didn't know that!"

Pete looked across the table earnestly. He was still pale after his experience in the local jail, and tired. His usual smile did not appear.

"Dad," he said in a low, thick voice, "I—I'll never be able to tell you how much I—appreciate—"

"Shucks!" Matt scoffed. "Forget it! Yuh didn't expect me to let them two buzzards send yuh to jail, did yuh? Only thing I'm sorry about is that I couldn't drag Hoghead in to Sheriff Weaver, like I figured on doin'."

"Just what happened?" whispered Pete.

"WHY, it was like this," Matt explained. "We was half way back to town, him ahead o' me, an' me with a gun in my hand, when my cayuse stepped into a hole. I had to jump quick, or I'd 'a' had all that hoss-flesh on top o' me. Hoghead saw his chance, an' he streaked away like lightnin'."

"If the cayuse hadn't gone lame, mebbe I'd have chased after the toad. But as things stood, I couldn't. So

I just put a couple o' slugs into the clouds, to lend Hoghead a bit o' speed, so to speak. Then I brought the cayuse into town. Havin' the confession in my pocket, I didn't much care any more. Sheriff Weaver's gone to get Hoghead an' Joe Lacey."

"Did—"

"Shucks, Pete! Forget it a while an' eat! Them flapjacks is all goin' dry!"

So they finished breakfast in silence and were just sharing the last two flapjacks when a clatter of hoofs drummed through the morning stillness. Matt rose quickly, eagerly; with Pete behind him he strode out on the porch—just in time to greet the gaunt Sheriff Weaver and four other men.

"Hi, Ed!" Matt called. "Did yuh get them buzzards?"

The sheriff stopped his horse in a billow of dust but did not dismount. He spat tobacco juice over his shoulder and shook his head.

"Nope, Matt. I didn't."

"Why?"—in surprise.

"Hoghead an' Joe didn't have the guts to stand an' face us," Weaver declared. "Seems like Hoghead streaked into the Circle T last night, grabbed Joe out of his bunk, an' the two of 'em lit out for parts unknown. By this time there's prob'ly seven counties between us an' them. Reckon now that we got the confession they're headed for Mexico."

Matt looked disappointed. But after a moment he brightened and even laughed.

"Well," he said, "long as they didn't get the bank's money, I'd sooner see them rattlers in Mexico than in this part o' the world! I say good riddance!"

Young Pete didn't speak at all. For a while he listened to the conversation between his father and the sheriff; then he turned away and peered haggardly toward the distant Sierras.

"Gosh!" he thought bitterly. "That sure was close! W-whatever happens, I swear to heaven I'll never try another robbery!"

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In Next Month's Issue of THRILLING ADVENTURES

ANOTHER STEP



He raised the point and held it steady

A Powerful Story of Life As It Was Lived Before the Dawn of Civilization

By L. R. SHERMAN

Author of "The Sixth Cottonwood," etc.

HE paused at the edge of the conifers and peered down the broad, grassy slope toward the tangle of tropical forest. A hardwood club with a malachite head lashed to it swung nervously in one hand. Giant grasses, tree ferns, cycads, strange survivors of a far earlier age, thrust themselves a hundred feet in the air among trees of a tougher, finer grain.

Huge lianas, like throttling ropes,

formed additional hosts to an endless tangle of parasitic and epiphytic growths, bromelias, orchids and mosses, all preventing visual examination of the jungle to a depth of more than a few feet.

Yet it was not upon his eyes alone, set beneath their bony brow ridges, that this dawn man with the brown skin covered with a fine fuzz, depended for information.

His slightly flaring nostrils below

their flat bridge were in intermittent motion as he tested the heavy odors that drifted up to him with each slight shift of the wind, and his ears twitched ever so slightly as distant roars and grunts, and the occasional crashing of heavy, unseen bodies brought warning of terrifying monsters inhabiting the lowland.

There was fear of the unknown in his eyes, and curiosity. For it was by fear that his kind had survived, and by curiosity that they had evolved into the then highest type of mammalian life. And, too, there were slight changes of expression in the eyes, as of the dimming and brightening of some inner light, the unmistakable stamp of an increasingly active and primitive intelligence.

SINCE early morning, when he had slain the little three-toed horse, Hipparion, by the water-hole, Gar had been following an elusive scent. Once during his search it had been so strong he had let desire becloud caution. He had charged out of the forest, to run directly across a plain dotted with high rock outcrops.

The fetid odor of decaying flesh from a near-by hole in the rocks, and a snarling growl followed by the big head and huge, furred body of a cave bear lumbering toward him, had sent him racing madly for the nearest trees.

At that moment a sharp cry of terror had come from the other end of the glade. A shift of his gaze and he saw one of his own kind leap to a low branch and disappear among the foliage of a wide-spreading maple, while the mate of his own pursuer reared to its full height and shot one massive paw toward an escaping prey.

Restlessly, at times forgetting briefly the object of his search, Gar had been drawn into unknown territory. Now and then the alluring

scent had focused an ever present desire and he had traveled purposefully.

An air current drifted along the edge of the forest through which he had advanced. It brought once more the message that was a call, an invitation. He turned abruptly to examine a spur of the coniferous growth which descended almost to the edge of the steaming jungle below, and had a brief glimpse of her, one of his own kind, gathering succulent seed cones.

He hurried forward as she moved out of sight among the trees. As he neared the spur, every sense on guard with the unremitting caution of the eternally hunted, the faintest suggestion of movement back in a denser group of conifers captured his attention. His advance became slower, more cautious. In the gloom at the edge of the clump he detected a dark shape, vague and formless.

Gar moved closer. A protective instinct, rather than any premeditated chivalry, guided his advance so as to bring him between the unknown and the place where he had last seen the female.

He had followed her away from the vicinity of his own kind for nearly the whole day, and she had lured him on, never quite losing touch. Though he had not yet caught her, he knew she was his, and protecting his own was a part of his nature.

FURTHER movement among the dense trees. A broad, stubby head was thrust past the low-hanging branches and little, malicious eyes stared unwinkingly beyond Gar.

Then Gar saw the female, much closer than he had thought. She had stepped from behind a tree and was plucking apart a cone and eating the seeds, glancing furtively at him from behind the long waving hair that

partially shielded her features. The animal came into the open, exposing a grayish, furred body the size of a bear, but with a heavy tail and less sturdily formed legs. Gar roared a hoarse cry of both warning and challenge as he lunged forward.

Amphicyons, neither bear nor dog, but exhibiting characteristics of each, was hungry. He had been driven from his mate by a younger, more active male, and had been many days nursing the wounds which had curtailed his hunting.

HE would not otherwise have attacked these two-legged mammals who could easily escape him in the trees, or, if cornered, put up a savage battle with crude but punishingly effective weapons. His lips writhed back from enlarged crushing teeth and a grunting snarl rumbled from his throat as he swerved to close with the suddenly discovered Gar. Himself bristling with quick rage, Gar answered the snarl with a short, throaty cry. The bear-dog's charge did not swerve from its straight line when Gar leaped aside at the last instant. As the small-brained animal plunged past, the malachite clubhead whistled downward.

The half-bear grunted, staggered and tried to reverse its charge. The club swung again in a vicious arc which ended with a sharp crack. A grunting roar was checked as he went to his knees. A third time the club came down, and the bear-dog straightened out, its hind legs twitching slightly.

Impelled by some primitive instinct he could not and did not try to understand, Gar placed a foot on the warm body and sent a call of victory rolling along the forest aisles. The call was immediately echoed by a shrill cry from the clean-limbed female as she flashed toward the edge of the tropical forest.

One quick glance behind him, and Gar raced in her wake. Machaerodus, the saber-tooth, had been attracted by the sound of battle, and was approaching with cushion-footed speed, his six-inch tusks gleaming in the light of the descending sun, his stubby tail twitching with eagerness.

The female had reached the far-flung limbs of a huge ginkgo and was rapidly ascending toward its crown when Gar leaped upward, caught the lowest branch, and swung to safety. The tiger had been diverted by the fresh kill just long enough to give him his chance, yet in its last leap had nearly plucked Gar from the branch.

Gar thrust the handle of the stone-headed club through the hide string of his loin covering of ocelot fur, and climbed quickly. Beneath him the saber-tooth snarled with disappointment, but finally returned to the body of the bear-dog.

The female no longer fled from Gar. She sat in a great crotch, watching his approach. Like his own, her eyes contained a sparkle of intelligence, of intelligence and of admiration for the prowess and courage of this big male who had clung to her trail since dawn.

SHE moved farther along the branch as he swung up and squatted beside her. Both of them shot startled glances along a narrow, open lane that stretched into the steaming jungle. They could not make out the ground far below, but they could see the thick foliage sway as some gigantic beast moved ponderously along.

A shrill scream had broken out some place down there, the cry of an animal being torn to death. The scream changed to short, intermittent cries. A horrible, worrying sound accompanied them.

The tall grasses swayed and small

trees crashed with the impact of heavy, threshing bodies. A humped, slate-colored back, with twin rows of erect, three-foot, bony plates along the spine, appeared briefly in the line of their vision.

Other movements and other sounds, increasing in number as darkness settled swiftly, announced the presence of additional survivors of a long dead age, when colossal reptiles dominated the earth and nature's first experiments with mammals were just beginning.

THE female moved closer to her mate, shivering, her teeth chattering faintly. She made soft, throaty sounds which were answered by harsh monosyllables from Gar.

"I am Gar, who travels alone, and who is not afraid," he volunteered.

Though his tone was guttural and his words brave, he gripped with a convulsive clutch a branch just above him.

In a near-by tree what had looked like a black vine, twice as big around as his own thick neck, had moved and was slithering silently toward the ground.

"I am Eia, whom only you would follow to the edge of this sweating, black forest. Have you ever been here before?"

Gar shook his head. He was listening to the snarling and bickering of the hyenadons as they circled restlessly, waiting for *Machaerodus* to eat his fill that they might fight over what was left of the carcass.

"We have come far from the uplands, where our kind used to find safety in their tree nests at night. But there have suddenly come strange, spotted cats, many as the leaves and hungry, who can climb better than our people. Many of us have been killed, and there is no way of escape. Do we go back there, Gar?"

Gar brooded silently while he listened to the increasing sounds of the night-prowling carnivore back on the higher ground, and the fearsome, reptilian noises that came from the swamp at whose edge they had taken shelter. Slowly, with a troubled frown, he shook his head.

"I do not know. We stay here tonight. When the light comes again we may know what to do. We cannot stay here long. It is not safe. We must find our own kind."

"But the spotted cats?"

Gar did not answer. Eia crept close to him and likewise remained silent while she regarded him curiously by the pale light of a queerly spotted moon.

Throughout the long hours of darkness he seemed never to be fully asleep. Sometimes his eyes were half shut while his mate dozed beside him. Then they would open wide, quickly. Now and then his ears would twitch slightly, or his nose wrinkle and his muscles tense, as some sour, reptilian smell rose to him with the miasmatic vapors.

BUT much of the time he stared sightlessly into the depths below, his brow furrowed in an effort at connected thought. Now and then his eyes would brighten with the approaching birth of an idea. His effort to cling to it, to bring it forth where it might be more closely examined, seemed almost physical.

At length, when the night was nearly past, and with the distant glow of the unborn idea still burning tantalizingly in the background of his consciousness, he settled himself more comfortably in the crotch and slept fitfully beside his newly acquired mate.

With the coming of the sun the terrifying noises from swampy jungle and wooded upland subsided. The carnivore, having eaten their fill, had

returned to their hiding places to relapse into torpor while their digestive processes functioned.

GAR, with Eia by his side, left the gingko, cut across the spur of coniferous forest and headed northward toward country they knew. There was an eagerness about Gar's movements, as though sleep had developed the idea he had not been able to grasp the night before and he was anxious to act upon it.

A rolling parkland, dotted with groves of willow and oak, was crossed at a half lope, for these dawn-men were more at home on the ground than they were in the trees. The trees were now only their refuge; the ground had become their natural domain.

An occasional small group of mastodons at the edge of the larger groves eyed them curiously, or trumpeted alarm, throwing up their tusked heads and disappearing, their huge, neutral-colored bodies given protective coloration against the gray background of the tree trunks. Marmots whistled shrilly and dived into their holes. Toward noon Gar squatted by a runway and killed two hares Eia drove to him.

They ate and rested in the crotch of a tree. To the north Gar could see the edge of the black forest where the families of his kind built their crude platforms high in the trees, to obtain their rest secure from the night-prowling meat-eaters. He stared at it for some moments and then his gaze slowly swept eastward where, blue in the distance, rolling hills made an uneven horizon.

In Gar's sixth year Megalicitis, the mammoth weasel, had caught Gar's mother and Gar had had to shift for himself. Compulsory independence and an insatiable curiosity had made a rover of Gar and had developed in him a far greater ability to take care

of himself in a hostile world than others of his age who had remained dependent for several years longer than he.

As he looked thoughtfully at the distant outlines of the hills, he recalled one journey far among them, and of the discovery he had made there. That discovery had been the fertile soil out of which his idea had grown. He turned suddenly to face Eia, who was watching him with a warm glow deep in her brooding eyes.

"I have not been in the forest for five or six suns. It was between here and the big trees that I picked up your scent and followed. Tell me more of the spotted cats," he demanded.

Her eyes dilated slightly, and the fine hair along her spine between the shoulders rose stiffly. She did not answer for a moment. Finally:

"There were few the first night. We heard their voices, deep and hoarse. One of our men saw a pair of yellow eyes on the limb where his platform was built. They came closer. He threw his spear.

"There was a spitting snarl, a hot breath in his face and white teeth; a paw, swift as a striking snake, raked the side of his head and he dropped screaming to the ground. He bounced from the branches on the long way down and was dead when he landed. He was my father."

SHE paused. Gar made no comment. At last she continued:

"Five other platforms were attacked. Three of our people were carried off. None of the cats were seen the next day, though one of the women found the bones of a child one had eaten. The next night and the next, more and more of them came.

"There was no escape. It was becoming unsafe even by day. None

were left but me in my tree. With the rising sun I ran toward where the warm winds come from. Then, while I was resting in a high tree not far from here, I saw you following. I do not know if any of our people are alive now.

"WHEN I left many of them had crowded on to the big platforms of Lig and another, which they had joined together. The males with clubs and spears were on the outside; the females and young in the center. Those who could not get on the platforms squatted on the branches.

"Maybe the big cats will be afraid of that tree—until they become very hungry. There were always more coming. One nearly caught me in the last tree. That is all."

"We must hurry. The cold winds which have been coming down from beyond the forest have driven the cats to us. Cats do not like the cold, I have found. But first we will visit my platform. Follow!" and he swung toward the ground.

Their course quartered toward the dark line of black forest in the north. They came to a lone, round-knobbed hill on top of which a solitary tulip-tree towered over two hundred feet in the air. At its base were the remains of Gar's many feasts; whitened bones, picked clean by vultures, the larger ones cracked open by the scavenging hyenadons.

The rough trunk, ascending a hundred feet before branching thickly, upheld an ideal refuge, and the upper branches became a perfect lookout. Using both feet and hands on the deeply furrowed bark Gar and Eia ascended almost as easily as if by ladder.

A small, firm platform had been erected in the thickest of the lower branches. On it was spread the skin of an antelope. Beside the skin lay

a number of crude stone implements and several spears with points of splintered leg bones of the camelops.

Gar picked out the lightest of the spears and a granite-headed club with a thin, pliable handle and handed them to Eia.

He himself took the largest spear and hung it from one shoulder by the aid of a looped thong.

From his home and watch-tower Gar led the way toward the forest. Late afternoon found them at its edge. Eia, her glances darting swiftly among the trees, suddenly gripped Gar's arm and pointed.

A thick-set, feline shape, with a basic color of tan, and spotted with black rosettes, lay stretched out on a limb thirty feet above the ground.

THE big jaguar's lips curled back and its spitting challenge brought Gar's spear to his hand. He balanced the weapon a second, then slowly shook his head and led the way into the forest.

Though he saw only a few of the cats who had been disappointed in their night hunting and were searching for some easy daylight victims, his nose told him of their presence in great numbers.

But there was more than the feter of the cats in the air; there was the scent of death, death of many of his own kind. He came upon their bones soon, picked clean and cracked open for the marrow they had contained. Swiftly as caution would allow, and directly as possible while avoiding trees with low branches from which the sharp-clawed felines might drop on them, Gar and Eia headed for the refuge of the surviving members of their people.

They found them, dull-eyed after two days and a night of constant vigil, many of the males weak from the loss of blood and stiffened by deep, knifelike claw rakes, huddled

on a double platform in the top of a tall beech.

There were less than thirty of the tribe's two hundred members left. They set up a jabbering when Gar and Eia, unmarked and apparently fresh, joined them.

Gar, his deep-set eyes alive with enthusiasm over the plan which had been stewing in his mind, shook his malachite club above his head and roared a demand for silence. He obtained it.

"I HAVE heard of the coming of the spotted cats. I have seen what they have done. There will be more coming down with the cold winds. To stay here is death for everyone. You know I have roamed far and seen many things.

"I have come to take you to a place where you will be safe from these killers who are swifter and surer in the trees than yourselves. The sun is nearly down. The cats will be hunting again with the dark. You cannot survive another night. We must start at once. Who will come?"

As he paused, looking them over, a great chattering and gesticulating arose. Everyone tried to speak at once. It was evident that the females with young and the younger men wanted to go. The older, who thought they were wiser, shook their heads, vaguely uneasy. They were being asked to leave the only homes they had ever known. Fear of the new and untried was deep rooted. The enthusiasm of youth had long since atrophied.

Finally, from the opposite end of the platform, a huge dawn man with more and coarser hair on his less symmetrically shaped body, rose from a squatting position and strode through the huddle. There were many scars, new and old, on his dark hide. They were the badges of courage, as

were the heavier brow ridges and the more acute facial angle evidences of a lower average of intelligence.

This was Lig, builder of the platform, the mightiest fighter of the tree people and, if ever they could have been said to have had one, their leader. He halted in front of Gar and his heavier build contrasted with the lighter, cleaner lines of the younger man. His little, red-rimmed eyes roved over the symmetrical form of Eia, then concentrated their stare on Gar.

"I have killed many of the cats. I will kill more if I stay. If anyone leads the tree people, I do. Gar lives apart. He is not one of us. Why should we go where he leads?"

NOT the words, but the insulting manner of the chattered objection, caused Gar to stiffen and bare his teeth. He half raised his club as little red lights began to glow in his own eyes.

"Where will Lig lead?" he half snarled in challenging interrogation.

For a moment longer the huge Lig stared at the bristling Gar. Then his lips drew back from protruding, buck teeth.

"Where Gar shows me."

Eia leaned close, after a fearful glance into the sky.

"It grows dark, Gar. The cats will be hunting soon. Let us hurry."

Gar listened to the pleading of his mate and some of the rage, that had threatened to become blinding, left him. He looked steadily at Lig for a moment, then slowly faced the others.

"The time grows short. Any who want safety follow. I go," and closely followed by Eia, he swung from the platform and commenced a swift descent.

The chattering arose again, and above the noise the heavy tones of Lig roared orders. But some of the

younger males, and a number of the females with young clinging to them, followed.

With the first reduction of their numbers others joined the exodus, until Lig alone was left standing on the platform beside the body of a male who had tried to push past him in the wake of Gar and Eia.

Somewhere a jaguar squalled hoarsely. There was a shifting of forms in many of the trees and the spotted bodies of the cats in restless movement grew visible. With a last quick look around, Lig slung his huge club over one shoulder and followed his hurrying companions.

GAR, with Eia a pace in the rear, led the way swiftly into the open country. The sun had touched the horizon when they reached a grove of maples. Here the tree dwellers mounted to the branches for the night.

Gar, from his perch in the first large tree, glanced back over their route in the last light of the setting sun. He thought he could see vague, almost imperceptible movements at the edge of the black woods, as though the spotted cats lacked only one slightly bolder than the rest to take the trail of their retreating prey.

For the second night Gar remained awake for long hours. Not only the danger of a night attack by the jaguars on the exhausted and sleeping tree people, but a slowly awakening and altogether unfamiliar sense of responsibility worried him.

As on the previous night, he wrestled with half formed thoughts that constant effort made clearer. This unaccustomed mental activity was a self-imposed torture which brought its own reward in answers to most of the problems.

Gar was the first of his tribe who had ever done any extended, consecu-

tive thinking. He realized this dimly, and with the realization came a partially understood appreciation of the advantage it gave him over the others.

Before daylight he had succeeded in picking out the route he would follow during the next day's march, the order in which the tribe would travel for the safety of the weaker, and the nature and source of their food supply.

Because certain death lay behind for any who became separated from the group and were lost, and because they were traveling into an unknown country with unguessed and therefore doubly fearsome dangers of which only Gar knew, the tribe blindly carried out Gar's simple directions during the next march.

Late that day one of the grass-eating Toxodons was killed and the hungry tribe feasted. Thereafter they followed Gar gladly and obeyed without question. Only the powerful Lig sulked and followed, nursing a resentment that increased with the popularity of Gar.

AND Gar never ceased to marvel at the sense of surging power each battle within his increasingly active brain brought him. He began to feel a queer stimulation at thought of his nightly mental exercises. They became something to look forward to throughout the hours of alert travel.

The fifth day found the tribe well within the rolling hills, threading their way over steeper slopes and down into ever deeper and more precipitously walled valleys. There had been but five lost. These had died when a wounded, single-horned rhinoceros, *Teleoceras* had charged with pain maddened blindness into the midst of the migrating tribe.

Gar was undisputed leader now. Lig had once challenged his authority when he was about to lead the

tribe past an inviting forest of ideal trees for platform-nests.

For perhaps the first time in man's generations of evolution, a dozen of the males had voluntarily gone into concerted action. They had caught up their weapons and moved up behind Gar.

LIG had taken one glowering look at them and at Gar, who was crouched in anticipation of the battle, and had turned away growling to himself.

The sixth and seventh days they traversed a barren country of solid rock, devoid of either vegetable or animal life. Sometimes the rock was hot. At other times strange gaseous odors came from the fissures at their feet. Once one of the men had suddenly become ill as he knelt over to peer down into the blackness of a crack larger than the rest.

On his previous journey across this stretch, Gar had been weak with hunger before finally securing food. This time the men killed a supply and the women carried it. That plan had been a minor triumph, giving to Gar confidence in his new conception of advance planning against known dangers.

That night the band toiled upward to a bald knob of rock and followed with their glances Gar's extended arm.

"We stay here tonight. There, beyond the white line, lies our new home," he stated.

They saw a grayish, white ridge extending across a near eastern horizon. They noted green foliage crowning this bare rock and felt that before them was a land of plenty. It justified their confidence in their leader. They visioned security in a forest of taller, more comfortable trees, undiscovered by the nightmare of enemies which had swept down upon them, and were content.

And that night, seated a little apart from the others, staring with unseeing eyes at the dim, eastern sky line, Gar slept scarcely at all. A peril greater than any they had faced since leaving the black forest lay at the end of the next day's march.

An hour before the first light Gar moved among the sleeping people, quietly awakening a dozen of the younger, more reckless males and motioning them aside. Among those he summoned was the fighter Lig and one of his own age called Tonax, who had, throughout the trek, wholeheartedly supported Gar and unquestioningly carried out his orders. When the little group were gathered some distance from the others, Gar addressed them softly.

"I have picked you because you are the best fighters and brave. To win our new homes we have first to overcome a great enemy. Except Tonax, we will leave at once. Tonax will guide the others along our trail when the sun is directly overhead. At the ridge he will wait until one of us comes back and says it is safe for our mates and the young ones to come."

HE paused and, with the exception of Tonax, whose features betrayed disappointment at not being with the advance party, all waited eagerly for him to continue.

"It may well be that all of us will not come back. Is there anyone who fears to go?"

Lig spoke up. "I do not fear, and you know it. But I do not go until I know what the enemy is and where."

One or two of the others nodded agreement. Tonax broke in eagerly:

"Let Lig take my place. I will go, and gladly fight instead of leading the women."

And then, as if by inspiration, was born perhaps the first bit of uncon-

scious diplomacy ever spoken among the tree-dwellers. Gar leaned toward Tonax and his guttural voice was tinged with pride.

"Because the old men know you have been second to me in command, Tonax, I have chosen you to guide them. With no other in charge would I feel sure of them following."

AND as a touch of pride appeared in the young man's bearing, Gar turned to Lig.

"Because you are probably the bravest and mightiest of the men, I have chosen you, Lig, to join us. When the time comes, you will all know what and how we are to battle."

He arose as he finished, and the others, satisfied, quietly returned to the sleeping place to pick out their weapons and follow their leader.

None of them noticed Eia raise her head once and then drop it and close her eyes. Nor did they detect her slip quietly to one side and follow at a distance after they had departed.

Half the morning had passed before the little party topped the limestone ridge and looked across the intervening valley to the high cliff, divided horizontally half way to its crest by what appeared to be a broad shelf. And in the face of the cliff, level with the floor of the ledge, was a series of small black dots. Gar addressed them.

"It is five moons since I was here. This is what I found, and I will tell you what we must do," and for some time he spoke rapidly, illustrating his words with acting which carried home the plan of battle.

The others watched him closely with shining eyes, some of them practicing his postures. Even Lig was silenced by such an exhibition of primitive strategy as he had never before witnessed.

In single file, with Gar in the lead

and Lig directly behind him, they threaded their way cautiously and silently up the narrow game trail that led to the shelf. As they drew to its level they could see that the black spots in the cliff were the low mouths of many caves.

Over the floor of the shelf were strewn slabs and chunks of limestone. Careful to step on none of those which were movable and would rattle, they approached the first of the caves. Each man was armed with two light, throwing spears with knifelike heads of bone and one long, heavy lance whose head was composed of a sharp sliver of stone.

Gar reached the first cave and thrust his head into the opening, his glance boring the darkness, his nostrils twitching slightly as he tested its air. He shook his head slightly, motioned to those behind, and continued to the next cave. And so they went until nearly half of the caves had been passed.

Then they came to one from which a little stream of water trickled, to flow in its shallow channel across the ledge and fall in a tinkling cascade to the valley below.

THERE was no need to thrust a head into the cave's mouth to test the air. The fetor reached them before they were opposite the opening, and scattered bones before it told something of its occupants.

Gar moved back some twenty feet from the cave and faced it, laying down his spears. Lig and four others crossed in front and ranged themselves on each side. The six men remaining formed a line opposite Lig and his companions. This done, they looked at Gar.

He had picked up a half dozen chunks of limestone. One after another, as fast as he could throw, he hurled them far into the cave. At first nothing happened. Then one

rock barely cleared the low roof in its whistling course to the extreme rear of the cave.

A SNARL, followed by a cavernous roar, seemed almost to cause the ledge they stood on to tremble. Gar stooped and snatched up two of his throwing spears as he stared into the black hole. The others tensed, crouched, and waited.

Two luminous, greenish eyes appeared. Behind them another pair, slightly less wide apart, glittered in the blackness. Gar hurled one spear after the other, and dropped to one knee, to recover his heavy lance. A spitting snarl as the eyes sank lower, then the giant, striped body of a sabre-tooth, the most dreaded of the major carnivore, leaped into the open.

A dozen spears were hurled. Half of them lodged in the body of the mammoth cat and the golden stripes became crimson. But he did not pause. He saw only the kneeling Gar ahead of him and rose to his hind legs as he neared his enemy, the claws in his forefeet extended like curved scimitars.

Even as Machaerodus was upon him, Gar's quick survey of his men informed him that he could expect no help from them. The smaller, but fiercer female had followed the charge of her mate, and she had not been lured past the double line of tree-men.

On hind feet, with both forepaws whipping in blows with lightning speed, and long upper canines slashing murderously, she sprang among them and they, the bravest of the tribe, had closed in, stabbing, stabbing, stabbing.

Then the male was directly over his quarry. The kneeling Gar swayed back and, both hands grasping the lance whose butt was wedged against a slab of stone, he raised the point and held it steady.

Machaerodus, dropping forward to crush his insignificant enemy while he ripped open his throat with one sweep of a daggerlike tusk, felt the point enter his breast and whipped a forepaw at the cause of the searing pain. But the blow was ineffective. The full weight of his massive body drove in the stone head on its thick shaft.

Gar leaped aside at the last fraction of a second, but he was too late. The weight of one massive foreleg pinned him to the rocky floor and he could feel the claws sinking into his shoulder as the open jaws of the big cat swung to slash with their six inch tusks. He instinctively threw one arm up to protect his throat, though he knew it would no more divert the death stroke than a blade of grass.

A lithe figure darted across his restricted field of vision. A piercing cry accompanied the swift stab of a light spear.

THE gaping jaws of the sabre-tooth were checked and the broad head thrust backward as the whole, fiercely fighting weight of Eia threw itself into the stroke of the weapon that had entered the throat of Machaerodus.

A moment later Gar squirmed himself from under the weight of the big foreleg and, after a quick glance at the unharmed, shaking figure of his mate kneeling beside the dead cat, he whirled to join his companions.

Four of them, torn and motionless, lay among the stone slabs. The others, one with arms slashed from shoulder to wrist, had drawn back. The female, with one hindquarter dragging where she had been hamstrung by a spear thrust in the back of the thigh, was backed against the cliff.

As Gar started forward, Lig, whose

own left side was a mass of blood dripping from ribbons of torn flesh, made a swift motion with his spear. The female answered the feint, rising on one hind quarter.

Lig flashed in, the spear stabbing out with all the strength of his muscular right arm. A scream of fury and pain and a wild, swift slash of armed paws, a gurgling noise from the impaled throat and a few reflex twitches of the muscles, and she collapsed.

But Lig lay with agonized eyes beside her. The cat's last, vicious stroke had torn open his unprotected side.

Gar looked down at him.

"The bravest and mightiest warrior of our people."

PEACE and understanding came at last into the eyes of Lig even as they glazed in death.

Gar straightened and looked around. Obeying his swift commands, the remnant of the fighters secured spears and continued along the shelf. Though there was evidence of previous occupancy in other caves, they found no inhabitants. Machaerodus and his mate had been rulers of that

ledge and had tolerated no others near them.

When Tonax led up the balance of the tribe just as darkness was settling, they found abundant meat and the skins of animals spread in several of the caves.

SLABS of limestone lay on the ground inside each cave mouth and when, still doubtful of this new mode of life, they entered and were shown how to raise the slabs and brace them with stout logs whose ends were wedged into the caves' floor, they composed themselves to uneasy sleep.

Within a week faith in their first, true leader, who with his mate occupied a comfortable cave at the head of the platform, had developed into an unshaken loyalty.

They were accustomed to the prowling of the meat-eaters outside their blocked cave mouths at night and convinced of their safety. Nothing could have induced them to return to the old, hazardous, uncomfortable platform-nests in the trees. They had truly and irrevocably become cave-men. Another step in the long journey upward had been taken.

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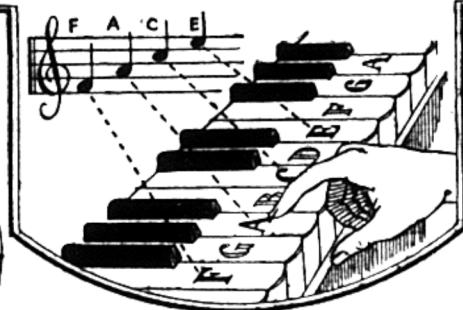
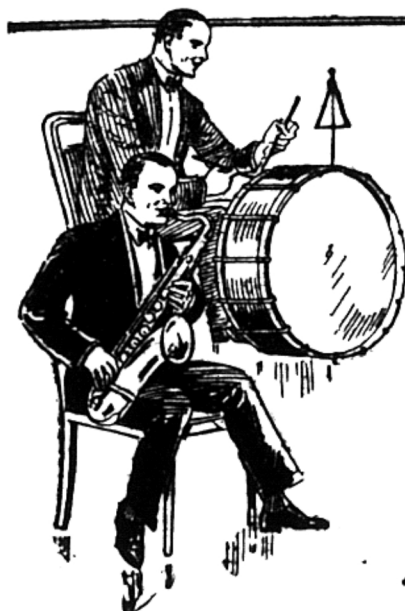
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Please send me your free book, "How You Can Master Music in Your Own Home," with inspiring message by Dr. Frank Crane, Free Demonstration Lesson and particulars of your easy payment plans. I am interested in the following course:

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The GLOBE-TROTTER



WELL, here we are again, fellow adventurers. Winter has passed and Spring is here. And what a tough old winter she was in this northern hemisphere of ours. More snow, more cold, more floods and blizzards than we've known for many years.

Byrd, Ellsworth and Wilkins escaped the tough winter by running off to the South Pole where it was nice and warm. Colonel Lindbergh and his wife got back just in time to get caught in the tail end of it.

Ye Olde Globe Trotter was snow-bound in the mountains of New Hampshire—and has just got back to the home plate.

On page 160 you'll find the names of some of the charter members of the *Globe Trotters Club*—next month I'll print more. So that now you'll know just who and where your fellow members are.

Join at Once

You readers of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** who haven't sent in your applications for membership should do so at once. Clip the application blank appearing on page 156 of this magazine, sign it, mail it, and enclose with it a stamped self-addressed envelope if you want a handsome membership card entitling you to all the rights and privileges of a charter member in this unique, world-wide organization with members scattered far and wide, all over the face of this old earth.

There are no obligations, no dues, no qualifications necessary for membership except a whole-hearted interest in adventure and a willingness to exchange information with fellow members.

I have had some letters from widely scattered readers of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** lately, complaining about the dearth of present day opportunities for soldiers of fortune. The plaint seems to be so widespread that I am going to take up a few columns of type matter in proving that those fellows who wrote in were all wet. Here goes!

Soldiers of Fortune

A REAL soldier of fortune doesn't seek for opportunities to ply his unique profession. He makes them. What, with all the revolutions brewing now in all parts of the world, does anyone mean by implying that opportunities for real, red-blooded he-man adventure have passed into the limbo of forgotten things?

Don't believe that nonsense, fellows. Two or three generations from now, your children and your children's children will be reading about soldiers of fortune who are operating right now, men with all the glamour and romantic appeal that you and I dwell on now when we read of the bold, daring exploits of Captain Kidd, Morgan, and the other buccaneers.

When the true story of the present *coup d'etat* and revolution in Cuba
(Continued on page 150)

Pays Big CASH Prices for OLD MONEY COINS - BILLS - STAMPS



B. MAX MEHL

Head of the Numismatic Company, Fort Worth, Texas. He has shown thousands how to turn old coins into new riches.

Amazing Profits for those who know OLD MONEY!

There are single pennies that sell for \$100.00. There are nickels worth many dollars—dimes, quarters, half dollars and dollars on which big cash premiums are paid. Each year a fortune is offered by collectors for rare coins and stamps for their collections. The prices paid are amazing:

**I PAID \$200.00
to J. D. Martin of Virginia
FOR JUST ONE COPPER CENT**

"Please accept my thanks for your check for \$200.00 in payment for the copper cent I sent you. I appreciate the interest you have given this transaction. It's a pleasure to do business with a firm that handles matters as you do. I wish to assure you it will be a pleasure to me to tell all my friends of your wonderful offer for old coins." *Julian D. Martin, Va.*

This is but one of the many similar letters we are constantly receiving. Post yourself! It pays! We paid Mr. Manning, New York, \$2,500.00 for a single silver dollar. Mrs. G. F. Adams, Ohio, received \$740.00 for some old coins. We paid W. F. Wilhelm of Pennsylvania, \$13,500.00 for his rare coins. I paid J. T. Neville of North Dakota, \$200.00 for a \$10 bill he picked up in circulation. In the last thirty years we have paid hundreds of others handsome premiums for old bills and coins.

All Kinds of Old Coins, Medals, Bills and Stamps Wanted

\$1.00 to \$1,000 paid for certain old cents, nickels, dimes, quarters, etc. Right now we will pay \$50.00 for 1913 Liberty Head nickels (not buffalo), \$100.00 for 1894 dimes, "S" Mint, \$8.00 for 1853 quarters, no arrows, \$10.00 for 1866 quarters, no motto, \$200.00 each for 1884 and 1885 Silver Trade Dollars, etc., etc.



Big Cash Premiums for Hundreds of Coins Now Circulating

There are literally thousands of old coins and bills that we want at once and for which we will pay big cash

premiums. Many of these coins are now passing from hand to hand in circulation. Today or tomorrow a valuable coin may come into your possession. Watch your change. Know what to look for.

It Pays to Post Yourself on the Big Values of Old Coins and Stamps

Knowing about coins pays. Andrew Henry, of Idaho, was paid \$900.00 for a half-dollar received in change. A valuable old coin may come into your possession or you may have one now and not know it. Post yourself.



Huge Premiums for Old Stamps

Some old stamps bring big premiums. An old 10c stamp, found in an old basket, was recently sold for \$10,000.00. There may be valuable stamps on some of your old letters. It will pay you to know how to recognize them.

Let Me Send You My Big Illustrated Coin Folder! It Will Open Your Eyes! Use Coupon Below!

Send the coupon below and 4 cents for my Large Illustrated Coin and Stamp Folder and further particulars. Write today for this eye-opening, valuable wealth of information on the profits that have been made from old money. No obligation on your part. You have nothing to lose—everything to gain. It may mean much profit for you.

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**SEND FOR IMPORTANT
COIN FOLDER TODAY!**

(Continued from page 148)

finally find their way into print, I'll bet my last remaining shirt and all the members in the *Globe Trotters Club* that the bold, daring hands and brains of a few wandering soldiers of fortune were at the bottom of it all. You read much of Colonel Fulgencia Batista, the little army sergeant who usurped command of the Cuban Army, deposing generals, colonels, and all the other brass hats. Yet, you fail to picture him as a soldier of fortune.

He is that in all the term implies, risking his neck and his freedom by placing himself in the van of the underdogs who succeeded under his leadership in throwing the "ins" out.

A Native of Cuba

He is a native of Cuba, and thus didn't have to wander far to make his opportunity to ply his chosen profession. However, from the inner provinces of Cuba to the capital at Havana, as commander of the national army, is a long journey for a small, illiterate man, and that was what Fulgencia was before he began his amazing career.

But the little Cuban is not the only soldier of fortune plying his profession with considerable success right now. There is another one down in the *Gran Chaco*, the littoral of the Paraguay River dividing Bolivia and Uruguay.

The Guiding Hand Behind the Bolivian Army

FOR over a year and a half the armies of Bolivia and Uruguay have been battling in the *Gran Chaco*, a dense, almost impenetrable area of uninhabited jungle bordering on the Paraguay River along the frontiers of the two countries.

Although the battle casualties have been greater than those suffered by

the whole American army during the entire period of the World War, the bloody hand-to-hand fighting going on continuously in that remote, desolate spot in South America has attracted little notice from the people of the northern hemisphere.

Why, it certainly is most difficult to understand.

All the glamour of bloody battle, all the drama of bitter war, all the adventure of desperate, striving, heroic souls is epitomized in the epic struggle now taking place there, in that almost unknown littoral.

Valiant Bolivians

THE Uruguayan army has had all the tactical and strategic advantages of being nearer their base, their source of supplies, of having better transportation facilities, and of defending the inner ring of a circle. But the valiant Bolivian army has fought the Uruguayans to a standstill, has managed to retain its tenuous, precarious hold on the ring of forts bordering the frontier, despite these manifest advantages.

And who is the guiding hand behind this marvelous Bolivian army, you no doubt will ask? Well, none other, my dear fellow adventurers, but a born-in-the-blood soldier of fortune—a German named Kirsch.

For two years before the hostilities began, he drilled, trained, this nondescript aggregation of Bolivian peons until they were molded into a formidable battle force. Then he left to pursue the same activities elsewhere. When they were routed in the *Gran Chaco* in the early stages of the conflict, he returned to piece the remnants of his once efficient force together again.

Ever since, the lines of the Bolivians have held like a steel band under the persistent charges of the hopeful Uruguayans. Bending a little at

(Continued on page 152)

**MEN AND WOMEN
THE STRANGE
EXOTIC WORLD
OF TWILIGHT**

**THE THIRD SEX!
MAN OR WOMAN?
CAN YOU TELL
"THEM" FROM
OTHERS?**



MYSTERIOUS FASCINATION ..

A Great Social Evil Uncovered



For hundreds of years men and women have talked with hushed voices about "STRANGE PEOPLE"—men who are not men—women who are not women. No one has ever dared to talk out in the open about THE THIRD SEX. Is it any wonder that the shocking, lurid facts of this great social evil are unknown to the great mass of men and women? Because this subject is considered taboo, strange nick-names have arisen. "Fairies, Pansies, Queers, Lesbians, Perverts"—these are but a few of the names used to describe these female men and male women.

Now a Doctor has dared to tear away the veil of mystery that hides the facts behind homosexuality. In blunt understandable words he describes the unbelievable facts. "STRANGE LOVES, A Study in Sexual Abnormalities," by Dr. La Forest Potter, noted authority, is a document so weird, so startling, as to amaze the civilized world. Dr. Potter says, "NO MAN ON EARTH HAS A CHANCE AGAINST A WOMAN ONCE SHE HAS SUCCEUMBED TO ANOTHER WOMAN." A startling, provocative indictment against the false modesty that has been responsible for the growth of these fantastic strange amatory curiosities among savage and civilized races.

Dr. Potter tells about the hidden secret passions that dominate these women's exotic lives. He talks about the tragic duality of the effeminate man—half man—half woman. Fearlessly, openly, the meaning of many misunderstood subjects is brought under the searchlight of truth. Sadism—Necrophilia—Phallic Worship—Sodomy—Pederasty—Triadism—Saphism—Uranism—the normal man and woman will refuse to believe that such abnormalities exist and have been practiced through the ages.



ASTONISHING DISCLOSURES ABOUT THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS MEN!

How many of the famous men of history were considered "odd"? Socrates, Plato, Caesar, Virgil, Oscar Wilde, Leonardo da Vinci, Lord Byron, Tchaikowsky, the musician; Walt Whitman, the gentle lovable poet; Napoleon—men and women of all kinds in all stages of life.

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(Continued from page 150)

times, it is true, but snapping back into position again with the rebound of true spring steel, the instant the overwhelming pressure was removed.

The German soldier of fortune, General Kirsch, had brought order out of chaos. He is still down there, leading his gallant army. If a stray bullet doesn't get him, it is my guess that the Uruguayans will some time soon call it a day, and go back to their gay capital, Montevideo, leaving the almost worthless jungle of the *Gran Chaco* to Bolivia for better or worse—and for keeps!

Happy When Battling

How many other soldiers of fortune are serving under the gallant Kirsch, of course, is unknown. Undoubtedly, there are many also in the opposing army. Soldiers of fortune are not usually particular on which side they battle. Just as long as they are battling they are happy—and dreaming of future battles to fight when the one they are engaged in is over.

But the Germans do not have any strangle hold on top places when present day soldiers of fortune are mentioned.

The little town of Bowling Green, Kentucky, in our own fair country, boasts one of the most unique and glamorous figures ever to bear the appellation of soldier of fortune.

And he is still going strong.

I am referring to Bert Hall, of course, the man who made Bowling Green famous.

The Chinese General Chan

HALL has been a soldier of fortune since 1908. When the World War broke out, he enlisted in the French Foreign Legion, the only service that would accept Americans. After a short period in the trenches, he was transferred to aviation, and went up

to the front in December, 1914, the first American aviator trained in France to see actual battle service.

In December, 1917, he was assigned to the French Intelligence Corps, and made his way through the enemy lines to Russia disguised as a machinery salesman. He helped to restore Russian morale on the Eastern Front, then went to Roumania to bolster up the falling morale of France's Roumanian allies.

While there he made a long distance bombing trip to Sofia in Bulgaria, 542 miles, to bomb the German Kaiser who was being entertained at the Palace of the Bulgarian King. His bombs missed the Kaiser, but did considerable damage to the Palace. While his attempt was ineffective, it gave Bert Hall the unique record of being the only aviator engaged in the World War who actually made an attempt to bomb the Kaiser in person from the air.

Busy—and How!

WHEN the war ended, Hall crossed Siberia, found his way to China, where he began training Chinese to fly. During the course of the many revolutions that followed in that immense and populous country, Bert Hall was unusually busy.

As General Chan, he commanded the aviation Corps of one of the many Chinese governments. And although 53 years old then, he took his hours in the air with all the rest in the many aerial battles taking place.

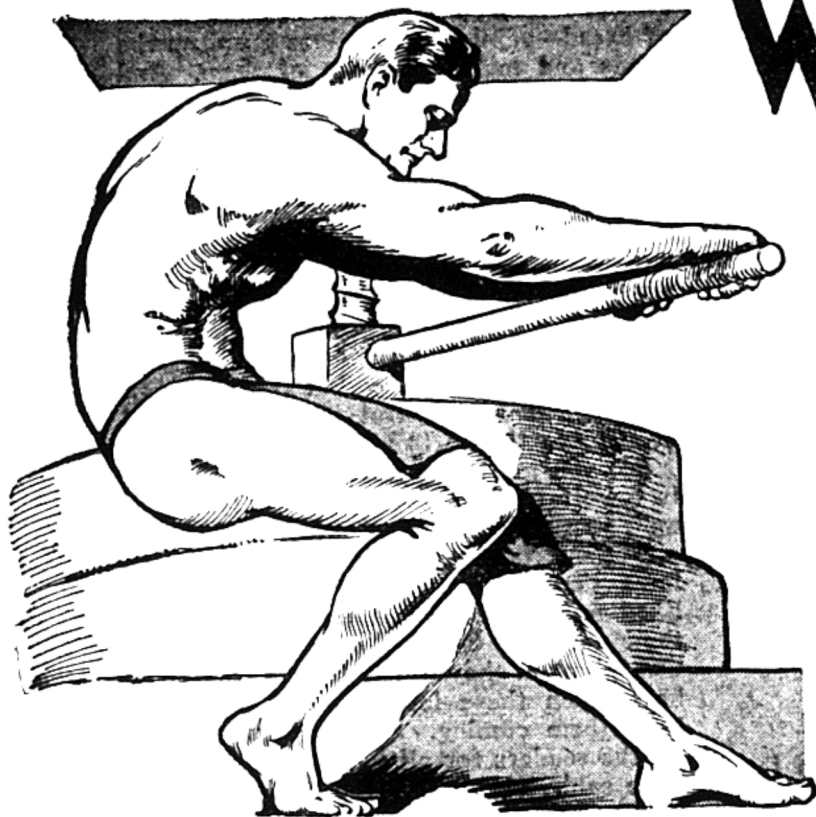
In the course of his varied, checkered career, fighting as a soldier of fortune under twenty different flags, he shot down over a hundred enemy planes during aerial combat.

Bowling Green, Kentucky, bows to no town or city in the world when it comes to turning out soldiers of fortune.

Opportunities for soldiers of for-

(Continued on page 154)

STOP YOUR Rupture Worries!

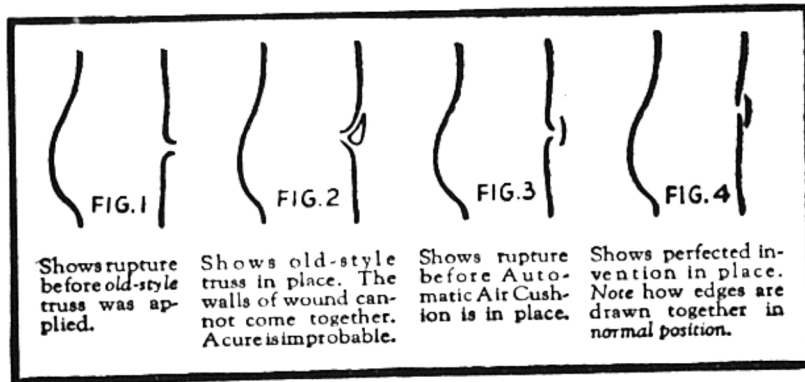


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Why worry and suffer with that rupture any longer? **Learn now about my perfected rupture invention.** It has brought ease, comfort, and happiness to thousands by assisting Nature in relieving and curing many cases of reducible hernial. **You can imagine how happy** these thousands of rupture sufferers were when they wrote me to report relief, comfort and cures! How would YOU like to be able to **feel** that same happiness—to sit down and write me such a message—a few months from today? **Hurry—send coupon quick for Free Rupture Book, PROOF** of results and invention revelation!

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Surprisingly—continually—my perfected **Automatic Air Cushions** draw the broken parts together allowing Nature, the Great Healer, to swing into action! All the while you should experience the most **heavenly** comfort and security. **Look!** No obnoxious springs or pads or metal girdles! No salves or plasters! My **complete** appliance is feather-lite, durable, invisible, sanitary and **CHEAP IN PRICE!** Wouldn't YOU like to say "good-bye" to rupture worries and "hello" to NEW freedom . . . NEW glory in living . . . NEW happiness—with the help of Mother Nature and my **mysterious-acting Air Cushion Appliances?**



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"Have no further use for your Appliance as I'm O. K. Wore it a year. I now can lift 400 lbs. without any fear."—John L. Helges, 635 W. Locust St., York, Pa.

"CAN RUN UP HILL"

"I had a rupture about 14 years, then wore your Appliance for 8. It is about a year since I threw it away. I feel fine, gaining weight nicely. I can run up and down hill which I never could before."—Mr. J. Soederstrom, 2909 Trowbridge Ave., Cleveland, O.

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Inventor

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St. _____ whether for man, ☐
City _____ State _____ woman ☐
or child ☐

(Continued from page 152)
tune? Don't make me leff, fellows (apologies to Milt Gross). The world is full of them!

Not Things of the Past

The adventurous hearts that once beat in the chests of Chinese Gordon and William Walker are not things of the past. The same hearts still beat in living counterparts. Fulgencia Batista, General Kirsch, Bert Hall, Sam Dreben, Tex O'Reilly, and hosts of others, just as courageous, just as resourceful, but little or completely unknown to the world at large.

So much for that, I must hurry on to other matters.

Here's an author with a yarn to spin—on paper, and a note of thanks to the readers of THRILLING ADVENTURES.

The Big Bad Wolf and the Last Roundup

Dear Globe Trotter:

I have been out of the States so long that I am sort of on the outside. This scurrying across the globe in search of material for stories would be all right if I didn't have to write the stories. That's work, fellows. If you don't believe me, come to my hotel some night when I am writing to meet a deadline. And hotels in foreign countries aren't what they are in the States. You can't ring up any hour of the night and get a pitcher of ice water or a hamburger sandwich.

But I'm getting off my point. I started to tell you I was all out of touch with things at home. Every letter I get mentions something or a whole lot about "the big bad wolf" or the "last roundup." And here last month I get the advance copy of THRILLING ADVENTURES and your Globe Trotters Department is all about wolves, too.

What's the idea? Has the old U. S. A. gone to the wolves, and have they called in the cow waddies to ride out on the last roundup? I take it there's quite a depression. But fellows in the old U. S. A., you don't know what a depression is. I have just been to Labrador and Newfoundland. If you think things are tough at home, you had better come up here just over the week end.

The whole colony has gone broke and has asked Mother England to take them over. There isn't a stray dime in a whole shipload—and the wolves, packs of 'em, old Globe Trotter, race down the village streets looking for stray bones and crusts of bread—vainly. The natives grind up the bones and make soup out of them. And if anybody should toss away a crust of bread he would be hanged at sunrise, or quartered in the public square by lantern light, which is plentiful because the people have lots of seal oil, and nobody to buy it.

As far as adventure is concerned, I don't have to stray out of town to get it. It's a perilous, hazardous adventure, just attempting to get a square meal.

I meant to go out with the sealing fleet when it left this Spring, but things are so bad that it is doubtful if the fleet will even leave the ports when the ice breaks.

So, you guys stop crying about the big bad wolf and singing "The Last Roundup"; you ain't seen nor heard anything yet.

But one last word. You tell those fellows that have written in saying they liked my stories that I surely appreciate their letters. Tell them to keep it up. Those not in the writing game don't know how much these letters cheer us up, so keep them coming. And again thanks to all the readers for all the nice things they have said. Thanks for the criticisms, too. They also help, if they don't come in too copious doses.

See you all soon.

Lieutenant Scott Morgan.
Port-aux-Basque, Newfoundland.

I guess the Lieutenant is right. Maybe we had ought to see some other countries before squalling so loud about our own. Sorry though he couldn't make that trip with the Newfoundland sealing fleet. It's a great adventure. I made it once myself, and won't forget it as long as I live. In case you have forgotten, Captain Bob Bartlett, who piloted Admiral Peary's ship on his successful quest for the North Pole, was once a skipper in the Newfoundland sealing fleet. It's a great school for sailors.

But here's a fellow adventurer with a question he wants answered. He must be thinking of joining the navy

(Continued on page 156) —

"One Week from To-night You'll See PROOF that I can make You a New Man!"

**NOTE—No other man
in the world has ever
DARED make such an
offer!**

I GIVE MORE than "promises." I give PROOF! If you're sick and tired of half-baked ideas—if you really want a build like mine—then one week, just 7 DAYS, is all I need to prove I can give it to you! You've got a body, man. Why not make it a real handsome man's body! There's NO good reason why you shouldn't have rippling cords of mighty muscle across your neck and shoulders. No reason at all why your chest shouldn't be strapping, big and husky like mine—your arms and legs powerful—your wind lasting—your vigor and pep 100%.

I used to be a sickly, half-pint runt weighing only 97 lbs.—a "laughing-stock" wherever I went. No fun. No friends. Right there I almost "fell" for some of these freak spring or weight contraptions to make me "strong." But THEN—by a lucky break of my life—I discovered Dynamic Tension.

Apparatus is OUT!

Look at me now. You don't see any skinny, flabby, no-account bag of bones here, do you? This is what my remarkable secret has done for my body. Twice—against all comers—I have won the title, "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." No wonder I've got no use for tricky weights, pulleys or machines that may strain your heart or other vital organs. I've found the natural way to build the husky, solid, fighting muscles that Nature means for you to have! And I've shown thousands of other fellows, many of them probably much worse off than you, how to develop themselves into champions MY way!

I'll give you clean-cut health inside, too—show you exactly how to get rid of constipation, poor digestion, bad breath, pimples, and other weaknesses that are robbing you of the good times and things in life that can be yours.

Now make me PROVE I can do it. Let me send you the FREE Book that opens the door to he-man living. Just tell me where to send it. There's no obligation. But—be MAN enough to send the coupon NOW!

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My big book, "Everlasting Health and Strength"—packed with actual photographs and vital facts every fellow must know to face life—tells the whole remarkable story of DYNAMIC TENSION. Privately printed for me, it's FREE if you act AT ONCE. Are you ready to learn my secret?—ready to learn how I can give YOU the kind of body that will make you a masterful leader. Then tell me where to send your copy of my book. Fill in the coupon and mail TODAY to me personally. Address

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Name
(Please print or write plainly)

Address

City

State

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(Continued from page 154)

to get ready for the next war. Well, we'll hop to it.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Globe Trotter:

I am just a high school scholar, first year, but I am very much interested in torpedoes. I want to know what speed they make in the water, how they are propelled, and how they are guided towards the target.



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NEW YORK CITY

And are aerial torpedoes practically the same thing? I understand they are, but I don't see how the same propelling mechanism would work in the air.

If you could give me information on these questions I will be very much obliged.

I like THRILLING ADVENTURES very much, and have been a steady reader ever since it was increased to 160 pages. I think it is the best magazine on the stands. The readers get more for their money.

Later on I will join the *Globe Trotters Department*. Right now I am behind in school work and could not take the time to answer other members' letters.

One of your best boosters,

Harry M. Martin.

Colville, Washington.

Answer:

The navy torpedo used on battleships and destroyers cuts through the water just beneath the surface at a speed of approximately 40 miles an hour. It is launched on its course from a tube under pressure. After it hits the water, its own propelling mechanism starts, a fast turning screw powered by compressed air from tanks on the inside of the torpedo.

The interior mechanical apparatus is very complicated, being a maze of

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
4-84 a self-addressed stamped envelope.

gadgets that enables the speeding torpedo to function almost human-like. The depth at which it travels can be regulated before it is fired. It is aimed by sighting before leaving the tube, having a fixed rudder to keep it on its course.

The explosive is in the fore compartment and the detonator is on the nose. The rear compartment is filled with the machinery of the torpedo. Aerial torpedoes are similar to water torpedoes, with a few extra devices to enable them to be launched from the air. They too, however, are launched into the water and function just the same as the ordinary torpedo after that.

Hope this answers your questions, Harry. And we certainly will be glad to have you join the *Globe Trotters Club* when you get caught up with your school work.

Sea Monsters

Dear Globe Trotter:

There have been lots of reports in the newspapers lately about strange sea monsters appearing in different parts of the world. Not so long ago I read of one having been seen off the northern coast of Scotland. Then within a week I heard that a huge one had been seen off Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Many witnesses claimed to have seen it.

Is there any authentic record where such monsters have actually been captured, or hooked, dead or alive? If so, where can I gain access to photos and the records of same?

Thanking you very kindly, I am

Yours truly,

John K. Hardesty.

Maple Grove, Massachusetts.

Answer:

You are not the only reader to write in and ask me about those strange sea monsters, Hardesty. But I am printing your letter and answering so that I can kill a whole flock of birds with one stone.

Frankly, I have been unable to find a really authentic record of any such

(Continued on page 158)

Vitality

Tablets For Men and Women

15 Days Supply **FREE**



Don't Send Any Money for this medicine. Just fill in the coupon below and send 10c to pay for postage and packing. A regular size \$1 box of Dr. Rainey's VITALITY TABLETS (2 Full Weeks' Supply) and a box of the Doctor's wonderful Laxatives will be sent without further cost or obligation.

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DR. RAINEY'S VITALITY TABLETS with their tonic effects help to banish the blues and steady the nerves.

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HEART WEAKNESS -skipping of beats, palpitation, fluttering, shortness of breath, dizzy sinking sensations, pain under shoulder blades, throbbing sensation swollen feet, can't lie on right side or back rheumatism or asthma. Dr. Rainey's Vitality Tablets (in those cases of heart weakness due to a rundown condition) will aid by reason of their tonic qualities to build up the system to a normal condition thereby assisting in eliminating these ailments.



STOMACH TROUBLE

Do you suffer from pain, headaches, heartburn, bloating, spitting of mucus, grawling, empty feeling, bad taste or breath, lost appetite, pain before or after eating, sore mouth, coated tongue or indigestion? Where these ailments are caused by a weakened or rundown condition Dr. Rainey's Vitality Tablets will aid by helping to build up the system in removing these ailments.

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Catarrh may be caused or aggravated by a rundown condition. In such cases Dr. Rainey's Vitality Tablets with their tonic qualities will help to build up the system.

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sea monster ever having been captured and brought up on shore. Although old histories are full of such accounts of these legendary monsters, modern naturalists have found no trace of their remains anywhere, and thus contend that they do not exist. I believe them.

The story is a good story, however, and always creates plenty of comment. I believe tired newspapermen are more responsible for them than Mother Nature herself, however. Being too tired or too indisposed to go out and get a real story, the tired newspaper man concocts another sea monster yarn, cloaks it with semblance of verity, and publishes it as an actual happening.

The readers seem to like it. As long as they do, we will have the stories. But until somebody actually hooks one and shoves it under my nose for inspection, I won't believe it. Even then I may not, for the late P. T. Barnum had one made up to carry around with his "Greatest Show on Earth," dead, of course, but it looked real enough to fool lots of people, even Ye Olde Globe Trotter, who was twelve years old at the time.

But that's enough of that. Here's something much more factual.

Red Snow

Dear Globe Trotter:

Some time ago I read a story in your magazine wherein the author based the plot of his story on the unprecedented and unheard fact of a blanket of red snow mantling the ground for an area of miles.

He not only wrote that the snow on the ground was red, but he said that the flakes as they came down were of a brilliant scarlet hue. That seems like stretching the truth a little too far even for a fiction story. I like good fiction stories, but I like them based on fact, not fantasy. That's why I read THRILLING ADVENTURES instead of the weird, pseudo-scientific magazines which give me a pain in the neck.

(Continued on page 160)

PATENTS

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SPECIAL—All for \$1.00

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4166 Park Ave. Dept. THA New York City

(Continued from page 158)

Why don't you tell your authors to stick to fact material? Most of them do, but frequently I find they stray from the proper path, that's why I'm writing this letter.

Scranton, Penn.

Ed. Borleske.

Answer:

Well, well, Ed, you surely have put the blast on Ye Olde Globe Trotter. You don't mention the name of the story or the author, and right now that particular story escapes me. But even so, fellow, you shouldn't have blasted so hard. The author was right and you are mistaken. Still, that's what we are here for, to set you readers right on fact stuff, so your letter is far from unwelcome.

Snow is ordinarily white, but not always so.

Conditions in the upper atmosphere control the color of snow. Only a month ago they had a red snowfall in Montreal, Canada. And the same thing has happened frequently in several areas of Alaska near the active volcanoes.

The upper atmosphere becomes laden with a chemical dust at certain

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times. If rain or snow forms at the same time, the product will be affected. The rain drops or snowflakes will become colored by the chemical action of the dust in combination with the water.

This is no ordinary phenomena, of course, but it has happened and probably will happen many times again. So, I believe the author had a perfect license to use the fact in his story.

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We're glad to have letters like Ed Borleske's. They keep us up on our toes. **THRILLING ADVENTURES** is the readers' magazine. If you don't write in and tell us what you like or don't like we'll never know and will have to shoot in the dark.

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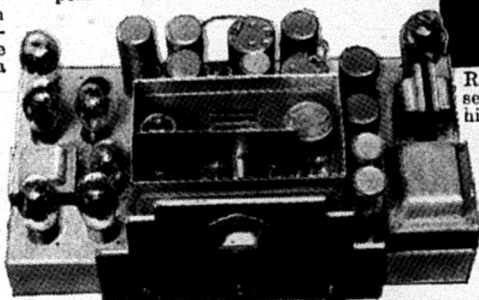


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