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Vol. X, No. 3

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

August, 1934

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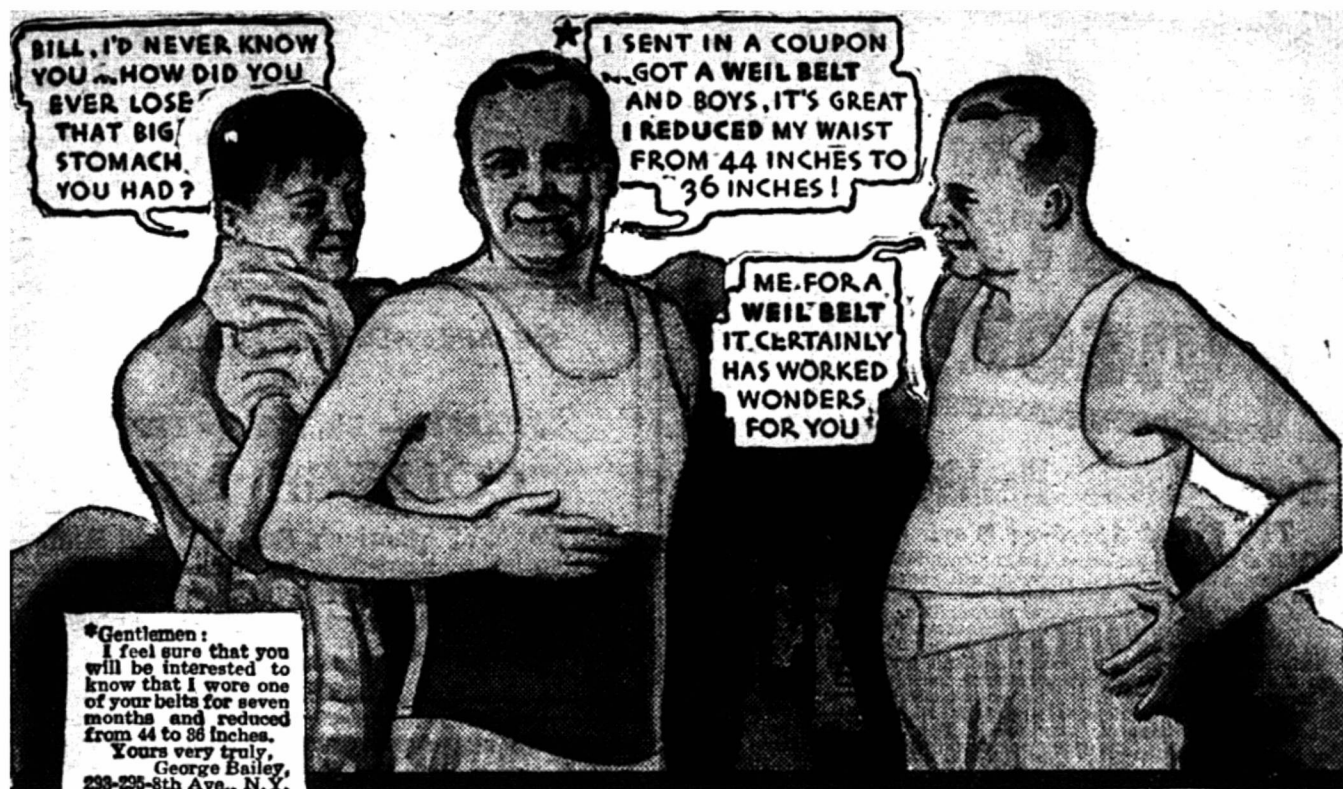
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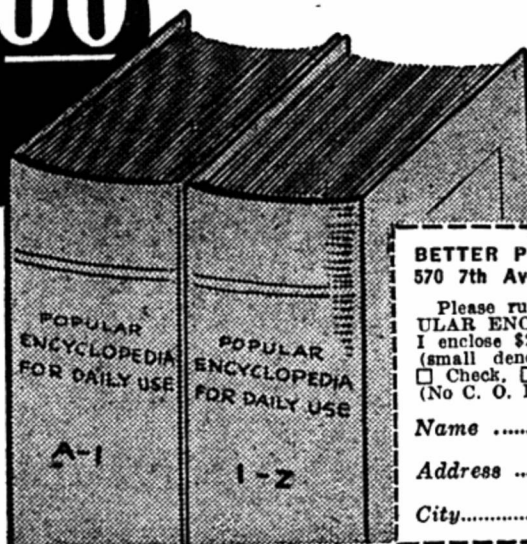
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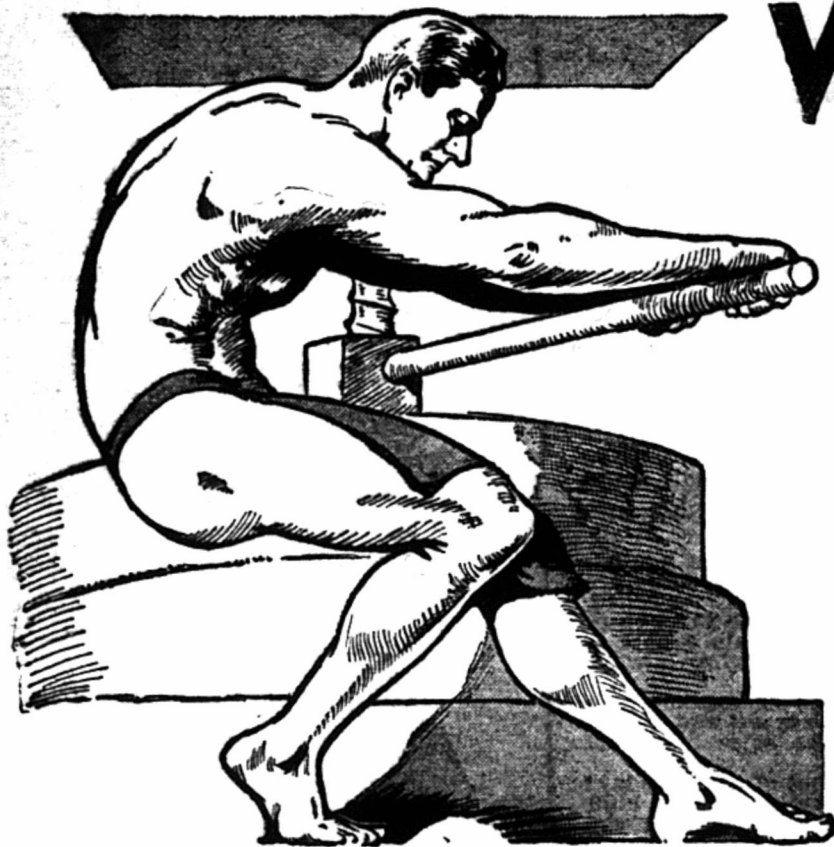
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FIG. 1

Shows rupture before old-style truss was applied.



FIG. 2

Shows old-style truss in place. The walls of wound cannot come together. A cure is improbable.



FIG. 3

Shows rupture before Automatic Air Cushion is in place.



FIG. 4

Shows perfected invention in place. Note how edges are drawn together in normal position.

## PROOF!

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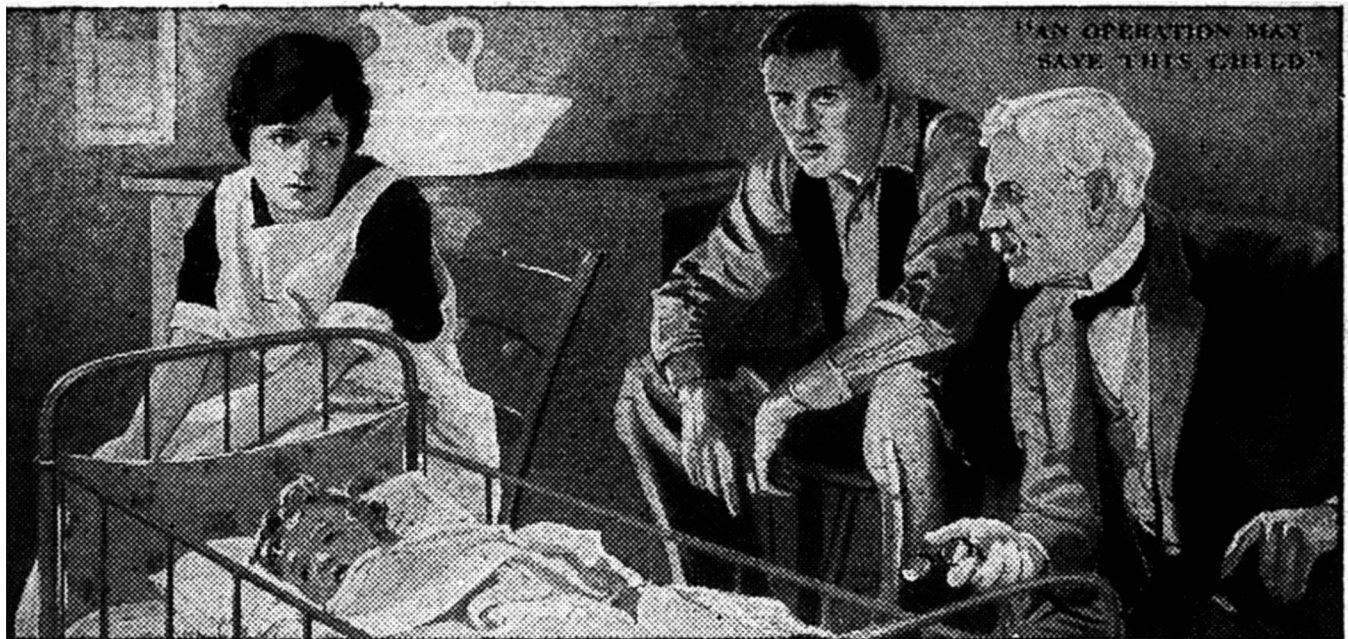
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*With startling suddenness, the men leaped upon Cairns*



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## CHAPTER I

### *Laughter In Gabur*

**"H**O-HO-HO!" The fat Bengali merchant hugged his rotund belly, rocking to and fro on the pile of dirty rugs that served him as a seat. The cor-

rugated iron roof of his incredibly hot warehouse echoed loudly with his mirth.

"Ho-ho! Your pardon, *sahib*, but it is too-a fonny—ha-ha-ha!"

Through the open door, through the blistering glare of pitiless sunlight outside, came the wheezing rumble of a steamer's siren. The





Mary Drummond

ship was going; there would not be another for two weeks. It seemed to Raymond Cairns that his last link with civilization was being cut.

No, not the last. There was the girl, of course. Though what *she* was doing here in this God-forgotten sink-hole on the edge of the Arabian Sea, Cairns couldn't imagine. But what was this fool laughing at?

"Ho-ho-ho!" Chublee Rao swept a mixture of sweat and tears of mirth from his fat face. "Ah, *sahib*—you have bought the silver mine? Ho-ho! And the-a railway? Ho-ho-ho!"

His laughter closed a cold hand of fear about Cairns' heart.

"Yes, I bought them!" Cairns snapped. "Twenty thousand dollars in good American gold. Here's the deed; here's a Persian government permit to begin work; here's my passport, viséd by the Persian consuls at Singapore and Bombay. It's my first venture on my own—what's so funny about it? Isn't the silver there?"

Chublee Rao choked down laughter in a series of throaty chuckles.

"Oh-a, yess, *sahib*," the Hindu assured him. "The silver, it is there. It is a good mine. The railway, it

is there also. And there are two engines, and trucks, and tools. Twenty thousand dollars—ho! Not all in-a cash, I hope, *sahib*?"

"Half cash; they took my note of hand for the other half," said Cairns. "I had a little more, but I needed to keep some funds in hand for development purposes. Say—"

"Ho-ho-ho!" The merchant was laughing again. "Development purposes! Ow-ow-ow!"

Cairns took off his sun helmet and wiped his own streaming brow. The warehouse was a veritable oven. And Cairns was impatient to be out of Gabur and up into the purple hills that shimmered against the northern horizon—the hills where his mine was.

His mine. He was working for himself at last, instead of drawing a mining engineer's pay and making fortunes for other people. His dream had come true. It had cost him the savings of ten years, but he was a mine owner.

He glared at the laughter-shaken Chublee Rao, who was, he had been warned at Bombay, the one intelligent and trustworthy inhabitant of Gabur, the one man from whom supplies, information and local advice could be obtained.

"Would you mind," he asked with exaggerated patience, "telling me what you're laughing at?"

AGAIN Chublee Rao suppressed his howls of merriment in favor of speech.

"It is from the syndicate—the Hornswood syndicate—that you bought the mine, *sahib*?" he asked.

"Yes! I met Hornswood in Singapore. He had good title; I had it examined and certified by the Persian consul there."

"Oh-a, yess, *sahib*. The title is clear enough," chuckled Chublee Rao, his small eyes twinkling out of the depths of their caverns of fat.



"And there's nothing wrong with my government permit?"

"Nothing at all, *sahib*. It seems quite in order. You will, of course, have to make a small present to the local magistrate."

"I expected that. I've spent some years in the East, Chublee Rao."

The Hindu nodded. There was a hint of sympathy behind his laughter now; this tall young American was so very much in earnest.

"Did you not think it odd, *sahib*," Chublee Rao asked in his precise Indian grammar-school English, "that you could purchase a producing silver mine, together with a twenty-seven mile railway and all equipment, for a sum approximating sixty thousand rupees? It should be worth ten times that amount."

Cairns scowled. It was true enough; it was the one thing that had worried him.

"The Persian government reports, made by Belgian experts in the Ministry of Mines, were quite satisfactory," he answered. "And there was also the report of Professor Drummond, the famous geologist, whom I know by reputation. His word as to the value of the mine was enough for me."

"Look here, Chublee Rao, what's wrong? Tell me!"

A SHADOW darkened the door. Chublee Rao drew in a sharp hissing breath between his teeth. All the laughter went from his face as though wiped off by an invisible towel.

Cairns spun sharply around.

In the doorway stood a young Arab, clad in a splendid white and scarlet burnous and the gold-embroidered headdress of a chief. His feet were planted well apart; his hands were on his hips—hips girt by a crimson sash stuck full of pistols and daggers. His large dark eyes were fixed in a glare of hatred upon



Raymond Cairns

Cairns. "An infidel dog!" he snarled in Arabic, and spat explosively upon the dirt floor.

Cairns had lived and worked long years in the East, and had dealt with all manner and races of Oriental workmen. He had learned one lesson: never let the yellow, brown or black brother get the jump on you. Act like the boss and you'll be boss.

So now he took two swift strides across the floor. His fist shot out, straight and true, to the point of the Arab's jaw. The young man sprawled his length in the red dust on the street outside, twitched once and lay still.

"Ah-h-h—*sahib*—what have you done?" gasped Chublee Rao.

"I've taught that smart guy a lesson he'll remember," grinned Cairns.

Someone was coming down the almost deserted street. Cairns' eyes, half-blinded by the frightful glare of the sun, caught the flicker of white.

"Beating the natives already, Mr. Cairns?" asked a cool, disdainful voice.

The girl who had been his fellow-passenger on the steamer from Karachi, and who during the four bliss-



A Yazdi

tering days and nights of the passage had remained serenely indifferent to Cairns' existence, swept past him into the warehouse with a rustle of crisp muslin.

The Arab stirred, lifted his head, and became aware of the laughter of a few street urchins—who scurried away the moment he moved.

He sat up. His hand dropped to the hilt of an automatic in his sash. His eyes were on Cairns' face again; the hatred in them had become a living thing, demoniac in its intensity. There was not only the hatred of the Moslem for the infidel, but a deep personal hatred of proud unbridled youth for the hand which had humiliated it.

Cairns' right fist slid under his white drill jacket and came out—all in one easy unhurried motion—holding a Colt. The blue steel gleamed with dull menace in the blazing sun.

"Get up, boy, and keep your fingers away from those guns," he ordered in Arabic.

Slowly the young Arab rose, never taking his burning eyes from Cairns' face. "On your way, now. Next time you meet me, remember to salaam

politely and call me *sidi*," Cairns advised, grinning.

"Allah do so, to me, and more also," said the young man in a voice shaken by restrained fury, "if I do not let out your heart's blood upon the sand for this!"

"Get out!" snapped Cairns contemptuously.

"This is too bad of you, Mr. Cairns!" said the indignant voice of the girl in white at Cairns' elbow. "These people are not mine coolies!"

The eyes of the young Arab flickered from Cairns' hard bronzed features to the blonde loveliness of the girl. For a moment their expression subtly changed, though still they burned. Then he turned away, saying not another word, and, not without dignity, strode off down the dusty street toward a horse which stood waiting by a crumbling fountain.

Cairns holstered his gun.

"And that's that," said he.

"A ver-ry bad that, if I may say so-a, *sahib*," Chublee Rao observed. He was not laughing now. "If-a you had any very small chance of succeeding with your mining venture, you have destroyed it by what you have just now done."

THE girl had given Cairns her back; she was looking out of a small window at two Arab children playing in the dirt. She had, it appeared, no desire for further talk in Cairns' presence.

"I wish you'd tell me what all this is about, Chublee Rao," Cairns said impatiently. "But first, you'd better attend to the *memsahib's* wants."

"When you have quite finished, Mr. Cairns," the girl murmured without turning her head.

"Very well." Cairns was not wasting time on polite insistence. "Now then, Chublee Rao."

"*Sahib*, you have bought a silver mine. It is a good mine. There is

a railway to bring your ore to the wharf side. Those are what you call the material factors. It is the human factors which render your task impossible. So-a—" Chublee Rao waved a brown hand toward the street down which the young Arab had departed.

"The Arabs?"

"The Arabs first of all. Their great man hereabouts is Sheikh Ali Basr. He is a Wahabits; that is to say, he is fanatical beyond the average Moslem, and if anything a trifle more ready to cut the throats of those whose religious beliefs are not—ah—agreeable to him. And he is lord of all the flea-bitten desert Arabs for a hundred miles around."

"But the Persian government—"

"The writ of the Shah runs not ten yards outside the walls of Gabor, *sahib*. Some day, perhaps, the Shah will become tired of Arab insolence and will send a Sirdar and an army and machine-guns, which will be the end of Ali Basr."

"But till that day—well, the Persian magistrate here has a guard of a dozen soldiers, whose pay is six months in arrears. What can he do against a thousand well-armed riders?"

"THIS Ali Basr, as I take it, is opposed to the entry of foreigners into the country?"

"Opposed is hardly the word, *sahib*. He has taken an oath on the beard of the Prophet to cut the throat of any Feringhi dog—your pardon, *sahib*, I but quote the venerable sheikh—who attempts to take up any concession or work any mine or otherwise settle down in this province. It was he who drove out Hornswood, *sahib*—"

"Damn the man! Hornswood certainly gypped me nicely!" cut in Cairns. "Why didn't the Persian consul in Singapore tip me off to this? He must have known."

"Certainly, *sahib*. But in twenty



Sheikh Ali Basr

years' experience of Persian officials, I have never yet found one who would not lend an ear to the clink of silver. Bahshish, *sahib*. It is the key to everything in Persia."

"Then," Cairns said calmly, "perhaps it is also the key to the favor of Sheikh Ali Basr. Perhaps the sight of a few gold pieces may work a miracle."

"Do not delude yourself, *sahib*," Chublee Rao warned. "The man is a fanatic, yes. But he is a sincere fanatic. He honestly believes that the coming of foreign enterprise means the end of freedom for his people"—Cairns was aware that the girl at the window nodded in sudden approval—"and from that position I doubt if any gold will stir him. Moreover—"

"What, is there more?"

"Ai, *sahib*. There are the Devil-Worshippers."

"The Devil-Worshippers?" It was the girl who spoke. She had turned abruptly and was staring at Chublee Rao with wide-open eyes.

"So-a, lady. That is, the Arabs say they are devil-worshippers, while others say they worship fire. At all events, they have a temple yonder in

the hills, beyond the Gateway of Swords, where their sacred fire burns day and night upon a vast rock altar. When darkness comes you can see it from the town here, a single tongue of flame on the far horizon.

"They are a strange people. Yazdis, they call themselves."

"But what have they to do with the mine?"

"**EVERYTHING, sahib.** Their temple, and the caves in which they live, are at the same place as your mine. And Ali Basr and his Arabs hate these Yazdis even more than they hate Christians; so much so that they cannot abide the sight of that altar fire by night and have sworn to wipe out the Devil-Worshippers to the last man and extinguish that fire forever."

"Why have they not done so already?" the girl asked.

"For two reasons, lady. First, because the Yazdis, though they have not many guns, are famous swordsmen and in this wiping out it is certain that many an Arab warrior would find his way to the arms of the Prophet's *houris* perhaps a trifle sooner than would be convenient.

"And second, because the Arabs, good Moslems though they are, are a little afraid of the Yazdis sorcerer, who is said to have performed certain miracles. It has given the Arabs something to think about."

"The poor saps—falling for that sort of mumbo-jumbo," growled Cairns. "I guess I can handle dumb eggs like that all right."

Chublee Rao shook his turbaned head.

"It may be mumbo-ah-jumbo, or it may not," he muttered. "For me, I have heard certain things of this sorcerer, and I would not like to meet him on a dark night if he disapproved of me."

"Nonsense!" Cairns dismissed the matter of the sorcerer with a wave of

his hand. "Now, as I gather it, Chublee Rao, the situation is this: The Yazdis have the mine; the Arabs have the country between the mine and the town.

"The Arabs are definitely against me. The Yazdis—eh—how did they get along with Hornswood?"

"They were not here then, *sahib*. The mine is the site of their ancient temple; but these Yazdis have come there only recently, bringing the brands of their Eternal Fire with them. Their ancestors were driven away by the Arabs a hundred years ago, went into Seistan, founded a temple there, and now have returned to the temple of their fathers, having been driven out of Seistan by certain Baluchis, as I am informed."

"Poor people!" murmured the girl softly.

"Poor or not, they're going to let go of my mine," grumbled Cairns. "Swordsmen, are they?" He glanced at his small pile of baggage, among which a foil case was conspicuous.

"Maybe I can teach the Arabs something about sword-play — and then we shall see, Chublee Rao! First of all, I am going to call on the Sheikh Ali Basr!"

"**YOU** will not return alive, *sahib!*" exclaimed the Hindu.

"On the contrary, I shall. I shall go to him alone, as a guest, and I shall thus be protected by the Arab law of hospitality. He must let me return unharmed. How far away is his camp?"

"It lies twenty miles from the town, *sahib*. And it is late; you cannot go today on the poor horses which are all—"

"Is the camp near the railway line?" interrupted Cairns.

"Yes, *sahib*. But—"

"Is the line undamaged?"

"As far as I know, it is, *sahib*. The Arabs have no use for rails and sleepers. Still—"





*The scimitar flew glistening through the air*

"Where are the two locomotives? At the mine?"

"No, they are here—in a shed close to the stone wharf. They burn oil, of which there is some supply in a tank near the shed. But, *sahib*—"

"I've made up my mind; delay is dangerous. I'm going now. Can I get someone to fire for me?"

"Impossible, *sahib*! Not a man in Gabur would venture his skin outside the walls while the Arabs and the Yazdis are at war. It is a question whether the rascals would be more afraid of Arab knives or the spells of the Yazdis sorcerer."

"Very well; then I'll go alone. I guess I can manage to run and fire

a little narrow-gauge oil-burner by myself. I'll have a talk with this Ali Basr and give him a little good old American high-pressure salesmanship. I'll have him eating out o' my hand—you wait and see, Chublee Rao!"

The Hindu shrugged his massive shoulders.

"I trust you may succeed, *sahib*. It would be luck for me if the mine reopened; the gods know business is bad enough, these past months.

"But as one who wishes you well, *sahib*, this is my advice: leave Gabur while your throat is yet uncut!"

"Be yourself, Chublee Rao!" grin-

ned Cairns. "I don't scare that easy. I'll be seeing you."

He swung toward the door.

"Wait, *sahib!*" cried the merchant, starting to rise. "There is one more thing."

But Cairns, snatching up his bags, was gone.

Chublee Rao sank back on his pile of rugs, turning a scared face to the girl.

"You are witness that I tried to tell him, lady!" he gasped. "These Americans—by the brow of Vishnu, they move so swiftly! Accurse my dilatory tongue; I could not get around to the matter in time."

## CHAPTER II

### *The Desert Camp*



THE locomotive shed was of corrugated iron, reinforced by steel ribs and corner posts. It was locked, but the lock yielded to one of the keys Hornswood had handed over. Inside, this place too was like an oven, but Cairns did not care; the locomotives were there.

Starting one of them, however, was no simple task. First of all, he fought and struggled for half an hour with a wheezy little one-lunged gasoline pump, connected to a well. At last the thing began its eternal put-put-put; a hose connection began filling the saddle tank of the outermost locomotive with brackish water.

Next Cairns filled the lubricator and went around with oil-can and dope-bucket to look at cups and bearings. By this time the tank was full; the fuel oil supply in the rear tank was all right.

It took Cairns another twenty minutes to figure out how to light the burners, since the locomotive was of English make and its details

quite unfamiliar to him. And then there was the long weary wait for steam-pressure; a wait during which Cairns sat outside the shed, considering various angles of his plan, cursing Hornswood mentally—and wondering what the devil made that girl so upstage.

Occasionally a wandering native came and stared at him in silence, wriggling bare toes in the sand. But no crowd collected; there was no chattering excitement such as would have been the case in a Chinese town, or a Malay village. These people seemed sunk in a lethargy too overpowering even to admit of curiosity.

Why, the young Arab was the only native of the vicinity who'd shown any pep at all. Cairns grinned. He wasn't afraid; he knew how to handle all sorts of natives. He'd get along with this Ali Basr, all right.

Steam began to gurgle gently from the safety valve.

Ready to go, eh? Cairns tossed his bags up on the left-hand side of the little iron cab; he might not be back for a while.

HE looked at his oil fire, which was roaring merrily; then released the hand-brake, hoisted himself to the engineer's seat, and tugged at the throttle. The lever came back; the blast of the first exhaust crashed against the iron roof overhead; the engine rolled slowly out of the shed.

Cairns glanced at the sun. Two hours of daylight yet, he conjectured. Say forty minutes to the camp, forty minutes to talk to old Stuffed Shirt—plenty of time to convince an Arab of anything!—and forty minutes back, if he didn't decide to go on to the mine. He'd see how the track was, see if it would be safe to run over it in the dark.

The tracks ran along the water-

front for a little way, then turned right, passing a group of huts from which the astonished inhabitants stared open-mouthed. It went through a breach in the tumble-down city wall of mud bricks, and after passing a half mile or so of cultivated fields and a few clusters of date trees, Cairns found himself in the desert.

It was a red desert. The sand was reddish; the rock outcroppings were of red sandstone. There was little vegetation to provide relief of color or of outline.

It was a sinister place, its very simplicity seeming charged with a nameless menace. The railway track on its low embankment was an obvious intruder, a white man's insult to this ancient desert which had not changed its face in centuries.

Here and there, as though in protest or in warning, the red sand had drifted deeply on the track; once so deeply that Cairns had to get out and shovel it away. But the track itself was well ballasted and well laid. Save for the occasional sand-drifts, Cairns was able to average above thirty miles an hour.

HIS eyes rose over to the purple hills which masked the horizon, the hills in which lay his mine. Arabs or no Arabs, devil-worshipers or no devil-worshipers, he meant to work that mine. It was his job—his chance. Hornswood had sold out cheap because he couldn't face a little "native trouble," couldn't take it. All the better for Cairns. He'd got a real bargain, because of Hornswood's cowardice. He'd show 'em.

The swaying, roaring engine clattered echoing between two high sand-ridges, and abruptly Cairns saw palm trees, dark-colored tents, the high beam of an Arab well. He had reached the camp.

He shut off the throttle, jockeyed with the air-valve. Confound it, he'd

forgotten to start the air-pump. He had to sweat and twist at the antique hand-brake wheel to bring the engine to a squealing stop.

HE could not complain of lethargy or lack of interest here.

Almost before the engine had stopped, it was surrounded by a crowd of excited Arabs, yelling, brandishing knives and an astonishing variety of firearms, shouting epithets of which "infidel dog" was by far the least injurious. But none of them appeared anxious to come too close to the iron monster—who knew what devil this might be, emitting its hissing white breath?

Cairns picked out an elderly Arab, pointed a finger at him.

"Bring me," he cried, "to the noble Sheikh, Ali Basr!"

The uproar died to an uneasy muttering. Men glanced at each other warily. If this Feringhi was a friend of their sheikh, perhaps he ought not to be killed out of hand.

The elderly Arab took a hesitant step forward, fingering the excellent Mauser rifle which he held.

"I do not know, Feringhi," he began, "whether—"

"I am to be addressed as *sidi*!" snapped Cairns, interrupting. "I come as a guest of your Sheikh! Take me to him at once. And post guards, to see that none interferes with my iron horse."

This arrogance had its effect.

"As you say, *sidi*," grumbled the old man. "Though I think that none of our people will dare to touch that offspring of demons. Come, then."

At his gesture, Cairns stepped boldly down from the gangway, among the hostile tribesmen.

"Follow me—*sidi*!" Did that title of respect slide between the Arab's withered lips with an ironic ring?

Some of the Arabs followed Cairns and his conductor; others stayed to stare, muttering, at the



little narrow-gauge engine which seemed to them so frightful an apparition.

The oasis where the Arabs made their headquarters was a pleasant place. There were palm trees in abundance, grass, and even flowers. Everywhere were scattered the tents of the tribe; save for the wells, there was no indication of permanent building.

These Arabs were nomads. They went where their horses and sheep and lean little cattle might find sustenance. The wealth of the tribe was in these things.

THE old guide gestured toward a striped tent, somewhat larger than the common run and connected by awnings to smaller tents on either side.

"The sheikh," said he, "is there, O Fer—uh—*sidi*!"

And in the looped-back entrance of that striped pavilion there appeared at that moment the majestic figure of the Arab chieftain. He came forward slowly, as though to greet an honored guest, and Cairns' first impression was that he had never before seen so dignified a personage.

Ali Basr was simply clad, in a white woolen *djellaba*, with a white turban bound by gold cord. The loose ends of the turban, falling about his head and neck, made an effective frame for his ascetic aquiline features. His sparse gray beard could not hide the firmness of his jaw; his thin lips spoke both of resolution and of cruelty; his eyes were dark, hard and opaque like bits of polished flint.

He was unarmed, save for a single poniard in a jeweled sheath. But behind him, two young Arabs stood on guard, rifles in the crooks of their left arms, watchful, ready.

Instantly, instinctively, Cairns realized that any attempt to bribe this

man to depart from a course dictated by his religious principles would be taken as the grossest insult. He must feel his way carefully; it came to him that he would be fortunate to escape from this oasis with his life.

For in the sheikh's eyes there burned, deep down but wickedly visible, the same flame of hatred for the "infidel" which had flamed in the eyes of the young Arab at Chublee Rao's store.

The sheikh's first words were directed, not to Cairns, but to the elderly one who had brought him to the leader.

"Why do you fetch me this Feringhi, O Abdulla? Is it not an order that all such unbelieving swine found outside the walls of Gabur shall be slain forthwith?"

A pleasant beginning, indeed.

The gray-haired Abdulla salaamed very low.

"True, O Sheikh. But he spoke to us in our own tongue, saying he came to seek you as your guest. And it is commanded by the Prophet—on whom be peace!—that a guest, even an enemy or an infidel, must be fed, sheltered, protected and permitted to depart unharmed in body or in goods."

"I do not need instruction in the words of the holy Koran from you, Abdulla," the sheikh snapped tartly. "Nevertheless, what you say is true."

HE turned his grim and searching gaze upon Cairns. "I will not lie, Feringhi. I will not say you are welcome. But a guest you are, and as a guest shall you be treated. Abdulla! Bid the women prepare food, bid a slave bring water that my guest may wash and be refreshed after his journey."

He bowed with grave courtesy to Cairns, his whole manner changing; and with his own hand he held back the flap of the striped pavilion.

"Deign to enter my poor home, *sidi*. This house is yours."

"Peace be to thee, O Sheikh, and the peace of Allah to all who dwell herein," replied Cairns in the time-honored Arabic formula.

Surprise at such courtesy from a foreigner flickered for an instant across the sheikh's stern face.

CAIRNS found himself treading on the softest of Persian carpets, in the somewhat gloomy interior of the big tent. Other rugs hung upon the walls; the cushioned divan toward which the sheikh waved him was covered with a robe of gold brocade.

A negro slave entered, bearing a basin of hammered silver filled with scented water, and towels of fine linen. Cairns washed the red dust of the desert from his face and hands thankfully enough. Then the sheikh handed him the ivory mouthpiece of a big water-pipe, took another himself, and puffed gravely.

He asked no questions; to inquire the purpose of a guest's visit would have been most impolite according to Arab standards. Nor did Cairns himself make the mistake of coming to the point at once. Instead, he talked of other things—of Persian politics, now centering around the rising star of Riza Ali Shah; of the state of the rug trade at Ispahan; of horses; and at last of swords.

On all these subjects the sheikh was astoundingly well-informed. Yet intolerance breathed in his every word. Riza Ali Shah was welding Persia into a strong Moslem state, independent of foreign tutelage for the first time in almost a century; yet the sheikh could find no good in the king because he was an "accursed Shiite," belonging to a different sect of Islam from that which the sheikh professed.

The decadence of the Ispahan rug-trade the sheikh blamed on the introduction of European looms. The

purity of the ancient breeds of Arab horses had been ruined, he claimed, by the export of stallions to European studs. As for swords—

"Once every Arab was a swordsman first of all, *sidi*, and the sword is the weapon of Islam. A warrior trained to the sword absorbs with his training the true spirit of war. But now we lie behind rocks and pull triggers of accursed Feringhi rifles—bah!

"Shame be upon my gray head that I must say it, yet the condemned of Allah, the Yazdi devil-worshippers, alone of all the peoples of this unhappy country, have kept alive the spirit of the sword!"

"I am, as you would say, a Feringhi, O Sheikh," Cairns remarked easily. "Yet I know something of swordsmanship."

The sheikh's eyes kindled.

"You? You are a swordsman?"

Cairns nodded gravely. It would have meant nothing to the sheikh had he mentioned that he had been captain of his college fencing team, or that he had won cups in the best *salles d'armes* of New York. Yet he was glad of this first bond of sympathy—and he plunged on:

"I am a swordsman. But I do not come here to speak of swords-play, sheikh. In those hills there is a silver mine; that mine I have bought from its owner—"

"Its owner!" The sheikh's face darkened. "This land is mine! No writ of a Persian vizier can give away one grain of sand that is my own!"

HE rose abruptly to his feet, pushing aside the low table on which the slaves had placed meat and fruit.

"I thought there was some purpose behind your coming, O my guest!" he thundered. "So, like the other Feringhi before you, you seek my silver! You shall not have it! Depart in peace, according to the word

of the Prophet—may he rest in the bosom of Allah.

"Depart—and know that if you set foot outside the walls of Gabur once again, you die as becomes an infidel!"

Rage contorted the sheikh's stern features. Rage—rage fired by an ancient and unquenchable hatred, glared from his eyes.

CAIRNS rose also. He was up against an immovable obstacle. This old man would never change. And rage rose in Cairns' heart also; the rage of progressive youth at the stubbornness of the old; the rage of a man who sees the ship of his dreams wrecked upon the reef of unreasoning bigotry.

But he held himself in check. No use flying off the handle. He'd do better to go with what dignity he could command. He was sunk, that was all. No—he'd not admit that yet. He'd find a way.

He bowed to the sheikh, struggling with a mad temptation to offer to stake the mine on the issue of a single combat, sword against sword. Perhaps he might have yielded to that temptation, but the sheikh was speaking again.

"As becomes an infidel—remember!" he said. "And that you may not forget, look!"

He strode to the rear of the tent, and with a swift jerk of two dangling cords drew aside the whole rear wall, exposing to view a garden. The last rays of the dying sun gleamed redly—red as the pitiless desert—on a corpse which lay on the ground. The sun and the wind of days had had their way with the tortured body; the sun and the wind, and the flying things of the desert, pitiless as the wilderness itself. Above the sun-whitened bones a carrion crow hovered restlessly.

"That," said the sheikh, turning glittering eyes on Cairns, "was once

a Feringhi like yourself. He died—there—as becomes an infidel. He gave me some sport in the cool of the evening; he was two days dying, even with the aid of the crows. A stout fellow."

He released the cords; the curtain fell before the gruesome garden. Again temptation came to Cairns—not, this time, to challenge this fiendish sheikh to combat, but to shoot him down then and there like the savage murderer he was.

And again he might have yielded; but again came interruption.

The flap of the tent was flung rudely back and there strode in through the opening, swaggering, eyes flashing, the young Arab whom Cairns had knocked down on Chublee Rao's threshold!

"My son! Where is your courtesy?" spoke the sheikh in stern accents.

"Pardon, my father! But I have brought here—" He stopped as his eyes met Cairns'. With a sudden snarl of feral hatred, he jerked out a curved dagger and leaped for the American's throat.

### CHAPTER III

#### *Trapped*



THE sheikh's out-thrust arm barred his son's path, flinging him back against the cushions, panting.

"He struck me, father! Made a mock of me in the street of Gabur! I have taken an oath before Allah to have his blood!"

The lines about the sheikh's mouth hardened.

"It is well, Feringhi," said he in a low voice, "that I did not know of this insult to my house ere you came here as a professed guest. But that matters not now. Guest you are, and as guest you return under



my protection to the place from which you came.

"Thereafter shall be vengeance. You hear, my son?"

"I hear, father." The young man stood trembling like a blooded charger that scents the battle, trembling but obedient to the rein of authority.

"Then, O guest, go in peace." The sheikh held back the flap for Cairns to pass out. Cairns knew that he walked in safety as he stepped out into the ruddy glow of the sunset. Behind him, he heard the young Arab speaking swiftly.

**B**UT he did not look back. His eyes were fixed on a horse and rider which, guarded by the two sentinels, waited before the tent. A semicircle of staring tribesfolk stood beyond.

The rider was the girl in white, Cairns' blonde fellow-traveler from Bombay; and now her hair was all disheveled, blood dried on a scratch across her lovely cheek, and her wrists were roughly tied before her by a piece of hair-rope.

Her eyes widened as she saw Cairns.

"Mr. Cairns! Help me!" The words came from her lips instantly and yet with a hint of desperation, as though she begged a favor of him unwillingly and only as a last resort.

"This is ill done, my son. It is very ill done," spoke the sheikh, coming out behind Cairns.

"I saw the woman. She is very fair," grumbled the young man. "And so I took her when she rode outside the walls. Why not?"

"Did any see you? Were you pursued?" snapped the sheikh.

"No one was near, my father. No one saw me. The woman rode alone, like a fool, and I took her and brought her here. She is mine." His words rose in a paean of self-praise and satisfaction.

"It is you who are the fool, my son," the sheikh informed him. "These Feringhis are a strange people. You may slay their men, and they do little or nothing. But if you touch their women, there will come warships, and soldiers, and they will give that Shiite cur who sits on the Peacock Throne at Teheran no peace till they have had vengeance on me and mine and all my tribe."

"But I tell you, none saw me, father. How shall the Feringhis say what has become of this woman? She rode alone into the desert. She does not return—does it follow that the Beni Basr have taken her?"

"Might she not have been eaten by a lion? Or fallen into the hands of the devil-worshipers? Or lost her way and died of thirst in some hidden nullah?" So spoke the sheikh's son, eagerly, half-angrily.

The sheikh groaned.

"Witless one! Has not *this* Feringhi seen the woman? Aye, and heard you tell with your own lips the tale of how you took her?"

He gestured furiously toward Cairns.

"Let us then cut his throat without more ado, my father!" cried the young man, knife in hand again.

"He is protected by the sacred laws of hospitality, my son. Do I hear you suggest that I should break the Law of the Prophet?" The sheikh spoke sternly; the young man bowed his head beneath the rebuke, and was silent.

**Y**ET perhaps there is another way," the sheikh went on slowly, as one who thinks even while he speaks. "O Feringhi, you have a desire to work the silver mine, yonder in the hills. You cannot do it, save by my favor. Listen, then.

"I will first of all drive away the accursed devil-worshipers who have dared to relight their defiling fire on the altar behind the Gateway of

Swords, and put out that fire forever!"

His finger stabbed out, pointing. A yell of fierce delight rose from all the Arabs within hearing, and again their weapons were brandished above their turbaned heads.

"The fire! Put out the fire that mocks the face of Allah!" rose their cry.

CAIRNS' gaze, following the sheikh's pointing hand, turned toward the dark hills to the north. There, against the deepening purple background, he saw a little pin-point of throbbing flame, a red candle burning through the evening shadows far away.

"It shall be put out," the sheikh said solemnly. "And then—you shall have your mine, *sidi*. You shall work it in peace, and your iron horses shall pass back and forth in peace through this, my country. Those of my young men who would work for you for wages will I not hinder.

"Allah forgive me my oath that these things should never be! But it is better so, better than that the riflemen and cannon of Riza Ali Shah the heretic should come and destroy my people. I shall make pilgrimage to Mecca and beg absolution for my broken oath at the foot of the holy Kaaba."

Joy surged up in Cairns' heart. What a break—what a lucky, lucky break!

"And you'll do all this, just so that I'll keep my mouth shut about your son's running off with this lady? Well, as long as no great harm's been done—" Cairns glanced at the girl. She nodded, even smiled a little.

She was too glad for freedom to haggle over vengeance.

"It's a bargain, sheikh. Untie the lady's hands and we'll be getting back to Gabur—if you don't mind

oil smoke?" He grinned at the fair captive. "What a break!"

"No!" said the sheikh sharply. "You go too fast, *sidi*. The woman stays here."

Cairns looked at the sheikh in stunned silence. What did he mean?

"I will trust your word, *sidi*. I can see that you are what is called among your people a gentleman: the word of such is not to be broken. But I am not such a fool as to trust my life, the life of my son and all my followers, the very existence of my tribe, to the word of any woman. The word of a woman is a rope of sand.

"No, *sidi*. Go back to Gabur, giving your word to keep silence. Come again in three days, when we have put out the Heaven-mocking fire, and the mine is yours. But the woman remains, and no man shall ever say in Gabur what has become of her. I have spoken."

"I will say nothing, sheikh!" spoke the girl, in Arabic as good as Cairns' own.

"Be still while your betters talk, woman!" snarled the sheikh. "I have spoken! No woman will I trust."

There it was again; age-old prejudice, the harem tradition. Woman must be ever weak, treacherous, untrustworthy. Cairns' house of joy collapsed about his ears.

But his eyes had been busy. He had marked the spot where a white plume of steam told him his engine stood. It was not a quarter of a mile away.

"DECIDE, Feringhi!" commanded the sheikh. "The mine is yours! And as for the woman, what is she to you? Let her stay here to ornament the harem of my son. She is honored, indeed. Come—decide!"

Cairns looked up at the girl, and saw in her eyes a plea—fear—doubt.

She dared to doubt what his decision might be! He could have slapped her.

What the devil did she have against him?

He reached out suddenly, grabbed the sheikh's son by his neckcloth and jerked him forward, spinning him around so that he stood struggling, helpless in Cairns' iron grip. The big Colt in Cairns' right hand jabbed harshly against his spine. Loud rang the American's voice:

"Bid your people stand back, sheikh! We go to the iron horse. Obey, or your son dies, here and now!"

The sheikh gaped for one instant of horrified astonishment, then as he saw his son's predicament he spoke:

"It is the will of Allah! Stand back, men of the Beni Basr. Let them pass."

He added something in low, rapid words which Cairns did not catch. The two armed guards darted away through the crowd.

"No tricks, sheikh, or I'll blast daylight through this young scoundrel!" Cairns warned.

"You on the horse! Can you manage the reins with your hands tied like that?"

"I think so," came the calm reply.

"Then follow me, and sing out if anybody makes a pass at me. Understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Let's go."

CAIRNS urged the sheikh's son forward, setting as rapid a pace as he could.

He feared treachery now, and he wanted to be on that engine and away. Once the wheels were turning beneath him, no Arab pursuit could catch him. And in Gabur itself he would be safe, for the vengeance of the Shah would be swift upon the Arab sheikh who dared to violate a walled town wherein dwelt

a magistrate holding the royal mandate.

Of course, the mine was lost.

But this was no time to think of mines.

Cairns could hear the plodding hoofs of the horse behind him. All around him surged the Arabs, keeping their distance at the sheikh's repeated commands but voicing threats of horrible vengeance.

"Death waits, infidel!" they screamed.

THE young Arab walked steadily on, disdaining to struggle now that he had found resistance useless. They passed the wells, passed the last date palms. The engine stood before them, steam roaring upward from the safety valve; Cairns remembered that he had not turned down the flame of the oil burners.

"Get off your horse and climb aboard," he called to the girl.

He heard her tumble to the ground; she ran past him awkwardly, holding out her bound hands in front of her. She was pulling herself into the cab as he jerked the young sheikh around to face the crowding, snarling Arabs. Cairns backed slowly toward the gangway, his eyes on the sheikh, who stood some twenty feet away, his face grim and inscrutable.

"When you start your iron horse, O Feringhi, you cease to be my guest," he said suddenly. "Thereafter, look to yourself!"

"I ask nothing better, sheikh!" grinned Cairns.

His backward-stepping foot struck the embankment. He gave the young Arab a sudden shove, sending the young man forward in a long stumbling fall; then whirled, grabbed a hand-hold, hoisted himself to the gangway.

He kicked free the dog which held the hand-brake. The wheel spun, whirring. He jerked the reverse



lever back, and his hand went to the throttle.

A dozen rifles covered him instantly. But Cairns had thought well ahead.

He leaned out of the window, facing backward.

His right hand was on the throttle, the Colt .45 in his left covered the Sheikh.

"Down with those guns!" he yelled, and the sheikh grinned in his beard, grinned with the baffled ferocity of a wolf who sees his prey escaping before his eyes. He shouted a command.

**T**HE rifle muzzles lowered. Steam hissed in the cylinders as the engine began to move. The little drivers spun crazily, then took hold. Faster and faster clamored the exhausts in the stack. The sand ridges loomed ahead. Cairns reached over and switched on the injector, then looked across at the silent girl on the left-hand seat.

"We're away. All over but the weeping," he called.

The Arabs yelled their rage as the engine rumbled into the gap between the ridges. Cairns waved a mocking farewell to the stately, immovable figure of the sheikh. He leaned far out, watching the track—there might be more sand drifts now, for the wind was rising.

Then the hair seemed to rise on the back of his neck; for beyond the ridges men were clustered on the embankment—Arabs—a score or more of them, some with rifles and some who labored furiously at the rails.

Two rails were already up, leaving a hopeless gap in the track.

They were trapped.

The words of the sheikh seemed to ring mockingly in Cairns' ears:

"When you start your iron horse—you cease to be my guest. Thereafter, look to yourself—"

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Gateway of Swords*



**CAIRNS** shut off, braked the little engine to a stop. The Arabs danced, laughing, yelling—then came running forward to take their prey. Cairns fired, dropping one of the sheikh's tall guards. So this was the meaning of those hurried, treacherous commands!

Then he threw himself upon the reverse lever. Forward it went; open the throttle again. The engine rumbled back the way it had come.

Cairns grabbed the girl from her seat.

"Down! Lie down!" She hesitated, her womanly instincts recoiling from the oily floor plates. "Oh, the deuce with your clothes! Get down there!"

As she dropped flat on the floor of the cab, Cairns pulled the throttle all the way back, yanked down the whistle cord for one scream of defiance, and dropped beside the girl. They were past the ridges again; the Arabs would be waiting.

"Let her roll!" he exclaimed. "If they've torn up the track in front, too, we might as well be in the ditch as here. If not, we'll get through."

Outside there was a chorus of wild yells, a sudden rattle of rifle fire. Bullets shivered the glass windows, spattered in stars of lead against the steel plating, the boiler-head, the oil tank. The engine lumbered on, gathering speed with every turn of its drivers.

A turbaned head showed at the gangway as an Arab warrior, knife in teeth, made a desperate leap. Cairns drove one foot into that face, and it vanished, screaming through a splatter of blood and teeth.

More bullets; and then the sound of shots and yells faded out behind.

Cairns rose to his feet, peered cautiously around the corner of the fuel oil tank.

Several mounted Arabs were spurring their horses in a pursuit that was rapidly being outdistanced. White and brown figures were running aimlessly here and there among the palm trees of the oasis.

But on either side of the track lay again the red desert, redder now as the horizon mists in the west laid their crimson veils before the orb of day. And ahead were the hills.

The hills—in which throbbed and glowed, brighter and brighter, the lamp of the Sacred Fire.

The track lay ahead, unbroken as far as Cairns could see. He found a switch, started the small dynamo, turned on the headlight. Its white sword leaped through the gathering dusk, showing rusted but perfect rails.

"We're clear, all right. Foxed 'em that time," grinned Cairns. He bent over the girl and cut the rope that bound her wrists. "You can get up now. Dirty but safe."

THE girl rose to her feet; she certainly was dirty. Cairns' grin broadened at the sight of the wreck the fuel oil had made of her once spotless white dress.

"You, Mr. Cairns," she said in her cool high-bred English voice, "appear to be what they call in your country a wise-cracker. Not an enviable distinction, I should say."

"Say!" snapped Cairns. "What's the matter with you, anyway? What have I ever done that you should high-hat me this way? Why, back there in the camp, you were actually afraid I was going to take up the sheikh's offer and leave you to the Arabs!"

The girl reddened.

"I—I'm sorry," she muttered.

"All right. Forget it. We've troubles enough," Cairns answered,

his grin returning. "Come over here, won't you, where I can talk to you while I run this coffee-boiler? You seem to know my name; mind telling me yours?"

"I'm Mary Drummond," she informed him.

"Drummond? Any relation to the geologist, Professor Drummond?"

"He is my father. I'm here to look for him."

"To look for him? Don't you know where he is?"

"NO. I last heard from him at Gabur, just after he had made the report on your silver mine. He wrote that he had encountered a remarkable sect of devil-worshippers up in the hills, and was going back to find out more about them. He had a bump of insatiable scientific curiosity. That was three months ago; since then, not a word."

Cairns' thoughts flashed instantly to the tortured-twisted corpse in Ali Basr's garden.

"Did Chublee Rao know anything of your father?"

"Not much. He knew father had examined the mine and written a report on it, at Hornswood's request; and that he had left Gabur, with no more than a native servant as company, saying he was going back to the temple of the Devil-Worshippers.

"When he did not return in a few days, the Persian magistrate made some inquiries, but nothing came of them. He seemed to have disappeared. So I came out from England to find him: there was nothing else to be done."

"I see." Cairns said no more for a moment. He thought there was no use to tell the girl of the unknown victim of the sheikh's fanatical hatred. Not now, at least, when she might need all her courage, all her faculties, to face the perils that confronted them.

He eased in the throttle, slowing

the engine to a pace which made conversation at once easier and less perilous.

"We're in a tight spot, Miss Drummond," said he. "No use disguising the truth. We can't get back to Gabur: not now, anyway. Even if we could get horses, we'd have a hard time dodging Ali Basr's riders. I have a little canned stuff in my bags; there's some water in the tank, brackish but drinkable.

"**B**UT we can't stop, or the Beni Basr will catch up with us. We've got to keep going; and that means, we've got to visit these devil-worshippers, whoever they are."

"Right-o," agreed Mary Drummond. "That's where I want to go, anyway. They may not harm us; they didn't harm father."

"We're on our way," shrugged Cairns. "We've no choice."

And they were, he thought, almost at their goal. The mountains towered higher, a dark barrier across their path. Night had come to the desert; the sky above was studded with the incredibly numerous stars of the tropics.

But ahead, like a lode-star to guide them to their bourne—or a will-o'-the-wisp to lure them to a dreadful death!—the Sacred Fire of the strange people whom the Arabs hated so, glowed on the hillside, burning steadily.

"Father says," Mary Drummond told Cairns gravely, "that the religion of these people is a perverted form of the ancient religion of Persia, founded a thousand years before Christ by Zoroaster. The altar-fires that Zoroaster lighted have been kept burning all these centuries; some of them, at least, have never been extinguished.

"It—it rather appals one, doesn't it, to think that that fire we're looking at, though driven from place to place by persecution, may have been

burning almost three thousand years?"

"Makes sort of a *nouveau-riche* of Mohammed, I'd say," replied Cairns. "Maybe that's what irks old Ali Basr so. The murdering devil! I had some idea of helping him clean up these devil-worshippers and getting his help in return; but now I'd rather play the game the other way."

Even as he spoke, he realized that he might very well be talking nonsense. The devil-worshippers might turn out to be worse cut-throats than the Beni Basr had ever dreamed of being. Frying pan to fire—perhaps.

No help for it, anyway.

The mountains were very close. Cairns slowed the pace of the engine still more. He watched the track; perhaps the devil-worshippers, too, had torn up some rails.

The engine roared through a shallow rock-cutting. Rocks appeared beside the track, replacing the desert sand. They were entering the hill country.

And then, suddenly, there came a long curve and they plunged into an echoing gorge, with high rocky walls on either hand.

**T**HE headlight picked up some dark barrier. A boulder on the track! Cairns shut off steam; the brake valve—he had long ago started the air-pump—hissed gently under his hand, checking the engine's pace. He brought the panting machine to a stop with her nose some ten feet from the obstruction.

"Stay quiet," he warned the girl. "This may be chance, or it may be placed there for a purpose. I'm getting out to see."

"Be careful," she whispered.

Cairns nodded and swung out of the gangway. On the iron step he paused, listening. There was no sound save the gentle sigh of the wind between the walls of the gorge,



the chugging of the air pump, the faint hiss of escaping steam. Ahead, as though framed between those dark walls, he saw the leaping flame of the Sacred Fire, high on a yet distant mountainside.

He dropped to the ground, walked forward past the engine, his eyes darting warily from side to side. The headlight's ray played steadily on the track, on the great boulder, the rocks on either side. In that cold white glare, nothing stirred, all was still.

HE reached the boulder. It was far too large for him to move unaided. He walked around it, examining it carefully. There was a small pinch-bar in the cab; perhaps he could—

"Look out!" shrilled the girl.

Cairns stiffened, hand on pistol. But force would not serve him now. Silently, like shadows suddenly taking on human substance, a dozen men had glided from the darkness beyond the headlight's glare.

They surrounded him; the light glittered on the long curved blades of their drawn scimitars. Dark cloaks, dark turbans, hid their forms and faces from his anxious inspection.

"Why do you come to the Gateway of Swords, stranger?" asked one in halting Arabic.

"I come," Cairns said boldly, "to inspect my property, which is a silver mine in yonder hills."

There was low-voiced interchange of words among the newcomers in a musical language wholly unknown to Cairns; he thought it might be ancient Persian.

Then the man who spoke Arabic addressed him again.

"It cannot be, stranger," he said. "You must return the way you have come. We have enemies; we can admit no strangers through the Gateway of Swords—save by the or-

deal of the sword, as it is written in the Law."

"I, too, have enemies," retorted Cairns. "The men of the Beni Basr seek my life, and will have it if I return to the desert. Therefore I must pass your gateway, friends."

"It cannot be, it is forbidden," the man answered stubbornly. But Cairns had not failed to notice a low growl of anger among the others at the mention of the name of Beni Basr.

"What," asked Cairns, "is this ordeal of the sword of which you speak?"

"That cannot matter to you, stranger. Go your way."

Cairns was getting desperate. He couldn't fight his way through these fellows; probably there were plenty more beyond, anyway. And he certainly couldn't go back.

"You said it is written in your Law," he insisted. "What is it? Speak, if it be the Law."

"It is but this," the man replied. "The ancient Law of our people commands, that if any stranger seek to pass the Gateway of Swords, he shall not be denied a refuge at the foot of the temple if he can first prove that he has the favor of our Lord the Peacock"—here the man turned his head away and spoke the word swiftly, under his breath, as though afraid that he might be overheard—"by successfully enduring the ordeal of the sword."

"AND in this ordeal he must face in succession the three best swordsmen of our tribe. If he overcome them all, he must be admitted. If any of them wound him so that he can fight no more, they must be cast out. If any of them slay him, his blood is on his own head. Thus says the Law."

Cairns laughed.

"And if he kills any of them?"

"They die according to the Law;

there can be no blood-vengeance by their kin."

"Very well, friend. I accept the ordeal. When do we begin?" snapped Cairns.

The man took a step backward, gasping his surprise.

"You? But you are an outlander—an Angresi from beyond the seas! This is a matter for swordsmen—"

"I am a better swordsman than any these hills have ever bred," Cairns cried boldly. "Lay on, Macduff!" He laughed aloud, more to cheer up the girl than for any other reason.

Then she was beside him, running to him over the rough ballast.

"You can't do it! They'll kill you!" she whispered fiercely.

"Don't you worry. I can take care of myself." He switched back into Arabic. "Bring on your warriors, friend."

There was more hurried consultation in the unknown tongue. Then—

"The ordeal must wait for daylight," the spokesman said. "Meanwhile, you must stay here."

"To be found and slaughtered by the Beni Basr?" protested Cairns. "A clever device, for those who fear the outlander's sword. For shame!"

SEVERAL voices rose in angry retort. The dark figures pressed closer.

"So be it," grumbled the man who spoke Arabic. "We will roll away the stone and let your iron chariot proceed, stranger. You can go on to the mine. You will find shelter there, and food. But in the morning you must face the ordeal, with the first rays of the most noble sun."

"Think well; for once you have passed through this gorge, which from time immemorial we have called the Gateway of Swords, there will be no turning back."

"Roll aside the boulder, friend. We go on," answered Cairns stoutly.

At once several of the men put

their shoulders to the big rock, while others produced wooden levers from some hiding place at the side of the track and began prying. The boulder shifted, rose, rolled over the rail and the track was clear.

"Remember! In the morning, the ordeal!" cried the spokesman.

Cairns had already helped the girl into the cab. The only answer he gave was spoken by the clamor of the engine's exhaust.

Forward they rolled—on through the Gateway of Swords, on toward that hill where burned the Sacred Fire.

## CHAPTER V

### *The Ordeal*



THE rocky walls fell away on either hand. A roar beneath; they were passing over a wooden trestle. The headlight showed a high cliff ahead. The track turned, climbing perilously along a ledge on the cliff's face, and then swung into a wide, open space where there were trees and grass and the murmur of a waterfall.

Switches appeared, and side-tracks with rows of little four-wheeled ore cars. A shed or two of corrugated iron, a bumper—and abruptly the track ended.

This must be the mine.

Cairns stopped his engine close to the bumper, shut off the oil burners, touched the girl's arm.

"We appear," said he, "to have arrived. Let's have a look at the local accommodations."

The sheds were both locked, but again Hornswood's keys proved adequate. One shed was a storehouse; there were tools, supplies, timber for shoring galleries and the like, but no food.

The other had been fitted as an

office, with a bunk room in the rear. A couple of cases of canned goods, some tins of biscuit, tea, a small oil stove, and a few cooking utensils rewarded a search conducted by means of innumerable matches. Then the girl discovered a kerosene lamp, and there was light.

They could hear a stream not far away, but to search for it at night among the rocks would have been silly. They drew water from the saddle-tank and made the best of it. Warm and brackish though it was, it did very well for washing and for tea.

CAPABLY enough Mary Drummond set about getting supper, while Cairns made up the most comfortable-looking of the bunks for her, and arranged a shakedown for himself in the office.

They ate, laughing and talking with an almost feverish determination to be gay. Not till the meal was finished and the tin dishes washed and put away did either permit a word about their present predicament to escape.

Then at last, when they were sitting on the wooden steps of the office, their cigarettes glowing in the dark, Mary Drummond said:

"Aren't you thinking about—the morning—at all?"

Cairns laughed.

"I'm really a first-chop fencer, Miss Drummond," he replied. "Cups and medals and all that sort of thing. Rapier or broadsword, I can manage to hold my own. I doubt very much if the best of these native worthies can even score a touch on me."

"You're not just trying to—to—"

"To make you feel better? No. You'll see."

She laid a hand on his arm.

"You make me feel rather ashamed of myself," she said. "My father had—has some pretty extreme ideas about the treatment of natives in

these countries by white planters and engineers and the like. They told me on the ship that you were a mining engineer rather noted for your success in handling natives in Malay and Burma.

"I've never been out here before—though my father made me learn Arabic—and so I judged you too hastily. The prejudice of ignorance, you see. Now—"

She stopped, embarrassed.

"Now you've met one sort of native on his own hearthstone, so to speak," chuckled Cairns, "and you're beginning to appreciate the other side of the picture. We live and learn, Miss Drummond. You'll meet another sort tomorrow, unless I'm much mistaken.

"And speaking of tomorrow, how about a little rest? We both need it."

He was dropping off to sleep when the thought came to him that she had not once mentioned her father, or tried to ask the guardians of the Gateway any questions. Was it because she feared what the answer might be?

HE woke when a shadow moved across his face. Early sunlight streamed through the open door. A man stood there looking down at him, a man who wore a black turban wound closely around his head, and whose black burnous, falling almost to his feet, was confined by a plain leather sword-belt from which swung a heavy scimitar.

His clean-shaven face was curiously fair, no darker than many a Spanish or Italian skin. His eyes were blue, and surveyed the awakening Cairns with more curiosity than hostility.

"The ordeal waits, stranger," he said, and his voice marked him as the man who had spoken to Cairns the night before.

"It waits till I've had breakfast,



too," he said with an amused grin.

Mary Drummond emerged from the rear room, rubbing her eyes.

"I'll make tea," she said.

While she was about it, Cairns opened his sword-case and selected a stout broadsword—a cut-and-thrust weapon, with a long straight blade.

"I'll back the straight blade against the saber any day," he confided to the girl.

OUTSIDE, the sun revealed a queer landscape. The mine buildings stood on a sort of shelf beneath a towering precipice, which was honey-combed with the entrances of innumerable caverns.

The entrance to the mine itself seemed only one of these many openings in the rock, which here was dark basalt rather than sandstone, as grim and forbidding as the black garments of their guide.

Below, to the left, was the fair valley into which the tracks of the railway sloped down sharply. It had a variety of trees, grass and vegetable patches and was bisected by a stream, which tumbled from the valley's farther edge down a steep slope and flowed on to oblivion in the desert through the narrow gorge called the Gateway of Swords.

To the right, the cliff fell away in a magnificent natural amphitheater, semicircular in shape. Not in the center of this, but high up, close to its upper and outer rim, stood a great altar of masonry, approached by a series of rough yet impressive steps cut in the solid rock. And on this altar burned the Sacred Fire. A thin column of smoke rose straight up in the windless air.

Four figures in white tended the altar, beside which stood a pile of fuel. All around the curve of the amphitheater were seated or standing other figures, every one in black. There were hundreds of them, yet there was no yelling, no excitement,

no brawls as there would have been among a similar concourse of Arabs. Only a solemn chant floated out on the morning air as the sun's disc cleared the eastern horizon.

A wash in the cold water of the stream, a cup of tea and a handful of biscuits made a new man out of Cairns.

He whipped his sword through the air, executed a *passado* at the doorpost and spoke gayly to the man in black, who waited outside with what patience he could command.

"Now—the ordeal, friend. The ordeal of the sword!"

Sheathed sword under his arm, Cairns was ready. With Mary Drummond beside him, he followed the guide across a rude wooden bridge over the stream, and so down a rocky slope to the floor of the great amphitheater.

The chant ceased. Before the altar the four white-clad priests stood with bowed heads, silent. Cairns noted that upon the altar was carved a stone peacock. Had he not heard that there were devil-worshippers who feared to speak the name of Ahri-man the Terrible, but instead represented him by a peacock?

Cairns stood in the center of that great open space, which was rock-floored and flat as any tennis court. His conductor raised his voice in the musical syllables of that strange language, addressing the silent crowd on the terraced slopes above.

WHEN he had finished, there was a moment's silence. Then a man stepped forward from the lowest terrace; a young man, who flung off black burnous and black tunic to reveal a lithe, well-muscled body, olive-skinned and wiry.

White teeth flashed in a confident smile as he whipped his scimitar from its scabbard and stood before Cairns. Cairns took off his coat and rolled up his shirt sleeves.

"Stand well back, Mary," he ordered, unaware that in this moment of stress he used her given name for the first time. The guide spoke to him.

"When the trumpet sounds from the great altar, begin," he directed. "When it sounds again, stop. He who fails to obey the trumpet shall be instantly dispatched by the people."

He walked away, leaving the two antagonists face to face.

"Good luck!" cried Mary Drummond. "Good luck—Raymond!"

A HOARSE trumpet blast. The young man with the scimitar leaped forward instantly.

Cairns met him with outstretched blade, parrying that first furious thrust. Steel clashed on steel a moment, and Cairns chuckled, for this lad was but an eager novice.

He let the boy thrust again. His own sword shifted slightly, slid along the other's blade. The point engaged the cross-bar of the scimitar's hilt. Cairns' powerful wrist gave a twist, and the scimitar, torn from its owner's grip, flew glittering twenty feet through the air, to fall with a ringing clang upon the stone floor.

"Played! Played!" cried Mary Drummond shrilly.

The young swordsman stood agape for an instant. Then, with beads of sweat starting out upon his brow, he drew himself up, arms at his side, and waited for the death thrust.

Cairns lowered his point.

"I give you your life, friend," he cried out in Arabic. "Bring on the next man!"

The black-cloaked interpreter ran forward.

"You may kill him if you will, stranger," he said.

"No. He is only a boy and he fought bravely," Cairns denied. "Let him live."

He lifted his sword in salute to the crowd and stood waiting.

His late opponent turned and walked slowly away, amid some laughter from the terraces. There was a pause, some discussion from man to man. Evidently these folk had no chief to say "do this," and "send that one."

At length a broad-shouldered, barrel-chested, short-legged man arose and came down the steps, shedding his burnous and tunic as he came. Here was no novice, but a scarred and veteran warrior, muscled like a Hercules and carrying a long scimitar which outreached Cairns' weapon.

The trumpet blared.

There was no sudden rush. The veteran moved in cautiously, his eyes on Cairns', his bare feet sliding inch by inch forward over the stone. Their blades engaged. Cairns, too, played cautiously for a moment; this man was strong, he could hardly hope to disarm him by a twist.

Cairns tried a feint or two, which were clumsily parried. He met easily enough a tentative attack by his opponent. Yes, the man was strong, but he was only a rough-and-ready swordsman.

CAIRNS grinned at the round scowling face opposite him. The grin seemed to annoy the other; for suddenly he dropped on one knee and flung arm and body forward in one savage slash at Cairns' stomach that would have disemboweled the Yank if a lightning-like leap backward had not saved him.

The grin faded. Cairns, his opponent on the ground and at his mercy, stood contemptuously aside while the man bounded to his feet and charged in, snarling, blade stabbing before him. Then, deftly and easily, Cairns parried the attack and ran his blade through the muscles of the warrior's sword arm.

Again the scimitar of a beaten

man clanged on the rock pavement. The veteran stood there, blood running from his finger tips, and a most comical look of surprise upon his face.

"Take him away," shouted Cairns, "and bring me a swordsman! I need my morning exercise!"

He knew the value of a bold front when dealing with Orientals; and as the few who spoke Arabic translated his words, there ran around the crowded terraces something that amounted almost to applause.

Then every eye turned toward the high altar. The stone slab upon which was the representation of the peacock was moving—slowly, slowly turning back as upon a pivot, revealing a dark doorway beneath the altar.

A hissing sigh ran through the expectant crowd as a man stepped out of the opened door.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Cry of War*



IF Cairns had found the dress of these folk—priests in white, the common run in black—somewhat colorless and monotonous, he could not say as much of the figure which now emerged into the morning sunlight.

From head to foot, the newcomer was clad in a tight-fitting costume of flame-colored silk. A short cloak of the same material, ornamented with little suns in gold embroidery, swung from his shoulders. On his head he wore a black, conical cap with little red flames embroidered all over it; and a mask of black silk hid his features.

Beside him, proudly flaunting his own gorgeous plumage, stalked a huge peacock, held in leash by a silver chain.

"The sorcerer!" the thought leaped unbidden to Cairns' mind.

The man in the garments of flame stood still for a moment, turning his head from side to side as though to assure himself that he had the attention of all. Then he spoke, in a queer, strained, high-pitched voice; only a few words, but those few sufficed.

The interpreter ran up to Cairns.

"He bids the ordeal cease," he announced. "He proclaims you the victor, stranger. The favor of the gods of light are with you. It is useless for us to risk the life of another warrior against your sword. *He bids you welcome, gives you sanctuary.*"

ABOVE the sorcerer, on the platform of the altar, the white-clad priests had drawn together. They were scowling. One called out something, but his words were lost in a clamor of approval from the crowd.

It was plain that the priests stood for the letter of the law; equally plain that the sorcerer's decision was popular with those who had no wish to face sword-play the like of which had never been seen before in that rude land.

The sorcerer spread out his hands in a sweeping gesture. Smoke rose from his fingers, red smoke from his right hand, yellow from his left. The people gasped. Suddenly a cloud of purple vapor seemed to rise from the solid stone at the sorcerer's feet. It wrapped him around like a veil, hiding him from view; and from its midst his voice cried out—once.

Then, as the purple vapor drifted away, it was seen that sorcerer, peacock and all had vanished. The rock door was shut. It was as though he had never been.

Mary Drummond was at Cairns' side now. Her eyes were round with wonder.



"What is it? Oh—I'm afraid."

Cairns slipped an arm round her shoulders.

"Don't worry. It's just some Oriental trick. I've seen queerer things than that in India," he reassured her.

"What is your will, stranger? Do you wish to remain here?" the interpreter asked Cairns.

"Come to the mine. We will talk there," Cairns suggested, seeing that Mary was much shaken and in need of a chance to sit down in peace.

So they returned to the mine office, and there was much talk to little purpose. The sum total of it was, that Cairns had achieved no more than a temporary refuge from the Arabs. The devil-worshippers had no objection to his working the mine, but their men would not labor for wages while the Arabs menaced the Sacred Fire.

They had resolved to make their last stand against Moslem persecution here, in the sacred temple of their ancestors. They would fight to the death; and they had no thought for anything else.

They had a few rifles, not much ammunition, no other weapons save their swords. Their position was a strong one in a military sense, but without firearms they could not defend it long against the well-armed tribesmen of the Beni Basr. They knew this; and their one resolve was to sell their lives as dearly as they might.

CAIRNS could see no way out of this impasse.

He could not get back to Gabur on the engine, for the track was torn up at the Arab camp. Afoot, it was hopeless. To attempt to get through the trackless mountains into Seistan, burdened with a girl, was sheer suicide. And to stay where he was, meant only to delay the end.

Mary had her innings now:

"Have you heard anything of an Angresi gentleman named Drummond?"

"Drum-man?" repeated the interpreter. His face went blank as he shook his head. "No, lady. No."

No. He knew nothing of any stray Angresi since Hornswood had left. There had been another man with Hornswood—two others, in fact. But what had he to do with the names of Angresi? He could not tell them, one from the other. No, none of these Angresi had ever returned to the Mount of the Sacred Fire.

MARY DRUMMOND buried her face in her hands. Cairns thought pityingly of Ali Basr's garden—and wished he might see the cruel face of the sheikh over the sights of a good rifle.

He started to ask the interpreter questions about the sorcerer, but immediately the fellow shut up like a clam, compressing his lips tightly.

"Of certain matters, stranger, it is not permitted the faithful to speak," he muttered. And he rose to take his leave.

There came through the open door a sound like the popping of distant firecrackers.

"Rifles!" cried Cairns, leaping up.

A wailing cry came from without, a cry repeated, carried along from man to man.

"The Arabs are in the Gateway of the Swords!" cried the interpreter, and ran from the room, drawing his scimitar as he went.

Cairns and Mary dashed out also. Far across the valley, in the tortuous canyon of the Gateway, little smoke puffs were rising; the smoke of Arab muskets, whose heavy reports could be heard mingling with the sharp crack of high-powered rifles.

Cairns ran to his bags, opened one, got out his field glasses. With these

he could make out easily the brown and white and parti-colored *djellabas* of the Arab assailants, sweeping up the gorge on foot but in overpowering strength.

He could also see the dark figure of the defenders, even their swords flashing in the sun in gallant but hopeless struggle against terrible odds.

"The Arabs have the Gateway, Mary," he said.

THE dark-clad figures were running back across the trestle, the Arabs in hot pursuit. The devil-worshippers could not stand on the open trestle, for it would be swept by rifle fire from end to end, and to burn it or tear it down there was not time. They should have thought of that before, Cairns reflected silently.

On came the Arabs, crowding over the narrow trestle. Their war cry: "*Allah il Allah! Allah Akbar!*" floated up shrilly through the valley.

Now the defenders had to retire up the ledge along the face of the cliff, or up the steeper slopes on either side of the waterfall. Here they were able to make a stand, finding some shelter from the hail of bullets. The Arab rush was for the moment checked as more warriors came swarming down from above to aid in the defense.

Cairns ran down into the valley, snatched an old Remington rifle from its indignant owner, and, esconcing himself behind a rock, picked off three or four of the boldest Arabs. The others began falling back, and there was much shouting back and forth between those who had crossed the trestle and those who were still on its farther side.

"I'd give my shirt for a machine-gun," thought Cairns. "I'd take all the fight out of those fellows in about two minutes' firing."

But he'd as well wish for the moon. The man who spoke Arabic

came up to him, smiling, and thanked him for his aid.

"Glad to do anything I can, friend," Cairns told him. "I think you'll have peace for a little while. Those Arabs will do some yelling now, and pat themselves on the back and tell each other what great warriors they are."

"Meanwhile, if I were you, I'd get all your people down here, men, women, kids, everybody, and build a wall of those loose stones along the edge of the bluff. Fell a few trees to make an obstacle; block that ledge. How many rifles've you got?"

"Not more than twenty, and not more than ten or fifteen rounds for each one. But truly, sir, we have no chiefs, no leaders. Each man has his own ideas of what should be done. It is impossible to get our people to agree on any plan without endless argument and discussion."

"The priests?"

"They can only sing chants of the past glories of our race, and assure us that the gods are with us."

"The sorcerer, then?"

The man spread out his hands in a despairing gesture and turned away without answering. Cairns would have tried to get the devil-worshippers organized for the defense of their position, if he could have talked to them directly. As it was, he went back to Mary.

HE found her staring at a scrap of paper.

"A boy brought this—stuffed it into my hand and ran. Oh, what can it mean?"

She held it out to him.

On it, printed with a lead pencil, were English words:

*"Be of good cheer. A friend watches over you."*

Who could write in English in this place?

Cairns shook his head, puzzled.

"Whoever our guardian angel is,

Mary," he observed, "he'd better be getting busy. Those Arabs'll be coming up the hill presently."

## CHAPTER VII

### *Arab Vengeance*



CAIRNS and Mary had nothing better to do for the moment, so they spent a little time looking over the silver mine.

Hornswood had done quite a bit of development work. His tunnel and headings were well timbered, the vein had been tapped in several places, and a considerable quantity of ore had been brought out. There were plenty of tools, and even a gasoline engine to work an electric lighting plant and also to operate a pump for bringing fresh water from the river.

"All ready to go—if it wasn't for what Chublee Rao calls the 'human factors,'" grumbled Cairns. "This confounded mine would make me independent for life if I could first get rid of those Arabs down there."

Mary didn't answer. She was still staring at the strange note, staring as though by closer inspection she could wrest its secret from it.

Now the women and children of the Yazdis, in their black garments, were streaming upward out of the amphitheater; up, past the mine, along the ledges and paths of the cliff's face and into the caves.

In the amphitheater itself, the Yazdi swordsmen stood about in gesticulating groups, with the white-clad figures of the priests moving among them, exhorting, encouraging.

"They're good fighters, and brave enough," said Cairns angrily, "but they stand around and argue instead of getting ready to make things hot for the Arabs. Why, they haven't even posted sentries.

"Hey. Hey! Below there! Here come the Arabs, you dumb idiots!"

He spoke, in his haste, in English, but added words to the same effect in Arabic. The Arabs were indeed coming, rushing forward in a compact mass, which quickly broke up as they began the toilsome ascent to the upper valley.

The Yazdis, startled by Cairns' cry, at first milled aimlessly about. But now some of them ran to the edge of the declivity and began firing at the ascending Arabs.

"They'll never make their stand good," Cairns asserted. "Come on, Mary. Get hold of some of that grub. I'll start filling water cans. We'll get back into the mine."

"Into the mine?"

"Sure. These buildings are too exposed. They'll be the first places the Arabs will come, when they get into the valley; not only for plunder, but to get hold of us, which is undoubtedly the reason this attack has come so soon.

"Of course the sheikh will know we must be here. He's after us and the Yazdis, too."

"But why must we go into the mine?"

"**B**ECAUSE we must follow the Yazdi tactics—they'll make their last stand in the caves, you may be certain. The Arabs will find their work cut out for 'em, storming those caves one by one against the Yazdi swordsmen, who'll be inside in the dark.

"With my sword and plenty of ammunition for old Colonel Colt, I'll make coming into that mine tunnel quite a chore for our pals of the Beni Basr."

"We can't hold out forever."

"No." Cairns was busy filling water cans as he spoke, and Mary, despite her despairing remarks, was dragging out biscuit tins and canned stuff from the bunk room. "No,

Mary, we can't hold out forever. But if we and the Yazdis, among us, kill enough of the Beni Basr, they may give up the siege of the caves as a bad job and go home. It's not much of a hope, maybe, but it's about all the hope we've got."

The Yazdis were fighting desperately with the upward swarming Arabs. Cairns and Mary rushed back and forth, carrying food, water, blankets, a kerosene lamp, the oil stove and other necessities into the mine tunnel. Inside the entrance, just out of the range of clear vision from outside, Cairns contrived a barricade of provision cases, bulwarked on either side with loose ore and rock.

"**N**OW let 'em come," he said. "We can stick around outside, Mary, and watch the fight. We'll leave this one case out of the top tier so we can duck in when they start our way."

"You talk a lot—but you do things, too," approved Mary, smiling at him. Cairns felt suddenly very much better. He had not realized himself how much this girl's approval meant to him, or how hard he had been striving to win it.

The fight was going badly for the Yazdis. The Arabs had won footing in the upper valley at a dozen places. On both sides of the stream they were driving the Yazdis before them.

Scattered bodies attested the desperation of the Yazdi resistance; the Yazdi swords were more than a match for Arab knives and rifle butts when it came to hand-to-hand fighting. But for every Arab hothead who rushed in to close with the foe, there were two or three seasoned warriors who hung behind, and with rifle and pistol shot down the devil-worshippers.

Conspicuous among these was a white and scarlet figure, who paused

to fire, then ran forward, yelling encouragement to the others. The sheikh's son, war-leader of the tribe, evidently.

Cairns wished he'd kept that Remington. He could not reach that Arab firebrand with a pistol shot. He saw the young man stop, point first at the silent locomotive, then at the altar on which the Sacred Fire still burned.

"Allah Akbar!" rose the fierce cry as the Arabs came on.

The Yazdis were forced back now to the edge of the amphitheater. Here rude stone benches and balustrades gave them some cover. They made a stand, and the Arabs, scattering through the trees, took cover from the weak fire of the remaining Yazdi rifles and settled down to a period of sniping and yelling.

Bullets now began to clang against the engine, and to hit the corrugated iron huts with hammer blows.

The Arabs apparently suspected that Cairns was somewhere in that vicinity, though he had been careful to keep Mary and himself as much out of sight as possible.

Some of them were working in his direction, dodging from tree to tree, wriggling along through the high grass.

"**T**HEY think I may have a rifle," he told Mary. "I've been looking for the old sheikh, but I don't see him. Maybe he's a little too old for active fighting."

He steadied his pistol against the engine and fired three well-spaced shots. At that range he could not hope for accuracy, but his bullets came close enough to give the Arabs pause. The advance of the skirmishers ceased, and Cairns and Mary, dodging around the building, scurried into their tunnel-fortress.

The sun was much higher now, and the heat outside was oppressive,



though in the tunnel it was cool enough. The Arabs made no immediate move to press their advantage—taking it easy during the heat of the day, after the fashion of Oriental warriors.

"Maybe they're waiting for the sheikh to arrive, to watch the final attack?" conjectured Cairns.

**B**UT though various groups of reinforcements did come through the Gateway of Swords and over the trestle as the afternoon wore away, the sheikh was not among them. Cairns with his glasses made sure of that. The Yazdis, for their part, seemed sunk in an apathy of despair.

They fired an occasional rifle shot, but most of their activity was directed toward bringing supplies of wood to the Sacred Fire. The priests, sheltered behind the massive altar, still tended that age-old flame, and Cairns could not but admire the devoted courage with which Yazdi youths exposed themselves, dashing along the open terraces under a hail of Arab bullets, to bring fresh wood to the altar platform.

No less than four young Yazdis gave up their lives during that long afternoon, in such attempts; and ever, when one fell, another would dash out from the caves or the stone shelters and take up the burden of the fallen one. The fire burned on, as though serenely indifferent to the menacing presence of those who had sworn to extinguish it forever.

At last the sun began to lose its power as it sank toward the western horizon.

"When it's dark, the big rush comes. After that, the last stand in the caves," Cairns told Mary. They had talked but little during that day. Part of the time Mary had slept, part of the time she had kept watch while Cairns dozed, storing up energy against a possible all-night fight.

Renewed activity amongst the reinforced Arabs; fierce cries promising death to the "infidels," awful tortures for the priests, and the utter quenching of the altar fire, made the evening air hideous.

Then—as at a signal—everywhere the Arabs rose and charged.

They swept the Yazdi swordsmen from the pavement of the amphitheater, and stormed up the terraces, clearing each one as they advanced. Some of the Yazdis would have defended the altar, but so heavy a rifle fire was opened on that position that the Yazdis fell where they stood, or fled into the caves.

It was a well-planned, well-executed attack, and ten minutes after it started, the amphitheater was in possession of the Arabs. Not a living Yazdi was left within it, save two surviving priests who were held fast by their screaming, triumphant captors at the very foot of the altar itself.

"Out with the fire! Out with the accursed fire!" rose the Arab cry.

**"STOP! I'll knife the man that touches that fire!"** rang the commanding voice of the sheikh's son. Cairns saw his red-and-white burnous struggling forward up the terraces through the excited, exultant Arabs.

"Let those priests live!" the young leader shouted, for knives were raised to plunge into the white-clad prisoners.

The sheikh's son gained the altar platform, roughly shoving followers aside.

"Remember, you fools, my father's oath!" he commanded loudly. "He himself, with his own hand, will quench this thrice-accursed flame! He will be here tonight. In the morning, at sunrise, at the hour most sacred to these enemies of Allah, he will put out their fire forever.

"Tonight, let these priests live and

tend it for the last time. Tomorrow, let them see their fire put out by my father's hand—then let their blood smoke upon their own altar. With my voice, the sheikh of the Beni Basr has spoken!"

A yell of fierce approval rose from all the Arabs; a groan of horror came from the Yazdis in the mouths of the caves. They must witness this final sacrifice, this dreadful end to all they held holy.

"Now," cried the sheikh's son, "have any of you found the Feringhi whose blood I have sworn to have? Or the woman who is my own?"

"No! They are not here, *sidi*." The denial was general.

"Then they are in the caves, and we will have them in the morning. So be it. Some of you stand guard, lest these spawn of the devil come forth to surprise us. The rest, build fires, and slay a sheep or two that we may eat. Truly Allah has delivered his enemies into our hands! To him be praise!"

And with the sinking of the sun, the despairing Yazdis had to watch the defilement of their temple by scores of triumphant Moslems, bowing themselves toward Mecca and offering fierce thanksgiving to Allah the Compassionate, who had brought them so notable a victory!

IT LOOKED to Cairns as if the morning must indeed bring the end. He might stand the Arabs off for a while, but if they charged home with determination, they would have him. And Mary—

"Ray!" It was Mary's voice, in the tunnel behind him. "Look, Ray! I've found something—maybe."

She led him back past the barrier, back along the tunnel till she came to a heavy wooden door, attached by iron hinges to the wooden sheathing. It was secured only by a hasp and peg.

She had opened it—and within, in

a scooped-out niche, were a number of small cases with the significant name "ATLAS" stamped upon them.

"Dynamite! You have found something, Mary! And here's a box of caps—fuse—everything! Damned carelessness, storing dynamite and caps in the same place, but I'm glad of it this time."

Cairns' first impulse was to cap some sticks, attach a short length of fuse and throw them down among the Arabs. But sober second thought showed him the futility of this. He'd kill some of the enemy, certainly. But then they'd take cover and the fight would resolve itself into a duel between dynamite and snipers, with the advantage all on the part of the snipers. Especially at night. He might hold out a day or two longer, that was all.

Wasn't there some way he could use this explosive to wipe out enough Arabs so that the rest would lose heart and flee? Perhaps if he waited till tomorrow, when all the Arabs would be gathered in the valley to watch the sheikh's dousing of the Sacred Fire—yes, that would be the best. A surprise attack with dynamite, then, might do the trick.

But it would be a risky thing; he'd have to expose himself recklessly to get far enough downhill to throw his capped sticks. "I'll have to think this thing over, Mary. There must be a way to use this stuff," he said.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Sacrifice to Ahriman*



OUT in the amphitheater, the Arabs were eating and making merry.

Two men bearing burdens, attended by torch-bearers—for it was dark now—were ascending the terraces.

"Put those water-skins behind the

altar," shouted the voice of the sheikh's son, evidently anxious that the Yazdis in the caves should hear. "And, guards, see that the priests don't touch them. They must be ready to my father's hand, come sunrise."

The Yazdi priests were still feeding the fire, as indeed they were duty bound to go on doing, under all circumstances, while still they lived. Cairns could but imagine their feelings as the water-skins were set down by the altar.

A SHADOW stirred a little way from the engine.

Cairns lifted his Colt. In clear Arabic he challenged:

"Who comes?"

"Allah Akbar!" came the fierce answer, and there was a sudden rush of dark figures. Cairns fired—once, twice, three times—with steady hand. One of the assailants fell screaming; another fell and was still; two or three others turned and fled.

"They won't try that again in a hurry," Cairns opined, reloading his .45.

Mary came to him, bringing a tin cup of hot tea and some sandwiches she had contrived out of biscuit and canned beef. She was a brave kid, thought Cairns. She sat there beside him in the mouth of that tunnel and ate her supper, as cheerfully and with as good appetite as if she were supping at the Ritz in her native London.

Presently Cairns thought he saw another moving shadow. Was it the wounded Arab trying to crawl away? If so, let him go.

Starlight glinted on steel. The wounded man's cries, which had died away to faint moans, ended suddenly in a dreadful gurgle.

Again Cairns, crouching with pistol ready, challenged:

"Who comes?"

"Friends," replied the voice of the

Arabic-speaking Yazdi who'd acted as interpreter.

He took form in the gloom, moving very cautiously. There appeared to be one or two other Yazdis with him.

"We have killed that Arab dog," he informed Cairns. "You are doing well, stranger. Is your woman with you?"

"Yes." Cairns saw no reason to waste breath in explaining that Mary could not exactly be described as his woman. He rather liked the idea, anyway.

"Better get back here in the tunnel," he added, "out of reach of stray bullets."

For the Arabs were sniping at the caves, shooting blindly in the gloom. Cairns could hear bullets striking the rock here and there.

"It is well." The interpreter and two—no—three other Yazdis glided into the tunnel. One of them was a priest who had escaped the slaughter in the amphitheater. His pale robe showed up plainly against the tunnel wall.

"We are in desperate straits, stranger," the interpreter said in a queerly strained voice. "Our gods of light have turned their faces from us. We have no recourse but to appeal to the gods of darkness—the ancient, cruel gods who of old protected our people from their foes. Now!"

WITH startling suddenness, all four of the Yazdis leaped upon Cairns. One wrenched his pistol from his hand; the other three pinned him to earth beneath their weight.

He struggled furiously, but to no avail. The wiry, powerful Yazdis held him fast. With short length of rope they bound him hand and foot, while the white-clad priest held Mary Drummond helpless.

They bound Mary, then, and laid her on the tunnel floor beside Cairns.

The priest spoke. His words were

unintelligible, but through them rang a note of rising hope, almost of triumph.

"I am sorry for this, stranger," spoke the interpreter, "for you are a brave warrior and I like you well. But for our sacred altar, our inviolate fire, I would strike down my own father!"

"What do you mean to do?" demanded Cairns.

"Tomorrow, at sunrise, the accursed Arabs have promised to put out the fire on the altar of the gods," was the grim answer. "We have done our best; only the gods themselves can save their altar now.

"**A**ND if the gods of light, the sungod himself, will not help us, then we must turn to the most awful deity of all, the dread one whom we call the Peacock, who was named aforetime—Ahriman."

The priest groaned low as that mighty name was spoken, and began muttering as if in prayer, as if begging forgiveness for the impiety of speaking the name of Ahriman in the presence of an infidel. "In ancient times, the priests tell us, so long ago that no man now living among us can remember having heard of such a thing during his lifetime," the interpreter went on, "it has happened that, in time of great need, our people have won the favor of Ahriman by a momentous sacrifice. Not the usual sacrifice of sheep or cattle, such as we offer every day upon our altars, but the sacrifice of a maiden, young and fair of skin.

"Among us we have none such—our women have grown dark with labor in the sun. And so—"

"Good God!" cried Cairns. "You mean you will take—"

"Your woman. Yes, stranger, it must be so. At midnight—for that is the hour of Ahriman the Dread—she burns on a pile of faggots in the high mountain top, that the god may

see and know and come to the aid of his stricken people. That he may smite these impious Arabs with his flaming, terrible sword!"

The interpreter's last words rose in a fanatical shriek.

Cairns' blood ran cold. These men were in deadly earnest.

"Mary—Mary—" He spoke her name through the darkness.

"Never mind, Ray. It's not your fault," she answered. Brave Mary—trying to comfort him even when—

He struggled with his bonds. They held—they'd been well tied.

"I return to the caves, stranger," the interpreter told him. "In the morning, if Ahriman has saved us, you shall go free. Fare you well. We return for the woman an hour before midnight."

He went out of the tunnel, followed by the muttering priest and one of the others. Two Yazdis remained on guard. They settled themselves on their haunches, swords in hand. Cairns could see them in the faint starlight at the tunnel's mouth, silent, implacable guardians.

"Mary!" he whispered again.

"Yes, Ray,"

"Try your bonds. Can you work loose?"

A moment's silence.

"No. They've tied me—very tightly, Ray."

**H**E turned on his side, and for ten minutes worked in grim silence at the unyielding ropes, till his wrists were raw and bleeding. He made no progress whatever.

"Ray!"

"Yes."

"I want you to know—I want to tell you before they—they come for me, Ray. I love you!"

It was the softest of whispers, but he heard.

"I love you, too, Mary. Oh, God!"

He strove in vain at the relentless rope.



Outside, a pebble rolled beneath an incautious foot.

The guards stirred; a rifle bolt clicked.

Someone spoke in the Yazdi tongue. A guard answered.

Had they come so soon? Was it already an hour before midnight?

Footsteps—soft, almost imperceptible—approached.

The guards spoke again, both of them, a quick exclamation of astonishment.

The voice of the newcomer snapped out in syllables that were plainly those of command.

The guards arose together and went out of the tunnel into the night, nor stayed upon the order of their departure. A single figure remained, dark against the dim rectangle of the tunnel's mouth—a slim figure, seemingly wearing a short cloak, a conical cap.

A match flared.

Its light gleamed on flame-colored silk, on gold embroidery.

The newcomer was the sorcerer!

In one hand he held the burning match, in the other—a naked knife!

## CHAPTER IX

### *Turning the Trick*



THE sorcerer glided forward into the tunnel, throwing aside the burnt-out match.

He knelt beside Cairns; Cairns could feel the man's hot breath on his face. A hand touched him. Cairns braced himself for the knife-thrust.

The hand found his arm, ran along it to his bound wrists. The knife-blade touched him—tugged—his wrists were free. He sat up, overpowered by astonishment. The sorcerer was busy at his knees and ankles, cutting away those ropes also.

Then the sorcerer spoke.

"Mary—where is Mary?" he asked. And he spoke in English.

"Father!" cried Mary Drummond in a voice that rang for joy.

The sorcerer swung toward her.

"Mary—Mary!"

For the next minute or two there was nothing but rapturous greeting between father and daughter. The girl, freed by her father's knife, clung to him, weeping and laughing by turns.

Then Mary leaned over to Ray.

"Father—this is Raymond Cairns. I love him, father," she said frankly to him.

"I am glad to know you, sir," said Professor Drummond. "Now listen to me—both of you. We're still in a tight fix."

HE explained swiftly his presence there in the garb of a Yazdi sorcerer. He had left the mine with Hornswood and an English engineer, Billings, who had been in Hornswood's employ. The Arabs had attacked them; Hornswood and the professor had escaped by hard riding, Billings had been taken.

"That," thought Cairns, "explains the body in the garden."

The professor, reaching Gabur safely, had at Hornswood's request written his report on the silver mine. But he had added some notes about the people, and the impracticability of working the mine until the Arabs had been dealt with. These notes, Cairns could understand, Hornswood had suppressed.

Then the professor, hearing of the coming of the devil-worshippers from Seistan to occupy their old temple, had resolved to visit this strange people, of whom he had heard before. By a circuitous route he avoided the Arabs and got back to the mine, to find the Yazdis in possession.

He had been unable to meet the challenge of the ordeal, but he had astonished them with a few simple

tricks with chemicals and the like from his scientific outfit.

"Such as you saw me perform before the altar this morning," he explained.

And he had become the tribal sorcerer! These Yazdis were a queer mixture; devout and yet superstitious. Assuming the dress and the position of the last sorcerer, who had died some weeks before, the professor had been able not only to preserve his life but to assume a position of great authority among the Yazdis.

**E**SCAPE would have been difficult at best; but he did not want to escape. He was too absorbed in his study of the tribal customs and language.

"Ah, what a book I shall write if ever I see London again! It will set the Royal Society by the ears, I tell you," he exclaimed.

Then Mary and Cairns had appeared. The professor had recognized his daughter at the ordeal, but he had been unable to go to her then, since the sorcerer, by immutable tradition, never left the vicinity of his den beneath the altar in daytime. He was a night-walking creature.

He had fled to the caves with the others; and then he had listened to the terrible decision of the elders of the tribe to sacrifice the "fair maiden" to Ahriman.

So he had come to the rescue, sending away the guards who had not dared gainsay the dreaded sorcerer.

"But we are not safe here," he concluded. "Presently, the rascal guards will pluck up courage to tell that priest what has happened. The priests always suspect and never love the tribe's witch doctor. This one will smell a rat. He will send warriors to the mine."

"We can stand them off," Cairns said stoutly. "My sword case is

still here, thank Heaven, though they've taken my Colt."

"I can do better than that. I'll go get your pistol, and a rifle, too," the professor offered. "Whoever has 'em won't think of refusing to hand 'em over to me. I'd better go now, before the priest has time to start any trouble. When I come back, I'll whistle—like this."

He whistled a bar of "God Save the King," and was gone.

"Good old Dad!" said Mary.

"Stout fella," agreed Cairns warmly. "Mary—"

Below, the Arabs set up a sudden yelling. Torches waved in the night.

"They must be celebrating the arrival of old Ali Basr," Cairns conjectured rapidly. "His precious son'll be telling him the good news, and how the water-skins are all ready for the big fire-dousing scene tomorrow. I wish—"

He stopped abruptly, blinded by the flash of sudden inspiration.

"By God!" he exclaimed.

"Ray! What is it?"

"I've got an idea—and I believe it'll work! Wait—let me think it out—yes—that'll do the trick! Listen, Mary—"

In the darkness someone whistled softly—God save our noble king—

"Come in, Professor. Tell me what you think of this scheme!" called Cairns.

**T**HE professor entered. Into Cairns' hand he pressed the familiar butt of the big Colt. He himself had secured a Winchester carbine.

"Only four cartridges, but better than nothing," said he.

"I'll say so," agreed Cairns. "Now, here's my idea, Professor."

He talked swiftly, eagerly.

When he had finished, the professor was almost capering with delight.

"It'll work! I'm sure of it, my boy!" he cried. "But be careful! The Yazdis are sullen and suspicious;

the guards have returned, and they are wondering.

"I told them I had laid a spell on you both, from which you could not escape. The priest, of course, does not believe that; but he's having some trouble convincing the commonalty, whom I've commanded to stay away from the mine."

"You'll be ace high with them, come morning," chuckled Cairns. "Let's get busy. First, we'll fix up a fishing pole. Mary, you stay here with the carbine—"

"I'm coming along, thanks!"

"All right, come on, then."

They went cautiously out of the tunnel and made their way to the storehouse, pausing to listen every few yards lest there be Arabs or Yazdi warriors about. They reached the storehouse unmolested, however.

There Cairns, aided by matches, found three light bamboo poles of the type used for rigging temporary awnings. A coil of stout cord, two files and the iron hook from a block and tackle completed his requirements.

These things he gave to Mary to carry.

He and the professor then went to the shed which housed the electric generator and its engine.

"It's here," he muttered. "Plenty."

THEY lifted a heavy burden between them and carried it up to the tunnel, Mary following. The professor then returned to the storehouse for a couple of square five-gallon tins, while Cairns set to work to lash the three poles firmly end to end, making one long, light pole some sixteen feet in length.

He filed the blunt point of the iron hook till it was tapering and sharp; then he lashed its shank securely to the end of his long bamboo rod.

"All set Professor," said he. The professor, who had been busy with his tins, chuckled in the darkness.

"So am I," he announced.

They carried their queer equipment out of the tunnel and up to the hillside above, where they left it.

Then, returning to the tunnel, they began getting out the boxes of dynamite.

These they lugged down past the storehouses to the siding on which stood the ore cars. The car at the down-hill end of the string was empty.

"Which is a break," Cairns remarked, sotto voice. "A nice job it'd be to unload it with our hands, in the dark!"

IN IT they stowed the dynamite, making a compact pile of the boxes of explosive in the center of the small car. The space between the pile of dynamite boxes and the sides of the car they filled in with ore, handling it very carefully, so as to make as little noise as possible, and also with a tender regard for the susceptibilities of dynamite.

They opened the top box, inserted caps attached to short lengths of fuse in four of the sticks, and carefully restored these sticks to the four corners of the box.

Then, with infinite care, they uncoupled the car, let it roll—which it did almost too rapidly, the grade being so steep—for a few feet, and blocked its wheels with a chunk of ore. They opened the switch into the main line.

"You've calculated the speed of the car and the burning time of those fuses correctly, I hope, Cairns," the professor said.

Cairns chuckled.

"I've been handling fuses a long time, Professor, and ore cars, too," he said. "But the Arabs have helped me out. They were piling rocks on the track this evening—'fraid I'd try to run out with the engine, I suppose. And they piled 'em right

in front of the temple entrance. Thoughtful of 'em."

The professor laughed softly.

"Then *au revoir*—until morning," he said.

Mary kissed him tenderly.

"I don't like to leave you, father!" she protested.

"Don't worry. I'll be all right here. No Yazdi would harm me, and as for the Arabs, they'll not come up here tonight. Besides, I have the Winchester."

She kissed him again. Cairns gripped the old man's hand hard.

Then, with Mary, he turned and went back up the hill.

THEY passed the mine entrance, came to the place where the hooked pole and the tins had been left. Mary took the pole; Cairns lifted the heavy tins, one in each hand, and staggered onward, following Mary, who had to pick her way carefully with her unwieldy burden ever in mind.

Their course took them up the mountain first. The going was hard over the uncertain rocks. Both were bruised, bleeding, out of breath, when at last they reached a rocky shelf high above the caves, of which the professor had told them, and turned westward.

Now they walked more easily. The amphitheater was below them and to the left, and they were able to guide their course by using the steady flame of the Sacred Fire as a beacon.

"Careful, Mary," Cairns warned presently. "This shelf ends abruptly, your father said."

"Here's the end, too," Mary announced. "O-o-oh—it's awfully rough from here on. We'll never make it with all this stuff."

"We've got to," Cairns retorted.

But it was certainly rough. The smooth shelf gave way to a series of brush-grown gulches, torn out by summer cloudbursts and filled with

loose rocks. Their progress became painfully slow. Often Cairns had to transport the pole and the two cans one by one over particularly bad places, and then help Mary afterward.

"It must be long past midnight," he said finally, as they stopped to rest. "Our friends the Yazdis will have discovered that their victim has left 'em. They'll be good and sore."

"How much farther?" asked the exhausted girl.

"Not far, I think. C'mon—we'll try it some more."

It wasn't much farther. One more gulch they labored through, and then Mary pointed down a more open slope at the fire-crowned altar.

"There it is. We're almost above it now," she whispered.

"Stay here. I'll work closer and have a look at the lay of the land," Cairns ordered.

He crawled down the slope, infinitely careful now that no loose stone rolled under him, no dry twig snapped.

Presently he came to the even feel of masonry beneath his feet.

He was on the lip of the amphitheater, where it had been cut back by long-dead artisans into a deep recess to contain the altar platform.

THE altar itself was just below him. Peering cautiously over the edge of the stone cornice, he could see the white-clad priests tending the fire, the Arab guards standing here and there about the foot of the altar—and the dark blotch against the gray stone that must be the water-skins. The fire itself was low, and gave off little light—not enough to be dangerous.

Cairns crawled back to the girl.

"Might as well try it now as at any time," said he. "I'll take the cans first."

One by one he carried the two tins down to the cornice. The sec-



ond trip, Mary followed him, bearing the pole.

"Thank heaven the crest of the hill is behind us, so we don't show against the skyline," Cairns muttered. "Well, here goes."

He knelt on the cornice and thrust the pole over the edge. Carefully, hand over hand, he worked its hook end out and down. He heard it click against the stones. The gentle crackle of the fire prevented the priests from hearing, too.

CAIRNS moved the hook along till it touched the water-skins.

Now for the delicate task of engaging the hook in the leather thongs which bound the mouth of the water-skin and, looped, served to attach it to a saddle on the march.

Cairns had to be very cautious. He must not let the iron hook strike too sharply against the stones. His arm was growing strained and tired.

"Brace yourself back there, Mary, and put your arms round my waist and hang on," he muttered. "Then I can use both hands."

The other hand made all the difference. He caught the thong; gripping the pole hard, he swung the water-skin up and away from the altar platform, and hoisted it up to the cornice.

Dragging it back out of the way, he began fishing for the other one.

"Got it, Mary. Now then—"

There was a liquid gurgling in the night—again—again.

Then came the task of putting the skins back where they had come from. This was comparatively easy. When it was done, still undiscovered, Cairns breathed a sigh of relief.

He and Mary crawled back from the cornice, back up the hills into the shelter of one of the water-torn gulches.

Cairns took from his pocket a miner's electric torch—which he had not dared to use to help him in his

tasks—pointed it as near as he could guess toward the spot where, far across the amphitheater on the slope before the mine, the professor waited. Swiftly he flashed it twice.

Arab eyes that saw might have taken the light for some will-o-the-wisp, or even one of the giant fire-flies of the country.

A pause—then, so quick and brief as to be gone almost before they were seen, two flashes winked back.

Cairns put an arm around Mary and drew her close.

"It's all set, honey," he murmured. "We've done it! We've turned the trick! Now all we've got to do is to sit here and wait for morning."

## CHAPTER X

### *The Quenching of the Fire*



MORNING was long in coming to those who waited with such impatient hearts.

But at last the eastern sky grew gray—then the first tinge of pink showed—then the golden shafts, forerunners of the rising sun, gave form and substance to the scene spread out at the feet of Cairns and Mary on their lofty mountain eyrie.

The Sacred Fire still burned on the great altar. The two priests, moving on weary feet, still tended it with what remained of their dwindling stock of fuel. About them stood their Arab guards, mocking them, inventing fresh insults with the ingenuity in abuse of which only an Arab is capable.

Far below, in the great open space at the foot of the terraces, the other Arabs were gathering, four or five hundred stout warriors, armed and triumphant. Some stood on the near side of the stream, some on the far side, over and around the pile of stone which had been used to

block the railroad track leading down from the mine.

None were near the mine buildings. The row of little ore cars, the silent, cold locomotive, showed up clearly in the field of Cairns' glasses. In the high grass near the cars, he caught a glimpse of brilliant color. The professor—waiting for his moment.

Cairns grinned at Mary.

"Here comes the Sheikh," said he. "Take the glasses, honey. Look at the old boy—it's his big moment."

**S**HEIKH ALI BASR, lord of his tribe, was coming up the terraces, escorted by his son and a dozen of his oldest retainers. Coming to his triumph over the accursed Yazdis, worshipers of the devil. Coming to the quenching of that fire "which mocked the face of Allah!"

He held his head high, as befitted a conqueror; and on his haughty, cruel face was stamped the prideful exultation which filled his merciless heart.

Now he had reached the last terrace; now he was on the altar platform. Riflemen along the terraces watched the Yazdi caves lest any rifle-bearing devil-worshiper should dare to interfere.

The sheikh turned, facing the yelling crowd, all unconscious of the Feringhi eyes which watched him from above.

He lifted his powerful arms above his head.

"Allah il Allah!" he intoned. "There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah!"

He bowed himself toward Mecca. The multitude bowed with him.

Then again the sheikh cried out in a mighty voice:

"Allah Akbar! Allah is great! Now will I quench forever their Sacred Fire, and then will we put them to the sword and send their souls flaming down to hell!"

He stooped, picked up one of the water-skins.

"Ai-i-i-i!"

A high-pitched shriek rang out across the amphitheater.

Every one turned to the flame-colored figure which stood alone hard by the ore cars, arms outstretched.

"God of light—god of the sun! Send now thy flame to strike this sacrilegious dog who profanes thy altar!"

Thus, loud and shrill, carrying even into the recesses of the Yazdi caverns, cried the voice of him whom the Yazdis knew as their sorcerer.

"Let your god save his accursed fire if he can!" thundered the sheikh, and, tearing the thong from the mouth of the bulging skin, he poured the rushing liquid out upon the fire.

**I**NSTANTLY he was enveloped in a roaring, surging blanket of flame—flame that wrapped altar, sheikh, priests and platform in one awful scarlet winding sheet. Then came a terrific explosion, a second blast of hellish fury which hurled the sheikh, blazing like a human torch, out and down the terraces, rolling and screaming in a ball of ceaseless fire—down toward his horror-stricken followers.

"The god has answered you, impious villain!" shrieked the voice of the "sorcerer."

So dreadfully intent were the Arabs on the awful sight before them—the flaming altar, their burning sheikh rolling down the terraces—that they did not see the ore car until it was right among them. It knocked down one man, another leaped from its path—it struck the heap of stones—

A vast dark column of earth and loose rock leaped suddenly skyward, a column at whose base there flashed one great burst of white-hot flame.

The earth shook as though struck

by a giant's fist. Stones tumbled from the cornice; loose rubble from the hillside slid down into the amphitheater. The flaming altar itself trembled on its platform.

Slowly the smoke pall cleared.

Cairns and Mary took their hands from their ringing ears and peered into the murk.

Arabs were scattered everywhere. Dead Arabs, heaped in a holocaust of slaughter; wounded broken Arabs who sought only to crawl away to some place of refuge; stunned Arabs who, as they came to themselves, sprang to their feet and fled from that place of terror as though a legion of Yazdi devils were at their heels.

"Down, sons of the fire, and strike home!" yelled a white-clad priest from the mouth of a cave.

And down upon the stricken Arabs, blades flashing bright in the sun, swept the Yazdi swordsmen.

Their blades drank deep of vengeance that bloody morning.

The sheikh was already dead when they reached him, but his son they slew, and his guards, and all of his people who still lived and could not flee from the vengeful swords.

Then, when it was over, when on

the high and smoking altar the priests who still lived were tending again the Sacred Fire, the Yazdis lifted up their grateful voices to acclaim their sorcerer. His spell, they believed, had saved them; his voice had reached the ears of their gods in the very nick of time.

Loudly they cried their gratitude, loudly they pledged eternal devotion.

The professor, gripping the hands of Cairns and Mary—who by this time had reached his side—answered them not at all. No words of his could have been heard in that storm of acclamations.

But he kissed his sobbing daughter, and he slapped Cairns heartily on the back.

"You'll be all right now, my son. They'll work for you; I'll make 'em work hard, too. And as for the Arabs, it'll be many a long day before an Arab of these parts dares to come near this place, thanks to your clever head."

Cairns nodded soberly; the slaughter had left him a little sick.

"It was a good scheme," he admitted. "Anyway, it worked. Whew! Gasoline sure does burn when it gets going, doesn't it?"

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IN WHICH HE DEFEATED THE  
BRITISH SQUADRON, MADE HIM  
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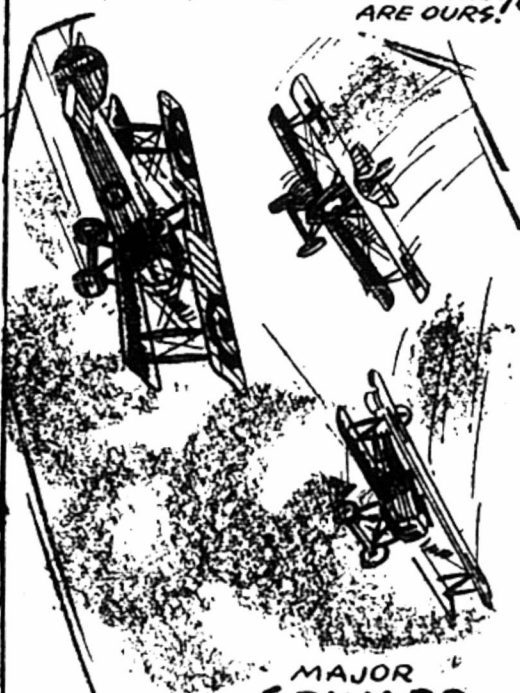
AFTER THIS ACTION, IN WHICH PERRY  
WAS COMPLETELY VICTORIOUS, HE  
SENT FORTH HIS FAMOUS DISPATCH,  
"WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY AND THEY  
ARE OURS!"



ABOVE LEFT—  
GENERAL FRANCOIS  
DE MERCY—  
BELOW RIGHT—  
DUKE BERNHARD  
OF WEIMAR.

**FRENCHMAN  
LED GERMAN  
ARMY AND  
GERMAN  
LED  
FRENCH ARMY  
DURING 30 YEARS  
WAR!**

FRANCOIS DE MERCY, A FRENCH  
SOLDIER AND ADVENTURER LED  
THE IMPERIAL GERMAN FORCES  
AGAINST DUKE BERNHARD OF  
WEIMAR, A GERMAN, WHO WAS  
LEADING THE ARMIES OF FRANCE  
DURING THE 30 YEARS WAR.



MAJOR  
**EDWARD  
MANNOCK,**

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PREMIER SKYFIGHTER, RAN  
UP THE ASTONISHING SCORE  
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*This is the Original Illustrated Adventure*





## EDWARD "TEX" O'REILLY -

VETERAN OF MANY WARS IN MANY LANDS, WAS BORN IN DENNISON, TEXAS AND GREW UP RIDING THE PLAINS WITH DEVIL-MAY-CARE COWBOYS.

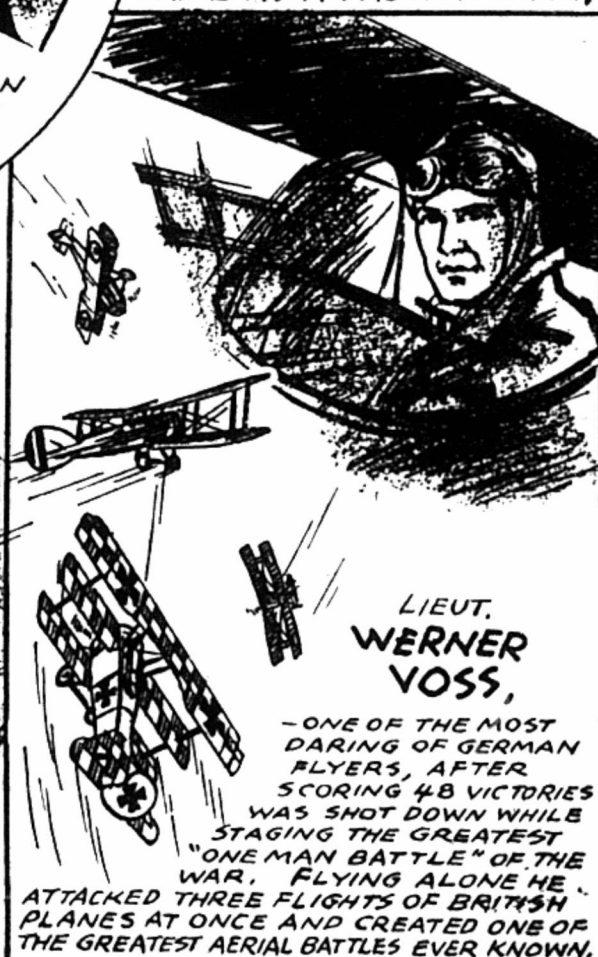
AT THE AGE OF 17 "TEX" ENLISTED WITH THE FOURTH INFANTRY AND HE WAS WITH THAT REGIMENT WHEN IT STORMED THE SAN JUAN HILL DURING THE SPANISH AMERICAN WAR.

FOLLOWING THE FIGHTING IN CUBA O'REILLY ROAMED THE GLOBE PARTICIPATING IN MANY REVOLUTIONS AND WARS GAINING WORLD WIDE FAME AS AN ADVENTURER.

CROWN MADE FROM A LION'S MANE IS WORN BY AN ABYSSINIAN ARMY OFFICER WITH RANK EQUAL TO COLONEL IN THE AMERICAN ARMY.



THE U.S. ARMY AND THE MARINE CORPS TODAY CONTAIN 600 OFFICERS AND 14,000 MEN OF FOREIGN BIRTH, REPRESENTING FORTY COUNTRIES.



## LIEUT. WERNER VOSS,

-ONE OF THE MOST DARING OF GERMAN FLYERS, AFTER SCORING 48 VICTORIES WAS SHOT DOWN WHILE STAGING THE GREATEST "ONE MAN BATTLE" OF THE WAR. FLYING ALONE HE ATTACKED THREE FLIGHTS OF BRITISH PLANES AT ONCE AND CREATED ONE OF THE GREATEST AERIAL BATTLES EVER KNOWN.

*Feature—the First to Appear in Any Magazine*

# The Fighting

Leading them was  
the young officer,  
pistol in hand



By  
**ARTHUR J.  
BURKS**

## *Thrill to the Sensational General Smedley D. Butler's Adventures as Related by*

### CHAPTER I

#### *Chinese Terror*

FROM the moment that Her Majesty, the Empress Dowager of China, had given word to Prince Tuan that she believed in the invincibility of the Boxers and commanded them to fire upon the foreign legations in Peking, horror and terror had stalked through China. The guns and swords of the Chinese were against all foreigners.

Columns of troops from many foreign countries marching to the relief of Peking was the world's answer. The U. S. Marines were part of that march. They landed near the Taku Forts, starting there for the trip to Tientsin, where they were to get a foothold for the rest of their march to Peking.

The Boxers—fanatical, savage, bloodthirsty—set themselves the task of turning back the foreigners at Taku. The marines, always the first to fight, were in the forefront as the advance began. Bullets hailed about them. They advanced from cover to cover. Now and again this marine or that paused in his advance, calmly leveled his rifle, pulled the trigger and grinned.

"I got *that* heathen!" he said.

The Boxers yelled fiercely. They brandished weapons. They bared their chests to the bullets of their enemies.

"Gee, Lieutenant," said Private Jones, "them Boxers have certainly

# Leatherneck

## *and Exciting True Story of Action-Packed, Perilous His Former Aide-de-Camp*

got nerve, or else they haven't got any sense. I can't imagine what sort of a guy would stand up and let a marine shoot at him!"

"The Boxers," explained the lieutenant, "have been coerced into the belief that they are invincible. Prince Tuan convinced the Empress Dowager that neither knives nor bullets could harm the Boxers. So convincing was the prince—who organized the Boxers in the first place—that the Boxers themselves believe it now."

"Humph!" said Private Jones. "Let's see now. See that big fella away over to the left? Watch!"

The "big fella," yelling, brandishing a huge sword, was racing toward the marines, as though he fully intended to kill every one of them with his own hands. Private Jones squinted along the sights of his rifle. It jumped back against his shoulder as he pressed the trigger. The big Chinese leaped high, and plunged forward on his face. He didn't move after that. Private Jones turned, spat tobacco juice into the dust, and grinned up at the lieutenant,





"See, sir?" he said. "Ain't nothin' to it. I never did take much stock in these foreign superstitions anyhow. I'm glad I'm not superstitious."

Whereupon, while the lieutenant grinned tightly, Private Jones struck the wood of his rifle stock with his hard knuckles.

The rattling of musketry was incessant. Bullets kicked up dirt all about the advancing leathernecks. Bullets struck parts of their equipment and ricocheted off, whining. The marines had few ricochets. They were seasoned fighters for the most part, from the Philippines.

So was the young officer who led the group of which Private Jones was a member. He was a veteran, despite the fact that he was only nineteen years of age. This wasn't the first time he had walked into the face of death at the head of his men. He had gone through the Spanish-American War, when he was only seventeen.

Calmly he directed his men.

"Don't fire wildly," he said. "If you yank your triggers and miss, the Chinese will believe they are invincible. One aimed shot that takes effect is better than ten that only make a noise. Let the Chinese make the noise."

"And are they making it, sir!" said Private Smith.

"Don't let it trouble you, son," said the nineteen year old lieutenant. "Noise never killed anybody."

IT sounded strange for him to call "son" a man twice his age, but from time immemorial an enlisted man had been "son" to his superior officer. Private Smith grunted.

At that point a slug caught Private Smith in the mouth and blew the back of his head off. The lieutenant's face went white. He looked down at the mess which had been made of the man who had just been talking with him.

"Thee were a good soldier, son," he said. "One hundred of these Chinese weren't worth a hair on thy ugly head. Come on, Jones, see that big fellow with his pigtail flying in the breeze? He just got Smith. Let's see what we can do about it."

Private Jones' rifle spoke. The Chinese crashed down.

The marines were advancing steadily. The Chinese were becoming desperate. They massed for a concerted charge.

THE marines were quite calm in the face of the onslaught, though they knew what it would mean if they were whipped in the charge. It would mean annihilation, perhaps mutilation. Several spat into the dust. Some dusted off their cartridges on their uniform pants. Their eyes squinted at the forming charge.

"Remember, boys," said the lieutenant, "aim every shot. By the time they get to us, they'll realize that the cost is too heavy. And keep your heads down."

The Chinese were coming. Wave after wave of them—ragged waves which, however, were filled with menace because each one of them outnumbered the marines beyond computing—rose out of depressions in the earth and ran forward. Their yells were blood-curdling.

"Reminds me of a mob of googoes gone *juramentado*," said a grizzled sergeant. "The taos and Moros don't kill easy when they've worked themselves into a frenzy. They keep on fighting after they're dead, as though they didn't have enough sense to know they was dead. These guys act like 'em."

The Chinese came on. Now they were so close that the marines no longer had to aim and fire. They merely pulled triggers. The Chinese were too close to miss. Ahead of them marched the young officer, pistol in hand, steadily firing, sig-



naling where fire should be directed, calmly leading his men into the thick of the enemy.

Once in the midst of the Boxers, the marines knew what to do; knew from long experience in the Philippines. They came to hand-grips. Their bayonets began to drink of the lives of their enemies.

They used a formation called "form for bolo attack," which had come down to the marines from the ancients—from the phalanxes of the Greeks and Romans. Bristling bayonets formed a wall over which the Chinese could not pass. Men knelt,



*The big Chinese leaped high, like a stricken stag*

holding bayonets to the fore. Others stood behind them with leveled bayonets. As the Chinese pressed closely the marines fired. Survivors of the withering bursts of hot lead plunged straight onto the waiting bayonets.

"Let 'em have it!" snapped the lieutenant.

The formation seemed to spread out. The bristling wall of bayonets advanced in four directions at once. Thrust, parry, thrust. The bayonets, which had looked like silver, now were painted a brilliant crimson. Leathernecks spat in the dust. They drove the Chinese back with determined savagery.

A wall of dead rose around them. The Chinese gave back. The marines

took several backward steps, and lo, their "form for bolo attack" was there again, as impregnable as before. There seemed to have been no change after the fierce interlude of hand-to-hand fighting—save that silver bayonets had become red, and that drops of the red dripped slowly down to the dust.

"Fire at will!" snapped the officer.

AS his men obeyed the calm command, the officer looked about him, to see how far the other units of the leatherneck force had advanced. He shook his head a little as he realized that he had outstripped the fighters on his flanks.

"I'll catch the devil for that," he said to himself.

He was quite right. It was as bad to overrun a line of attack as it was to fall behind it. Being in advance of his comrades, was to become a common failing with the young officer during all the years of his military life—and he was always to "catch the devil" for it.

"But I never got called down by a superior when I didn't deserve it," he said many years later.

Now the flankers came into line. The marines were steadily advancing. Now and again they left a comrade behind them. When so many slugs were flying, it would have been a miracle if all the leathernecks had remained untouched.

They advanced several hundred yards. Twice they repelled attack flurries with their bayonets. They went into compact formation a bit further on, to reorganize for continued advance. The young officer studied his men. His eyes narrowed. They were keen eyes. They missed nothing at all.

"Private Jones," he said, "where the devil is your bayonet?"

"I stuck it into a Chinnee when we was advancing, sir," said Private Jones ruefully, "an' I guess I musta

ketched it between a coupla ribs. I broke the blasted thing off in him, sir, an' we traveled so fast I didn't have time to get it back."

The officer pursed his lips. During the breathing space Jones spoke to a comrade at his side.

"Did you see the eyes of that looie? He didn't like me losin' my baynit. I'll bet the quartermaster takes the price of it outa my next payday."

Private Jones was quite right. The quartermaster did exactly that.

But that happened when they had reached Tientsin and had consolidated their position again, preparatory to clearing the city of Boxers so that they could go on. The young officer was everywhere among his men then—as he always was during the years that followed, before and after he became famous.

That young officer was Lieutenant Smedley D. Butler.

Twenty-seven years later I was to be his aide-de-camp. He was to be a famous brigadier-general, an even more famous major-general. But even as a young lieutenant his men were beginning to think of him as "the man with the gimlet eyes." Years later he was to become known throughout Uncle Sam's services, throughout the the United States, as "Old Gimlet Eye," or "The Fighting Quaker." And even today he is not really "old"—certainly not in years—though in experience he has lived through a dozen average lives.

## CHAPTER II

### *On to Peking*

G RIM and a little haggard after their bitter fighting from the Taku Forts to Tientsin, the marines prepared to clear the way for their further advance to the Capital of China. The Boxers, realizing that the foreigners had advanced this far from the coast

in spite of their best resistance, redoubled their efforts to beat back the invaders. The Boxers had limitless numbers at their backs. China had a population somewhere around five hundred millions of people. The Chinese had for centuries been indifferent to death.

Let one man fall before the bullets or bayonets of the foreigners and a dozen, a hundred, a thousand, rose out of the flatlands of North China to take his place, perfectly willing to give their lives in their turn. The marines were beginning to tire from the sheer task of killing. It seemed that the holocaust would never end.

**T**IENTSIN had to be cleared. Chinese bandits, or Boxers, when in extremities, had no more consideration for their own than they had for the enemy. As they fell back like waves before the prow of a battleship, or gave way to right and left before the spearhead of the foreign advance, they looted the homes of their own people, mistreated the women, burned houses.

Butler, in common with all the marines, watched all this with hard eyes. They had never, even among the *taos* and Moros, seen such disregard of human life. Dead dotted the streets of Tientsin. Bullets sped back and forth without ceasing.

The order had come to clear the streets, to drive back the Boxers, so that lines could be re-formed, dead foreign soldiers dropped from the rosters, and the march could continue. The marines were doing their part to clear those streets.

And somewhere in the forefront of the battle which never ended, was young Butler at the head of his men. His narrowed eyes studied the way ahead. He paid no heed to the bullets which snapped past him to right and left. He was looking for weak spots into which to thrust tentacles of his abbreviated command.

He snapped an order for a squad to rush to the right, to keep under cover, and get forward to a spot whence it could clear out a building from which lead poured into the ranks of the leathernecks. A corporal led the way, running. He got his men into place, but forgot his own exposed position. He was right out in the open, where rifles could be trained on him from a dozen different coigns of vantage. He was yelling to his men.

The Boxers yelled their triumph as their rifles let go with a deafening clatter. Among so many bullets it was a miracle that so few struck the corporal. He fell and the Boxers' cries of savage exultation rose to the heavens.

Butler's eyes narrowed. He seemed to grow taut for a moment. Then he dashed forward, grabbed the shoulders of the wounded corporal, started dragging him back to cover. He couldn't lift the man. Butler, at his very best, probably never weighed over a hundred and fifty pounds.

Even as he dragged the corporal back he was probably thinking to himself, "I'll catch hell for going myself when I could have sent someone else."

**H**E was right. He always thought of such things after he had done something he should not have done, when it was too late. And he *did* catch hell, as usual. But his superiors, men who were given little to praising and much to harsh-lipped criticism, marked the act of young Butler.

Smoke and flames from burning houses rose straight into the white-hot sky. Far down the streets, beyond the reach of leatherneck lead, Boxers went through queer didoes in plain view of their enemies. Their swordplay, during which two men struck at a third from every possible angle, until it seemed that their tar-

get could not keep from being hewn to bits, was marvelous to watch.

It did look, indeed, as though the swords glanced off the sweaty, glistening hides of the Boxers. Butler watched all this, and understood how, by tricks of legerdemain, the Boxers had convinced the Empress Dowager that bullets and swords could not injure them.

"Take careful aim, son," said Butler to Private Brown, "and down that fellow those other two are hacking at with swords. Don't miss, now."

Private Brown flung himself prone, cuddled the stock of his rifle against his cheek, slowly squeezed the trigger. A bullet kicked dirt into his face. He blinked his eyes a little, relaxed the pressure on his trigger until his eyes had cleared of the dust. Then he "froze." His piece recoiled against a shoulder accustomed to receive the "kick" of his rifle.

Far down the street the Boxer crumpled like a balloon from which the air has suddenly been snatched. Yells of anger rose all along the street. The Boxers' attempt to impress the non-combatant Chinese with their invincibility had failed.

"Keep going, fellows!" snapped Butler, when sure that the leather-necks on either flank were in proper position so that his contingent would not overrun the general line. "Take it easy. Make every shot count. Don't forget that we've got to get to Peking."

**M**EN grumbled. They didn't like to be forced forward, always within inches of death. They grumbled.

"He's damn free with our lives," said one.

"If he wants to be a hero, why don't he drive the Chinks out by himself?"

"He's a blasted slave-driver!" said another.

Butler heard some of these com-

ments. He only grinned to himself. He had already learned what it sometimes takes lesser gifted officers years to learn—that soldiers are at their best when they grouse, grumble, bellyache, "sound off"; that when they are sullen and say nothing, mutiny or wholesale desertions are just around the corner.

And now in the narrow streets, bordered by stinking hovels among which coolies and their women and children scurried like frightened rabbits, more fearful of their own people than of the marines, Butler walked ahead of his men. Afraid? Of course he was afraid! But he couldn't let his men see that; couldn't admit it even to himself.

**H**IS narrowed eyes, which were to make him famous, searched out strong points from which Boxers poured lead in the direction of his men. Locating such strong points he turned his head back over his shoulder and shouted.

"To the left front, fifty yards, an open window. Silence those rifles!"

A squad swung into formation, flopped down. Rifle bolts clicked metallicly, thrusting cartridges into the chambers. Then silence while men held their breath and squeezed triggers carefully. A concerted burst of firing. A Chinese suddenly appeared in the window, his hands clutched over his stomach, his queue flying free, to fall into the street below, somersaulting over and over.

No more bullets came from that particular window.

"Good work, fellows!" snapped Butler.

A bullet plucked at Butler's uniform. Blood seeped forth from beneath his shirt. He had been slightly wounded and didn't know it himself. Excitement made men impervious to pain, at least momentarily.

The advance continued. Through narrow alleys which passed for





*He lifted the sacks as though to hurl them*

streets, Butler could keep track of the detachments to his right and left. He wouldn't offend again in the matter of outracing his comrades. The streets, the hovels, seemed filled like maggots with the enemy—or at least with Chinese coolies. One never could be sure which Chinese were enemies; they all looked alike.

Finally, near the very edge of the city, when most of it was in the hands of the foreigners—British,

German, Russian, American—Butler suddenly stopped in his advance. Dead ahead the buildings were all in flames. Coming out of the heart of the flames, was the lusty yelling of a frightened baby. Butler's face went a little white.

"Hold everything!" he snapped. "Keep the Chinks back for a minute or two."

Butler broke into a shambling, awkward run. He was always awk-

ward. He was guided by the bellowing of the baby. Someone had apparently left the kid in the flames to die. That wasn't an unusual thing in China. Babies, especially girl babies, were not held in too high regard.

Still guided by the squalling, Butler entered a burning house, found the baby—a girl at a guess—choking on smoke which came all too close, bellowing at the top of her lusty lungs. There was no one else around.

Butler hadn't figured on anything like this. He gathered the kid up in his arms, carried her out of the building. But what could he do with her then? He didn't know where her parents were. He'd have looked silly marching at the head of his attacking forces with a Chinese baby in his arms.

He couldn't leave her in the street, obviously. For a brief moment, while flames fanned his clothing, he considered the matter. He wasn't far from the Pei Ho River. The river was crammed with junks and sampans, filled to overflowing with Chinese who were fleeing from the burning city and the sullen Boxers.

**B**UTLER raced to the river, hailed the nearest sampan. He didn't know one Chinese from another. He shoved the girl into some woman's arms.

"Here's somebody's brat," he said. "You shouldn't be leaving her loose like that!"

"*Hsieh hsieh, hsieh hsieh!*" said the woman, which means, "Thanks!"

Butler went back to his business.

Twenty-seven years later a brigadier-general was guest of a Chinese family in Tientsin. The hostess asked him if he had ever known a Lieutenant Bagley. She explained that during the Boxer uprising this Bagley had carried her out of a burning house. Halfway through her

narrative "Bagley" Butler began to grin, held up his hand to stop her, and then went on with the story!

The "brat" had grown up and married one Henry Chang—who was to become, for a brief space, Consul-General for China in New York City. One wonders what Lucy Chang and General Butler found to say to each other after the mutual identification.

### CHAPTER III

#### *Reward for Gallantry*

**T**HE relief column, after untold hardships, reached the outer walls of Peking. Within the Forbidden City, where she had heard that the foreigners intended to take her prisoner and exhibit her in a cage throughout the world, the Empress Dowager calmly prepared to flee before the wrath of the foreigners. She would flee inland with most of her court.

She knew now, even if the Boxers did not realize it, that her cause was lost. Not even the numerically infinite Chinese could smother the determination of the foreigners.

Outside the walls, the foreigners paused for breathing space. Inside the walls, the Boxers redoubled their efforts to destroy the foreign legations before the armies could breach the walls.

Butler, in common with the rest of the foreign officers, knew that no time was to be lost. Desperate men, and the Boxers were that, were powerful, ruthless men. What good would it do to enter Peking if they arrived even seconds too late?

The foreigners looked about them for a way over or through the walls.

Peking is a city of four walls. The inner wall is the Forbidden City Wall, the next—leading outward—the Imperial Wall, the next the Tartar Wall, and the outer wall is known as the Chinese Wall.

It was fairly easy for the foreign-

ers to get inside the Chinese Wall. But the Tartar was something else again.

Up and over the wall! Smash down the gates and go through! Drive the Boxers out of the city!

The foreigners were eager for the fray. Dispositions were made. The city would be entered at every imaginable place, and all at the same time. But even then men wondered which individual, of all the foreign troops, would be first over the wall.

History gives the honor to a bugler named Titus. But young Butler was not far behind him. He was certainly among the first handful to drop into the city proper of Peking.

The Boxers were murderous. The foreigners went over the wall in the face of savage, relentless fire.

Scores of Boxers bared their chests and ran straight into the bayonets, or into the bullets, of the invaders. As calmly as though they marched on parade, the foreigners breached the walls and entered the city streets.

Boxers fell by scores. Marines dropped here and there; not all the enemy bullets could miss.

**B**UTLER and his men were in the midst of the foremost of the attackers, and here the street fighting of Tientsin was repeated. Only here the Boxers were more sullenly vicious and desperate. They began to give back, fighting as they went, contesting every inch of ground.

Behind the forefront of the slowly retreating Boxers, other Boxers were looting the homes of their own people. Their abuse of women was merely a repetition of what had happened endless times during China's history. Young women, rather than fall into the hands of the Boxers, strangled themselves with their own hair—or choked the wells of Peking with their corpses.

Cries of women and children

sounded through the sullen, roaring of flames. The screams and yells of the Boxers were a satanic accompaniment to the noise of rifles, the clashing of swords against bayonets, the moaning of dying young women, as the foreign troops marched stubbornly forward, bayonets to the fore, hard eyes grimly intent on Boxer targets.

**B**Y the time the marching column had entered Peking, and debouched into its many streets, of which Legation and Hatamen were the most important, they had been tested and tried in the crucible of war. For ninety miles over trackless flat lands, marked only by muddy canals, with here and there an aged temple to the gods of the Celestial Empire, the relief column had marched.

Eyes had become sunken from gazing deeply into horror. Butler and his men had seen heads hanging in baskets on sticks driven down among the graves. They had seen naked women swinging by their hair from crossbars on poles—as though the women had been slain to warn other women.

The Boxers retired sullenly, firing as they retreated, while behind them their fellows dragged women and girls forth by the hair into the streets. Butler and his men raced among the Boxers, shooting them down here, bayoneting them there, but always pushing them further toward the edge of the city, forcing them through walls of black smoke and sullen flames which reached almost to the sky.

Twenty-four hours before, Her Majesty Tzu Hsi had fled from Peking, enroute to Shi An, where she was to spend two years in exile, taking with her His Majesty Kwang Hsu, the prisoner Emperor.

The Boxers, the back of their uprising broken, dispersed outside Peking, and it is probable that many of them were later employed as

"boys" by the very soldiers who would have slain them—all unknowing. The Chinese is adaptable.

But there in Peking Butler got a bullet wound. It didn't seem at first to be serious. But it was.

It sent him to Cavite, near Manila, in the Philippine Islands. The wound, and the deeds of heroism which had resulted in the wound, gave Butler his first brevet. It made him a captain—at the age of nineteen! And captains in the "old" Marine Corps were graybeards usually. Uncle Sam was preparing to reward young Butler.

Later Uncle Sam was to reward him again, with another brevet, jumping him two grades which it would have taken him years to have gone through in the usual way.

Reward for gallantry. But Butler would have given the brevets, the honor and the glory that went with them, had he been well enough to go with Major Waller on his historic march across Samar—the grimmest page in all Marine Corps history.

Butler missed that. It was one of the few things he missed during his more than thirty years of service. Other things he did not miss. If anything happened anywhere, promising excitement, Butler managed to be in on it. Sometimes laughter, sometimes tragedy, traveled with Butler for the next twelve years.

Then came the Nicaraguan Campaign of 1912, with Butler a major, doing spectacular things in the land made famous by William Walker.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Land of William Walker*

UNCLE SAM, in accordance with the tenets of the Monroe Doctrine, intervened in Nicaragua in 1912 to keep some foreign power from doing so to protect her nationals. Nicaragua was having one of her periodic revolutions. She

had had them regularly during all her history.

Filibusters, down the years, had made good names for themselves in these revolutions. William Walker had become famous, had almost made himself absolute ruler of the country. The common people had been repressed and suppressed for ages. Mixtures of Indian, Negro and white, they were easy laughers, full of fun. But they liked to fight. Politics always set them off.

It happened again.

FAMOUS natives had aroused the countryside in a revolt against established authority. Mob rule was the order of the day—and a mob has no horse-sense. Foreigners died with the rest. England, France and America all wished to make sure that their nationals, sojourners in Nicaragua for various business and professional reasons, were safe. Uncle Sam went in to protect lives and property.

In the years which had intervened since the Boxer uprising, Butler had figured in many things. He had visited most of the countries of Latin America. There is little connected with Marine Corps history since the Spanish-American War but what contains the name of Butler.

Due to his past record, Butler was given the task of actively pacifying the country. In common with most people, he had a certain contempt for the natives. He believed, as so many others believed, that "one good American could whip a dozen natives with his hat"; that to pacify the country, to put down banditry, would be a walkaway. He was to discover differently, as Walker and Dulong, and many filibusters whose names have since been lost, had learned before him.

First, the marines were landed at Corinto on the Pacific Coast, with orders to proceed to Managua. There they were to organize the country



and look about them. Butler, for all his fiery disposition, had one mania: he always wanted to do his job without losing the lives of his beloved marines. By the same token, he did not wish to take lives. But if he had to lose lives or take them, he didn't hesitate. For above all things, he was a soldier.

Marines and sailors—for the sailors were a part of every landing party, and the marines are a branch of the navy—entrained at Corinto and started the trip to Managua. Their troubles began the moment they were beyond the protection of battleship guns. Natives ripped up the rails ahead of them. Marines swore. Sailors swore. The train stopped. Butler issued terse commands.

"Replace the rails. Get the train through!"

The men swore, grumbled. They climbed down, rifles slung across their backs, to replace the rails. Utter silence from the surrounding jungles greeted them.

THE white heat of the tropical sun smote their heads and backs. Men burned themselves to crisp agony before they realized it. Men simply *would* strip down to their bare skin to work. And the sun hammered at them relentlessly. The natives, always lazy, hadn't taken the rails very far away. They had simply tossed them aside.

With the first attempt to replace the rails, the jungles awakened to life. Aged fowling pieces, old rifles of all kinds, including the *pata de mula*—mule's leg—were suddenly loosed against the marines and sailors. The mule's leg is a rifle sawed off close to the stock so that it can be thrust into a pants' leg. The bullet makes a small hole going in, but coming out leaves a hole into which a big housecat could crawl.

Bullets smashed into the rails,

caromed off, whining shrilly. The natives, hidden by the jungles, shouted obscenities—and no language, save Chinese, contains the obscenities of which Spanish is capable. Many of the marines and sailors understood Spanish.

BUTLER considered for a moment, standing in the middle of a box-car. Obviously, the rails couldn't be relaid under such heavy rifle fire. Equally obviously, it would be impossible for the marines and sailors to chase the natives very far in the tangled jungle.

"Get those rails down!" snapped Butler, as the marines, true to their training, took cover when the bullets began to fly, unslung their rifles and looked for targets they already knew were invisible.

The marines hesitated.

Butler snapped a command at a non-com.

"Take a handful of men and charge the natives!"

The non-com grinned. He took one side of the track. Another non-com took the other side. That left but a few men to replace the rails, when already there had been too few.

Butler was now a major, with several junior officers to aid him in his work.

"Yank off your blouses and dive into the work!" he snapped at his officers.

Maybe they were aghast at being ordered to labor as the enlisted men labored. Butler didn't look to see whether they were or not. He was the first to strip down to his undershirt, and his scrawny body bowed and bent as he tugged at the rails himself, setting the example for his officers and his men.

Shame-facedly the officers joined in with a will. Rails were replaced.

Bullets continued to come from the woods, but they were flying wild now, because the marines had taken

seriously the command to clear the woods on either side of the track, and the Nicaraguans gave back before the hot lead and the stubborn steel of the leathernecks. Rail by rail, while Butler and his officers sweated and swore, and pretended they didn't know that bullets were flying all about them, the track was rebuilt. The antiquated locomotive, the Masaya, moved forward.

**M**ORE rails had to be laid. The toil was back-breaking, muscle straining, ghastly in the unaccustomed heat. The marines were not impervious to the heat, despite the fact that most of them had come up from Panama, where it really was hot. They cursed the mosquitoes and the natives, but they laid down the rails, and yard by yard the train crawled on toward Managua, capital of Nicaragua.

When the train had distanced the attacking flankers, the marines were pulled in. Up ahead of the trains the marines heard the shouts of natives, the explosions of dynamite, and knew that the sounds meant one thing—more track to be relaid in the face of crazy volley fire from the natives. Butler swore a little, too.

But he wasn't worried about getting through; only that it should not take so long. He wanted to get his job finished and get away. He wanted to get back home to the States to spend Christmas with his family—to whom, besides his few intimates, he was accustomed to using the Quaker mode of address, the "thee" and the "thy" and "thou" of his forefathers who had rooted in Pennsylvania.

The train moved forward.

A bridge had been torn out by the roots. Impossible to reach Managua with the train without that bridge. The landing party had already done prodigious labors. Butler stared at the bridge.

"Build the damn thing strong enough to get this rail-riding peanut whistle across, or we'll have to carry the thing on our backs."

"That would be easier," retorted someone, "than to rebuild the bridge."

It came very nearly being true, for the Nicaraguans knew as well as the landing party did, that unless the train could pass here, it wouldn't reach Managua, and the forces of Uncle Sam would be balked entirely. Butler shook his head.

"Fix the bridge!" he snapped.

Butler led the way as usual. There was no need for further commands when officers worked with the men, sweated and got themselves covered with grime. They worked like Trojans, cutting whatever timbers they needed from the jungle. Snipers hurled lead at them.

Keen-eyed sharpshooters, leathernecks and sailors, lay prone on boxcars, listening to the bellowing of ancient weapons. Now and again some marine cuddled his rifle stock against his cheek, pressed the trigger—and a Nicaraguan dropped out of a tree, surprised beyond measure that a bullet could find his heart when he thought himself so well hidden.

**B**UT the bullets of the Nicaraguans, in spite of the skill of marine marksmen and constant sorties of detachments of marines with fixed bayonets, took a certain toll. Several men, lying very still, some of them ghastly things to look at, rested side by side on boxcars, covered with tarpaulins. They had given their lives for their Uncle Sam. Plenty of natives would live to pay for that, and die to make the payment final.

Butler grimly continued at his task.

At last the bridge was crossed, after work which would live afterwards in the nightmares of the landing party. The noise made by the

natives increased as the marines approached Managua, the city for which the opposing forces were fighting. Butler knew that on the outskirts of the city he would encounter his greatest resistance.

As the train crawled on, he instructed his men to barricade themselves on the boxcars with whatever supplies could be utilized for that purpose. During the last hours of the advance the train had moved so rapidly that the Nicaraguans had not been able to do much damage to the tracks, so they were fairly clear.

Finally the contingent came almost within sight of their objective—to find the way barred by a force which outnumbered the Americans by heaven only knew how many.

Should he attack directly? Butler knew what that would mean. The Nicaraguans might be terrible marksmen, but they had plenty of ammunition; and bullets fired wildly would kill as quickly as any others.

**S**HOULD he hesitate, taking stock of the situation? A man who didn't know Latin-America might have done that. It would have been a horrible mistake. Latin-Americans are grandstanders. They go a lot by appearances. Even for the landing party to hesitate would have been to admit fear. For Americans to admit fear in the face of no matter how great odds, would have been suicidal. They simply did not dare.

"Forward!" snapped Butler.

The train hadn't even slowed at sight of the formidable array ahead. Butler jumped down once or twice and walked along the side of the slowly moving train as it approached the enemy. He had a plan of his own.

The Masaya was pushing the train instead of pulling it, so that the fighters could be nearest to the ene-

my. Butler instructed the engineer and firemen to keep going until something stopped them over which they had no control. Butler's gimlet eyes were narrowed thoughtfully as he noticed what the cagey Nicaraguans were up to. They merely lined the tracks, and packed their men ahead of the train. They were armed but they did not fire.

**B**UTLER might have instructed the engineer to speed up and plow through the Nicaraguans. But to have done so would have been to grind the natives under the wheels. Plenty of native fanatics would have died that way to prove their "patriotism" and to become posthumous heroes. But Butler wouldn't give them that satisfaction.

The train had to slow down to keep from running over natives. The faces of the Nicaraguans were triumphant, grim. Rifles came to the fore. Nobody said anything. Fingers were nervous on triggers. Butler, seemingly, had run his train right into a trap. It was utterly surrounded. Every marine and sailor was covered by more rifles than he could count. Let one finger get nervous, and every American would die. Of course, Nicaraguans would die, too. Butler realized that the tense situation could not be prolonged. He called an interpreter to him quietly. Then he held up two small bags in his hands and instructed the interpreter what to say.

"I've enough dynamite to blow us all off the face of the earth. I'm going through to Managua. Try to stop us, or fire a single shot, and you'll all die!" He lifted the sacks as though to hurl them.

The natives vanished as though a giant hand had erased them.

Butler poured the sand out of the sacks after he reached Managua!

*Further Adventures of General Smedley D. Butler Next Month*

# The King Takes Command

*Death Stalks the Eerie  
Decks of the "White  
Snake" in this Tense  
Drama of the Sea*

**A Complete Novelette**

**By RICHARD B. SALE**

*Author of "The Sting of the Scorpion," etc.*

## CHAPTER I

### *Mystery Yacht*

CAPTAIN BRADLEY, skipper of the *Cumberly*, peered into the sultry night through powerful binoculars across the vast undulating reaches of the South Arabian Sea. A gaudy tropical moon illuminated the scene and a hot desiccated wind fanned his cheek.

"That's damn strange!" he muttered uneasily.

He turned to his companion and handed him the glasses. "Have a look, Ridley," he said.

Martin Ridley, adventurer, who was returning from a hunting expedition through the python country of Malay, accepted eagerly. He was the sole paying passenger on the lumbering freighter and had shipped



*The limp arm reached*

on the *Cumberly* because the pampering ease and comfort of luxurious passenger ships annoyed him.

Ridley quickly leveled the binoculars and adjusted them.

Out of the sparkling crystal-like reaches of the sea, studded with myriad diamonds, a white gleaming ghost leaped to meet his gaze. It was tacking steadily on a direct westerly course through the moonlit night.

Suddenly, even as he watched, it careened far off its straight path and flung wildly to the starboard, its sails flapping idly in the wind. It hung that way a second, a phantom against the shimmering sea.

Then a whipping gust smacked into the canvas and spanked the vessel around again on its former westward route.

It was a two-masted yacht—a beautiful ship.





for the wheel, even in death

"Why, there's no one at her helm!" Ridley cried.

"Exactly," Bradley replied. "All her canvas is set, all her lights are ablaze and yet—there's not a living soul guiding her!"

Ridley felt a tingling eerie thrill shoot down his spine. The yacht had repeated her previous eccentric maneuvers. During the intervals when she doubled back on her own boiling wake, the *Cumberly* gained rapidly on her.

"Stand by," Bradley said at length to his helmsman. "We'll hail her when we come alongside. Keep safely away. We don't want to be rammed to pieces by her if she fouls again."

The captain took up a megaphone and stepped out onto the open bridge, Ridley in his shadow. They were close to the mysterious yacht now. Every graceful line of the

craft was distinct in the deep yellow moonlight.

In the stern of the ship, the helm stood as before, unguarded. The lifeboats were entirely intact. Apparently everything was shipshape.

There ensued a short silence while the freighter crept to the leeward.

"You can make out her name now," said Ridley, pointing. "See there—under the bow? She's the *White Snake*."

"Aye, and she looks like one, twisting and turning that way," Captain Bradley returned gruffly. "It's a wonder she doesn't capsize!"

He lifted the megaphone with both hands. "Ahoy—the *White Snake*!" he bellowed resoundingly.

Except for the weird, ghostly flapping of the sails, uncanny silence greeted him, mocking at him satanically.

Meanwhile the freighter slackened

her pace and hove too, waiting for further orders from the bridge.

"WE'LL board her," Captain Bradley announced abruptly. "If there's no one in her cabins, she'll make a pretty salvage. We can send a power launch to her on the leeward. If she swings over, like before, she'll carry the smaller boat with her."

He ceased speaking without warning and stared at the strange yacht in quick horror. The whites of his eyes gleamed in a terrifying glare and bulged as though they would start from their sockets.

"Good God!" he breathed raspingly:

"What's that?"

A sable, supple shadow danced down the deck of the yacht and stole stealthily past the lighted cabin windows. It was indistinguishable because its height did not lift it into range of illumination. It seemed to crawl, and yet was much too lithe in action.

It embraced the dark murkiness of the yacht's deck like a nocturnal carnivore bat.

"What is it?" Captain Bradley whispered hoarsely, his voice quivering queerly.

Ridley shook his head, an ominous wave of dread and apprehension sweeping over him.

The ebony thing reached the stern. It leaped agilely to the top of the aft hatches, close beneath the main boom.

The ship was becalmed at the moment, and the canvas hung down limply. A rapid blast of hot wind struck into the sails like a bullet. The heavy boom creaked in pain and began to swing!

Instantly, and with lightning alacrity, the shadowy thing hurled itself through the air to the safety and protection of the stern. The bound prodigiously covered a distance of

fifteen feet, and the thing had landed with ease even before the boom began to groan in the agony of its swinging arc.

From the stern, the black thing flashed to the lee of the ship, where it paused briefly, sniffing down distastefully at the flowing sea underneath the yacht. Finally, it trotted to the open door of the salon where it stopped. Cautiously raising its head for enemy scent, it sniffed again.

For a split second, it was barely visible in the glare of the electric lights of the salon.

Then it disappeared like an ebony streak through the doorway, and was gone as mysteriously and quickly as it had come.

It was a ten-foot, sleeky, black leopard—

Captain Bradley and Martin Ridley looked at one another in unholy awe for a moment. Neither was able to say a word. Then Bradley moved to action.

"Make ready to lower away the launch!" he boomed overside to his men below on the decks of the freighter. "Boarding party's going over!"

RIDLEY grabbed the skipper by the arm as he started hurriedly down the gangway.

"I'm going along, Captain," he said firmly.

Bradley grinned. "Okay, Ridley. You're luckier than I am. I've got to stand by with my ship. Maritime law. But it'll need a good shot to take care of that leopard we saw. And after your hunt through the Malaccan jungles—"

"I'm the man," Ridley finished, smiling. "Let's go!" His eyes glowed with excitement.

Captain Bradley led the way to his own cabin first, where he unlocked a closet and brought out two heavy .30-.30 rifles. "Good guns," he

said. "True shots. And here's my own pistol."

He produced a Luger automatic from the arsenal.

"It's a handy gun in a tight spot when you can't swing a long barrel." He proffered it to Ridley who thankfully accepted it, along with an extra clip of cartridges.

**D**OWN on the lower deck, Bradley asked for volunteers. Nearly the entire crew stepped forward. The captain smiled.

"Nice of you boys," he said, "but you can't all go. Let's see. Regan, you handle the launch. Blake, you assist Regan in the launch. It'll be a ticklish job boarding that yacht with no one at the helm. Hill—you go with Mr. Ridley.

"Take the yacht in hand and bring her alongside the *Cumberly*. We'll reef the canvas and put her in tow." Bradley paused. "I need one more man—some one who can handle a rifle."

A young man of about twenty-two, with wavy blond hair and blue eyes, stepped forward. His face was streaked with dirt and his clothes were filthy with black. He was plainly an oiler.

"I'm your man, sir," he said, a smile spreading over his face.

"Name?"

"Stuart Anthony."

"All right, son. You and Ridley here handle the weapons. I'd advise you to plug the big cat before you try to do anything with the ship. And be careful. That's all for the present."

It required but a few seconds for the men to clamber anxiously into the waiting launch and then be lowered into the pacific waters of the sea.

Regan, at the wheel of the boat, gave the engine full gun. They shot away from the freighter in a swirl of foam. Swiftly they approached

the mysterious yacht and saw what a thorough seaworthy beauty she was.

Her long white hull glistened in the moonlight like a living thing. The sharp dagger-like prow sliced into the sea, cutting the waters into whirling phosphorescent curls.

As they came close to the ship, Regan began to jockey the launch into position, converging slowly to meet the prow which plunged erratically into the sea. The oppressive tensivity of the danger injected itself into all of them. A little closer. Their lips tightened; no one uttered a sound.

With the thunderous crack of a giant bull-whip, the wind catapulted into the billowed sails and the boom began to suddenly swing!

Ridley cried: "She's changing! Hard over!"

The white yacht halted jerkily in its former charge and wheeled at them, turning swiftly and steeply. The knife-like prow reached forward to sever them, while the ship towered above them like an omnivorous sea-dragon.

**R**EGAN blanched at the sight over his shoulder, and instinctively jammed the gas control to full, throwing the wheel over with all his strength.

The small boat charged madly to the left like a veteran. But the yacht, through its added impetus, was even quicker.

The prow gently bumped the stern of the launch.

The yacht was pursuing them—pushing them!

Ridley felt a tingling thrill of terror as he looked up and saw the long, sharp bowsprit of the yacht directly over his head.

Beneath it, an iron black guard stretched down to where the hull bit into the sea.

He stood up like a bolt at the

chance, grasped the guard with his left hand, holding his rifle in his right.

Wildly he threw his leg up. It caught and he clung there under the bowsprit, perilously.

Hill, the sailor, immediately saw Ridley's plan. Rising on the rear seats of the launch, he flung himself up at the guard, grabbed it with his two free hands and pulled himself up.

With a little precarious wriggling, he soon gained the bowsprit, from where he reached down and took Ridley's rifle.

Thus freed of the cumbersome weapon, Ridley climbed up beside him on the bowsprit.

Anthony, the youngster, was in trouble.

He followed directly after Hill, but he had no sooner flung his leg over the guard than the big ship veered breath-takingly away from the launch at right angles.

Anthony was dragged down brutally into the sea. He clung with all his strength to the guard, while half his body was immersed. In his other hand he still held the rifle, which he stubbornly refused to cast away to save himself.

Martin Ridley leaned down from his perch.

"Give me your gun!"

Anthony raised it as high as he could and Ridley finally clutched it and brought it up. With his two hands free, Anthony had no trouble in pulling his body from the sea and slowly climbing up the iron guard to the bowsprit.

THEY all steadied themselves there, while the launch roared away, back to the freighter. Then, rifles ready for action, they walked along the bowsprit and finally leaped to the decks of the yacht.

The profound silence held a deathly portent.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Dead Leopard*

"THAT was a nasty moment," Ridley said glancing cautiously about the ship.

"I'll say!" Anthony replied with a grin. "All I could think of was a tiger shark aiming at my pet corn!"

"I didn't know you were going up, sir," Hill put in.

"I didn't know it myself," Ridley explained. "I just saw the guard over me and took a chance."

Anthony grinned. "Well, we made it."

The simple statement reminded them they were not yet safe. Ridley shifted his rifle to an advantageous position and released its safety, wary of the man-killing beast they had seen from the freighter.

The yacht was careening again, the sails cracking stridently.

"I'd sure like to get my hands on that wheel and hold this tub with the wind," Hill remarked uneasily. "But I don't hanker for any cat to go scratching at my back. The black leopard is one of the most savage and vicious of all the cats."

"This ship'll capsize yet, swinging around like that," Hill interrupted anxiously.

Ridley said: "I've an idea. You, Anthony, climb the rigging in the center of the ship there. That will give you a clear view of the decks. If you see anything—shoot, and shoot accurately! Meanwhile, Hill and I will get down to the stern and reach the helm."

"Right," said Anthony. He left their sides instantly and ascended the roof of the first cabin. From there, he reached the rigging of the main mast and climbed up quickly about twenty feet.

Settled in the meshes of the ropes, he surveyed the panorama below with ready gun.



"Can't see a thing," he encouraged.

Reassured briefly, Ridley and Hill crept slowly along the port deck, past the lighted cabins. It was tedious, tense work, every step filled with dread expectancy. They speeded their pace when they reached the door through which the ebony leopard had disappeared, running the distance to the stern. There they jumped down behind the weak protection of the helm.

They saw nothing—

THE main boom was about to repeat its former erratic antics. Hill, with an uncanny sense of seamanship, anticipated the wind and brought the yacht out of its lurching with a steady hand.

"What the hell— Hey, Mr. Ridley!"

The sudden cry through the night startled Martin, until he realized it was Anthony up in the rigging.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"It's the black leopard! Right here below me on the deck! I didn't see it before!"

Ridley felt a terrible chill go through his bones.

"Shoot it!" he cried shrilly, repeating again, more fiercely: "For God's sake, shoot it!"

The answer floated back fantastically across the silent ship.

"I can't! *It's already dead!*"

Ridley glanced at Hill unseeingly, dazedly.

"Dead," he muttered dully, his voice a hoarse whisper. "But—"

"Who could have killed it?" Hill queried automatically.

Ridley shook his head, completely baffled. "I'll be back," he said. He glanced forward.

Anthony was disengaging himself from the rigging. He ran forward to meet the youngster.

"It's over here," Anthony said, when Ridley reached him. "You just passed it. That's how I was fooled.

It's in the shadows by the companionway. It must've been dead when I climbed up here. Otherwise, I would've seen it or heard it. Good it wasn't alive when I climbed up here. I hate to think about that!"

They walked into the turbid blackness of the dancing shadows.

Curled up in a companionway between two cabins and the aft hold, the defunct leopard lay. Its posterior protruded from behind the cabin wall, the only visible part of the dead beast.

The long, black, sinewy tail was looped like a lariat.

Ridley prodded the cadaver with the barrel of his rifle. He frowned suddenly and bent down, shaking his head.

"This is damn queer," he said, lighting a match.

"It's a big fellow, isn't it?" Anthony asked.

"Abnormally so."

"Look at those fangs!" Anthony marveled at the canines. The mouth of the leopard was hanging limply open and the lips curled back away from the gums and teeth. Blood poured from the mouth.

The match flickered out. Ridley rose.

"I DON'T understand this at all," he said. "Here—give me a hand with it. Grab the tail and pull it out in the moonlight where we can get a better look at it."

They yanked the tail with all their combined strength. The leopard was heavy, but soon they had the slain cat in full view on deck. Its right side was turned skyward. There was no wound on the torso. Yet a twisting trail of blood indicated some violence.

Laboriously, they turned the corpse over. There was a bullet hole in the left leg. The slug had penetrated the thigh and had passed out of the dorsum of the lower calf. The

open wound still oozed some blood.

"That's it," said Anthony.

Ridley stared at the laceration. "That can't be it, though." He minutely inspected the rest of the body for possible abrasions. There were none. He bit his lip, mystified.

"What's the matter?" Anthony asked.

"Matter?" Ridley echoed. "I'd like to know what killed this animal."

"Didn't that bullet kill it?"

"Of course not! The wound accounted for the limp the beast had when we first saw it from the *Cumberly*. But it's only a flesh wound and not fatal. But who did it?"

"Maybe there's some one else on board," Anthony whispered.

"There must be. The leopard has been killed *since* we saw it from the freighter. And this bleeding mouth—what does that mean?"

"I don't know," Anthony scowled. "The beast seems sort of swollen, though."

A possibility seized Ridley. He bent down over the beast and lighted another match. The left front leg shrieked for recognition. How he had missed it before, he did not know.

IT had swelled far out of shape and in its abnormality resembled an over-inflated balloon about to burst. The entire front shoulder had expanded.

"Looks like a tumor," Anthony observed.

Ridley shook his head. "No tumor. Something hit him here—a dart perhaps, or a hypodermic needle. It was poisoned.

"The bleeding of the mouth indicates that it was a lethal dosage of some sort of haemotoxic poison.

"I've read of native darts of this type. Such poison destroys cell tissues, eats up the erythrocytes of the blood and is disastrous to the capillary system."

"But this isn't Africa!" Anthony exclaimed, horrified. "Where would such a dart come from?"

"I don't even know if it was a dart. But here's a tiny wound. And the leopard is dead of poisoning."

Both of them became aware of the towering side of the *Cumberly*. Hill, at the yacht's helm, had brought the ship alongside of the freighter for reefing. Hatches in the freighter's side quickly opened and men jumped to the decks of the yacht. In a few minutes' time, the two masts stood nakedly into the sky like tall razed trees. The canvas bellied down helplessly.

THE *White Snake* rose and fell tranquilly, utterly calmed.

"We're taking her in tow," Captain Bradley called down from the *Cumberly's* deck. "Are you staying on there?"

"Yes," said Ridley. "I want to investigate."

"All right," Bradley replied. "If you want me—or if anything goes wrong—blow the yacht's fog horn. See you at breakfast tomorrow."

As soon as they had gotten under way again, this time following the freighter through the pull on a steel cable, Ridley turned to Hill.

"We'll take shifts at that helm if you get tired."

"Not necessary, Mr. Ridley. I'll just rope it by the guide loops here when I get tired."

"Okay."

Ridley joined Anthony past the aft hold cover.

The youth was surveying the dead leopard in disgust.

"What'll we do with it?" he asked.

Ridley grimaced. "Toss it overboard," he said wryly. "No sense letting it lie here."

"Sorta gruesome if we have lady guests," said Anthony in grim conceit.

With difficulty, because of the

dead weight of the beast, they pushed the corpse through the railing of the yacht. It splashed dully into the sea. The phosphorescent foam from the splash floated past them to the rear as the yacht moved on.

"I'm going to explore the cabins," said Ridley. "Want to come along?"

"No use doubling," said Anthony. "I'll go below and look around."

"All right. Be careful though. And take your rifle."

"Don't worry!" Anthony replied.

Ridley watched him descend the stairs of the main companionway in the center of the ship. When he had gone from sight, Ridley walked forward to the cabins. He entered the first one.

At first glance, nothing appeared to be amiss.

The electric bulbs of the room were all flaring brilliantly. It was a spacious room, with a built-in lounge seat under each of the port holes. In a far corner was a Governor Winthrop desk.

It was open—

On it was a white piece of paper. Ridley walked toward the desk to investigate. On the floor he suddenly noticed a heavy automatic rifle and next to it a yellow pencil.

His breath hissed suddenly as he caught it in whistlingly. His eyes went open wide in pure horror.

The yellow pencil was clutched tenaciously in a closed fist. It was the fist of a dead man.

He was sprawled prone — face downward.

### CHAPTER III

#### *A Killer Loose*

RIDLEY was transfixed for several seconds, and his breath came hard. When at last he got a grip on himself, he approached an oblong table in the center of the room and laid his rifle

on it. Then he bent over the dead man, feeling for the pulse. There was none.

But the flesh was still warm!

Gingerly, he removed the pencil from the clenched fist. Its lead point was jaggedly broken, as though a great weight had been placed down on it.

RIDLEY laid the pencil aside momentarily and examined the body for causes of death. Failing to find any wounds, he pulled the body over on its back.

Instantly, he shrank back, repulsed by the grisly sight!

The face of the cadaver was horrible. A livid, unreal purple hue discolored the skin. The pouches of the cheeks were abnormally swollen. Where the open mouth had touched the rug, there was a small pool of dark blood.

The teeth were ferociously bared, as though the man had clung to life with grim tenacity. Under the eyes, the skin had changed to a jet-like color.

Sane features had been transformed into those of a madman.

There was something peculiar in the contour of the man's left leg. Ridley had to cut the trouser leg with his pen-knife and slit it open, the flesh was so swollen. The leg looked as though it had been afflicted with a chronic case of elephantiasis. The expansion of the flesh had been extraordinary.

Puzzled, Ridley rose, still staring at the corpse in helpless fascination. This man — whoever he was — had died in the same manner as the black leopard. There was no doubt he had been poisoned.

Ridley shook his head and shrugged. The whole business was strange and unnatural. It was, apparently, a case of wholesale murder. Where was the crew?

He picked up the pencil and eyed

the jaggedly-broken point speculatively. The man had been writing—

Hurriedly, Ridley moved to the desk, where the piece of white paper had caught his gaze. He picked it up from the open partition of the desk and read it.

THE writing itself began evenly enough, but without warning fell into a puerile scrawl. It read:

"To anyone who reads this: for God's sake, keep out of the hold. The King—"

From the last word, "King," the pencil, instead of finishing the lower loop of the letter g, had described an interrupted zigzag line which reached to the bottom of the paper and had bitten savagely into the veneer of the wood.

The man had undoubtedly died while writing the warning.

Questions immediately flung themselves at Martin Ridley. But the paramount issue of the inexplicable problem was the disappearance of all others who had been on board. That was the crux—this deserted yacht sailing serenely through the tropical night like a great white ghost.

One bullet had been fired from the automatic rifle. Ridley sniffed the barrel. The acrid odor of gunpowder was noticeable. He felt reasonably sure the dead man was the one who had shot the leopard in the leg before they had ever boarded the *White Snake*.

He reread the warning. "—Keep out of the hold. The King—"

The King.

What had the dead man meant to say? Who was the King? The note did not make sense. Ridley shrugged and put it in his pocket. Temporarily, at least, the secret of the note was with the dead man.

"Anthony!"

Ridley had uttered the word aloud.

The sudden realization that An-

thony was down in the hold just struck him. He had been damned thoughtless about the youngster.

The note warned: "—Keep out of the hold—"

There was death in the hold. The King was there. Ridley grew pallid at the thought. He ran from the cabin and tore down to the stern. Hill was sitting behind the wheel, placidly watching the freighter in front of them.

He looked incongruous in his complacency, with horrible death threatening Anthony somewhere in the bowels of the yacht.

"Has Anthony come up yet?" Ridley snapped.

"Not yet, sir," replied Hill.

Icy dread clutched Ridley's heart. He flung himself to the companionway and descended. He remembered he had left his rifle behind him, but he felt for Captain Bradley's automatic, found it and drew it out of his pocket, releasing the safety.

HE navigated the stairs in bounds and leaps, coming into a small, dimly lighted corridor which ran length-wise along the spine of the yacht. Doors opened off it, and toward the stern the hall ended with a door which faced him. It was closed.

There was not the slightest sound. He called softly:

"Anthony!"

No one answered him.

He gripped the butt of his Luger automatic tensely, and proceeded down the corridor with utmost caution.

Stopping before one of the closed doors, he heard the dull vague sound of shuffling emanating from within.

He raised the gun slowly and his trigger finger grew taut.

"Anthony?" he called.

The door opened.

"What's wrong?" Anthony asked,



stepping from the room with youthful nonchalance.

"Thank God you're safe," Ridley breathed.

ANTHONY nodded, smiling, "I'll say. Have you seen the menagerie in the stern yet?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"That room," Anthony pointed at the far door with a sign marked *Danger* on it, "is full of crates and cages, with enough animals to make any curator's mouth water. I'll show it to you."

"No time," Ridley said, tight-lipped. "Follow me. There's some one else on board. A killer. We're not safe down here."

Before the youngster could reply, Ridley turned back through the corridor and climbed up the stairs to the deck, Anthony followed in his shadow.

They went immediately to the forward cabin.

The dead man lay on the floor face up, just as Ridley had left him. Anthony gaped at the hideous cadaver before Ridley covered it with a spread from one of the lounges.

"He looks awful!" Anthony exclaimed.

"No word for it," Ridley said. He picked up his rifle from the oblong table.

"What happened to him?" Anthony asked.

Ridley shrugged. "Same thing that happened to the black leopard. I don't know what it is. But I do know this."

He fished in his pocket and brought out the warning note which the dead man had written. Anthony read it whistling in amazement at the message.

"The King—" he muttered. "Huh! Well, whoever the King is, he's certainly taken full command of this ship."

"Uncle Barton!"

Both of them jumped stiffly erect. It was a new voice, and it had come from one of the doors which opened onto the death cabin. It was followed by a gasping sort of muffled sobbing.

"It's a woman!" Anthony exclaimed.

"Yes," nodded Ridley trying the door from which the cry had come. "The door's locked. I can't open it."

"Uncle Barton!" the inner voice said again.

"It's not your uncle," Ridley said loudly. "I'm a stranger. Do you know where the key to the door is?"

"My uncle had it. He must have it now. He locked me in here."

It was a girl.

The voice was young and sounded dazed and frightened.

Ridley's eyes traveled to the covered cadaver. Then he approached it and pulled the coverlet from it. Reluctantly he went about the gruesome task of searching the dead man's pockets.

He was rewarded with the discovery of a single key. He unlocked the door.

THE girl was against the opposite wall. Her eyes were badly blood-shot and she had been crying. Her black, waved hair was completely disheveled.

"How did you get here?" she whispered. "Who are you?"

Ridley introduced himself and Anthony. "As for how we got here—I'm afraid that's too long a story. You see, something queer has happened. As far as we know, *you* are the only living person on this ship besides ourselves, the man at the wheel, and—the King—"

"What do you mean?" she asked, wide-eyed.

"First," answered Ridley, "what is your name?"

"Lois Trevor." She paused. "This

is my uncle's yacht. We are a week out of Malacca."

"Malaysia?"

"Yes."

"Well," Ridley resumed, "we came upon your ship tonight. It was sailing without a helmsman—in fact, without a crew. We found no one on board but a dead leopard and a dead man."

Lois started. "A dead man?"

"Yes. You may as well know it now. It must be your uncle."

SHE stiffened as though he had slapped her, and swayed.

Anthony jumped forward in order to grab her.

"I'm all right," she said, with Spartan courage.

"Good girl!" said Ridley. "We haven't time for tears. Now, please tell me everything you know."

Lois Trevor nodded and controlled herself bravely.

"I was sitting in the cabin, reading. Uncle Barton had gone down into the hold to look after the animals. Something had gone wrong. Suddenly he burst into the salon. He was very pale and babbled about something terrible that had happened."

"He took a rifle from the closet and told me not to leave the cabin. Then he ran out again. About five minutes later, Mr. Weston ran by the door and yelled at me."

"Who is he?" Ridley asked.

"Paul Weston," Lois answered, "was my uncle's assistant on the expedition."

"I understand. Go ahead."

"After that, Uncle Barton reappeared and flew into the room. He was as white as a ghost and looked as though something had happened to him. He grabbed me by the arm and threw me into my room here, locking the door afterwards. I fainted."

"When I awoke, I heard your

voices and called out, thinking perhaps it was my uncle."

"You were the only woman on board?"

"Yes." Lois grasped Ridley's arm. "But what has happened?"

Ridley shrugged. "I wish I knew. Someone killed your uncle. It's murder by poisoning. By the way, Miss Trevor, was there any one on board who was called the King?"

"Why—no! Why do you ask?"

"Because some one, who calls himself the King, murdered your uncle, Barton Trevor."

"And killed a black leopard in the bargain," added Anthony. "That's what I don't understand. What kind of a trip is this—the aft hold is loaded with wild animals?"

"Barton Trevor was a famous hunter who brought 'em back alive," Ridley explained. "He supplied the different zoos and serpentariums of the states with wild cargo which he captured."

"But what are we going to do?" Lois asked, terrified.

"The answer to the carnage is in the hold," Ridley said. "Otherwise, your uncle would not have warned us against it. There's some one hiding down there. The King, perhaps—and I mean to find him. I'm going down."

"But that's dangerous!" Lois cried.

RIDLEY laughed. "So is taking a walk! You stay here with her, Anthony. Don't leave the cabin until I return. If you hear me fire a shot, you'd better hurry up and come to my rescue."

"Okay, Martin."

Ridley left his rifle on the table, but carried a pistol with him. In a closet of the cabin, he found a powerful flashlight and a heavy *machete* in a thick leather scabbard. He strapped it over his shoulder like a gun holster.

Then, taking up the flashlight, he

traced his way to the companionway and descended cautiously, playing the amber beam of the flash before him like a dancing tennis ball.

After Ridley left them, Anthony and Lois Trevor sat in the cabin and talked to pass the dragging time. About a half-hour passed, with no sound from below.

Becoming apprehensive, Anthony rose and began to pace the floor of the cabin where he and the girl had been sitting. Of a sudden, as he shifted his rifle from one arm to the other, a sudden shock knocked him off-balance and hurtled him to the floor.

HE rose to his feet, baffled by the cause. He became aware that the *White Snake* was lurching chop-pily from side to side in short, swift strokes.

"This tub's floundering like a fish out of water," Anthony said. "Hill's not holding her. She's liable to spin around. You wait here, Miss Trevor. I'll be right back."

He left the cabin and ran down to the stern, rolling with the side-swiping antics of the yacht. He covered the distance rapidly. The helm in the stern was revolving idly. The spokes whirled like spinning gyros.

No one guarded it—the yacht was masterless once more!

Anthony called: "Hill! Where are you?" Only an eerie silence answered him.

He sprang forward, a nameless dread materializing in his heart. As he started to seize the spinning helm, he saw something and stopped with breath-taking suddenness.

A body had fallen there, crumpled limply, one of its arms reaching for the unguarded wheel—even in death.

The face was partly upturned in the yellow moonlight. It was marked with indescribable lines of terrible agony. The wild, staring eyes seemed

to burst from their sockets. The condition of the body was startlingly like that of Trevor's.

And it was the sailor—Hill.

Struck dumb with shock and stupefaction, Anthony only removed his fascinated scrutiny from the corpse to adjust the free helm. He stepped over the dead man and awkwardly brought the yacht around. Then he fastened the guide ropes to hold the ship in a straight course without a master.

He did not glance at Hill again. Instead, he ran breathlessly to the forward cabin where he had left Lois Trevor.

He was excited and panicky when he hurtled in.

"Hill's dead!" he cried piercingly. "Out there in the stern. The King got him—just like the others! I'm going down after Ridley. You stay here. Right in the cabin—lock the doors!"

"And no matter what happens, don't open them until you hear from me. There's a killer loose on this ship!"

## CHAPTER IV

### *The King!*

AS Martin Ridley descended the gangway into the hold, after leaving Lois Trevor and Anthony, he miscalculated a step, missed his footing and plunged headlong down to the bottom of the stairs.

He cursed and picked himself up, badly bruised. Then he continued down the corridor to the animal room in the aft of the ship.

The lights were on.

They disclosed an unusual spectacle to him. In sundry boxes, crates and cages, arranged around the capacious hold, was a startling variety of beasts, birds and smaller mammals.

The mate of the defunct black leopard was pacing in its cage. In

rowed cages, next to it, were four royal Bengal tigers, beautiful specimens with gorgeous, gleaming stripes. Multi-colored birds of exquisite resplendency were held captive in cages behind the big cats. Monkeys and apes also constituted the cargo. It was a formidable group.

RIDLEY entered quickly and closed the door behind him. He went to an empty cage next to the leopard, which snarled furiously and struck at him through the narrow bars of its cage. The tigers regarded him unblinkingly, without moving.

The cage of the dead leopard was bound at the base of its stakes with strong rattan. Evidently this rattan had been chewed and eaten until it had weakened considerably. Ridley concluded that, in fury of aggravation the dead leopard had struck the weakened fiber a strong blow and had thus escaped to the deck.

But Ridley felt the break for liberty had been coincidental with something else—something far more sinister.

Further inspection brought him to a packing case, securely nailed. It had two small bored holes in the side. The label on the box read: *Regal Pythons (2)*.

He moved away from the box instinctively. On top of it, however, he noticed two red-haired, weasel-like rats in a small cage. Their label read: *Herpestes Mungo*. But that meant nothing to him.

They were odd specimens with bristly long fur.

Ridley finally left the animal room and explored the corridor. His foot struck a bamboo pole with a wire noose on it. He kicked it aside and went on. The first door on his left was open. He peered in, throwing the beam of the flashlight ahead of him.

There was a man on the floor—probably the cook. He had died in the ship's galley. A quick glance showed that the King—whoever the killer was—had not been responsible for this man's demise.

The man's face was upturned and had been clawed to ribbons.

"Leopard got him," Ridley thought. "He probably stood in the way as the cat escaped, and it struck him down. Rotten luck!"

He closed the door after him and went on to the next room. His spotlight fell upon the sign on the door, which was ajar, opened about a foot wide. He approached it closer and read it.

*Danger, it said. Poisonous Reptiles.*

RIDLEY felt his hair rise a little on the back of his neck. He took a deep breath. This was rotten business. He would rather have fought a dozen head-hunters bare-handed, than play around venomous serpents. He cautiously pushed the door open full length.

Here, too, the lights were on.

He went in. On tables against the walls, all around the room, were boxes of all shapes and sizes. They had heavy meshed wire for their tops, nailed down firmly at the four corners. Nothing seemed amiss. Ridley crossed the room and looked into one of the boxes through the semi-opaque meshed top.

A squalid ugly maple-leaf headed snake was coiled within, motionless. It was a Gaboon Viper, third deadliest serpent of the world.

That sufficed. Ridley decided to get out of there pretty damned fast. Examining snakes did not appeal to him much.

He cast a sweeping glance hurriedly around the room.

One of the snake boxes was lying on the floor on its side!

Instantly Ridley snapped to at-



tention. His hand flew to his pocket for his automatic.

*It was gone!*

Ridley felt an empty sensation sweep through him. He thought rapidly. The Luger must have dropped from his pocket when he fell down the stairs while descending into the hold. He tried to shake off his nervousness, and took a closer look at the fallen box.

It was empty.

He picked it up and placed it on the table again. The wire mesh in one corner was raised, leaving a yawning hole. The identifying label on the side read: "*Elapidae* genus: *Naia Hannah*."

The scientific name confused him. *Elapidae*. That was a sub-species of the Colubrine snake family. He knew that. But *Naia Hannah*. What the devil did that mean?

He shrugged. There was a red star on the box with a notice, "Special Care." The two words stuck in his mind—*Naia Hannah*. Hadn't he read somewhere—

"God!" he exclaimed hoarsely. His hand went to his mouth in a motion of awe at the sinister translation of the words.

"I've got it!" he cried stridently, staring in horror at the labeled box. "I've got the answer to the whole mystery!"

HE heard a slight shuffling noise in the corridor outside.

"Anthony! Anthony!" he shouted. "Come here quickly! I've got it! What a maze it's been—but I know the answer! I know who the King is!"

He turned as he spoke. And froze like death! There was only the sharp piercing intake of his gasping breath. His blood felt like ice-water in his veins. Eyes widening in terror, the skin of his face drained a ghastly white, he stood stock still.

There was unmitigated terror in the room as he met the accusing gaze of the intruder. For it was not Anthony.

At last Ridley found his voice, a tremulous whisper.

He groaned, "The King!"

## CHAPTER V

### *Grim Battle*

RIDLEY was dazed with the unanticipated proximity of the ruthless killer. It was the King beyond all doubt, evilly regal in all his deadly character.

The King was a fantastic entity, shaped at the head like a diminutive parasol. Its two black, elliptical, unmoving eyes glittered like cold, hard diamonds at Ridley. Its body was a repugnant gray-white and on the upturned belly was a series of half-etiolated, scaly rings.

A King Cobra!

The famous long-sought white hamadryad of Celebres which Barton Trevor had searched for all his life, for the fame it would bring him—and which instead, had brought him horrible death. It was fifteen feet in length and its ominous spectacled hood was spread wide, raised plainly by the small anterior ribs at the sides of the throat. Ridley recalled flashingly a cobra was able to elevate its body one-third of its length.

Now, the King seemed to tower above him.

It swayed back and forth less than a dozen feet away, concerned with Ridley's presence, yet completely unafraid.

Ridley remained like a marble statue, fearful even of breathing. He did not want to antagonize the great serpent to action.

Cold, clammy sweat exuded from his brow.

The King remained motionless.

With his automatic lying some-

where at the foot of the gangway in the corridor, Ridley was helpless. And he knew what a lightning blow the snake could deliver from that strategic position!

RIDLEY thought of the keen *machete* in its scabbard around his shoulder. He knew the deadliness of the bolo-knife, but wondered how he could ever make it effective without getting into the cobra's lethal range.

If he could only throw it, like book heroes did!

Reptile and man regarded each other fixedly. Transfixed, Ridley made no move toward his *machete*. His throat was tight and painfully dry.

What was it snake charmers did? Those filthy beggars with their baskets of venomous snakes—they played a piccolo, didn't they? Or hummed a tune? Ridley tried it. He began to hum a popular melody in a low, fear-rasped voice.

The King hissed shrilly and raised its hood slightly. Simultaneously, the tune ceased. Ridley knew he had angered the snake. He watched it rigidly for the next move. Slowly his hand crept up to the *machete* and drew it from its scabbard. Inch by inch. Monotonously tense.

At last, the big knife came out. Its fat hilt felt reassuring in his clenched fist.

The King had seen enough. The long squalid length dissolved as the deadly head went down to the floor. By a series of shallow lateral loops, the snake's repulsive body slithered squirmingly across towards Ridley.

An experienced herpetologist might have frozen immobile and lifeless in such a predicament, and thus avoided rousing the creature's ire and animosity. Ridley liked life too much to take the chance. He fell back with a rush against the boxes of the other reptiles. They hissed angrily

at the disturbance and reared within their dens.

The King's tongue flicked out at the action of the man. The deadly head rose like an arrow, its grim hood expanded.

Ridley was in a dangerous position—he had placed himself in a corner from which there was no retreat.

And he was now within the striking range of the vicious fangs with their bursting venom sacs.

His grip on the knife tightened. It was a fight to the death now. He glanced around despairingly for something to help him, anything! A small chair was next to him.

HE seized it and held it out in front of him.

The cobra struck!

The grisly gray length shot forward in a bullet-like streak. For a second Ridley thought he had been bitten, the toxic fangs came so close to his hand on the chair. His stomach rolled, nauseated at the closeness of the hideous dart.

The cobra was back into a raised position faster than his eyes could follow the action. There were two drops of greenish vicious venom on the wood of the chair.

This was too much for Ridley's nerves.

Blindly, he flung the small chair at the snake's hooded head. It struck the cobra full on, and hurled the squirming length cruelly to the floor. With rapid dexterity, Ridley leaped over the snake as it struggled to free itself from beneath the chair.

He reached the corridor safely, but before he could close the door, the white reptile had wriggled out and launched itself at him in a new attack.

Ridley raced down the corridor, terrified. He reached the aft hold where all the other animals were housed. He leaped in and slammed

the door after him with terrible force. Then he swore blackly.

HE had pushed the door so hard that the catch had missed the lock. It swung slightly ajar. Ridley backed away and dashed from the entrance, climbing up on top of the cages.

The beasts were roaring and pacing to and fro in frenzied pandemonium. Some smashed themselves against the sides of the cages in their maddened efforts to get free and escape.

They were panicky, and with good cause, Ridley admitted.

Out of the turbid darkness of the corridor, the white cobra materialized like an apparition—an avenging specter. It glided past the open door, into the room. It halted and coiled. The hood rose ominously. A hiss. The neck inflated.

Simultaneously, there fell a profound silence.

The four tigers and the solitary black leopard stood as still as marble carvings. They seemed to sense that death was close to them. Ridley was reminded, strangely of a setter pointing a covey of birds.

The King, regally erect, swayed perceptibly, its eyes beady as black onyx.

Ridley was breathing fast. He gripped the knife in his hand and waited—waited. For an interminable time, neither snake, man nor beasts moved.

Then Ridley noticed, for the first time, a peculiar paradox. In the small cage on top of the Regal Python crate, were the red-haired little weasel-like rats. They were very excited. Their long hairs had bristled up and stood stiffly erect. There was a queer sparkle of expectancy in their tiny eyes. Somehow—they were unafraid, not daunted like all the others.

"Mongooses!" Ridley cried aloud.

A Kipling children's story came surging up into his mind out of the remote past. *Rikki-tikki-tavi!*

The little rats were dancing excitedly on the floor of their cage now, instinctively sensing a climax. With a strong slice, Ridley brought the razor-edged blade of his *machete* down against the wooden stakes.

They split into pieces and crumbled to the floor. The mongooses flashed like twin red sparks from the cage through the gap.

The King had started to glide away, but instantly reared up again. The two weasels stepped stealthily up to the great serpent. When they reached the outer circumference of the snake's striking range, they paused tantalizingly.

FOR a second no one moved. Ridley could hear his heart pounding like a trip-hammer.

Then one of the mongooses stepped into range.

The white snake struck like a fiery bolt of lightning, hurling its hood forward and down. The body struck flat on the floor and thudded. The cobra darted upright again, so quickly that Ridley only had a blurred impression of the rapid movement.

That anything could elude a strike of such astonishing rapidity amazed Ridley. But the mongoose was still there. Its lips had curled back and it was snarling angrily, its needle-like teeth in plain view.

In the meantime, the second mongoose had traversed the outer rim of the snake's range and was back at the tail. The little beast nipped it smartly. The cobra swayed. Its tail lashed furiously, but the head never moved its concentrated stare from the enemy in front.

The first mongoose moved slightly forward. Again, the snake struck like lightning, brushing through the erect hairs on the weasel's back;

Ridley was sure the fangs had gone home.

But the little red mongoose danced lithely out of danger.

AT the same moment, the second mongoose bit savagely into the snake's spine.

The scaly head shot around at the rear oppressor. As though prearranged, the first mongoose stepped in and snapped at the serpent's belly. Then both animals dashed back out of danger.

The white cobra raised up again.

For several minutes this procedure persisted. The snake's beady eyes still glittered with that ruthless intent, but Ridley sensed the reptile was worried. He watched the strange duel, fascinated.

The cobra was tiring. Its body was heavy, and the constant strike and return of its head to a firing position was a fagging exertion. The task was telling. Ridley could see its movements slowing up.

So engrossed was he with the conflict between mammal and reptile that he failed to hear steps approaching in the corridor. He suddenly saw the long protruding barrel of a rifle aimed through the door at the raised head.

"Don't shoot!" he cried fiercely.

Anthony, in the doorway, lowered the gun in amazement.

"Don't shoot?" he echoed, stunned. "My God, Ridley, let me kill the damned thing!"

"No," Ridley replied. "Not unless you have to. Let the mongooses get it."

He was really safe now. The cobra's lunges had carried the snake away from him. Anthony had his rifle in case of emergency. The little weasels had made a brave fight. They wanted to finish it.

Suddenly, it was all over.

Ridley had thought the snake was fast. But he never even saw the

leap when the first mongoose fastened his teeth into the depths of the cobra's throat. There was an indistinct red streak. The snake went down from its height, twisting and squirming revoltingly on the floor.

The second mongoose dived into the fracas, onto the back of the turning serpent. Its fangs sank into the reptile's spine in a paralyzing grip.

Chaos followed.

Despite the terrific thrashing of the long body, both little beasts hung onto the snake like grim death. They were brutally beaten and banged on the floor. Neither released its grip. The mass became a seething fury of red fur and ugly white snake.

The wild uncontrolled tantrums of the cobra continued for several minutes before the great snake fell still. Its spectacled hood collapsed limp, the mouth hanging open.

The mongooses loosened their grips at length and sniffed the body with uncanny caution. Their long side-whiskers were badly rumped from the ordeal. They began to yank and tear the body, dragging it around the room.

Anthony was breathing as though he had run a race. Ridley joined him at the door.

"That was the most exciting thing I ever saw," Anthony muttered.

Ridley nodded. He couldn't get his wind.

His stomach felt empty. He closed the door after them firmly.

Somehow—the King had met with a poetic justice.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Ridley Explains*

"HOW did you happen to come after me?" Ridley asked as they walked through the corridor to the gangway.



"Hill's dead," Anthony replied soberly. "That damn snake must have come up on deck and bitten him. He died like Trevor and the leopard."

Ridley's face looked pained.

They reached the deck and walked to the cabin where Anthony had left Lois Trevor. She looked up as they entered and held her finger to her lips.

"What's the matter?" Ridley asked in a hoarse whisper.

"I've heard something," she replied in a low voice. "Listen here against the wall."

They ran forward to where she stood and took up listening posts, ears to the wall.

There was a sound—an inexplicable sound like that of a person stirring.

"Where is that room?" Ridley asked.

"On this side," Lois answered.

RIDLEY motioned to Anthony. He ran out of the cabin around to the starboard deck, stopping abruptly before a closed door. He tried it. It was locked.

"No lights on inside," Ridley muttered.

"What'll we do?" Anthony asked.

"Break it in. You've got a gun?"

"Yeah. Here's your pistol. I found it down below."

Ridley nodded his thanks.

"Heave!"

They threw their bodies against the door like a battering ram. The wood groaned with the force. Again they hit it, projectile-like. The lock split and the door swung open with a bang. Ridley leveled his pistol and waited.

Nothing happened.

They listened. A voice within was groaning faintly.

"Turn on the lights," said Ridley. "There's some one in there. A man."

Anthony groped along the wall, found the electric light switch and threw it on. The bulbs in the cabin burst into a bright glare, illuminating the place brilliantly.

The groaning man was lying on the bunk of the cabin, face-down. He kept rolling back and forth as though in severe pain. Ridley bent over him and pulled him on his back.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

The man seemed not to see him, although his eyes bored into Ridley's with an insane, terrified gleam. "That damned snake!" he muttered wildly. "It's loose—you mustn't let it near me."

"HE'S nuts," said Anthony, perturbed.

"It's only shock," Ridley answered, more at ease. "Amnesia, too, probably. Evidently, he came in close contact with the King. I know the feeling.

"Nerves can snap from the terrible tension and strain."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. Suppose you get Lois Trevor. She ought to be able to identify him."

"That's right," said Anthony. "I'll get her."

He disappeared through the door of the cabin.

When he had gone, Ridley sat down on the bunk and lifted the stricken man's head. "Take it easy," he said. "We've killed the snake. It's dead, gone. It won't hurt anyone else now."

The man looked at him without comprehension, eyes glazed and glassy.

Anthony re-entered the cabin, followed closely by Lois Trevor.

"I can't bring him out of it," Ridley said.

"It's Mr. Weston!" Lois exclaimed in surprise.

"Paul Weston?"

"Yes, Uncle Barton's assistant;

what can be the matter with him?"

"Shock and amnesia. See if he recognizes you."

A strange new light pervaded Weston's stare as he gazed at Lois Trevor. He tried to speak but could only grunt. His second effort was more successful. His voice trickled out raspingly: "Barton—"

GRADUALLY recognition displaced the imbecilic emptiness of his eyes. He tried to sit up, accepted Ridley's aid. He looked at both men carefully.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Friends," said Ridley. "What has happened tonight? You know, don't you? Tell us what has happened."

"The cobra—" Weston murmured. "The King Cobra. God, yes. That's it. I—went mad. Something snapped out there—after the snake got loose."

"Tell us everything," Ridley encouraged soothingly.

A frown lined Weston's face. "I went down into the serpentarium to water the snakes." He paused. "Yes, that was it. I was watering the snakes. The white cobra's water tin was dry. It was an emergency sardine can. I took it out safely and filled it. Then as I pulled up the wire mesh to drop the tin into the box—the snake struck at me!"

He licked his lips.

"I dropped the can and my elbow knocked the box to the floor. The snake began to crawl out. I had no weapon. I ran for Barton. When I got him, we both came down, he with a rifle and a snake noose. The cobra had gone into the aft hold and the animals were all in a frenzy.

"Then—it happened! The leopard, the black leopard was so terrified by the presence of the snake, it struck the lashings of the cage and split them open, escaping.

"I ran upstairs instantly. I heard Barton shoot at the beast. On deck,

my mind seemed to snap. I tore for my cabin here and locked myself in. That's all I remember."

"And it's enough," said Ridley. "The entire puzzle is pieced together, thanks to Weston's testimony. I think I can explain the whole thing intelligibly now."

"Well, explain it, then," Anthony insisted. "I haven't the slightest idea what it all means."

Ridley leaned back comfortably and lighted a cigarette.

"You just heard Weston's story," he began. "Therefore you know everything leading up to the liberation of the great snake. All right. Listen.

"After Weston left, Trevor took a shot at the black leopard and put a slug through the beast's leg.

"YOU remember, Anthony, that we saw the wound before we tossed the cat overboard. I saw Trevor's gun in the cabin with one shot fired. The leopard evidently went past Trevor, struck down the cook in the galley and then went up the gangway to the deck.

"Trevor meanwhile was faced with the problem of recapturing the white cobra—the snake which would at last give him renown. Somehow—we shall never know the way precisely—he laid himself open to a bite from the serpent and the snake bit him in the leg."

Ridley paused as Lois Trevor gasped in horror.

"He knew immediately that he was doomed," Ridley resumed. "An intravenous injection of King Cobra or *Naia Hannah* venom will kill a victim in five minutes. It has been known to kill elephants in less than two hours."

"But that snake was smart," Anthony intervened. "I never knew a serpent had a brain like that."

"Most of them haven't," said Ridley. "The King Cobra is one of the

exceptions. It is a canny creature. It knows enough to strike an elephant between the toes. Otherwise, its fangs could not pierce an elephant's tough skin."

"GO on, please," Lois Trevor put in.

"Trevor immediately abandoned all hope of recapturing the snake. He had no antivenin serum aboard. He was dying and he knew it. So his next concern was for his niece—Miss Trevor here.

"He ran upstairs again to warn Lois. He grabbed her and pushed her into her own room, locking the door securely after her. Thus, neither the King Cobra nor the black leopard could reach her or harm her. This done—he realized that the masterless yacht would soon attract the attention of a passing ship, and that he had to leave—"

"Just a second," said Anthony, interrupting. "There's something I still don't understand. Why is the yacht masterless? Where the devil is the crew?"

Ridley tossed his cigarette expertly through the door, over the railing and into the sea.

"I'll come to that later," he answered. "Trevor knew he had to leave a message for any one who happened to board the *White Snake* to investigate its unguarded helm. He took a piece of paper from the desk and wrote the warning which perplexed us so.

"You recalled the words: '*To any one who reads this: For God's sake—keep out of the hold. The King—*' He never finished what he started to say. And the message was so garbled that it fooled us. We thought the King was a human being, a man, a murderer who knew what he was doing.

"Instead it was a ruthless snake, whose instinct is to kill.

"What Trevor meant to say, prob-

ably, was: 'The King Cobra is loose.' or some similar warning."

"But the black leopard," Anthony put in. "What about that? We saw the beast alive when we came upon the yacht with the freighter. When we got on board, only half an hour later, the beast was dead."

"The black leopard," Ridley explained, "was no problem at all. We knew it was an escaped animal. How it escaped, we know from Weston's story. Captain Bradley and I were the first to see it. Finally, it disappeared in the doorway of the salon. I noticed then that it limped and evidently had been shot.

"DURING the half an hour which it took us to board the yacht from the *Cumberly*, the black leopard must have passed unknowingly close to the coiled King Cobra and was savagely bitten by the white snake."

"In the left foreleg!" Anthony cried. "That's why it was so swollen and I thought it was a tumor."

"In the left foreleg," nodded Ridley.

"And Hill," Anthony ran on, "that's how he died. The King bit him while he was at the helm."

"Of course," said Ridley. "The King was the crux of the whole mystery. He struck silently and disappeared. Trevor, when writing the note, did not think that the snake would leave the hold and come up on deck.

"But it did. The cobra confused us all the time by shifting the scene of his operations."

"But where is the crew? Where has every one gone to?"

"That was the most redoubtable riddle," Ridley said soberly. "I couldn't figure that for quite a while. Consider the psychology of the situation. You, with the other sailors, know something is wrong. You crowd around the companionway entrance, the only exit from the hold,

wondering what is happening down there.

"Suddenly, and completely without warning, you hear a horrible screech and bloodthirsty snarls. Then a roaring, raging, demon of a monster hurtles up the companionway in red fury, clawing, snapping, crashing its way to freedom!

"UNDER such an unexpected stress, you would have done just what the rest of the crew did to escape that omnivorous ebony leopard. *They dived overboard!*

"In the utter pandemonium of the split second, fear overpowered their reasoning. They did anything to escape the furious cat. I'm certain they went over the side. Otherwise they would have climbed into the shrouds of the rigging. But there was no time for that. They never got a chance to run or scatter. They were stunned, stupefied! The leopard tore right into the midst of them!"

Anthony's face clouded with pity and feeling at the thought. "Overboard," he said dully. "Then the sharks—"

Ridley nodded. "The sharks got them, without a doubt. These are warm waters. Probably full of tiger sharks and hammerheads. It's tragic, tragic."

There was a long unbroken silence. Finally they all rose, Ridley,

Anthony, Lois Trevor and Paul Weston. They left the cabin and walked out onto the deck. The rosy dawn had broken the night sky and the fragment of a moon had vanished, dissipated by the expanding light of the day.

In the stern, the grisly arm of Hill's corpse still reached up towards the fixed helm.

A thunderous roar boomed through the semi-cool morning sky and bounced reverberatingly along the decks of the trim white yacht with its wild cargo.

They all looked up quickly, startled.

OVER the high dark looming stern of the *Cumberly*, Captain Bradley stood, the huge megaphone at his mouth.

"Ahoy! Ahoy—the yacht!"

Ridley cupped his hands and answered, "Ahoy, Captain."

"We're putting about," Bradley's voice floated down. "We're going to take you aboard. Is everything shipshape?"

"Yes, sir," Ridley replied. "Everything is shipshape." Under his breath he added, "now."

"All right, Ridley. Stand by. We've got ham and eggs for breakfast!"

Anthony sighed. "Gee," he said boyishly, "ham and eggs never sounded so sweet to me before."

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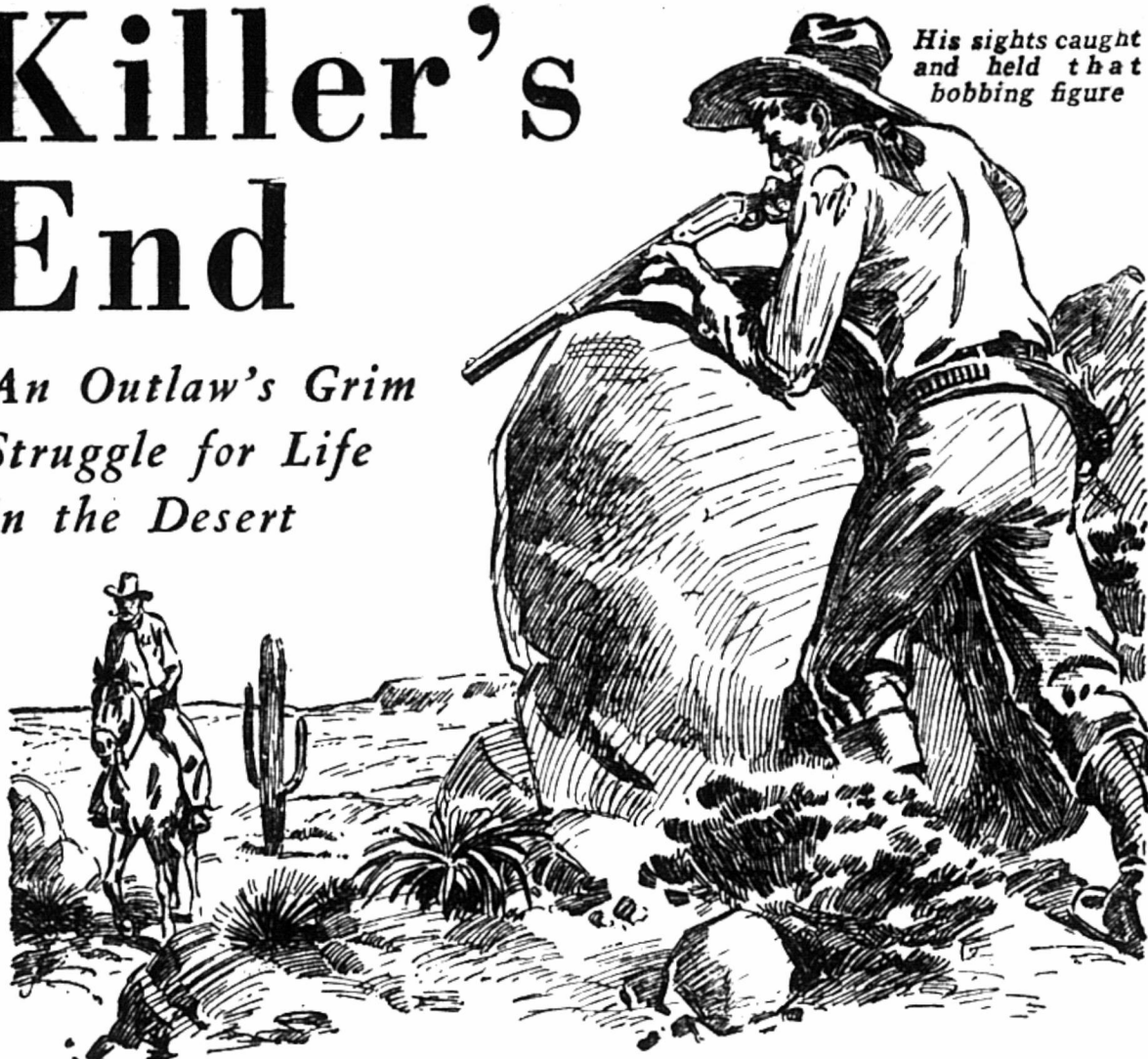
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# Killer's End

*An Outlaw's Grim Struggle for Life in the Desert*



His sights caught  
and held that  
bobbing figure

By LLOYD ERIC REEVE

Author of "Stacked Cards," "The Calgary Kid," etc.

THE things men fear are seldom the things they think they fear. Lobo Larson had long been possessed by a sensation of being mysteriously followed. In a sort of blind defiance he fought his fellow men, fled from them, hid from them.

He didn't know that they were only the symbols of his fear; that the three who haunted him were untouchable; that he could no more defeat or escape them than he could his own shadow.

At the summit of the heat-hazed slope, Lobo Larson's great body was crouched behind a granite boulder. His battered sombrero was punched back, his ragged shirt sticky with

sweat and half unbuttoned, revealing a red bulge of hairy chest.

His thin lips were lifted from white teeth in a snarling grin; his enormous hands clutched a ready rifle; and his inflamed eyes, lit now with an almost insane brilliance, maliciously watched the gaunt figure of old Sheriff Dunsing, riding slowly up the trail.

For twelve hours Lobo had been aware of the sheriff's relentless pursuit, and he had now decided that the time to end it had come. His hatred for Dunsing was savage, personal, a consuming flame. Yet, strangely, he had never talked with the old peace officer, had never seen him before.

But the Lobo was an outlaw and

a killer, with a dozen rewards on his head, a new murder fresh on his hands. Against this stood Dunsing's record as a sheriff, a dogged enemy of the wild ones, gaunt symbol of law and order.

It was this same Dunsing who had once said: "An outlaw is his own worst enemy; give any one of 'em enough rope, an' sooner or later he'll hang himself." Because Dunsing was the natural enemy of all outlaws, Lobo hated him instinctively, with a snarling defiance, as the slinker wolf hates the pursuing hounds.

The old sheriff lounged in his saddle, his spurs jingling and leather creaking, as he slowly ascended the stony trail. Once he drew rein, mopping his brow and letting the lathered roan snort and blow.

He filled and lighted his pipe. Then he came on, smoking moodily, his lank body wearily slumped.

The Lobo glanced furtively rearward, over his left shoulder, then back at the sheriff. The hair at the base of his skull prickled oddly; his lips stretched malignantly. It was still a risky shot, long and down-hill, but a passion to kill suddenly swept aside his last vestige of caution.

He whipped up his rifle, pressed it to shoulder, closed one eye and squinted down the shining barrel. He took a deep breath, held it, steadied his grip. His sights caught and held that bobbing figure, followed it like a pointing finger of fate.

Then carefully he squeezed the trigger.

"Cra-ack!"

**E**VEN as the shot echoed, the gaunt sheriff leaped rigid. His arms flew out, his sombrero bounced upward, his white hair gleamed silver in the sunlight.

For one instant he was splayed thus, pipe clenched between teeth, staring at the sky; then he slid from the saddle, rolled over the edge of

the trail, and tumbled from sight among looming boulders and gnarled mesquite. His startled horse, whirling suddenly and dashing down the trail, at a terrific pace, sent a dusty shower of rocks clattering after the vanished body.

The Lobo came slowly erect. He stared downward, grinned darkly, instinctively struck his naked chest with a clenched fist. Suddenly his whole body tingled to a savage exultation, a sense of enormous power and strength, but at the same time he had the strange impulse to lift his head and mournfully howl.

It was always thus when he killed—it made him feel desperate and god-like.

**H**E turned finally, gazed southward and again snarled. Not at a man now, but at a more inscrutable enemy, the bland and tawny desert. As far as he could see, it flashed and scintillated, like yellow flesh palpitant beneath the fiery breath of sun—a land bewitched—vast, flickering, desolate. The wind-sculptured dunes, the supplicant cacti, the slow-drifting pillars of dust, stretched on to a faraway world of mountains exploding in purple splendor against an indigo dome of sky.

The Lobo was hunted, a price on his head, afoot and without food or water. Those distant mountains were in Mexico, water at their base. To reach them he must first pass through a smoldering inferno, withstand strange tortures, endure beyond the limit of ordinary flesh. But he had no choice. They symbolized his sole hope for freedom and life. They were sanctuary.

Life? He glanced quickly over his shoulder, furtively, convinced again that something stood just behind him. He saw nothing. He whirled back toward the desert. He flung away his rifle and struck his chest. No! He would not die. He could not.

His bullet head thrust forward a half growl rumbled from his bulged throat, and suddenly he stalked defiantly ahead, down the heat-hazed slope and into that blistered inferno.

He thought he was unafraid—he didn't know that his courage was nothing but an insanity of fear.

For long hours he made steady progress, marching grimly on, head and shoulders thrust forward, great fists clenched, his gaze fixed on that mountainous goal ahead. He seemed constantly to sense a whisper of footsteps behind, yet whenever he glanced back he saw nothing but an illimitable sweep of desert. He plodded doggedly on, his legs aching, throat parched, a weakening gnaw of hunger in his vitals.

The sun sank impassively in the west; night pressed down, a massive thickening of purple silence. A wind came secretly, hot as the fetid breath of a tiger, and the millions of grains of sand moved and slyly hissed, filling the night with a subtle stirring like the darkening beat of wings.

He stumbled, faltered, and sank finally to ground. He knew he must rest, and he slept for a time with his body pressed close to the feverish earth. He dreamed that Sheriff Dunsing had captured him, that he was tied to an iron gate, a slow fire built beneath.

HE writhed and twisted, incoherently muttered. Thirst finally strangled him awake. He lurched again on his feet, staggered on.

The stars were molten silver. A moon like an inflamed eyeball rose sluggishly out of the east, slowly bisected the sky, sank sluggishly in the west. Somewhere in the vast waste a wild burro hysterically brayed. The Lobo paused, staring furtively over his shoulder.

His hair prickled, his lips stretched, as a dog will sometimes snarl at no

visible object. Suddenly he whirled, broke into a faltering run, tripped and fell to his knees.

He came to his feet slowly. For a space he stood motionless, head lifted, both hands clenched at his sides. Then he advanced much more calmly, his haggard gaze fixed straight ahead.

Stars dimmed. The darkness tightened to an utter black. Gradually the black dissolved, lifted, and a pallid grayness stole silently over the land. The east flushed; haughtily the sun rose, an orange peacock, its gaudy tail fanning across the sky, green and violet, shimmering saffron.

THE Lobo groaned. Gradually he ceased to sweat; his skin blistered, stretched tight and brittle, hardened like an iron jacket, constricted his breath, seemed to crush his organs. A steel band clamped around his forehead; his eyes protruded.

Hours dragged past. Each step was weighted, an excruciating effort. His lips cracked; his tongue swelled and became a clenched fist striving to force itself down his throat. And still he reeled desperately on, head and shoulders thrust forward, his inflamed gaze crucified against that purple blur of mountains—freedom, water, sanctuary.

But something ghastly was following him. He had feared it before, but now he knew it. He could even glimpse the vague shapes now, half formed in the dancing glare of light. He violently shook his head, rubbed his eyes, pressed forward at a lumbering trot. He tried not to look back, as though by refusing to look he could deny that hovering presence.

But fever crept into his fermenting brain, crackled and hissed, spit colored flame. He seemed to float from the ground, to drift through the hot air, slowly spinning. The steel band around his head tightened.

Then suddenly it snapped free, his

head suddenly puffed like an inflating balloon. He whirled around. His eyes flared.

He leaped backward, crouched, a guttural cry on his lips.

For there behind, watching him, were three people. One was a bow-legged cowboy, and above his sightless eyes was a bullet hole, from which trickled a stream of crimson. The second figure was a gray-haired prospector, bent double, both hands clutched to a knife hilt protruding from his stomach. The third figure was that of a girl, young, slender, her dark hair disheveled, her dress torn at the neck, exposing an ivory shoulder. Her eyes were staring with a fixed horror at something at her feet.

The Lobo's black hair prickled. He lifted both hands, his fingers crooked like claws. "Stay back!" he screamed. "Go away! I'm not afraid of you! You're dead! I killed you all!"

But the three figures remained motionless, staring.

Lobo rushed toward them, cursing; but they silently receded, just out of his reach, stopped when he stopped. A half sob burst from his throat; he whirled, and again reeled forward.

He no longer looked back over his shoulder, yet he knew that the three shapes silently followed, that now they must always follow.

**H**IS gaze clung only to the mountains ahead—freedom, water, sanctuary. But the mountains seemed to rise from the flickering plains, to float against the sky, hazy and intangible, never to be attained. Invisible hands reached out and clutched him, caught and held him with unseen fingers. His feet rose and fell, but uselessly, as though beating an endless treadmill.

The land blurred. It tipped and swayed and rocked. It closed into a gigantic wheel, flickering and flashing, revolving around him.

Three figures rode the wheel. They

circled him endlessly, the cowboy with sightless gaze, the old prospector bent double, the girl whose stare was fixed with horror. Up feet, down feet, up-down, up-down, up-down—

A puppet struggling blindly on. Other puppets drifting behind. Were they any less real because he imagined them? Who makes the puppets? Who pulls the strings?

**A**T the foot of Passionaire Mountains, fringed with gnarled mesquite, sparkled Ajos Waterhole—dancing in the sunlight, the life-giving pool.

The Lobo had lost all sense of time and space, even of motion. When suddenly he realized that he had actually reached the waterhole, he was for a moment too stunned even to move. Yet there it was, cool and sparkling, not thirty feet away! An animal joy distorted his face. He flung both arms out to the pool, lunged frantically toward it.

He stumbled; the ground flew up and struck his face. He made a desperate effort to rise—failed. He glared at the gleaming water. Not twenty feet away—but twenty feet that were like twenty miles. Must he die here, tortured by the water, watching it, just unable to reach it?

The thought brought a convulsive shudder to his body, wrenched him to his hands and knees. Whimpering now, pleading incoherently to nothing and no one, he inched painfully ahead, on all fours, like a wounded animal.

But his arms gave way like putty. Again his face was crushed against hot smothering sand. He lay there twitching, his breath rasping. Waves of darkness poured over him.

He lifted his head, stared at the sparkling water. Not ten feet away, yet he could no longer rise even to his hands and knees. He cursed, prayed, sobbed like a child.

Finally, flat on his stomach, he



stretched out his arms, dug crooked fingers into the gritty sand, and pulled desperately. A few inches he slid forward, literally dragging his own body, then repeated the agonizing move.

Claw, pull—claw, pull—waves of darkness—claw, pull—

Suddenly his eyes flared open. He loosed a cry of triumph. For he saw his own ghastly reflection, staring back at him from the dark depths of the pool.

Victory! He had defeated them all, man, nature, and the ghosts of the dead! But then he glanced up—

Three forms were squatted on the opposite side of the pool. They silently watched him, a bowlegged cowboy, a bent prospector, a girl with a stare of fixed horror. He cursed them wildly, then insanely laughed. For not even they could hurt him now. Yet he sensed their hands reaching out, touching him—

A wave of darkness passed over him. But he fought it back. Water! Life! Freedom!

Suddenly he plunged his face downward, into a life-giving liquid, opened his cracked lips to the cold sweet rush of water.

Two days later Sheriff John Dunsing, his head bandaged, still weak from the shock of a stunning scalp wound, reined in his roan at Ajos Waterhole. Swinging to ground, he crossed to the rim of the pool, and was for a long time motionless, staring moodily at the lifeless body of Lobo Larson.

"Hmm," he mused. "I've always said to give 'em enough rope an' they'll catch themselves." He touched the stiff body with his boot. "Hmm—he must have fainted jus' as he started to drink; head fell forward.

"Lordy, jus' think of the hell he went through to reach that water—only to have it drown him."

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## CHAPTER I

### *A Ruby from Burma*

THE Fleet was in Manila Bay from China station. White uniformed sailors roistered in the barrooms, crowded the downtown theatres, and fought enthusiastically in the Walled City with hard-boiled infantrymen from Fort Santiago and Cuartel de Espana. As always on Fleet Day, the Navy owned the town.

From the entrance of the Oriente Hotel, Bart Steele, formerly of the Naval Intelligence, watched the endless procession of seamen streaming through Calle Real. With a touch of nostalgia, he scanned their wind-



*The killers surged forward,*

burned faces. They were all strangers to him.

"After all, I've been out of the Service ten years," he told himself. "Slim chance of seeing anyone I know."

He was about to move on when a heavy hand fell on his shoulder. Steele swung around to meet a pair of merry blue eyes, twinkling under bushy red eyebrows which overhung a craggy, unbeautiful face spattered with freckles. The picture of homeliness was completed by a Chief Petty Officer's cap, that hung precariously on the back of a bristling bullet head.

"'Hunk' Flannigan—by the lead-tipped cat!" Steele said. "There's something goofy about this, Hunk. You're supposed to be dead. I saw a thrilling account of your death in



with his whip, while the passenger stabbed vigorously with his umbrella.

"Hey!" Hunk yelled, wiping a dollop of mud from his mouth. Then he grabbed Steele's arm. "Hell's blazes! I know that Chink. He's th' old guy I was tellin' you about."

Before Steele could reply, the big Irishman was wading into trouble.

"Geez—beat it!" yelled a little sailor with a twisted nose. "It's a petty officer full of rotgut!"

**S**UITING action to his words, the small one backed away. His two companions felt differently. One of them socked Flannigan in the mouth, splashing blood. His companion swung a pair of knucks with vicious intent.

Steele took a hand then. He struck one blow—with the barrel of a short, thick automatic. Dropping his arms, the man with the knucks began to walk around in circles. Hunk Flannigan drove his fist into the other's belly, and that one ran backwards across the street, caught his heel, and sat down heavily on the curb.

The *cochero* stood up and lashed his horse. As the hack jerked forward the Chinaman bowed sidewise thrice, and called out in a shrill cracked voice:

"Three million thank-you's!"

"Hey, wait a minute," Hunk belated. "It's me—Hunk Flannigan!"

A thin yellow hand fluttered through the curtains, but the driver continued to belabor his horse and the hack bounced away at undiminished speed.

"What d'y'know?" Hunk complained, wiping his bruised mouth. "That was Sun Chong. He must have knowed me."

"Evidently didn't want to renew the acquaintance," Steele remarked. "Come on, Buttinsky—let's leave here."

They ducked down Magallanes,

hurried through a smelly alley, made several turns, and finally stopped at the side door of the Balintawak Bar.

Before Steele crossed the threshold, he paused to allow his eyes to become accustomed to the dim light. This habit of his had on several occasions saved his life. For Steele made his living by doing jobs, for princely fees, that other white men did not care to tackle.

His shoulders stiffened slightly as his eyes swept the sailors and dock scum congregated within. A bar boy motioned toward an unoccupied table, and the two men crossed the room.

Steele ordered Scotch and Tansan; Flannigan a schooner of San Miguel. When the bar boy withdrew, Steele spoke guardedly.

"This seems to be my turn to run into old acquaintances. See the little chap with the big ears over there—the one with his back to the wall?"

Flannigan nodded, following the slight movement of Steele's eye.

"Uh-huh—what about him?"

**S**TEELE lifted his glass. "Pretend to be interested in your beer and I'll tell you something. That bird is Steve Frawley, one of the cleverest confidence men in the East."

Hunk applied himself to his beer mug and cocked a ready ear. Steele continued:

"Frawley is one of the few crooks—in fact the only one—who ever tried to gyp me and got away with it."

"That runt?" Flannigan raised a red eyebrow. "Quit kiddin' me!"

"I'm not—I'm merely telling you how good the man is. He's good because he hasn't any nerves, and if he ever had any scruples, he lost 'em with his baby teeth. He saved my life once, and took a bad knifing."

"In my gratitude I allowed sentiment to overcome my natural suspicion of the human race. Six



months later he did me out of five thousand Mex. It was a deal in diamonds. I was green about stones then; Frawley took it upon himself to give me a lesson."

"I been feelin' a fight comin' on all day," growled Hunk Flannigan. "Let's clean house with him."

Steele smiled. He knew the suggestion was whole-hearted, for on two or three occasions he had done Hunk large favors.

"**A**S you know, Hunk, I'm a timid man and have an aversion to violence. Sit still and keep your shirt on while I go over and ask Mr. Frawley, in a nice way, to cough up what he stole from me."

Extricating his rangy legs from their confinement under the table, Steele rose and crossed the room as Frawley pushed back his chair and started gathering up his chits. His back was turned when Steele touched him on his shoulder.

The effect was instantaneous—and utterly surprising. Kicking away his chair, Frawley snatched an automatic from a concealed holster, thumbed the safety latch, and shoved the stubby muzzle against Steele's body an inch above his belt. The man's yellow face was a mask of horrible fear; his eyes bulged, and his thin, bloodless lips curled back over long narrow teeth. Steele felt his flesh crawl.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Hunk Flannigan swing a chair.

"Hunk!" he yelled. "Drop that chair, you fool!"

Flannigan had been accustomed to the stern naval code of absolute obedience all his adult life. Long trained reflexes acted. His body froze with the chair shoulder high. That sudden obedience saved Steele's life.

Steele met Frawley's fear-haunted eyes with a look of cold contempt. Then, suddenly as it had begun, the

tension snapped. The little man thrust the gun into its holster and seemed to wilt. He managed a sickly smile, then his voice came jerkily.

"My God, Steele—I nearly shot you! I'm hounded to death, hellish jumpy. I'm sorry," He paused, and added: "I'm glad to see you."

"So it would seem," Steele responded dryly. His eyes bored into those of the man who had been so venomous a moment before. "Come over here; I want to talk to you."

So quickly had the drama ended that less than half of the saloon's patrons were aware of it. And they, meeting Hunk Flannigan's bleak eyes, read a warning to mind their own business.

**A**GAIN Frawley seated himself with his back to the wall, his eyes darting nervously between the two doors. Steele did not speak immediately. He was puzzled by Frawley's evident fear.

"Hunk," Steele said at last, suavely, "I want you to know a very clever man—Mr. Steve Frawley, Mr. Flannigan. He has just given an exhibition of his cleverness on the draw. Now he is going to explain why."

Ignoring Flannigan's growls, Frawley spoke excitedly.

"Listen, Steele—get me away from here. Take me some place where we can talk privately."

"They probably have rooms upstairs," Steele suggested. "You know the barkeep, Hunk. Ask him to fix us up."

Flannigan got up, glowering at Frawley, and moved toward the bar. Frawley leaned forward and clutched Steele's arm.

"Who is that ape?" he demanded. "I said I wanted to talk to you alone."

"He's an old friend," Steele replied shortly. "He goes with us." At that instant Hunk returned.

"Upstairs," he growled. "On th'

right, at th' end of th' hall. Barkeep says if we cut this guy's throat we can't leave th' body on th' premisis."

He led the way through an empty warehouse in the rear and up a flight of stone steps. The floor above was dimly lighted. Flannigan opened a door and they entered a scantily furnished room overlooking Calle Real.

**F**RAWLEY dropped down on the bed with a sigh. "This is the first time I've felt safe in two months," he said.

"What's your trouble, Frawley?" Steele asked shortly.

The little confidence man leaned forward.

"Steele, get me straight. I double-crossed you on those diamonds, but this is on the square." He lowered his voice. "I've got something here—something big. I'm stuck with it, but you stand to make a quarter of a million Mex out of it—if you're game to take the risk." He spoke excitedly, with a wild glitter in his eyes.

Steele looked at him narrowly.

"Go on. What's the game?"

"There ain't any trick. You don't get me—I'm *giving* you something!"

Steele merely smiled at that.

Frawley fumbled in his shirt and brought out a knotted handkerchief. With trembling fingers he plucked at the knots. Then he held out a lumpy, dark red crystal, larger than a duck's egg.

"Uncut ruby from upper Burma," he whispered almost madly. "Look at it!"

Steele took the rough pebble and turned it in his fingers. As he examined it, his lips drew together in a thin, speculative line. Having been once stung on fake jewels, he had read up on precious stones. A glance told him that Frawley had told the truth—this was the real thing. A touch confirmed it.

He had never seen such a stone. He closed his eyes and tried to imagine the beauty of it, divided and cut into a score of flawless gems. Then he handed it back and waited, suspicion in his eyes, for Frawley to speak.

"It belonged to a buyer from Le Chateau's in New York," the other said unemotionally. "I had to bump him off to get it. But some Chinese mugs were after it, too, and they have been camped on my trail ever since."

"Wait," Steele cut in coldly. "Murder is out of my line. I don't care to be in your confidence."

"I'm offering you the ruby to square up the other deal," Frawley hurried on.

"If you think you can shift the evidence into my possession to clear your own skirts, you must be getting childish." Steele's eyes held a frosty look. "I don't deal in stolen property."

**"O**H, hell—take it or leave it," Frawley said wearily. "I'll throw it in the Pasig before I'll let the Chinks have it. Has it occurred to you that Le Chateau's would pay to get that ruby back?"

"I'm not trying to rook you—honestly. A man doesn't cheat when he knows he's dying. I'm going to cash in tonight, Steele. They gave me poison—the Seven Days' Death it's called. This is the seventh day!"

Flannigan's grim expression had relaxed a little as Frawley talked. Now he asked a question.

"What do you mean, 'Seven Days' Death'?"

"You want to know what the Seven Days' Death is?" Frawley demanded with a wild laugh. "Listen, mug—if you ever get it, you'll know it. God knows what it's made of. It kills in exactly seven days, and there ain't a doctor in the world that can cure you. The swine gave me a

dose, and every day they send a note reminding me of how long I've got to live.

"They promise to trade me an antidote for the ruby."

Exhausted from his vehemence, Frawley slumped on the bed. Sweat gleamed on his sallow features like dew on a dead man's face. There was hopelessness in his eyes.

He gulped and went on hurriedly—defiantly:

"But there ain't any antidote. If there was, d'ye think they'd give it to me? I've got one night to live, but I'll roast in hell before I'll give that ruby to Fong Tao!"

"WHO'S Fong Tao?" Hunk demanded, a little breathlessly.

"Head of an international opium syndicate, for one thing," Frawley said listlessly. "Also a pirate."

"That's funny," Flannigan mused. "I don't savvy much Chinese, but I've heard that name."

"I heard Sun Chong and his daughter talkin' about a pirate named Fong Tao, oncet."

"What do you know about Sun Chong?" Frawley demanded with a sudden show of interest.

"What do you know about him?" Hunk countered.

"Nothing—much. He's Fong Tao's cousin, if you mean the Yangtze bandit."

"Hell's hinges! That must be why Sun Chong is in Manila."

"I didn't know he was here, but Chinese are like wolves—the whole pack is generally in at the kill."

"I seen him less'n an hour ago," Hunk asserted.

"Then you've got another mighty clever murderer to look out for if you take the ruby," Frawley warned. "What do you say, Steele? Do you want it, or shall I drop it in the river?"

"I've got just one chance to live, and I'm taking it."

"I've heard in a roundabout way of a Chinese doctor, educated in the States, who is an authority on poisons. His name is Dr. Tsai Po, and he's got an office on Calle Rosario."

"Better remember that, Steele—you may need him. I'm going to see him tonight, but first I'm going to get rid of that rock. My number is *written on that ruby!*"

Steele made a mental note of Dr. Tsai Po's name.

Then he spoke:

"I'll take it," he said crisply. "The ruby goes back to Le Chateau's with an explanation—and a bill. As for you, Frawley, you've got yourself in a lovely fix. I can't help feeling a little sorry for you."

"There's a C. P. liner out for Hongkong tomorrow. If you're still alive when she sails, you'd better be aboard her. I'll give you time to get to Macao before I notify the police."

"Notify them when you like," Frawley said hopelessly. "I'm sunk. No doctor can do me any good any more."

"Aw, nerts," Hunk spoke up cheerfully. "They've put th' Indian sign on you, that's all. I bet it's all a bluff."

"I wish I could think so," Frawley said.

STEELE knotted the handkerchief around the jewel and then he stowed it inside of his tough Fuji shirt.

"You guys better not be seen leaving here with me," Frawley said. "Beat it—I'll wait fifteen minutes. I've been staying at the Shinomoto Hotel on Plaza Santa Cruz. You might look in tomorrow and call for the dead wagon."

Steele and Flannigan got up and crossed the room. Flannigan unlocked the door. They left Frawley sitting on the bed, chin cupped in

his hands, staring desolately at the floor.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Seven Days' Death*

STEELE and Flannigan passed out of the Walled City through the Parian Gate and, avoiding the plethora of beggars whining for alms, walked toward Plaza Lawton.

"I smell trouble," Hunk said ominously. "I got a gift that way. What I mean we've let ourselves in for something."

"You're probably right," Steele replied easily. "Trouble and precious stones frequently go together."

"What's the lay?" Hunk demanded. "What you figger to do with th' rock? You can't carry it around like it was a plugged nickel. Not unless you crave for some bird with slant eyes and yellow hide to carve his initials on your back."

"I'm staying at the Shoreside Hotel. The stone will be safe in their vault overnight. Come along with me and have a drink. We can eat in the hotel, or go out somewhere for dinner."

"I got to report aboard th' battle-wagon at six, but I can go along for th' drink."

Steele caught the eye of a roving taxi driver. The car drew up, the driver saluted smartly, and the two men stepped inside. Five minutes later they were set down before the portico of the Shoreside Hotel.

At the desk Steele ordered two whisky-sodas sent up to his room. He and Flannigan stepped into the elevator and were lifted to the third floor. Steele's room was in the Annex, overlooking the bay.

A Chinese boy followed them with a tray. As he was about to mix the drinks, Hunk seized the bottle and poured for himself.

"From now on no Chink mixes any drinks for me," he explained when

the boy had effaced himself. "That yarn of Frawley's got in my hair."

"Rot!" Steele scoffed. "You'll be dodging Chinese laundrymen the rest of your life." They tasted their drinks, and Steele asked:

"What do you think of it, Hunk?"

"Me? Why, I think you an' me are a pair of prize saps. Nobody but saps would touch that rock with a boat-hook. I predict we'll get our ribs tickled with sharp knives, our throats cut, and our innards salted with lead."

"Want to stay out of it?"

"Hell, no! But what beats me is where Sun Chong comes in. His hide is yellow, but I got him figgered as white meat inside, the way him and his daughter treated me after that Yangtze scrap."

"Forget the lady," Steele advised. "She would probably cut your throat to see what your windpipe looks like."

"Not that kid."

Steele lighted an Alhambra Corona and stretched his lanky body on the bed. At ease, he fumbled in his shirt, brought out the knotted handkerchief, untied it, and slowly turned the marvelous stone between his long thin fingers. "Let me look at that ruby," Hunk said, his voice husky.

STEELE extended his hand, but suddenly closed his fingers over the stone. His body stiffened and he laid a warning finger on his lips. Silently, he slipped from the bed and stood poised for quick movement.

"I think we have an audience," he whispered, barely audibly. "Sit still."

He crossed the room in three quick strides, shot the bolt, and flung open the door. Hunk bounded from his chair and leaped after him. They were barely in time to see a white clad figure disappear at the end of the corridor. Hunk lunged forward, but Steele grasped his arm.



"No use; he is gone. There's a servants' stairway at the end of the hall."

THEY stepped back into the room and closed the door.

"Well," Steele remarked. "We know they're keeping tab, anyway." "Chinaman?"

"I think so—didn't get a very good look at him."

"Now what?" Hunk asked.

"For the moment—nothing," Steele replied lightly. "The program requires thought. For the next half hour I'm going to do my thinking in the bathtub. You're detailed to mount guard over the ruby." He passed the stone to Flannigan and disappeared into the bathroom.

He was still in the tub forty minutes later when the telephone rang. Hunk thrust the ruby into his pocket and lifted the receiver.

"Yeah, this is Mister Flannigan," he growled. "Who's talkin'? Sun Chong? The hell! Listen, you got the wrong guy—I don't know nothin' about any ruby. Oh, you're warnin' me? Yeah, I got it—much obliged. Hey, wait a minute—where are you at? Hello—hello—"

He slammed up the receiver blasphemously, as Steele barged out of the bathroom.

"That was Sun Chong," Flannigan rattled excitedly. "Called to tell me not to get mixed up with the ruby. Practically called me a liar in a polite way when I told him I didn't know anything about it. Then he told me to tell my friend to hide out. The old son hung up on me."

Steele grabbed the phone and rattled the hook.

"Trace that call!"

A moment later he slammed the receiver with a grunt of disgust.

"The call came from a pay station at Pier Seven," he said, in response to Hunk's inquiring look.

"That lets Sun Chong out, any-

way," Hunk said triumphantly. "He's on our side. I told you he was all right."

"Maybe. Have it your own way. I'm going to finish my bath."

Ten minutes later he was dressed in a fresh linen suit, and but for the military set of his shoulders, his bronzed complexion, and a certain alertness—an ever present readiness for swift action—he might have passed in any crowd as a casual tourist.

HE always dressed with studious intent to appear both innocuous and inconspicuous. Yet he was perfectly aware that he was too well known ever to lose himself entirely in any pleasure resort crowd between S'pore and Vladivostok.

"We'd better go down and see about getting this thing locked in the hotel safe. Since you can't have dinner with me, I think I'll eat at the University Club."

Opening his trunk, Steele selected a small teakwood box from one of the trays, placed the ruby in it, and dropped it into his jacket pocket. The two men then stepped into the hall, and Steele locked the door behind them.

Bartley, the American manager of the hotel, was alone in his office. He was a middle-aged, capable looking Southerner, an ex-captain of marines. Steele knew him for a discreet, close-lipped individual with a hotel man's faculty for forgetfulness coupled with a disinclination to ask questions.

"This box belongs to a New York jewelry firm," Steele explained. "I have reason to suspect that certain individuals intend to relieve me of it. I'd like to leave it in your vault, to be turned over to Flannigan in case anything should—er—happen to me. That is, if you'll accept it at my evaluation."

"Certainly. What's it worth?" asked

Bartley as he reached for a receipt pad.

"Arbitrarily, I'd say a hundred thousand pesos."

BARTLEY lifted his eyebrows, but offered no objection. "I'll lock it in our private vault," he said. "It will be as safe there as it would be in any bank."

"Give the receipt to Flannigan," Steele suggested casually.

Having seen the box safely locked up, Steele called a taxi and dropped Hunk at Legaspi Landing in time to catch the last tender. They agreed to meet in Steele's room the next evening and have dinner together. Until then, he promised to report any new developments to Flannigan, who would be on duty until noon.

At the University Club, Steele ate a leisurely dinner on the roof. Afterward he took in a show at one of the downtown theatres and returned to the hotel at eleven.

At the desk he was handed three telephone call slips. The notations showed that calls had come for Mr. Flannigan at seven-thirty, eight, and nine-forty. The caller was Sun Chong. He had left no number.

"Persistent devil," Steele mused, "and uncommonly bold for a Chinaman, if he is one of the gang and trying to run a bluff. Hunk may possibly be right about him after all. Yet—it doesn't make sense."

He said good-night to the elevator operator and walked down the corridor. Even at this comparatively early hour, most of the transoms were dark. Either the occupants of the Annex had not yet returned, or had already gone to bed.

Steele paused to listen at the door before inserting the key in the lock. There was no sound. Yet something which he could not have accounted for, some electric warning to which his alert senses responded, made him cautious. Very slowly he slipped the

key into the lock, turned it, and pushed open the door.

There was no sound within the room. Stepping inside, he fumbled for the light switch and pressed it. No light came on. As his hand closed over the gun in his pocket, there was an almost noiseless movement, a quick, silent converging of men from all parts of the room.

His right arm was seized and paralyzed with a wrenching twist. Even as he dropped his gun, he lashed out with his left fist. His knuckles cracked against a bony face. He heard a tortured exhalation of breath and the thud of a falling body. Then something that burned like fire struck his eyes.

HE sneezed violently and knew the stuff was cayenne pepper. The next instant he was down, fighting desperately under a smother of bodies smelling foully of unwashed garments, rotten Chinese tobacco and stale opium.

But the fight wasn't over yet, for Steele managed to roll under the bed and wedge himself in a corner. Battered and bleeding, well-nigh exhausted, he still had strength enough to kick the teeth out of any Chinese that felt like crawling in after him.

Only two tried it before it occurred to the others to yank the bed away. Those two lay groveling on the floor and plucking at wrecked faces. The bed out of the way, the others jumped on him—feet first.

Consciousness didn't last long after that.

The sun was shining into the room when Steele awoke. He had a splitting headache, and it was some time before his eyes would focus properly. At first he had no recollection of what had happened; then his disordered thoughts slowly cleared and memory came flooding back. As he

sat up in bed, he was almost overcome by a wave of nausea.

"Doped!"

**H**AZILY at first, then with shocking clarity, he recalled Frawley's horrible story of the Seven Days' Death.

He got up and rang for a cup of coffee. While he was waiting for the boy, he looked at his watch. It was nine o'clock. He wondered why his room boy hadn't awakened him. When the coffee was brought, he saw the reason. His attackers had hung a "Do Not Disturb" card on the door-knob.

"Thoughtful of the beggars," he muttered.

The coffee steadied him to some extent, and a bath helped even more. Dressed again in a clean suit of whites, he had himself under perfect control, outwardly at least. Then, and only then, did he turn his attention to the littered room.

Nothing had been overlooked in the ransacking that had followed the fight. Bureau drawers had been jerked out, their contents dumped on the floor; his trunk and suitcases had been emptied; cushions had been torn from the chairs and scattered about—nothing he possessed had escaped examination.

"At least the devils didn't find what they were looking for. Some satisfaction in that—a great deal of satisfaction. Now the question is—am I poisoned?"

He lighted a cigarette, then tossed it away; it had a vile taste. Presently his eye fell upon a strip of red paper on the floor. Stooping, he picked it up. With narrowed eyes, he scanned the four vertical lines of Chinese characters that covered one side of the paper.

A fair student of Chinese, he had no difficulty in making out the warning, for such it undoubtedly was.

"Yang-li is like a faithless woman;

both are destroyers of men, though Yang-li is merciful. Yang-li does the work of death in seven days."

He read the script several times before he finally folded it and placed it in his bill-fold. In his fogged state of mind, the word Yang-li was puzzling. It aroused a vague memory of something he had some time read or heard, which, for the life of him, he couldn't recall.

Then, at last, the connection flashed through his mind. He had come across the term once while thumbing a curious old volume of fable and fact which he had picked up in a Shanghai bookshop. Clearly as though he had read the passage yesterday, he remembered that Yang-li had been described in the book as a rare and poisonous variety of Chinese poppy, which was said to grow only in the Tibet hills.

Leaning back in his chair, he indulged in a fit of silent laughter that shook his whole body.

When his merriment passed, his face grew sober again.

"What a clever devil you are, Fong Tao," he said aloud, his voice tinged with faint irony. "A man well worth meeting, no doubt."

### CHAPTER III

#### *The Clue in Frawley's Room*

**D**RUG fumes still lingered in Steele's brain when he left the desk, where a note appraised Hunk Flannigan of the night's events. His head throbbed, and spots of light danced before his eyes. Instead of taking a taxi, he walked down town, hoping that the salty, early morning breeze would clear his senses.

He was dressed in a crisp Singapore drill suit. His hard jaw was blue from his customary morning shave. He walked easily, with long strides, his hands swinging at his sides, and only his bloodshot eyes,

rimmed with dark circles, betrayed his mental stress.

MAKING his way through the horde of flower venders, sidewalk news dealers and cadging beachcombers who perpetually obstruct the narrow cement walk in front of Monte de Piedad, he crossed Plaza Santa Cruz and stopped in the grateful shade of the old church to look for the whereabouts of the Shinomoto Hotel.

It proved to be a small, and inconspicuously located establishment, occupying the floor above a native sweetshop and *panciteria* on the opposite side of the plaza. A small sign at the entrance of the stairway leading up from the street gave notice that R. Takawa was the proprietor.

Steele noticed that it was a typical native-style Jap hotel, of the kind that draws its chief revenue from *sukiaki* dinners for tourists rather than from regular guests. A quiet place, outwardly respectable, at least; the kind of place, in short, that a man like Frawley would naturally choose to live in.

Steele climbed the stairs and pushed through a pair of swinging doors into a cubbyhole of a lobby. A Jap servant was straightening up from the business of scrubbing as he made his entrance.

"Show me Mr. Frawley's room," Steele said briskly.

"Sorry, is not up yet," the Jap hissed. "Door locked."

"I said show me his room," Steele reiterated, showing the servant a peso bill. "Come this way, pleeze."

The Jap padded down a matting covered hallway, paused at a door at the extreme end, and knocked. There was no response. He knocked again, and shook his head when there was no reply.

"Is not up, sir. You will come again, pleeze?"

Steele turned the door-knob; the door was locked. Although there had been no response to the boy's knocking, Steele had thought he heard a rustling sound within the room.

IT came again, unmistakably this time, as he tried the door-knob. Steele's ears had heard similar sounds many times before—the measured, almost noiseless movement of a man treading on tiptoe.

"Get the keys," Steele whispered softly.

The Jap hesitated.

"*Sigue!*" The cold, hard glint in Steele's eyes brought obedience.

"Pleeze yes, am going to do so this minute." As the Jap scuttled back toward the lobby, Steele put his ear to the panel and listened. He could still hear the movements on the other side. He was certain they were being made by someone moving very stealthily toward the other side of the room.

Frawley?

Steele was certain it was not Frawley.

The grating sound of a sliding window panel galvanized him into action. He threw his weight against the door, but the panel was too strong to be broken down. There was no choice but to wait for the Jap, who was taking his time about returning.

At last the boy came down the hall, jangling a huge ring of keys. Selecting one of the keys, he stabbed it into the lock, opened the door, then let out a squeak of terror. Steele, looking over his shoulder, saw Frawley's body lying on the bed.

His glassy eyes and sagging jaw left no doubt that he was dead. Steele gave the Jap a shove into the room.

"Get inside. Lock the door."

Steele bounded across the room to



the open window. He looked out upon an expanse of iron *bodega* roofs, shimmering in the heat.

THE window of Frawley's room was separated from the neighboring *bodega* by a space less than a yard wide, easy enough for a man of ordinary stature to step safely across. That a man had crossed it within the preceding two minutes, Steele knew without a doubt, although now no one was in sight.

Turning away from the window, he flashed a look at the Jap, who seemed to be considering the advisability of bolting. Next he glanced about the room, and then he stepped to the bedside.

With a slight grimace of distaste, he looked down at the body. Frawley had died with the same expression of haunting fear that he had worn the day before. A half empty whisky bottle stood on the window ledge beside the bed.

The body showed no signs of having been disturbed. Steele guessed that he had been dead since midnight, or shortly before. On the point of turning away, he noticed a slip of paper protruding from beneath the pillow. He picked it up and saw that it was addressed to himself. It had been written in a shaky, almost illegible hand.

Steele:

My bank book is in my pocket. Have the money used to bury me. If anything is left, give it to the Bilibid Prison fund. Keep the thing I gave you, and watch out! Think I'm going—heart is—stopping—

Steele merely glanced at what Frawley had written. What captured, and held, his attention was three Chinese characters printed in the margin of the note with a pencil—the same pencil Frawley had used, probably. Undoubtedly meant for his own eyes, the three characters carried a sinister warning:

*"Consider this one's fate."*

Steele's eyes narrowed as he studied the message.

"You were taking quite a chance, Fong Tao," he muttered, "if you came here just to leave that message. Silly thing to do, and not in keeping with your reputation for cunning."

"No, you came for some other purpose, and the message was an afterthought."

"Now, I wonder what your real object was."

Nothing in the room had apparently been disturbed. A table beside the bed was littered with odds and ends—Frawley's automatic pistol, a broken package of cigarettes and a box of safety matches. A small black leather case embossed with dragons, of a size to fit easily into a man's pocket, somehow, it seemed out of place among the rest of the litter on the table.

STEELE picked it up and opened it, and his eyes grew hard and narrow.

The case contained a surgeon's hypodermic needle.

Steele gave a long, low whistle as he examined the thing. Then he snapped the case shut and dropped it into his pocket.

He looked again at the dead man. If Frawley had died at midnight or before, as the appearance of the body indicated, it meant that his life had ended almost exactly at the time he had expected the Seven Days' Death to strike. But why the visit of an intruder more than eight hours later?

Why the needle?

"'Yang-li is like a faithless woman; both are destroyers of men, though Yang-li is merciful,'" Steele quoted thoughtfully. "'Yang-li does the work of death in Seven Days.'"

"A pity such a perfect plot should be bungled, Fong Tao," he murmured, with a glint of grim humor

in his eyes. "A deuced pity. But you made your first mistake when you left that note in my room, and another when you added your postscript to Frawley's letter, becoming so interested in doing it that you forgot your quaint little card case. Something tells me that you're about due to learn an elementary lesson in criminology: that it doesn't pay to write warning letters!"

His inspection of the room completed, he swung on his heel and spoke to the Jap.

"Get out!" The Jap was hasty in his obedience. "Lock the door behind us," Steele instructed.

He followed the porter to the lobby and paused at the desk to scribble a note. Folding the paper, he gave it to the boy with a twenty-peso note.

"There is a policeman in Plaza Goiti," he said tersely. "Take this paper to him. Tell him it was given to you by a fat Spaniard—sabe?"

"Pleeze, yes, sir," the Jap hissed, stuffing his *cumshaw* into his trousers.

Steele walked downstairs and stepped into an alley which led into Calle Raon. From there it was only a block or so to the swarming crowds on Avenida Rizal.

#### CHAPTER IV

##### *A Difficult Case for Dr. Tsai Po*

THE office of Dr. Tsai Po occupied a front room above the display rooms of the Canton Tea and Spice Company, Ltd., on Calle Rosario. Steele climbed the stairs with his right hand in his jacket pocket, his fingers curled about the butt of his gun.

He ascended with the intention of treating Dr. Tsai Po to a surprise. But instead of that, Steele himself was surprised in a totally unexpected manner.

He was reaching out with his left

hand to try the door-knob when he heard a rush of slippered feet on the other side. The next instant the door was flung open in his face, and he was face to face with the prettiest Chinese girl he had ever seen.

Dressed in scarlet silk jacket and trousers, her varnished black hair gleaming, her flower-like features enameled with cosmetics, she would have been a picture of exotic loveliness but for her look of stark fear.

A step behind her, claw-like hand outstretched to seize her shoulder, was a pock-marked apparition whose disfigured face was ugly as hers was beautiful. More horrible now, because of the light that gleamed in the creature's slitted eyes.

Steele's left arm circled the girl's waist and jerked her out of the way. A knife came out of the Chinaman's sleeve, but he never had a chance to use it. Steele struck him decisively above the temple with the barrel of his automatic. It was a practiced blow, and the recipient of it was senseless when he hit the floor.

"Inside," Steele snapped. He spoke in English, but the girl appeared to understand. Horror still showing in her eyes, she stepped over the unconscious coolie and faced Steele, half defiantly.

He closed the door, dragged the man's body behind a screen, and left him gagged and bound with his ripped-up jacket. Then he turned toward the girl with a tight-lipped smile. "Any others?"

"No." Her voice was hardly audible. She was swaying on her feet.

"Sit down."

HE glanced about for some stimulant to give her, but saw nothing that would do. Not daring to leave the room, he stepped to a window and slid back the panel. A rush of air into the room drove away some of the heavy odor of incense that pervaded the place, and

the girl seemed to gather strength.

Steele seized the chance to have a look around the apartment. Bestowing only cursory glances upon the costly rugs, delicate porcelains and objects of beaten brass that decorated the room, he went over the walls, feeling behind the silken hangings for a hidden door. He found none. There was one wide door at the far end of the room which opened into a dark hallway. There were other doors beyond, on both sides of the hall, but he had no time to investigate them. He wanted to question the girl. He took a chair himself, facing the entrance door. "Who are you?" he asked without preamble.

"Peach Bloom, the daughter of Sun Chong," the girl answered. "Fong Tao thinks my honorable parent is very rich. He is holding me for"—she frowned—"what is the English word?"

"Ransom?" asked Steele; then as the girl nodded, he mused. "That explains why Sun Chong has been so anxious to reach Hunk Flannigan."

"Flannigan?" Peach Bloom looked at Steele eagerly. "You are friend of Flannigan?"

"Yes," Steele nodded. "But Dr. Tsai Po?"

"Dr. Tsai Po is Fong Toa!" the girl whispered the words.

STEELE abruptly motioned her to remain silent as he heard someone mounting the stairs. He lit a cigarette and was idly toying with his gun when the door opened, and an abnormally tall Chinese in European dress stepped into the room.

There was a pronounced stoop to his shoulders, giving the impression of a conscious droop to minimize the effect of his extraordinary height. His face was cadaverous, his complexion a jaundiced yellow. His stiff, black hair was short and bristling, and he wore very thick glasses.

At sight of Steele and the girl he stopped with a jerk. A dangerous light glinted in his eyes, and his powerful body hunched as though he meant to throw himself upon Steele.

"Use your own judgment, Doctor," Steele said crisply. As he spoke the automatic's safety latch clicked.

Ignoring Steele, the Chinese spat a stream of rapid Mandarin at the girl. Steele understood it perfectly, and took it upon himself to answer.

"IF you're referring to your pock-marked carrion, he is lying behind the screen with a cracked skull. I assure you that your chances of joining him are going to be very good unless you observe the utmost discretion."

Dr. Tsai Po bowed.

"Your bravery is exceeded only by your recklessness. What do you want?"

"Sit down and I'll tell you."

The doctor bowed again and seated himself in a swivel chair behind a mahogany desk, the only occidental furniture in the Oriental's room.

"Keep your hands on top of the desk," Steele advised. "Shall I call you Dr. Tsai Po or Fong Tao?"

"It does not matter; I am known by both names. Now, if you'll tell me what you want—"

"For one thing, I'll inform you, in case you don't know it, that you stand an excellent chance of dying in the electric chair in Bilibid Prison, for the murder of Steve Frawley. I think there is no doubt that the evidence will convict you, though it is a little ironic that you didn't actually kill him."

Dr. Tsai Po's eyes glittered.

"You have only six days to live. I am not likely to be convicted by your testimony."

"Mind standing corrected?" There was grim humor in Steele's ice-blue

eyes. "I expect to live a great deal longer than six days. I don't happen to be suffering from heart trouble, as Frawley was."

Dr. Tsai Po gave a visible start. Behind his thick glasses his slant eyes gleamed with vicious purpose.

Steele reached into his pocket and tossed the black leather case upon the desk.

"Remember, I said you didn't actually kill him. You scared him to death with your threats of the Seven Days' Death, but you didn't actually think he would die. After the ruby passed into my possession, you thought the same threat might be effective with me.

"You took the trouble to dope me and leave an enigmatic note of warning which was so cleverly worded that it gave the thing away. That however, was not your fault; you merely played in bad luck by writing something that put my memory to work.

"**H**AVING administered a suitable drug to me yourself, you doubtless returned home last night in good humor. It was not until this morning that it occurred to you that you had failed to play your trump card. Reasoning with the best logic, you decided that Frawley must die according to schedule after all, in order to strengthen the fear of death in me.

"You therefore went to the Shinomoto Hotel and entered his room to administer a lethal dose of poison. Finding him already dead, it occurred to you to add a postscript to the letter he had written to me. I showed up on the other side of the door about that time, and in making your hasty exit you forgot your kit. Am I right?"

"You are a very clever man." Dr. Tsai Po's voice was velvet over steel. "And your deductions are almost entirely correct. However, it was no

afterthought on my part to arrange Frawley's death for your benefit.

"He came to me yesterday, as I had arranged that he should do, and I gave him medicines to stop his heart. This morning it occurred to me, since he had been drinking heavily, that he might have gone to sleep without taking the medicine. I therefore went to his room to make sure."

"And that was the serious mistake on your part."

**S**TEELE leaned back in his chair, crossed his legs comfortably, and lit another cigarette. He was very cool, very calm, and very deadly in his demeanor; yet Dr. Tsai Po met his level gaze with a suggestion of a smile.

"A mistake, yes," he admitted softly. "But not one that cannot be rectified."

"I think differently," Steele said lazily.

"No matter," the doctor gestured deprecatingly with one long, bony hand. "Permit me to ask a question. I am interested to know what was in the message I left for you, which stirred your memory and resulted in your deductions."

"'Yang-li does the work of death in Seven Days'," Steele quoted. "A long time ago I had read that the distilled sap of Yang-li is a slow and deadly poison when mixed with opium. In any other form it is harmless. Since the poison cannot be administered in any other way except the smoking of opium, I knew I was safe so far as the Seven Days' Death was concerned."

Dr. Tsai Po appeared to consider Steele's words. After a moment he bowed his head in a gesture of defeat and answered them suavely.

"The ruby meant much to me, and defeat is doubly bitter because the gem was so nearly within my grasp. I doubt if I shall ever obtain it



now." He paused and eyed Steele queerly. "But since you hold the threat of prison and death over me, you surely cannot be so stupid as to think you're going to leave this room alive!"

Too late, Steele realized his danger. He saw Dr. Tsai Po's body stiffen slightly as his knee came up beneath the table to press a hidden button.

THE doctor laughed mockingly as Steele leaped to his feet.

"I give you credit for courage," he said with the threat of death in his voice. "You are a brave man. A clever man. A man of iron. But your recklessness approaches stupidity—"

He never finished his triumphant speech. Steele fired as his enemy rose from his chair, his lips set in a cold, hard smile. A button jerked on the prisoner's shirt, and a spot of red appeared on the white silk. His face twisted with pain, Tsai Po slapped his left hand over the wound and sat down heavily in the swivel chair.

The scarlet clad girl screamed shrilly as a flood of hatchet men came up the stairs. Tsai Po, with death rising in his eyes, barked a hoarse command. His killers surged forward, and Steele met them with his gun blazing.

He shot the nearest one through the windpipe, and the coolie dropped to his knees, making horrible noises. A knife in the hands of a shelf-toothed assassin flashed above the girl's shoulders, and Steele's bullet sent the man spinning across the room.

He emptied his gun among the others, shooting as fast as he could pull the trigger.

The room became a shambles. The coolies hesitated, but Tsai Po, sitting at his desk, urged them on with the death rattle in his throat.

His gun empty, Steele attempted to shove in a fresh clip of ammunition, but he dropped the clip as the nearest coolie drove at him with a knife. Side-stepping, he kicked the man back among his mates. The others, though, were upon him before he could get another clip out of his pocket.

He saw the girl struggling with one of the hatchet men on the other side of the room, and tried desperately to reach her. He fought savagely, but with no hope of escape; he knew they were too many for him.

He wished for Hunk Flannigan, and yet was glad the big Irishman wasn't beside him. It would only have meant a few more coolies dead; in the end they would have killed Flannigan, too.

The malignant Tsai Po—or Fong Tao, however one preferred to call him—was still croaking orders to his Yangtze scum even as he sat there dying. And Steele knew that so long as life remained in Tsai Po, they would keep on fighting.

He slugged away with his gun, and lashed at hate-filled yellow faces with punishing jabs of his left fist. Three were down with crushed skulls—done for. Another one, crazy with pain, was dragging himself toward Steele, sheltered by the press of those who were crowding in for the death blow.

STEELE knew they were going to get him in a minute or two. His attackers knew it too, and were screeching with blood-mad glee.

Suddenly the injured coolie grabbed Steele's ankles. He went down, and they crowded in like mad wolves. He felt a knife bite into his side. He rolled over. His fingers touched a knife on the floor, and he drove the blade to the hilt in a naked brown back. He struck again and again as sickness flooded over

him. Somehow he regained his feet, reeling toward the struggling girl. She was on her knees, and the man she was fighting with had grabbed her hair. As her head went back and the knife jerked upward above her throat, Steele drove downward with his bloody blade. The point went in the coolie's neck at the base of his jaw, and the stroke meant for the girl's throat ripped by her scarlet jacket.

Steele tried to get her toward the door at the far end of the room, but the howling mob was upon him before he could take three steps, hacking and slashing and trying to drag him down. He knew that the next time he went down, he would stay down. They would cut him into bits.

His jacket was slashed to ribbons and red from a number of gashes on his chest and shoulders. He was half blinded by blood that dripped from a cut above his eye. Still he fought grimly, desperately, doing his utmost to keep the pack away from the girl.

He was doing his best, but his best was not enough. They caught his knees and dragged him down and he saw a hatchet raised high.

AND then he saw something else —the fighting countenance of Hunk Flannigan coming through the door!

Hunk's gun spat a streak of red, and the hatchet man's body slumped across Steele's chest, his razor-edged weapon splitting the knee of another coolie as that one leaped like a string-jerked marionette under the impact of Flannigan's second bullet.

Hunk was yelling like a banshee as he cut loose into the clawing yellow horde, shooting high to avoid hitting Steele. The knot of struggling bodies melted before the stream of lead, and Steele rolled free, still clutching his knife.

When his gun was empty, Hunk

flung himself into the fray with driving fists. One of the coolies had the bad judgment to try to stop him with a knife. Hunk knocked the blade from his hand, seized him, and flung him through a window. The man plunged downward amid a shower of broken glass, hit the pavement on his back, and lay there moaning.

IN a moment more it was over—all but dragging out the dead.

"How did you get here?" Steele turned to Flannigan weakly.

"Sun Chong met me as I came off the ship," grinned Flannigan. "We went to your hotel, found the note you left for me telling me you were going to call on Dr. Tsai Po—and about th' gang that jumped you—and maybe bein' poisoned. Sun Chong tells me that Dr. Tsai Po is Fong Tao, and we don't waste no time gettin' here."

"I'm—glad you didn't." Steele staggered and dropped to the floor.

When the police squad from Meisic station came charging up the stairs with riot guns a few minutes later, they found a wild-eyed Irishman and a scarlet-clad Chinese girl bending over Bart Steele. He had fainted from loss of blood.

The Irishman was swearing as only an Irish sailor can, and the girl was weeping hysterically. The coolies who were not dead or too badly injured to move were dragging themselves toward the open door at the rear of the room. Dr. Tsai Po, alias Fong Tao, master poisoner, still sat in his swivel chair gazing with awful malignancy at his wrecked apartment. He was dead.

Off on one side of the room, a wizened little Chinaman stood looking on. This was Sun Chong. His wrinkled parchment face was cracked in a wide smile of approval, and he was industriously shaking hands with himself.

# Gobs *Can* Fight!



*His club-like fist sent a second native into the fountain*

*Tip Tovey and Bottleneck Briggs Face a Firing Squad—  
and Other Troubles—in this Rip-Roaring  
Story of Central American Rebels*

**By SYL MacDOWELL**

*Author of "Too Much Liberty," "Gobs Can't Shoot," etc.*

**S**QUATTED in the shade of the galley bulkhead, two Navy gobs toiled unhappily beside a mountainous tubful of spuds. They wore sleeveless skivvy shirts and work-smeared white duck pants. An off-shore breeze swept to their long-

ing nostrils a land smell; that strange, sweetish scent of a tropical shore. A scent that mingled with the aroma of noon-mess stew that escaped from the galley.

"Time we was nearin' Puerta Bella," remarked "Tip" Tovey, the

smaller sailor. "Bottleneck" Briggs, his companion, shrugged his bare, sloping, tattooed shoulders.

"It may be a port to some folks," Bottleneck sighed, "but it's only another dent in the coastline for us."

"Who says so?"

"The skipper. Or was I only dreamin' that he mentioned sumthin' about us remainin' aboard ship for the next thirty days? Without pay!"

At that moment the cook thrust his parboiled face through the galley porthole. Twenty gallons of bubbling stew was ready for two bushels of peeled potatoes.

"Hey, youse lugs! Do I get 'em or don't I?"

**T**IP TOVEY calmly stabbed another tuber with his paring knife.

"Just keep your skivvy shirt on, Mister Funnelface," he replied calmly. "We gotta dig the eyes out, don't we? We aim to do this job up right."

"Yah!" howled Funnelface, the cook. "You do everything up right, youse guys do! Includin' that monkey rum liberty back at Cristobal."

"It was a grand liberty," said Tip Tovey, "even if we was ten hours overleave."

"Well, get a move on with them spuds!"

Bottleneck spoke up.

"Be patient, Mister Funnelface. Me an' Tip, we're gonna invent a potato-parin' machine one o' these days."

"And win a Navy medal," added Tip Tovey.

Funnelface growled something and pulled his head back in from the galley porthole. The deck was silent again, except for the rumbling vibration of the turbines and the whisper of purple fathoms rushing past the lean, gray hull.

Down in the stokehold, the black gang of the U. S. S. *Norfolk* was sweating one hundred thousand horsepower out of nine roaring boilers. The crack new cruiser of the Special Service Squadron was racing northward at 25 knots. A mile or more off her port beam, endless leagues of Central America slid astern.

The Mosquito Coast, sailormen called it—mangrove swamps of malarial green, broken now and then by a sluggish river that crept down from rich banana *fincas* and coffee plantations.

There was nothing along that low, monotonous coast to suggest adventure. But beyond the dim, distant jungle wall, danger lurked, and sudden death. War and intrigue eternally dwelt there, along with human greed and that love of conquest which was a heritage of Montezuma's time.

In that land of tiny banana republics, political upheavals were so frequent that the State Department at Washington was hard put to keep track of new national boundaries. Rand and McNally, to follow the shifts of party power and claims of corrupt patriots, would have had to issue new maps with the frequency of evening extras.

It was to one of those fortnightly disturbances that the cruiser *Norfolk* was racing.

There was revolution in Puerta Bella.

**A**ND now Tip Tovey was aware that the strip of shade wherein he sat was visibly narrowing. The sun beat dazzlingly down on the tub of spuds. He lifted his eyes and squinted shoreward.

The ship was changing course. Its long wake was rounding a low headland, putting towards the mouth of a jungle river and the clustered rooftops of a town.



"Here we are!" he sang out.  
 "Here's Puerta Bella!"

Bottleneck grunted.

"If we get a liberty here, it'll be with a Springfield over our shoulder."

Tip Tovey grinned.

"Aw, no. It'll turn out to be just another gold-braid visit," he started to say. "Just another—"

There came an interruption, a sound that seemed eager to support Bottleneck's melancholy prediction. It was the rattle of rifle fire ashore. A long, scattered volley.

A SECOND of tense silence, then another volley sounded. Little jets of spray whitened the sea. A bullet pinged against the galley bulkhead. Tip Tovey and Bottleneck ducked in unison. Then Tip dropped his paring knife with a clatter to deck, leaping to his feet. Funnelface's red face appeared again at the porthole.

"Say!" he yowled, "when are youse guys—"

Tip Tovey scooped up a large potato and poked it into the cook's wide-open mouth.

"Suck or blow, sweetheart," he yelled. "And please excuse us now! We got a war on our hands!"

Gongs were beating all over the ship, from weatherdeck to fantail, beating out the harsh summons of general quarters. Tip, with Bottleneck at his heels, propelled himself down the companionway that led to the berth deck—and the ship's armory.

The ship had magically sprung to life. Men scampered across the decks towards their various battle stations. Porthole covers clanged shut. Voice tubes buzzed with orders. Signalmen up on the bridge clawed for halyards. Up to the peak of the mainmast rippled the United States battle flag. Puerta Bella was due for a headache.

In a trifling matter of seconds, the

*Norfolk* was converted from a peaceable messenger of trade to a floating fortress—ten thousand tons of scowling vengeance, the long snouts of her eight-inch main batteries swinging on the misguided spiggotys ashore who had dared to fire without warning on an American man-o'-war.

The *Norfolk* surged on, speed unabated, towards a row of rickety docks. White foam rolled high at her knife-like prow, and the puny bullets of the shoreside rebels fell like harmless hailstones from her steel armored hull.

Up on the bridge, Captain Bagby, the *Norfolk* skipper, smiled grimly through his binoculars. He spoke to his navigation officer at his side.

"Tryin' to coax us into blowin' up the town for 'em," he said. "Just an old Spanish custom, Mister Hennison. So they can loot and raise hell. But I'm going to give that rebel chief Spirado a surprise, Mister Hennison."

"What is your plan of action, sir?" inquired Hennison.

"I'm going to launch a landing force."

THE voice tubes buzzed some more, and a minute later Tip Tovey and Bottleneck were filling ammo belts with cartridge clips, pulling machine-guns out of their cases and assembling them, and rationing out haversacks and canteens.

"I told you what kind of a party this'd turn out to be," panted Bottleneck.

"Who cares?" chirped Tip Tovey. "We're gonna get ashore, ain't we? And I always wanted to see Puerta Bella."

"Why, for Pete's sake?"

"Old Grandpop Tovey used to make this port."

"That clipper ship captain you brag about so much?"

"You'd brag, too, Bottleneck, if

you ever had a skipper in your family."

"Funny thing how the old fellow disappeared. Wasn't you tellin' me he sailed outa Boston one day and never came back? And never was heard of again?"

"That's what happened. And y'know, Bottleneck, that's why I enlisted in the Navy. I always figured to get down here in Bananaland some day and solve the mystery."

"Yeah, that's how we went over-leave at Cristobal, on account o' you explorin' the waterfront in search of your missing grandpop."

"Never mind, Bottleneck. I'll make it up to you some day, when I find out what happened to him and—"

THE master-at-arms yelled at them then, ending further conversation.

"Hey, shake the lead outa your pants, you bozos! Cut that wala-wala! Wotta ya think we're goin' on—a basket picnic?"

The anchor ball hadn't shot up yet, but already the accommodation ladders were being lowered. Boat booms swung out. Motor launches were swinging on their davits. And in the galley, Funnelface was tearing his hair and wondering how in seventeen hells, with this sudden call for boat rations, he was going to get rid of his twenty gallons of bull-neck stew.

The *Norfolk* was nearing the wharves now. The sniping from shore stopped. From deck, the waiting members of the landing force could see an occasional ragged rebel, flitting across a narrow *Puerta Bella* street.

On a hilltop back of the town stood the *palacio* of the deposed president—a venal dictator named Gonzalez, who in his short term of office had looted the treasury and aroused the angered populace to an outbreak.

Tip Tovey and Bottleneck stood in the crowded ranks by the star-board companionway. Their division officer, a mustang lieutenant, paced back and forth, uttering final orders before taking to the boats. The *Norfolk's* screws were churning in reverse. The rumble of anchor chain sounded in the hawse-pipes at the squeal of a bosun mate's whistle on the forecastle deck.

"While the main body marches up the main drag, towards the palace," barked the lieutenant, "you men will deploy through the back streets, covering their advance. Keep an eye peeled for snipers on balconies and roofs. Search every house and shop and disarm the insurrectos. Clean up every joint in the town, see?"

The boat falls creaked outboard now and launches were lowered and brought quickly alongside the accommodation ladder. In orderly precision, legged gobs filed down the ladder. Among the first to descend were Tip Tovey and Bottleneck Briggs.

Motor Launch No. 1 was quickly filled and shoved off. It headed towards the docks, some two hundred yards from the ship. It came alongside and made fast. The scent of rebel gunsmoke still hung in the streets as the landing force charged on the double-quick up *Calle del Sol* towards the palace.

THE skirmish line scattered and Tip Tovey and Bottleneck barged into an alley-like thoroughfare that twisted off between crowded rows of two-story buildings whose projecting balconies nearly met overhead.

Together they marched, Springfields at ready, cautiously scanning every areaway as they advanced. Doors were bolted shut and windows fronting the street stoutly shuttered and barred. The district seemed deserted until, when they had gone

about two blocks, Tip Tovey saw a rifle barrel poked out from a balcony railing.

He shouted a warning to Bottleneck. The big sailor ducked into a doorway barely in time. The rifle cracked.

Plaster whizzed from the adobe wall, level with his head.

Tip Tovey raised his Springfield and sent a quick shot in the direction of the exposed rifle barrel. Splinters showered from the balcony railing. The rifle was jerked hurriedly from view.

The two gobs ran towards the building from whence the treacherous shot had come. The street level floor, they found, was a shop. The entrance, like all the others along the crooked way, was bolted from the inside.

Bottleneck lunged against it. At the impact of his shoulder, the door creaked but did not yield. Tip thrust him aside, reversed his hold on the Springfield, and using the butt as a battering ram he splintered the lock in three high-powered smashing swings.

The door swung open and they rushed inside.

THE interior of the shop, with window shutters closed, was dark except for the shaft of light that entered at their backs. They paused for a second, until their eyes became accustomed to the change from the searing sunlight outside.

A steep stairway led from the tiny shop to the floor above. Bottleneck rushed the steps. His feet clattered to the top. Then Tip heard a yell, and a bang as a trapdoor at the head of the stairs banged down, separating him from his companion.

"C'mon, you banana-bellied gooks!" yelled Bottleneck.

There was the muffled sound of a blow, a groaned curse, and much scuffling.

Tip dived for the blocked stairs, shoulders hunched to lift against the trapdoor. Just as his foot touched the steps, a voice rasped from a dim corner of the shop. Tip halted and turned. A coffee-colored gentleman in khaki uniform had sprung erect with the suddenness of a jack-in-the-box from behind a counter.

He gripped a heavy automatic pistol. The muzzle was leveled at Tip's heart.

"Wan meenit, my frien'l!"

The coffee-colored gentleman smiled, his teeth gleaming against his dark face. There was a riot upstairs now, and the babble of shrill voices and the stamping of many feet. Bottleneck bellowed a salty, oath-tanged challenge. There was a shrill cry. The balcony railing crashed, and Tip heard the ugly thud of a body falling to the street. The thud was followed by a moan.

"*Madre de Dios!* Help!"

The smile vanished from the face of the coffee-colored gentleman.

His pistol wavered as he shot an anxious glance towards his fallen *companero* outside. In that instant, Tip swung the heavy barrel of the Springfield upwards. It struck the coffee-colored gentleman on the wrist. The automatic clattered across the shop.

THE Springfield jabbed the yelping rebel on his skinny chest. His arms went over his head, one hand gripping his injured wrist. With his back to the wall, he whimpered as Tip recovered the pistol and tucked it inside his web belt.

With a final thump of a falling body and a crash, the tumult upstairs died down. Running feet sounded on the balconies farther up the street, then diminished into silence.

"Bottleneck!" Tip shouted.

No answer. He called again. Something wet and warm spattered

on his hand—the hand that gripped the stock of the Springfield. Tip stared at it, gasping. "Blood!"

He looked up. A slow, crimson trickle was dripping from the unceilinged rafters, from the ceiling overhead!

WITH a sudden frenzy, he drove the coffee-colored gentleman from behind the counter and up the stairs. He prodded him in the seat of his khaki uniform until the rebel lifted the trapdoor. The two of them burst above the level of the upstairs floor.

Bottleneck lay prone, his long body half across a chest that had smashed with the impact of his fall. Blood was streaming from a gash above his left eye. The place, a scantily-furnished sleeping room, was a shambles. In a corner lay a limp, whiskered Puerta Bellan, blissfully unconscious. The shuttered door leading to the balcony looked like a locomotive had been driven through it. "Bottleneck!" Tip cried again, dropping to his knees at the side of his fallen shipmate. He gripped a shoulder and shook it.

"Wake up, you big bum—!" For all the words, there was a break in Tip's voice. It was more than the heat that beaded his anxious brow. They had served together in many strange places. They had worked and slept and eaten and played together. They knew each other's tastes in food and drink and places to go and girls to go with.

Tip was vastly relieved when Bottleneck's eyelids fluttered and his lips moved. He was only knocked out, after all.

"Two gooks got away," he mumbled. One great paw explored the floor, clutching onto the Springfield at his side.

"Easy, shipmate, easy!" Tip's voice was in his ear. Tip broke out his emergency surgical kit and be-

gan dabbing the blood from the gash in Bottleneck's head.

The coffee-colored gentleman, backed in a corner, hugged his hurt forearm and looked on, scowling darkly.

As he drew the edges of Bottleneck's wound together with adhesive tape, Tip's eyes, accustomed now to the dim light, took notice of the shattered chest under his shipmate's head. Puzzled wonder leaped into them. Where had he seen that quaintly-designed box before? It was wrought of thin panels of many kinds of fine wood. It was about three feet long, brass-hinged, and on its shattered top was a brass plate initialed, "A. B. T."

He then spoke to his scowling prisoner.

"Who this box b'long, *hombre*, huh?"

"No *sabe*," grunted the other.

Tip examined it again. A nearly-vanished memory clamored in his brain. All at once, then, a recollection of his childhood rushed into his mind.

IT was back in Boston. He was aboard his grandfather's ship. The old salt was whittling, making a miniature sea-chest.

"'Tis made o' bits o' wood, each from the many ports I've seen," Captain Tovey had said. "Some day, m'lad, 'twill be your own."

And now, on the tarnished nameplate, those initials stood out plain, mutely beckoning to him. "A. B. T." *Abner B. Tovey!*

Bottleneck, struggling to a sitting position, wonderingly watched Tip exploring the jammed drawers.

"Easy, feller! Y'know the law on looting—!" he started to say.

"Looting, my eye! This gadget belongs to me! It's mine!"

The drawers yielded nothing. But in pushing one of them back into the chest, a thin panel of ma-



hogany came loose and dropped to the floor. Tip, convinced that his efforts were futile, gave a sudden exclamation as he saw a sheet of yellowed paper, loosely glued to the inside of the panel. His eager fingers pried the single sheet loose.

One side was covered with faded writing!

HE started to read it, but as he did so the sound of rapid firing came to his ears. From the direction of the palace floated the din of brisk fighting.

Bottleneck was on his feet.

"C'mon, feller! Herd that bozo of yours along to the marine guard! Hear them guns? We're needed up yonder!"

Tip Tovey crammed the stained and faded bit of writing into a pocket of his belt and stood up. He poked the coffee-colored gentleman with his Springfield muzzle, ordering him to precede them down the stairs.

The rebel chief, Spirado, had barricaded himself in the palace. The *Norfolk's* landing party had circled it and were advancing up the hill towards the impromptu fortress. The thick walls of the Puerta Bella administration building were proof against bullet fire, and the small, barred windows made firing parapets that gave the besieged rebels a strong advantage.

Reaching the main body of the attackers, Tip and Bottleneck delivered the coffee-colored gentleman into the hands of a marine squad that was guarding a group of bedraggled prisoners herded in the shelter of a wall at the base of the hill.

"This *hombre* was sniping at us, with a bunch of other gooks, from a balcony," Tip reported to his hard-boiled division officer.

"Are we goin' to charge the palace now, sir?"

"We are not!" blazed the lieutenant. "We are going to send word up

to Spirado to surrender! If he doesn't give in by noon, the ship will open fire and make brickbats outa that *palacio*! What I want now is a coupla volunteers to crawl up there, under a white flag, and take a message orderin' them monkeys to give up!"

"We'll go, sir!" Tip chirped up eagerly. Bottleneck stepped forward. The lieutenant eyed the big gob's bandaged head dubiously.

"I'm all right," insisted Bottleneck. "It's just a scratch, sir!"

"It's dangerous duty," the lieutenant reminded them. "Spirado is dangerous as a snake. Treacherous, that bozo. He may fire on a white flag, like as not. I'm tellin' you, men."

Tip and Bottleneck exchanged glances.

"I'D rather take the chance," declared Bottleneck, "than go back to spud-peeling for Funnel-face."

"Me, too," said Tip.

The lieutenant glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Eleven-thirty now. Seven bells. You better be starting."

"The message ready, sir?"

"Here." The lieutenant produced a folded note from a pocket. It was worded in Spanish:

Spirado: Further resistance is useless. Our ship's guns are trained on your position. Immediately lower the Puerta Bella flag, else when the shadow of the flagpole falls vertical, the *Norfolk* will open fire.

Tip thrust the note into a belt pocket. The lieutenant knotted a white handkerchief onto the barrel of his Springfield.

"Good luck," said the lieutenant.

Tip grinned and saluted.

"I hope them spiggotys got chow ready when we get up there," said Bottleneck. "I'm hungry enough to eat doggone near anything—except spuds."

A winding roadway, paved with

crushed conch-shell, wound up the hill towards the palace. It reflected the blinding heat of the midday sun. With the white handkerchief fluttering from the upheld barrel of his gun, Tip started up. Bottleneck handed his own rifle over to the prisoner guard and followed. From their shipmates, entrenched behind the wall at the base of the hill, a scattered cheer rose.

"I knew I'd like Puerta Bella," grinned Tip Tovey. "Here we are, heroes already!"

"Yeah?" Bottleneck was skeptical. "Well don't forget, I'm a bigger hero than you are."

"How come?"

"I'm six feet high an' twice as easy to shoot at!"

THOSE were nerve-wracking, danger-fraught moments, as they climbed steadily, abreast. The rebel guns were silent now. A silence had fallen on the attacking force below. Rounding a turn in the ascending roadway that brought them into full view of the palace, the pair marched upwards, taut with expectancy. Any second now, and a rifle report might echo from the whitewashed walls above. A shot that would drop them, writhing, into the hot dust of the roadway.

But Spirado held his fire. As they approached, Tip saw a small band of rebels in the palace courtyard, beyond the arched entry. Ragged, dark-faced soldiers in faded khaki, *bandilleros* hanging heavy on their shoulders, guns glinting in their hands.

In front of them, leaning against a shaded arch, lazily smoking a cigarette, vigilant for all his apparent nonchalance, stood a man in olive green uniform that flashed with the gold insignia of rank. Under the low brim of a campaign hat he wore dark glasses.

"*Senor Spirado*, in person," puffed Tip Tovey.

"I wish he'd take off them colored cheaters," said Bottleneck. "S'pose they'd make him color blind so he wouldn't reckonize our white flag!" His footsteps faltered.

"Look, he's wavin' us to come on!"

They fell into step again, the pair of them, and a few more moments of climbing brought them face to face with the man in the green uniform.

"Hi, General!" panted Tip, lowering his Springfield to parade rest and mopping the streaming perspiration from his face.

THE rebel leader flipped away his cigarette. He was taller than most Puerta Bellans, of soldierly erectness once he pushed from his leaning position against the wall, and his uniform was of the finest. Unlike his barefoot soldiers, his feet and legs were encased in polished cordovan. He was lean, darkly handsome. Behind his dark lenses, the light-colored eyes of a mixed ancestry inspected them with mild amusement.

"Into the shade, *Señores Marinos*. Your Navy, it is ready to parley, no?"

Tip and Bottleneck advanced into the court. They sat on the edge of a fountain, where a tame white egret waded, unfrightened by the recent shooting. Tip, eyes fixed on Spirado's cynical smile, reached into his belt pocket. His fingers encountered crumpled paper which he handed to the rebel leader.

"Better read it and get busy, General," Tip advised. "Else there'll be an awful shortage of banana pickers in Puerta Bella."

Turning his back to them, Spirado opened the note. Pacing slowly in the court, he read. He suddenly halted and whirled on them.

The slightly contemptuous unconcern had vanished from his face. He plucked the dark glasses from his eyes. They were wide with surprise.

His lips rattled a Spanish exclamation. Then to the waiting soldiers, an explosive order:

"Benito. Tomas! These gringos, seize them, disarm them!"

THE order was in Spanish, and before Tip or Bottleneck could comprehend its meaning, the loafing rebels had sprung into action. Swarming upon the two gobs, they wrested their rifles from them.

"The lieutenant was right! He's a tricky devil!" yelled Tip. He aimed a whizzing right that smacked one of the rebels into the fountain with a splash that sent the white egret flapping in high alarm.

Two of Spirado's men pinioned Bottleneck from behind. He stamped backwards. His captors howled as his heavy heels crunched down on their bare toes. He jerked free. His club-like fist sent a second *Puerta Bella* into the fountain.

The two sailors were fighting desperately now, back to back. Spirado shouted. More soldiers poured from inside the palace and swarmed to the attack. They took heavy punishment from the flailing fists before Tip Tovey and Bottleneck were crushed to the stone flags by the weight of numbers.

The gobs were still fighting as the soldiers dragged them to the base of a flagpole in back of the fountain. Gasping and bleeding from cuts and abrasions, they were quickly bound with the halyards. Spirado, implacable fury on his thin face, stood before them.

"And now, *Señores Marinos*, prepare to die!"

"What for, you crazy gook?" panted Bottleneck.

Clutched in the hand of the rebel leader was the note Tip had given him. Wordless, Tip stared at it, then squirmed in his bonds to plunge a hand into his belt pocket. From it he took a folded square of paper.

His glance traveled back to the yellowed scrap of parchment-like writing in Spirado's hand.

"Good gosh, Bottleneck!" he gasped. "I gave him—the wrong note!"

"You—what?"

"That paper we found in the broken chest—he has it!" Then to Spirado: "Listen, General, whatever that thing says, it is all a mistake." He offered the surrender demand that the lieutenant had given him to deliver.

Spirado refused it with a short, harsh laugh.

"Another Yankee trick, eh? No, it is too late!"

FOUR soldiers took their places against a wall and at a gesture from Spirado the bolts of their rifles clattered in ugly unison.

"A firing squad!" gasped Bottleneck.

With brutal, impassive faces, the men raised their weapons, leveled at the helpless prisoners, awaiting Spirado's order to fire. Tip Tovey's mind sought frantically for some excuse for delay. He saw a shadow whip across his sprawled body. He looked up and saw the flag of *Puerta Bella* whipping in a breeze.

High over it blazed the hot, tropical sun! The shadow was falling vertical! High noon!

Spirado's arm raised slowly. Once it slashed down, a murderous volley would spat from the muzzles of the aiming guns. "No prayers? *Bueno!* May the devil, then, have mercy on your souls. Ready, my *compañeros* . . .!"

"Don't shoot! Wait, General! Listen!" Tip Tovey's plea was interrupted by a sharp crack out in the harbor—a crack that sent a shell shrieking past the upper balconies. A final warning.

"A three-inch deck gun! Next shot will be a hit!" blurted Bottleneck;

the firing squad hesitated, eyes on Spirado.

"A bluff!" sneered the rebel leader. "Your Navy is a big fat cow! It will not dare . . .!"

**A** GAIN came the tell-tale crack of the three-inch gun. And with it was the shattering detonation of high explosive in some upper part of the palace; a prolonged crash on the tile roof as a wall collapsed. Dust and rock and broken tile rained down in the court. The firing squad scampered for cover like scared rats.

Spirado hesitated, cursing. As he stood there, a heavy fragment bounced from the eaves and struck him a crunching blow on the head. With a sigh he collapsed. His body lay, uncannily still, a dark pool forming on the stone flags, around his shattered skull.

Tip Tovey began struggling with the halyards that bound him and Bottleneck.

"Now's our chance!" he cried. "Another shot and we'll be buried alive!"

"Migawd! I almost wish I was back peeling spuds!" groaned Bottleneck. But his hands were busy, too. Fortunately, the knots that held them had been hurriedly tied. Sea-trained fingers soon had the halyards slackened. A minute of agonized effort that seemed like an hour, and they staggered to their feet, free.

The mysterious paper had fluttered from Spirado's lifeless grasp. Tip's first act was to capture it. Debris was still raining into the court, filling it with dust, and lashing the waters of the fountain. But Tip was oblivious of this as he paused to read the faded writing of the stained document. His mouth gaped open with amazement as he grasped the message it contained.

"Let's go from here!" yelled Bottleneck. He seized his small companion by the blouse collar. "Let's get outa this pile while we're able!"

But Tip seemed unaware of the danger of his position. He had forgotten that any second would bring another missile hurtling into the masonry overhead.

"Wait!" he cried. "Wait!"

"Say, what you aim to do—commit suicide? C'mon outa here, I tell you!" Bottleneck started, fairly dragging his protesting shipmate.

"But Bottleneck, we gotta stop those guns!"

"I should worry about them guns! These gooks deserve what they get!"

"You don't understand, I tell you!" Tip tore free and ran back to the halyards at the base of the flagpole. He seized the rope and began hauling down the Puerta Bella flag.

**"T**HAT won't stop 'em long!" shouted Bottleneck, prancing crazily. "Unless the landing force reports Spirado's surrender, the ship'll start shooting again! And ten to one the next shot will come from the six-inch guns. They won't be satisfied with peckin' away with the deck pieces!"

The flag fluttered to their feet.

"But we gotta stop 'em, I tell you!" Tip raged. He was no less excited than Bottleneck, but he paused now to study the Puerta Bella national emblem. It was a red-and-white background, centered by a single blue star. Thoughts were racing in his brain. And now an ingenious plan came to him. He dropped on his knees beside the flag and began ripping it in pieces.

"Have you gone clean nuts?" raved Bottleneck.

"C'mon, get busy!" Tip snapped back at him. "Sail-Hypo-William! Y'get it?"

None other except a gob who at one time had been a signalman, as Bottleneck had been, would have understood the mystic words. But "Sail-Hypo-William" was a significant phrase to a man-o'-warsman who



had learned to talk in International code with flags and pennants and burgees.

Sail-Hypo-William—the S-H-W of signal alphabet, was naval parlance for “cease present exercises.”

Bottleneck was bewildered. He saw no reason for saving the palace. His sole notion had been to get elsewhere, in the shortest possible time. But in past crises, he had learned that his little shipmate was more agile-witted than he. So he joined Tip at the task of ripping up the Puerta Bella national emblem, and re-assembling it into three flags—one a white square with a blue center, another of white and red, and the tri-colored “William.”

It was nerve-wracking work, there in the open courtyard, which at any second now might become a hell-roaring shambles, a pit into which tons of debris from the upper walls might fall from the blasting impact of a heavy shell.

And it took the ingenuity of sailormen to fasten the bits of ripped cloth into the necessary patterns with no fastenings to be had—slitting the cloth here and there, drawing corners of other cloth through it, knotting them.

**B**UT a “Sail-Hypo-William,” crude but complete, was presently finished and tied to the halyards. Tip hauled on the rope and the signal fluttered aloft.

With their leader weltering in his own blood, the fleeing rebels had cowered in some far part of the palace. But now, emboldened by the long lull in the shellfire, they began a stealthy return to the court, bent on recapturing their American prisoners. As the three-flag signal shot to the peak of the flagpole, a shout sounded in a corridor. Then came the sound of bare feet pattering on the tiles.

Tip and Bottleneck were weapon-

less. Even the pistol that Tip had taken from the sniper and thrust in his belt had been taken from him in the struggle beside the fountain.

The corridor was suddenly filled with shouting rebels. They poured into the court with shouted commands in Spanish for the two sailors to surrender.

“Now see what you got us into!” wailed Bottleneck, backing away as a fiercely-mustached rebel poked him in the stomach with his gun. “For the love o’ Pete, can’t you haul down that bunting?”

**B**UT Tip seemed undismayed by their alarming situation. His red head was cocked sidewise, in an attitude of listening. One of the rebels, attracted by the same sound, ran out of the court to the head of the roadway that ascended from the bottom of the hill. One glance and he scuttled back inside with a howl of despair.

“Ze Yanks!” he cried. “Ze Yanks, zey are here!”

The marching feet of a column of men sounded now on the crushed shell of the roadway, and with the steady tramp-tramp came the hum of voices.

Then, louder than the rest, came the call of the hard-boiled mustang lieutenant.

“Tovey! Briggs! Are you there? Are you safe?”

“All secure!” Tip yelled. The bravado had vanished from Spirado’s men. Tip faced them with a new confidence.

“Drop them guns, savvy!” he ordered. The soldiers paused in brief uncertainty. Flight was futile now. The landing force had reached the hilltop.

The vanguard rushed into the court, led by the red-faced, sweating lieutenant.

“What happened?” he demanded. “I thought you birds were done for,

that is, until I saw that crazy bunting. Where's Spirado?"

Bottleneck pointed to the limp form on the stone flags of the court.

"Who's in command?"

"I am, sir," spoke up Tip Tovey.

"What's that? Have you gone bugs, Tovey?"

TIP grinned cheerfully and extended the stained document that had caused so many surprising turns in his adventure.

"Would you mind reading this, sir?" The lieutenant grabbed the offering. As he read it, Bottleneck, his curiosity overcoming his sense of discipline, craned over the officer's shoulder. Tip watched their faces as they read:

Know all men by these presents that I, Abner B. Tovey, being of sound mind but unsound body, to-wit: about to die of yellow fever, do hereby will and bequest my earthly all to the last of the Tovey line, one Tippianny Tovey, to possess and treat as his own when he reaches his majority.

Years of trade in the lower Americas have rewarded me richly. My property is this splendid domain where I am now dying: seven leagues to the four winds from the government palace of Puerto Bella, the same representing in its entirety the Republic of Puerto Bella. Thus in my own right I could be absolute dictator of this small but productive country. But enfeebled by fever, I am forced to allow government to remain in the hands of the grafters and tyrants.

Puerto Bella is incapable of self-rule. Knowing this, I hereby direct and order that my heir shall take over the duty of president, administering the affairs of the Republic of Puerto Bella with a firm but merciful hand. Honesty and justice will soon be recognized by these oppressed people, and his rule should result in order and prosperity.

And now, on my deathbed, I am stowing this, my last will and testament, in a chest wrought by my own hands, which article is well-known to my grandson, if he remembers. It will remain here awaiting his finding. For find it he surely will, if he reverts the

memory of his grandfather, and if he is of the adventurous turn of the Toveys who have lived before him. If not, he is unfit for the responsibilities herein bestowed. News of my death will not go forth, and the Republic of Puerto Bella will never know the benefactions of able rule such as only an American can give.

Abner B. Tovey.

TWO hours later, Tip Tovey faced Captain Bagby on the bridge of the *Norfolk*. By now, the electrifying news of the little gob's strange inheritance had spread, not only through the ship, but it had penetrated the jungle fastnesses ashore. The population was pouring back into the town of Puerto Bella and the streets were taking on the appearance of a fiesta.

Bottleneck Briggs, who had accompanied Tip back to the ship, stood on the wing of the bridge, his wind-scoop ears bent in an attitude of listening.

"What's goin' on ashore?" Bottleneck spoke up. "A riot?"

But it was not a riot. Faintly came the sound of cheers:

"*Vive la presidente! Vive las Americanos!*"

"Them spiggotys," Bottleneck said, "crave to stand in with the new administration, I guess."

"By jumping Jupiter!" vowed the *Norfolk's* skipper. "That is the most remarkable thing I've seen in thirty years at sea! Yelling for their new president! What do you intend to do about it, young man?"

"With your permission, Captain," Tip said, "I'd like to take over the job."

"It's something a lot of men wouldn't want to tackle."

"Just the same, if the *Norfolk* stands by for a few days, I'm pretty sure I can get things to running smooth."

"That much is already settled. The ship is ordered to remain at Puerto Bella until order is restored."

"There's one more favor I'd like to ask, Captain."

A smile crinkled the corners of the skipper's mouth.

"You want an honorable discharge, I suppose?"

"Yes, and still something else besides."

"Well, what is it?"

Tip turned to Bottleneck Briggs. "I'd like to borrow this man from the Navy. On an indefinite leave of absence."

"What for?" demanded Bottleneck.

"Well, now that Spirado's dead, the army of Puerta Bella needs a new general."

"Migosh!" gasped Bottleneck. "Me, a general, feller?"

"From the way you handled those snipers, you ought to get plenty of discipline."

"Yeah, and look how they handled me!"

Captain Bagby chuckled.

"How about it, Briggs? But hang it all, don't forget that this country is a powder mine for an American!"

Bottleneck rubbed his chin reflectively, and sent a glance down on deck. Beside the galley bulkhead, a heaping tubful of spuds stood waiting. A banging of skillets from the galley gave indication of Funnel-face's temper.

"Yes, an absolute powder mine!" repeated Captain Bagby.

Bottleneck's lips pressed shut in final determination.

"I guess you're right, Captain," he said. "Just the same, I think I'll accept the general job. Y'see," he added, "I like powder better than potatoes!"

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By JACKSON COLE

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### CHAPTER I

#### *The Outlaw*

**A**S the man on the dun colored horse swung out of the narrow draw the rider quickly noted a scramble of fantastic rocks and brush into which he turned the animal. Once screened by this natural shelter the man slid from the saddle, dropped the reins, jerked a Winchester from beneath the saddle skirt and stalked, half crouching to a point where he could watch his back trail. The dun colored horse began at once to jerk wisps of coarse bunch grass that covered the bleak land like hair patches on a shedding buffalo.

"Reckon we run the legs off'n them *hombres*, Mustard," mused the man with the rifle in a voice that carried a soft drawl and a peculiar gentleness that halted the horse in its munching. "Purty dry stuff, eh. Well, one o' these heah mornin's you an' me is goin' to mosey into a real feed an' water. Keep yore shirt on, lady hoss."

The dusty brown horse went back to the tough grass and the man edged over to a low rock where he seated himself, rifle across his knees, and proceeded to fashion a smoke from the tobacco crumbs in his chaps pocket. There was an odd little smirky grin on the smoker's face.

"Guess I'm uh outlaw, Mustard," he said casually to the horse. "Thutty days runnin' befo'e a posse jes natchully brands Hondo Peters with the wide loop bunch."

At this the horse lifted its head slowly and pricked up its ears. The man, too, his range-hardened face grown suddenly half savage, stiffened, and the muscles of his jaw rippled under the bristle of a dusty week-old beard. Whether the sound had come through the draw or from the vast rolling range at his back, made no difference. One thing was definite. Hondo Peters and the dun horse were not alone in that country. For many minutes Peters crouched, eyes shifting from draw to the rising ground behind him. Pursuit, if they still followed him would come through the draw. If riders were approaching from behind, it would look mighty suspicious for them to come up on him this way.

**H**E cursed low in his throat and his gray eyes glinted. Both man and horse were ragged and jaded and Peters was determined now to fight it out at the mouth of the draw. Perhaps they were suspicious and stalking him now. The first rider to appear in that brush choked groove in the ground would get a bullet through his carcass. Peters' finger tightened on the trigger.



# Range Rider



*Peters' gun thundered, and Curley fell forward*

Then from the distance, far away to the southwest, drifting on the hot wind, he heard the bawling of cattle. It was a weirdly plaintive sound and Peters, born to the saddle, shook his head.

"Dogies on the prod," he said half to himself, half to the horse. "Bawlin' for water 'r I'm a sidewinder."

Across the sprawling foothills the sound came clearly to him now and Hondo Peters slowly rose to his feet. Leaving the horse tethered cowboy style with hanging reins he hobbled, stiff-legged, hugging the brush to where he could search the back trail through the draw. There was no sign or sound of men or horses. Peters drew a deep painful breath for he had been riding day and night, hounded like a wolf through sun, wind and rain. He had beaten them.

His teeth bared in a grim smile as he realized this and he swung awkwardly about to retrace his steps. A sheriff-killer, he was branded with the mark of the wanted men. But evidently the friends of the brute who died behind a lawman's badge had no wish to come face to face with Peters unless they were twenty to one. And Hondo had scattered them far and wide over his four-county flight.

"Reckon I'll take a little pasear," decided the lone cowboy.

Hondo Peters mounted his Mustard horse and sat quietly for a moment his eyes on the mouth of the draw, then with a gentle nudge of his knees he put the horse toward the rising slope of sparse grass studded range. Far away in the distance he could make out the hazy line of the Skeleton mountains. Hold-

ing the rifle across his saddle he inspected the twin Colts that nestled in worn greased holsters low on his thighs.

The horse, sweat streaked and caked with dust, climbed slowly. As man and beast reached the crest the rider spoke suddenly refraining from a jerk on the weary animal's mouth.

"Hold up there, pardner," he said, "we trompin' right into somebody's front yard. Cow critters—an'—a rider—two o' them 'r I'm agoin' blind as a county judge."

SOME distance ahead of him, with many folds in the rolling ground between, Hondo Peters was looking at a group of moving dots near a straggling row of trees. Soon he was able to see that the riders were herding a bunch of cattle along a naked ridge running parallel with a stream. Peters studied the scene, his eyes warry slits in his tanned face. The cattle were certainly stubborn. Time after time they attempted to break back toward the row of trees.

There would be a wild swirl of dust and the riders would head them reluctantly after the others. Then the milling mass turned in a bunch and charged back toward the water, bellowing with rage.

Hondo Peters was puzzled and urged his horse slowly forward.

"Gosh," he finally decided, "them two ain't nothin' but kids. An' that's sure funny!" He stared intently. "That's barbed wire strung across that gap. Looks like a spite fence." His eyes narrowed quizzically and he rode slowly forward.

He was quite close to the riders before they saw him. At a glance he knew they were brothers, not more than eleven and twelve maybe. Small for their age too. They looked hot and tired and were slumped in their saddles. The younger boy's face was streaked with angry tears.

Hondo Peters turned his attention

to the cows. Strung along the fence they tossed their heads and bawled. The calves looked feeble. A thick dust cloud filled the air. The animals were demanding water, as they milled forlornly up and down the wire that barred them from the creek and succulent feed along the bed of the stream.

The older boy was shouting over the bellowing of the cattle. "Come on Bill, snap into it. We got to haze 'em past the ledge or they'll die against that wire."

The smaller boy did not move. He called back, "Aw Sam, what's the use. We'll never get 'em away from here. We been tryin' all mornin' and they always busts back again."

"Yeh," shrilled Sam, still unaware of the stranger. "But I tell you it's got to be did or when Dad comes back they'll all be dead. Come on. Shake a leg! There's a couple of calves down now." He wheeled his horse and found himself suddenly face to face with Hondo Peters who had ridden up quietly.

"Hyah, kids," he grinned.

THE two boys reined in their horses and stared at this stranger with the steady questioning gaze of youth. What they saw evidently pleased them for their mouths slowly widened in friendly grins only to sober again immediately.

"Lo, stranger!" they replied as one.

"Them cows seem right thirsty, why for don't you pull down that fence an' let 'em get to the water?" Peters' voice was easy, the tone tended to encourage confidence.

Sam, the elder of the brothers—for Hondo decided now that they were—clenched his fists in sudden rage.

He spoke in a choked voice:

"You take another look, an' you'll see why."

Hondo Peters turned in his saddle.

Inside the wire, the space between the fence and the water was littered with the carcasses of cows. Dead cows! As he looked his eyes smoldered with anger. He turned back to Sam.

The kid was staring fascinatedly at the two big guns in Hondo Peters' holsters.

"Pears like you got trouble," the man said. "Supposin' you tell me about the spread."

Their eyes were blazing, their slight bodies taut with rage. Between them they told the story.

"Our cows always drift down here," said Bill. "Dad's gone to the sheriff, and we can't get the cows away from the wire. Yesterday we took part of the fence down and let 'em through. They—they shot 'em!" Angry tears started, to be brushed away with grimy fists.

PETERS answered calmly, though his eyes were filled with fire: "Wait a minute. Take it easy like. Who's this—they?"

"The Barleys," cried Bill. "There's three of 'em. Tex is the worst, he's the oldest. He's got two brothers, Ed and Curley. Yesterday Tex stood over us with a whip and made us dig post holes to put the fence back up."

"Dad bought the Lazy Y last winter off Barley," explained Sam angrily. "There was plenty of feed until the summer drought came. We was figurin' to use the hills t'other side o' Clear Creek for summer range but the damn skunks put up that wire an' shut us out."

"You mean full grown men made you kids dig post holes?" demanded Hondo Peters, his ire rising steadily.

Peters had almost forgotten his own plight, the month-long trail he had cut over range and mountain. Now, strange, the thought flashed again into his brain. He was stick-

ing his horn into another man's business. His eyes glittered as he looked from the two youths to their wretched cattle, the damnable spite fence. Then he glanced down at the mud flecked withers of his little dun horse. That last night in Buckleville had heard his bullet echoed vow—Never again!

No more would he take up the battle for the oppressed.

The picture of the smoke filled barroom of the Branding Iron Saloon flared up in his steady gaze. The withered, broken nester with skinny clawing fingers reaching for the weapon he never drew—and the lawman, brazen, bully—"Big Barn" Crowder, crooked as a trail through pear thicket, surrounded by his range grabbing friends. That was none of Hondo Peters' business but he had made it so.

"Crowder!" It was Peters' voice ringing through the reek and smoke of the Branding Iron. Hondo could hear himself again as he had many of the dark nights when he rode the owl-hoot trail with the blood lusters at his heels. "Yore a dirty thievin' dog, Barn Crowder. A murderin' skunk to shoot a man as ain't got a chance agin yuh. Draw that gun o' yourn again—not a move you gents—"

THE booming blast of Hondo Peters' Colts cut the crooked lawman down with his pistol in his fist, and the single dusty street of Buckleville echoed to the swift running feet of many horses. Mile after mile the little dun mare had carried Peters in the race with death.

"Mebbe," Hondo mused now as he glanced up at the boys, "mebbe the *hombre* that built this fence is right—legal—an' these young rannies'll rattle me into a tangle with the law." Then to the boys he said, louder, "Ain't yuh got no other water on yore range?"

"Sure," they answered together. "The Black Hole's all right enough in winter but in summer she ain't much 'count. An' she sure stinks."

"An' there ain't no other way 'cross the crick?"

"Nope. The crick come out o' Red Cañon right close to our ranch. A man and a hoss can get 'cross all right but there's quick sands on both sides of the ford an' 'long the banks, so we can't use her for critters."

"Then," added Sam, "the crick runs along back of that ridge to where them skunks strung the wire, and some bit further she plumb disappears under ground."

Peters nodded thoughtfully. It was clear that the Barleys had the Lazy Y stopped. His mouth was a hard line as he looked at the freckled faces. But the boys evidently thought they had wasted enough time. They wheeled round toward the cows.

"Wait!" he called, "mebbe I give you a hand."

Fifteen minutes later they had the cows headed away from the fence and drifting east along the ridge.

THE Lazy Y Ranch buildings stood on the border of a long string of pools formed by the seepage from the creek that flowed out of the canyon some half mile to the north. But the pools now were mostly dry, their beds unsightly stretches of cracked mud. As the three unsaddled by the corral, Bill called shrilly in the direction of the ranch house:

"Hey, ma! Put on another plate. We got company for dinner."

A slender woman in her late thirties appeared in the doorway. Hondo Peters could see even at that distance that her face was drawn and haggard and her shoulders drooped. She looked crushed and very tired.

For a moment she stared out into the sunshine straight at the stranger, then her expression lightened. Re-

lief came into it. It was clearly to be seen that she had been expecting someone else, someone whom she perhaps dreaded.

Peters grinned and swept off his battered Stetson. "Howd'y ma'm. these kids of yours is responsible for me bein' here."

"I—I was afraid it was—Tex Barley," she faltered. "Dinner's on the table. Come in an' set, stranger."

Letting the boys lead the way Hondo followed into the rambling old house.

AS he pulled out a chair and sat down at the kitchen table, he asked: "So you was expectin' Tex Barley! For why, ma'm?"

"He sent word he wanted to talk to Tom, my husband," the woman explained. "You know Tex?" Anxiety was dominant in her voice.

"Nope. No ma'm. That is, not personal. Yore kids been talkin' to me 'bout him. What's he got to say to your man?"

"He said he'd heard Tom had been threatenin' him. Oh—I'm so—" her voice faltered, "so frightened." She dabbed at her eyes with the corner of her apron. "Tom's gone into town to see the sheriff, but if he won't help us I'm scared of what Tom might do!"

"You know, stranger," Sam broke in, "Dad goes down and asks Tex Barley how come he strung that wire and Tex he jus' laughs."

Bill added loudly through a mouthful of beans.

"Shucks, it's just 'cause Dad's sick an' all. You wait 'til he gets strong again. He'll sure make skunks hard to find."

Hondo's face clouded and he stared moodily at a juicy lump of salt pork on his plate. He understood this woman's fear. Her husband was perhaps not only ill; he was not a fighting man. But if he were badgered beyond endurance and the sheriff re-



fused to help him, the day might come when he would seek justice with the business end of a Colt.

"Can't you make a dicker with this Tex Barley, Ma'm?"

The woman shook her head. "There ain't no use, mister. There's only one thing we can do. Tom bought this place from Barley, and maybe he will buy it back. We'd have to let it go dirt cheap o' course."

"That seems like to me," agreed Hondo Peters, "as the best thing yuh can do, ma'm. Straight open an' shut business deal. Yore husband, he ain't no fightin' man, I take it."

A DEEP frown creased the tired woman's face as she looked out the window at her side. She appeared not to notice the stranger's rise from the table, nor his mumbled words of thanks or sympathy as he picked up his hat and then made for the open door.

"A queer cuss," said the older boy as the mother and sons watched their strange visitor secure his horse from the corral, saddle it and swing lazily up. "An' I thought from them guns o' his'n he wuz a hell roarin' ranny. We skeered him out with talkin' 'bout Tex Barley, heh, mom?"

"You ain't got no right talkin' thataway, Bill," censured the woman wearily. "Folks don't have to go mixin' up in other folks' troubles—an' two guns on a man's thighs don't make a gunfighter. Traipse out there an' looksee if that cloud o' dust yonder's yore dad comin'."

Young Bill shrugged and walked across the barren dooryard of the Lazy Y ranch. The puff of dust miles away appeared in the opposite direction from that where the stranger had ridden out of sight beyond a swell. Bill stared steadily into the distance. If it was his dad that yellow cloud would swing off at Dead Man's Draw. If it was one of the Barley bunch—

## CHAPTER II

\$5,000 Reward

HONDO PETERS rode silently on the rolling range. Five miles from the Lazy Y he rounded a bald knob to discover on the trail he was following a grove of cottonwoods in which nestled a cluster of small shacks. Riding, slouched in the saddle, he entered what appeared to be a clearing on a creek bank. At the door of a flat roofed building marked Tomkins' Store, Hondo Peters, drew rein. Sid Tomkins, the proprietor of the combination store and bar, was short and fat with a round, good natured face and friendly humorous eyes. He stood, leaning in the doorway and as Peters stepped down he looked the stranger over carefully.

"This town," greeted Hondo, "is sure mighty big an' is plumb crowded with humanity."

"Yeh, we're sure some metropolis," Tomkins admitted judiciously, smiling. When Peters had tied his horse to the hitch rack, he ambled into the store, to face the owner who had edged behind the counter.

"You got any o' them ginger crackers?" Peters demanded.

Tomkins chuckled as his caller's hungry eyes watched him weighing out the crackers. Suddenly as if it were impossible for him to wait, Hondo reached out and seized a handful. The storekeeper chuckled.

"Gosh, I'm plumb starved fer something sweet," the stranger explained. "I've always been loco about ginger snaps."

Tomkins stared at the stranger curiously. He noted the lean face with the gray eyes. There was something sinister behind those smiling features. Yet he could not place it.

"You come across the creek?" he inquired lazily.

"Yeh."

"Tome Simms got back yet?" he

asked, his voice soft, vibrant with hidden feeling.

"You mean the *hombre* that owns that Lazy Y—Got two boys?"

The proprietor nodded, his eyes probing his customer's face.

"No, he ain't—yet," answered Hondo Peters. "His woman's plumb scared of what he'll do when he gets back. Say, them kids is sure real boys. Reckon they got a bum deal. Too bad." Hondo gave himself over to the rare pleasure of eating ginger snaps.

The smile faded from Tomkins' face and he looked anxiously over his shoulder toward a dark corner in the rear of the store. Peters followed his glance and for the first time noticed that there was a man in a chair tilted back against the wall.

A second look showed him that the man was asleep. The face was thin and pointed, the forehead narrow, receding sharply. Something about the sleeper made Hondo think of a blind rattler.

Peters glanced again at Tomkins and decided that the fat store keeper was afraid of his thin guest.

"Huh," snorted Peters, contentedly. "A pretty lookin' cuss. Bet he's got fangs for teeth, eh pardner?"

A FOOT away across the counter, Tomkins signalled at Hondo with mouth and eyes, silently. Then, very low, he whispered: "Keep your mouth shut, stranger!"

Peters grinned but was aware at once that the fat proprietor was undoubtedly host to some tough *hombre* of whom he was in mortal fear. He began to order. Bacon, flour, canned goods. He sat on the counter nibbling at a sugar lump while Tomkins took the stuff down from the shelves.

"Mrs. Simms told me," Peters added, "she was goin' to try an' persuade her husband to sell back that ranch to the Tex Barley gent. You

know anything at all 'bout it?"

"Well, they won't get nothin' for it," whispered Tomkins, glancing cautiously over his shoulder at the sleeper. "The others didn't."

"What you mean—the others?" Hondo Peters' interest was evidently aroused.

"Same trick been played on five families. Simms ain't the only sucker."

"You mean these skunks make a business of sellin' that ranch to greenhorns, then wirin' off the water, an' buyin' the place back for next to nothin'?" Peter almost snarled. "Don't none of 'em over go on the prod?"

"Yeh, one, a big Swede. They planted him."

Munching his crackers Peters remained silent for several minutes, then:

"Gosh, I ain't had nothing that tasted so good for a month."

The storekeeper's attitude had gotten under his skin. Hondo smelled a crooked deal. He glanced from the fat Tomkins to the lean, wiry sleeper. Who was this feared gent and where did Tomkins head in?

Tomkins looked thoughtful. The big Swede had been a friend of his and he had a weakness for Simms' kids, Billy and Sam.

"You don't sound," ventured Peters, "as if the Barleys was perticler friends o' yours."

TOMKINS replied in a hushed whisper, for a moment forgetting his caution. "If I was a fightin' man I'd sure learn 'em tricks."

He stopped with a jerk. Behind him the sleeping man had stirred. He put the last of the purchases down hastily and said in a loud voice: "You talk too much, mister. Take your thin's an' clear out o' here."

Hondo Peters was puzzled more than ever. The man's eyes did not

match his words. He picked up his supplies and went outside, unhitched his horse, lashed the pack behind the saddle.

Tomkins was watching him from the doorway.

Peters felt that he was being watched and his indomitable fighting spark sprang into his eyes. He knew that Sid Tomkins had walked back into the store but he could not see inside where the fat man stood now facing his rear wall. It was covered with sheriff's bills. Reward notices. Some were yellow with age, some new.

Tomkins glanced rapidly over the newer ones until he found what he sought. He tore it down and held it so that the light from a window fell directly on the picture. Below the picture was printed in heavy type:

\$5,000 REWARD  
DEAD OR ALIVE  
HONDO PETERS

TOMKINS stared at it and in a whisper said: "It's him!"

He hurried now to the door of the store. Hondo Peters, outlaw, was just swinging into the saddle. There was no other sign of life in the little town. What in hell had come over the storekeeper that made him look like that?

"What's your hurry, stranger?" drawled Tomkins.

Peters rested a quick hand on his right pistol and studied the other appraisingly. He felt a quick suspicion. "You was plumb anxious to have me ride. What's crawled into yore hide?"

"Shucks, I figured you was mebbe a four-flush," said Tomkins softly. "But I knows different now—Hondo Peters, an' I'd be right tickled to have you drink with me!"

So they had notices out for him. Hondo Peters—dead or alive. His

gray eyes fastened on the storekeeper. Whatever it was the young cowboy felt the challenge to his nerve and his speed with the guns that hung low on his chaps.

He slid from the relieved dun horse and walked into the store where he and Tomkins talked together for ten minutes in low hushed tones. Tomkins was excited, eager. Hondo listened and measured the man beside him.

"Somehow you don't look like a gent that's aimin' to double-cross me," he said finally. "I'll take a chance. Keno, pardner, but savvy this pronto—one crooked move outa you an' down you go."

Tomkins nodded with relief and hurried into the back room where he took down a bottle from the shelf.

Seated on the counter together Hondo Peters and the rotund storekeeper sealed a pledge. Tomkins shoved the bottle toward the younger man but the rider whose life was worth five thousand dollars to the conscienceless cowtown of Buckleville shook his head.

"I ain't a drinker, friend," he said with a grin. "A man that takes the chances I've brushed against ain't got a right to run risks. I'll roll one."

PETERS' face was earnest as he built a brown paper smoke. His eyes were divided between the thing in his supple fingers and the snoring man on the tilted chair. So that was Ed Barley, brother of the famous Tex. The tough Barleys who ruined unsuspecting small ranchers and let women and kids starve. Suppose that sheriff should refuse to help Tom Simms and his family.

What business was it of Hondo Peters?

The proprietor watched this wanted outlaw with a strange sort of fascination. Here was youth, strength and a courage that Sid Tom-

kins had never felt. Hondo Peters, a two-gun *hombre* with nerves of steel and speed that beat the widely feared Big Barn Crowder. Peters' fingers held a match, the cigarette gripped between his thin lips.

Carefully Hondo Peters broke the match while his solitary audience sat spellbound. With a nick of his finger nail he then lit the business end and tossed it with unerring accuracy toward the sleeping Ed Barley. Like a rocket the flaring match dropped down Barley's shirt neck, and with a howl of surprise and rage Tex Barley's brother sprang to his feet, sputtering, beating at his chest and staring about him, cursing.

"I'M damn sorry, mister," offered a young tanned cowboy as the eyes of the enraged Barley discovered him. "She broke clean in two equal parts. Now I—"

Barley stood fuming, his feet spread wide, his rawhide body crouched as if he would spring. He was glaring hotly at the stranger.

"So—it wuz you," bellowed the hot-headed gunman. "You dirty maverick." He paused to fish out the now dead match end and stare at the smoking cigarette hanging in the corner of the stranger's mouth. "It broke in two, eh. Well, I'll break you in two—teach yuh to run wild on the Barley range. Come over here!"

Hondo Peters smiled pleasantly, completely baffling the gunman who faced him. "It was an accident, mister," insisted Peters. "Ain't you got any brains?"

Ed Barley leaped. His gun hand streaked for the Colts at his belt and his lips spouted a volley of oaths. The quick shuffle and stamp of booted feet, a shrill yell from the storekeeper and a pistol cracked with a shattering blast that toppled bottles from the shelves. Barley's gun clattered to the floor and with

a cry of mad hatred he lunged at his enemy. This was Hondo Peters' pie. He rammed his Colts into his holster, planted his feet and met Barley with a smashing left hook to the face.

A bellow of bitter rage burst from the bully's throat and he flung a hand to his bleeding face. Hondo's fist had spread the man's nose flat across his cheeks; his face was hideous, but he hurled himself like a wolf at the younger man who was shorter by a full six inches.

Whamgo! As Barley swung and missed widely Hondo Peters' right fist struck him under the ear, spinning him like a top that is about to fall.

"Tough gent, eh," chuckled Peters heartily. "Rough-an'-tumble gun toter. Get yore laigs under you." With a leap, his feet like a welter-weight boxer even in high-heeled boots, Peters was close in and ripping a flurry of punches to Barley's face and body. It was a surprise all around; to Tomkins, to Barley whose wits were dazzled and to Peters who watched curiously as Ed Barley, punch drunk and cock-eyed, folded like a camp-stool and fell headlong under the overhang of the counter.

Behind the counter Tomkins was watching happily. Hondo Peters stared at the prostrate man thoughtfully. He bent down, seized him by the foot and dragged him across the floor where he dumped him out of the door into the dust.

THEN he ambled easily back to the counter. Tomkins was wiping the sweat from his forehead. He sputtered something unintelligible and pushed the aforementioned bottle toward the outlaw. Peters shook his head.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Ed Barley stumble up out of the dust and stagger away out of



sight, not even glancing once in their direction.

Turning to a bucket and dipper on a near-by box Peters drank thirstily and the storekeeper chuckled again.

Tomkins said slowly: "How about a chunk of real apple pie? Mrs. Simms made it for me. You look a mite hungry."

Peters grinned widely and said he would look after his "hoss." What he was going to do would be impossible if his horse was neglected. Tomkins agreed nervously and waved as Peters left the store.

He watered and stabled his horse, then returned to the store. The two men silently ate their supper. Afterward they sat on the store steps and watched the shadows creep across the range. Dusk came and then the night. Sid Tomkins itched to ask Peters questions but lacked the courage so they went to bed.

It was not until Hondo Peters heard the healthy snores of his companion that he crept out of the back room into the store. Fumbling his way along, his fingers found the heavy bolt. He slid it back without a sound. A second later he was skulking around the corner of the shack through the darkness. High up in the sky a million stars twinkled. Somewhere in the cottonwoods a bird cried.

HONDO PETERS was quiet and his face wore a decidedly serious expression in the morning. He and his host, the fat storekeeper, ate breakfast with little talk. Tomkins was aware of the tenseness in the general atmosphere of his shambling store.

"Yore hoss could stand a bit o' rubbin' down, pardner," he said casually to Hondo. "Looks like she musta busted out o' my barn durin' the night."

"Huh," grunted Hondo. "That's queer. I'll see 'bout that when I

feed her. Ain't that a party o' folks headin' this way?"

Sid Tomkins peered through the cobwebby window, screwed his face up into a red tangle of flesh, and nodded.

"The Simmses," he mused without excitement due the occasion under ordinary circumstances. "Now I wonder what that whole family's stam-pedin' this way for at daybreak?"

HE glanced speculatively toward Hondo Peters. The last arrival at Buckleville grinned sheepishly.

"Mebbe the little *hombre's* made up his mind to quit fightin' them Barleys, mister."

Tomkins chuckled, shrugged, wiped his mouth on his sleeve and appeared to become suddenly nervous about something. The Simms family had arrived before the general store. Tom Simms hopped down from the wagon in which he and his wife were riding. The two boys were mounted, their horses standing near the wagon. As Simms entered the store he squinted narrowly into the darkness. The storekeeper called cheerily.

"Hyah, Simms," he greeted the unfortunate rancher. "If that's yore wife yore leavin' out there might's well bring her inside. The young uns too. Shake hands with Hondo Peters."

Simms craned his ewe neck toward the lithe chaps-clad figure beside the proprietor. Almost timidly he shoved a scrawny hand out. Hondo grasped it in a fist that made the other wince. But the grin on the two-gun man's face brought a responsive smile to Simms' drawn mouth.

"You—you're the feller—" Tom Simms paused to clear a sudden gulp in his throat, "that left the note under my door in the night? Yeh. Well, mister—Peters—its perty fine o' you offerin' to help downright strangers like this." He shook his head sadly:

"But it ain't no use, Peters. I can't do it. They'd on'y kill yuh if yuh put up a fight. Shoot yuh down like a coyote."

HONDO PETERS laughed low in his chest and motioned to a box.

He saw the man's wife come in, followed by the two boys and he bowed stiffly to the woman.

"Howdy, ma'm," he said. "See you an' yore husband got my note. Let's get this settled quick's possible. Things mebbe'll happen fast today if my plan works like I hope. You got that paper all fixed pardner?" This last he addressed to Tomkins.

The stout merchant nodded and bustled behind his counter. There was an air of profound mystery about this business, but Peters, with the modesty found in most generous hearted, reckless men, left it to Tomkins to explain. Tomkins he had learned was the only real friend the Simms' family had in that section. Simms had confidence in the general factor of Buckleville.

"It's all right, Tom," assured Sid Tomkins. "Yuh can take my word fer it, Missus Simms, ma'm. Tom jus' signs this bill o' sale like he told you in his note. You got the note, eh? Yeh. Jus' to make it legal like. See, Mister Peters gives yuh this silver dollah, makes it legal, an' buys the Lazy Y."

"But—" the woman's eyes were drawn tight in a perplexed frown, worried, frightened, "the Barley's 'ould give us more'n that fer the ranch. We'll be paupers Mister Tomkins. I don't understand."

"Jus' sign it Tom," urged Sid fervently. "Leave it to me—me an' my pardner here."

Simms and his wife looked at each other wearily, puzzled. The two boys stood silent staring hard at Hondo Peters. A strange *hombre*. There was considerable explaining

for Tomkins, but the paper was signed.

The Lazy Y now belonged to Hondo Peters, gunfighter and outlaw. Somewhere on the ranges to the north of the Lazy Y the lawmen were even then searching the draws, the coulees and the hills covered with stunted cedars for the quick-trigger cowboy who had beaten the crooked Crowder on the draw. Hondo Peters had to work fast.

"You folks," he said to the Simms family, "can throw down here with Tomkins fer today. I'll be ridin'."

Drawing the twin Colts from their holsters Hondo spun the cylinders carefully, blew a speck of dust from one hammer, and slid the deadly weapons into their greased leathern pockets. He was ready.

Tomkins grinned cheerfully. "He's a gent that goes 'round skinnin' skunks just for the love of it."

SIMMS opened his mouth, but before he could speak, a hard metallic voice came from the doorway. The little group in the store swung round and the color drained from all but one of their faces. It was Tex Barley, black and threatening. He stared menacingly his little eyes like beads of jet, from one to the other, then fixed on the stranger. Hondo Peters noted that the man was the counterpart of his brother, only perhaps more evil looking. He was known to be a cruel killer and quick as lightning with his guns.

"Tomkins!" rasped Tex Barley, "you sidin' with that stranger agin' me?"

The storekeeper swallowed convulsively and started to speak apologetically. Then he gulped and blinked rapidly. Peters was half hidden in the shadows.

Barley spat and burst out with a snarl. "Well, what's this damn fool mean leavin' that note on my ranch last night?" He swung on Peters.

"After I'm through with you, I'll feed you to the crows."

### CHAPTER III

#### *Bullets and Bad Men*

THE storekeeper looked furtively at the small figure of Simms and motioned the woman and kids into the back room. Hondo Peters had not moved out. His face became cold and hard. His eyes glinted like live wires grounding sparks and now he started stiff-legged across the floor.

Tex Barley must have sensed the menace of this stranger who had notified him that he was the new owner of the Lazy Y. He saw the two guns, but missed the portent of those flinty eyes. Tex Barley had complete faith in his own speed. His lips parted in a cruel leer and he waited. Here was another victim. Another notch. There was an ominous silence. Only the slow footfalls of Hondo Peters. No words now. Like the walking of a man to the gallows.

Tom Simms watched with horror stricken eyes. He tried to open his mouth, to shout a warning. Tomkins clamped a hand over his mouth and whirled him behind the counter.

Tomkins hissed savagely. "Now watch him die."

"You're keepin' my cows from water, mister," Hondo said coldly.

"What of it? Do you know who I am? I'm Tex Barley!"

"Mister Tex Barley, you're a no good murderin', rustlin' crook. I'm countin' three to get goin' fast and tear that fence away, then I'm feedin' you lead." His voice was icy, chilling.

There was a brief black moment's silence. Neither man moved. Peters started to count.

"One!"

Tex Barley's body stiffened and his hand stretched downward slowly above the butt of his gun. With

a roar like a range bull, he grabbed. But the gun barely left the holster. There came the deafening blast of a pistol, a cloud choking smoke. Someone screamed. The woman? The gunman spun half around, staggered, his pistol wavering. He threw a wild stream of lead at Peters and the bullets tore into the ceiling. Hondo Peters, crouched and fired. Two guns ripped twin streaks of flame and bad Tex Barley crashed into the counter, slid to the floor.

Peters peered at him through the swirling smoke, then threw out his empty cartridges and reloaded. As his guns dropped back into the holsters, he turned to the white faces that stared at him from various points of safety.

"I'm ridin' out to my ranch," he called back as he walked out of the door.

Leaping into the saddle he turned Mustard south and east following the creek several miles until he spotted a cabin built on its banks. Here he dismounted calmly and marched up to the hut on foot.

No one was inside. Peters listened cautiously, then stalked off through the bush, eyes and ears alert, his rifle gripped for quick action. Soon he discovered the two men he sought sitting facing the creek. Rifles lay across their knees. They appeared to be expecting someone.

Hondo Peters cached his rifle and unlimbered his six guns.

One in each hand, he crept up like a catamount and covered them.

"Reach for the sky," he said easily.

THE two watchers turned startled. Angry eyes on the man with the drop. Threats rolled out of their throats, then slowly, reluctantly their hands went into the air. Hondo recognized his foeman of the previous day. His eyes were black and his nose resembled nothing that be-

longs to a human face. This man cursed vilely. The other was smaller but there was a strong family resemblance in every feature but the nose.

Hondo studied him. "Reckon you're Curley."

"Who in hell are you?" Curley snarled.

"In hell I'm the devil himself," laughed Hondo evilly, "but here I'm the gent that owns the Lazy Y. Don't make no mistakes. Climb up outa there, pronto. Any gun stam-pede'll only get you a grave."

The two Barleys stared at him in utter amazement. Their rifles still rested on their knees as they broke into vehement expressions of friendship. They insisted that they had no intention of continuing the harassing tactics that Simms had suffered from.

Hondo Peters fondled his pistols and listened, amused.

"Get up. It's time we had this business settled," he ordered finally. "Keep your hands in the sky and march—yeh, down to 'em trees."

The grim procession, grumbling and cursing, descended the slope. Over on the left the trees formed a tangled wilderness. Sweat began to pour down the captor's faces. It stung their eyes and they demanded to know what he was going to do with them.

"I got a little work for you," Peters informed them and his face was hard, his mouth a grim line. "Head across the creek."

THEY stumbled on as he directed. Peters looked around the country slyly and followed them through the shallow water to the far side, his guns steady on their backs. At the spite fence he halted the Barleys.

"Now then! Get at that fence an' take it down. Posts, wire 'n all."

There was a gurgle of protest from

the one called Curley, a muttered oath from his battered brother. Hondo Peters' voice cracked like a whip.

"TAKE down the fence or dig yore graves. I ain't got no time to waste. I'm in a hurry."

Peters' eyes had caught far distant a tiny swirl of dust on the dim horizon. His face twitched and he swore. Snarling like trapped beasts the two Barley brothers shambled up to the fence and began stripping the wires from the posts. Peters, alert, nervous, kept them covered. If they paused in their sweating labors he drew back the hammers of his Colts. The effect was remarkable. Sweating, stumbling, the Barley gunmen heaved and tugged, the increasing heat of the sun's rays soaking them through.

Hondo now divided his attention between his captives and the distant dust cloud. Once Ed Barley stumbled to his knees. Peters was relentless. A bullet clipped sod at the man's side and the man rose frantically to his feet to pull viciously at the last strand of wire.

"I'm bettin' you're right thirsty," opined the man with the twin Colts. "Maybe it'll learn yuh how them poor critters felt when they was dyin' th' other side o' the fence."

Ed Barley, hideous spectacle from the fight of yesterday, was quick, eager to reply. His words, thick and nasal because of his ailing nose, promised peace.

"You ain't gonna have no more trouble, mister," he whined. "We swear we'll be plumb peaceful neighbors—no fences, no dead cows—no—"

Peters caught the swift side-long glance that Ed tossed to his brother Curley. In a flash, the outlaw knew that his original plan must go through. It had to be a showdown on the range. At the first slim chance



these two Barleys would gun him to death, shoot him through the back if necessary. They were merely marking time. He broke in on Ed Barley's vow of peace.

"Get hold on yore tongue, Barley," he warned him. "I'm trustin' you both's far as I can toss a three-year-old. Keep yore hands away from them weapons o' yourn an' get goin'."

Desperate, bent on revenge the two gun flingers tramped as directed back to the clump of alders and cottonwoods where Hondo Peters had first discovered them. Here their horses were staked out, masked by the foliage. Also their rifles. And here as Hondo Peters waved them on their way came the grim reaper.

"Fork yore brons," ordered Peters, "an' ride. If I ever hears o' you two hombres stampin' tracks around that water I'm payin' yuh a visit you won't live to remember. Drag it!"

THE two Barleys growled an inaudible reply and walked to where their rifles lay in the cool, lush grass. Hondo Peters also turned and began retracing his steps. But he walked like a man on stilts, stiffly, as a fighting dog walks warily around another, tense, ready for the swift spring that ends in a death grapple. Seven steps Hondo walked, soundless in the grass, only the soft swish of boot toes brushing the green blades. Seven—eight! Peters caught the thin, low sound of a foot spinning on a stone and the hushed grating whisper of Ed Barley's voice passing a signal.

With the speed of a sputtering fuse Hondo Peters whirled and snaked his Colts from their holsters. From a sidewise stance he fired, the deadly crash of the pistols awakening the shadows beneath the trees. Both Barleys were there before him crouched, their rifles half raised.

Wild lead spouted from the long

barrels and shrieked past the lone puncher, then with a shrill cry of pain Curley Barley dropped his Winchester and snatched his Colts to let drive a stream of lead. Peters felt the quick tug of something at his shoulder, a burning flash of flaming iron that cut into his flesh. He staggered, gripping that gun for dear life, caught himself and felt his Stetson jump. Cool as an icicle he covered the men with his single pistol, shooting deliberately following their skulking jumps from cover to cover.

"SNEAKIN' skunk—" shouted Curley as he raised up from behind a stump. "You ain't—"

Peters' gun thundered and Curley fell forward across the roots motionless, as a slug from Ed Barley's weapon jerked the neckerchief around Hondo's throat so that he thought he was choked. Crack! Crash! The booming volleys rolled around the range. A wild bullet downed one of the Barley horses. It screamed in terror as it died. Ed Barley kept up a stream of venomous curses as he maneuvered for a center shot at the man who had finished Curley.

Wild with fury he came rushing from his cover.

"Fool!" shouted Hondo Peters, steadying himself.

Both Colts spun flame. Peters felt the hot seering whisper of a bullet kissing his jaw and saw before him the sudden collapse of Ed Barley. The last of the gunny trio fell like a rabbit, in a spasm—a buck-jump to the heavens, then half over and down in a heap.

"Defendin' my water hole," said Hondo Peters wiping sweat from his hat band and stumbling awkwardly back to where he had left the dun horse.

As he climbed painfully into the saddle he glanced backward across the miles of rolling rangeland. That

dust cloud was sure no further away.

"Make tracks, old Mustard hoss," said Hondo gently. "Our past looks like its goin' ter catch up with us."

THE dun horse nodded and bent down to the task of covering ground. Peters slouched lazily in the saddle, felt of his shoulder and rubbed sticky fingers on his chaps. The miles flew under the burning pace of the game little dun. Buckleville seemed to spring from the center of the plains.

The rider who broke across the shallow ford and came to a sliding halt before Sid Tomkins' store, was a bit unsteady as he entered the dingy shop. But a grin was on his face as he beheld the proprietor and his guests, the Simms family.

"Hyah," said Hondo Peters. "I just come from that Lazy Y ranch Mister Simms, an' I plumb changed my mind 'bout wantin' the spread. I'm sellin' it back to you fer what I paid, if yore agreeable."

"But—" Tom Simms stammered, "uh—uh—I'm licked—I ain't no gun-fighter—they'll bury me an' my whole—family."

"You don't savvy, pardner," urged Hondo. "The Lazy Y is a nice little spread. I looked it over. Didn't miss nothin'. But its too quiet for me, too peaceable. That water hole o' yourn especial. Yore cows'll never find no fence there no more. Gimme that silver dollah."

Sid Tomkins nodded gravely, smiling. "I'll fix up that scratch on yore shoulder Hondo Peters."

Tom Simms was speechless. His wife wept on his shoulder, her eyes, tear filled, fixed on the grim smile of Hondo Peters. Words were beyond her. Only the awed whispers of the two boys who stared at the bloody outlaw hero of the recently beleagured Lazy Y.

Tomkins had dressed Hondo's wounds, and Hondo had signed another paper, transferring the Lazy Y back to Simms. The storekeeper was a witness to Tom Simms' alibi—for Simms was not the owner of the Lazy Y when the three Barley gunmen met their death. Tomkins was Simms' assurance of amity. The little man shook Hondo's hand at the door.

"MEBBE some day," said Hondo Peters, looking away across the range, "I'll be ridin' this way again. Be glad to unfork at yore spread an' talk over ol' times, mister. So long!"

The dust cloud came into view some miles to the northeast. With a wave of his hand Peters mounted the dun and spun the little horse in a whirl of dust. Straight west he thundered and the rider lolling easily in the saddle glanced backward, his punctured Stetson brim shading his eyes as he measured the miles between. Whatever was making that ball of yellow dust had emerged from the mouth of the draw. It had taken the posse a long time to unwind his tracks. And now they would come first to the water hole and what they found there would hold them up for a few hours. Meanwhile—

Faintly to the ears of the little group on the porch of the store at Buckleville came the voice of a vanishing rider singing in a high tenor, the lilt of the song keeping swift pace with a running horse. Back over the gentle floating wind it carried:

*Last night as I lay on the prairie,  
And looked at the stars in the sky,*

*I wondered if ever a cowboy  
Would drift to that sweet by an' by.*

*Roll on—roll on—  
Roll on little dogies—roll—*

# JUNGLE CODE



Twelve hurtling  
spears hissed  
through the air

*It's a Far Cry from Chicago to the Zambezi Brush, But  
Some Men Are Pretty Much the Same Anywhere—  
As this Stirring Story Proves*

**By CAPT. KERRY McROBERTS**

*Author of "The Sultan of Hell," "Legion of the Frontier," etc.*

**I**T WAS Parker, the junior clerk, who first brought word of Eddie O'Brien's arrival in Leveve. Up there at the tail of the Zambesi, we generally knew of a white man's arrival forty-eight hours before he actually got there. A fact which accounted for the R. C.'s faintly amazed stare when Parker brought the tidings. Mainwaring (the R. C.), and myself were sitting in his bungalow at Tiffin, when young Parker entered.

"There's a white man down in the native village, sir," he reported.

Mainwaring stared at him for a full minute in silence. Then, evidently satisfied that his subordinate was neither drunk nor suffering with a bit too much sun, he asked: "Who is he?"

Parker shrugged. "I don't know. He talks English, but in a peculiar way. American, perhaps. I didn't understand half that he said."

"Why didn't you bring him along?" I said.

Parker hesitated. "Well—" he said slowly, "I didn't know whether—you

see, he isn't—he isn't a gentleman—and he's filthy."

THE R. C. grunted. "Go and get him," he snapped. "Gentleman or no, we can't leave a white man living down there with those stinking natives. Get him up here."

"Yes, sir."

Parker left the hut and walked down the path, his clean white drill suit gleaming in the beating sun.

In a short while Parker returned bringing with him a ragged, unshaven derelict, who, notwithstanding his obvious indigent condition, wore a jaunty enough air as he puffed easily on one of Parker's cigarettes. The R. C. received the stranger with his most official frown.

"Who are you?" he queried.

"The name's Eddie O'Brien."

"Where are you from?"

"Chicago."

"Chicago?" said the R. C.

"Illinois," said Eddie O'Brien. "And I'm just beginning to see what a sucker I was for ever leaving the burg."

Mainwaring didn't bother to listen to this.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Eddie O'Brien sighed.

"What the hell," he said easily. "I suppose I might as well come clean. They can't nab me in this neck of the woods. All right, major. I bumped a guy in Chi. Took him for a ride. It turned out it wasn't the mug I wanted at all. It was a big shot. Up there I stared a murder rap in the face. So I took it on the lam, pronto. I had to scram to some joint where they couldn't get me. I landed in Bengal after bumming around in a dozen other countries. And—"

The R. C. silenced him with a wave of his hand and turned a distressed, puzzled countenance to me. "What on earth's he talking about, Fielding?" he said plaintively.

"He means," I translated, "that he murdered a man in Chicago and had to find a country from which he couldn't be extradited. So he's here."

The R. C. turned again to O'Brien.

"Well, my man," he said. "I don't want to be harsh. You appear to have had a hard enough time. But you can't stay here. If you do I'll have to notify the authorities."

"Okay with me," said Eddie O'Brien. "I'll scram."

"Where to?" I asked.

"Back to the native village. They don't treat me bad down there."

The R. C. shook his head emphatically.

"No," he said with finality. "You can't go there."

"Why not?"

"I can't permit a white man to remain down there living like a savage."

"Why not?" asked Eddie again with ingenuous logic. "If you won't let me stay here, why can't I stay there?"

"If you go down there again," said Mainwaring, "I'll have you brought back here. I won't let a white man live with the natives. That's final."

EDDIE O'BRIEN appealed to me. "Is he nuts?" he inquired querulously. "He won't let me stay down there cause the natives ain't good enough for me. But he's perfectly willing to send me back to the States and the chair. Is he nuts?"

I evaded the question. Mainwaring, used as he was to rendering quick decisions, remanded the case.

"Get him shaved and give him a clean outfit," he told Parker. "I'll consider this."

The pair of them left the room together. I noticed Eddie's dirty hand reaching out to Parker's cigarette case as they walked out into the molten sun.

At dinner that night Eddie O'Brien sat next to Mainwaring



opposite me. He was lost in a suit of Parker's whites. Mainwaring was rather aloof at first, on his official dignity. That pose of his always awed Parker, and I was too interested watching the stranger to contribute much to the desultory conversation.

Over the cordial Mainwaring opened up a bit. He invariably did at the end of a meal when spirits and food sent a cheery thrill pulsing through his well-fed figure.

"Old Wang ought to be in tomorrow," he remarked. "We can go to work for a change."

Old Wang, as we called him, was the chief of a border tribe with whom we did most of our trading. His blacks would show up about once every two months, and for a while, our easy routine would be broken by hard work, profound haggling and barter. A runner had informed us a couple of days back that Old Wang's men had taken the trail. At Mainwaring's words, Eddie O'Brien looked up. "Wang," he repeated. "Sounds like a Chink."

"It isn't," I told him. "We call him that because his real name is nothing for a Caucasian tongue to struggle with."

"Ever have any trouble with the natives up here?" he asked.

I ANSWERED thoughtlessly. I intended a mild bit of ragging to lighten the boredom that came upon us in that womanless, miserable hole at the source of the Zambesi. When it was over, I would have given my right arm to have recalled the words I uttered then. For it was my next sentence that killed young Parker and sent Eddie O'Brien to his doom.

"Trouble?" I repeated. "You don't know what trouble is until you've seen Old Wang's outfit. You said you'd killed a man, didn't you?"

"Half a dozen," said Eddie O'Brien.

"Then," I said portentously, "you're

in the right place, son. When we deal with Old Wang, we need killers. He's a bad and tough customer."

Eddie O'Brien's little eyes lit up. Mainwaring, getting into the spirit of the thing, took up the conversation cumbersomely.

"YES," he said. "You want to look out for Old Wang. If his men arrive at night with torches lighted and paint on their faces, don't bother to do anything but shoot. It means war—war to death, sans mercy, and sans prisoners."

He gestered violently with his port as I stifled the smile that came to my lips. For Mainwaring's speech was an improvement on my hasty invention. He had exactly described the arrival of Old Wang's blacks. As a rule it was their habit to achieve a dramatic entrance to the trading station. If they arrived at night and they usually did, it was with torches flaming and drums beating, an impressive sight which would be rendered more so to Eddie O'Brien if he believed that it meant war instead of a colorful overture to the more prosaic business of trading.

Eddie O'Brien listened avidly to Mainwaring as he added verbal embellishments to my theme. His little eyes darted all over the room. Finally they came to rest on a canvas covered object in the far corner. "Jeez," he ejaculated. "A typewriter?"

Parker stared at him curiously. Mainwaring followed his gaze, and repeated in a puzzled tone: "A typewriter?"

I understood him.

"Yes," I said. "We use that Lewis gun when we have to. It's the only thing that compensates us for Wang's superior numbers."

"Jeez," said Eddie O'Brien again. "That's my meat. If this Wang guy blows in I'll give him the business with that."

"The business?" said Mainwaring,

inquiringly. "The woiks," said Eddie O'Brien.

"Shoot him," I said.

"Well," said Mainwaring as he rose from the table. "Be on your guard."

Parker then picked up the joke.

"I suppose we'll stand watches to-night, chief," he asked.

Mainwaring winked broadly at us.

"Of course," he said hastily. "Suppose you take the first trick, O'Brien. Stand by till midnight. Don't leave your post until Fielding comes to relieve you. We three are pretty much all in—had a hard day—we'd appreciate it, if you stand the first watch."

"Okay, Major," shot from the side of his mouth. "I'll hold it down till the first relief."

Mainwaring thanked him profusely, and stifling our laughter we left the mess hut and walked over to Mainwaring's bungalow. The air, perhaps, restored some of Mainwaring's temporarily forgotten dignity. He frowned as we entered his diggings.

"We shouldn't have done that," he said.

"Why not?" asked Parker. "It's a good one. If Wang shows up with his war paint on and all, the big killer from the States'll probably die of fright."

"I don't like it," said Mainwaring.

"Oh, come on," I said. "We'll just let him stand there. You told him to carry on till he was relieved. We'll let him wait. Wang mightn't arrive, anyway."

**R**ELUCTANTLY Mainwaring agreed to see it our way. I went to bed regarding it in the light of an excellent experiment. Here was a self-confessed gangster from Chicago—well, we would see what he'd do with a mob of howling natives, who he believed were after his scalp.

I sat up in bed a little later, every nerve tingling. Outside, it sounded as though some howling hell had descended upon us. A flaring circle

of light enveloped the sleeping veranda. A myriad of screeching voices rammed into my slowly dawning consciousness. Then I heard the unmistakable staccato hammering of a Lewis.

**I** SPRANG from the bed buckling on my ammunition belt as I did so. As I ran toward the mess hut, I saw Mainwaring rush across the clearing, a .38 held in his hand.

"What's up?" he called breathlessly.

I didn't bother to answer but continued my mad charge toward the pandemonium beyond. We burst through the rear door of the shack together. Parker appeared from somewhere behind us. Before, back of a barricaded window, stood Eddie O'Brien. His thin shoulder was lunged tightly up against the butt of the machine-gun. His left hand firmly held the stock, while his right kept the piston pounding its murderous tattoo into the night.

The abandoned torches of Wang's advance guard lay upon the ground burning eerily in the blackness as the howling natives ran for cover. Half a dozen javelins rent the air and splintered the thin wood of the bungalow. For a moment not a black was in sight so well had they taken advantage of the jungle cover. But we knew they were there—watching, waiting.

Mainwaring jerked Eddie savagely away from his weapon. As he turned around and the light fell upon his face, I saw an expression there that frightened me. If I had ever doubted that Eddie O'Brien was a killer, that doubt was dispelled now. Gone was his insouciance of the afternoon; gone was his careless air. His face was a tense and terrible thing. His eyes were deep burning balls, alive with a lust to kill. A faint cruel smile curved on his thin lips.

"Well," he said in the thick voice. "I gave it to 'em. I let the rats have it the minute I seen 'em. I guess

they know that Eddie O'Brien's handling the typewriter now"

MAINWARING was for the moment speechless. Parker leaned over and grasped him by the shoulder. His regular features were almost as pallid as the gangster's.

"You fool," he shouted hoarsely. "You bloody fool. You've done it for fair. You've—"

Mainwaring found his voice suddenly. He held his rage well in hand.

"You've murdered God knows how many natives," he said coldly. "Possibly you've murdered us as well. Time will answer that. What the hell do you mean by it?"

His .38 was held before him in a direct line with Eddie O'Brien's heart. His eyes glinted icily. For a moment the gangster returned his glare stupidly. A vague amazement supplanted the look of triumph that he had worn a moment ago. But if he failed to understand the meaning of Mainwaring's words, he understood the fact of the revolver held at his breast.

"All right," he said. "I don't know what the hell you're talking about. But give it to me if you're going to. Well, why the hell don't you give it to me?"

For a moment Mainwaring stood there undecided. Then for the second time that day Eddie O'Brien appealed to me.

"Is he nuts?" he said again. "He tells me to look out for this Wang bloke. I knock off half a dozen of his men. Then the major blows in and squawks. What's McCoy on this gag?"

If Mainwaring didn't understand the speech verbatim, he, at least, got the general idea. He lowered the gun, and his face clouded.

"He's right, Fielding," he said slowly. "It's our fault. We pushed him into this. We—"

He stopped abruptly. A cluster of

whirring spears sang a ziralet as they hurtled through the air. Wood cracked, and a window lay shattered into a thousand pieces on the floor. Mainwaring rose to the occasion.

"We'll talk later," he said swiftly. "Just now we're fighting for our lives. I'll see if I can white flag them. Hold your fire for a moment."

HE tore off his pajama coat, and cautiously opened the door. Slowly he waved the coat up and down. For a moment there was no response to the signal of truce. Then a wild savage yell rent the air, and a single spear, whirled like an arrow through the night. Aimed by a steady expert hand it neatly pinned Mainwaring's coat to the wall of the shack.

He slammed the door grimly.

"All right," he said. "Put another drum on that Lewis, O'Brien. Wang can't be with them yet. These are his young bucks and we're going to have trouble. They're probably parleying now on the best form of attack. Is everybody armed?"

We were. Armed and ready. Eddie clipped a fresh magazine on the gun, and ran a caressing hand over the breech. As Parker and Mainwaring were peering through the window, he spoke to me.

"Was that a lot of baloney about the natives being tough guys?"

"Just that," I told him.

He grinned through his set teeth.

"Jeez, I'm dumb."

"Or we are," I added.

Mainwaring turned from the window. "Here they come," he said. "With torches. They'll try to force the place. Commence firing!"

"Give it to them!" said O'Brien.

We did. But they gave us as good as we gave them. Our three revolvers took up a jerky obligato to the smooth legato song of Eddie's Lewis. Javelins and arrows beat a steady ominous tattoo against the walls of our flimsy fortress. From somewhere in

the jungle a war drum boomed menacing music.

ONCE, twice, we repelled those dusky figures who advanced with the flaming torches which would drive us out into the open to die at the mercy of their flying spears. Our revolvers were effective but as nothing to that calculating machine-gun in the hands of Eddie O'Brien. He swept a leaden hail across their ebony ranks again and again. His eyes were shining steel fixed upon the sights. His lips were curved and cruel, and the sheer joy of the kill shone upon his pallid sweating face.

Young Parker was standing at my side. I saw him go, and was suddenly sick. He stood in the centre of the window frame blazing away at whatever target offered itself to his gun. Twice I had shouted a warning, but he paid no attention. A steel point abruptly thrust itself through the window. Its shaft reflected the fires outside as it came, an unbending venomous snake of death.

The point flashed by my eyes. The metal was suddenly red. Parker's throat was a gory slit. The haft of the spear fell upon the window sill. Parker made a horrible gurgling noise. He dropped to his knees. His hands grappled with the shaft. They stayed there, limp and helpless. He slumped forward, his head against the wall. He said nothing. Neither did he move. For a minute my stomach came up in my throat. I fought it. Then it went back again. Eddie O'Brien's shout sounded in my ear.

"Give 'em the business."

I fired blindly through the window. I made myself forget young Parker.

Then it was dawn. Suddenly and without reason a crimson tropical day thrust the night deep into the jungle. The spear throwing had ceased a few minutes back, and as I peered with aching eyes into the glare, I saw nothing animate. The

ground was red and black with blood and death—but I saw nothing alive.

Mainwaring was bending over young Parker chafing his wrists futilely, like a frustrated Messiah essaying to revive the dead. Eddie O'Brien ran an oily rag over the hot machine-gun, caressing it like a woman with his lean fingers. I leaned against the wall, done up.

With the dawn and just as suddenly came Old Wang. He stood before my gaze alone, a solitary figure in the midst of his dead. His hoary face wore a grim reproach. For a full minute he did not move. Mainwaring stuck his head out the window. Their glances met. The native chief then flung his arms out in a wide gesture.

"Ah," he said. "And why does the white *sahib* not slay Wang as he has slain his men?"

"He's askin' us," said Eddie O'Brien. There was a click as he shoved another shell into the breech.

I grabbed his arm. Mainwaring spoke.

"I would talk to you, Wang," he said. "There is much to be explained."

"Aye, much," replied the old black, as he walked slowly toward the shack.

AS he entered he looked with compassionate eyes at the body of young Parker. They'd always got along well together. But he said nothing. He turned inquiring eyes to Mainwaring. Mainwaring summoned all the native words in his vocabulary and talked.

It was no easy matter. To explain to a black man of another race that his men have been wantonly murdered as the outcome of a joke is no simple assignment. Haltingly Mainwaring attempted to make the matter clear to a mind that could hardly be expected to know what he was talking about.

Though the morning was still cool, sweat stood out on the R. C.'s forehead. He gesticulated violently as if that would compensate for the



meagerness of his sentences. How much of the palaver Old Wang understood I do not know. He waited in uncompromising silence until Mainwaring had finished. Then he asked one question. "Who fired the gun of the machine?"

He indicated the Lewis. Mainwaring hesitated for a moment. Then Eddie O'Brien spoke up.

"Me," he said with an upward turn of his eyebrows. "None other than little Eddie from the South Side. I woiked the typewriter and how!"

Old Wang nodded. "It was that that slew most of my men," he said quietly more to himself than to us. "Wait," he added. "My men are angry with the sahibs—very angry. Bloodshed is no good—more bloodshed is the work of a fool. Wait."

He turned majestically and strode into the jungle beyond, leaving us standing embarrassed, humiliated and rather ashamed. For a long time none of us spoke. Then the side of Eddie O'Brien's mouth opened a little.

"I'LL bet I knocked off fifty of them natives," he began conversationally. "Shut up," snapped Mainwaring. And there was murder in his voice. Eddie O'Brien scowled at him, but he shut up.

I found a bottle of whisky in the kitchen and we all took a swig. After a while Old Wang reappeared. This time his followers were in evidence. As he approached the bungalow, his men set about the task of removing their dead. Mainwaring said nothing, but I noticed his hand gripped the butt of his revolver tightly as Wang re-entered.

"It is difficult," began Wang. "Difficult. But I have appeased them. They accept the peace."

Mainwaring started forward, his hand outstretched, phrases of gratitude on his lips, but the old chief stayed him with a gesture.

"Wait," he said. "There is a condition. They want delivered to them the man who fired the gun of the machine. If he is given up, all will be peace."

There was a long uncomfortable silence. Eddie O'Brien's face contorted into a defiant sneer. His hand rested on the metal gun barrel. Mainwaring tapped his pistol against his thigh. His brow was wrinkled.

"What will they do with him?" I asked.

"They will kill him," replied Wang simply. "I shall wait outside for your answer."

Again he walked from the room and left the three of us standing in a worried silence.

"So," said Eddie O'Brien. "They want you to put me on the spot for them."

"On the spot?" repeated Mainwaring.

"Give him up to be killed," I explained.

"Well," said Mainwaring at last, "I suppose we're all in it together. It's just a question of how long we can last. I take it all the house boys have fled. How much ammunition have we left?"

WE investigated. We had about thirty more rounds for the .38's, and less than half a mag for the Lewis. Death was striding swiftly toward us through the jungle, Eddie O'Brien would meet it with a scowl. I felt pretty nervous but said nothing. Mainwaring summoned up the British Public School tradition and said: "Splendid. We'll all lunch together in Valhalla."

"What'll they do if I don't go for the ride?" asked Eddie O'Brien.

"We've got little ammunition," I said. "They've got numbers and a fanatical desire for revenge. They'll get it."

"They'll knock us all off then?"

"They'll knock us all off," said

Mainwaring evenly. I'll go out and tell Wang to start."

"Why don't you give me up?" asked Eddie.

Mainwaring stared at him as though he was slightly mad.

"Oh," he said. "A chap couldn't do that, you know."

Eddie O'Brien turned to me. "Is he nuts?" he demanded for the third time in twenty-four hours. "Is he goofy? This morning he was talking about sending me home to burn. Now he won't put me on the spot to beat the rap himself."

"The rap?" said Mainwaring.

"To save your life," I told him.

"The way I figure it," went on Eddie. "Is that if I stay here we all get the woiks. If I take the ride, I'm the only guy that gets it. What the hell. I got nothing to win. I'll take the rap."

He started toward the door. Mainwaring stopped him.

"I won't let you," he said gruffly. "I'm running this show."

"Listen," said Eddie O'Brien. "I'm going to croak anyways. Surely I got a right to say the way I'm going to do it. I started this knocking off, and I'll see it through. I got as much guts as you have. I got plenty of guts. Did you see me knock those natives over?"

Mainwaring stood hesitant in the doorway. Despite the sporting tradition, life is a sweet thing. Perhaps it was desperate rationalization, justification, but I perceived logic in Eddie's argument. We couldn't save him anyway. But he might save us.

"Let him go, Mainwaring," I said.

FOR a moment our eyes met. There was a vague reproach in his glance as if he expected me to drop my eyes in shame. I didn't. I looked at him steadily. Then he tore his eyes away and stood aside. Without a word, Eddie O'Brien walked out

into the open. We followed him.

Old Wang said nothing as we came up to him. He waved a signal to a group of his blacks. Four of them appeared with a stretcher like affair made of leopard skin. One of them held bamboo at each corner. Wang waved Eddie toward the litter.

"Where are you taking him?" I asked.

"Inside the jungle."

"May we come?" asked Mainwaring. Old Wang considered for a moment then nodded a silent assent. Eddie O'Brien climbed into the litter.

"They're certainly taking me for a ride," he said.

We walked, a strange procession, into the jungle for some two miles. The four blacks set the gangster down. They escorted him to a clearing still red with the embers of their camp fire. They stood him up, his back against a huge tree trunk. A dozen splendid black bodies stood before him. Each savage held a spear uplifted. Wang stood beside them.

MAINWARING grabbed me by the arm and dragged me through the cordon that surrounded Eddie O'Brien, they didn't stop us. We walked up to him. Mainwaring held out his hand. When he spoke his voice held tears.

"Thank you," he said simply. "We treated you like a dog. It's our fault. We shouldn't have ragged you. You've done a damned sporting thing."

Eddie O'Brien grinned.

"What the hell," he said. "It wasn't your fault. I was dumb to fall for it, that's all."

He took Mainwaring's hand. I thrust out mine.

"Mainwaring's right," I told him. "You've got a lot of guts."

He liked that.

"Sure, I got guts," he said. "What  
(Concluded on page 158)

# The GLOBE-TROTTER



**R**EMEMBER that story about the fellow who made a pet of a tiger cub? For a while everything went fine. The little jigger was mighty cute and playful, and just as affectionate as any other pet. Used to lie beside its master's chair and lick his hand.

Then one day the man fell asleep, and the cub kept right on licking un-



til its rough tongue tore the skin and drew blood. Instantly that gentle little cub was transformed into a snarling, snapping, bloodthirsty tiger. Never again would it be a docile pet.

That tiger cub is pretty much like us adventurers. We're quiet and domestic enough, perfectly content to stay put, until we get a thrilling draught from the cup of adventure.

After that all bets are off. We're never the same again, that's a cinch. Never able to get the taste of it out of our mouths; never able to still the lure of it in our blood. Just let adventure beckon, and our feet begin to itch.

*Calling! Calling!*

"You're a wise guy," said one of the incurable rolling stones who dropped into the office this morning. "Tucked away here in a comfortable office in a New York skyscraper, you don't have to worry about being tempted to chuck everything overboard and slip

your leg over a rail some fair day. This town looks like an adventure-proof hideout to me."

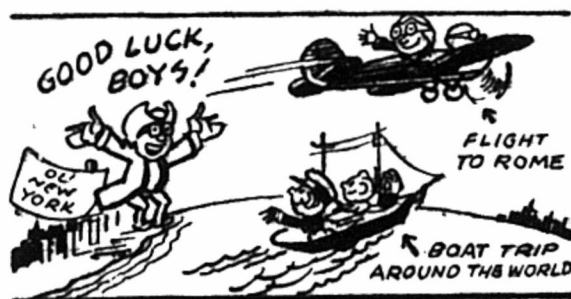
Which shows how little that *hombre* knows about New York; and about adventure, too.

Lately, three young fellows cast off in a thirty-foot yawl and sailed out of this harbor, bound for a cruise around the world that is planned to take two years. Boy, Ye Olde Globe Trotter would have given an eye to make a fourth on that party!

And then two intrepid aviators took their seats in an aeroplane and sailed out into the blue, their destination Rome, Italy. And Ye Olde Globe Trotter cheerfully would have given his right arm for such a swell opportunity to gyp the Trans-Atlantic steamship lines!

And now, as I write this, one of those palatial liners is sailing out of the harbor, tooting provokingly to the stay-at-homes. What's that, you say? There's no adventure on those floating palaces.

Maybe not on most of them, but there is on this one. For on that boat is a fellow with a hollow quill about six inches long. That quill came from the Belgian Congo, and in it is a piece of hide—human hide—on which



is scrawled an urgent call for help. His old partner wrote that message;

so of course he's going. And Ye Olde Globe Trotter would have given—

But that's enough of this dismembering! Only, don't let them tell you that there are no opportunities for adventure in New York. Or in Kalamazoo. Or in any other place.

#### *Far-Flung Globe Trotters*

Certainly wherever the U. S. mail goes it takes the call of adventure with it. Just look at them—Shanghai, Manila, Singapore, London, Cork, to list just a few of the foreign-stamped envelopes the postman dumped on my



desk. Globe Trotters sending in their application blanks or sending along a few words to the home office.

The far-place letters prize this month goes to Phil Menzies, from way down Ciudad Bolivai, British Guiana. Phil read Jackson Cole's yarn, "Jungle Diamonds," and was amazed to find it laid right in his own territory.

"I sure never expected to find this little dump in a fiction story," he writes. "That sort of made me feel as if the Globe Trotters were meeting right here in my hut! One thing I want to say for Jackson Cole: he sure knows his stuff when he writes about British Guiana. If all your stories are as authentic as 'Jungle Diamonds,' you sure hand it to 'em right!"

#### *Straight Goods*

That's not the first time we've been complimented on the authenticity of our yarns. Lots of you have recognized familiar settings and stepped up to say a word of commendation.

But Phil Menzies' letter gives us a chance to go on record and at the same time give credit to the fellows who write these yarns for you. We're not surprised that you felt at home in Jackson Cole's yarn, Phil; we'd have been flabbergasted if you hadn't.

Yeah, Jax knows his stuff. And so do the rest of the chaps who contribute to these pages. They know because they've been to the places they write about, and mighty often they've had a bit of a hand in the yarns they tell us.

Ye Olde Globe Trotter knows this writing gang personally, and he's mighty proud of them. They're a two-fisted, devil-may-care, happy-go-lucky outfit. They're all incurable adventure maniacs, and you can't make a date for next week with any of them and be sure he'll be on hand to keep it. But when they say the dope is straight, it's straight. It's on this sort of thing that we've built THRILLING ADVENTURES.

#### *First-Hand Dope*

Take this issue, for example. When we wanted a bang-up article on that picturesque old warhorse, Smedley Butler, the logical man to do it was Arthur Burks, Butler's old aide-de-camp. Burks knows Butler, and you will know him when you finish this intensely human two-part article.

Generally with Burks' yarns, there is a "story behind the story" — a wealth of interesting details and anecdotes which never come out unless you dig for them. So Ye Olde



Globe Trotter got out the editorial spade and began digging. Here is the result—a fistful of sidelines that are as good as the article itself:

Dear Globe Trotter:

In my story of General Smedley D. Butler I must admit that I am prejudiced in his favor, and, I think, rightly so. He has been maligned in his time, but I never met an officer or enlisted man who served under him but told me that he was absolutely without fear under fire, eminently fair to his subordinates, and always ready to do anything he wished others to do;

(Continued on page 150)



THE STRANGE  
EXOTIC WORLD  
OF TWILIGHT  
MEN AND WOMEN

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 SUCCEDED 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—Tribadism—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.

*For Sophisticated*

*Adult Readers'*

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(Continued from page 148)

he never ordered a man to face dangers he would not face himself.

There is, for example, the famous story of the "Duckboard Parade." It happened in Brest. Butler had taken over command of Camp Pontanazen, a muddy swamp. He started to clean up. There were countless duckboards near the camp—ask any soldier what duckboards are. To the initiate they are ladderlike strips of board walks, eight or nine feet in length, and deucedly heavy to carry.

Butler's men didn't wish to trudge through seas of mud with such monstrosities on their shoulders. Butler said nothing. He got one on his shoulder—and it weighed almost as much as he did—and started off with it. Behind him immediately thereafter stretched the entire command, loaded to the guards with duckboards!

I wish some of you could hear the



stories he sometimes tells to his intimates, as I heard him tell the stories I have related in my article. Of the famous "Battle of the Coconuts," of the trip to Cana on the border of Colombia, of work on the Panama Canal.

He has a keen sense of humor, and while he talks he walks back and forth like, as he himself puts it, "Felix the Cat," remembering things and putting them into pun-gent words. He is one raconteur to whom one never tires of listening.

He tells of taking a trip on a small steamer loaded with stacks of fertilizer. I heard that one in Tientsin, China, when I sat beside the general on a piano bench at a house party which had an odd finale. Liquor was served. America was dry. So, therefore, were the marines under Butler. When the general started to leave, he told me he would take me in his car and drop me at my billet. I said I wasn't quite ready to go. Butler looked at me, then at the tray of drinks, and calmly repeated his offer to take me home. P.S.—I went home!

My most interesting and exciting experiences while in the Marine Corps happened while I served with Butler. I'd like to serve with him again—the highest compliment I can think of. And there are many others who swear at and about him—yet follow him, by request (or did while he was on duty) all over the world.

Arthur J. Burks.

## He Knows Snakes

All right, now let's take one of the fiction yarns. If you get the creeps from reading "The King Takes Command," by Richard B. Sale, there's a mighty good reason why you did. That cobra seemed plenty life-like, eh? Well, the lad who wrote about him knows plenty about cobras, and other snakes as well.

Here's what the editorial spade dug out of Bro. Sale:

Dear Globe Trotter:

Yes, there's a story behind "The King Takes Command"—a story, and plenty more besides.

In 1927, the newspapers carried an account of the finding of the barkentine, *High Wind*, at sea in the South Arabian Sea. There wasn't a living soul on board her. No one could explain the mystery, and right then and there I set that down for a story. It wasn't until this year that a possible solution to the problem occurred to me.

For many years I have delved in herpetology. I don't know what it is, but snakes and lizards positively fascinate me. I studied them at college when I should have been passing Math. As a result, I don't know much Math, but I flatter myself that I do know snakes.

The King Cobra I have always looked upon with a respect akin to worship. This great serpent—the true king of snakedom—is so deadly, so aggressive, and so definitely intelligent, that I just had to write a yarn about him.

Finally, when I read that a leopard had escaped out of Frank Buck's wild cargo last year when that hunter was returning from Malaysia, the thought clicked. A deserted ship, a cargo of wild animals, and an escaped King Cobra playing hell with every one in general. There you have the genesis of "The King Takes Command."

Richard B. Sale.

## That Oriental Atmosphere

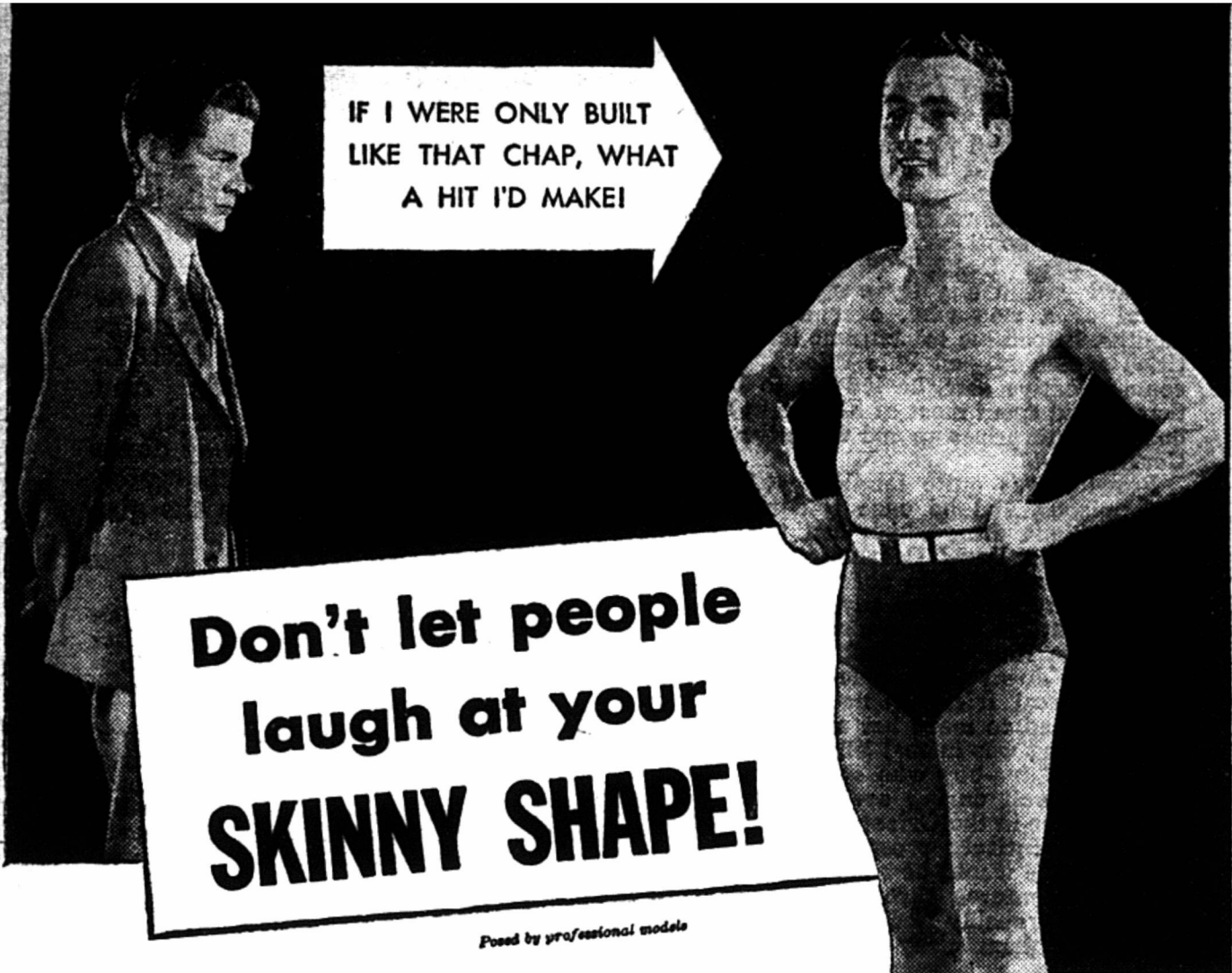
Now let's have a look at Carl N. Taylor's story, "Seven Days' Death." Felt that you knew his characters pretty well by the time you were finished, did you? And, maybe, that you'd had a little excursion to Manila? Well, you're right on both counts.

They were real people, and it was the sure enough capitol of the Philippines you were in. Listen to Taylor:

Dear Globe Trotter:

Back in 1930, I used to hang around a certain saloon of unsavory reputation in

(Continued on page 152)



IF I WERE ONLY BUILT  
LIKE THAT CHAP, WHAT  
A HIT I'D MAKE!

**Don't let people  
laugh at your  
SKINNY SHAPE!**

*Posed by professional models*

## Thousands find new way adds pounds *quick!*

*Astonishing gains in a few weeks with new discovery.  
Richest imported brewers' ale yeast now concentrated  
7 times and iron added. Gives 5 to 15 lbs. quick!*

**F**OR years doctors have prescribed yeast to build up health for rundown men and women. But now, thanks to a new scientific discovery, you can get far greater tonic results than with ordinary yeast—regain health, and in addition put on pounds of husky flesh—and in a far shorter time.

Not only are thousands quickly gaining solid, good-looking pounds, but also clear skin, freedom from indigestion and constipation, new pep.

### Concentrated 7 times

This amazing new product, Ironized Yeast, is made from specially cultured brewers' ale yeast imported from Europe—the richest yeast known—which by a new scientific process is concentrated 7 times—made 7 times more powerful.

But that is not all! This marvelous, health-building yeast is then ironized with 3 special kinds of iron which strengthen the blood, add pep.

Day after day, as you take Ironized Yeast, watch

gawky angles fill out, flat chest develop, skinny limbs get husky. Skin clears, new health comes.

### Results guaranteed

No matter how skinny and weak you may be, this marvelous new Ironized Yeast should build you up in a few short weeks as it has thousands. If you are not delighted with the results of the very first package, your money will be instantly refunded.

Only be sure you get *genuine* Ironized Yeast, not some imitation that cannot give the same results. Insist on the *genuine* with "IY" stamped on each tablet.

### Special FREE offer

To start you building up your health *right away*, we make this absolutely **FREE** offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body", by a well-known authority. Remember, results are guaranteed with the very first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Dept. 778, Atlanta, Ga.



(Continued from page 150)

the Walled City, Manila. I was interested in the flotsam and jetsam of humanity who drifted in and out through those swinging doors. With some of them I struck up interesting acquaintances, and these people unwittingly contributed to the birth of "Seven Days' Death."

Frawley is a slightly exaggerated portrayal of a man who, over a period of months, helped me to consume large quantities of San Miguel Pale Pilsen. An uncommunicative sort, he led me to believe that he had spent most of his life in highly dubious enterprises up and down the China Coast.

Frawley was quite familiar with drugs and poisons, and he once told me about a mysterious drug which had the action of the Seven Days' Death. It had a Chinese name which I do not remember, and could hardly pronounce anyway.

My beautiful Chinese girl was inspired by a Santa Ana dance hall *ballerina* who had come down from Macao. She once proved a real friend in need, and I just naturally had to make her attractive.

Sun Chong was in real life one Tommie, an Amoy China-boy who served me faithfully and well during several months of my residence in the Oriente Hotel on Calle Real. An entirely prosaic person, I am sure Tommie would be amazed if he knew of the adventures through which I put him. He'd probably remark, "Mistlah Tayleh plenty dlam clazy—dlink too much nipa gin."

The background of Manila, particularly the Walled City, the color, descriptions, etc., are quite accurate, since I spent many months prowling about the more smelly districts of that delightful burg.

Carl N. Taylor.

#### *Readers Who Know*

"These birds are the worst bunch in the world to talk to," a well-known soldier-of-fortune said to Ye Olde Trotter one night when the adventurer was addressing the Explorers Club. "They've been to every place in God's world, and they're able to pick you up any time your memory gets a bit woozy."

Well, adventure writers have found THRILLING ADVENTURE readers just as exacting an audience. There's mighty sure to be some Globe Trotter somewhere who is ready to call the turn if they slip up. And we want 'em to.

That's the way we can give you a better magazine. When we're wrong you're doing us a favor when you call us on it. And we'll step right up and get things straightened out.

A few months ago Harry Green, one of the rollinest of the rolling stones, rolled in here and gave us a yarn about how he lost his arm in a desperate battle with a Kodiak bear. We passed the yarn along to you, and it sailed along fine, until—

Well, Charles Madsen, Field Manager of the Kodiak Guides Association, in Kodiak, Alaska, is a THRILLING ADVENTURES reader. And when he read Harry's yarn he let out a howl that could be heard way down here in New York. We've expurgated his remarks a bit, but here's the gist of them:

Dear Globe Trotter:

There never was anybody ever lost an arm in a mix-up with a Kodiak bear. Let me tell you that when anybody gets in a mix-up with one of these bears he never lives to tell the tale!

I have hunted these bears for many, many years and have well over a hundred to my credit on expeditions where I acted as guide and with what I killed personally. In my whole career as a guide I have never heard of a bear "pit" a man could fall into as he walks along. Probably this Harry Green meant a "den," but there again he didn't know what he was talking about because bears never den up for the winter in any place a person could fall into.

In all the bear dens that I have seen—and I have seen and been inside a lot of them—it would be necessary to crawl in. And every one of them was way up in the mountains, under rock shelves and in natural cracks, where no man would be walking no matter where he was bound for between any camps.

If a "giant paw bashed in my face," as the story tells it, that would be the end of the story right there. And, believe me, there is no room in a bear's den to do any swinging your arms around to do any stabbing with any knife. Furthermore, a knife on a Kodiak bear would be useless when we sometimes have to plug them a dozen times with 220 gr. mushroom express ammunition of the 30.06 caliber—and still they keep on coming!

Charles Madsen.

Sort of looks as if Field Manager Madsen is after Harry Green all primed for bear! Since the day that entertaining but elusive gent strolled out of the office we haven't heard from him—but there will be a howl all right when he sees this, don't worry about that.

Meanwhile—get this right; I'm not horning in on this argument; not me!



—let me just say that Madsen seems to have misunderstood what Green meant by a "pit" anyway. As he told the yarn, I understood that this pit was a trap set to catch a bear, not a den the bear had made for itself. And it might just be, too, that Bro. Bear, flopping into that pit, was pretty well busted up or starved when Harry landed on top of him. Of course, then he—

All right, mister! My hands are up and I'm running! Fight it out, you bear hunters.

### The Sign-Up Place

Back a couple of paragraphs I mentioned the flock of far-flung Globe Trotters who are sending in their letters and applications lately. There's a heap of blanks from every corner of the good old U. S. A., too—and, what's more important, we've got plenty room for more.

So, if you haven't responded to that impulse yet, now's the time to do it. The Globe Trotters need you, and you need the Globe Trotters. It won't cost you a cent to join—nothing for dues, initiation fee or anything like that. Just clip the coupon, fill it in, and send it to us with a self-addressed and stamped envelope. That's all. We will put you on the roll, send you a handsome membership card, and you will be a full-fledged member with the rest of the gang.

It's some gang, boy!

I haven't been featuring calls for pen pals in this department. Rather felt that all Globe Trotters are pen pals and that you fellows are free to correspond with one another. That's

(Continued on page 154)

## GET ACQUAINTED CLUB

Established, Reliable, Members everywhere (Many Wealthy.) If lonely, write for sealed particulars.  
P. O. Box 1251 DENVER, COLORADO

### A Baby For You?

If you are denied the blessing of a baby all your own and yearn for a baby's arms and a baby's smile do not give up hope. Just write in confidence to Mrs. Mildred Owens, 8406 Coates House, Kansas City, Mo., and she will tell you about a simple home method that helped her after being denied 15 yrs. Many others say this has helped bless their lives. Write now and try for this wonderful happiness.

**SAVE 50%** Write today for FREE Mail Order price list of Sanitary Necessities of all kinds for men and women. Goods sent in plain sealed envelope, postage paid by us.  
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PUT ON YOUR ARMS  
with the  
GERMAN IRON SHOE  
MUSCLE BUILDER**

Here is the greatest exerciser ever made to build giant-like arms, wide, powerful shoulders, a brawny back and a tremendous chest! John Fillipone added five inches to his arms; E. Peter added one inch to each bicep the first week! What they have done, you can do!

**Now You Can Have Strength and  
Physique the Equal of the  
Strongest Professional!**

Become the center of attraction wherever you go! Decide now that you are going to have muscles that not only look good but are good! Get sinews of steel! The iron shoe will develop them to the super-state that cannot be equalled. Some of our pupils have put four inches on their biceps and increased their shoulder spread six inches.

**Now Strength Register Attached**  
The new register always shows you the exact strength you are exerting . . . you can see your day-by-day improvement!

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The Iron Man's Famous 60 day illustrated Picture Course of Instruction is included FREE! This is the greatest body-building offer ever presented. Ring in now for the lowest priced and biggest result-getting exerciser under the sun! Send today . . . NOW . . . for FREE illustrated information. No obligation.

**SEND FOR Special FREE OFFER!**

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Gentlemen: Without obligation and without cost, send particulars about your Iron Shoe Strength Builder and Special FREE offer.

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**GOOD YEAR**  
**Firestone Goodrich**  
**U.S. AND OTHER TIRES**

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**12 MONTH WRITTEN GUARANTY BOND**  
 WITH EACH TIRE

BALLOON TIRES				CORD TIRES			
Size	Rim	Tire	Tube	Size	Tire	Tube	
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29x4.50-20		2.35	0.85	30x3 1/2	2.35	0.75	
30x4.50-21		2.40	0.85	31x4	2.95	0.85	
30x4.75-19		2.45	0.95	32x4	2.95	0.85	
29x4.75-20		2.50	0.95	32x4 1/2	2.95	0.85	
29x5.00-19		2.85	1.05	34x4	3.25	0.85	
30x5.00-20		2.85	1.05	32x4 1/2	3.35	1.15	
28x5.25-18		2.90	1.15	33x4 1/2	3.45	1.15	
29x5.25-19		2.95	1.15	34x4 1/2	3.45	1.15	
30x5.25-20		2.95	1.15	30x5	3.65	1.35	
31x5.25-21		3.25	1.15	32x5	3.75	1.45	
28x5.50-18		3.35	1.15	35x5	3.95	1.55	
29x5.50-19		3.35	1.15				
30x5.00-18		3.40	1.15				
31x5.00-19		3.40	1.15				
32x5.00-20		3.48	1.25				
33x5.00-21		3.65	1.25				
31x5.50-19		3.60	1.35				
32x5.50-20		3.75	1.35				
34x7.00-20		4.60	1.85				
34x7.00-21		4.60	1.85				

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 With Each Order for 2 Tires  
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 2515 So. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

## FROM OUR SANCTUM

- Our companion magazines for August contain the best stories and features to be found anywhere.
- Don't miss **THRILLING WESTERN**—featuring a complete book-length novel by Dabney Otis Collins, with a thrill in every line, **TWO-GUN TROUBLE**. Also a novellette, **THE SHERIFF OF CROOKED CREEK**, by Ray Humphreys and many two-fisted stories and features. Now published monthly. 10c at all stands.
- SKY FIGHTERS** starts off with a bang—with **THE DEVIL'S SPEEDWAY**, a complete war air novel by Arthur J. Burks. Also, **THE SKY TERROR**, a zooming novellette by F. E. Rechnitzer, and stories by Harold F. Cruickshank, Gil Brewer and others. Many interesting features. 10c.
- Arthur B. Reeve, famous creator of Craig Kennedy, presents a new Craig Kennedy mystery—**MURDER AT NIGHT**—in the August **THRILLING DETECTIVE**. The featured book-length novel is **DEATH PARADE**, by George A. McDonald. 10c at all stands.
- The air-minded will thrill to **SKIES OF JEOPARDY**, the latest full book-length novel by Lieut. Scott Morgan, featuring the world's greatest ace, in **THE LONE EAGLE**. —10c.
- You'll find all the glamor of the West in **THRILLING RANCH STORIES**—15c—containing action-packed, romantic stories of the ranch and range.
- Detective fans will thrill to **THE SILENT MENACE**, the latest full book-length novel featuring the world's greatest sleuth in **THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE**—10c.
- For sis and mom: **THRILLING LOVE**, 10c at all stands. They'll love it!

—THE PUBLISHER.

(Continued from page 153)

why I print a batch of new members' names and addresses every month.

But here are two Globe Trotters who seem pretty lonesome. That's a might punk way to feel. Listen to 'em:

Dear Globe Trotter:

My pal and I would like to find a pen friend somewhere in the U.S.A. We are two lonesome soldiers of the British Army, at present stationed in India. We can supply plenty of interesting information about life in India to anyone who is interested.

Private A. Gillard, DMG Company,  
 Private S. Boatfield, B Company,  
 1st Somerset Light Infantry, Wellington,  
 Niligris, South India.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

First of all this month along comes a fellow with a request that I'll bet has been on the tip of the tongue of a whole lot of you. Says he:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I think you have the finest adventure magazine on the market. All I can suggest is that you give us more stories about the Marine Corps by Arthur J. Burks.

Can you tell me where I might pick up a copy of the Marine Corps song, "The Halls of Montezuma"?

Lewis Cranfield.

Winston-Salem, N. C.

Answer:

Yes, sir, Lewis; I sure can tell you. No better place than right here. That is what this section is for: to give you gents the dope you want. Here are the words of the Marines' Hymn:

From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli

We fight our country's battles on the land as on the sea—

First to fight for right or freedom, and to keep our glory clean,

We are proud to claim the title of United States Marine.

Our flag unfurls to every breeze, from dawn to setting sun;

We have fought in every clime and place where we could take a gun.

In the snow of far off northern lands and in sunny tropic scenes,

You will find us always on the job—the United States Marines.

Here's health to you and to our Corps, which we are proud to serve!

In many a strife we've fought for life,

(Continued on page 156)

# "Stop Worrying..."

## NOW I CAN TELL YOU THE TRUE FACTS ABOUT

# SEX!



**WOULD YOU** like to know the whole truth about sex? All of the startling facts that even the frankest books have heretofore not dared to print are explained in clear, scientific manner, vividly illustrated, in the revolutionary book — "The New Eugenics". Hereat last, the naked truth stands forth, stripped of all prudery and narrow prejudice. Old fashioned taboos are discarded and the subject of sex is brought out into the bright light of medical science by Dr. C. S. Whitehead M.D. and Dr. Charles A. Hoff, M.D., the authors!

### SEX ATTRACTION I

Sex appeal and sex satisfaction are the most powerful forces in your life. To remain in ignorance is to remain in danger of lifelong suffering. It is the purpose of this great book to show sex-ignorant men and women how to enjoy safely the thrilling experiences that are their birthright. It not only tells you how to attract the opposite sex, but also how to hold the love of your mate throughout a blissful married life.

### DANGEROUS!

... Unless you know the true facts about sex! Ignorance leads to shame, despair, worry and remorse.



Do you know how to add variety to your love-making? The most innocent kiss may lead to tragedy if you are ignorant of sex relations.

### Will FEAR

grip you on your wedding night? ... or will it be the tender, thrilling experience that is your birthright!



### SEND NO MONEY!

You send no money — just fill out the coupon below and then when it arrives, in plain wrapper, pay the postman \$1.98. Keep the book five days, then if you are not satisfied send it back and we will refund your money immediately and without question. This book NOT sold to minors.

## Banish Fear and Sex Ignorance Forever!

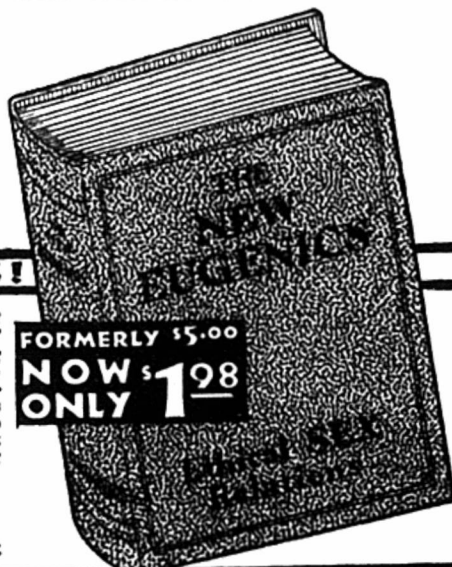
**SEX** IS NO LONGER a mysterious sin, mentioned only in the conversational gutters—it is the most powerful force in the world and can be made the most beautiful. Thanks to this bravely written book, it is no longer necessary to pay the awful price for one moment of bliss. Science now lights the path to knowledge and lifelong sex happiness.

### LOVE MAKING IS AN ART!

Are you an awkward novice in the art of love-making or a master of its difficult technique? The art of love-making takes skill and knowledge. The sexual embrace as practiced by those ignorant of its true scientific importance is crude, awkward and often terrifying to more sensitive natures. Normal sex-suited people are torn apart because they lack the knowledge that makes for a happy sex life!

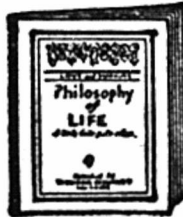
### Sex Facts for Men and Women

Twilight Sleep—Easy Childbirth  
Sex Excesses  
The Crime of Abortion  
Impotence and Sex Weakness  
Secrets of the Honeymoon  
Teaching Children Sex  
The Dangers of Petting  
What Every Man Should Know  
The Truth about Masturbation  
Venereal Diseases  
The Sexual Embrace  
How to Build Virility  
How to Gain Greater Delight  
What to Allow a Lover To Do  
Birth Control Chart for Married Women



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\$158 to \$225 month. Every second week off—full pay. Common education sufficient. Boys—Men. 17 up, write IMMEDIATELY—for free 32-page book with list of U. S. Gov't positions. Many early examinations expected.  
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**LADIES END PAIN AND DELAY NOW.** Get a married woman's secret when nature fails. I positively guarantee my successful "Special Relief Compound" is praised and used by thousands of women for relief! Compounded of ingredients used by physicians and nurses more than a quarter of a century because of power to relieve pain and induce flow. Believes many of the most stubborn unnatural delays, often in 3 to 5 days. Mrs. G.: "After 3 1/2 days it worked." Mrs. L. W.: "I missed several weeks. Only took half a box to get results." Mrs. V.: "Used two boxes and the flow started." Mrs. C.: "I was about 6 weeks past, in 5 days I was O. K." Send for this proven remedy today. Regular package, \$2.00. Special Formula No. 2 for obstinate conditions, \$8.00. Valuable knowledge FREE.

**MARTHA BEASLEY**  
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## SEX SECRETS

127 pages of vital, most intimate information that you must know to get the most out of Love—Life—Marriage. Plainly told in our amazing booklets "Man's Sexual Life," and "Womanhood." Both sent postpaid in plain wrapper for 25c. For mature adults only. A prude would not dare to read them. Get your set now from—

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Than They were at 35



Why not feel young again, youthful-like, ambitious—full of PEP and VIGOR? Don't be deprived of life's richest prizes—love, fame, health and happiness. Why be discouraged or depressed. No matter what you have tried before, Snyder's Vigorette Tablets, by their powerful tonic effects, have proved a great help to every user. Why not have plenty of red blood and tone up weak organs. Vigorette Tablets are a powerful tonic yet safe and harmless. Endorsed by Doctors. They pick you right up. Improvements noticed in 3 to 5 days for Men or Women. Send for one month's supply for \$1 (C.O.D., if preferred).—Trial supply, 25c. Plain wrapper, sealed. **BETTER TABLET COMPANY,** 1434 N. Wells St., Dept. 454-B, Chicago, Ill.

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## TILLIE AND GUS!

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Also Tillie and Mac, Maggie and Jiggs, Dumb Dora, Boss and Bubbles, Peaches and Brownie, French Stenographer, A Bachelor's Dream, A Model's Life, Adam and Eve, Kip and Alice, Harold Teen and Lillums, Toots and Casper, The Gumps, Winnie Winkle, Gus and Gussie, Barney Googie and Spark Plug, Boob McNutt and Pearl, Tillie the Toller, Care-men Love, Chorus Girl Love, Turkish Love, Apache Love, Old Maid's Love, Papa Love, Sailors on Shore, What Tom Saw Through the Keyhole, When Hubby Comes Home, What the Window Washer Saw, Mabel and the Ice-man, A Turkish Harem, Mexican Love, and 80 Snappy French Girl Poses, 16 French Lovers' Pictures, French Men and Women in Passionate Love Poses. Also Hula-Hula Dancing Girl. All the above will be sent you prepaid for only \$1.00.

**SEA-BREEZE NOVELTY HOUSE**

P. O. Box 1458, New Haven, Conn., Dept. G35-4-TN

(Continued from page 154)

and never lost our nerve.

If the Army and the Navy ever look on heaven's scenes,

They will find the streets are guarded by United States Marines!

## Hermit Islands

There are still some places in the U. S. where a fellow can get away all by himself and live pretty much as he chooses. The question seems to be why anyone should want to live in some of them. But then, there's no accounting for tastes. Perhaps these islands are just what some of you are looking for:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I have heard of a group of islands off the coast of California—off Santa Barbara, I believe—called the Channel Islands. As I have heard it told, the islands are quite beautiful, well supplied with timber and pasture ground, and afford good fishing.

Can a fellow go out there and take a place for himself? How large? And what expenses is he likely to run up against? This sounds like an interesting proposition to me if the islands are open to homesteading.

Alvin Tomlinson.

Cicero, Illinois.

Answer:

The Channel Islands are just about where you locate them, and your description seems to fit them pretty well, Alvin. There are about twenty of them, stretching on down to Lower

(Continued on page 157)

## PARTIAL LIST OF CHARTER MEMBERS

### The Globe Trotters Club

C. Van Vorhes, 4430 Milford Avenue, Cleveland, O.  
Hymie Widofsky, 1290 Fulton Ave., N. Y.  
Harold E. Lail, 412 N. East Ave., Kannapolis, N. C.  
George L. Prokop, 158 S. Broadway, Wahoo, Nebr.  
Harry A. Rohwer, Jr., 1146 E. 105th St., Los Angeles.  
Walter Blohm, 849 Higgins Ave., Neenah, Wis.  
C. S. Harper, 224 Pierre Br., Shreveport, La.  
E. R. Parkhurst, Box L 4, Bowie, Ariz.  
Jim Toulouse, 1011 Forrester Ave., Albuquerque, N. M.  
Edward V. Wells, 2822 Broadway, Schenectady, N. Y.  
Roy Baer, 8551 Carpenter St., Chicago.  
Jack C. Harris, 31 N. E. Hancock St., Portland, Ore.  
Norman Jackman, 1448 Hanchett St., San Jose, Cal.  
H. Abrenhoerster, Dittmer, Mo.  
Eugene Kellog, 240 Plane St., Newark, N. J.  
Fred Hammermeister, 3323 Brenshaw St., Chicago.  
Bruce Winchell, 1504 Genesee St., Utica, N. Y.  
John Loda, 1032 N. Winchester Ave., Chicago.  
Emanuel Gordon, 1711 East 174th St., Bronx, N. Y.  
Edward Pahutka, 305 Webster St., Ranshaw, Pa.  
R. G. Kiefer, 963 Union, Memphis, Tenn.  
Alfred Rasmu, 631 37th St., Union, N. J.  
G. Plutchok, 264 Elm St., Newark, N. J.  
Irving Castenbaum, 1045 Kelly St., New York.



(Continued from page 156)

California. Of the lot only Santa Catalina Island has been settled, and I take it that's not the sort of thing you want.

The others are wide open to homesteading, or what have you. For the most part they are uninhabited. A couple of lonely shepherds on some of them; a few odds and ends of humanity on others.

The islands nominally belong to California but you can pretty well have them for the taking; nobody else wants them.

That sounds a bit odd, but there are drawbacks to be considered. While these islands are only a few hours run in a fast boat from the shore of the mainland, remember that there is absolutely nothing on them when you get there. Twice a year a supply boat for the sheep herders calls at some of them. That would be your only contact with humanity; your only chance to get anything that you needed.

Then, while your human neighbors would be few and far between, there would be plenty of others. Snakes, for example. Rattlers. And these islands are famous for their wild boars—great, vicious beasts that roam in packs and have no regard whatsoever for a gun.

Takes a heavy game rifle to bring one of them down—and that won't stop his companions.

All in all, the Channel Islands don't sound like very friendly places. Maybe if you had plenty of cash you could take an outfit out there and whip one of these islands into shape

(Concluded on page 160)

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# Beware the DANGER in Wearing Trusses Like These



## KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT RUPTURE

**Y**OUR doctor will tell you that there are only two ways to get sure results if you are ruptured. One is by having an operation; the other is by wearing an expertly fitted truss that holds under all conditions!

Trusses like those shown above may prevent recovery, because often you can't make them hold, even when drawn so tightly you can scarcely stand to keep them on. Instead of holding the rupture safely in—they squeeze the rupture while out, and force thousands into ill-health and a dangerous rupture condition.

### Eight Advantages Your Truss Should Have

The truss you wear should enable you to be just as active, work just as hard as anybody, with absolute safety and maximum ease. It should be guaranteed to hold your rupture in under all conditions, and have the full approval of doctors.

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(Concluded from page 157)

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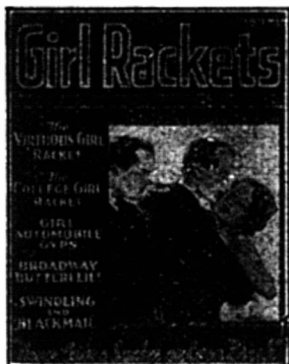


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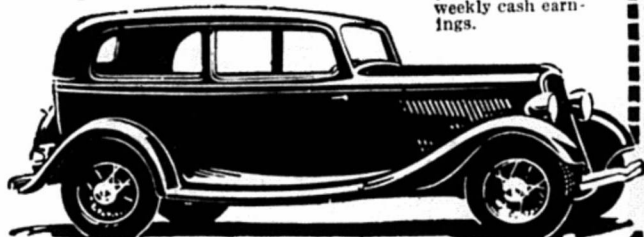
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