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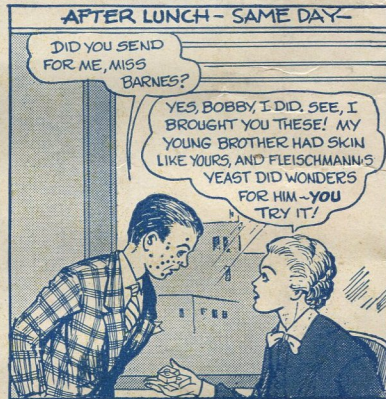
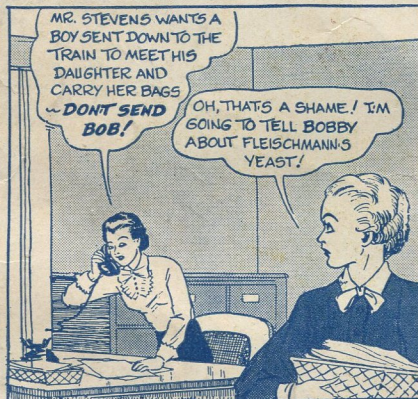
By LIEUT. JOHN DANE

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A Complete Novelette
By CLAUDE RISTER



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Important glands develop during the adolescent years—13 to 25. This causes disturbances throughout the body. Harmful waste products in the blood stream irritate the skin, causing pimples.

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Eat Fleischmann's Yeast 3 times a day, before meals, until skin clears.



—clears the skin

by clearing skin irritants out of the blood

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*I'll Prove in the first 7 days -
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DO YOU want big, smashing, sledge-hammer muscles all over your body? Husky, broad shoulders? A deep, powerful chest? All the pep and vigor of a "hard as nails" athlete?

Give me just 7 days—one short week. That's all I need to give you the **PROOF** that I can make you a *new man*—give you a real be-man build and glowing health that resists sickness, ends pimples, skin blemishes, constipation and other troubles.

Read the reports below from just a few of the hundreds of fellows whose bodies I have made over. That's the kind of **RESULTS** you can get with my discovery—*Dynamic Tension*. My free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength," tells how I can give YOU a body that women will admire and men will envy.

The 97-lb. Weakling Who Became "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"

LOOK at this new photo of me. This is exactly how I look today. Yet once I was a soft, skinny, 97-lb. weakling! I always felt timid, self-conscious—never had good times—couldn't eat a square meal and feel well afterward. Then I discovered the secret of *Dynamic Tension*—my entirely new and different method of body building. It changed my entire life—gave me the body you see here. It has twice won for me the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man!" And what my amazing system did for me—what it has done for hundreds of other fellows like yourself—it can now do for YOU, too!

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THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. XVI, No. 3

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

February, 1936

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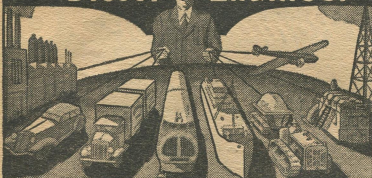
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Death Safari

Major Shann Fearlessly Faces the Roving Lions on the African Veldt, and the Man-Eating Saurians in Murky Pools—But Human Perfidy Proves the Most Dangerous Foe of All!

By **FREDERICK C. PAINTON**

Author of "Black Panther's Prey," "Flaming Death," etc.

CHAPTER I

The Path of the Leopard

CLAD in sweat-stained khaki shirt and shorts, Major Dirck Shann stood ankle-deep in the hot sand of the dune ridge. The sun of equatorial Africa

blazed above him, relentless in its thirst for moisture. As far as his eyes could see stretched the vast, awful loneliness of the African veldt—brown, parched earth, dotted with dusty underbrush.

His powerful sun-blackened legs were solidly planted. There was a

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frown on his hawklike face as his eyes roved the desolation about him. Then he jerked his head right as another khaki-clad figure scrambled up the dune to join him. She was a beautiful golden-haired girl, with a lithe, boyish body.

The loveliness of her blue eyes and lips was accentuated by her heavy makeup.

SHE smiled up at him, admiration in her eyes. A hero-worshipping look it was—tribute to Shann's fame as the greatest big-game hunter in the world, to his internationally recognized skill and cunning in bringing back alive dangerous wild beasts.

"They want you on the set," she

"I just want to tell you that I feel certain you'll win. 'Death Safari' will be the greatest African picture ever made. They cannot stop you."

Shann shrugged. "They've been trying hard enough," he said bitterly.

"Yes, I know," she nodded. "Superlux Pictures wanted you to make 'Death Safari' for them. That little rat Julian Broun went wild when you turned down his offer and announced you would make the picture at your own expense. For with your reputation behind it, your technical skill when dealing with wild animals, the film is certain to be a great hit. Which would have meant five or six million dollars to Broun and his outfit."



He went on slowly, stealthily,

said. "We're going to shoot the waterhole scene."

"Right," Shann nodded. "Thank God, we're getting under way, at last!"

"Still worried?" she asked.

Shann smiled. "Are you?"

There was a brief pause.

"When I'm alone back there," she confessed quietly—"when I think of all the accidents that have happened and the threatening notes sent me—I get so scared I could scream. But I'm not frightened when I'm with you."

Shann flushed at the compliment.

"Nice of you to say that. And now let's get back. You know how temperamental Allenby is."

"In a moment, Dirck," the girl said. Her eyes were on his bronzed face.

"Then," Shann asked slowly, "you believe Superlux Pictures are responsible for the sabotage and 'accidents' that I've been running up against ever since we landed in Africa?"

"Of course," she replied promptly. "I'm certain of it. Your money is limited. Unless the picture is completed soon, it will run out altogether. Then you'll be on a spot. You will either have to accept Broun's offer, or abandon the project. And out of sheer loyalty to the men and women you brought out here, I believe you'd accept it—if it came to a showdown."

Shann nodded shortly. She was right, of course. He thought of the hellish turmoil of the last three months since he had come to Africa

to make a picture based on his own exploits as a big-game hunter. Misfortune had dogged his trail. Twenty thousand feet of film had been light struck and had to be retaken. The tribes in the neighborhood had complained of witchcraft and were dangerously aroused. Finally, two lions he had captured had been poisoned.

"Superlux knows they could make an enormous amount of money out of 'Death Safari,'" she went on, "and they intend to force you to let them make it."

"Yes, if it came to a showdown!" Shann echoed grimly. "But it has not yet."

Before she could speak, a thin,

looked the set over. Before him was an African waterhole. A pool ten feet deep. In the water were two crocodiles, their red protruding eyes and lumpy foreheads just emerging from the water. Vicious, terrible saurians, they would boldly attack and kill a human being if given the chance. Shann had captured them, and had stretched a steel mesh across the small creek on each side of the set to keep others out.

Around the waterhole was deep foliage. Hidden by this tropical growth were wire netting runways in which two leopards paced restlessly. Though he studied the scene carefully, Shann could find no flaw. He turned to the seven-foot black,



with every sense alert

peremptory hail came from the group of khaki tents on the movie location. "That's for us," said Eileen. She put an arm through Shann's. "Come on, let's tumble to the bottom."

Breathlessly, they slid in a cloud of dust to the bottom of the wadi, and ran to the set where the sequence was to be shot. Here Eileen Marsh left him to put on her costume and Shann moved across the open space to where the director he had hired, Douglas Allenby, sat under an umbrella. The director, dark, sleek, with weary, disillusioned eyes and sardonic mouth, looked petulantly at Shann.

"We've got to shoot this while the sun is right," he said. "Do you have any suggestions?"

Shann puffed on his pipe and

naked save for a loincloth, who now stood beside him.

"See you anything wrong, friend and warrior?" he asked in Swahili.

TEMBA, Shann's gun-bearer and friend, stepped forward. The sun played on his jet black torso and made of it black marble.

"I see nothing that is not true."

Yet his fingers played nervously with the necklace of human teeth that girded his powerful neck.

"B'wana," he added impulsively, "for you I would die. Thy orders are my will. But"—he hesitated, went on—"must I let them put me in the black box? Will not an enemy catch my image and bring death to me?"

Shann did not smile. He had lived too long in Africa, had known

too many witch doctors, to laugh at Temba's fear. He had seen many a strong, sturdy native sicken and die without any apparent explanation, and had been told that the man was bewitched. He had seen white men cursed by witch doctors and driven away by the curse. And those who braved the curse, sickened and died and no doctor could diagnose what killed them. He did not know why this was so, but he'd seen it with his own eyes.

Consequently, he realized the sacrifice he was asking of his Masai gun-bearer to play a part in this picture, "Death Safari."

"I swear to thee, friend," he said gravely, "that no harm will come to you from the black box."

An expression of profound relief crossed Temba's face.

"Then I am glad, *b'wana*, for I have heard this day the flutter of death's wings. Death has come to this camp and someone will die. I was afraid for thee and myself."

Shann stood very quiet.

"You have truly felt?"

"*Aie, b'wana*, death is close—waiting—I feel."

IN all the years of his association with Temba, Shann had never known the black to be wrong. If Temba felt death, then death was close.

He stood there patiently, thinking, ignoring the petulant frown on Allenby's face. He had invested his last dollar in the making of this picture which dramatized the real Africa that he loved. He had ignored the eager and persistent offers from Superlux Pictures. And despite attempts to sabotage the picture, he was nearly completed with it. Was he to be beaten now by death? And from whence?

His eyes turned to the two riflemen poised on a low dune. Shann had them there in case of accidents. He gestured for them to come closer.

"Keep close watch," he said, "and shoot to kill if anything goes wrong. This is a risky sequence."

The two guards nodded. Shann glanced at Allenby.

"No suggestions," he said.

Quietly he watched the scene rehearsed once. It was a small sequence. The script called for the heroine, Sunny, played by Eileen Marsh, to crawl on her stomach along the ground to the waterhole and bury her face in it. Her companion, Kroom, played by John Kurt, was to follow her and pretend to shoot a crocodile which tried to attack her. They both had presumably been lost on the *veldt* and were near death from thirst.

Allenby snapped finally:

"Well, it's okay, I guess. We'll take it. Places!"

Someone jostled Shann. He turned to stare at Vesta Vale, who looked particularly sensuous and lovely despite the brown stain on her half-naked body, stain that she wore as part of her make-up as a half-caste girl.

"She'll boot the scene," she muttered. "She never could act."

Shann said nothing. But in his mind Vesta Vale reminded him of a black panther. Treacherous, beautiful and cruel.

"It's a take," Allenby now shouted. "Quiet, please! Everyone please keep quiet."

Silence fell on the set. The cameraman, beside his glass-enclosed camera, became tense and alert. The sound-effects man put on his headphones and waited. An extra went out with the plate which recorded the scene number.

"All right," called Allenby. "Turn 'em over."

The cameraman began grinding. Silence held starkly. A second or so of this passed, increasing the tension. And then Eileen Marsh crawled from the thick green foliage. Her golden hair was cleverly disheveled, her khaki suit cleverly rent to show lovely skin and rounded contours. Shann thought her beautiful beyond anything he had ever seen as she crawled slowly, giving a splendid interpretation of a person in the last stages of thirst exhaustion. Suddenly she licked her lips.

"Kroom!" she called harshly.

"Kroom! Water. Water, I tell you. We're saved!"

Her movements quickened. She panted, got to her knees. Came down to the water's edge. Across the waterhole the two crocodiles watched her with red, viciously protruding eyes. The man who played Kroom broke out of the bushes, lurching, staggering, his breath sobbing in his throat. John Kurt was a great character actor and he was giving his best now.

"Anne! Anne, dear," he croaked, "just wet your lips. Not too much at first."

Allenby nodded in satisfaction. The suspense in this scene was building well. Eileen reached the water, buried her face in it, scooped it up and let it trickle over her head.

"Oh, Kroom," she half-laughed, half-sobbed, "it's glorious. I never knew water could be—so good!"

A slight gesture of Allenby's hand sent the leopard slinking along its runway. Another gesture to a stage-hand and the man began dragging a huge chunk of raw beef through the water on an under-water trolley. The crocodiles, smelling the beef, instantly got into motion to follow it. Looking like scaly submarines with periscopic eyes, they moved silently, with scarcely a ripple, toward Eileen because the under-water trolley drew the beef past the girl. Even knowing the truth, Shann felt suspense quicken his pulse.

Slower came the crocodiles. Eileen Marsh laughed, splashed the water, scooped it in beautifully shaped hands and sipped it. Shann watched the crocs. Leaned forward intently. Allenby also watched the crocs. Suddenly his hand twitched. John Kurt leaped to his feet. Seized his rifle.

"Anne!" he yelled. "My God, Anne, look out!"

Swiftly, he jerked at her tunic which, ripping, exposed a lovely shoulder. Eileen sprawled gracefully back from the water's edge. The rifle in John Kurt's hand roared almost in the very maw of the crocodile. Its mouth opened like a great door. A

raw red throat lined with two horrible fences of crooked deadly teeth yawned at Kurt. Again Kurt's rifle bellowed and the wads from the blank cartridges stung the raw slaving throat. The crocodile submerged to follow the raw beef on the trolley. It left two hissing lines of bubbles. Below, it found the meat and stayed there to gnaw it. To all outward appearances, John Kurt had killed it.

Shann had just relaxed in relief when suddenly a frightful scream tore the new silence. He whirled—in time to see a flashing, tawny body plunge through the wiring of the runway.

A leopard, frightened, vicious, maddened with terror by the two shots, was bounding in great leaps across the set clearing. And directly in its path was—Eileen Marsh!

SHE had turned in a convulsive start at the scream which was not part of the script, and saw this tawny beast lunging at her. Paws out-thrust with long razor-sharp claws. Slaving mouth, open, revealing murderous fangs. Eyes blazing. Screaming the death cry.

Shann grabbed the Masai spear from Temba's hand, lunged forward. "Shoot!" he yelled to the riflemen.

A shot roared, but the slug stabbed the ground closer to Eileen Marsh than to the plunging leopard. And as Eileen Marsh dodged to avoid the leopard, she got in the line of fire and neither man dared fire again for fear of hitting her.

Shann stretched every ligament to reach the leopard with the spear. But he could not. Eileen Marsh would have died then and there but for—John Kurt!

The gallant old character actor had reversed his rifle, seized it by the barrel as he saw the deadly beast plunging across the clearing. He swung the butt that struck the leopard a glancing blow on the skull. It did not knock the beast out, but it deflected the charge so that the terrible claws raked the girl's skirt instead of her body.

Bounding like a rubber ball, the leopard twisted and launched itself upward at this new foe. Kurt tried to ward it off, but the beast broke through the barrier of his arms as if they were straw bits. Shann's spear dug into its side. The leopard did not vary its spring. The great white fangs sank deep in John Kurt's neck. The cocked hind claws raked the man's chest and stomach. They tore him open as if they had been so many knives.

John Kurt's death yell rang out. "God—get him off—stop—ah!"

His last words died in a flood of bright arterial blood that gushed from his opened neck as if a pump were behind it. The spurt of blood from the gash bathed the leopard's muzzle, got in its mouth. And it went mad, worrying the corpse, tearing at it with those fearful fangs.

Shann again drove the spear deep into the leopard's side. The beast whirled as if equipped with tightly wound springs to face this new adversary. Eileen Marsh had frozen in utter panic that comes when the brain congeals with fear. And Dirck Shann stood before her. Its belly close to the ground, the leopard faced him.

The leopard was cunning. It toyed, sidestepped, baited Shann to make a thrust for the forequarters. It required delicate precision, that stroke, and the blade instead of going through to the heart was deflected by a bone. With a wild scream the leopard sprung before Shann set himself for another thrust. The beast launched upward in a long hurtling charge. Tawny hide made a yellow streak against the sun-burned air.

Now the leopard was inside the spear length.

With a lightninglike move, Shann drew back the spear. Drove the butt into the ground against his heel. Seized the shaft halfway and held it there on an angle in front of him, directly in the leopard's path. He braced himself as the beast came for his throat.

The leopard, sailing through the

air, instinctively sensed the trap. Its body made a violent twisting motion to avoid the braced spear-point. But it was too late.

The animal's body struck the spear head.

The sharp point slid into its stomach, through its backbone, so that it was impaled like a stuck pig. Now the leopard's weight broke the spear shaft. Both Shann and the beast tumbled to the ground.

Shann lay within inches of the dying animal. The leopard's jaws snapped at him weakly. Then its eyes glazed. The beast was dead.

Shann lay there, panting, aware of turmoil and confusion around him, but even more aware of failure. John Kurt had played a big part in this picture and it would now have to be done over. Who had released the leopard?

CHAPTER II

Horror Camp



THE sun was setting redly in the west. Quiet had come to the camp where death had so recently struck. Men were discussing the jinx which relentlessly pursued Dirck Shann preventing him from completing the picture.

Dirck Shann stood at the steel wire enclosure through which the leopard had broken. Beside him was Eileen Marsh. Temba, his faithful shadow, was, as usual, six feet behind him. Shann lifted the wire and pointed.

"That was no accident," he said evenly. "It was murder!"

She saw how the steel strands had been sawed or filed almost clean through so that a lesser weight than an infuriated leopard's would have smashed through.

"Murder!" she repeated, shuddering. "That leopard was deliberately released to—kill me?"

"Yes," Shann said. "But for poor

Kurt, it would have been a successful attempt, too."

She was silent for a time, pale, lips tight.

"It means, then," she said, "that Superlux may not be to blame for this. Whoever cut those wires is here in Africa. Must be."

Shann nodded grimly, his bronzed face set, hard.

"In this camp a murderer!" she shuddered again at the implication.

Shann looked at her levelly.

"I want you to go back to your tent, Eilleen," he said, "and *don't* leave it. Do you understand? Food can be brought to you from the mess tent. And Temba will guard you."

"You're going to try and find the killer?"

"Yes."

"But they might get you!"

"Nonsense! Do as I say."

She nodded quietly. Shann turned to Temba.

"Warrior," he said in Swahili, "this girl is more precious to me than gold and jewels. I ask you to guard her with your life."

"Aie, b'wana, I have seen that she has much favor in your eyes. I will guard her."

"That is well."

THE three walked slowly back to Eilleen's tent.

"Have you got that threatening note here?" Shann asked when they reached her tent.

She nodded, slipped inside and brought out the note that had been sent to her at the ship when they had docked at Capetown. A note addressed to her, and reading simply:

"Death Safari" will be your own epitaph—unless you return to America immediately.

No signature. Only the crude picture of the devil.

Shann took the note and slipped it in his shirt pocket.

"Okay. Now get inside—and stay there!"

On the way to his own tent the director, Douglas Allenby, stopped him, his eyes glittering strangely.



Major Shann

"Who do you think is here on the veldt—came all the way to Africa?" Shann shook his head.

"Who?"

"Julian Broun!"

Julian Broun! Head of Superlux! Here in Kenya Colony! Shann's suspicions leaped alive. Then his face became impassive.

"You'll retake those sequences that John Kurt was in, tomorrow," he said. "We're going ahead."

Allenby nodded and Shann went on to his tent. Broun sat on a camp stool inside, a small, pigeon-breasted man with a great round head shaped somewhat like an egg. It looked more like an egg because it was completely bald. He had small narrow eyes, and in them was betrayed the cunning, the guile, the ruthless cruelty which had raised him to the head of the greatest motion picture corporation in existence.

Shann had not seen the magnate since Hollywood, when Broun had offered him one hundred thousand dollars to make "Death Safari" for him—an offer Shann had refused.

Broun rose.

"Mixing business with pleasure," he grinned. "I'm thinking of marrying Vesta Vale—but don't tell her.

So I came to see her—and I thought I might increase my bid for your picture."

"Increase it how much?"

"One hundred and fifty thousand—and I'll foot all production expenses." Broun beamed. "It's a generous offer, Shann."

"Why are you so anxious to get 'Death Safari'?"

"It will make a good picture—done by you and with your name behind it. Make a lot of money."

Shann was containing himself well. He lit his pipe.

"What you really mean," he said calmly, "is that the banks hold so many of your notes, Broun, they'll take Superlux Pictures away from you unless you can make a hit picture at relatively small cost. You know 'Death Safari' might gross five million or so, and you want it. Right?"

Broun's eyes were cautious. "Part of it is true."

"And this is also true," said Shann sharply, "that you've hired men in my employ to sabotage this picture. Destroy film, poison animals. Today a man was killed. Murdered by whoever had released that leopard!"

"You're crazy," cried Broun. "I've had nothing to do with this."

Shann came closer.

"Broun," he said softly, "in Hollywood you're a great mogul. People bow and kiss your ankles when you pass. You've got a great sense of your own power. But here—in Africa—you're just a little rat. And I intend to shake the truth out of you."

JULIAN BROUN swiftly came to his feet. He was still arrogant, but there was a hint of fear in his eyes.

Shann approached closer, inexorably, deadily.

"I want the name of the people you've hired to wreck this film."

"But I don't know—"

Julian Broun tried to spring back. But Shann's beam-like arm now shot out. Steely fingers gripped Broun's expensive coat. "Whom did you hire?" repeated Shann softly.

"Let me go!" yelled Broun. "By

God, I'll have you jailed for assault—"

"This is the *veldt*. There are no jails. The law is a thousand miles away."

Shann's hand swung out; the bronzed palm cracked hard against Broun's cheek. The man's head spun at the impact. Once again Shann's hand rose and fell. Julian Broun screamed.

"I can do this as long as you can take it," said Shann implacably.

Four times more his hand smote Julian Broun's face. Now the movie magnate was reduced to impotent tears and curses.

"All right, confound you, stop it!" he half screamed. "I'll tell you."

"Talk," said Shann gently.

He released his hold on the movie magnate, and Broun cowered there.

"I didn't want to know details," he whimpered. "I told Harfinger, my right hand man, that to keep the banks off my back, I had to have 'Death Safari.' Told him I wasn't particular *how* I got it. He arranged everything. Just what he did, I've no idea."

Shann studied the man.

"In spite of all the practise you've had, you're still a bad liar," Shann said softly. "You *know* who is doing this."

"I don't," babbled Broun. "Only—we used to hire Crash Slover. He's a racketeer, and professional trouble-maker."

Shann nodded. It was an old Hollywood stunt.

"Is he here in camp?"

"No," said Broun flatly. He retreated crablike to the end of the tent. "I'm going back to Nairobi now."

Swiftly Shann strode after him, seized him.

"No, you won't," he said evenly. "You came here without invitation. Now you'll stay here!"

Shann dragged Broun to his trunk, got out a stout rope and tied the man hand and foot to the steel tent pole. "If I were you, Broun," he warned softly, "I wouldn't let anything else happen."

Broun cursed. Shann ignored him and went out to Eilleen's tent. Things were bad, but Broun's fortuitous arrival had helped. He would keep the man a prisoner, at least until the British African Constabulary came. And he knew now he had a racketeer to guard against.

He found Temba on guard, and Eilleen inside mending the khaki coat. He told her what he had learned. But he was still puzzled.

"There's only one flaw in it," he said curiously. "A man like Slover would not send threatening letters. He would act! Might Broun have hired someone else?"

He shrugged, laid the note on the table, and studied it carefully. Time and again he found himself staring at the two red eyes in the devil of the signature.

"It's not crayon," he said finally. "It's too greasy."

Eilleen bent forward, rubbed her fingers across the dots and looked at the scarlet smear. She laughed suddenly.

"Dirck," she said, "it's lipstick. Goudin's, too, because I used to use it. I know the color."

SHANN came to his feet, his eyes suddenly alight.

"Now," he muttered, "we're getting some place. I know you hate Vesta Vale, but you could call her over here for a few minutes. I'm curious about her lipstick."

Eilleen looked startled.

"I hadn't thought of her," she reflected, "and yet she might've done it. She's madly in love with Douglas Allenby. He's been making passes at me ever since we left for Africa, and she's crazy jealous. She wanted the part of Sunny, too."

"True," said Shann. "Give me about five minutes, then call her."

He went out into the dark silence of the African night. He had taken scarcely ten steps when the primitive silence was shattered by a terrific roar. Then another that fairly made the skin vibrate. Lions!

Temba spoke softly to him.

"B'wana, the lions are restless,



Temba

nervous. Someone has been around them. They do not roar like that unless they smell strange flesh."

Shann hid his puzzlement. These were two lions for use in the picture. He had spent a month in capturing them. They were very valuable. He made his way to the stockade where two guards rested on their rifles.

"Keep your eyes open," he ordered. "Have you seen anything?"

"No," rejoined Jim Hardy, an old hunter. "But them cats is restless, Major. Trouble is it's so dark you can't see your hand before your face."

He promised, however, to do his best, and Shann had to be satisfied with this. Shann examined the heavy steel wire and then went back noiselessly to Vesta Vale's tent. He paused outside, hearing distinctly, voices within.

"You can't do this to me, Douglas," Vesta Vale was saying. "Not after what we've been to one another."

"Keep your hands off me," came Allenby's ugly voice. There was the sound of a blow, a whimper from Vesta Vale. "We're washed up, I tell you. I never loved you. Now, get out."

"Oh, I'll get out," said Vesta Vale

bitterly. "I know you're mad about Eileen Marsh. The trouble with you is, Douglas, that you want the only woman you can't have. She loves Major Shann."

"You lie," cried Allenby. "She doesn't love anyone. I've always had what I wanted. Women have thrown themselves at me. And I can—oh, get out. Do you hear? No, never mind, I'll go to my own tent. I can get away from my thoughts there."

Footsteps, then Vesta's voice: "Oh, Douglas, I don't want to marry Broun. Even for my career. Please!"

Another sound of a blow, then footsteps again, dying away slowly. Vesta Vale was weeping inside, sobbing quietly. Shann remained where he was.

A moment or so later he heard Eileen's voice.

"Vesta, come stay with me a moment or so, will you? I'm nervous."

Vesta's voice, now sickly sweet: "Of course, darling. I'd be nervous, too, after what happened today. I can't get over the idea that you were meant to be killed."

She went out and their voices retreated into silence. Shann waited still another moment, then softly crept into the tent. The interchange he had overheard had revealed a definite motive for Vesta Vale to hate Eileen. He was on the right track. He had a tiny flashlight which he produced, and shielding the glow with his palm, carefully searched Vesta Vale's baggage.

At first there was nothing. He was beginning to despair when he discovered in a small silver-mounted bag, a lipstick pencil of the same color as the eyes in the devil signature. And he found a heavy coarse file! Bits of sparkling dust adhered to it. Steel dust! Such a file which, if used diligently, might file through steel wire and leave it badly weakened. He had what he came for. Vesta Vale was definitely involved. But had *she* done all this sabotage?

He switched off the light, backed out of the tent and turned his feet toward Eileen's tent. He would

have the accounting with Vesta Vale here and now.

He was perhaps halfway to his destination, striding through the black clammy night, when two sharp explosions tore the curtain of night silence. A voice yelled. Another shot. Then the deep-throated roar of two lions. Clear and thin a voice screamed across the night.

"The lions are loose! Look out! The lions!"

CHAPTER III

Camp Revolt



MAJOR DIRCK SHANN whirled and his Webley gun snapped into his hand. Upon the ridge where the wire enclosure was he saw flashlights blinking like fireflies. Voices now added to the confusion. Shann hesitated, then ran swiftly to the animal stockade, now brightly alight.

The two guards stood near a break in the wire, cursing wildly. Shann looked at the wire under the flashlight's glow.

"Cut clean," he said softly. "With nippers. How did this happen, Jim?"

"Major, I swear to God, we was wide awake. Both of us. But you couldn't see your hand before your face. The cats was restless and yowling. And I walked down here twice. I could hear 'em rubbing against the wire as they prowled. But the wire was all right then, so help me."

"Go on!" Shann said tersely.

The man shrugged helplessly.

"The next thing I knew I heard the roar. Different kind. And I saw Sarah—she's the bad one you had the time catching—bounding over the sand. Leo was behind her. I fired at them. But they went off—out there"—he pointed to the *veldt*—"and how the hell are you gonna catch a couple of lions?"

"Major, don't blame us," said the other guard.

"I'm blaming no one," retorted Shann curtly.

He stood there for a space, realizing the tremendous blow that had been struck him. Those lions were needed in the next sequence. And now he must delay, with his funds dwindling, to capture others. He had no money to purchase any at Nairobi.

Once again he was impressed with the sinister atmosphere of death that hung over the camp. Who could have done this? Vesta Vale? Hardly, for she was with Eileen Marsh. Crash Slover—disguised as an extra?

Slowly, he started back to the camp. He came upon a scene of wild panic. Actors and stage-hands, their baggage in their hands, were grouped together making for the parked motor cars.

At this new menace to his plans Shann snapped erect. "Wait a minute," he called curtly.

"Wait hell!" muttered a voice sullenly, "you're nuts if you think we are gonna hang around this camp with a couple of lions on the loose."

Dirck Shann's mouth set grimly. Was there not enough to plague him without this? He started to talk in a reasonable tone. He reminded them of their contracts, of the ruin to himself and to all the plans so brightly made. He appealed to loyalty, ambition.

"There is no real danger from the lions," he concluded. "They will go back into the *veldt* where I captured them."

He thought he had them persuaded, for they all liked him. But a dour, dark man, Peter Cutler by name, who played an extra's part, said, "Come on, you fools. I wouldn't stay here to see my name on Broadway in twelve-foot lights."

Shann marked this man, this Cutler. The panic which Shann had partly quelled, rose again. All of his arguments were forgotten. The mass of people swept on toward the motor trucks that had brought them from Nairobi. He reached the cars long before they did.

Deliberately he took the ignition

keys and pocketed them. His strong bronzed fingers ripped out commutators and ignition systems. In less than two minutes the party was stranded, cut off, marooned in the *veldt*. As they came up, Shann said quietly: "We are going to continue making this picture tomorrow."

"But the lions," wailed someone.

Shann's lips curled. "Start a fire if you're afraid."

Cutler strode up cursing. A big man, he deliberately called Shann an unprintable name. "We'll go out of here if we have to walk," he snarled.

Shann did not seem to move much; his was a deceptive grace. But suddenly his right hand, starting at his hip, whipped out. The fist and hard knuckle smote Cutler on the jaw with a sound like a small explosion. The man went backward at the impact and lit on his shoulders. He lay there half-stunned.

SHANN said quietly, "Any one else feel like questioning my orders?"

There was uncomfortable, shuffling silence. More kindly Shann said: "Go back to your tents. There is no danger here for any of you."

As they filed away Shann's eyes searched their number. He spoke: "Where is Douglas Allenby?"

No one knew. Technically the director was their chief boss. Shann wanted the director now to watch them while he got on with the mystery of who was trying to ruin him. Shann went to Allenby's tent. He lit a Hindenberg light. Allenby lay on his cot, breathing heavily, turgidly, apparently in the deep lethargy of sleep. But Shann saw the naked arms, perceived the tiny blue pin pricks that dotted them.

Shann's face did not change expression. He felt the man's pulse, then slapped his face lightly until Allenby's eyes opened. Eyes with pupils contracted to tiny light points.

"What's up?" asked Allenby drowsily.

Shann said, "How long have you been on morphine?"

Allenby shrugged, smiled cyni-

cally. "Life bores me most of the time. Morphine is a great antidote for boredom. What business is it of yours?"

Shann nodded without expression. Briefly he told of the present situation. "I want you to take charge of the group," he said. "So get yourself in shape."

"I am in shape," Allenby shrugged.

Shann made no comment to this, but watched silently until Allenby was presentable. He then said: "Who is this Peter Cutler? Where did you hire him?"

"He's a type," said Allenby. "Had experience and the good health to risk bringing him out to this hell-hole. Why?"

"Nothing," rejoined Shann.

He followed Allenby to the circle which had now gathered around a huge roaring fire. Miserable faces stared at Shann, but did not question him. Shann saw that Vesta Vale had not gone. His lips tightened; he'd settle with her now. He left the fire and went to Eileen Marsh's tent.

"Temba," he called softly in the darkness.

The Masai black did not reply. Shann switched on his flashlight and turned its shaft of luminosity into the darkness.

The black was not there. Alarm tugged at Shann's muscles. Swiftly he strode into the tent, turned the flashlight's beam all around it. The tent was empty.

Eileen Marsh had vanished!

"Eileen!" the cry burst from his lips.

HE stood stricken, his eyes sick. Suddenly a tremor shook him. The muscles in his jaw tightened, grew firm and deadly. He turned and raced from the tent. Carefully his flashlight covered the ground in ever widening circles looking for a spoor. And finally in the shadow of the cook tent he saw a sprawled body. A black silhouette against the grey earth.

Shann knelt down, and his fingers went tenderly to the black throat

and felt for a pulse. There was one, feeble. Under the flashlight's radiance he saw the terrible cut in the back of Temba's head. A blow sufficient to break an ordinary skull. Shann made a noise deep in his throat. He picked the black warrior up in his cradled arms and carried him to the campfire. People shuddered as he strode into the light with his burden.

No one made any endeavor to aid the stunned black. Shann's lips curled, but he said nothing. He made a bandage from a first aid kit, wrapped Temba in a blanket, and administered a small drink of potent brandy.

"I've got to leave him now," Shann said. "His black skin won't contaminate you. In case he recovers consciousness and needs anything, please be good enough to get it for him."

He turned silently and strode off into the darkness. He went to Vesta Vale's tent. Empty! He went to his own tent where he had tied Julian Broun. The ropes that had bound the movie magnate were cut. The man himself was gone. Shann took each of these crushing blows with impassive face. Only he hitched the holster carrying the Webley pistol to where he could make a fast, snapping draw.

He went back into the night. Eileen Marsh gone! Vanished! Where? The questions drummed in his brain. He had a sickening sensation of failure. He had promised to save the girl—and he had not. Why had she been kidnapped?

Or was she, then, dead as had been threatened?

He climbed a ridge near the motor cars and stood in deep thought. Before him stretched all Africa, its blackness holding his enemies. If Eileen Marsh was gone, then she was not gone far. All the cars were disabled. There was no way to civilization. Unless—unless Julian Broun's trouble men had a car and camp nearby.

He walked swiftly to where the disabled cars were parked. Here he

suddenly stopped, froze in a crouching alert attitude.

Against the star glitter he had seen a black shadow move silently through the thorn bush. Shann swung around to the other side of the cars and crept silently forward, stalking with all the sagacity at his command. He heard a soft whisper, a reply. Then there were two of them. Who?

He reached the end of the cars and crouched there as the two, unknown, made small sounds as they advanced toward the end car. Shann's gun lay heavy in his hand. Two forms, almost merged, bore down upon him. When they were within a yard, Shann suddenly stepped out from the protection of the car. His gun muzzle jammed into a set of ribs and drew a squeal of pain.

"My God, don't shoot," whimpered the voice of Julian Broun.

A she-tigress tore at Shann's gun arm.

"Don't kill him." It was Vesta Vale, clawing wildly at Shann.

CHAPTER IV

Crash Slover



DIRCK SHANN seized her wrist, gave it a twist that brought her crying with pain to her knees. Broun sank down, suddenly a man divested of protection, without his mantle of greatness, pitiful in his abject fear.

Shann drove the Webley back in his holster and turned the flashlight on the two so that they were clearly revealed in its radiance while he remained in darkness.

"All right," said Shann softly, "you'll both talk—and plenty. To begin with, where were you going?"

"To Nairobi," said Broun sullenly. "I told you once you were a bad liar," said Shann. "You were going to Nairobi but by another car—not any of these. Whose?"

Broun licked his lips. Shann came forward a step. "I'm just about out of patience, Broun," he said softly, "and, by God, you'd better talk and now."

He was menacing, terrible, and Broun shivered.

"Whose car?" repeated Shann.

"Crash Slover's," retorted Broun sullenly. "He has one hidden not far from here."

"Then he's here in camp?"

"Yes. But not to do anything. I told him to lay off."

"What name does he go under?"

"Peter Cutler. An extra. I worked him in through the Central Casting Bureau when you were making up your party to sail."

A small sigh escaped Shann. "Then he's responsible for the exposing of the film?"

"Ask him." Broun drew himself up. "Listen here, Shann, I don't have to take—"

Shann jerked the man toward him, his face set and grim. "You'll stand for anything I say. That goes for the both of you. We're going to have an accounting here tonight."

Broun relapsed into frightened silence. Shann said, "Slover filed the leopard's runway wire?"

Broun hesitated. "Yes," he said.

"Slover sent the threatening notes to Eileen Marsh?"

"Yes," said Broun.

Shann laughed, an unpleasant grim sound. "All right, if he did, then how did this file get into Vesta Vale's bag?" He flashed into the brilliance of the light the file he had found. "And if Slover sent the threatening notes, then why was the eye in the devil-signature made with lipstick pencil? This lipstick pencil—which I found in Vesta Vale's bag?"

He flashed that, too, and with the brilliant light on them their faces were revealed and all the emotions that were behind their eyes. The surprise had caught them unprepared. Vesta Vale gasped, shrank back. Julian Broun sucked in a hissing breath.

Shann waited a small space of

time. "You are both going to be charged at Nairobi with murder in the first degree. The murder of John Kurt. And the British hang murderers. No matter who they are."

"Oh, my God!" cried Julian Broun. "You can't. I—"

"You dare not," cried Vesta Vale. "We had nothing to do with that."

Shann merely stood, deadly, implacable, and his very menace kept her talking.

"Oh, I'll admit," she cried, "that I sent the threatening notes. I wrote them. But you can't charge me with murder for that. Broun told me that if I could wreck the picture, and he got the rights to it, he'd cast me for the part of Sunny. I sent the notes thinking I could scare Eileen Marsh out."

Shann said, "How did the file get into your bag? Remember, experts can prove in a court that that file cut the wires of the leopard runway."

She got the implication. "I didn't do it," she breathed. "I swear it. I don't know how the file got there." She turned on Broun. "Damn you, Julian, did you have Slover plant that file there to get me in wrong so you wouldn't have to keep your promise?"

"Don't be a fool, Vesta," rasped Broun. "Of course, I didn't."

A silence fell. Shann made no effort to break it. Swiftly his mind was going over the facts, trying to put them in order.

He had now three suspects. Julian Broun who might have done all this himself, but probably didn't. Vesta Vale who had sent the threatening notes and might have been responsible for all the other tragedies. Her present fright and nervousness made her look guilty. Her denial did not prove anything. And finally there was Peter Cutler, alias Crash Slover!

The man had deliberately aroused panic after Shann had nearly had it quelled. The man, since he had been on the picture from the beginning, could have been responsible for everything.

The only flaw in this whole case now was the abduction of Eileen Marsh.

Had Slover kidnaped her to make sure that the picture production was ruined? It was possible. Without her the picture must come to a stop or have many re-takes.

His voice came queerly calm. "All right, stop your bickering. Why did you kidnap Eileen Marsh—and where is she now?"

The flashlight brilliance aided Shann then. Their expressions could not be hidden.

"Eileen gone?" gasped Vesta. "Why, I left her and she was guarded!"

"I don't know nothin' about it," shrilled Julian Broun.

Shann grilled them cruelly for ten minutes but got no confession. Finally he said, "Back to the fire and if you try to run you'll wish to God you hadn't."

IN silence the trio made their way to where men were feeding a huge fire of hot coals. Shann instantly missed the extra known as Peter Cutler.

Curtly he asked for the man.

Every one professed surprise. "Why, he was here a minute or so ago?" a man said.

Shann studied faces. "And Allenby? Where is he?"

The ironic, sardonic countenance of Douglas Allenby was missing.

"Why, I saw Cutler talking to him," said the man. "Come to think of it, they went off—in that direction."

He pointed to the *veldt*.

Shann felt a sharp constriction of the heart. Eileen Marsh kidnaped. By Cutler.

And had the trouble-maker abducted Allenby, too?

Never before had Shann felt the strength of these malign forces so brutally.

But then—he squared his shoulders resolutely. The picture, the mystery of who killed John Kurt, which was beginning no longer to be a mystery to him, all had to be

forgotten now with the abduction of Eileen Marsh and Allenby. Somehow, if they were alive, he'd find them.

He knelt beside Temba's relaxed body and gently felt of the pulse. It was stronger, but the black had not yet recovered consciousness. Shann quelled his disappointment, for Temba could have helped much.

He rose and turned to the guard, Jim who still had his rifle.

Shann said, "Jim, I'm placing you in charge here. I do not want any of these people to leave the fire. I give you permission to shoot if they try. And if you shoot, aim to kill."

Distracted faces, pale cheeks greeted this. Fear-stricken eyes followed his brawny form as he strode away from the fire's cheerful glow into the night that cowered blackly beyond.

Some instinct led him toward the pool on the main set which was beyond a shallow rise. It was the only place near the camp where he had not searched. He went slowly, stealthily, with every sense keenly alert.

And that saved his life.

He was near the chair and umbrella of Douglas Allenby when a black shadow came out of the darkness.

Came with a bounding speed and a muted roar. In the darkness the lion's eyeballs burned like living balls of fire. He had been crouching back of the chair, perhaps stalking the camp. Now he sprang at Dirck Shann, hurtling through the air, fifteen hundred pounds of charging death.

Shann made a mighty leap to one side and went down as the lion's lithe body plunged through space where the big game hunter had stood.

Shann turned even as he scrambled upright, and the Webley in his hand cracked twice. Livid sheets of flame seemed to burn the gaping throat of the lion that had whirled like a top and sprung savagely toward him.

CHAPTER V

Beside the Pool



SHANN saw those livid balls of flame that were the lion's eyes bearing down upon him. The lead slugs from the Webley pistol had hit the lion but they hadn't stopped him. Nothing short

of a .30-30 slug could do that. The unsheathed claws of the great paws could disembowel him at a stroke. The great teeth in the gaping mouth could rip his throat out.

Shann had less than a split-second to take snap aim again. He pulled the trigger even as the lion bore down upon him. The Webley chattered like a machine-gun. Four slugs smashed into the lion's face. Shann tried to hurl himself out of the way of the body. But he could not. He had lost too much time bracing himself that the kicking gun might not deflect the aim.

He went sprawling under the impact of the lion's body. And it lay across his legs, pinning him fast there.

The reek of animal smell combined with that of burned powder, there in the silence. The lion made strange hiccoughing sounds in its throat. It did not turn, nor move.

Shann took heart and with a sudden smash of the Webley drove it at the lion's face. At the same second he jerked his legs with all his force and came out from under the lion's weight. He scrambled backward, turned to run.

The lion did not follow. Under the star glitter he could see it poised there, great-maned head erect, forepaws out, making the hiccoughing sounds in its throat. Presently the head rolled to one side and the beast lay there as if sleeping. Shann could hear the lion breathing, but in some fashion it could not move. Perhaps one of the bullets had penetrated part of the brain, paralyzing it. In any case, he was for the time

being safe. There was always the lion's mate to fear. But that could wait.

He took a deep breath, and on a sudden, a thought flashed across his brain. Why had the lion crouched there behind the chair? Why hadn't it stalked elsewhere for food?

"Because," he told himself, "it was stalking something here. And I came along and distracted its attention."

His body became alert at the thought.

HE turned now toward the pool, certain that he was on the right track. He told himself that it was perfectly logical for the abductor to take Eilleen and Allenby this way to make a wide circuit toward the trail to Nairobi where doubtless a car reposed. He wished for his Webley but since it was empty he took the broadbladed skinning knife that had been sheathed to his gun belt.

With this in his hand he circled the thick shrubbery, peering into it, straining his eyes for signs of movement under the stars.

He found nothing. Yet he did not lose patience. All his training told him that the lion had been stalking something close here.

"A living thing," he told himself, "and it is not far away."

He finished one side of the pool, moved silently across the open space to the other where the wired runway had been. Bushes grew thickly here. He fingered his flashlight but dared not use it. There was something deadly about this silence here. Something sinister.

As silently as a ghost he prodded into the bushes. He found nothing. Yet it was the only covering hereabouts.

Slowly he worked around the west edge of the pool. He heard slight sounds of lapping water. The crocodiles were moving. He thought he saw once the sheen of eyeballs. He was near the edge of the clearing now. Still no sign or sound of human being.

He looked toward the water's

edge. The clear air and the star glitter let him see a white object shaped something like a human. A body! There! Where the crocodiles could seize it and drag it under the water.

"Good God!" he muttered and, forgetting the need of silence, broke through shrubbery and raced to the pool's edge.

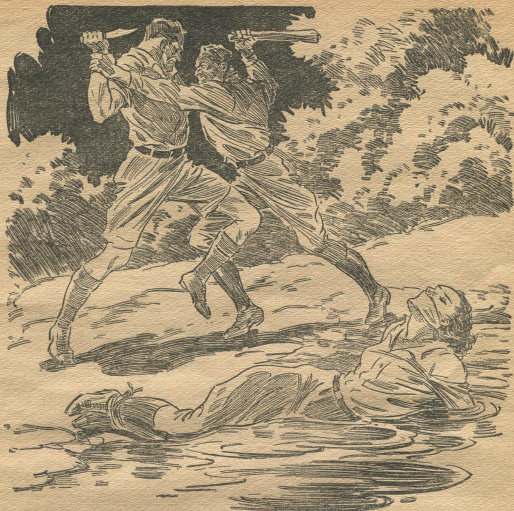
Behind him suddenly pounded a man who had risen darkly in the shadows. He had some weapon in his hand. It raised, a long clublike object. Shann heard the hissing sounds of breath behind him. An ambush! He did not stop abruptly. That would have been fatal. He did not turn to see what this thing was that thundered down upon him.

His life hung in the gap of a split-second. In that instant he leaped into the air, twisting. Came down. Head down, body hunched. He raised his hands, the knife gleaming in one of them. The pounding adversary could not stop like that. His terrific blow hissed past Shann's head. And still running with fierce speed the man ran squarely into Shann's braced body.

Under the impact they both fell to the ground in a tangle of striking, kicking arms and feet. A great savage joy surged within Shann. At last! The murderer! For that this was the killer of John Kurt he had no doubt!

For the moment he could not bring his great strength into play, for the antagonist had fallen on top of him and was striking with an insensate fury that kept Shann busy protecting himself. He took many blows, a dozen perhaps, and later he would hurt from them. But now, beyond a numbing feeling, buoyed as he was by his own red lust, he fought carefully, coolly. And at length he got the club arm locked between his own arm and his body. With the haft of the knife he struck at the man's head. Heard the dull thud of it. Felt the renewed efforts.

He breathed only to resist the savage, frantic attack. Either the man was stronger than a bull or he was



He raised his hands, the knife gleaming in one of them

fighting with maniac strength. Shann found himself calling upon that tremendous reserve of strength which he saved only for critical moments.

And slowly he wore the other down. His knife hand had been seized. Gradually they rose to their knees, chest to chest, the antagonist trying to recover his club, Shann endeavoring to wrest free his knife hand from the steely grip on the wrist.

Sweat oiled his body. His breath hissed between his lips. Ligaments strained; muscles writhed in the silent struggle. Shann had never felt such wiry strength before. Gradually they came to their feet. Shoes dug deep in loose earth for purchase. Bodies arched. The smell of vile

breath swept Shann's face. The man had deliberately tried to bite him.

Slowly but inexorably Shann applied his great power. Forcing his knife arm down from over his head. Inch by inch. And he still held the antagonist's arm locked against his side as a prize-fighter ties up an opponent in a clinch.

More furiously the unknown struggled. He tried to knee Shann in the groin. His feet kicked twice to the leg. But Shann was wearing him down, gaining, inch by inch.

The unknown cursed violently. "I'll feed you to the crocs as I fed him and her," he raved.

If the words were spoken purposefully they accomplished their purpose.

At the word "her" Shann thought of Eilleen. In the water! With vicious crocodiles to drag her under, tear her slowly to bits. His applied strength relaxed as the shock of alarm swept him.

Instantly the opponent took advantage of the relaxation. He jerked back, lowered his head, drove forward with all the strength left in him. The top of his head caught Dirck Shann squarely on the jaw. Combined with the mental confusion caused by knowledge of Eilleen's peril, the shock was sufficient to dump him over backward.

THE intruder jerked loose his club. He swung it so that Shann was struck a glancing blow on the head. Half-stunned Shann swept the knife in a wide arc that sliced through cloth and flesh to the bone of the man's arm. A cry of infuriated pain echoed in the night.

Shann, groggy, staggered to his feet. The antagonist cursed once, then hesitated as if debating whether to renew the battle. Shann surged forward, shaking his head, trying to clear his brain. The man swung another blow that struck Shann's shoulder.

Then he turned and ran with incredible speed away from the pool into the night's blackness. Shann tried to follow. But he only took a few steps. His clearing brain visualized the white shape lying in the water. Eilleen! He wiped a forearm across his bleeding forehead. He turned and stared through the grey darkness toward the pool.

It was there, that long bundle of white. And beyond it he could see balls of red fire glowing. Four! Two crocodiles!

Perhaps already they had killed the girl and were biding their time to devour the corpse. He shook his head yet again, tightened his grasp on the knife, and ignoring the would-be killer fleeing through the darkness, raced down the sloping sand to the pool's edge.

Now, the star glitter made reflection on the water so that he could

see her face protruding above the water. Her face in which eyes wide with horror gazed up helplessly.

Shann cried, "Eilleen!" and all the agony of which he was capable was in the word.

He lunged forward to seize her feet lying in a few inches of water, but even as he did so he saw there was no time. No matter what had delayed the saurians from investigating this human flesh before, they were doing so now. The blazing balls of fire coursed swiftly across the pool and bore down on the unprotected head of the girl. Shann saw instantly that if he stopped to drag her feet foremost from the pool, the leading croc, its mouth already wide-spread, lined with crooked, terrible teeth, would seize her by the head. And rip her to pieces even as Shann tugged at her ankles.

A groan of fury and horror wrenched from his stricken throat. He waited not a second now. Hurling himself head foremost he went into the pool, beyond her body, interposed his own between her and the crocodile.

His bold attack served one purpose. It stopped both saurians for a second as he splashed foamily through the water. He came to his feet, backed against her head, trying to swing her body so it would be closer to shore. Then he could take a quick backward leap, seize her and scramble up the bank to safety.

But before he could even take a half backward step the leading crocodile made a terrible sound in its gaping throat. Its great tail lashed the water into a lather as it surged forward boldly at Shann.

Shann's skin grew hard and his hackles rose in sheer horror at the sight of the reptile shooting toward him like a submarine torpedo. Not for fear for himself, but of what would happen to Eilleen if he could not stand his ground.

Luck favored him in that. The leading saurian struck alone. The other seemed sluggish, and lay al-

most as quiet as a log. In that second, as Shann braced himself to meet this onslaught with nothing but a knife, he suddenly understood the reason for that sluggishness. He smelled a fetid, terrible odor. Blood smell. The smell of torn flesh. He saw an oily scum glittering on the water as the crocodile surged toward him pushing a small wave of water ahead of his blunt jaws. The other crocodile was soggy with human flesh, God!

He had no time to dwell on the horror. The saurian was upon him. Driven wild by taste of human flesh, brave enough to attack a human being at any time for the pleasure of killing, the crocodile raised its scaly body upward, its mouth wide and gaping and prepared to close its great jaws on Shann.

A gush of water swirled around his waist. The crocodile, twelve feet long, seemed monstrous, primitive, terrible as it loomed up in front of the hunter. Eyes like fire. Little spurts of water, sounds of sucking air, coming from the pin point nostrils. Fetid breath and the vile smell of rotting meat between the jagged rows of teeth. Upon him now. The yawning mouth. The teeth glittering in the cold starlight. Shann waited until the last possible second. When it did not seem he could possibly escape the snapping jaws.

Then he dodged to one side. Felt the teeth hook into his shirt. The knife came up, hung there glittering in his hand. Descended. Straight into the blazing eye that was closest. He drove the blade until it was buried to his fingers in the eye socket. He felt the cold spurt of blood, slimy, thick, horrible to the touch, on his hand. He jerked backward with all his strength. Felt the cloth, caught in the crooked teeth, rip—and then he was free!

Around him the water was lashed to a foam. The great scaly creature's tail lashed around and one blow would have killed Shann where he stood. A frantic sound gushed from the saurian's throat. Shann pushed backward, got Eilleen's body so that

it paralleled the shore. He was trying to lift it, still facing the crocodile when the writhing monster's tail came around in a wild sweep. Shann nearly dodged it. But not quite.

A groan broke from his throat as the pointed scaly tail, as hard as a steel whip, lashed him alongside the chest. It knocked him spinning away from Eilleen's body, exposed her for a new attack. His left side was numbed by the shock of the blow, delivered by two tons of monstrous strength.

He staggered upright, choking, with a lashing monster with scaly claws foaming down upon him.

CHAPTER VI

The Fight at the Pool



AS SHANN staggered back a new peril came. The second crocodile began nosing toward the helpless girl. Shann hurled himself across the water. It impeded his progress. Dodging

frantically the one-eyed saurian which attacked him, he took a glancing blow from the tail. Somehow he reached Eilleen and the sluggish monster, sniffing at her motionless form, glared with fiery eyes at him.

"Do not move, Eilleen," called Shann. "Lie still. Do not breathe. Just a moment now—"

He slashed at the croc with the knife and sliced across a protuberant eye. A wild sound came from it, but it retreated before the attack. Did not try to follow up.

Swiftly Shann turned and slashed at the ropes that bound the girl. He cut the gag, the ropes on her arms. He swept her up, and flung her bodily onto the sandy bank. And then the half-blind saurian thrashing around struck him again, this time with a scaly paw. He lost his balance, slipped in the mud. The monster lunged at him with wide open mouth.

The saurian missed him as he dodged. Boldly Shann struck the knife into the other eye. Buried it to the hilt. Black cold blood bathed his arms above the elbow. The smell cloyed his nostrils. The wild mad sounds from the mortally wounded croc deafened him. A blow of the lashing tail just missed him and the pool water ran in huge waves, foam sudded the shores.

He scrambled to his feet. Exhausted, half-strangled, he struggled blindly to climb the bank. A wild blow of the tail again knocked him down. The beast surged like a catamaran across the pool. Bumped blindly into Shann's body as he staggered up. Its teeth snapped before he could strike again with the knife. Snapped tightly at the cloth of his left arm. Pulled back with all its tons of weight.

Like a straw in the mouth of a great fish, Shann was drawn under the water. He was pulled farther and farther into the center of the pool where the water was deepest.

He wrenched upward and his mouth and nostrils just cleared the water, but before he had half filled his lungs the elongated head of the crocodile pulled him under. He thought he heard a scream, but the next instant his head was under the water.

He wrenched at his arm, numbed to the shoulder now. The knife had fallen from his paralyzed grip so he could not cut himself free of the cloth. He threshed, each time more feebly. Once again his head appeared above the water.

And then a muscular black hand had him around the waist. He saw the flash of a spearhead driving downward. His arm was freed suddenly, and he felt himself dragged to the bank.

He must have lost consciousness for a time because when he next was aware of things, Temba was crouched over him. The giant black had ripped clothing to make bandages for the gouged arm.

"Eilleen—where is she?" Shann asked wildly, trying to sit up,

The black, erect now, the spear balanced in his right hand, his eyes peering at the underbrush, turned for a moment.

"She is behind you, *b'wana*." Then his eyes returned suspiciously to the underbrush.

THREE seconds later, Shann was crouching over that still, white figure. He breathed easier when he saw that the girl was only unconscious, in a dead faint from the terrible ordeal she had just gone through. Straightening, he swayed unsteadily on his feet.

"What do you search for there, warrior?" he asked Temba, who was still squinting at the underbrush.

The black lowered his spear.

"A man was hiding there," he said. "I can swear it. But he is gone now."

"He would be—now," Shann said grimly. "I think—yes, I think I know who did this. And if it's the man I'm thinking off, he has only one move left." Then his voice softened. "Warrior, I have often owed thee my life. Tonight I owe more than my life—hers. How did you come to be here?"

"I was struck from behind, *b'wana*," rejoined the black simply. "When I opened my eyes again, I was beside the fire. The other white *b'wanas* said you came this way. I thought you might have need of me. So I came here."

Shann nodded.

"For that, many bolts of cloth and the pretty beads for thy mother. That I swear. Now you stand guard here over the white missy. I will be back soon."

Still staggering, he went to his tent and got a very fine Luger seven shot automatic. He holstered it. Then he walked grimly to the fire around which the remaining members of the company sat huddled. Curtly, he beckoned to Jim Hardy, the grizzled old hunter.

"Get your rifle and come with me."

The man obeyed quickly.

"Where are we goin', Major?"

"After the murderous devil who's

been responsible for all the hell raised here," Shann replied grimly.

They went through the pre-dawn darkness toward the line of motor cars. Under Shann's supervision Jim put the commutator back on a fast roadster. When Shann turned the ignition key the starter whined, the motor caught and purred powerfully.

Shann chose to drive.

"You may have to shoot tires," he said.

He wrenched the wheel. The soft red earth yielded reluctantly, but after a while they were on the new Nairobi Trail, wide enough for a single car only, and with the headlights blazing, started as swiftly as might be in the direction of Naiwasha, the nearest town.

They rode quite a while in silence. And then Jim said, "How do you know the killer went this way?"

Shann smiled ruefully. "Not through any deduction on my part. Not through any clever work by me. I suspected the man from the beginning. I simply didn't know he was a psychopathic case and couldn't believe the evidence when it came in."

Jim listened to this. "It still doesn't say how you know he came this way."

"It's the only way out of the *veldt*," rejoined Shann. "And he *has* to make his getaway."

With that Jim had to be satisfied. They made fair time for fifteen minutes over the bumpy, sagging road. It soared around and over rolling hills crowned with flattish trees. A grey light was stealing over the east when at last Shann's headlights revealed a car ahead driving without lights. As soon as the car ahead spotted Shann's car it began to make reckless speed over the bad road.

Shann trod on the accelerator. The car leaped ahead, skidding, swerving over the uneven trail. The car ahead drove as if a madman was at the wheel. Twice Shann skidded off into the soft earth and only main strength swerved the car back to the trail. Slowly but surely he gained on the car ahead.

There was about twenty miles of this road that led finally to the main cross highway between Naiwasha and Thika. Shann knew he had to catch his man before the main road was reached. He became more reckless yet and the roadster screamed across the treacherous trail.

Shann said, "Shoot at the tires. Try the gas tank."

His voice rose peremptorily over the whining scream of the racing motor. The speedometer said sixty and it did not seem as if the car would stay a second more on the trail. Jim fired three shots, but did not hit the tires. However, the fourth shot struck the gas tank, and instantly it left a trail of moisture along the dry earth.

There had been no reply from the fleeing car. But now, as if desperate, the car ahead plunged forward at a terrific speed. Shann's strained arms would not hold the roadster at such a pace. The car ahead drew away. Shann cursed.

"Still, he can't make the highway. He hasn't got the gas—or won't have."

HE had scarcely spoken when the car ahead slowed suddenly, skidded terrifically with the front wheels turned and locked and the hind end swung around in swaying skid so that the car now faced the way it had come. Too late Shann saw what the murderer planned. He jammed on the brakes, fought the skid. Too late. There was a flash of steel and the murderer's car, sliding on locked wheels, came roaring into his car.

Shann braced himself. Jim yelled. A terrific crash smashed over the night. A flash of flame leaped out of the two cars. Shann plunged forward and his forehead smashed against the wheel top. Jim's head and shoulders went through the windshield with a chorus of crashing glass.

The car ahead now disgorged a man's figure. And an instant later, orange flashes lanced from it as the man fired pointblank into the mass of wreckage where Shann was still

braced behind the crooked steering wheel.

Desperately, Shann jerked open the door. He fell out of the car, rolled over, came up. Viciously, his Luger responded with smoke, flame, hot lead.

The killer abruptly ceased his firing. His gun dropped to the ground as he clutched at his wounded hand. He uttered a snarl of rage as Shann plunged toward him.

Shann raised the Luger, held it ready for another shot as he ran. The murderer had begun to back slowly away, but he was edging closer to the gun he had dropped on the ground. His face was a white blur in the darkness that lingered just before dawn.

"Stop!" snapped Shann. "Don't touch that gun!"

THE killer suddenly bent over, reaching for his gun. Shann tripped over a root as his finger tightened on the trigger of the Luger. He went down, the gun in his hand roaring harmlessly as the bullet sped skyward.

Before he could rise the killer had reached him. Shann felt a hand clutch at his throat as he got to his knees. His left arm swung up, fist smashing against a face. There was the crunch of bone against bone as the murderer reeled back. Shann leaped to his feet, the Luger still in his right hand.

The murderer had raised his gun, there was the glint of steel as he aimed at Shann. The weapon clicked but there was no burst of flame, the hammer had struck against an empty chamber. With a curse the killer flung his automatic at Shann. It caught him full in the chest, made him gasp for breath for an instant.

In that brief second he had dropped his arm, and now the killer had reached him. Desperately he caught Shann's wrist, tried to twist the Luger out of his grasp. As they struggled, the gun roared. The killer reeled back. An amazed, incredible expression crossed his face. Slowly, one hand went down to his stomach.

Then the other hand was clapped over it, squeezing, squeezing, as if he could so alleviate the terrible pain. Finally his knees buckled from under him. He crumpled to the ground, his hands still at his stomach.

"I guess," he muttered, "that's the end."

Shann came forward warily, and kicked the murderer's gun to one side.

"Yes, Allenby," he said grimly, "it's the end. The end of a murderous fiend. You wanted Eileen, but she wouldn't let you put your slimy hands on her. That's why you twice tried to murder her—first, by releasing those leopards; second, when you attempted to feed her to those crocs."

Allenby stared up at him defiantly, his eyes bright and glittering with pain.

"Yes, bright boy, that's one of the reasons."

"And the other," Shann continued coldly, "is that you were Broun's man. I'll take care of him later. With the murder—disappearance, really, for those crocodiles would have left no trace of her—of Eileen, I'd definitely have to stop production."

Broun could import another actress easily enough—something I couldn't afford to do.

"You freed those lions. In the excitement which you knew would result, you and Cutler dragged Eileen out of her tent and took her to the crocodile pool. There you promptly killed Cutler—alias Crash Slover—because you knew that the rat couldn't be trusted. You dumped his body to the crocodiles, left the girl bound there, and went back to establish your morphine alibi. Then you returned to find out whether the reptiles had already killed Eileen—and you ran into me."

"You are a bright boy," the dying man said wryly. "Yes, every penny I own is invested in the Superlux Pictures. And without 'Death Safari,' Superlux Pictures will go bankrupt." He grinned weakly. "I was

just protecting my interests, you see."

"Sure you were," Shann drawled. "You were also doing pretty much that when you placed that file in Vesta's bag. The woman was beginning to get in your hair. You knew if I discovered that file, chances were good I'd promptly ship her out of here."

"All right, Shann, you win," said Allenby, his voice weaker now, almost a whisper. "Had the crocs got the girl, I'd have got away with it. I only had to run for it in Cutler's car when I saw that you'd rescued her. Knew I wouldn't stand a chance scrapping with that big black devil of yours. Eileen named me, of course, as soon as she came to."

Shann shook his head.

"No, I knew you were the killer," he said slowly. "That dose of morphine you pretended to have taken in your tent—to establish an alibi for yourself—should have slowed up your heart action. Yet I noticed that it hadn't. Your heart had been pounding—as if you'd been running a minute or two earlier. It was then that I first suspected you."

The hoarse voice of Jim Thorpe now came from the wrecked automobile:

"There's a car coming this way, Major."

There was! But when the patrol of the East African Rifles arrived there, Allenby was dead.

Major Dirck Shann never mentioned the man's name again until five months later, when he and Eileen Marsh stood at the taffrail of the *Normandie*, looking at the magnificent Manhattan skyline. The completed film of "Death Safari" was in the ship's safe.

"Allenby is many thousands of miles away from Hollywood, buried on that African *veldt*," he said soberly. "I guess he won't be missed in either place."

"And I," Eileen said softly, "won't miss Hollywood and Africa in our own home in Westchester."

"Nor I," said Shann, his left arm encircling the girl's shoulders. "But what about you, Temba?"

Temba grinned, his white teeth like pickets in a black fence.

"Me, *b'wana*, I be happy where you and missy are."

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Rookie Red McGowan and Lieut. Vernon Saxsby Hated Each Other as Only Leathernecks Can—Until They Met Deadly Peril Together Aboard a Chinese Junk!

A Complete Novelette

By **CLAUDE RISTER**

Author of "Death Detail," "Double Holdup," etc.

CHAPTER I

The Deserter



ROOKIE Red McGowan of the United States Marine Corps took a few swift strides that carried him up to a chunky man whom he had seen pass a doorway. The pent up resentment and anger of months was burning in the marine's heart. Now he would get even for all that he had suffered!

He clapped a hand on the man's shoulder and spun him around. For a moment they glared at each other, Red with mingled triumph and hate shining in the icy blue eyes; the other in outraged dignity. Then Red's mouth twisted in a mirthless smile.

"We-ell!" he said softly. "If it ain't Lieutenant Vernon Saxsby, of the U. S. Navy!"

"Take your hand off me, McGowan!" Saxsby's voice crackled. "Remember—"

"Yeah, I know; remember that you're an officer and a gentleman! Well, *Mister* Saxsby, the last time you had me thrown in the brig I told you I'd just love to have it out with you sometime, man to man, when I wouldn't be fighting a gold

striped uniform. You shot back that I might have that opportunity some day, and that if I did you'd knock my head off. Well, Lieutenant, here we are, both in civvies, and with nobody but Chinos to see. Now, *Mister*, let's see you knock my block off."

"You've been drinking, McGowan!" again the officer's voice crackled. He struck the big-knuckled hand from his shoulder. "You'll pay for this! Report to your ship under arrest!"

Rookie Red's devilish grin turned into a snarl.

"Fighting with your gold stripes again, huh? Well, this time you've got to fight with something else, see? I'm going to punch your face right back through your cranium; then—over the hill. Got me a stow-away berth all fixed."

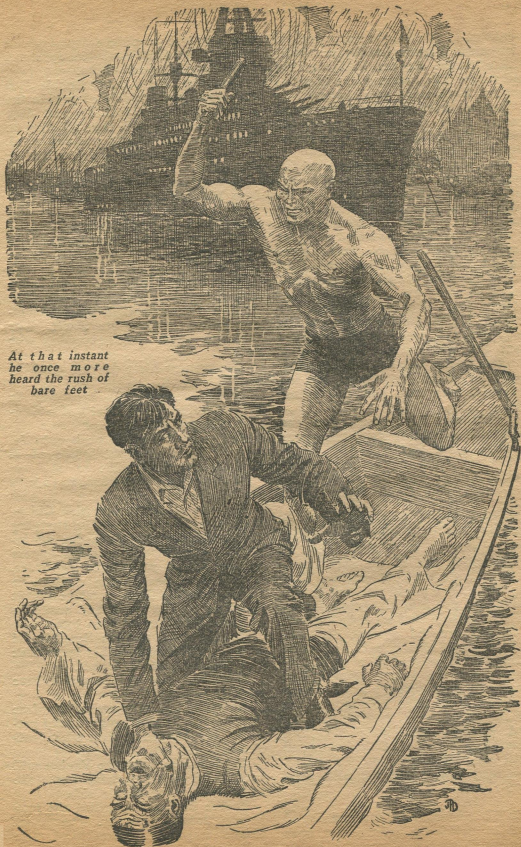
"Deserting, eh? Yellow!"

Red swore and struck for the face. The officer ducked, stepped in quickly, slammed a jolting blow to the heart. Red grunted and dropped his guard a little. Saxsby whipped over a hook. The big recruit sat down abruptly.

He stared up, ludicrous surprise on his blunt face; then he came to his feet. His hat had fallen off, and now his shock of curly red hair glinted under the late sun. He downed his head and rushed. The next instant the two men were at it exchanging blow for blow.

A crowd of Chinamen quickly gathered round, chattering like

*At that instant
he once more
heard the rush of
bare feet*



monkeys. It was a fight worth seeing. Lieutenant Vernon Saxsby was built like a turtle. Rookie Red was big and rangy. They were about of equal weight. Both were good boxers.

"You've been insubordinate and unruly from the very beginning!" panted the officer. "I'll beat some discipline into you!"

"Oh, yeah!" Red swung a right, and Saxsby went down. He was quickly up again, however. With head drawn back between his heavy shoulders he bored in. Red stepped to meet him. They pounded away at close quarters. Soon both were bruised and bloody. First one, then the other went down, got up; and the fight went on.

Once more Rookie Red hit the ground. He thrust himself to a sitting position, shook the cobwebs from his brain, wiped blood from his face with the back of a hand. Again he looked up queerly at the heavysset, fiery man who had felled him.

"Damn me, Lieutenant, you *can* fight with something more than your uniform, after all!"

"Get up from there, you yellow rookie! I'm going to knock you out; then have you taken back aboard ship!"

With a growl Red scrambled to his feet, and they went at it again. Saxsby slipped on a little pool of blood, which one of the combatants had spat onto the cobblestones. That slip was only a slight one, but it was enough to put him off guard for an instant. Within that second a big knot of a fist crashed against his jaw, and he went down and out cold.

Now there was a ruffle of excitement down the street. Rookie Red McGowan saw three marine police and two Sikh cops coming on the run, attended by a flock of Chinos. Red grabbed his civvie hat, tore through a ring of Chinamen, and went long-legging it up the street. The navy police and the Sikh cops gave chase.

RED turned a corner and found himself on a quiet street, near a splendid carriage. Framed in a side

window was a cadaverous face; a visage with deep socketed eyes and long strands of mustache.

Running like a deer, Rookie Red McGowan was quickly alongside the slowly moving vehicle. Its near door opened a little and the tall man in the back seat thrust out his head.

"What happened?" he inquired in English.

A reckless plan for escape flashed into Red's mind. He swerved while in full stride, jerked wide the carriage door, and sprang inside.

"*Chop-chop!*" he gasped fiercely to the coachman. "Step on it! Drive like hell!"

The little coolie up front gave him a startled backward look. Red flung a glance through the rear window, then yanked its shade. The pursuers were just rounding the corner.

The man at his side was speaking stiffly.

"Who are you, Yankee? What's the meaning of all this?" His English was perfect.

Red jerked out a pocket knife, opened it, jabbed the point of it against the other's side.

"Tell the boy *chop-chop*, or so help me I'll shove!"

He was bluffing, but the Chinaman took no chance. After studying the audacious passenger for an instant, he waved long-nailed fingers to the coolie and spoke an order. The driver cracked his whip. The team leaped. The carriage went speeding up the street and around a corner. Pursuit was soon lost.

Rookie Red's swollen lips twisted in a grin. He snapped his knife shut and thrust it into a pocket.

"Thanks, fellow. I wouldn't have used the sticker."

He caught a glimpse of his face in a mirror. It was pretty badly battered. He mopped it with a handkerchief.

"And now perhaps the Yankee will be so kind as to explain," came the sepulchral voice at his side.

Rookie McGowan studied the man briefly before replying. The gaunt visage was like a deathhead. The yellow skin seemed to adhere to the

bones. Long strands of mustache hung fully two inches below the point of the sharp chin. The sunken eyes held a strange glow that somehow made even the big marine feel a little creepy. The fellow wore a queer skullcap, a gorgeous robe embellished with golden dragons, and felt shoes. The long-nailed hands were like claws.

"Well?" the man prompted hol-
lowly.

Red quickly decided that he might as well tell the truth. Hell, wasn't he going over the hill anyway? And so he told what had happened, and why.

The other smiled, showing inordinately long teeth.

"And now what will the reckless one do?"

"Go over the hill; quit; desert. If I went back I'd be hanged by my ears from the crow's nest."

The fellow studied him contemptively. For a moment, queer fires burning in the deep eyes. Then he laughed, a peculiar laugh that shook his rail-thin form, but made scarcely a sound.

"It may be that the fates sent you to me, honorable marine."

"How's that?"

"Did you ever hear of Soi Chee?"

"Nope, who is he?"

The man tapped himself with one talon.

"I am a merchant of great power. I might be able to use a man like you. Can you use a machine-gun?"

"Sure Mike! What jirene can't? But—"

"And are you by chance also familiar with light field pieces?"

"Fairly so. But why the questions? Planning a revolution?"

The other ignored the inquiry.

"Then I'm sure the fates sent you to me. There is no need for you to stow away. You would get no pay, and would have to live like a dog in a kennel. It will be great pleasure to employ you on one of my ships, at a salary of—shall we say, two hundred American dollars per month?"

"Two hundred bucks a month; Now I know you're plotting a revolution!"

"Not so. But my junks are continually being robbed by pirates. Tonight the finest sails with a rich cargo, and I want a man like you to guard her. Frankly, the job is a hazardous one." He looked at the adventurer from a corner of his eyes; noted the eager glow on the squarecut face: "But will you take it?"

"Will I! But when are paydays?" Red had suddenly become cautious.

"One hundred in advance, to show good faith. Thereafter you will be paid at the end of each voyage."

"You're on, Soi Chee!"

Rookie Red McGowan grabbed one of the long, cold claws, thereby sealing a very desperate bargain.

CHAPTER II

Junked



SOI CHEE took Red to his Oriental mansion and gave him rich food and drink. Warming to a glass of spiced wine, Red retold the experiences which had driven him to desertion.

"That snapping turtle, Saxsby, was always on my tail. He was responsible for my being brigged four times in my six months aboard. The last time was for six weeks on bread and water."

"The best horses are always hard to handle at first," murmured Soi Chee. "This Lieutenant Saxsby—you must hate him very much?"

"We-ell, I did, but—I guess I got it out of my system. After all, I was pretty ornery aboard ship. I guess he's the kind of gold striper the Navy wants. Hell for discipline, and a fine navigator. And brother—can he fight!"

Red was grinning now.

"So I observe," Soi Chee remarked dryly.

Darkness was now falling. Soon Rookie Red and Soi Chee left the house in the Chinaman's carriage. The junk was lying at the river's

mouth, Soi Chee explained. He had sent word to Fu Wing, the skipper, to be waiting for them at the river's edge with a *sampan*.

The night was foggy. The part of town which they traversed was very quiet. There was only occasional sing-song voices, the *clop, clop, clopping* of the horse's hoofs, and the steady trundling of carriage wheels to be heard. Lights glowed dully through the gloom. There was little talking, for Soi Chee had fallen into a deeply contemplative mood.

Finally Rookie Red caught the dank, stagnant smell of the river; saw lights, some gliding, some still, some blinking.

Houseboats and *sampans*, lying in a black row along the shore, loomed ahead. Once more sing-song voices were heard. The occasional shouts of boatmen passing one another in the gloom, came from farther out on the river.

The carriage stopped. A figure emerged from the darkness; a stalwart figure in seagoing cap and baggy silks. His feet were bare. Soi Chee opened the door and for a moment he and the other Chinaman talked in their native language. Then the cadaverous merchant introduced him to Red: "Fu Wing, the skipper."

Fu Wing bowed, then turned abruptly and went padding away with those mincing, shuffling steps characteristic of his people.

"Fu Wing speaks English," came once more the hollow voice at Red's side. "Follow him. Good fortune, honorable Red McGowan."

Red got out, again pressed a cold, clawlike hand; then hurried after the skipper. He and Fu Wing boarded a dark *sampan*. A coolie stood at the sculling oar. The boat shoved off, and Rookie Red McGowan was away, adventure bound.

Soundlessly, except for a soft rippling at her sides, the *sampan* went down the black river. She moved swiftly, for besides the current, there was the strong drive of the big oar to carry her along. The sculler presented a ludicrous spectacle, dressed only in bathing trunks and a bat-

tered old straw hat, doubtless cast off by some tourist.

No one spoke. Fu Wing squatted on his naked heels, smoking a long pipe, and watching the dark flow ahead. Rookie Red sat on a small bale, blunt chin cupped in one big hand, lost in thought. Adventure lover though he was, he suddenly had come to feel a queer depression.

After all, the old Corps was all right. Always first into action. A place for men, not weaklings or quitters. He almost winced at the self-inflicted thrust. "Turtle" Saxsby had called him yellow. In his sudden strange melancholy Red was almost ready to admit that the lieutenant was right.

HIS spirits sank lower and lower as the black water slipped past. The prospects of thrilling adventure, and at the same time good money, suddenly were no longer attractive. Hell, he'd rather have his old job, with a buck's pay—if only it weren't for Turtle Saxsby.

The majestic bulk of the flagship loomed out of the night. Her blinkers were winking cheerfully, her port-holes glowing. As the *sampan* glided closer Red could see human forms moving on the decks. If they were not ashore, Pug and Jack would be at their usual game of acey-deucey, cussing each other for cheats. Top Galloway would have a bunch of wall-eyed rooks around him, telling them whoppers about strange sights he had seen and thrilling adventures he had experienced in different lands.

Great fellows, every one of them, from greenest rookie to the old man himself—excepting Turtle Saxsby, of course. And just now Red didn't even hate Saxsby. And the old battle-wagon! Red never had noticed it before, but she was so dignified, so impressive. And she had been home to him—a safe home!

He swallowed hard. If it weren't for the certainty of getting a long stretch for assaulting an officer, damned if he wouldn't give himself up!

They were slipping past her now!

Suddenly through the night came the clear notes of a bugle call. It was like a strident cry urging him to return. Red's heart swelled. His eyes grew hot.

Rookie Red leaped to his feet, startling Fu Wing up with him.

"I'm going back!" There was a snap to his voice as he said:

"Put this tub alongside the big ship!"

"No can do! You makee bargain! You keep! You take big *cumsaw* one hunnuh dollah!"

"You can have the money back! Put me alongside, or I'll jump overboard and swim!"

"You jumpee you nevah come up."

Red McGowan quickly realized that what the fellow said was probably true. He had heard old salts and leathernecks say that the river had a terrific undertow, and that persons who went overboard were likely never to come up alive.

Already the *sampan* had passed the great bulk of the warship. Red swung toward the sculler.

"All right, then! By God, I'll take the oar and shove alongside myself!"

He was halfway astern, when he heard a soft rushing of feet. He wheeled, just in time to prevent Fu Wing from leaping onto his back.

Bodies thumped together. The two men struggled, Fu Wing chattering excitedly. Red strove to jolt blows to the fellow's jaw, but he had grabbed the marine under the arms, and head down, was hanging on and trying to hurl Red to the deck. The Chinaman was as big as the marine, and was strong and lithe.

The *sampan* rocked precariously as their feet shuffled swiftly on the narrow deck. Red snarled, and swung his antagonist around. Fu Wing fell back against the little matting canopy amidship; pulled Red over with him. The canopy smashed. They hit the bottom of the *sampan*, Rookie Red uppermost. He managed to smack a blow into his opponent's face. Still the agile Chinaman held on.

Again Red struck; felt his knuckles crush human flesh. The Chinaman started yelling wildly. Red got him

by the throat and slammed his head against the bottom of the boat. The gripping arms and legs loosened. Again Red viciously flung back the head. This time the body under him went limp.

At that instant he once more heard a rush of bare feet. The sculler had quit his oar and was coming to Fu Wing's assistance. With a muttered invective Rookie Red started to rise and wheel, but a human projectile hurled him backward.

He saw an arm flick upward, holding a short club of some kind. He tried to ward the blow, but the coolie knocked his hand aside and—*crash!* Stars rioted before his eyes.

Crash!

The lights went out.

WHEN the marine regained consciousness he was lying, bound and gagged, in the pit of the *sampan*. He saw dimly the form of the Chinese skipper, squatted again on the fore-deck, quietly smoking his long pipe and peering down the dark river. The soft *tump, tump, tump* aft, told that again the coolie was at the sculling oar.

Perhaps half an hour passed. Then Red knew by the pitching of the small craft that she had reached the open sea. A short time later she bumped and came to a stop.

Fu Wing was standing now, legs set wide, bare feet planted firmly on the deck. He yapped out something and a voice replied from above. A moment later there was a soft thud forward. Red saw that a rope ladder had been tossed over the side.

Fu Wing and the *sampan* coolie carried Red out onto the deck. The marine saw now that the *sampan* was alongside a huge junk. A row of heads protruded over the rail.

A rope came curling down. Fu Wing quickly affixed its end about the prone captive's body. He gestured, sang out, and the men on deck heaved away. Red was hoisted like a bag of rice and dumped on the deck.

Fu Wing quickly came up the ladder. Again he barked orders. Red

was lifted, carried below, laid on the floor of a small cabin. Fu Wing removed the gag and squatted beside him.

"Anybody makee bargain with Soi Chee, all same keepee. Me takee hun-nuh dollah. You good sailah, you ketchem back. You makee moah trouble, you no ketchee cash, Maybe-so sha'k ketchee you, Savvy?"

Rookie Red McGowan nodded slowly. His face was stoical, but there was fire behind the ice in his eyes.

"Yep, I savvy, I just got soft for a minute back there on the river. Gimme that hundred again and the bargain's on. You won't have any more trouble with me." He grinned acridly and added: "I can say to my conscience that I didn't desert, but was shanghaied."

Fu Wing studied him for a moment through narrow, slanted eyes.

"Velly good," the Chinaman said.

He took a small roll of banknotes from his cloth belt and shoved it into one of the marine's pockets; then went swiftly to work on the prisoner's bonds.

Red stood up and rubbed his wrists.

"You waitee here. Pletty soon me come along," Fu Wing said in his jerky pidgeon English.

Again Red nodded. "I savvy."

The Chinaman went *pat-patting* away, followed by the deck coolies who had helped bring Red into the cabin. The door swung shut. Rookie Red waited for a moment; then tried to open the door. Just as he had expected! Bolted on the outside. He returned to the bunk and sat down; dropped his chin into cupped palms, stared at the floor.

HE was aroused by a muffled jarring bump, and realized that another boat had come alongside. The little cabin had two ports, covered by stout panels. He got up and went to one of them, slid the shutter aside and peered out.

The light from the little brass ship's-lamp within, made the darkness outside all the more intense.

Red could see nothing save Stygian blackness. Fog, like the clammy breath of some ghost, blew in his face. The boat which had jarred against the junk was on the other side. There were voices calling back and forth—things which he could not understand. He continued to listen, and after some five or ten minutes he heard a rhythmic chanting:

"Oe-e-e—yoh! Ie-e-e—yih! Eh-e-e—yeh!"

There was a creaking of tackle. He knew that something was being loaded. He wondered what. And why had not that something been taken aboard at one of the river docks? Was wily old Soi Chee cheating his government out of some rightful tariff?

Red grinned. Well, it was none of his business.

He closed the port, turned away, and walked the floor for a while. His big hands were sunk deep into the pockets of his civvie trousers, and there was a thoughtful expression on his freckled face.

Suddenly he stopped and jerked up his head. On deck there was commotion. The loading had ceased. He heard excited jabbering, a pattering of bare feet, a stamping of shod ones—then a familiar heavy voice.

"Lay off, you slant-eyed heathens! Blast you, I'll—"

There was a smack of a fist against flesh.

Red's mouth dropped open. Turtle Saxsby!

CHAPTER III

Prisoners of Fortune



WHAT the hell was Saxsby doing there? Evidently the lieutenant was in trouble. And in such emergencies one of Uncle Sam's men helped another, regardless of the cause, regardless of

personal feelings, regardless of everything!

Red sprang to the door and threw himself against it. The bolts held. Swearing under his breath Red tried again and again. Still it held. Jaws set, he backed clear across the cabin; rushed, and sent his one hundred and eighty pounds of brawn hurtling. This time there was a slight give, and a tearing of wood. One more such attack would do it!

He drew back, listening. Sounds of excitement were drawing swiftly nearer. Voices and a scurrying of footsteps in the passageway! The iron bolt clicked in its bracket. The door swung open. There stood Lieutenant Vernon Saxsby, panting, hat gone, black hair tousled. His barrel chest heaved. Fu Wing was holding one of his arms. A stalwart Manchu gripped the other. Behind crowded a pack of deck coolies.

They brought him in, and a stillness fell. Rookie Red and Saxsby gazed at each other. Red's blunt face was ripid, unreadable. Saxsby's dark eyes shot lancets of fire. Fu Wing was watching Red narrowly: "You savvy this man?" he asked Red accusingly after a moment.

Red did not answer the question directly. His mouth twisted.

"We-ell!" he said in a dry, gentle voice, "if it ain't Lieutenant Vernon Saxsby again! What're you doing here, shipmate?"

"I came after you, you yellow quitter!" Turtle Saxsby exploded, and then his lips curled and he went on in a voice of withering contempt: "So this is the kind of tub you're sneaking out on! A stinking Chino junk! Throwing in with a bunch of damned yellow pirates! Rat!"

McGowan's rangy form stiffened. His mouth became a hard seam.

"You're mistaken, Lieutenant," he said in a voice of strained calm. "This is not a stinking pirate junk, but a respectable merchantman belonging to Soi Chee, the prominent mandarin. Pirates have been robbing his junks, and he has hired me as a gunner-guard."

Turtle Saxsby snorted.

"Soi Chee's an old scoundrel! He's a pirate and a smuggler himself! The law has been trying to nail him for

years, but he has always been too eely for them all! What kind of cargo do you suppose this stinky junk is to carry this voyage?"

Red had gone a little pale.

"Why, I suppose, the usual stuff. Silks, and rugs, and—"

"Silks and rugs, hell! Munitions, that's what she'll carry! Some of them are being loaded right now!"

Red looked at Fu Wing. The skipper's silence was confirmation enough. The fellow was watching Rookie Red keenly.

FOR just a moment the big marine's square face was hard, but expressionless; then he burst into a short, mirthless laugh.

"What the hell do I care what she's carrying? My job is to guard her from pirates, and I get two hundred a month for that. I'm sticking to my part of the bargain, and Soi Chee had better stick to his."

"Why, you dirty—"

Turtle Saxsby tried to surge forward, but was held back.

Fu Wing, having listened to the exchange of verbal shots, addressed Rookie Red.

"This allee same man you hate so much, eh? The man you fight?"

Evidently Soi Chee's messenger had told him of the circumstances leading up to Red's employment.

"The same!" the marine answered, and grinned maliciously at Saxsby. "What're you going to do with him, Fu?"

"One thing can do. He savvy too much."

The skipper simulated tying a weight to the neck, and—the splash overboard!

Red shook his head.

"We can use him. He's a fine navigator, and knows a lot more about guns than I do. And don't think he won't serve! I'll beat him into it! And later, when we're through with him—"

He made a wry face and turned up his palms.

Again Fu Wing studied Red McGowan intently.

"You velly smart. Makee Soi Chee one velly good man—mebbe-so."

"As long as I get the two hundred a month," Red coolly reminded. "By the way, Fu, since you're carrying contraband, and the pirate stuff is all eyewash, what is it you birds really want me to do?"

Fu Wing was silent for a moment, then calmly explained: "Teachee clew, teachee me, teachee gun-buyers to shootee."

"I see! Revolution, as I suspected in the beginning," Fu did not affirm or deny. Red went on: "Who buys these guns?"

"You find out, plitty soon."

Red shrugged.

"Okay by me. What difference does it make, anyway? Sure Mike, I'll teach the lot of you to use machine and light field guns—as long as I get that two hundred berries a month."

Turtle Saxsby's voice as the officer turned on Red shook with contempt.

"You dirty scum! I never would have believed that any man in the service could be so damned rotten low! Especially Red McGowan!"

"Take him away!" snarled Red, and the Chinaman hustled the naval lieutenant out of the cabin. One of them at Fu Wing's command, closed and bolted the door.

Again Red smiled crookedly. "Still don't trust me," he thought. "Ain't taking any chances—the bubonic rats!"

ROOKIE RED lighted a cigarette and with it stuck to a corner of his mouth, resumed his thoughtful pacing.

He flipped the butt away and went quickly to the door. Crouched there he listened intently. The chanting on deck was still going on, but there was no sound below. Remembering the weakened bolt he backed across the cabin and set himself. His blue eyes were hard and shiny.

Again he hurled himself against the door. This time it smashed open and he went sprawling into the dimly-lighted passageway.

Quickly he picked himself up and with breath held, listened! Somewhere, beyond a small door which was at the end of the short passageway, sounded a padding of feet. Some one

had heard! That person was now hastening to investigate.

The heavy iron door-bracket had been ripped away, had cracked against the opposite bulkhead. Red seized it, sprang silently back into the cabin, pulled the door closed.

Flattened against the bulkhead he waited, the short iron club upraised. He heard the bolt of the other door cluck. The *pat, pat, patting* footsteps came down the passageway; stopped before the cabin door!

Then Rookie Red McGowan heard a quick intake of breath; a low, throaty exclamation. The door flew wide. A coolie rushed in with a drawn gun in one hand. Red struck!

Sensing the descending blow the coolie wheeled, but not in time. He groaned and his knees sagged. Red struck again. The marine was not ruthless—there was just so much at stake!

The Chino went down, sprawled half in, half out of the cabin. Red picked him up, toed the door shut, and carried the limp form across the room to toss it onto the bunk.

He made a quick job of securing the unconscious man, using for the purpose the gag and the bonds which he himself had worn a short time before. This done he slipped to the door and again listened. Not a sound, except those which came from above!

He picked up the pistol which the Chino had dropped and swiftly examined it. His mouth tightened in satisfaction. Loaded all around!

Cautiously he eased the door ajar and peeped out. Below her upper-decks the junk seemed utterly deserted—but adventurous Red McGowan wondered! The smelly tub fairly reeked of danger!

The departing footsteps told him that the Chinaman had taken Turtle Saxsby somewhere forward.

Red stole along the passageway, past the wooden ladder, through the door and into black gloom. For a moment he stood as alert as some animal, every sense tingling—nothing, save the continued sounds of loading! The darkness was so intense that he imagined he could feel it. The atmosphere was musty, fetid.

Rookie Red pushed the door wide open. A bar of dull illumination darted into the gloom ahead. Somewhere up there something stirred. He went catfooting along, half crouched, gun ready.

He found a heavy door that had a small, barred opening at the top; saw two familiar stubby hands gripping strong, steel rods; the vague outlines of a square face beyond.

"Is that you, Lieutenant Saxsby?"

A voice came back, low, dripping with contempt. "Yes, you yellow rat! Get the hell away from me!"

"Sh-h! Speak in a whisper! We mustn't let 'em hear us!"

Swiftly Red told of his regrets; how he had been shanghaied; how he had disposed of the guards.

"Couldn't you see that I was only acting a minute ago?" he demanded. "I'm going to get us out of this jam!"

FROM behind the little barred opening came a sigh of relief. "I didn't see how a McGowan could be so dirty, lowdown rotten!" In the excitement of the moment Rookie Red did not consider the significance of the words, "a McGowan."

"How'd you know I was here?" he whispered.

"The navy police saw you hop into the carriage. They found out that it belonged to Soi Chee. The crooked mandarin and his swell rig are both well known. I dismissed the policeman and took charge myself.

"I reached Soi Chee's home just in time to see you and him drive away. I hung around until the carriage came back; then bribed the driver to tell me where you'd gone. I hired a *sampan* and came after you.

"Through the darkness and the fog I saw the other junk slip alongside and start discharging cargo onto this one. I was not much surprised to see light field-pieces coming over. We slipped up under the stern and listened to the talk on deck. My *sampan* boy whispered an explanation.

"One junk had already discharged cargo onto this big one. The munitions are for a Moro insurrection in

Sulu. They made a fool of you, Red. The scheme was for you to teach the Chinos gunnery on the way over. Then, when they'd learned all they could they'd dump you overboard. They meant to teach the Moros—and get mighty well paid for it."

"Dead set on sending me to the big house, ain't you, Lieutenant?"

There was bitterness in the whisper.

A long moment of silence before Turtle Saxsby answered. "You don't get me at all, Red. Now you're going to. I wangled plenty to get you aboard my ship. You see, your sister and I happen to love each other, but we decided to tell no one we were even acquainted, until after she has her divorce."

"Say, I was glad when she gave her husband the boot. He was a no good punk."

"She asked me to look after you," Saxsby ran on. "You think I've been pretty hard, but it was just to keep you going straight, Red."

"I don't know why you took such a chance tonight to help a deserter."

"You're not yellow. I know that. Good stuff in you—only needs tempering. You've been as ornery as the devil, all right, but I guess it was just because you didn't know what it was all about."

"Yeah, but I've learned a few. I'd made up my mind to go back if I could get us out of this jam. And I'll take whatever's coming to me."

"Now you're talking!"

Red had been groping in the darkness; found a heavy iron hasp and a huge padlock.

"Question is how'm I going to get you out? I couldn't break this gadget with a sledge hammer."

"I suppose the only way is with the key, and Fu Wing has that tucked in his belt."

Red turned resolutely.

"Then I'll go see what I can do about getting it."

"Be careful, leatherneck!" Saxsby's anxious whisper followed him. Red merely gestured recklessly and strode on.

He made his way toward the forepart of the huge junk, for

it was from there that the sounds of loading were coming. The characteristic fetid odor peculiar to the below-decks of Chinese ships was strong in his nostrils.

A narrow, black passageway between two walls of cargo carried him to a door. Beyond was the hold in which the loading was being done. Perhaps the one in which he stood also held munitions. It was too dark for him to tell.

Red placed an ear to the panel and listened. He could hear Fu Wing's sharp voice directing the stowing. Softly Red opened the door just a little and peeped. He saw half a dozen coolies as busy as bees, and big, straight-backed Fu Wing bossing them. The Chino skipper was faced away from Red.

The marine could see great stacks of bagged powder, dismounted machine-guns and light "landing pieces;" boxes which he guessed contained rifles, bayonets, ammunition.

Some of the boxes had been broken open, doubtless so that their contents might be used during the voyage. Under the bare feet of the workers was a thick carpet of straw, excelsior, and matting box-coverings. The workers were using electric flashlights to see by.

For perhaps half an hour Rookie Red McGowan remained crouched by the door, watching, hoping that Fu Wing would separate himself from the others, but the fellow did not do so. Red was just about to walk boldly in with drawn gun and threaten to blow up the ship unless Turtle Saxsby was immediately released—when he saw a familiar rail-thin form coming down a rope ladder.

As the descending one reached the lower deck, the beam of Fu Wing's flashlight swept around and spotted the cadaverous face of Soi Chee. That visage was startlingly ghastly under the white light. The eyes glowed hotly in their deep sockets. The two long strands of mustache were like black serpents.

His thin lips writhed apart and the abnormally long teeth showed as he grinned. The light flicked away

and circled over the piles of cargo. Fu Wing began speaking. The coolies, who had paused for a moment, resumed their fast work.

Soi Chee and Fu Wing walked about, inspecting the cargo while they conversed. Fu Wing unpurposefully sent the beam of his light swinging toward the door. Rookie Red shrank away just in time to keep it from finding him.

On the door the light held, some of it escaping through the wide crack which was there. Red heard the Chino skipper utter an exclamation of annoyance. Doubtless the fellow was wondering how the door had come to be open. There were whispering footsteps. Fu Wing was coming to close the door. Red drew his captured pistol and waited.

CHAPTER IV

Marines for Luck



FU WING thrust his head and the flashlight through the opening and reached for the door edge. He was wholly unconscious of the human presence in the blackness near him.

Red struck a sharp blow, and at the same instant grabbed the skipper by the collar of the jacket and heaved. He yanked the slumping form out into darkness and stretched it upon the deck. A darting glance through the doorway assured him that none of the others had noticed what had happened. The coolies were still at work. Soi Chee was watching them, tall form showing dimly against the light flashes.

The marine eased the door shut; then wheeled and knelt. His left hand fairly flew along the cloth belt. Ah! There was the key! His fingers shook with eagerness as he tore it free.

Red jerked a pistol from Fu Wing's belt; then grabbed up the flashlight and ran back to the little brig. "I got it!" he exulted softly, as

he flashed the light onto the heavy lock. Swiftly he whispered an explanation of how the key had been obtained.

"I knew you had metal!" Turtle Saxsby chuckled. "You'll make a leatherneck the service will be proud of!"

"Aw, can that stuff, Turt—I mean, very well, sir."

"You can *that* stuff," said the lieutenant, as the door opened and he slipped out. "For the moment, at least, we're buddies."

"Okay, buddy; take this." Red shoved a gun into his hand.

At the moment there was an outburst of excitement forward.

"They've found the Chino I konked," whispered Red. "Let's shove."

Blindly they ran along a dark passageway, through a doorway, and to a ladder. The whole ship, now, was a madhouse of excitement. Chinos were yelling. Feet were pattering. In the passageway there were sounds of rushing men—shouting, stumbling, banging against cargo and each other. Above the whole wild tumult sounded the voice of Soi Chee, shrill and querulous.

Red and Saxsby started up the wooden ladder. A dark form popped into the companionway. There was another shadow close behind. The leatherneck heard a throaty exclamation, saw an arm jab down, and he guessed that there was a gun at the near end of it.

He fired. There was a groan. The form crumpled backward knocking the other from before the opening. A pistol hit Red's left shoulder, bounced, and struck below. He went on up.

Below, the door flew open. A ray of light darted through. Soi Chee screamed to his pack of coolies. Saxsby fired, but the flashlight had caught the movement. Soi Chee had leaped back, slamming the door in front of him. The bullet whacked into the thick, tough wood.

Crowding each other the two service men went through the little companionway, stepped over a sprawled human form and out onto

the main deck. Turtle Saxsby's head was drawn in on his short neck and he crouched, as he went along, like some stealthy animal. Rookie Red McGowan was striding boldly.

DARK forms were scurrying on the deck. No people in the world can get more excited than a bunch of Chinese coolies. As the two white men separated instinctively, gunfire stabbed the gloom and they heard the waspish zip of passing lead. Some of the slugs bit into the housing behind them. By some miracle neither man was hit.

At the edge of the open hatch stood a Chink with an oil-burning ship's-lamp. Near him were two others. It was these men who were firing the most fiercely. Red felt a bullet jerk at his civvie hat. He fired back. Saxsby flung lead at a form crouched near the port rail. It pitched forward and hit the deck with a sickening, crushing thud.

The man at whom Red had fired buckled at the middle, began moaning and backing swiftly. The one with the lantern tried to evade him. In so doing the fellow thrust one bare foot over the edge of the hatch. The backward stumbling one struck him at just that moment.

With a wild cry that rang trenchantly through the night, the fellow with the lantern went hurtling downward. Those on deck were scurrying for cover. In their excitement they had forgotten their superiority of numbers.

Smash!

That was the lantern, crushed under the Chinaman's body, Red surmised. Instantly a dull flickering glow showed at the hatch-mouth. Through Red's mind streaked remembrance of the cargo of inflammables and the explosives below.

Footsteps and voices at the foot of the ladder had caused Saxsby to snarl, wheel, trigger two shots down the companionway.

"The ship's going to blow up!" Red yelled. "Quick! Let's dive!"

Saxsby understood instantly. With a muttered exclamation he went bounding for the port gunwale.

He and Red launched themselves at the same instant. Shots cracked out as their bodies arced over the rail, but the Chinos were too wildly excited to shoot accurately.

THE two men chugged into the water, came up, swam with desperate haste. Behind them on the main deck they could hear Soi Chee's high-pitched voice directing the crew. Red McGowan wondered if the wicked mandarin was aware of the fire in the magazine.

Glancing behind as he swam desperately he saw forms appear at the rail. One of them was tall and slender—Soi Chee. Again the old villain screamed at the coolies. Ephemeral fireflies flashed back there in the gloom. Bullets chugged wickedly into the water about the two men. Red thanked his lucky stars that the Chinos were such bum shots.

And then it happened!

There was a terrific explosion.

The huge junk went to pieces like a plaster ship. The fearful concussion almost jolted the breath from Red's body, nearly dazed him. He had a glimpse of huge blades of red flame stabbing through broken parts of the ship; of a horrible red glare which flashed outward and upward into the fog; of flying timbers and human bodies.

That weird glare of an instant showed him also the ghastly, contorted visage of Soi Chee as the mandarin's rail-thin body twisted in mid-air. The sunken eyes were wide with shock and terror.

Just one fleeting glance the swimming leatherneck had of it all, and then the flash went out. He heard the blown-away sides of the junk slap the water.

"Dive!" Turtle Saxsby yelled, and they thrust themselves under. It was well that they did so. A heavy timber smacked right above Red.

When they came up again, dark fragments of the junk were bobbing on the water. The smaller junk which had been alongside, was heeling over. Her whole starboard side had been blown in. Aboard her two men were screaming in pain. Others

were gabbling like maniacs. Then she was sinking, stern first.

Out of the fog and the night shot a *sampan*. It ran between the two swimmers. A little coolie sprang to help Red and Saxsby aboard. It was the boatman whom Saxsby had employed to bring him to the junk. The Chino was almost beside himself with excitement. He gabbled an explanation that, fearing discovery, he had shoved away from the junk as soon as Saxsby had gone aboard; that he had been waiting and watching at a safe distance.

"Well, that settles Soi Chee and his whole pirate outfit," sighed Rookie Red McGowan, as a moment later he and Lieutenant Vernon Saxsby sat in the *sampan*, gazing at the bobbing blotches of wreckage.

"Back up the river, boy," Turtle Saxsby calmly directed the *sampan* coolie.

Within two hours, then, the two Americans were standing on the river bank, looking silently into each others' eyes.

"You've found yourself, McGowan; I'm glad," the naval officer said.

Red nodded gravely.

"And now I'm ready to go back and take my medicine."

The other simulated surprise.

"Your medicine? For what?"

"Assaulting an officer—you—and desertion."

"You're talking crazy, McGowan. One of those timbers must have hit you on the head. I was assaulted by robbers in the old walled city tonight—that's where I got my bruises. As for desertion—just out of your head. I found out about this shipment of munitions for the Moros, and you and I broke up the scheme."

"Thanks!" Red McGowan said huskily. For the third time that night Rookie Red McGowan's eyes went hot.

"Forget it!" Saxsby chuckled. "Ashore in civvies, we're buddies. Aboard in uniform, I'm a naval lieutenant, and you're a buck leatherneck. Get it?"

"I get it," Red said humbly, and squeezed very hard the hand which the other offered.

Ace Jordan

By
BOB
MACKAY

IN THE YEAR 2236 A.D.
I FOUND MYSELF
PARTICIPATING IN A
REVOLUTION TO RESTORE
MARA, DEPOSED QUEEN,
TO THE THRONE OF
MARS

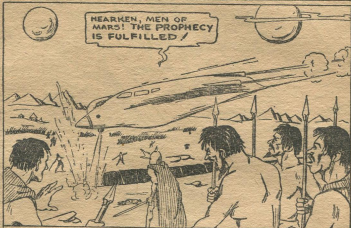
BORIS BELZAR, A MEMBER OF THE EARTH EXPEDITION TO MARS IN 2234, HAD USURPED THE THRONE AND WAS PLOTTING UNIVERSAL DOMINATION.

DICK MAXWELL, MY PAL, HAGASHI, JAPANESE SCIENTIST, AND MYSELF HAD THROWN IN OUR LOT WITH MARA. WE WERE REINFORCED AT THE LAST MOMENT BY PHAEDO, AN EXPLORER FROM THE PLANET VENUS. (VENUS HAD BEEN SETTLED CENTURIES BEFORE BY A MIGRATION FROM MARS).

WE WERE ABOUT TO BE OVERWHELMED IN BATTLE BY BELZAR'S SUPERIOR ARMY... WHEN I THOUGHT OF A PLAN, PHAEDO AGREED.

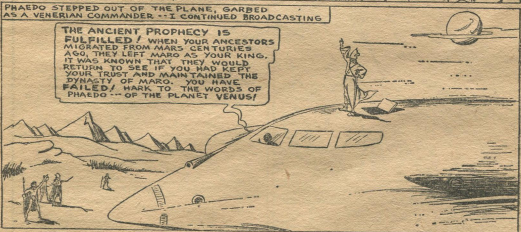
IN PHAEDO'S SPACEPLANE WE LANDED BETWEEN THE TWO ARMIES... HIS DISRUPTOR RAY TEARING A DEEP CHASM BETWEEN THE RIVAL FORCES. I SHOOTED THROUGH HIS AMPLIFIERS!

HEarken, MEN OF MARS! THE PROPHECY IS FULFILLED!

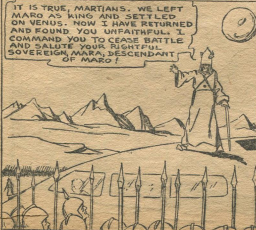


PHAEDO STEPPED OUT OF THE PLANE, GARBED AS A VENERIAN COMMANDER -- I CONTINUED BROADCASTING

THE ANCIENT PROPHECY IS FULFILLED! WHEN YOUR ANCESTORS MIGRATED FROM MARS CENTURIES AGO, THEY LEFT MARO AS YOUR KING. IT WAS KNOWN THAT THEY WOULD RETURN TO SEE IF YOU HAD KEPT YOUR TRUST AND MAINTAINED THE DYNASTY OF MARO. YOU HAVE FAILED! HARK TO THE WORDS OF PHAEDO -- OF THE PLANET VENUS!



IT IS TRUE, MARTIANS. WE LEFT MARO AS KING AND SETTLED ON VENUS. NOW I HAVE RETURNED AND FOUND YOU UNFAITHFUL. I COMMAND YOU TO CEASE BATTLE AND SALUTE YOUR RIGHTFUL SOVEREIGN MARA, DESCENDANT OF MARO!



THE HIGH PRIEST OF MARS NOW ADDRESSED BELZAR'S GENERALS

FOR CENTURIES WE HAVE CLUNG TO THIS ANCIENT PROPHECY. IT IS INDEED FULFILLED! THE WILL OF THE GODS CANNOT BE LIGHTLY IGNORED. SHALL WE ACCLAIM MARA?

LONG LIVE MARA!

WE SALUTE HER MAJESTY!

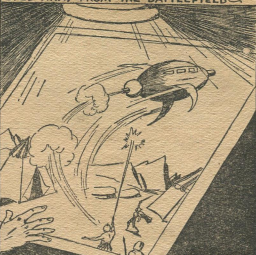


JUST THEN I TURNED THE SPACE-TELESCOPE ON BELZAR'S HEADQUARTERS ~

THERE'S BELZAR AND HIS LATEST FLAME -- WHATS HE UP TO?



THEY LEAPED INTO THE ROYAL PLANE AND SPED AWAY FROM THE BATTLEFIELD ~



I TOOK AFTER THEM -- ALONE -- IN PHAEDO'S PLANE ~



IN THE SPEEDY VENERIAN PLANE I SOON OVERTOOK THEM ~

THIS IS ACE JORDAN, BELZAR. THE GAME IS UP. LAND BEFORE I DECOMPOSE YOU!

OKAY, ACE -- TAKE IT EASY!



I COVERED HIM WITH MY ELECTROMATIC, BUT BELZAR HELD THE GIRL IN FRONT OF HIM ~

YOU YELLOW CUR! I'LL COME AND GET YOU!

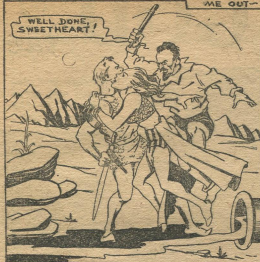


AS I APPROACHED HIM HE THRUST THE GIRL BEFORE ME

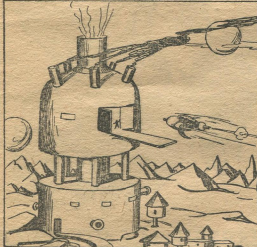


SHE CLUTCHED AT ME--AND BORIS KNOCKED ME OUT--

WELL DONE, SWEETHEART!



AS THE FURNACE GUARDS SAW THE ROYAL PLANE APPROACH, THE DOORS SWUNG OPEN TO ADMIT IT!



BELZAR SHOT HIM DEAD WITH MY ELECTROMATIC

REFUSE TO OBEY
YOUR KING!
DEATH TO ALL
TRAITORS!



HE EVIDENTLY COULDN'T RUN PHAEDO'S SUPERIOR PLANE---FOR WHEN I CAME TO IN THE CABIN OF BELZAR'S PLANE.....

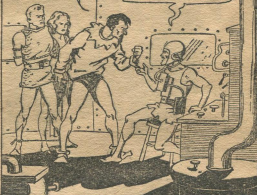
LISTEN, DEARIE---WE'LL HEAD FOR THE NEAREST OXITE FURNACE---SLAM OFF THE AIR SUPPLY---AND BOTH ARMIES WILL PERISH IN THE THIN AIR. THEN I'LL CERTAINLY BE MASTER OF MARS! CLEVER, EH?



WE ENTERED THE CONTROL ROOM OF THE FURNACE

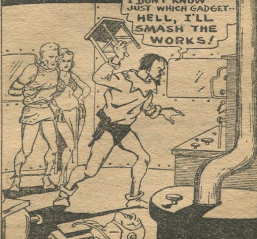
TURN OFF THE AIR SUPPLY!

BUT MASTER--WE CANNOT--IT IS FORBIDDEN BY HOLY LAW. THE OXITE FURNACES ARE SAFE BY ALL THE LAWS OF WAR! IT IS UNTHINKABLE!



SO BELZAR APPROACHED THE CONTROL BOARD

I DON'T KNOW JUST WHICH GADGET--HELL, I'LL SMASH THE WORKS!



DOES BELZAR SUCCEED? SEE THE MARCH ISSUE OF THRILLING ADVENTURES

WHITE GOD *of the*

By
LIEUT.
JOHN
DANE

Savage and civilized men were reduced to the same status



A SENSATIONAL TRUE-EXPERIENCE STORY OF

CHAPTER I

Symbol of Death

I NEVER think of those Bajao savages as anything but devils. Not that I can blame the poor wretches such an awful lot; they, at least, didn't know any better. But the white men—well, the black pearls of the Bajas could turn white men into devils, too.

A lot of people think black pearls are unlucky. I'll say they sure are! Yes, I know what you're going to say—black pearls fetch fancy prices.

True enough! But they're harbingers of evil and symbols of death just the same, and that's all there is to it.

Let me tell you that I know what I'm talking about. I'm not an imaginative lad nor a coward, either. I've seen my share of fighting and I've breathed the air of danger.

Hell, no! I'm not boasting; just trying to explain why a chap who's been cited for conspicuous bravery in the Big Scrap, who'd been mixed up thick in a couple of red-hot Latin-American revolutions and who had been stationed two years with

A Savage Deity Exacts Blood-Payment

BAJAOS



*Weird
Adventure
on an
Island
of Mystery!*

FIGHT-PACKED THRILLS

the scouts in the outer islands of the Philippines should have a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach and an honest-to-goodness shaking in the knees when black pearls are mentioned. But those are the facts. Take 'em or leave 'em.

My last stretch—the commission with the Army Scouts—comes in at the very beginning of my story, so I'll have to tell you something about it. You see, I resigned my commission and because of that I got tangled up with the Bajas. Why did I resign? Well, for a number of good

for Sacred Treasure!

reasons, chief of which was that I was fed up with army post life. It was too tame. I'd been stationed in an out-of-the-way hole called Mindanao and where I'd expected romance, I got dull routine, and in place of adventure there was a brick of army regulations tossed at my head.

Which brings us to a night in Jolo and my plunge into the whole crazy rigamarole of black pearls, Bajao savages, Tommy Hearn, Ron Carstairs, Ed Grinnell, and last but most important—Patandra, which I later shortened to Pat.

At Jolo, I boarded a stumpy little Dutch craft called the *Cengal*, bound for Singapore. You see, I had ideas, and after making inquiries I'd found out that in Singapore I could pick up a trading schooner dirt cheap.

My plan was to work the outer islands clear across to the Malay archipelago. Lots of chaps I'd known had made a good thing out of that sort of trading business and many of them didn't know as much as I about the Sulu Sea.

NO sooner had I stowed my few duds in my cabin and come up for a turn on deck when I bumped into someone and looked up—straight into Patandra's eyes.

Oh, baby! Those eyes! Half-closed lids and long lashes that looked at you dreamily. Right on the spot, my heart did a tremendous flip-flop and the apologetic smile that sweetened my homely pan must have been nothing short of maudlin. Could you blame me? I'd never seen anyone half as beautiful as she. Hers was one of those delicate oval faces with the clear, satiny skin, the willowy form and long, tapering fingers to go harmoniously with it. Her hair was dark, jet-black in fact, and soft like spun silk, in other words, a perfect frame for those lovely features. I couldn't manage to speak at first.

Before I could stammer a word of apology, however, she slipped past me like a frightened gazelle and disappeared down the companion hatchway. I was staring after her sort of

yearningly when I became aware of two figures tiptoeing toward me. Even in the moonlight, I could see the glint of a revolver in the hand of one of them. That gave me a start.

In the Sulu Sea, a wise man keeps his shooting irons within easy reach. I was reaching for the gun in my hip pocket when one of the figures stepped forward and a beam of moonlight fell aslant his face. Then, boy, did I whoop!

"Tommy!" I yelled. "Tommy Hearn!"

His head jerked about quickly and as he recognized me, he gave tongue to a halloo that was as enthusiastic if not as loud as mine.

For, you see, this chap was Tommy Hearn, my one and only sidekick throughout the war in France. Why, we'd been thicker than Mississippi mud and twice as ornery. Tommy, with that leathery, lopsided face of his and that grin that went to your heart like a very old monkey's, had shared every scrape and every binge with me.

"Tommy," I cried, "what are you doing in this part of the world, and why the gun?"

He looked down at it sort of sheepishly, then pocketed it. But instantly, his face changed. His lips twisted to a savage snarl.

"That girl," he muttered, "she's a damned she-devil. Where she is, there's bound to be trouble for me and my partner."

"Hey, what are you talking about?"

"That girl who just went down the hatchway. She's followed us aboard, spying on us, by thunderation!" he scowled.

"Spying?" I spluttered, more at sea than ever. "But—but why?"

"I—I—" He broke off lamely. "John," he said with a flourish, "I want you to meet my partner, Ronald Carstairs. He's jake, and an expert on Sulu Sea natives, too."

I gave this Carstairs a quick looking over. He was a man of about thirty, tall, well-built and I reckon what most women would call handsome, though, personally, I've never

cared for such looks. For my taste, there was a bit too much shiftness in his eyes and a hidden but nonetheless clear streak of cruelty in the set of his lips. But he was Tommy's partner and I was civil to him.

"Come here," said Tommy, dragging us to the shadows cast by the bridge overhead. "We don't want to be seen. Now, tell me about yourself, John."

I was more than a bit nettled by his strange behavior but right off I told him how I'd resigned my commission with the Scouts and was going to Singapore to pick up a buy in a trading schooner. His brows raised a little at this information and he kept looking at me sidewise.

"Come on, Tommy," I urged him. "Out with it. What's going on here? You act so funny about that girl. Why, she's the most beautiful creature I've—"

"Shall I tell him?" Tommy asked, looking at Carstairs.

"That's your business," Carstairs snapped. "Not mine." And turning on his heel, he stalked off in a perfect blaze of outraged dignity.

"Whew!" I breathed. "What's eating him?"

"He's all right," Tommy said in a mollifying tone. "It's just he don't know what pals you and I are and he's afraid if I let you in on the secret—" He stopped and his face broadened into a smile. "Hell, why shouldn't I let you in? We need another straight shooting guy and you are just my size! How about it, John, are you with us?"

"With what? What's this all about? What secret are you talking about? I've got to know what I'm going in for."

"Sure, sure. Take it easy. Now, listen." His voice dropped low. "You remember my telling you about my Dad?"

I nodded, more puzzled than ever. He had often in the past told me that his father, many years before, had been a trader in the Philippines and Malay Islands and had lost his life there. He had been killed in a fight with natives near Siasi and

was supposed to have been buried by his partner on some unknown island.

"Well," said Tommy, "six months ago my grandmother died in Cape Cod. In going over the old house, I found a batch of letters my father had sent my mother. Among them was a map of an island called Paraminkang, southwest of Siasi. I went to Manila. There I met Carstairs and needing help, he threw in with me. Ever hear of the island?" He gave me a musing look.

"Paraminkang?" I cried excitedly. "Why that's the holy island of the Bajaos, the place where they bury their dead!"

AND instantly, there flitted through my mind all the queer tales and leg-ends I'd ever heard concerning that strange tribe of pagans who inhabit the Sulu Sea. Very few white men know much about them. That's because they do not live on land but in little outrigger boats.

Some folks call 'em the Sea Gypsies and a good nickname it is. Long ago, they'd stirred up lots of trouble, raiding and such, and in the years of the Spanish possession, they had been continually at war with the Macabebes and the Moros who, as you know, are both Mohammedan.

"Ever hear of their god?" asked Tommy suddenly.

"Why, no," I came back at him. "I know they've resisted Mohammedanism and clung to their ancient pagan rites. But—"

"I'm talking of a living god!" snapped Tommy. "A creature who walks like you and me, who's dressed completely in white, who—"

His voice trailed off into silence. I looked at him in bewilderment. He was actually shaking as though with cold. He looked about the deck furtively to make certain no one was watching us and then he fumbled at a money belt buckled on under his shirt. His hand closed to a fist. He opened it.

"Look!" he said in a hoarse whisper.

My eyes went unnaturally wide

with astonishment. I sucked in a deep breath and held it imprisoned in my lungs.

"Judas Priest!" I heard someone gasp and realized it was my own voice I was listening to. My eyes almost popped from my head. I literally could not believe what I saw.

My curiosity was like a tormenting mental itch.

And no wonder! For what lay in Tommy's palm was a pearl. Not any ordinary, pink-tinted pearl, though those are costly enough, but a whopper of a jet-black pearl! The kind that are almost invaluable! The calcareous, smooth surface had an ebony luster in the moonlight that made me fairly goggle. I pointed a shaking finger.

"Wh-where did you get it?" I asked.

"Along with the map of Paraminkang," said Tommy quietly. "I found a letter which described the place. It seems that when a brave warrior dies among the Bजाos, they bury him with two such pearls, one on each eye."

"And you dug this out of a grave?"

"No!" His voice dropped almost to a whisper. "I stole it—from the White God!"

"The White— Hey, what in blazes are you talking about?"

I didn't get any answer. For in one bursting moment, the warm sea night was filled with the sounds of conflict. Before Tommy could speak, bedlam broke loose, shattering the tropic stillness all around us.

The attack came as suddenly as all that. A moment before the *Cengal* had been plodding along leisurely. Now there rose on all sides the shrieks of men and women among the passengers, the shrill squeals of natives in battle frenzy, screams of alarm from the Malay crew, a din of Dutch curses from the bridge, a confused jangling of bells from the engine room, an irregular splutter of gun shots and the clangor of iron grappling hooks in the steamer's rails. The din was ear-shattering, paralyzing.

CHAPTER II

The Enigma of Patandra



WE were being boarded!

I grabbed Tommy's shoulder excitedly. "Pirates!" I yelled, pounding his back.

Without waiting for him, I ran aft.

I was passing the cabin windows when suddenly I stopped short. In one of the windows, a lantern was being swung. First up and down and then back and forth.

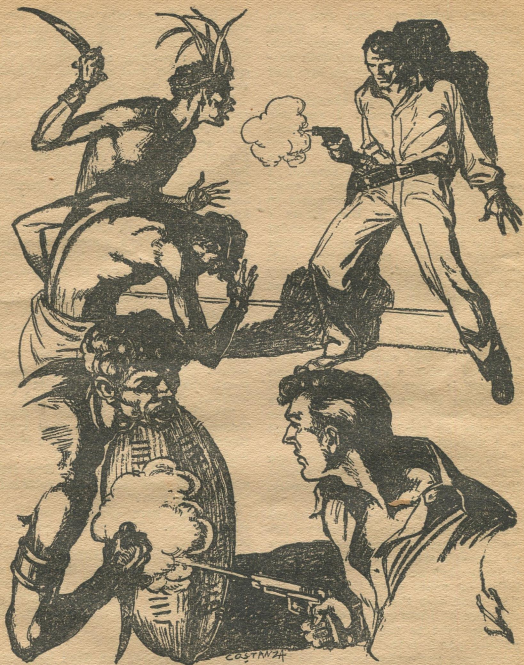
Not very far off at sea was some sort of craft and from it another lantern was being moved in the same fashion. Like a blow between the eyes, it struck me.

Signals! A confederate on board the *Cengal* was giving the pirates instructions.

Boy, did I see red! Out came my gun as I rushed forward to that window. I was fully prepared to shoot down the person in the window in cold blood. But when I reached it, I stood stock-still, open-mouthed. The person holding the lantern was none other than the beautiful girl I had seen on deck only a little while before.

Whew! What a facer that was! She put the lantern down in a whale of a hurry and rushed for the door. I was so shocked I didn't move to stop her, even though I couldn't, short of shooting her. At the door, she turned around for a fleeting second and flung me a look—well, it had me tingling from head to toes even in that anxious moment! It was a mingled look of pity and beseeching entreaty and I swear there were tears in her eyes. Only a split second she stood there and then she was gone.

I rushed around to reach the companion hatchway to head her off but I never got there. The deck was a maelstrom of conflict. I saw dozens upon dozens of half-naked savages milling around wildly, brandishing



My gun was up and the trigger had been pulled. Tommy's gun spoke a second later

barongs and spears with dozens more piling over the rail all the time. It needed but a single look to identify them. Bajaos! Their queer head-dresses of feathers and shark-skin combined gave them away.

All about me were men and women, most of them in night-clothes, white-faced, screaming, eyes starkly

wild with dread. From the bridge, the captain and the officers were swearing loudly in Dutch in unison with the vicious *spat-spat brrooom* of their heavy Mausers. Red javelins of fire spurted from those gigantic guns, the fire directed entirely to the rails since the decks were so cluttered with passengers.

I was using my own gun with caution, accounting for a Bajao every time I pulled the trigger back. Then I saw Tommy Hearn with Carstairs only a few feet from him and I went berserk with rage.

A baker's dozen of the savages had ringed around Tommy. I saw one grab him by the throat, poise a spear for the death-thrust. Almost by reflex action, my gun spoke. Down went the Bajao with a scream. I shot again, fought my way through the milling throng of passengers to reach Tommy's side. But before I got there, I saw him go down under a blow on the head. At the same instant, Carstairs slipped and went down too. I wasn't afraid to use my gun then. I just pumped away at the trigger until it emptied.

As if by magic, that ring of savages melted away, leaving Tommy and Carstairs lying prone on the deck which was now slippery with blood. I heard a shout raised and realized it came from a Bajao. I had spent my spare time with the Scouts brushing up on *Joloana*, the language of the outer islands, and so I understood his yell.

"Brothers," he shouted, "we have regained our prize. The white thief lies dead. Let us depart hastily. Our speedy *proas* wait!"

Evidently, this chap who shouted was a chieftain, for the others immediately set up a tremendous shout of triumph and took to going back the way they had come. A few were killed by shots from the bridge as they went over the *Cengal's* side but the bulk of them got safely away.

I ran over to the rail, saw them pulling away from the steamer in three huge *proas* that were more like regular men-o'-war with fifty oars to each and two sails shimmering under the light of the round, yellow moon. I saw another sight that had me staring even harder.

It was the girl. Yes, there was no mistaking her. She was seated in the foremost of the boats that were scuttling away toward the distant horizon at better than fifteen knots.

I don't know why but I cursed then—long and loud. Confounded idiot that I was, I stood at the rail without repeating an oath for the space of five full minutes. Which about gives you the idea.

When I turned back, I saw the captain bending over a fallen form and with a pang of conscience I hurried over to see how Tommy and Carstairs had fared. Neither of them had been killed. Tommy had a nasty cut in the scalp, made by a barong, and Carstairs had merely been knocked out.

Tommy got both Carstairs and me to one side. "It's gone!" he whispered fiercely. "The black pearl! They snatched it out of my money belt!"

"But, great Scott," I bumbled like a blithering fool, "do you mean to say that's all they came on board for—to get back the pearl?"

Tommy nodded solemnly. "It wasn't piracy. They wanted their pearl, that's all. Their White God ordered them to fetch it back."

"White God!" I blurted. "Now, Tommy, that's nonsense. You mentioned him before and I don't know what you're talking about."

"If you'll throw in with Ron and me, you'll find out!" he retorted. "Won't he, Ron?"

A savage grin appeared on Carstairs' face. "He will," he said shortly.

But I wasn't listening. I was thinking of the girl. She was a queer enigma. A white girl mixed up with Bajao savages! Something mighty queer in that, all right, all right!

AT Singapore, two days later, we took a train immediately for the small port of Lenku. This was the nearest point to the island of Paraminkang. Yes, you've guessed it—it was Tommy's plan for us to strike at the island immediately, without losing time.

You see, he had chartered a power pearler—the *Island Sprite*—for his first voyage to the Bajao stronghold but this time he proposed that we

buy the boat outright so that we could equip it as we pleased.

A couple of days passed during which we were busy putting in a stock of guns aboard the *Sprite*, ammunition and food stores. We were living aboard the boat, impatient to be off. That night, Carstairs went off to town. In less than an hour he was back, boiling over with excitement.

I had never seen him in such a mood before and he surprised us by blurring:

"What do you think? I've just heard a sure rumor that the Bajaos are in Lenku, celebrating one of their pagan holidays!"

"Here?" I questioned him sharply.

"Yes," he said. "It's not unusual. They come to Lenku quite often to buy the few things they need. The Malay who told me about them even showed me the house where they'll be gathered. What's more, the White God will be among them. The Malay was certain of that!"

Tommy jumped to his feet, eyes flashing.

"That is an ideal!" he exclaimed. He flung a glance at me. "What do you think, John?"

I knew what was in his mind. In fact, we were all thinking the same thing simultaneously.

"All right," I said. "Let's have a go at it!"

An hour later, guns primed for action and handy in our pockets, we stalked down a straggling street at the edge of the town where the jungle seemed to be creeping in on us. Just ahead was a huge house, built years before by a rich tea grower, but now a mere shambles of a hulking ruin.

It struck me even then that this was a queer place for Bajaos to foregather, but I wasn't questioning. None of us was. Instead we were seething with inner excitement. We heard the sound of voices from within lifted in a kind of chant and that convinced us on the spot that we'd come to the right place.

Carstairs led the way to the back of the place by a circuitous route.

There was a half-rotted trapdoor that led to a cellar. We lifted that and crept down. The darkness was thick but we didn't dare strike a light. From up above sounded that mournful chant and instinctively we headed for it. Any slight noise made by our movements must have been drowned by the chanting, for we made our way unmolested.

The stairs were old but still trustworthy and one by one we tiptoed up until stopped by a closed door. Very slowly, I pushed it open a bare inch, peered through the crack. There was a hallway and another flight of stairs on the left side. But no one was in sight. That, too, struck me as odd. Nevertheless, feeling Tommy's urgent prod in my ribs, I pushed the door wide, stepped out quickly, moved up the stairs as swiftly and silently as a ghost.

At the top, I whirled, gun in hand, to cover the advance of Tommy and Carstairs. But still no one heard or saw us. We found a sort of balcony that in old days must have looked down on a ball room, and crept out on it on hands and knees.

THE sight that met my eyes caused them to blink with astonishment. In the center of the tremendous room was a heap of large flat stones upon which a fire had been built. About the fire were seated innumerable Bajaos, cross-legged, bodies swaying from side to side with the rhythm of the chant. The only person in the room who was standing was a tall figure clothed entirely in silk of the purest white. Even the face was covered by the folds of the garment.

Somehow looking at that figure, I felt the hair rise on the back of my neck. This was the White God! An awesome shiver coursed through my body. Who was he? What sort of hold had he over these pagan savages? I turned to whisper into Tommy's ear when suddenly the chant ceased. There was a single shout. I whirled. The door through which we had crawled out on the narrow balcony was thronged with

scowling Bajaos, raised barongs in their hands.

Surprise is only a mild term for what I felt at that instant. But with the passing of a single pulse beat, my gun was up and the trigger had been pulled. Tommy's gun spoke a split second later and two of the savages toppled at our feet. I looked around wildly for Carstairs but he wasn't there.

I FIGURED the Bajaos had plucked him away while we were busy looking down at the ceremony. We were fighting like madmen—Tommy and I—in less than five minutes our guns were empty. Up to that point we had kept the attackers at bay, but now they were closing in on us.

I wondered why the barongs were no longer in evidence, but then I realized that the purpose of the mob was to capture us alive. I saw Tommy snowed under an avalanche of blows, slump to the floor. I felt a savage impulse to maim and tear and the next moment was flailing about with the butt of my gun.

Hopeless onslaught that it was! Amazed at first by the sheer fury of the attack, the savages had fallen back. But only for a breathing spell. The next second with wild yells they flung themselves at me, smashed me back so that my head knocked sharply against the ironwork of the balcony. I fell in a crumpled heap, fighting off the waves of engulfing blackness descending upon me.

Boy, was I absorbing punishment! Blood was on my face, my hands. My cheek was badly gashed. Fists, kicks rained down on me. I made a last effort to get to my feet but then the old machine wouldn't take any more abuse and I collapsed like a limp rag.

When I regained consciousness, I was too weak and sick to wonder why they had not killed me. My hands were tied behind my back. Even my ankles were bound. I rolled over, saw Tommy in the half-darkness, similarly treated. The damp earth under us told me we were in the cellar and probably in the same

house. I looked up—and choked back a cry. A lovely face was peering down at me. The girl I had seen on the *Cengal*!

There was a knife in her hands and in a thrice she had cut the ropes on my wrists and ankles. A second later, Tommy also was free. I stared at her unbelievably. "Why—why did you do this for us?" I asked.

She spoke English as though she were not quite accustomed to regular use of it.

"It is to save your life I did it!" she whispered. "Go at once! If they come down, they will kill you and me, too. Ah, that wicked man! He sold you for a few pearls but he, too, will be betrayed. The fool!"

I grabbed her arm. "What do you mean? Who betrayed us?"

"Your partner, Carstairs! It was he who arranged to have you come here, yes? He received two pearls for it and the promise of more!" She looked straight into my eyes. "You are—hurting me!"

I released my grip shamefacedly. "Sorry, Miss—Miss—"

"I am called Patandra!" she said softly, yet shyly.

I smiled. "Sorry, Miss Pat. But what about yourself? Why are you mixed up with a bunch of savages, you a white woman who—"

She flitted suddenly for the stairs. "Hurry, out of here!" she called in a low, soft voice—the sweetest voice, I thought, that ever I had heard. "Your life depends on it!" And with that she was gone.

We got out of the place, all right, and hurried to the go-down. We didn't say much to each other but in our minds was probably the same thought—Carstairs' amazing treachery. I think if he had appeared before us right at that moment we would have gladly torn him limb from limb. To sell out his partners' lives for the sake of two pearls. It was too base, too unthinkable! Yet he had done it!

But Carstairs was not within reach that night. When we reached the go-down, we stopped short at the water's edge, regarding each other

silently, quizzically. The *Sprite* was gone from her mooring. Carstairs had taken the boat, too.

CHAPTER III

Island of the Dead



MORNING found Tommy and myself ensconced in new quarters in Lenku's one hotel we had roused up. The night before, the town's police official had joined him with a raiding party that

descended upon that gloomy old house at the edge of the jungle. But the raid, as I had expected, uncovered nothing. The building had long since been vacated by the White God and his savage followers.

You can't blame me for putting in a lot of time that night thinking about lovely Pat, who had risked her life to save mine and Tommy's. I wondered who she was, in what relation she stood to the personage who called himself the White God. I wondered, too, if she were safe, or whether the White God had discovered her culpability in releasing us.

Only the light of dawn in the east brought an end to my ceaseless self-questionings and when Tommy rose from a troubled sleep, we set about the business of leaving Lenku as quickly as possible.

Luckily, we left sooner than we expected. I still had a good bit of money left from the savings I had intended putting into a trading schooner so when we heard about a small two-cabin motor launch for sale we bought it promptly. She was a sweet job, painted white to her water line, trim and fast. We couldn't stock much by way of provisions but we bought a couple of army issue .45s, two high-speed Winchester rifles and ammunition with all the money that was left. Which wasn't such a hell of a lot.

Days passed while we worked feverishly to be off. At last, one bright morning we left Lenku behind us

and put out for the open sea. More days dragged by and then late one afternoon we sighted the weird island of Paraminkang, rolling into view off the port bow. Somehow, when I saw the God-forsaken place, I couldn't shake off an oppressive feeling that its tongueless hosts of Bajao dead would rise up to confront us should we dare make a landing. Then I cursed myself for an imaginative idiot, headed the boat to round the lower end of the island where Tommy said there was a reef-protected harbor.

As we stood in for the harbor, Tommy searched the place for sign of any other craft, but saw none. We had expected to see the *Sprite* and I daresay we were disappointed. At any rate, Tommy said there was a good possibility of there being another anchorage on the side of the island. For, you see, we figured that Carstairs had headed for Paraminkang and we were hoping against hope that we would meet up with him.

We dropped an anchor, getting as close in to the beach as we dared. Tommy broke out the little tender and ten minutes later, armed with a .45 and a Winchester apiece, we rowed in and I first set foot on the place that was to change the course of my life henceforth.

It was a brooding, somber place. The very stillness of the jungle was a sort of mute warning of danger to come. Still we saw nothing alarming and before we proceeded to march into the jungle we made fairly certain that an ambush was not awaiting us.

"The last time I was here," Tommy told me, "Carstairs and I hadn't time to investigate the place where the Bajaos bury their dead. It's a valley in the middle of the island. You see, the White God and his savages appeared and we were driven away."

"Then how come you were able to get that black pearl from him?"

Tommy grinned. "It was a fight, see? It got to be hand to hand. I downed the damned ghost in white,

spilled something from his pocket. It was the pearls—hundreds of them. I managed to get only one. This time—" He left the rest significantly unsaid. But I knew that this time he meant to get many more than one.

We plunged into that brooding mass of somnolent green, the land rising sharply beyond the sea's edge. For an hour, it was a steady uphill climb. Then the jungle cleared miraculously and we were on a sort of promontory looking over its lip down into a wide, deep river gorge—the river part long since dried up.

Higher yet, there was a thin tinkle of a mountain stream tumbling down from high boulders. That served only to emphasize the absence of all other sound.

BUT my attention was not fixed on the stream but riveted right onto the floor of the gorge. Judas Priest, what a sight! Every inch of it seemed to have been spaded up. Bones of Bajao warriors long since dead were bleaching in the hot sun. Bones, bones, and more bones, bones of skulls, of forearms, of legs. I'd never seen anything like it. And what's more that spading job, thorough and painstaking one that it was, looked pretty recent. Someone had beaten us to the jump.

Who? My guess went to Ron Carstairs right off. And when my eyes met Tommy's, I could see that tacitly he agreed with me.

I won't say that I wasn't a little shocked. Not by the sight of those disinterred Bajaos, mind you, but by the thought that Carstairs might have been and gone. And if he had and had collected the booty besides, what could we do? Just exactly, nothing!

"Anyway," I muttered gruffly, "we're going down there for a look, Tommy."

We found what seemed a path and circled the gorge until we reached the floor. It was pretty much of a let-down. A lot of that loose earth around the bones looked as if it had been put through a sifter. If there

had been any pearls, it was a good bet Carstairs had them.

At least, that's what I thought then. Later events proved me way off. The pearls—but that's getting ahead of my story.

I was turning my head to say something to Tommy when the flat crack and high whine of a rifle in action broke the silence. The bullet plowed into the earth at my feet, threw up dirt. Immediately I had a healthy respect for whoever was handling that gun. That baby could shoot!

Down I went on my stomach, laying flat as a pancake. Tommy was a split second behind me. A curling puff of smoke that was ascending from a thick clump of lianas above us was my target. But when I'd sent two bullets into the spot, I stopped firing because I had hit nothing and there was no sense wasting bullets. Evidently whoever had been there had moved.

Ten minutes passed in unbroken silence and then at a signal Tommy and I started to crawl to the opposite side of the gorge so as to be out of range. Anybody shooting down has an advantage over anyone shooting up and if I could help it, I wasn't going to stay where I could be hit.

We hadn't moved a dozen yards when that rifle spoke again and I saw Tommy throw up his hands. Instantly, I was at his side, dragging him behind a chance boulder and before I was fully behind it with my precious burden I felt a white-hot bolt of agony pierce my thigh.

The leg flung out from under me with the impact and I went down flat on my face, scraping a lot of skin off my nose. Tommy was still out in the open so I forced myself up, pulled him to safety. That rifleman had used less than six bullets but he had scored twice. That's shooting!

Lucky for us none of his bullets had struck in vital spots. My thigh was damaged and Tommy's left shoulder had been nicked. There was a lot of blood and all that but

we tore strips from our shirts and bandaged the wounds. Then we rested pretty comfortably and took stock of our position. So long as we remained where we were we were comparatively safe.

An hour passed on leaden wings and then I tempted the marksman with a bit of my shirt stuck on the end of my gun. Nothing happened. A few more minutes dragged by and then we decided to chance it. I wasn't fast on my game leg although I could move with a fair amount of agility. But there was no need for caution. The attack had ceased. This was a puzzler.

"Carstairs?" Tommy asked when we had reached the top of the gorge, putting all that was on both our minds in that one word.

I shrugged. "Looks that way. If it had been Bajaos, there would have been spears and if rifles, a dozen of them all shooting at once and not as accurately. The sun's high, brother. We ought to get back to the boat. And," I added a bit irrelevantly, "I would give a million to have Carstairs in front of me for five minutes. I ask for nothing more."

"Ditto," grunted Tommy laconically.

I had half expected that the rifleman, particularly if he were Carstairs, would take a few pot shots at us as we beat our way to the beach. But nothing of the sort happened. The silence of that green hell was unbroken save for the tramp of our feet.

Let me tell you it had our nerves jumpy—the stillness I mean. It enshrouded all things, blanketing even the chatter of birds.

Tommy was a bit in front of me as the curtain of the jungle lifted to disclose the beach. He stopped short, pointed wildly.

"The launch! It's gone!" he cried.

My heart sank in my boots and I had a swift premonition of impending disaster because not only the boat was gone but the tender, too.

I whistled a few bars out of tune. "Ho hum," I said carelessly, "I've

always wondered how it would feel to be marooned."

Tommy stared at me unbelievably. "Huh?" Then he got the point. "Okay, okay," he said. "I ain't lost my nerve yet."

"We got our guns anyway," I said, "and a couple of dozen rounds of ammunition. They won't get that, I hope." I grinned at him.

His grin answered mine.

CHAPTER IV

Savage Ghosts



PRETTY cheerful cusses, huh? Well, it was all front, of course. Only it was a good front. None of our inner anxiety was showing on our faces. I was busy figuring that if worst came to worst we could build a raft and paddle to

Siasi. Such things had been done. But I didn't speak of it. Such a subject would keep. In the meantime there was a lot of immediate things that needed our attention.

Guns came first. We checked over our weapons, counting up the ammunition. Most of it had been left on the boat. My .45 was full up, so was Tommy's. We had a couple of extra reloading clips between us. The Winchesters were pretty weak sisters, though.

There was one ammunition pouch between us, from which had been fired fifty rounds. Some eighty-odd rounds between us. As I'd said before—ho hum! We'd have to put up with what we had and make the best of it.

The sun was going down fast, sinking into the blue of the sea. We picked a spot for shelter where the beach met the jungle, figuring it was as good—or bad—a place as any to meet an attack. That's right. We weren't kidding ourselves for a minute. An attack was *sure* to come.

We didn't have long to wait. Hardly had night set in when from

the jungle came the muted call of a *luman* or outer island leopard. Tommy, lying flat on his stomach and staring hard into that now impenetrable wall of jungle, stirred uneasily, his finger nervously fidgeting with the trigger of the Winchester. Another *luman* had sounded its cry in answer a little distance away.

I know what that meant. Those calls had come from human throats. At least, there was one thing we now knew. Our attackers were the Bajaos. Only they could simulate the *luman* call so perfectly.

"Remember that machine-gun attack we squelched in the Belleau Woods, Tommy?" I asked.

"Huh? Yeah. What about it?"

"Just remember it, that's all. Because those palookas are coming. Soon."

THEY came sooner than we had expected. Suddenly, the jungle, quiescent a second before, became alive with dark, fitting shapes that came forward by the dozens, yelling wildly and brandishing spears.

We shot not hastily but methodically. That was the difference between us and the savages. They used a lot of wind up in yelling, on the theory probably, that we'd be scared witless. We just kept quiet and attended to the business in hand. Which at the moment was stopping that first mad rush.

We did. The front line crumpled before our withering fire. Those behind broke formation and fled. I had been using my automatic. Now I grabbed up the rifle and went through the clip, seeing a man fall with every blazing bullet that left the gun.

But we were two and they were nearer two hundred. That's giving away too much weight, believe you me! As fast as we mowed them down, they re-formed and massed for another attack, their spears all this time rattling on all sides of us.

I noticed one tall young fellow exhorting the others to deeds of bravery and recognized him as the man who had called his cohorts

away on the *Cengal*. He had seemed like a chief then. Now he looked and acted the part, too, taking the helm in practically every charge, staying it out longest after everyone else had turned tail and run.

I picked him for my own, knowing that if I brought him down with a bullet, half the fight was over. I'd fought savage tribes before. Strip those warriors of their chief and they run around in circles. Well, three times I aimed at his tall form and three times I missed because of some fluke.

Then suddenly, both Tommy and I became aware of a flanking party sent out to cover us from the rear. That spelled finish. We could not hope to withstand their charge much longer. We jumped to our feet.

"It was nice meeting you again, Tommy," I said, not looking at him but keeping my eyes along the sights of the rifle where they'd do the most good.

"Thanks," he muttered between his teeth. There was a short pause while we both reloaded. Then he said: "It was a good fight, huh, John? I'm not sorry."

"No, neither am I. Wouldn't have missed it for the world. Besides, who wants to die an old man?"

Tommy picked off two over-sanguine Bajaos who had advanced to within fifteen yards of us. But thereafter there was no keeping those screaming hordes back. They were closing in fast. How fast I did not realize until my automatic again emptied and I found I hadn't time to reload. How those dark-skinned devils did charge!

I flung the empty .45 into the face of the nearest one, scrambling his nose all over his face. A spear shot inches by my head—and Tommy's rifle spat angrily. At five feet, the hurtling lad nearly tore that poor mug's head off.

Then Tommy's hammer clicked without sending forth a bullet. We both grabbed the rifles by the overheated barrels and swung the butts like shillalies. *Bam!* I struck a head with such force my fingers stung

with the impact. Tommy yelled like a savage himself, laying about him with lusty swings that cracked heads, jaws, chests. As for myself I went clear off my noodle, charging into a whole mass of the Bajaos without a thought for the penetrative qualities of a spear in contact with human flesh.

But no spear touched me, nor Tommy either. Which was damned odd! Even in the blinding heat of the battle, I realized that these chaps had no intention of killing us. Even that rifleman, I remembered, had not killed us, nor had he tried to, probably. His intention had been to wound us so we'd be easier to capture—alive.

Tommy succumbed first. They simply threw an avalanche of human flesh at him and buried him under it. Then the din of the battle quieted suddenly and before I knew precisely what was happening I saw that tall black-haired chief whom I had marked for my own facing me. Alone.

He had a spear; I, my empty rifle. Savage and civilized man, reduced to the same status on this lonely island. I charged at him, butt extended. He sidestepped cleverly, caught the stock with one hand, yanked and with the same motion brought his spear handle crashing down on my head. My game leg which I had not even bothered to think about doubled under me and I very nearly lost my footing. I was poised when he came at me, however, and I let fly with a right and a crushing left. There's not much science to my fighting but I'm considered a pretty fair puncher.

The first blow glanced off his cheek but the second rocked him from head to toe. Before he could quite recover himself, I let fly from the hip with a lifting punch that carried behind it every ounce of my weight. That blow would have felled an ox. He stood stock still as it connected flush on the button. Then his whole form relaxed and he slid down to the sands.

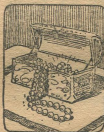
A great hush suddenly came on the scene. These savages were

stunned, unable to believe that their chief had really gone down. But it didn't need a count of ten to show he was out. That baby had been hit, what I mean! They closed in on me with fierce, blood-curdling yells. A dozen hands clawed at me, blows by the score rained down on me. My thigh felt warm and wet and I knew that the blood had begun to flow again.

Before I was rightly aware that further struggle was useless, a rough rope of liana fiber bound my hands behind my back. I remember that they stepped back and that I tottered to my feet. But that's all I do remember I guess, for it was right after that I lost consciousness.

CHAPTER V

White God of the Bajaos



UPON opening my eyes again, I found my spine was hugging a pole set in the ground and my wrists were tied around it. I twisted my head, faced Tommy similarly draped about a pole two feet from me. Blood had dried on his bruised and battered map but that didn't stop him from grinning. "Well, well, John, old topper. Fancy meeting you here!"

"Mere coincidence, I assure you!" I growled back at him. "Hey, what's this, an Elk's convention?"

Facing us was a horde of Bajaos, their naked bodies dark and sweaty, their rapt faces glinting like polished ebony in the fitful flare of dozens of pitch torches set into the ground at regularly spaced intervals. They were squatting in a semi-circle about a huge pool on the surface of which immobile logs were floating. And they were chanting in unison a monotonous reiteration of three or four syllables.

Cripes, what music! It made me shudder. It rose and fell with pulsating, ominous rhythm as those deep-throated voices moaned a sup-

plication to their evil gods. It was not *Joloana*, that chant. It went back beyond that, probably to the dawn of time.

How long it kept up, I do not know. I remember only that it dinned into my ears until I was fairly ready to scream. The effect of it was weirdly maddening and on the brutal face of each singer there shone a fierce, unholy joy.

But suddenly the chanting ceased. That startled me. Every eye was turned toward a glade at the edge of the clearing. I looked, too—and gaped, open-mouthed. It was Patandra! With arms lifted above her head, palms extended outward, she advanced toward the pool. She made a sort of obeisance, then turned away, facing me.

Good God—she was beautiful!

Her hair, darker than the night, fell about her shoulders in a mass, half veiling the rounded contours of her form. She was dressed in a *sari*, a sort of wrap-around cloth, of the purest white. But her eyes—those amazing depths of liquid black—held no glint of recognition when they met mine!

THEN for an instant I forgot about her, for another figure was stalking into the clearing. It was the creature called the White God! Cold sweat beaded my forehead and I caught my lower lip between my teeth. I guess it was the utter silence that did it. At any rate, that figure dressed in a huge cloak of purest white silk possessed the power to awe me and I felt something that was like a cold hand close about my heart. What was coming next?

I found out soon enough. The White God clapped his palms together. Instantly, there appeared two stalwart warriors, dragging between them a whimpering, shivering bundle of human flesh. Ron Carstairs!

I felt sick. I didn't even remotely guess what was coming but I knew it would be something horrible. I looked at Carstairs' trembling form

and felt sick. Yes, he deserved whatever was coming to him, he had betrayed Tommy and me, he had stolen our boat. Sure! But he was a white man, wasn't he? And he was helpless in the hands of cruel, blood-mad savages.

If I'd gotten free of my bonds then, I'd have rushed in to save him. Even if it had meant sacrificing my life. But I couldn't do a thing. I was as powerless as he.

But now I tensed, unable to believe my ears. A deep voice like the rumble of a distant drum was speaking. It was the White God and he was speaking English!

"You are a miserable specimen, Carstairs," the voice intoned. "You betrayed your comrades for two miserable pearls, and then you tried to betray me! Me! Did you think you could fool me by delivering them into my hands only to cut them loose once you'd received your pay? Bah! Fool! You even had the colossal nerve to come here to receive more pearls, to protest your innocence when I told you your comrades were loose."

Then I understood. The White God did not know that it had been Pat who'd set us free back there in Lenku. He was blaming it on Carstairs! The figure in white had ceased speaking. He clapped his hands. Two more savages appeared at Carstairs' side and then all four lifted him high above their heads, marched solemnly toward the pool!

I wanted to cry out—I did, but my outburst was drowned in a mighty shout from the throats of the savages. I saw Carstairs squirming, kicking, writhing. Then there was a second of silence as his body was flung into the shimmering surface of the pool. I wanted to shut my eyes but the awful fascination of the scene held them open. Carstairs hit the water with a mighty splash—

Yes—they weren't logs. They flashed to life. Huge cruel jaws opened to unnatural widths, sinister antediluvian tails flashed, churned water. Carstairs' last scream died away in a raucous wheeze as he was

dragged under. Slowly the water reddened—

The savages, screaming and howling, seemed to go literally mad at the sight. They danced with furious abandon, heads thrown back, teeth exposed. Their horrible gods were feasting!

At last, I looked at Tommy. He was white, trembling. His eyes met mine. They were glittering with a feverish light.

"Crocodiles!" he said hoarsely, through parched lips.

"Aye and jolly hungry, too!"

We both looked up. It was the White God! He had thrown back his hood. We could see his face, bony, aquiline—but a white man's face! A white man? Yes, in color. But he was black—blacker than any one of the savages over whom he had so much power. I looked into his eyes and realized the truth. They were cunning, shifty eyes, but they were the eyes of a lunatic, of a raving madman.

"Your turn is next," he chortled, fairly hugging himself with delight. "This is what you came for, is it not?" He dragged forth a leather pouch from beneath his cloak, opened it, poured a stream of black pearls into his wet palm. "I have taken these from every grave in the burial ground. Ha-ha! These savages think me a god. I've convinced them of that. Twenty years I've lived here—alone with my black beauties!"

Now I understood why Carstairs had found no pearls in the burial ground. This man had sifted over all the ground and taken the precious stuff long before anyone else had ventured here.

"I'm rich!" he screamed. "Richer than anyone in the world! Twenty years I've been here. It was Jack Hearn's idea—first. It was he who thought we could get the Bajaos to think us gods. But I was smarter than him. I didn't want to share my beauties with anyone." He leered at us, slobbering at the mouth. "I murdered him one night. Murdered him! Do you hear? I've lived here alone

until I found Patandra. But even she can't have my pearls. Not even she!"

"You murdered Jack Hearn?" It was Tommy who spoke. "You? He wasn't killed by natives?"

The madman threw back his head and laughed. "I did it! Sure! I, alone! It was—" He broke off, staring.

Tommy was jerking at the bonds, at the pole as if he, too, had gone mad. Suddenly, his convulsive movements ceased. A sob tore from his throat.

"So you killed him. You, Ed Grinnell! I've always been brought up to revere your name."

At mention of the name, the man in white leaped as though he had been stung. Mad fires blazed in his sunken eyes. "Wh—who are you?"

"Tommy Hearn, son of Jack Hearn!" Tommy flung at him. "I found your name in letters my father sent my mother. He picked you up from the beach. You were broke, beaten. He made a comrade of you—and you murdered him!"

THE creature in white shrank before Tommy's scorn, took a hasty backward step. "I—I—" he began. Then fury got the best of him. "Damn you! Don't look at me like that! Don't!" he screamed. "You'll die! Like Carstairs!" He rattled off something in *Joloana*. It was an order.

Instantly, a handful of the natives rushed at Tommy. A knife flashed as he was cut loose. Before he could use his hands, however, they grabbed him, lifted him above their shoulders. My heart jumped into my mouth. "Tommy!" I yelled. "Tommy!"

What more was there to say?

"So long, John!" he shouted back. "Meet you in the hot place!"

He had nerve, Tommy had. Even at that moment. I saw Patandra rush at Ed Grinnell. I didn't hear what she was saying but she was pleading with him. He flung her away from him with such force that she stumbled to the ground, sobbing.

I didn't look at her any more. My eyes were on poor Tommy.

They were halfway across the clearing with him now. Grinnell was dancing up and down in front of them. I felt someone fumble at my hands, turned—and looked into Patandra's eyes. She was cutting my bonds. In the excitement, no one was paying any attention to us.

But before I could take a step toward Tommy I heard a voice speak a sharp command and the next instant the unmistakable crack of Winchesters—dozens of them—filled the night. I whirled as Bajao savages fell on all sides of me, saw what was undoubtedly the finest sight that ever met my eyes. A captain of Scouts, bare-headed, leading a squad of Filipino soldiers, every man of whom had a rifle tucked under his shoulder, ready to fire the second round.

THE natives howled wildly at the sudden attack, took to their heels without the slightest thought of showing resistance. I saw Tommy flung from the shoulders of his bearers, fall to the ground. Instantly, I was racing toward him. Ed Grinnell, that weird figure in white, had not fled with the others. He had snatched a knife from under his garments and was falling on Tommy with murderous intent. He didn't even hear my yell. As his arm was swinging down, I caught it at the wrist and yanked. Tommy rolled free and Grinnell went over in a somersault. He bounded to his feet, practically frothing at the mouth, more animal than human.

He didn't have the knife any more but he was as dangerous as a mad dog. I swung in on him, determined to knock him out with one blow. He jumped at me, evading my punch, closed his teeth on my wrist. I tore it free, grappled with him. But he was slippery as an eel. I grabbed hold of his garments, yanked. Somehow, they came loose in my hands and he ran. He wasn't looking where he was going. His head was half turned about.

"Look out!" I yelled. "The pool!"

But it was too late. He stumbled, arm outflung. I had a glimpse of his crazed face for a split second and then he plunged into the water with a terrific splash. For a few seconds, he floundered wildly, and it looked as if he might make it back to the shore, but then a huge jaw opened, saurian teeth clicked. Ed Grinnell was dragged under—

I turned away too sick to see any more horror that night. The captain of Scouts was talking to Tommy rapidly. Then he stepped away, barked orders to his soldiers.

I came up to Tommy. Solemnly we clasped hands, looked long into each other's faces. Then Tommy held up a leather pouch.

"Look!" he said. "When you tried to stop Grinnell, you yanked this from him. Why, you aren't even excited! What's wrong, man? We're saved, we have the pearls!"

"Yeah," I muttered. "Sure. That's fine."

My eyes, you see, were on Patandra. She was standing to one side. I came up to her.

"You summoned the Scouts?" It was really not a question. I knew she had been responsible. "Why did you do it?"

"I—I— The bloodshed! I couldn't stand any more of it!" She looked up at me with flashing eyes. "Back in Lenku, I overheard Grinnell planning to kill you two. He knew you'd come here to Paraminkang. I found out it was under Philippine sovereignty. I cabled to Jolo, used your name. It was the least I could do. Grinnell, poor fellow, he was mad. He didn't know what he was doing."

"Yes, he was mad all right," I agreed. "But tell me. He said he had found you. Is that true?"

She nodded. "To me he was kind and sweet. He was not altogether bad. There must have been some good in him. He found me when I was a bit of a girl. I couldn't have been more than five. A steamer for Penang had been blown off her

(Concluded on page 78)

Hop to Havana



He struck once, with the muzzle of his gat

*Transporting a Plane-Load of Passengers to Havana,
Pilot Hendryx Is Forced to Take Flying
Orders from a Desperate Killer!*

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Author of "Devils in the Dust," "Corpse Whispers," etc.

"I'M getting fed to the eyes with this Miami-Havana hop," said Chief Pilot Hendryx to the steward. "I could fly it with my eyes shut. Nothing ever happens. I've a mind to go to Addis Ababa and enlist under the banner of the Lion of Judah."

Carson, the steward, grinned, then looked grave.

"You're tempting fate, Mr. Hendryx," he said. "You should never wish for something to happen, not in the air, anyhow, for it may happen, and then you'll wish it hadn't."

"Then," said Hendryx doggedly, "I wish it would!"

The steward shook his head. He'd been on the Miami-Havana hop longer than Hendryx. He'd flown so

many passenger miles without any trouble that he was beginning to think, every time he took off: "This time something *has* got to happen!"

Maybe, thought Carson, this would be the time. Everything was ripe for it. Hurricanes? Crates didn't take off when there were warnings. And what else could happen? Forced landings in mid-ocean in the heart of the Gulf Stream? Nothing like that. There was always gliding range, almost always vessels in sight on the ocean below. Nothing, really, could happen. That very fact had disgruntled Hendryx.

But there seemed to be nothing out of the ordinary. There was the usual batch of curiosity-seeking tourists, bound for the land of the rhumba and the peanut vendor. Chattering women who'd never flown before, and wanted someone to hold their hands when the great transport took off. There was a little man with a dusky, oily face, who had interests in Havana of which he hinted mysteriously. The steward gathered that the interests had to do with the monkey farm, outside Havana. The man looked a little like a monkey himself and his easy laughter over trifles was a kind of chattering.

THERE was a big man with scars on his cheeks which the steward believed had been made by knives. There was a suspicious bulge under his left arm, and another over his right hip.

"He'd shoot at the drop of a hat," thought the steward.

The swarthy man with the two suspicious bulges sat in his place and kept glancing toward the outer gate of the flying field.

"He's expecting the police to get here before he can get away," thought Hendryx, looking back from his cubby.

But it was no use. Invariably, when he endowed his passengers with romantic or adventurous characters, they turned out to belong to the tribe of Caspar Milquetoast. Hendryx stared at the sky. It was

cloudless, without a breath of wind. A calm, uneventful flight, that's what it would be. A drink or two at the Sarasota Hotel, then the hop back. Nothing to stir the blood of a man who had taken on a job for the sake of thrills.

Hendryx got his orders. His assistant slid into place. The great transport was ready to get away, exactly on time. The monster rolled down the field, bumping a little, to make the turn, head into the wind, and get off the field. The swarthy man's face was hidden by the newspaper he seemed to be reading. The steward was talking.

"It's very simple, nothing to be frightened about. Just sit quietly."

And then they were off, smoothly flying. Wisps of cloud came off the Everglades as they ascended to five thousand, Hendryx thought for a moment they might be in for a blow, which would mean a bit of excitement. But they dropped the clouds behind as they headed out over the Keys for their destination: the Pearl of the Antilles.

The swarthy man folded his paper meticulously, stared down at the approaching waters of the ocean, at the many keys, rimmed by reefs behind which white sails of fishing boats could be seen.

He paid attention to no one. The monkeylike man was chattering, showing white teeth in grins of delight. Spanish, of course, and heading home.

They were almost over the Gulf Stream when the dark man put down his paper and beckoned to the steward.

"Go to the pilot," he said, "and tell him to head for Nassau."

"But, sir, you must be joking, sir!"

"I'm not joking. Do as I tell you."

The man shifted in his seat, bringing the bulge under his left arm into prominence. His right hand was moving across the expanse of his chest. Carson's heart began to hammer. This would be great stuff for Hendryx. But when the other passengers realized what was happening—well, it wouldn't be easy, trying to

calm a dozen hysterical men and women.

Carson bowed and started for the pilot's office. The swarthy man, silent and sure as a cat, rose, followed. The passengers saw nothing amiss. They glanced idly at the steward and the man who followed him.

The steward didn't look back, which was unfortunate for him. He put his hand on the door. The swarthy man's right hand moved like the striking of a serpent. It was so fast that the passengers didn't see it travel. An automatic, blue-steeled, flashed into view as the door to the cubby opened. The man struck once, with the muzzle of his gat. Then he smiled tightly at the two pilots.

"Head for Nassau," he said grimly.

Hendryx looked at him.

"Did you have to smash the steward?"

"I didn't know how to open the door, and didn't want to be delayed. You can do the job quietly, and get ten grand for yourself, or you can let yourself and these people in for a lot of trouble. Are you changing your course?"

"Can you fly if I refuse and you're crazy enough to shoot me?"

"I know what I'm doing, and I'm not crazy."

"Perhaps not—legally, Black Big Heber!"

"You know me, eh?"

"Yes. Recognized you the minute I stepped into the plane."

"Change course!" snapped Heber.

"You won't make me kill you, not with the lives of fifteen passengers to consider. They can stand for the inconvenience."

Hendryx looked at Stevens, his co-pilot. Stevens' face was white. Hendryx wasn't surprised. He hadn't expected too much of Stevens.

Two women had fainted. Another screamed. Heber backed against the side of the plane, swerved his automatic to cover the passengers.

"Don't start anything!" he snapped above the roaring of the motor. "You know me, maybe. I'm Black Big Heber. That name should mean something to you. It means, too,

that if I go back I'll take the hot squat. I'll do plenty killing before I'll stand for that. There's coppers waiting in Havana for me, or will, when the cable or the radio gets busy," he paused, lips tight. "So, I'm going to Nassau, understand?"

Hendryx glanced at his passengers and felt a surge of disgust. Some of the women seemed to have some courage, but if any of the men had, they hid it admirably. The monkey-like fellow screeched, staggered to his feet, and raced for the back of the passenger compartment, to the door that led to the baggage room. Heber shouted at him.

THE man kept on. Heber fired, just once. The bullet slammed into the rear wall of the passenger compartment. A man cursed. A woman screamed. The steward, sitting up, felt of his head, then crawled away from the man who had struck him. The bullet hadn't missed Alesandro Ramon, the monkey-mannered one, more than a few inches. It didn't stop him. He got through the door into the baggage room.

"Anything in there he can use for a weapon?" asked Heber of Hendryx.

"No, and he wouldn't use it anyway. He's scared stiff."

Heber's eyes flicked over the other passengers.

"That will show you I ain't fooling," he said grimly.

Hendryx knew he couldn't leave the controls now to offer battle; not with his co-pilot, Stevens, in a blue funk. But he had no intention of heading for Nassau. Hell of a note, if a guy had to do something for a murderer just because the buzzard had a gat! His eyes stared steadily at the gunman.

"I'm not going to Nassau," he said quietly.

Heber apparently had figured everything out in advance. His right hand moved again, swiftly, surely. Stevens, smashed a terrific wallop across the temple, started to fall from his seat. Heber's left hand shot to the collar of the co-pilot's uni-

form, dragged him into the passenger compartment. Heber slipped into his place. Heber's face never changed expression. He was as cold as glacier ice.

"That ties your hands, fellow," Heber said. "He can't take over the controls now while you give me an argument—and nobody else in this plane has the nerve."

"Thanks, but I'm not going to Nassau."

Heber's right hand moved swiftly. His left hand came to meet it. Then his left hand was holding the automatic. His right hand slid to his back right pocket. When it came back it, too, held an automatic. Heber's face was a swarthy mask.

"I could persuade you, I suppose," he said.

HE lifted his left hand slightly. Hendryx didn't see the man's eyes swerve in the slightest as his right hand crossed under his left, and his right-hand automatic flamed, roaring in the narrow confines of the cubby.

In the passenger compartment a man screamed, grabbed at his throat. Hendryx whirled, looked. The man had tumbled into the aisle. Blood streamed from his throat. He died before Hendryx's eyes. Hendryx's face went white.

"That's murder, Heber," he gritted tensely.

"There'll be more, one every minute, until all your passengers are gone, if you don't head for Nassau. I might point out, sap, that this isn't my first murder—and not my last, if you insist on being a fool."

Hendryx could not head for Nassau now. He *would* not! This man had murdered a passenger. He would not nelp him escape! Something had to be done.

The plane was flying at seven thousand feet. Just what would it do, without someone at the controls? Hendryx stared balefully into the beady eyes of Black Big Heber.

Suddenly he moved as swiftly as Heber had moved. He was sure Heber wouldn't shoot him, Heber couldn't fly. If he could, he'd have

shot Hendryx at once and taken over the controls.

Hendryx jumped Heber. The murderer's two automatics swung as he attempted to crash them on the pilot's head.

Instantaneously Hendryx, arms clamped about the arms of the murderer, pinning them to his body, hurled himself and the murderer out into the aisle between the rows of seats. His panting voice yelled to the passengers:

"Hang onto your seats!"

It was plain enough that for any of them to try to come to his aid would mean disaster. It would shift the balance of the pilotless plane, which was already swinging into sickening gyrations. Its left wing went down. The passenger compartment rocked and rolled like a sub-chaser in a heavy sea. The passengers clung, their faces white. With all that was in him, Hendryx was fighting to disarm the murderer, to deal a knock-out blow.

Carson leaped toward the fighting men.

"Keep out, fool, or get a bellyful of lead!" the murderer snarled.

Heber was keeping his head as he fought. A cold-blooded killer, Heber. He had managed to loosen one arm partially and was banging Hendryx on the head with one of the gats, to which he clung tenaciously. Not hard enough to knock him out, but hard enough to make his head reel. But gritting his teeth, Hendryx fought on.

Heber drove a knee into Hendryx's midriff, and Hendryx groaned in agony. Then Carson hurled into the battle. He sprang atop Heber, who had flung Hendryx beneath him. Heber heaved his shoulders mightily—and Carson went sprawling. Heber turned, with the hands of Hendryx grabbing for his throat, and shot once. Carson sprawled in the aisle, a hole between his eyes.

"Anybody else want some of it?" snapped Heber.

Nobody answered; Heber astride Hendryx, was pounding the pilot's head on the cabin floor.

"Better stop being a fool," he gritted. "I'd give you the same dose, if I could fly this crate."

"Why didn't you charter a private plane?" Hendryx gasped.

"I did what they didn't expect me to do—and you will, too! Want another killing? It's up to you. Nassau—or more bumped off?"

"For the love of God, head for Nassau!" a woman cried. "I'd rather he got away, than be murdered."

"That's sensible, lady," nodded Heber. "This fool better listen to reason—quick! We're going down."

The plane was going into a spin, headed for the Gulf Stream.

"Let me at the controls!" panted Hendryx. "This crate'll be in the drink in two minutes."

Heber slid back to his knees, escaped Hendryx's hands. He grabbed the pilot by the collar, yanked him to his feet.

Both men clutched at chairs as the crate went into a wild gyration, caused by up-drafts of air from the Gulf Stream. Hendryx, his face pulped and bloody, reeled to the pilot's cubby.

HE yanked at the controls. The transport steadied, there was the beginning clatter of a message, but before Hendryx could make out what it was, Heber, sliding into the copilot's seat, smashed the radio with the butt of his gun.

"All right," said Hendryx grimly, "I'll take you to Nassau."

"Thought you'd come to it," Heber sneered.

Deliberately, so that all could feel the change of direction, Hendryx swung on the course for Nassau. Heber's eyes never left the pilot. There was silence, save for the droning of the motor. An awed silence, for two dead men lay in the aisles, rolling gently to the swaying of the crate.

There was reason for the swaying, though Heber couldn't guess it.

Almost imperceptibly, Hendryx was bringing the crate around, praying that Heber knew nothing of telling position by the sun. It took him

an hour to get back on the course for Havana.

And he was none too sure of it even then. The blows of Heber's gats had knocked him silly. His brain seemed addled. Now and again he rubbed his left hand over his face, over his head. It came away wet with his own blood. Heber's face was an expressionless mask.

The cold-blooded murderer! Who hadn't given a thought to the two men he had killed!

"Land," said Hendryx grimly. "We'll be in soon."

Tense, wary, Heber leaned forward, staring at the smudge on the horizon.

"Don't try anything funny, fellow," he advised. "I know Nassau. Used to run booze out of there during prohibition."

Hendryx didn't answer. He was wondering, for the first time, what had happened to the man who had run into the baggage compartment and shut himself in. What was he doing, besides shivering in his boots? Hendryx stole a furtive glance into the mirror. Passengers sat like stone images. The dead rolled in the aisle. The door to the passenger cubby was tightly shut.

Then—it moved slightly. A queer little face peered around it, low down. Hendryx glanced at Heber. Had he noticed? But Heber, though he held a gat against Hendryx's side, was oblivious to everything except that growing splotch on the horizon.

Hendryx looked at the door again. Now there were two faces! His heart began to hammer.

Suddenly Heber jammed the muzzle of his gat hard against Hendryx's side.

"I told you no funny business, fellow," he snapped. "Didn't think I knew Havana, eh? That's Morro Castle!"

Hendryx stared, then shot Heber a look.

Heber snarled, "Head for Nassau, damn you, or I'll blow your brains out!"

Hendryx grinned.

"Couldn't make it now," he said softly. "I'd be down in the sea, without gasoline, in less than an hour." He glowered at the man beside him. "The next move seems to be yours, Black Big Heber. What'll it be?"

He was watching the mirror, as Heber, eyes narrowed, seemed to be trying to make up his mind.

Then pandemonium suddenly broke loose among the passengers. Heber whirled as high, feminine screams burst on his ears. He swore aloud. He swung his gats into firing position. Hendryx clawed for altitude as the little faces—one, two, three, four of them—appeared in the door of the baggage room.

Monkeys!

How did it happen he hadn't heard their chattering when he had boarded the plane for the hop to Havana? Unless, of course, Alesandro Ramon had some way to keep them quiet. But they weren't quiet now! Raging and excited, they leaped into the passenger compartment. They didn't understand airplanes or the people who flew or rode in them. They were wild with excitement.

WOMEN screamed and went into hysterics. The grimacing creatures leaped for their shoulders. Tiny, hairy hands fastened in hair. In a moment the plane's interior was filled with struggling men and women, terrified, and with hands clawing at the chattering little beasts. Hendryx was almost standing the crate on its tail to get altitude. It was a showdown with Heber now. And he still had no intention of making for Nassau.

One passenger killed—and the steward. That dead passenger! His face was familiar somehow. Suddenly, from some corner of his consciousness was dragged a memory. He *knew* who that man had been!

Hendryx threw the plane into gymnastics as it approached Havana harbor. Heber was yelling, threatening. The monkeys were chattering. Women were screaming. Madhouse!

The muzzle of Heber's gat was in

Hendryx's face. Heber had gone stark mad. This was the end for him. He knew it. He would die here before he would go back to be electrocuted. His thunderous face told Hendryx that. Better to go out in an air crash and take with him the man who had defied him.

Heber would shoot—any minute.

Then Hendryx went into action. He ducked, shot up his hand as Heber's automatic exploded. The hot breath of the bullet seared Hendryx's cheek, but it missed, went through the shield. The altimeter said six thousand feet.

By now people ashore would be watching the mad antics of the incoming transport. There would be other crates out shortly. As Hendryx grabbed at Heber's wrist, sought to bring up his knee into the murderer's groin, he saw two small crates take off from the other side of Morro Castle. He shouted as the gat dropped from Heber's hand. Hendryx had snapped the killer's wrist over his knee.

Hell raged in the transport. As Hendryx and Heber, for the second time tumbled into the aisle as they fought, the four monkeys ran riot. Fighting off Heber's punishing, throttling hands, Hendryx caught a snap glance of Alesandro Ramon, standing at the door of the baggage room. The owner of the monkeys was grinning, nodding his head, apparently very much pleased with himself.

The strangling hands of the killer fastened themselves about the pilot's throat. He tried to shout to the cowering co-pilot to take the controls, but could not. Hendryx might have a chance. If Stevens would only snap out of it.

And then, as though but numbly realizing what had to be done, Stevens staggered to the pit. His face was pale, his eyes rolled—still.

At the controls, Stevens was straightening out the crate. Hendryx twisted his head from side to side, trying to escape those throttling hands. Plain enough he had to battle this out himself. He could

expect no help from any of those passengers, paralyzed with fright.

Hendryx bowed his body, a supreme effort, forcing Heber forward. Then, with all his power, he brought his right knee up into the killer's back. The man's head snapped back. Though desperately trying to cling, Heber's hands slipped from Hendryx's throat.

With superhuman strength, Hendryx managed to roll to his belly under the legs of his antagonist. Then, bowing his back again, he heaved. He unseated the killer. Then Hendryx was on his feet, but Heber was staggering up, whirling again to the attack. The murderer's hand had touched his when Hendryx kicked out with all his power. The wrist of Heber's gun hand got the full shock of it. The gat went spinning.

The last time Hendryx saw the gat, one of the monkeys had it. Alesandro was dancing about, trying to get the simian to relinquish it.

It was savage fighting, bitter give-and-take, there in the narrow aisle, with two dead men rolling underfoot.

Heber was a fighter with fists as well as with gats. His fists were rock hard. But Hendryx had never allowed himself to go soft. He charged Heber, got his head against the bigger man's breastbone. He drove rights and lefts, dynamite-filled, to the killer's abdomen. He felt the stomach of the killer give to his savage driving. A panting breath of triumph whizzed as Heber gave ground.

He stepped back swiftly for the kayo, shooting rights and lefts to the craglike jaw of Black Bige Heber. The fear of death was in Heber's ash-white face. Not at the hands of Hendryx, but if Hendryx should conquer him.

From outside came the roaring of motors of the two crates which had come out to see why the mighty transport behaved so strangely.

Heber was fighting like a cornered coyote. His ashy face was a smear of blood. And still they fought on, to the accompaniment of women's

screams, of men's hoarse yells, the chattering of monkeys, the high, shrill laughter of Alesandro Ramon, and the roar of the motors of the two circling ships. Hendryx's clothing was ripped and shredded. His nose had been flattened by Heber's fists.

"You haven't got a chance, Heber," he panted.

Suddenly the killer whirled. He stumbled back two steps, then hurled himself straight at one of the windows. He meant to plunge through it. To cheat justice by dropping into the sea, six thousand feet below!

His head and chest went through the window. The slipstream, clutching at him, would have dragged him on out, if Hendryx hadn't clutched his ankles. He yelled to Ramon for help, and the grinning monkey owner leaped forward.

Heber was dragged back into the compartment.

HE was unconscious from the blow he had given himself in his attempted suicide. Before he could regain consciousness, he was bound hand and foot, placed in the baggage compartment. Ramon and his monkeys stood guard over him.

Grinning with bloody lips, Hendryx started back to his office.

He spoke to the passengers: "That man he killed—I recognized him—one of Black Bige's confederates. He took that chance to get rid of a man who might prove dangerous to him when the rewards mounted, and to make a split of his loot unnecessary. Poor Carson's to be the only loser."

Danger past, the pilot's mind shot to his company—and his duty. A hell of a mess, this! Could they stave off lawsuits? He said what he could—the first thoughts to mind.

"It must be plain to all of you," he said, "that if we had headed for Nassau, we would only have landed in the sea—and this crate isn't equipped with pontoons. I hope you will all remember that, when you get ready to blame the company for what's happened."

"I'll have something to say," said a fat man pompously. "I wouldn't have missed it for the world!" he grinned as he shot a glance around at his fellow passengers. "I'll guarantee we all came on this trip looking for—excitement—thrills." He chuckled. "We've had 'em—plenty."

Hendryx grinned. During the fracas, this fat man had been scared silly. Now he was trying to recover his self-respect. He wasn't fooling anybody. But what he said made all the others realize how the story of their terror would look to the public. Hendryx had a hunch that they would all take the same attitude, when they had a chance to think about it—that the least said of the affair, publicly, the better.

HE took the controls, headed for the far landing field. When the passengers, required to remain seated until the pilots were out of the plane, looked at him as he passed along the aisle, he said:

"The company desires you to go to Havana's best hotel, where entertainment, of whatever kind you desire, will be furnished you." He grinned. "Including liquor for those who feel the need of it."

One or two of them grinned back. They could grin now. At the door Hendryx said, with a grin of his own: "As a grand finale to the show I suggest you retain Alesandro Ra-

mon and his performing monkeys. They should amuse you no end!"

He left the plane with the hang-dog Stevens following him. Stevens was still frightened, worried now about the report Hendryx would have to make against him. Hendryx clapped the co-pilot heartily on the shoulder.

"Forget it, Stevens. Next time It'll be different. It might have happened to anybody, and you didn't have time to think."

"Thanks, Hen," said Stevens. "It's God's truth—I was plain paralyzed when Heber started his play. I'm ashamed as hell!"

"Forget it, kid," Hendryx said again, then he laughed. "Well, there's one thing certain—"

"What's that?"

"It will be a calm, quiet hop back to Miami. Beginning to think after all, that I could stand some peace and quiet about now."

Stevens managed a sickly grin.

"Then what about that idea of yours of hopping off for Ethiopia and some excitement?"

"There is a night club in Havana, called Ethiopia, Steve," grinned Hendryx, "where they gamble for high stakes—sometimes as much as a quarter. That's the place I was thinking about, boy—there's excitement for you."

Stevens grinned, too. He got the idea.

WHITE GOD OF THE BAJAOS

(Concluded from page 70)

course in a storm. She struck a reef and sunk just off Paraminkang. He saw it all. I was the only living thing to be saved. He brought me up here as if I'd been his own daughter."

A little sob shook her. "He's dead, poor man. May God have mercy on his soul!"

Somehow, my arms found their way about her shoulders and I smoothed her hair soothingly. Tommy came rushing up to us.

"John!" he shouted. "When do you think? I counted one hundred and thirty four pearls—all black. We—we're millionaires, by thunder!"

"Shoo!" I murmured gently.

"Huh? Okay, okay, I get the idea."

I didn't care two hoots in hell for pearls out of a leather pouch at that moment. In my arms was a pearl that no money in the world could buy!

Objection- Matrimony



*There's More than One Way to Skin a Cat—and Salty
Old Flapjack Tilley Finds Strategy Beats Violence
When His Pard Decides to Get Spliced!*

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Author of "Cottontail Assembly," "Hell's Half Acre," etc.

FLAPJACK TILLEY took his disreputable corncob pipe from between his teeth and baptized a horsefly plentifully with a gusher of tobacco juice. After the rite, he grunted with satisfaction, tilted his old chair back against the side of his wikiup and gazed thoughtfully

out over the Odds and Ends Ranch.

Flapjack was a medium sized *hombre* who was halfway between middle age and senile decay. His face, almost as long as that of his calico pony, was embellished by slate grey eyes, a prominent bulbous nose, and an abundance of mustache the color of dried corn husks and as well-trained as a clump of mesquite.

"I been thinkin'" Flapjack orated without warning—"I been thinkin', Dodo, how we could put hawgs in on this hyar ranch so's we could have our own bacon an' pork chops an—" He paused and cast an oblique glance at his partner.

Dodo Sparks was hunkered down on the porch, gazing soulfully into space. He was a harmless-looking individual blessed with a little more avoirdupois than his frame warranted. Dodo, the junior partner in this ranching venture, was gifted with a round cherubic countenance plentifully decorated with big freckles. And at the moment, so far as he was concerned, Flapjack might as well have been chasing coolies around China.

"Holy cactus!" he breathed to no one in particular. "Them big blue eyes an' that chestnut hair. Ah-h!"

FLAPJACK'S pipe clattered to the boards.

"H-huh? Why, yuh moon-faced idjut! Don't tell me yuh've got them pains agin. Moonin' over that school ma'am some more. Ugh!" A look of nausea spread over the older man's features.

Flapjack hated everything pertaining to females. Once long ago he had hummed love's old sweet song to one of the opposite sex, had been accepted and then spent one blistering afternoon waiting on the steps of a church, packing an armful of columbine and a small circlet of silver.

But the bride-to-have-been came not; and since that time Flapjack had dodged females the way a bear sidetracks a steel trap. He spent a lot of his time feeling sorry for husbands.

"Shore," answered Dodo, rapture in his brown eyes. "Las' night she almos' said 'yes' an—"

"'Almost,' yuh cussed fool?" exploded the woman-hater. "What yuh—"

"Waal," drawled Dodo with a sigh. "I ast her las' night tuh be my wedded wife an' when she said 'no' she seemed plumb doubtful. Ah-h!" he breathed, lost in happy recollection.

Flapjack walked up and down the rickety porch, hands behind his back. Suddenly he stopped and poked a finger at Dodo.

"Yuh cain't git hitched," he stormed. "It's agin our agreement. What you want a female aroun' fer, huh?"

"This wikiup needs a feminine touch," declared Dodo, getting to his feet. "I'm sick of abusin' my stummick with them alleged biskits o' yore'n, Flapjack. I'm sick o' washin' my own shirts an' socks an— Waal, I'm jest sick of it!"

"I knowed it," wailed Flapjack. "I knowed yuh'd git hooked sooner or later. Dad rat it. Gol blast it! Of all the *hombres* in the hull world, it'd be a love-sick heifer like—"

"Kin I help it if I'm the type?" grinned Dodo, as he stretched and yawned. "She's some gal, Flapjack. A li'l over-sized, but a looker."

"It's agin our agreement," argued Flapjack desperately. "We has to split if yuh git spliced. Dad rat it, it's becus they ain't no competition in that misguided town of Antioch. If they was another elig'ble gent that only looked mebbe half human, she wouldn't look at yuh twice. Ugh! Waal, it looks like a female has got me again."

He spat disgustedly at another fly, knocked it off the top of an overturned dishpan, and stared wrathfully out over his domain.

The Odds and Ends was some ranch. Neighboring ranchers had dubbed it that. When Dodo and Flapjack met up and decided to go into business, they had disagreed as to what kind of livestock they would stock their ranch with. Dodo had

wanted sheep and Flapjack had held out for the more favored and respected cow.

They had compromised by putting in both. There was also a patch of land fenced off for the express purpose of raising green vegetables—and all in all it was a layout extraordinary.

DOODO walked into the humble abode and began to slick up. The sound of a stiff brush grating against boot leather twisted Flapjack's face. As the smitten Dodo prepared to fare forth to spark his lady fair, he hummed a tune that turned his partner's stomach upside down. When he issued from their wikiup to wash his face in the pan outside, Flapjack eyed him wrathfully.

"I'd be doin' yuh a big favor by shootin' yuh, Dodo," he declared. "No court'd convict me, nope. But mebbe the school ma'am will git her eyesight back afore long. Waal, I'm hopin'."

"Love is a wonderful thing, Flapjack," pronounced Dodo as he slicked his hair with a comb well-nigh toothless. "It's what makes the world go 'round. Waal, *adios*, Flapjack, I'm off."

"As if I didn't know it, yuh *locoed* idjut," snapped the disgusted misogynist. "I hope yore hoss hits a gopher hole an' breaks yore fool neck."

Whistling blithely, Dodo meandered to the corral and saddled his mount. With a wave of his hand he climbed aboard and was away, romance bound. Overburdened with misery, Flapjack watched Dodo until he was out of sight.

And for two hours afterward Flapjack Tilley sat gazing dolefully over the darkening scenery, deploring the fact that females had had to be a part of the scheme of things; likewise that Dodo, as had another Adam, was plumb ruining a paradise, an Eden of fifty acres which was the apple of Flapjack's eye.

A deep throated sigh escaped the ruminating Flapjack as he got up from his chair and entered the shack.

He lighted a lamp and picked up a newspaper which his sister Carrie had sent him from Cheyenne.

Flapjack, it must be said, had been favored with quite a smattering of education in his youth. At one time his father had even voiced the opinion that his only son might follow in the steps of Abraham Lincoln. But Flapjack had been influenced by the words of Horace Greeley and, as soon as he had acquired sufficient *dinero* to light out, had left the wikiup of his forebears and pilgrimed west where there were Indians, sidewinders and lots of elbow room.

Inattentively flipping the pages of the newspaper, Flapjack's attention suddenly was arrested. He swore and screwed up his face, for staring at him was black type at the top of a column, to wit: MATRIMONIAL.

"Huh," he sniffed, "there shore are more soft-brained gents in the universe. Looka that, now. Advertisin' fer females. Ugh!" And, in spite of the biased viewpoint he maintained anent connubial existence, Flapjack perused the needs of lonely hearts.

Wanted: Refined woman with average intelligence and with a little money. Object matrimony.

Wanted: Woman of middle age. Children no objection. Lonely man wants to get married. Woman must be good cook. Prefer brunette.

Wanted: Lady desiring good home. Object matrimony. Prefer woman who likes children. Am a gentleman of even temper and means. Not bad-looking.

The reader slammed the newspaper to the floor and bit savagely on the stem of his corncob.

"What's the gol-blasted world comin' to?" he blurted out, mustache bristling. "Askin' fer trouble! Askin' fer females like as if the hull place wa'n't cluttered up with 'em anyways. Ugh!"

Suddenly Flapjack's mouth snapped open. His pipe fell out of his mouth and dumped hot ashes down the front of his open shirt. A wide grin split his long face and he began to chuckle as he got up and began rummaging around in an old wooden cupboard.

The cupboard was nothing but a

big soap box nailed to the wall, but in it Flapjack and Dodo kept various of their personal belongings. From its depths Flapjack produced a pad of writing paper, a bottle of thick ink and an ancient pen. He sat down to the table and began to write.

Tongue sticking out one corner of his mouth, the Odds and Ends rancher began to compose a letter. The wrapping from the Cheyenne newspaper on which was Carrie's writing was at his elbow. As best he could, Flapjack emulated the feminine flourishes with his pen. After much cussing, he completed his masterpiece and sat back in his chair to survey the results.

Dear Sir:

I am a school teacher, approaching middle age, living in the town of Antioch, Arizona. I am interested in your proposition. I am considered attractive, have chestnut hair, very dark, and can cook and sew. Will be glad to have you call a week after you get this letter, but I want you to keep it a secret as you will come here and say you are an old school friend of mine looking me up.

Of course if I do not like you, you will have to leave without saying anything to the townspeople. I expect you to court me in the usual manner, so people will not suspect. You can come here as if you were looking for a place to settle. My name is Laura Gilkey and anyone can direct you to my house.

Confidentially and hopefully,
Laura Gilkey.

"Education," opined Flapjack as he admired his own handiwork, "is shore a wonderful thing, yep. It mebbe is a dirty trick, but the situation calls for desperate measures. Dodo knows not what he does, the fat-faced gopher, an' Flapjack'll shore do anythin' fer a friend. Hee-ee ya-a-a-ah!"

The part owner of the Odds and Ends folded the letter carefully, inserted it in an envelope and placed a stamp on same. After which he went to work writing the address of the matrimonial bureau upon the face of the envelope.

"Waal," he drawled finally. "I figger that'll nip the impendin' tragedy in the bud. As I said to Dodo a few hours back, he ain't got no competition. Now if this gent looks half hu-

man, the school ma'am'll send Dodo out grazin' on the range of blissful single life fer good an' all, and the Odds an' Ends Ranch'll know no touch of female hand, an' all will be well, yep."

With the letter concealed in his pants pocket, Flapjack sat down to a very peaceful smoke. In spite of his aversion to the frailer specie, he had to admit to himself if that Laura Gilkey was something of a looker. The school teacher was perhaps a head taller than Dodo. She was not skinny nor was she fat, but simply plump, with the stature of an Amazon and a crowning glory of chestnut hair that was the envy of less fortunate females.

UP to the time that Dodo began to wilt under the spell of her big dark eyes, Laura had received little attention from the eligible bachelors in Antioch. The truth of the matter was that they could not have excited the interests of a Piegan squaw.

Flapjack was humming a tune and was getting ready for his bunk when his nose caught the scent of Dodo's return. The odor of a mixture known as Moonlight and Roses emanated from the smitten Romeo's sleek hair as he removed his wide-brimmed hat and entered the wikiup. On Dodo's face there was an angelic glow.

"Waal," grunted his partner, "Jes' stand quiet-like an' I'll snap my fingers an' shock yuh out of yore trance. What she say tonight, huh?"

Dodo breathed a sigh and sat down on a stool.

"She says it was so sudden she would have tuh have a coupla weeks tuh think it over. She was shore purty tuhnight, Flapjack. Her ha'r was like gol' spun by elfs in the moonlight, an' her eyes was like big waterholes filled up with purple ink. Ah-h-h-h-h-h!"

"I'll git yuh some sulphur an' merlasses," said Flapjack and a pained expression sat upon his face. "Yuh needs tonin' up, Dodo. Yuh shore look ready fer the loco lodge. Females, ugh! They're plumb—"

"I gotta break it to yuh, Flapjack," interrupted Dodo. "She says if we git married, she wouldn't have a ol' galoot—er—ol' gent like you around, as they wouldn't be nothin' romantic about thet, she says. So I'll buy yuh out an'—"

Flapjack threw his corncob against the wall and jumped up and down in rage.

"She said thet?" he bellowed. "She called me a ol'—waal. I won't sell out, yuh moon-faced wart! I'll buy *you* out. Nothin' could drag me offen the Odds and Ends, an' I'm gol-blasted shore no female kin. How I hate the critters! Dad rat it, how I hate 'em. Listen, yuh—"

"Tain't me," Dodo hastened to defend himself. "I says to her I couldn't jes' kick my pard out like he was a old boot. But she says waal, if yuh love me yuh'll do like I says an'—"

But Flapjack heard no more. He snatched up his blankets from his bunk and stamped out of the wikiup.

"I'm goin' out tuh sleep with the sheep," he flung back as he left. "I can't stand the smell o' thet ha'r oil. Listen, even the cows is blattin'. Ugh!"

Dodo sighed. He clasped his hands between his knees and gazed into the darkness.

Out in the open Flapjack snorted, then grinned as he felt of the letter he had written, fingering it avidly.

"Eve," he soliloquized. "I figger Dodo ain't the Adam yuh're goin' tuh feed a apple to, nope. Flapjack Tilley is runnin' this Eden, hee-e-e ya-a-a-ah!" So saying, the plotter pulled his blankets around himself and closed his eyes. The recent events were a balm to his conscience.

JUST a few days later, a stranger arrived in Antioch. He got off the stage and walked into the saloon. He wore a store suit, a brown derby hat, and a pair of squeaky yellow shoes. The newcomer was tall and broad-shouldered with a ruddy complexion. A luxuriant black mustache adorned his face and curled up at the ends.

Flapjack Tilley had gone into town for a fresh supply of tobacco and was just emerging from the general store when he got his first glimpse of the new arrival. He nudged close as the stranger asked the way to a hotel.

"Name's J. Billington Carstairs," the stranger orated, his fingers idling with a great gold watch fob. "Come to look over the vicinity for a mining company. Ah—er—looking up an old acquaintance of mine, too, by the by. Harumph! Not much of a town."

Flapjack regarded the honorable Carstairs with savage delight. The results of his brain-child had even surpassed his wildest expectations. Compared to this one-hundred-and-ninety-odd-pounds of what makes feminine hearts flutter, Dodo Sparks would seem like a mangy something that said bow-wow at sight of a rabbit.

"Glad to show yuh the town's hotel," offered Flapjack willingly. "Let me carry yore bag, stranger."

"Any promising mines in the neighborhood?" inquired J. Billington.

"Nope," replied his guide. "Reckon yuh won't do much business hereabouts. Pyrite Pete's been lookin' fer a mine fer sixty year, an' all he got was two rattler bites an' sunstroke."

"Ah—er—could you tell me something about Miss Laura Gilkey?" the stranger began hesitantly. "Ah—er—we used to know each other when we were knee high, yes indeed." He kneaded one end of his mustache haughtily as he ambled into the Antioch Hostelery.

"Y-yeah," replied Flapjack in high glee. "Shore is a purty woman. Seems everybody's tried tuh throw a rope over the gal, but she's pertic'lar, is Miss Gilkey. Yep."

"Much obliged," acknowledged Carstairs as Flapjack set his bag down. "Thanks for your trouble."

"Trouble?" repeated Flapjack. "It shore ain't trouble, nope. Hee-e-e ya-a-ah!" He turned and clumped out.

"Strange fellow," commented the stranger. "A little simple, perhaps. I

fail to see anything funny. Oh well," and he turned to the insignificant bald-headed man behind the desk and asked for the best room. "I must have a bath, of course. You can give me one?"

"Waal, stranger," announced old Purdy, the proprietor, "I kin give yuh the bes' room, but dad-gummed if I wash no *hombre*. Reckin yuh look able 'nough tuh do it yoreself. Hmph!"

Such was J. Billington Carstairs' introduction to Antioch.

THAT night Dodo Sparks slicked himself up again. He was a Romeo who did not intend to let grass grow under his feet. Exuding an aura of Moonlight and Roses he sallied forth, clutching a bouquet of wildflowers in his hand. Flapjack Tilley, engaged in washing bean stains from the supper dishes, watched his partner depart with an expectant gleam in his eyes.

Dodo's parting remark had been:

"Waal, it's a good thing yuh've seed it my way. It jes has tuh be. When a gent meets the gal of his dreams, no *hombre* kin block the path tuh the halter—er—altar, Flapjack. See?"

"Shore, I *sabe*," Flapjack had assured the round-faced cowpoke, turning his face to hide a grin. "Good luck, Dodo. Yuh need it."

Across the nocturnal landscape rode Dodo, until he saw the light shining from the window of his light of love. He dipped down into Antioch and rode toward the wikiup which stood just outside of town and was hidden partially by a clump of trees. And then the lilting tune that bubbled from his lips suddenly whistled back through his teeth, for in front of the school ma'am's door stood a fancy rig with two horses attached to it.

Dodo dismounted from his own steed and drew himself and mount into the shadows. The door opened and out stepped Laura Gilkey, dressed in her Sabbath finery. Escorting the lady was an *hombre* attired like one of the pictures Dodo

had seen in mail order catalogues. Without a doubt this was a man of the world, a Lochinvar who spelled oblivion for one Dodo Sparks. Sweet words drifted to his ears.

"Oh, Jeffrey, how did you know where to find me?" came the simpering voice of Laura Gilkey, and Dodo's innards became petrified. "Just think. It's thirty years since you carried my books home from school. It's fate, Jeffrey, I know it. I knew we'd meet again some day."

"Ah, Laura," ejaculated J. Billington, with appropriate gestures, "to think I've found you once more. True, 'tis fate, my sweet, fate. And a most amazing thing."

Dodo, however, waited to hear no more. He got aboard his calico and, steeped to the ears in woe, rode out into the dreary night.

"I'll end it all," he mumbled as he rode on and on. "My heart's bruk. Ah-h-h-h-h Lawd!" He circled the town eight times, then found himself in front of the Antioch saloon. The horse whinnied and dipped its nose deep into the watering trough.

"That's it," said Dodo mournfully. "I'll drown my sorrows, too. Yep." He entered the oasis and demanded a full bottle of red-eye. After the contents were poured into his vitals, he strode unsteadily to the bar and picked up another.

"I-I'll end it all, yesshir!" he reiterated time and again. "I shore will. I'm a heart-bruk *hombre* an'—"

Two hours later Dodo was carried bodily from the saloon and loaded like a sack of flour onto the back of his horse. The barkeep slapped the calico on the rump and it loped out of town, heading for home. The next morning Flapjack Tilley looked high and low for Dodo. His horse was standing by the corral fence, still saddled, but Dodo was not attached to it. After quite a search Flapjack came upon his partner sitting on the very edge of a ravine. A rope was looped around the dejected lover's neck and the other end was tied to a limb.

"I will end it all," Dodo was repeating, at the same time endeavor-

ing to summon enough courage to jump.

"Waal, make up yore mind, yuh dad ratted idjut," grinned Flapjack, inwardly gloating. As he spoke, however, he lifted the noose from Dodo's head.

"Whut ails yuh, yuh ol' cuss?" he thrust out at the miserable man. "Whut in hell—"

"All is lost," wailed Dodo, pulling out his gun. "I will end it all. *Adios*, Flapjack, the ranch is yoren. My heart is bruk. My gal has—"

His partner tore the gun loose from Dodo's grasp, stifling a chuckle as he led the would-be suicide to their wikipup.

"I told yuh females was pizen," orated the long-faced jasper to the weebegone lover. "I'm a *hombre* that has suffered at their hands. We're feller martyrs, Dodo. Waal, I'll cook yuh a couple aigs an' yuh'll feel better. Stop groaning, yuh idjut. Now, as I was sayin' a day or so ago, about them hawgs, Dodo. We could have our own bacon an'—"

But Dodo Sparks did not hear. He was staring out through the door at the dismal world. He emptied the last of a paper sack of tobacco into his pipe and tamped it down. Throwing the pipe into the woodbox, he shoved the empty sack between his teeth. When Flapjack announced that grub was ready, Dodo got up and went to the table. He sprinkled sugar on his eggs and poured salt into his coffee, proceeding to swallow them with disinterested gulps. Flapjack Tilley shook his head and wondered if he had overplayed his hand.

There was work to be done on the Odds and Ends that day and Flapjack thought that honest labor would make Dodo forget. But the crushed Romeo could not keep his mind on his work. He roped a sheep and was about to brand it when Flapjack came to the wooly's rescue. Soon thereafter he captured a calf and began to bathe it with sheep dip, whereupon Flapjack, with accompanying gestures, cussed a blue streak and told Dodo to crawl some

place where he would not be under the feet of *hombres* who had all their marbles.

Dodo took the hint and rode out of the ranch, heading for Antioch. He found the town agog over the romance between J. Billington Carstairs and Laura Gilkey. Dodo got spifficated once more.

Into the saloon came the shining example of what the well-dressed dude should wear. J. Billington carried a cane and flourished it pompously as he strutted to the bar. Dodo's eyes blazed and he hauled out his gun.

"Yuh stole my gal," he yipped. "Yuh're a snake in the grass!"

Bang! A neat hole appeared in J. Billington's derby hat.

"I—I—er—s—say now," protested the man from the city, his knees wobbling. "Er—help, police!"

AN arm well-upholstered with muscle hooked around Dodo's neck while a horny hand tore the gun from his grasp. Then Dodo was dragged to the calaboose down the street, the heels of his boots etching parallel lines in the dust. The sheriff threw his captive into durance vile and brushed off his hands.

Two hours later, when Dodo's jag had worn off a bit, he received two visitors, Laura Gilkey and J. Billington Carstairs.

"Jeffrey," the school ma'am assured Dodo, "does not wish to prosecute. He has a big heart and—"

"He come like a thief in the night," insisted the prisoner. "He stole yuh from me an' I—"

"Now, Mr. Sparks, do be sensible," urged Laura. "Jeffrey is an old sweetheart of mine. We're to be married two days hence. It was fate, wasn't it Jeffrey? Tell Mr. Sparks how—"

"Ah—er—yes," and J. Billington dusted off a chair before sitting down. "A most amazing coincidence. I—er—have been lonely, Sparks, old fellow. I consulted a matrimonial bureau in Cheyenne about acquiring a wife with—ah—certain qualifications. A letter soon came in reply to

my advertisement and it was from—er—Miss Gilkey, but she declares she never wrote it.

"Most amazing, Sparks, eh what? Someone would have his joke, ha! But he brought me to the sweetheart of my youth. Ah 'twas fate, Sparks. Sorry, my man, but—" He lapsed into a glowing silence as he removed the letter from his pocket.

Dodo pushed his hand through the bars for the letter which J. Billington extended to him. He opened it and read the words with absorption. The handwriting was familiar, very familiar, and the paper on which it was scrawled was even more familiar. Dodo Sparks jumped to his feet and howled like a coyote.

"Let me out of hyar," he stormed. "Gimme my gun!"

"Shore," agreed the sheriff, "but if yuh starts anythin', I'll salivate yuh quick, *sabe?*"

"I'm gunnin' fer a polecat!" yelled the duped Romeo as he burst out of the jail.

"My word!" exclaimed J. Billington. "Are there many skunks about?" The sheriff guffawed. Miss Laura Gilkey did not know just what to do. She gulped and took her prospective husband's arm.

"Come, Jeffrey," she coaxed. "We must call on the Reverend Tolliver right away."

FLAPJACK TILLEY was propping up part of the groggy corral fence when he saw Dodo Sparks come riding in, his calico mount burning up pounds of energy. "Greetin's, Dodo," he greeted the returning cowpoke with a flip of his hand. "Where yuh b—"

Bang! Bang! A bullet splintered the handle of the hammer which Flapjack had clutched in his hand. Another sliced the air close to his nose and he sprawled on the ground. Dodo was off his horse and crouching behind a big boulder when Flapjack, gun in hand, raised his head to appraise the situation.

"It was you that writ that letter, yuh skunk!" Dodo was yowling. "Yuh low-down snake in the grass. Flap-

jack, I'm declarin' war, by lickety hell!" *Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Flapjack counted the shots, then got to his feet.

"I'm comin' Dodo, gol blast yuh!" he shouted. "Six shots yuh wasted. I'll lam the hell outa yuh. Shore I writ the letter, as I figgered tuh save yuh from worse'n death!"

Dodo knew he had no chance to reload. He leaped for his horse and made the saddle in the nick of time. Flapjack's clawing fingers brushed the stirrup as the calico bolted.

"I warn yuh, yuh long-faced galoot," Dodo flung back, "I shoots on sight. I dast yuh tuh show yore big nose in Antioch!"

"It's war, huh?" Flapjack blazed after his partner. "Waal, I aims tuh visit Antioch tonight."

When Dodo's dust cloud had rolled around a bend in the road, Flapjack sheathed his gun and sat down dejectedly.

"Gol blast it, the blame cat's outen the sack," he groaned. "I reckon I shore gummed things up. Females, drat 'em!"

The town of Antioch was all a-twitter. There were the impending nuptials of J. Billington Carstairs and Laura Gilkey, plus the blood feud of Flapjack Tilley and Dodo Sparks to break the monotony. The sheriff pulled on both guns and waited for the fireworks.

Flapjack Tilley, a belligerent hunch to his shoulders, rode into Antioch at sundown. Dodo Sparks reeled out of the saloon and snapped a shot at his erstwhile partner. The bullet hit a noncombatant across the street right in the seat of the pants. The outraged citizen blamed it on Flapjack and let blaze with both his own guns.

The spirit of Mars spread and every jasper in the town who had a grievance against someone else succumbed and started unloading guns. Ten minutes later every front window in Antioch was splintered and Flapjack and Dodo were tossed into jail.

"Let 'em kill each other," commanded the sheriff and he sat across

the street from the calaboose to wait for results. Sounds issued from the quaking square building as if a buffalo had been locked up within it and was trying to buck its way out. When a lull came in the disturbance, most of Antioch barged forward to get a look at the shambles.

They found Dodo in a heap in one corner, an eye closed and his finger rammed into his mouth, taking an inventory of his teeth. One hand still clutched a boot. Flapjack was leaning against the wall with both hands clapped over his nose. He had a big bump over one eye and his pants had rippled down around his feet. On the floor of the jail was a shirt sleeve, two halves of a vest and a pair of battered hats.

"Reckon yuh've had yore fun," grinned the sheriff complacently. "*Vamose*, both o' yuh. We don't aim tuh feed yuh."

Dodo staggered out. In the doorway he turned.

"This is the end," he squeaked. "Flapjack, it's the end."

"Gimme my gun," growled the long-faced cowpoke. "I'll salivate the moon-faced toad."

Dodo did not tarry. He rode out of Antioch toward the Odds and Ends Ranch. Continuing on to a little tumble-down shack in the north pasture, he crawled inside to ease his aching frame. Flapjack, too, went on home, but to the main wikiup. During the days that ensued, he and Dodo carried on. At times they would meet in the line of duty, but neither spoke.

AND then came a day two weeks after J. Billington Carstairs and Laura Gilkey had been made one. Dodo had occasion to ride into town; and as he passed the Carstairs, *née* Gilkey, wikiup, he beheld a strange sight. Jeffrey was bolting out of the door of the house two steps ahead of a frying pan. The erstwhile exponent of sartorial splendor had a woman's apron tied about his middle. His shirt sleeves were rolled up to the elbow.

Dodo, jaws agape, stopped his

horse, dismounted and coaxed it into the lee of a pair of cottonwoods. Out of the house issued the one great passion of Dodo's life, Laura Gilkey Carstairs. Under one arm she carried a bundle of wearing apparel. Jeffrey Billington Carstairs skidded to a stop near a bench on which reposed a washtub. From this rose a cloud of steam. The gent with the luxuriant black mustache turned to stare timidly at his spouse.

"Sure, I was only fooling, my sweet," he said quaveringly, his voice full of shivers. "You are quite right. I should do the washing."

The woman tossed the bundle of clothes into the tub.

"You bet you will, you loafer!" she lashed out. "You'll do something to earn your board an' keep. Hmph! Have means, have yuh? You big clothes dummy!" She strode away back into their domicile.

For several minutes Dodo Sparks watched J. Billington scrub clothes against a corrugated washboard. After a while he tiptoed up. Suddenly his face took on a look of acute nausea. For the article of clothing over which J. Billington labored at the moment was a lady's beruffled petticoat.

"Ah—er," began Dodo, "g'mornin', Mr. Carstairs. Shore is some day, huh?"

The response was a muffled curse and the washerman slammed the petticoat into the soapy tub.

"I'd like to get hold of the person who wrote that letter," he stormed. "If I ever find out, by godfrey, I'll get a gun and—" He paused and wiped his steaming brows.

"Why, Mr. Carstairs," replied Dodo. "Ain't yuh havin' wedded bliss?"

"Bah!" spat out J. Billington. "She's a hellion. Can't smoke in the house. Have to take my shoes off before I go into the parlor. Wash my face and hands before every meal and twice besides. Have to wash the clothes! Oh, if I ever get my hands on that son of a seacock who wrote —ah—you got any idea who did it, Sparks?"

Dodo's face immediately became expressionless. At the moment a wave of affection was sweeping through his frame, and the object of the emotion was Flapjack Tilley. Dodo knew that Flapjack was truly one of nature's noblemen.

"Nope," he replied to the question. "I ain't got the least idee."

"Cripes!" exclaimed J. Billington. "An' after I wash these, I have to scrub the floor. I have to cook the supper so's it'll be ready when she comes back from the schoolhouse. I have to—"

"Stop," interposed Dodo, forcing back a grin. "It is too much, yep. Waal, Mr. Carstairs, thanks a lot. I'll be pilgrimin'."

"Thankin' me?" the miserable husband stormed. "What for, you—"

"Mr. Sparks"—a voice suddenly pierced the ozone—"get along and mind your business. Jeffrey has got work to do and he hasn't time to chin with you." Her eyes snapped fire as she turned upon her husband. "You haven't got all day to do that washin'," she barked at him. "You've got the hen coops to whitewash. The yard has to be swept up. And after you've done that, I want you to—"

Dodo waited to hear no more. Heart singing, he walked to his horse. The hard ground seemed covered with goose-down up to his knees. Seemingly lifted up by invisible hands, he swung lightly into the saddle and urged his steed toward Antioch. There he purchased six cans of peaches and as many plugs of tobacco. Flapjack Tilley's two passions were canned peaches and Sickie plug.

FLAPJACK was in town a hour ago," the sheriff informed him. "Reckon yuh'd wished yuh'd been here to salivate the hoss-faced ol' galoot. Figger he must be an ornery ol' coot, Dodo, as—"

"I reckon mebbe this town'll need a new sheriff if yuh open yore trap about Flapjack jes' oncet more tuh me," cracked Dodo. "All other gents that ain't hidin' behind a star an' wants tuh orate about Flapjack's

shortcomin's, draw close an' say thar prayers."

Nobody approached. The sheriff scratched his head, shook it and sauntered away.

Dodo rode out of town and hied him to the Odds and Ends. As he neared the corral, the prodigal cow-poke knew how Moses must have felt when he showed his flock the promised land. He thought of J. Billington Carstairs, the steaming tub of water, and shivered.

Flapjack Tilley was puttering around the wikiup when Dodo drew near. Immediately he yanked out his gun.

"Stop where yuh are," he yipped. "I shoots at the drop o' the hat."

"I ain't lookin' fer a fight, Flapjack," confessed Dodo meekly. "I ain't got a gun on me, nope."

"Waal, come on, but I'm watchin' yuh," growled his partner. Suspiciously he eyed the bundle that Dodo held under his arm. The returning Dodo ambled up like a dog that has done something wrong and expects a kick in the slats.

"I—er—harumph—got some peaches, Flapjack," he stammered, untying the string of his package. "Knowed yuh like 'em a heap." Flapjack stood, arms akimbo, watching his partner warily.

"Reckon mebbe they're pizened, huh? Git goin', yuh moon-faced toad."

Dodo cast his oblique glance at Flapjack and their eyes met. Immediately his gaze fell to the toes of his boots. He cleared his throat, coughed, and kicked at a stick lying near his feet.

"Ah—er—I got some plug ter-backer, too," he said, his eyes avoiding Flapjacks. "Sickle Plug. Light color. I—er—figgered mebbe yuh wouldn't have time tuh pilgrim intuh Antioch an'—"

"Got three plugs this mawnin'," interrupted Flapjack, his long face losing its expression of wariness. "Reckon I don't need none." He eyed Dodo quizzically. The latter was shifting from one boot to the

(Concluded on page 98)

Naked Knives

Matched Against the Death-Dealing Poco Novos of the Brazilian Jungle, Fast-Thinking Hap Hazard Calls His Ready Fists into Lightning-Quick Action!

By RALPH A. BENNITT

Author of "Talons of Steel," "Knotted String," etc.

A QUARTER mile east of the railroad clearing, sheer exhaustion forced "Hap" Hazard to slow his pounding feet to a walk. His lean sun-browned face, his slim hands, were bleeding from deep scratches caused by spiny thickets along the trail. It had been a mad run ever since Manoel and Joao had discovered Lon Greene's hat, coat, and shirt, on the cross that marked the grave of Ferreira, the breed.

A subtle warning, left by the Poco Novos!

Lifting leaden feet, Hap Hazard scrambled over a huge half-rotted log. Ahead, he perceived a fork in the dim trail, a fact which brought relief without his realizing it. With the two "boys" gone to Tarbell's camp for help, he had better wait here. That siege of malaria, he was thinking, had taken a lot out of him. Suddenly dizzy, he sat down.

The fearful muggy heat gripped him like the pall of a Turkish bath. The tropical sun, so fiercely bright above those tremendous trees, passed through moss-shrouded branches and gave only a mottled gloom among the dense thickets. Over all hung a quiet, a brooding quiet that gave Hap the creeps.

Gradually, he became aware of a low humming which he laid to the blood pounding in his ears. Specks, floating before his rheumy, blood-shot eyes might be insects—and might not. Just then he could not tell.

But as his laboring breath eased he became certain of one thing:



Hazard stood alone, fighting desperately

Manoel and Joao had been right. If the Poco Novo Indians had caught the resident engineer, what could one man, even an armed white one, do against a score or more of the untamed ones who roam the *sertao* of western Brazil?

Staring at the .44 Colt in his right fist, Hazard cursed his boss, weakly, monotonously. The hand was cold, nerveless. He doubted if he could squeeze the trigger even if he were fool enough to go on with this hare-brained venture. A venture for what?

To save the life of a man he despised!

An imp whispered in Hap Hazard's ear and for a brief space a queer glow lurked in his dark eyes: "Turn back, you idiot! Greene's a goner by now. With him dead, chief engineer Doran will have to promote you *this time*. You disobeyed orders again, lowering that grade this morning; you can explain that to the chief where Greene wouldn't listen. Now's your chance for the job you should have had, anyway, instead of that fat four-flusher—"

A HORRID picture, a man lying helpless and bleeding from a hundred cuts, flashed into Hazard's mind. Swearing, he came to his feet and wiped the sweat from his brow. Then as he gazed down at his sweat-streaked khaki breeches and high laced boots, a wry grin twisted his lips.

"Gettin' that way now, are yuh, feller?" he said, half aloud. "Like a buzzard, eh?— Well, march, damn you! Maybe these Indians will run when you go *bang-bang*—"

A low animal snarl stopped him as if stung. He dropped to a crouch behind the bole of a great purple-heart in the fork of the trail. Feathers of fear tickled his spine, then he relaxed slightly. Jaguars, even the more dreaded black panthers, do not attack grown men; their presence proved that the Poco Novos were not in the immediate vicinity.

He peered cautiously around the tree but could see nothing because

of intervening brush. With senses sharpened, he took a quick survey above and behind him.

Hanging lianas, from pencil size to that of the thickness of his own lean body, hung from the lower tree branches. Orchids, bewildering in their riot of color, clung to the mould in tree forks. But to Hazard the fragrance they gave off was nauseating.

Forcing himself erect in spite of a retching stomach, he stole forward along the left-hand trail. He chose that way because it was slightly more worn and led diagonally toward the Rio Mutunga, a mile to the north. Even the rubber-gathering *caoutcheiros* avoided this territory, knowing that the main village of the Poco Novos lay along the river somewhere near.

Ferreira, the breed muleskinner, had seen it the week before, only to be driven back whence he came. Dying from a thousand cuts, he had gasped out words:

"What—is one female savage? For that—they take my life. Avenge me, *amigos*." With that he had stifled in death.

"Jungle justice," Tarbell, the Texan, had drawled, "has plumb caught up with yuh, feller."

So these white men, having plenty of other troubles in driving steel through the jungles, buried the breed with a curse instead of a eulogy.

A twig snapped under Hazard's foot and a coughing snarl came in answer. Then, as the white man, tense in every muscle, shoved his gun forward, a long mottled shape crashed into the brush and was gone. Hazard caught his breath at the sight of the feast he had interrupted.

And then the reason for the humming he had heard became clear. Beside the trail lay Lon Greene's black saddle mule with a six-foot cane arrow sticking out from its ribs. On the already bloating remains a swarm of blue-green flies were clustered thickly.

Eyes wide, Hazard started at the dread weapon which can pierce a man's body as a needle does cheese.

Remembering a certain sordid boast which Greene had made yesterday, Hazard quickly conjectured what had happened. A small party had probably seen the resident engineer ride to the poker game last night in Tarbell's camp; had nabbed him on the return.

He'd be dead by now, else why kill the mule here? Greene must have made a break for it only to be cut down. He might, even now, be suffering the tortures of the damned. Breath coming in short gasps that choked him, Hazard went on. On past the horrid sight, expecting every moment to find another more horrid. A hundred paces farther along he halted at a sharp turn in the trail.

Animal instinct warned him to make that halt; every nerve in his tense body shrieked for him to go back. But, bending low, he made the turn to see an open little glade. Beyond that only the gloom of the forest again.

At that moment a distant wailing scream reached him. Thin, ululating, it came from the lungs of a man in an extremity of terror. But in its timbre Hazard recognized Greene's voice. Forgetful of danger to himself, he raced forward.

A tree root tripped him, sent him sprawling, and flung the gun from his hand. Cursing, he dove for his weapon. "The fool! Monkey with these women—"

A long arrow swished just above him as he plunged downward. It came with the *whirr* of a swooping eagle and slapped into a bush beside him. Snatching up his gun, Hazard rolled to the scant protection of a six-inch black palm. He stilled his wheezing breath and listened.

Off to his right was a stealthy rustling. How many were waiting to send those slivers of death into him, he could not tell. Probably moving now to get in back of him. Putting his torn Panama hat on a short stick, Hazard thrust it out in front of him. No result.

Again came that piercing cry, nearer now. There was a wild

thrashing beyond the glade; the pounding of feet; the crack of a rifle. Then, gibbering unintelligible moans, Lon Greene reeled into sight. Like a bull ape amok he smashed blindly into bushes beside the trail, tripped, pitched headlong. He pulled himself to his knees, head over shoulder.

"This way, Lon," Hazard sang out. "Run low, there's another over—"

A strangled bleat came from the fleeing man as he redoubled his efforts. He did not know that his fat naked torso made a shining target for the hidden watcher.

A marvelous coolness gripped Hazard now. His eyes searched the green wall, saw the front half of an arrow aimed at the white bulk. He swung his gun a little to the right and fired waist high. A shrill scream, a wild thrashing, then it was quiet over there in the bushes.

GREENE was almost up to the tree behind which lay his assistant when seven Indians bounded into view with a chorus of guttural howls. Their leader, a half-clad Poco Novo with long tangled black hair, clutched a .44 Winchester. The six followers, except for a G-string, were naked. Short, bandy-legged, pot-bellied, each gripped a long black-palm bow and several six-foot arrows.

The chief fired his precious rifle from the hip. Whatever his intentions, the slug whistled ten feet above Lon Greene's head. The other six deftly fitted arrows to strings as they ran. Their hands came back as Greene bounded over Hazard's outstretched legs. And this time the chief raised his rifle to his shoulder.

Lips compressed as he held his breath, Hap Hazard aimed deliberately at the chief's right shoulder and fired. But his aim was faulty or a twig deflected the bullet. With a burbling squawk the chief plunged to earth, scrabbling at his bleeding breast. His men dropped their weapons and fled, shrieking with fear.

Hap Hazard listened to the sounds

of their wild retreat as he reloaded. A queer apathy gripped him. He got to his feet and walked slowly up to where the chief lay writhing on the ground. And in the white man's heart came a deep pity followed by a cold rage for the other white man who had caused this evil.

Picking up the fallen rifle, he stood staring down into the beady black eyes of the Poco Novo. Frothy blood came from the man's lips from the lung wound but he stared fiercely, unwaveringly, at the one who had laid him low.

"Sorry, grandfather," Hazard muttered in Portuguese.

To his surprise, the Indian answered in the same language instead of the Tupi tongue, the *lingoa geral* of the *sertao*. And as the chief went on in faltering breath, Hazard's eyes stung with sudden moisture.

"We meant only to frighten him," said the chief. "He did no real harm to my daughter—"

Then when the old Indian's eyes glazed in death, Hazard bent down, closed the sightless eyes, and ran from there with stumbling feet.

THE whistling frogs were heralding the blessed coolness of night when Hap Hazard came out on the pole-floor porch which overlooked the silvery Mamore. A shower and change into clean dry clothes should have made him feel better, but did not. Those black shadows, reaching out across the broad river from the Bolivian shore, seemed portent of disaster.

He slumped into a steamer chair and gulped greedily of the ginger ale highball which Lon Greene shoved across the table to him. They had distinguished guests this night and the resident engineer was in his element entertaining Chief Engineer Doran and Principal Assistant Engineer Munch.

Doran was slight, quick in his movements, with a pair of cool grey eyes that brooked no interference with his ideas of organization and discipline. Munch was tall, gaunt, phlegmatic. Both were old-timers

who had helped fight railroads through the Choctaw country.

Stiff with a nameless dread, Hazard barely listened to Lon Greene's boasting recital of his escapade earlier that day. Knowing that Lon was safe enough, Hazard had returned to the prosaic task of setting slope stakes where he had left off. Stakes which would make a fill some ten feet lower than the grade established by Doran, himself.

Two meters (six and a half feet) above the flood marks he had found on the trees, was the minimum height for the long embankment starting at the Rio Mutunga. And, knowing that a mistake had been made, Hazard had deliberately disobeyed orders. And then had not been able to get up nerve enough to tell Doran when the chief came along late in the afternoon. A coward—

"A man," Greene was saying loudly, "has to save his own skin, I figured. They had me tied to this tree and were nicking my flesh with their long knives. It looked bad, I don't mind telling you. I kept working at the withes around my wrists and finally freed myself. I slammed a couple of those brown babies on the jaw and beat it while they were collecting their weapons."

Knowing the truth of the matter, Hazard made no comment. At that, he conceded, it was frightening enough since Lon Greene could not have known the Poco Novos' intentions. Looking into the resident engineer's pale blue eyes, Hazard found himself wondering how the fellow could now be so cool about it.

"Bad business, I suppose," Greene went on, "running away from these savages. White man's burden, y'know. Thought if I could get the chief alone and get his gun I'd scatter the rest. About then I met Hazard. All he had to do was shoot once and they beat it. Wasn't much to it, after all."

Doran had sat in frowning concentration; now he smiled faintly at the younger engineer.

"Lucky you happened to be there,

Mr. Hazard; we'll have to hear that, too. But how is it they captured you in the first place, Mr. Greene?"

"Well, Tarbell wanted some stakes south of the Rio Mutunga to throw a gang of Spaniards on first thing this morning. So, last night I lined up Hazard here on what I wanted, figuring, however, on being with him myself." The resident engineer grinned jovially at his assistant. "Hap had an idea the grade was way too high, but I showed him—right, Hap?"

Hazard flushed as the three men looked at him, but only nodded. He opened his mouth, then closed it on a hard line. He saw the trap Greene was setting for him, but bided his time. That apparent good nature meant nothing. And at that moment Hazard had a startling thought; he saw the reason why Lon Greene had asked for his erstwhile rival in another camp to be his assistant on this new residency.

"Not entirely to gloat over me as I thought," Hazard reasoned dully. "He figured he'd ride me until I socked him, or failed to carry out one of his crazy orders. Then Doran here would do the rest—kapoot!"

SOME of the cold fury he had felt toward his boss came back to Hazard. He began listening attentively as Lon Greene continued.

"These yella-bellies don't scare me," Greene said, inhaling deeply on a cigarette, "so after dinner I rode down to Tarbell's camp to let him know that the engineers were on the job. I knew we could slap in stakes while he was getting squared away with his Spaniards.

"We played a little poker, had a few drinks, and then I started home. 'Bout two in the morning. Just as I passed the spot where we buried Ferreira, that Indian chief wearing pajama pants stepped out with a rifle aimed at my gizzard. And since he had about twenty more with their damn arrows on their bowstrings, I stopped. He said something in their Tupi lingo, I guess; anyway, I suddenly saw a million stars. Next

thing I knew it was daylight and I was tied to a tree. That's all."

"Queer," Doran observed as Greene tenderly touched the back of his scalp. "Those fellows didn't bother the locating party last May except to steal a few things. We all know why Ferreira was killed and nobody blames them."

Doran's grey eyes bored into Greene's. "You mixed up in anything like that?"

"Me?" The resident engineer laughed heartily, and Hap Hazard busied himself lighting a Veado cigarette. From the tail of his eye he watched his boss. Greene chuckled as he mixed another round of highballs. "I didn't touch 'em except with my fist," he said glibly. "Have another, chief."

Doran wagged a finger; Munch and Hazard accepted. The chief's eyes rested a moment on Hazard, then flicked to Greene.

"By the way, Greene," Doran said casually, "I saw Tarbell working south of the Rio Mutunga and he said the fill in that stretch is a lot lighter than he expected, that he'd finish a month sooner—"

"That's right!" Pale of face, Hazard came to his feet. Bitterly, then, he regretted that he had not explained matters when Doran was right there on the ground. Through a haze he saw the chief engineer stiffen slightly, saw Munch finish his drink, while Greene, purple of face, snapped to his feet. "I—" Hazard gulped, then rushed on, "lowered the grade three meters."

"What?" crackled from Lon Greene.

Doran held up a hand and for an instant there was a heavy silence. Surprisingly, it was Munch who spoke up.

"I'm confident that Hap had a good reason," said he with a faint smile. "Like the time he changed the location of the culvert I had selected. It was a better location."

"Which involved disobedience to specific orders," Doran cut in icily. Hazard shot Munch a grateful look but froze as the chief impaled him

with a stern look. "Hazard, I'm truly sorry. I warned you of the outcome if you again took it upon yourself to make changes contrary to orders."

"Come, come, Henry," Munch interrupted with a shade of asperity. "Let the lad explain. Good men are scarce, and pretty expensive to bring down to this lousy place."

"A river boat," Doran said, as if he had not heard, "leaves next Wednesday."

"Thanks," Hap Hazard said stiffly, "I'll take it." The skin on his jaw tightened and his lips felt like two pieces of cardboard. But as he caught a look of delighted triumph on Lon Greene's face, rage shook him. "Go on, laugh," he cried. "Saying the company fifty thousand cubic meters means nothing to you, Lon Greene."

"Why," sneered the resident engineer, "didn't you lower the grade three more meters? Then we wouldn't have had any embankment to put in there. The choo-choo—"

"Hark!" Munch snapped suddenly. "Somebody's coming!"

Drumming hoofs sounded across the clearing of the little camp. Then spurs jingling, Tarbell leaped to the front porch, clumped across the pole floor of the palm leaf shack to burst upon the four startled men. The Texan was excited, but he spoke in a soft drawl.

"Hell, now, white folks," he said. "The Poco Novos is shore on a rampage. Killed two of my Spaniards, punctured a couple more with their dang arrows. I was this side and tossed a little lead at 'em, but they just flopped low and went on shooting. So I wagged a signal to Jack Hurley on t'other end. He rid hell for leather to round up the boys in my camp. Git yore rifles!"

Eyes wide, Hap Hazard was staring at a picture of the Indian chief writhing on the ground while withered hands clawed at a bleeding breast. In utter loathing, he turned to Lon Greene when the Texan had finished.

The fat face of the resident engi-

neer had blanched, but it reddened when he saw Hazard watching him.

"We have four Winchesters," he blustered. "They'll run like dogs when we start mowing 'em down. This job's got to be safe from any more funny business. Hap, get the rifles while I see about the mules."

"Damn," Tarbell grunted as the big man lumbered off. "Reckon I was dead wrong about that jasper when I figured he was mostly wind." He broke off and stared at Hazard who had not stirred. Tense in every muscle, Hap was trying to reason out the purpose of the Poco Novo's raid.

"**S**HAKE a leg, feller," urged the Texan, "or—" His lip curled a little in an inference that was plain.

"Get the rifles and ammunition, *Mister Hazard*," Doran said with cold emphasis. "Under the circumstances, we shall not expect you to do more for this company."

"Hell with that!" Hap burst out. "I'm going anyway!" He pulled away angrily as Munch gripped a shoulder. "I may be fired but that won't stop me from seeing this through. After that you can all just go—"

"Steady, lad," Munch said. "You told us about meeting those Indians; what's on your mind?"

"I was thinking that we ought to take an interpreter to talk Tupi," Hap said in a choked voice. A lump had come into his throat at Munch's understanding and support. Jerking about to hide the sudden moisture in his eyes, he saw Greene standing near.

"Gonna use diplomacy on 'em?" Greene asked nastily.

"You shut that big trap before I do it for you," Hap Hazard blared fiercely. Oblivious to the murderous gleam he caught in Greene's eye, he whirled on the two older men. "I told you I killed their chief when they were chasing—that! We owe 'em restitution. And we're gonna have to pay it. The chief talked Portuguese. Before he died he told me—"

"Bugs!" Lon Greene roared. "Let's get going. We gossip—"

"Greene," Doran crackled, "I'm handling this. And I want the whole truth of why they captured you. Out with it!"

"Wasn't much of anything," Greene grumbled. "Haven't seen any angels flying around here, myself. Anyhow, I was crossing the Rio Mutunga on the pack-train bridge when I see one of these Indian girls in bathing. So help me, I just got off to watch her and she ran for the brush, hollering her head off."

"And the chief," Hap snarled, "said they only meant to scare you." It was on his lips to tear down all of Greene's boasting story, but he bit back the words. "So if Joao will explain matters, we may learn what they want to leave us alone."

Munch smiled faintly, perhaps at Hazard's unconscious use of "us." Doran's teeth clicked.

"It might work," he decided. "We will try it. This job's going ahead."

THE moon was high and the dark jungle looked all the blacker as the little party cantered down the weedy right of way.

With Joao trudging alongside, Hazard began giving instructions. It was plain that the young Brazilian did not relish his task, but his sober bearing and the way he clutched his machete assured the American that he would go through.

Lon Greene was dawdling behind the other three when Hap galloped to catch up. It was apparent that the resident engineer had been pondering Hazard's words, for he leaned over in the saddle with a conciliatory grin.

"Darn it, Hap," he scolded, "why didn't you keep your mouth shut about changing that grade?"

"I'll bite," Hazard answered morosely. Well, why hadn't he? Lon would have, but then Lon was smooth. That was one reason why he had been promoted.

"—too stubborn in your ideas," Greene was saying. "You fight 'em against your own interests. Now,

a word from me will fix it with the chief."

"How?" Hap asked with growing irritation.

"Easy." Greene laughed. "He thinks you deliberately beefed a sacred cow. You didn't actually disobey an explicit order because I was to meet you and iron out our argument but could not 'count the Indians grabbing me. I'll go to the mat for you but I'll have to tell him you admit you used poor judgment and are willing to correct your mistake."

Hazard saw the other's game, for a blurred second he was tempted to "take water." He would not have to go home whipped, to face the wondering eyes of two worshipping kid brothers. A harsh laugh was jarred from him as Greene ended on a patronizing note and his face in the moonlight became like stone.

"My mistake, eh, Lon?" Hazard stared off down the narrow clearing toward the Rio Mutunga which they were approaching. He jerked a thumb at the slender canes which, springing upward in a few months' time, are so useful in making the roofs and sides of jungle huts.

"You gave Doran the elevation of flood water and he established grade two meters above. You got that elevation from the mud marks on those canes; you did because you told me yesterday to do the same. Only I didn't."

Lon Greene drew in a hissing breath. "Well, what of it? If you are leaving, what do you care?"

"Because if I live through this fracas, I figure to go on being an engineer. And I'm just mean enough to want to watch you squirm." Hap's voice suddenly lashed out like a whip. "Now, trot up there! And you tell the chief *all* about your mistake—or I will!"

"I'll tell 'im," Greene muttered. Mouth open and eyes gleaming, he glared into Hazard's face. Then as Greene fumbled with his rifle, Hap jerked his mule back on its haunches. He read murder in those staring eyes.

The attack came swiftly. Tarbell was pointing toward a dozen mounted men approaching the far side of the river when Hazard heard a stick snap off to his right. A furtive figure darted back from a patch of moonlight.

"Look out!" Hap tumbled to the ground as he yelled it. And the others, although hampered with rifles, were quick to obey the warning.

There was a whirr of feathered shafts. Some whizzed through the space where men had been a second earlier; others thudded into the flesh of the mules like a brief roll of drums. Hazard's mule dropped like a chunk of lead; Greene's, whirling with a scream from an arrow in its rump, plunged toward Hap.

Hazard escaped the flying hoofs only by rolling over the body of his own dead animal just as Greene's rifle cracked viciously from behind a stump. The slug whizzed past Hap's ear but he clung to the ground, glad that he wore khaki instead of the white duck that Greene and Doran had on.

That Greene meant to kill him, Hap had no doubt. Safe from bullets, yet he was exposed to another volley of arrows when they should come. He lay motionless between the legs of his mule. Doran raised his voice in angry protest.

"You fool, Greene, don't shoot yet! Hazard, tell Joao—"

A yelp came from the chief engineer as more of the terrible missiles were loosed by their unseen enemies. None touched Hap, lying in a cold sweat, but many passed close overhead and thudded into Greene's protecting stump.

Crouched behind a boulder ten yards away, Joao clucked a string of throaty vowels and staccato consonants. An offer of peace that brought only shrill yells and the hiss of arrows.

"Hell with this!" Greene bawled. "I'm shooting!"

His first slug ripped away the hat which Hazard shoved above the dead mule on the barrel of his revolver.

"You louse!" Hazard howled. Obnoxious to arrows sure to follow, he leaped over the mule. Seeing only through a red mist of rage, he leveled his gun at the white blob that was Greene.

For that instant he was only vaguely aware of a glittering shaft of light; that his companions were firing rapidly; that the deadly flight of arrows had unaccountably ceased. Then as a choking gasp came from Greene, Hap quickly saw what had happened.

A naked savage, coming up from the rear, had hurled his knife into the back of the big engineer. In the act of firing again, Greene sailed his rifle into the air and fell face forward to dangle over the stump.

"Reload, men," Doran was crying in an odd voice. A six-foot arrow had sliced through his shoulder.

HAP HAZARD glimpsed it; gave a shout of alarm as he fired at the Poco Novo rushing up to tear his blade from the white man he had laid low. Like flitting shadows a score more Indians were stealing up on the white men's rear.

A shrewd ambush, that. Too late, the Americans saw why the arrows had stopped, when, with naked knives gleaming, the Poco Novos launched a new attack from both sides.

Hazard saw the man he had shot fall with a screech. Snatching up Greene's rifle, he fired and levered at swift-moving naked bodies. Doran emptied his hand gun and sprawled over a boulder. The roar of Tarbell's six-shooter ceased when a thrown knife snicked into the Texan's throat.

Munch was firing steadily beside his fallen friend and chief. Rifle emptied, he coolly drew his revolver, fired six times and picked up Doran's rifle.

Hazard dashed past him, firing almost point blank at six Poco Novos converging upon Munch's rear. Five dropped under that deadly fire; the sixth scuttled toward Doran's motionless figure with ready knife.

For a space, Hazard stood alone.

He fumbled for cartridges as four Indians rose silently from the weeds and plunged at him with glittering blades. Unless they threw their knives, he could escape. For Jack Hurley and the others were three hundred yards away and coming at a furious gallop.

The Indians paid no heed to Tarbell who, with rifle beside him, lay bleeding out his life. Just beyond was Doran with blood dyeing his whitecoat; while above, Munch clubbed valiantly at clustered black heads. He sagged away as two leaped upon his gaunt form. And at that instant, the savage crouching near Doran leaped.

Doran, who had fired him.

Hazard thought of that but with a muttered curse he hurled his empty gun with all his strength. It struck the black head with a dull thud, and he fell beside the chief engineer without even a groan.

In a swift leap, Hazard was beside Tarbell and stooping for the rifle. But two Poco Novos jumped upon his back like hungry weasels and he was borne to earth. Two others added their weight in a struggle too close for knife work.

With the strength of desperation, Hap twisted to his back and fought, wild-cat style, with churning feet and fists that grated and smacked on naked flesh. Struggling to his knees, he swung savagely at a hairless jaw. It smacked solidly just as, through swimming eyes, he saw Munch go down with a gasping curse.

Lean brown fingers, slippery with sweat, clutched Hap's throat; other hands yanked at his ankles. His face was ground into earth when a bony knee thudded on the back of his neck. Dizzy, with the smell of stinking bodies in his nostrils, and tasting salty blood from a cut on his cheek, yet Hazard tried to bow his back against the ponderous weight that crushed him down.

Shots came muffled and far away as, breath coming in bubbling gasps, he strove to break that terrible grip on his throat. He felt a sudden stab

like a red-hot poker being jabbed into his shoulder. Something hard clunked on his head. He wondered, oddly, what had become of Joao. He felt another stunning blow on his temple and exquisite agony along his back ribs. Then the lights went out completely.

HE came to, fighting. It was Hurley who made him realize that the Poco Novos were gone.

"And they won't come back, the way I figure," Hurley continued. "They got what they wanted—Lon Greene. Boy! is he cut!"

Hap Hazard swayed a little when helped to his feet. There were Doran, Munch, even Joao grinning a little. The medico was bending over Tarbell, staunching the throat wound. He gave the Texan an even chance to recover when he had finished.

Joao was cut in several places. According to Munch's story, Joao had plunged in with swinging machete as a Poco Novo sought to drive his knife into Hazard's back. Hazard promptly gripped the hand of the staunch fellow.

"So long, Joao. And thanks."

The Brazilian's black eyes glistened. "But—but I thought you would now be our chief."

"Perhaps," Doran interposed, "the senior will remain."

A few minutes later, mounted and riding slowly under escort to the engineers' camp, the chief engineer spoke to Hazard. "I want to thank you, Hazard for your help. I know, too, that you undoubtedly saved my life at the risk of your own."

"Is that why you're asking me to stay?" Hap's voice was hard in spite of him.

"Not altogether." Doran's voice also took on an edge. "I try not to allow personal feelings to influence me on points purely business. You may not believe it, but I have always liked and admired you. You must believe that."

"Ye-eah? So you put a— Oh, well. Because I'm in a hospital you put Greene in charge."

"Because you were sick and this

residency had to be started immediately," Doran corrected. "And even though your old superior said that you had the edge on Greene for clear thinking and devotion to your duty, Greene obeyed orders; you break orders and use your own judgment. While I have never doubted your ability and loyalty, our responsible positions must be filled by men—"

"Yes-men," Hazard finished harshly. "Who'll carry out an order, however wrong! However costly!" With a twinge of pain he twisted in the saddle to glare at his chief. "I can't change overnight. No good my accepting this residency unless I can use my own judgment."

"I haven't offered you this residency," Doran replied with slow distinctness, "although I'd like to be able to consider you later on. It's up to you. You can make a start by acknowledging your mistake and rectifying the change in grade you made today."

Aghast, Hazard, for a moment, could only stare.

"My mistake?" he breathed. "Yours, Greene's. He saw the mud line on those canes and you set the grade, blindly, above the high water mark he gave you."

"Certainly. The locating party did

the same, but their notes were lost in a river crossing—"

"Six months ago." Hap laughed wildly. "Greene told me to get my level off the canes, but I took the trouble to look on the trees. Get it now? Big trees that grow very slowly."

Doran stiffened as he frowned toward the edge of the right of way. His slight form relaxed suddenly. Then he chuckled softly as he held out his hand.

"Of course, those canes have grown ten or twelve feet in six months. Shot the flood mark up! Can you beat it? Hazard, I apologize for a thick-headed old idiot too set on organization—" The chief burst into a sudden gale of laughter. "Munch, come here! Here's one you can throw at me."

"Do I get this residency?" Hap Hazard asked softly.

"You do."

Hap let out a long breath as he released the chief's hand. He felt suddenly free and light-hearted under an emotion beside which the promotion seemed a small thing. It was a feeling rather than a conscious thought: he had acted as a thorough engineer, a *man*, and had been vindicated.

OBJECTION—MATRIMONY

(Concluded from page 88)

other. His hands could not seem to decide what to do. Flapjack's heart began to melt.

"Ah—er—" began Dodo, his eyes getting up courage to meet those of Flapjack. "What was thet yuh was sayin' some time ago, Flapjack? 'Bout puttin' in hawgs? Now I figger thet's plumb sensible. We could smoke our own bacon an'—"

Flapjack Tilley's face split into a wide grin. He held out his hand to Dodo.

"Shake, yuh gol-blasted idjut! It's

shore been lonesome out here, yep."

Dodo shook the hand and stamped into the wikiup.

"Got the beans ready tuh eat," said Flapjack. "Hunker down, Dodo. We—"

"Yuh was plumb right, Flapjack," remarked Dodo some time afterward. "Females is pizen. I ought tuh've listened to yuh an' I shore am a danged ol'—"

"Yep," agreed Flapjack, "with them hawgs we'll be plumb independent-like, Dodo. Now—"

Next Month: NIGHT OF BATTLE, a Complete Novelette of Colorful Action, by William Merriam Rouse

Adventure THRILLS!



ADMIRAL
DAVID
FARRAGUT

**WHEN ONLY
12 YEARS OLD
DAVID FARRAGUT COMMANDED
A SHIP AND CREW IN THE U.S. NAVY!**

YOUNG FARRAGUT DISPLAYED SUCH
UNUSUAL ABILITY AS A SEAMAN
FOR HIS AGE ---- HAVING SERVED
AS A MIDSHIPMAN IN THE NAVY
SINCE 1810 ---- THAT HE WAS
MADE PRIZE MASTER OF THE
BARCLAY IN 1813.



**"LEAP OF
DEATH"
SAVED
LIFE**

OF MAMELUKE EMIN
BEY WHEN HE JUMPED OFF
THE WALL OF CITADEL
IN CAIRO ON HORSEBACK ----
A DISTANCE OF NEARLY 100 FEET ----
TO ESCAPE THE RURY OF MOHAMMED
ALI, VICEROY OF EGYPT, 19-60, WHO
HAD INVITED HIS 470 RULERS TO A MEETING
IN ORDER TO ASSASSINATE THEM.



**LANDS SPEEDING PLANE
ON ONE WHEEL!**

AFTER LIEUT. HAROLD NEVINS, YOUNG
WORLD WAR PILOT, HAD LOST THE LEFT
WHEEL OF HIS PLANE WHEN FLYING, HE
MADE A LANDING USING ONE WHEEL.

PICKED OUT OF THE WRECKAGE,
NEVINS WAS TOLD THAT FIVE PILOTS HAD
RECENTLY BEEN KILLED IN THIS MANNER.
HE WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO HAD EVER
ACCOMPLISHED
THIS FEAT AND
SURVIVED
IT.



**MIRACULOUS ESCAPE FROM DEATH
IN BATTLE WITH MARINE MONSTER**

IS ONE OF THE MANY THRILLS EXPERIENCED BY
GEORGE VANDERBILT. THIS YOUNG MILLIONAIRE
WHO HAS ROAMED THE WORLD IN QUEST OF
ADVENTURE, WHEN ATTACKED BY A
SHARK NEAR THE BAHAMAS IN 1932,
ATTEMPTED TO GIVE UNDER THE MAN-
EATER AND KILL HIM WITH A KNIFE,
BUT MISSED THE VITAL SPOT.
JUST THEN A BARRACUDA
FLASHED BY AND ATTACKED
THE SHARK, ALLOWING
VANDERBILT TO ESCAPE.

The driller fired a
shot at the giant of
the forest



Jungle Enemy

A Complete Novelette of the Tropics

By **TOM CURRY**

Author of "Stolen Orders," "Fool Americano," etc.

CHAPTER I

Death in the Bush

THE shrieking whine of the first bullet from the jungle gave Dan Lane no warning, for in the racket of the clanging iron he thought it was a bird that had flown past his head. It was not until the second lead slug actually hit the derrick strut close to his

ribs, tearing away a splinter of wood that Lane realized someone was shooting at him.

"Hey, Lane! What the hell's wrong with you?" bawled Driller Fitzhugh, seventy feet below, at the draw works. The big man's red beard pointed up at young Lane, who was staring at the impenetrable wall of the Venezuelan forest.

"Are you takin' a nap?" went on

Dan Lane Combats White Treachery



Fitzhugh furiously, shaking his fist at Lane.

Dan Lane waved toward the bush; he could not see the hidden gunman. A third bullet creased along the black leather safety belt he had fastened around his naked waist. Hastily, Lane cast off the buckle and swarmed down the spider ladder to the ground.

"Have you gone nuts?" growled

Fitzhugh, leaving his seat by the engine. Then for a moment silence hung like a pall.

The two men faced each other. Lane was tall, broad of shoulder, with a waist that tapered off; his dark hair was matted to his skull; and sweat was rolling down his bare, powerful chest. A pair of khaki pants, black with oily dirt, covered his long legs.

in the Steaming Wilds of Venezuela!

But Fitzhugh was even larger, an inch taller, heavier in maturity. They were in the center of the southern Maracaibo oil basin, miles from civilization, with only one another on whom to depend. It was an impenetrable, lush black swampland extending southward to the system of the Orinoco, thence to the Amazon, a thousand miles south.

Virgin, cruel in its heedless, crushing power, it teemed with wild things deadly to man.

The equatorial sun beat upon them. A flash of fiercer heat passed through Lane as he looked into Fitzhugh's green, blood-flecked eyes. Peons, stupid breeds from the Maracaibo country, were waiting for their masters to resume work, holding the drill stem with chocks and wrenches.

"You're slower than cold molasses," growled Fitzhugh. "Why'd you come down, Lane? I've lost half an hour."

"You'll lose a hell of a lot more, if I'm killed," snarled Lane, flushing under his bronzed skin. "Someone's trying to pick me off over there; he's hiding in the bush." He pointed to the west.

FITZHUGH'S red forehead drew up into puckers. "Huh. Why in the hell should anybody want to shoot you?" he demanded.

He was plainly amazed, incredulous.

Lane shrugged. "You tell me why," he muttered. He took a cigarette from his rear pants pocket, struck a match, lit up and puffed out a cloud of blue smoke that rose languidly, straight into the thick, humid air.

"Watch out you don't set off that gasoline," warned Fitzhugh, still staring at the jungle wall. His huge hand, flecked with red hairs, strayed to the butt of the Texas six-shooter he wore.

Dan Lane was sick of Fitzhugh, sick of the harsh bull voice that belted threats and insults at him. He wanted to quit, throw in the sponge, but, as a matter of stiff-necked pride, he had sworn to himself he would

not give Fitzhugh the pleasure of breaking him.

Lane, too, was proud of his powerful body, of his trained muscles and his perseverance. Back at La Rosa Field, near the city of Maracaibo, Lane had been assigned to work on a rig as Fitzhugh's assistant, replacing one Marty Carson. Carson had warned him of the red-headed driller's toughness. But Dan Lane had believed he could stand a pace that others couldn't. When the company had ordered Lane into the *monte* as Fitzhugh's derrick man, to drill in a new field, Lane had set his teeth, said nothing, determined never to give Fitzhugh the pleasure of loudly boasting that he had busted another tool dresser.

In the weeks spent in the bush, Lane had often regretted that he had not demanded a transfer. Fitzhugh was more irritating in the bush than at the home field; he drove harder, and there was no way to escape his company after working hours.

He was czar of the jungle camp, and liked to demonstrate it, driving Lane and the peons. He had a fist like a pig's hind leg, and never hesitated to use it on the workers, though he had not yet struck Lane. Lane had often heard him boast of those who had found him too tough to work for. He was a roughneck, a driving empire builder; and got the work done. The company rated him their best driller.

Fitzhugh stepped around the engine house, exposing himself for a moment to the western jungle wall. The instant he showed a bullet drove close to him. He leaped back for cover. The engine, left in neutral, was quieter, and this time they heard the faint crack of the shot from the west. The driller swore, unbuttoned the flap of his holster, drew his revolver, and cocking it, sent three bullets crashing into the bush.

Whoever had been shooting at them from the jungle did not reply to Fitzhugh. The driller, after waiting a moment, lowered his head and with a shout started for the trees,

revolver up; he went all the way across the clearing but the hidden rifleman had evidently retreated. The driller returned to the rig, puffing from his run.

"Okay," he growled. "Guess it was some goofy Indian hunter. Get back on the board, Lane."

Fitzhugh sent Juan, the peon cook, who had been with the driller for years, over to the bush as a guard, to prevent any more firing from the western face of the jungle. Panting, dizzy in the heat, Lane wrestled with the heavy drill stem, while Fitzhugh cursed up at him when he fumbled.

"He won't break me—he won't break me," Lane told himself between gritted teeth.

No more shots from the jungle. Lane released the weakened strap and went down the ladder; the earth felt solid, comforting under his weary feet. Fitzhugh was down in the rathole, examining the used bit.

"Rock's as hard as flint, so help me," he snapped. "Pedro, pass down that wrench—hurry, you old fool. Move, damn you. Lane, make sure that fishtail's got a razor edge on it. We can't spend the rest of our lives in this cursed sinkhole."

Lane crossed the clearing to the blacksmith shop and, picking out a sharp bit, stooped to lift it to a barrow. As he straightened up, he looked into the face of a man who stood in the door of the small shack smiling at him.

"Why, hello, Carson. What are you doing here?" he cried, surprised. The jungle camp was a long way from any town; it was amazing to look up and see an acquaintance appear so casually.

Marty Carson grinned. He was chewing on an unlighted cigar, strained teeth showing through his pudgy lips.

"Howdy, Dan. Didn't expect to see me, did you? I'm down this way to look over a pipeline route for Standard. I quit that lousy outfit you're slavin' for. Couldn't stand Fitzhugh."

"Don't blame you," muttered Lane.

The red-headed driller's roaring voice reached them: "Who the hell you chinnin' with, Lane? Roll out that bit, *pronto!*"

The stocky, wide-faced Carson scowled. "Someone ought to give that guy what he's askin' for."

Lane shrugged. "Got to deliver this bit," he muttered.

Lane trundled the bit over to the well. Carson did not follow, but remained near the forge.

"Who's that over there?" demanded Fitzhugh.

"Marty Carson. He's down here on a pipeline for Standard."

Fitzhugh actually paused for a moment. "Huh. That's so. They own the concession south of this. Wonder if he knows anything about those shots?"

"Why don't you ask him?" growled Lane.

"I will. But later. Let's get goin'. We got to hustle."

But when the driller saw Marty Carson strolling toward the rig, he left the engine, and stepped out, bristling. He waited, chin down on his barrel chest, frowning at the stocky newcomer. "What'd you want?" he shouted.

CARSON stopped in his tracks, staring at Fitzhugh. "Just over here for a little visit, Fitz," he said.

"We're too busy for visitin'," Fitzhugh roared mockingly. "Stay away from this rig, savvy? You're workin' for another outfit, and that's that."

"What'd you think I mean to do, drop your tools?" Carson asked sarcastically. "This country's all leased, ain't it? Standard's just waitin' to see what you hit before they come in."

"Just the same, keep off. Somebody was takin' shots at Lane and me this afternoon. Know anything about *that*, wise guy?"

Carson's chin dropped in surprise. "Shots? At you? How the hell should I know about it?"

"Well, you always pretend to be so smart, I figured you'd try to guess at it," the driller said derisively.

"But I always knew you were dumb, Carson."

Carson swore, scowling at the red-headed driller. Lane was furious at Fitzhugh for his rudeness and lack of hospitality. "Carson's here to see me," Dan cried. "He's a pal of mine."

"Yeah?" Fitzhugh kept his eyes on the stocky man. "He can't see you now. After work, maybe, but not now. Scram, Carson."

"Wait for me, Marty. I'll be through after a while," Lane called.

Marty Carson shrugged, swung on his heel, went over to the shade of the cookhouse. Fitzhugh watched him, till he had left the vicinity of the rig. Then he waved his hand. "Let's go, Lane," he said quickly.

CHAPTER II

Night Attack



MARTY CARSON was waiting for Dan Lane when the latter, exhausted from hitting the ball all day, quit work at sundown. Fitzhugh coming from the well, passed close to Carson, gave him a twisted grin.

"Say, listen, Fitz," Carson said eagerly, "you got me wrong. I hold no grudge. You broke me fair and square in Maracaibo. If anybody took a shot at you, it wasn't me. I just come up the river. And I sure wouldn't want to hurt Dan."

Fitzhugh's grin was cold; he did not answer, but went on over to the shack they lived in.

"Stay and eat with me, Marty," Lane invited. He led the stocky man into the cookhouse, and Juan passed them food.

Lane and Carson went off together, to the back of the shack.

"I been watchin' Fitzhugh," Carson growled, as they drank coffee and smoked together. "Someone ought to kill that big slob. Often wondered why I didn't do it my-

self. I could have dropped a wrench on him off the fourble board, and no one would have been any wiser."

Lane started, stared at his companion. He thought Carson must be joking. But the other man's face was set.

"I'm no murderer," Lane told him shortly. A coldness crept over him. Roughnecks, Dan was aware, killed over small things, a curse, a woman's smile; but in hot blood. And, as Lane said, he was no murderer.

Carson laughed, then, the wrinkles of his seamed face breaking deep. Lane didn't like the smile as much as he had the frown. "I know you are not," Carson answered him. "But Fitzhugh is. He'll kill you sure as hell if you try to keep the pace he sets in this fever heat. I can't savvy why the company don't stick you on your own rig. Why, you could put down this hole as good as Fitz. That would bring you real money. Fitzhugh's pullin' down plenty for this job."

"I'll rate my own rig some day."

"If anything happened to Fitzhugh," continued Carson, "you could finish this hole and be a full-fledged driller, Dan. There's plenty oil down here. I'd help you, on the board. I only got a couple of miles to survey."

Lane was silent; he shot a side glance at Marty. In spite of smiling lips, the former derrick man had been quite serious. Lane decided, when he suggested that Fitzhugh be murdered.

"Are you afraid of that red-headed mutt?" sneered Carson.

"I don't like him. I'm not afraid of him."

"Take my advice," said the stocky man, getting up, chuckling as he spoke. "Sneak a chuck up with you tomorrow and lay him out good and cold."

Lane was glad when Marty Carson had gone. The man disappeared along the trail toward the river. Dan had known Carson rather casually back in Maracaibo. Carson's suggestion that he drop a tool on Fitzhugh from the height of the tubing

board kept pushing back into his mind.

Finally he stamped out his cigarette with a curse, yawned, and went into the single room shack that he shared with the driller. They worked so hard all day that after dark they usually dropped quickly into deep sleep.

Fitzhugh himself was still outside, haranguing the peons upon their lazy ways. Lane was about asleep when the driller pushed in past the netting and lay down in his bunk.

Lane lay with closed eyes, his ears buzzing from the daily dose of quinine he took to ward off fever. The heat of his body under him in the flimsy bunk burned his flesh; the buzz of a million insects sounded outside, and in the mighty jungle birds and animals cried.

Lane had grown used to such noises, though he had never been able to shake off altogether the eerie sensation brought by the black night. It always seemed that death crouched close at hand, ready to spring on him.

Next thing he knew, he was awake, in a heavy sweat, as though an evil dream had suddenly come true. It was dark as pitch inside the little hut, built of logs and palm thatch cut from the forest. The doorway, with the now invisible mosquito netting hanging over it, was a paler blue rectangle against the sky, star-spattered—there was no moon.

Lane's eyes were open; he lay quietly on his right side, orienting his mind to his position; there was a vague oppression on his heart. Then a faint rustle focused his gaze on the entry. He thought it was a prowling animal, perhaps *el tigre*, the formidable jaguar of the South American jungles. But with the suddenness of Fate, a giant figure was framed in black silhouette against the open door.

"Who's that?" he cried, his voice hoarse in his throat. He raised himself on his elbow, forcing his fear-paralyzed muscles to act. His feet touched the dirt floor, and he flung

himself at the figure paused inside the entrance.

He had an impression of the flash of white eyeballs, and his outstretched hand touching greasy, warm flesh, was scratched as it rose by contact with rougher skin. A flash of fire in his face stunned him; he staggered back with a shriek of pain at the burning of his cheek. Then the netting ripped away as the bizarre, giant figure retreated, leaping from his sight.

FITZHUGH, roused by the shot and the commotion, jumped from his bunk, seizing his revolver from the belt that lay alongside the inside of his bed.

"What's goin' on?" he gasped.

Powder had seared Lane's cheek; it stung badly, and his hand strayed to it to feel the extent of the wound.

The lead had missed him by a fraction of an inch.

"Something's after us," cried Lane. "Something's trying to kill us!"

Fitzhugh quickly struck a match, lit a candle on the box serving them as a table. He stared curiously at Lane. "What'd you mean, something?" he demanded. "You mean *someone*, don't you, Lane?"

Lane shrugged. He licked his dry lips, as he fought to regain his self-control. He knew that the night magnified danger. "I—I don't know," he replied dully.

"You young fool," snarled Fitzhugh. "That was a man. Must have been. Ghosts and animals don't fire pistols and rifles."

Lane found that he was covered with a sweat that cooled his body as it evaporated. He drew in a deep breath, and hunted for a cigarette to steady his nerves.

"Guess you're right," he muttered, ashamed that he had allowed Fitzhugh to see he was rattled. "Have you any idea who might be after us, who'd want to murder us?"

Fitzhugh stared at him. It seemed to Lane there was a suspicious look in the driller's green eyes. His mouth opened, as though he meant to speak, but then he shut it, shook

his head. "Don't know. Unless—"
 "Unless what?"

"Don't know." Fitzhugh was again in command, again the boss of the oil camp, as he said briskly, "Come, let's get back to sleep, Lane. Must have been some crazy wild man."

"Right back at you," growled Dan, "did you ever hear of a wild man carrying a high-power rifle and a pistol?"

"He could have stolen them somewhere. He's not likely to come back again tonight. It's three A. M. now. We got to sleep, and work hard tomorrow. Faster we go, the quicker we'll get out of here. I gave my promise to the boss I'd put this hole down in record time. So shut up and get some rest. And if I see your pal Carson, I'll find out about this."

"What'd you mean? That wasn't Carson. It was two feet taller than he is, and black at that."

Fitzhugh cursed impatiently. "To hell with it or him or whatever it was. Nothing will scare me out of here." He threw himself down on his bunk, lying on his back.

Lane stood motionless in the middle of the hut. It seemed to him that the driller was watching him, distrustfully, through lowered eyelashes.

"Don't be a big baby," Fitzhugh growled at him. "Are you yellow? Lie down and go to sleep."

Lane shrugged coldly, went back to his bunk.

CHAPTER III

Beaten



WHEN Dan Lane started his climb up to the fourble board next morning, he carried tied to his belt a ten-inch pipe wrench with which he meant to repair the bolt damaged the

previous day. He was still shaken from the experience of the night before.

He had not slept much during the remainder of the night. And the sight of huge splay footmarks in the mud of the clearing had not made him any more comfortable about his position in the camp. His dislike for Fitzhugh had not been lessened by the way the red-headed driller had taunted him in the morning about being afraid. At breakfast, Fitzhugh had laughed at Lane's narrow escape, and at the signs Lane had discovered.

He began to adjust his wrench, screwing up the round ratchet wheel with his strong fingers. Fitzhugh was standing almost directly under him, close to one of the perpendicular, main supports of the derrick. The red-headed driller was dwarfed by the height.

It was funny how he kept thinking of Marty Carson's suggestion that he drop a tool on Fitzhugh, crush the driller's thick skull. He had to hold to the side of the derrick with one hand, while he worked the wrench with the other.

The teeth of the grip squeaked against the nut as he applied pressure—it was clumsy, trying to turn it and hold on at the same time. If he used both hands on the wrench, he might throw himself into space when the wrench gave or if it should slip off the scarred nut.

Then the wrench did slip, flew out of his hand. It flashed suddenly into the air, fell thirty feet, bounced off a cross strut, drove heavily on down and buried itself in the mud a foot from Driller Fitzhugh.

"Look out!" gasped Lane, aghast as the metal projectile hurtled toward the driller. But his warning was much too late, and unheard at that. The wrench had landed, the driller heard the swish of air and was spattered by flying bits of dirt.

Fitzhugh leaped away, running off a few yards where he stood staring up at Lane. His hand went to the butt of his revolver.

"Come down here," the driller bawled, and he shook his left fist up at the derrick man.

Lane was nervous as he descended

the ladder at Fitzhugh's command. Though he had not meant to drop the wrench, the fact that Carson had suggested it and that he had had it on his mind, made him feel guilty. He hit the ground and walked toward the driller.

"I'm sorry, Fitz," Lane said shamefacedly.

But Fitzhugh's face was screwed up in rage; he cursed, hit Lane in the jaw. The jolt of that iron fist jarred Lane back on his heels. Then rage flushed Dan's muscles; a bundle of springy fibers, he threw himself on the driller. Lane's blind rush was met by a short jab to the stomach which knocked out his wind, stopped him short. Fitzhugh hit him in the face again, followed him, seized him around the chest in a gorilla hug that threatened to crush in his ribs.

The peons disinterestedly watched the fight, squatted near the draw works. What the white bosses did was nothing to them.

Lane's remaining wind left him under the pressure put on by the driller. Fitzhugh then lifted him off his feet, and flung him down. Lane came up on his knees, fists working automatically; he caught the driller twice in the body but with small effect. Fitzhugh punched him again, sledgehammer fists delivering short, stunning blows that knocked Lane flat, again and again.

"Tried to murder me, eh?" snarled the driller.

"You lie," panted Lane. "The wrench slipped out of my hand."

"Yeah? That sounds good but it's a lie, you young devil. Juan heard that snake Carson tell you to smash my skull in by dropping a tool on me," cried Fitzhugh.

Dan Lane gasped, came slowly up on his feet. He wiped blood from a split lip, panting with rage. He was shaking with anger as he glared at his enemy. "I—it was an accident," he muttered thickly. Red spots danced before his eyes as he fought to control his killing fury.

"If you've had enough," Fitzhugh said angrily, "then get the hell up on your board and go to work. I

don't want to beat you till you're too done in to rack drill stem. I need you here, and you're goin' to finish this job, savvy? If you try to kill me again, I'll handle you, don't worry."

Lane pulled himself together. "This isn't all, Fitzhugh. When the job's done I'll see you again."

"Any time at all," the driller told him cockily. "I thought you were a decent kid, Lane, but you've turned out to be a dirty skunk."

Then, as Juan shouted a quick warning, he jumped back and away from Lane, whipping out his pistol.

MMARTY CARSON came around the side of the cook shack. He paused where he was, staring at the beaten Lane and the bristling driller. He pursed his lips in a whistle.

"What the hell you want to hit the kid for?" Carson growled indignantly.

"What business is that of yours?" snapped Fitzhugh dangerously. "I gave you plenty in your time, didn't I? Get out of this camp before I put a slug through your worthless body."

Carson swung on his heel. But he paused, slowly turned back. "Now, listen, Fitz. You got that boy wrong. He's okay. There's someone around here tryin' to wipe us all out. Look here, at my hat."

He pointed with a stained, stubby forefinger to the crown of his felt Stetson. There was a jagged hole through the Texas hat. "Someone fired at me from the bush," explained Carson.

"Too bad he didn't aim a little lower," growled the driller. "I suppose you'll say you don't know anything about last night, either?"

"What do you mean?" asked Carson.

Fitzhugh laughed derisively. Then his face hardened. "Stay out of this camp. That's final, Carson," he warned.

Marty Carson shrugged, strolled on to the southern trail leading out to the river. Fitzhugh watched him go, then turned on Lane. "Now you

get up on the board and work," he snarled.

Handling the drill stem as they went back into the hole, Lane's whole body burned with shame. He had taken a bad beating from his enemy. Fitzhugh believed he had purposely dropped that wrench at Marty Carson's suggestion. Juan, the peon cook, had evidently sneaked to the rear of the cook hut and listened to Lane's talk with Carson, then retailed it to Fitzhugh in his own way, probably with Latin exaggeration.

At the high point of the sun they paused for a rest. Later in the afternoon, after *siesta*, they went back to work. The flesh crept in that burning humidity. The sun was low over the jungle when they finally ceased drilling for the day. Lane went down, ignored the leering Fitzhugh, who was wiping the grime off his chunky, powerful body with a dirty towel.

LANE strode over to the streamlet that touched the clearing at the southwestern edge. He knelt down and began to splash water over his naked torso and matted head, but it was too warm to give him much relief. He was trying to get off the worst of the dirt when someone softly called him from a nearby bush clump. He raised his head quickly, pausing in his ablutions. He glimpsed Marty Carson, watching him from the trees.

"Watch out," warned Carson, "don't let that red-headed mutt see you talkin' to me. C'mere a minute."

Lane rose, stepped over the brook, and stood beside Carson in the shadows.

"Now listen," began Carson hurriedly, and put an arm across Lane's bare shoulders. "Too bad you missed that dog Fitzhugh with that wrench. I didn't think you had nerve enough to try it. Here, take this gun and hide it inside your pants. When you get up close to him, step behind him and blow out his brains."

The stocky man's eyes gleamed feverishly. Lane could feel him

trembling with eagerness. He realized that Carson, too, believed he had purposely tried to brain Fitzhugh with that wrench.

Anger flushed Lane. "You damn fool!" he muttered, twisting away. "You're crazy. It was an accident, the wrench slipped out of my hand. I never intended to kill him."

"Then you're yellow," Carson told him fiercely. "And even if you did not want to finish him before, any man who'd take what you did this mornin' is a skunk and a coward."

"I took it because I had to, and you did the same when you worked for him," snarled Lane. "Not only that, but I'm going back and warn Fitz you're out to kill him. Why you want to do it, I don't know."

"Wait. Listen, kid. There's a fortune, plenty of dough in this for you. Just put a bullet through Fitzhugh, get him out of my way."

Lane bit his lip. "Some kind of skullduggery about oil leases?" he asked.

"No, no; the hell with that; the big companies got this land all sewed up. It's quicker than leases, and bigger. Lay Fitzhugh out and I'll split with you."

Lane laughed. "You sure got me figured all wrong, Marty. For that matter, so has Fitz. I'm no killer. I told you so before. And you can take your crooked money and stick it in your ear."

Marty Carson swore, drawing back a step. But Lane was alert, watching for that move, and he lunged in under the rising arm, seizing the stubby wrist. The pistol in Carson's hand went off but the slug burrowed in the dirt. An instant later Dan Lane had shoved Carson back, ripping the weapon out of his hand, flinging it off into the bushes.

He followed the stocky man up, fists working fast, connecting with Carson's head and body. Carson hit back, kicked at him, roaring with anger and pain. Lane landed a one-two in Carson's midriff. He was pulling back his fist to send a finishing uppercut to Carson's chin when he was seized from behind and

furiously torn away from his opponent.

Lifted clear off the earth, in the grip of inexorably powerful hands, Lane was flung through the air. He brought up hard against a thick tree. The shock of contact with the corrugated bark tore at his nerve centers; the wind was forcibly driven from his lungs as his ribs whanged the unyielding wood.

Across his pain-racked vision flashed reddish lights, but he had a glimpse, an impression, of a gigantic man wearing a wide, high head-dress of brilliantly colored feathers torn from jungle birds, and a great body wrapped with spotted jaguar skins, face masked with black stained leather.

"Here they come," he heard Carson say, but it was all far off to him, as though in another world. He lay as he had fallen, breath intake fast, exhaling slowly; shouting came from the clearing as Fitzhugh, alarmed by the shot and racket, came running toward the spot in the midst of the peons.

Close by Lane a shot boomed. A screech of pain came from a peon. Carson was cursing, as he stepped back into the thicker bush. Lane heard gun triggers clicking. He made a terrific effort, drew up his legs, rolled his body to the clearing side of the tree against which he had smashed.

"Look out, Fitzhugh. They're going to pick you off."

Marty Carson fired at Lane, the bullet hitting the earth a foot from him, his body protected by the tree trunk.

The big man Lane had glimpsed flitted back toward the western jungle, seen only for instants by the men from the camp. Carson faded off eastward, out of Lane's vision.

"There he goes—after him," roared Fitzhugh. The driller fired a shot at the giant in the forest, and swerved to the right, followed by his men. The peons, having seen the apparition, slowed down with cries of fright. But Fitzhugh ran on, gun up, hit the wall of the bush and

crashed on through. Juan urged the peons on after him.

Lane pulled himself up on one knee. His side ached badly, and, when he moved, a stabbing pain ran through his ribs. He was covered with black dirt, rubble and leaves; one arm was skinned so that the blood ran from the scraped flesh. He was still a little dazed as he heard the sounds of the chase growing dimmer to the west. He licked his lips, wiping his eyes clear with his bare arm.

CHAPTER IV

The Fight in the Forest



IT was some moments before Dan Lane could gather himself together. Then he saw Marty Carson emerge from the trail to the east and run to the huts. He watched Carson

went into their living quarters. Lane started back to head him off. He heard sudden shrieks of pain and terror from the west, and he turned to stare at the impenetrable green jungle. He heard Fitzhugh bellowing, some distance off, excited, higher cries from the peons. He headed as fast as he could go toward the commotion.

Branches slapped at his face and bare flesh as he pushed through the thick bush. For many yards the going was difficult, but, as the forest thickened, and less light from the sun reached the earth, the undergrowth became less brutally tangled.

For some distance stabbing streamers of sunlight still came in from above, but then the foliage overhead grew denser and the floor of the tropical forest became easier to move upon. The trees were two hundred feet high in spots; the roof was thick, a mass of vines, creepers, aerial roots. But down below was a purple twilight, and stillness save for the row created by man.

Lane, running more swiftly through the clearer woods, saw Juan stretched lifeless on the dirt, a bullet hole through his head. He came on two more peons, machetes in hand, both wounded; the rest of the workers, seven or eight small breeds, suddenly appeared from the north, terror in their twisted faces, running as fast as they could back toward the camp.

"Wait," shouted Lane, picking up a fallen machete, waving it. "Where is Fitzhugh?"

But the peons would not stop. "Hees dead," one cried over his shoulder. "The Wizard keeled heem. Run for your life, *senor*."

The sharp knife clutched in his hand, Lane ran on toward the west, gasping. He descended a slope into a natural arena among the tree trunks, and he saw Fitzhugh ahead, bent back in a torturesome position by the black giant in the jaguar skins; in the forest gloom he could see the negro's gleaming teeth and rolling eyes.

FITZHUGH'S tongue was stuck out between his red-bearded lips, his eyes bulged as he tried to resist the terrific pressure on his ribs. His revolver lay some yards from where they fought; a rifle was on the ground on the other side from Dan Lane.

Lane raised his machete, running in. The man holding Fitzhugh hearing him coming, suddenly wrenched at his victim, raised the big driller off the ground and flung him violently down. Lane uttered a loud shout as he lashed out with the machete. The black leaped back and away, snarling behind his mask; as he jumped, he ripped a canvas money belt off Fitzhugh's body, the strap snapping under the strain.

Lane stooped, seized Fitzhugh's pistol, raised it, pulled the trigger, but it clicked on an empty shell. He lunged again with his knife, the heavy blade swishing dangerously close to the black giant. The latter had evidently emptied his guns, firing back at the peons and Fitz-

hugh. Now he faced Lane, his eyes rolling. But the knife Lane wielded intimidated him and he turned, trotted swiftly away, leaving the derrick man standing over Fitzhugh.

Lane stared down at the red-fringed face. Fitzhugh was unconscious, head limp; he lay in a heap. The powerful muscles which had animated him were weak as water now.

What scant clothing he had been wearing had been torn off him; there was a red welt around his stomach where his money belt had been ripped loose. His cartridge belt, which carried his empty pistol holster, had worked down around his thighs, the buckle torn loose from the leather, so that it hung on by a few threads.

Lane glanced westward, where the forest man had disappeared. He bent over Fitzhugh, whom he hated; the driller breathed faintly, his head rolled limp on his thick neck as Lane shook him, trying to rouse him.

Lane knew it would soon be night; he could not stay in the jungle with the wounded man, and there was great danger of infection there.

"Have to get you back to camp," he muttered aloud. "You sure met your match that time."

Fitzhugh was bleeding in several places, but Lane could find no mortal wound. One gash, along his shoulder, looked like a bullet crease. Lane finally raised him, working the big body around onto his own strained back, pulling Fitzhugh's arms down in front of him so that Fitzhugh's chest rested on his shoulders. It was a terrific effort to raise the driller but at last Lane was on his feet, and staggered a few feet east, toward the camp.

Then he set Fitzhugh down, returned to pick up his machete and stick it in his belt; he saw Fitzhugh's .45, and reloaded it from the driller's bulky cartridge belt.

Resuming his burden, the weight of the big man made him grunt at every step. He paused often to listen, for he feared the forest man might creep up behind them, catch him helpless. Finally he came to the

thicker bush that marked the outskirts of the camp clearing. Sweat poured through his hair, blinding him as he shoved into the thickets. Fitzhugh's bulk brushed and caught on limbs and thorns, almost pulled off Lane's aching back.

After twenty-five yards of hard going, Lane set the still senseless man against a tree and, advancing to the edge of the bush, peered out at the oil camp. He saw none of the peons, nor was Marty Carson in sight.

Venturing out into the open, he drew no fire, so, returning to Fitzhugh, he hoisted the driller again on his back. As fast as he could travel he carried the driller to their hut. Before entering he set Fitzhugh down, and, drawing his pistol and cocking it, cautiously went to the open door. But there was no one inside; Carson had evidently gone back into the forest, to the south.

LANE took Fitzhugh in. The driller's mattress was off his bunk and ripped almost to shreds. Lane had to arrange it as best he could, with several blankets as pads, to make a soft couch on which to place the red-bearded man. It was with a sigh of relief that he put his erstwhile enemy on the bed and wiped the sweat off his own face.

As he went farther into the hut to find iodine and drugs with which to treat his own and Fitzhugh's wounds he realized that everything had been turned upside down, papers lay all over, his own bunk and mattress had been ravaged, boxes smashed open and overturned, contents strewn about.

He looked Fitzhugh over more carefully, and found another bullet crease, but in both cases the lead had emerged of itself. Behind Fitzhugh's heavy neck, at the top of his spine, was an ugly, black bruise, inches in extent. Lane cauterized several scratches and the wounds.

Night was close at hand. The stinging of the antiseptics roused Fitzhugh; he stirred, grunted, swore. He

opened his green eyes, staring wildly up at Lane.

"Like hell!" he gasped. "Get away from me."

"Take it easy," ordered Lane gruffly—he had no love for the man who had bullied and beaten him. But he had to tend Fitzhugh for the sake of humanity.

Fitzhugh tried to hit at Lane but was too weak to do more than gesture feebly. "You won't get it. Like hell!"

"Quiet, you fool," snarled Lane. "You're lucky that black devil didn't tear you to pieces. Keep quiet."

"My belt—you can't have my belt," muttered Fitzhugh. He was fighting for consciousness that was slipping away from him. He had taken a terrific beating from the forest man. "Those diamonds are mine—"

Lane looked into the green eyes. They were closing again, in spite of the driller's efforts to stay awake. Exhaustion claimed Fitzhugh, his head went limp. Lane saw a little light; it must have been precious stones Fitzhugh had been carrying in that money belt, and Marty Carson had been after them.

Well, the black man had taken it; Lane had seen him run off with Fitzhugh's belt. He shrugged. It was nothing but trouble to him. Maybe, now they had it, the pair of them would go away and leave him alone.

Fitzhugh's hand fumbled at his waist. "My belt. Where's my belt?" he mumbled drowsily.

"That black man got it. You're lucky to be alive. Shut up."

"A fortune. A fortune in diamonds—" Fitzhugh's voice trailed off to nothing; he slept.

Lane looked at the red face, flushed under the wiry beard. Fitzhugh had no belt on now.

The tropic night was on them. Lane did not want to remain there, trapped in the hut, but felt he could not leave Fitzhugh, and there was no other safe place to carry the driller. He wanted more bullets for the pistol, and bent over to get the big man's cartridge belt, but it was

no longer around his thighs. He searched the hut quickly but could not find any guns or bullets—he decided Marty Carson must have removed all arms.

He had the .45 with six slugs in it. He was still hunting weapons when the sun dropped behind the jungle, the light of day disappearing like that of a stuffed candle. The shadows of the night fell over the quiet clearing; nocturnal bush creatures prepared to sally forth for food, to fight.

Worn out with the strain, Lane sat on a low box, his shoulder blades resting along the sharp edge of the unconscious Fitzhugh's bunk. He faced the doorway, now a bluish rectangle, the heavy pistol across his knees, on guard.

THERE was a small screen window at the rear of the shack. Presently Lane, fighting to stay awake, heard the sounds of approaching men. He stiffened alertly, ears wide. Someone was walking along the side of the hut. Then Marty Carson's rough voice called out to him.

Lane did not answer but waited grimly, gun trained on the doorway. Something black loomed in the rectangle, and Dan fired, twice, heard a thud and a curse from Marty Carson.

"That was a log you hit," called Carson, from the side of the hut. "Fitzhugh, toss it out or we'll kill you."

"Go to hell," shouted Dan.

"Lane—is Fitzhugh still alive?" demanded Carson.

"What if he is? What's the idea of trying to murder us, Marty?"

"This is serious. Tell Fitz if he don't give it up, I'll kill both of you. Toss it out, and we'll go away; otherwise we'll get you."

"Toss what out?" asked Lane, crouched close to Fitzhugh's bunk.

"That treasure map, and the stones."

"Your black pal took Fitzhugh's money belt. I saw him run off with it. That's all I know."

Carson's reply was a bullet that drove through into the hut, narrowly

missing Lane; the derrick man heard it strike a yard from his body. There was someone else on the other side of the door, stirring, obviously Carson's friend, the giant black. Lane stayed low, and after a minute heard Carson pass around the rear of the hut and converse in low tones with his companion. Then the pair retreated, making a great deal of noise toward the out trail.

Fitzhugh moaned, began to talk; his voice grew saner.

"Lane!" he called at last.

"What'd you want?" asked Dan sourly. It was not love for Fitzhugh that held Dan there, trapped inside the hut. He did not doubt that Carson and the black would return to finish them.

"You—you saved me from the devil in the jungle," Fitzhugh said weakly. "I was wrong, Lane. For a time, because of that wrench you dropped, I figured you must have let Carson talk you into cahoots with him. They've—they've got my belt, it's gone. Too bad."

"I told you, you're lucky to be alive," growled Lane. "Carson wants that belt! I saw the black run off with it. Maybe he's crossing Carson, because Marty's here still, asking for the belt."

"Huh. Say, give me a slug of whiskey, will you, boy." The drink seemed to brace the driller, though he was still very weak. "Can't move my legs," he muttered.

"You were carrying some kind of treasure, was that it?" asked Lane. "Diamonds?"

"I only had a few stones. It's the map Carson wants most. Though I can't figure how he knew I had it on me. Last time I was in the monte, in Tachira, south of here, I ran onto an old Indian mine—wasn't sure it held diamonds then. I picked up a few stones, and later they turned out to be fine specimens.

"I hid the entrance, and covered my tracks—did it just in case the samples proved valuable. I made an accurate map so I could get back in there later, to take out what was in the mine—it looked very rich. You

know how the bush grows up in this country; a trail will be completely run over, all traces lost, within a few months. I never said a word, so far as I remember, to anybody about that mine. But Carson has found it out, and is after the map. Being down here for Standard was just a stall he thought up to fool me."

"Why didn't you go down there and get out your diamonds before?" demanded Lane.

"I had my contract with the boss," replied Fitzhugh, "and couldn't let the company down. Figured I'd finish here first, and get more capital to work that mine with." He coughed thickly. "That black rascal damn near crushed in my lungs; he beat the back of my neck with his fist till I thought he'd knock my head off."

Lane was coldly angry. Angry with Marty Carson, angry with Fitzhugh. "Your lousy diamonds have put us in a fine spot," he said, and took a drink himself.

It was evident that Carson and his friend were not yet satisfied; he could hear them moving about outside in the blackness.

CHAPTER V

Smoked Out



LANE caught the stealthy sounds of approach, and he grew alert again, grasping his pistol tightly. He could not afford to waste any bullets. He was rather irritated with himself. He

could easily have sneaked out, hidden in the bush, kept away from Carson. After all, it was the tough driller, Fitzhugh, and his diamonds that Marty was after. The attempts to kill Lane had been to put him out of the way.

It was plain to Dan that at first Carson had hoped to dispose of the derrick man and force Fitzhugh to take Carson in Lane's place; then Carson could easily have robbed Fitz-

hugh. Failing at this Carson had gone after the driller, tried to talk Lane into killing Fitzhugh, made efforts to shoot down the driller himself. But Fitzhugh's wariness, his luck, had prevented Carson from carrying out his plan.

Lane shrugged, intently listening. It was none of his affair, yet he had been forced into the thick of it, and now was fighting for his life and to protect a man he didn't like, who had never shown him anything but cruelty.

Outside he caught the rustle of dirt, faint but unmistakable, under the tiptoeing feet of the intruders. He wondered why they did not make a frontal attack; but then, they knew he was armed. He could probably get one of them with his revolver before he was overpowered, killed.

The sweat stood out on him in the humid, buzzing night; prickly sensations raised the hair glands of his skin, and he felt as an animal does when the hunter is close at hand. It was eerie, hearing them so near, knowing they would finish his existence the instant they had the chance.

Scratching noises—a moment later, and he smelled acrid smoke, drifting in through the entrance. They were going to burn him out, get him, under cover of the smudge. Panic rushed through him, as his lungs contracted spasmodically with the smoke. He fought himself for control. In the emergency an idea flashed to him.

"Carson," he called, creeping close to the door. "Fitzhugh's conscious now, and he says he'll give up the map if you'll promise to go away when you have it."

"Okay," replied Carson eagerly, from Lane's right. "Toss it out."

"Here, it's in this belt," called Lane, and, unbuckling his own belt, pulled it through the loops with shaking hands. He pushed it gingerly out, so that it lay directly in front of the doorway. Then he drew back a step, tensing, bringing up his pistol, holding it steady.

He meant to shoot to kill when Carson reached out for the belt; the

men outside had proved themselves cold-blooded murderers and deserved no mercy. And the smoke from the smudge fire was thickening to a white haze that clogged Lane's lungs, made him utterly desperate, reckless. Fitzhugh coughed miserably in his bunk.

But Marty Carson was too wary to jump for the belt. "Shove it over to this side, Lane," he ordered, "so I can reach it."

"You'd shoot me."

"No. All I want is that map; then we'll leave."

"I won't come out," declared Lane stubbornly.

"Get a stick, Doc," Carson ordered his companion, who was on the other side of the door.

Lane cursed himself. The moment Carson had that belt in hand he would realize that Lane had tricked him. The fire would eventually force Lane and Fitzhugh out to certain death. He heard the big black step off in search of a pole long enough to hook the belt from the side.

LANE heard the crackling of the brush fire alongside the hut. A faint breeze fanned the smoke into the shack. He touched Fitzhugh's arm.

"Talk to him, loud as you can, keep him busy," he whispered. He ran silently to the rear, pushed out the netting of the window. Fitzhugh was cursing at Marty Carson, keeping up a steady flow of talk.

Lane pulled himself through the opening, landing on hand and knees on soft earth at the back of the hut. He hurried around on Carson's side; there was a red glow from the burning wood. He came up behind Marty, who was swearing back at Fitzhugh, and awaiting his black comrade's return.

The noise they made talking, the crackle of the fire, covered Lane's quick approach; he was within four feet of Carson before the stocky man heard him, whirled with an oath.

Carson had a revolver; he recognized Lane in the faint light, and his gun muzzle rose. But Lane's

pistol was ready, cocked; it spat flame, pointblank at Marty Carson's breast. Carson's gun exploded, the slug burying in the dirt at Lane's feet. The stocky man doubled up in a spasm of pain, fell flat on his face, groveled for a moment in the dirt, then lay still.

A hoarse curse warned Lane that the black man was almost on him. He saw the giant as the latter rushed around the other side of the shack. The negro wore his feather head-dress, and his wide eyes rolled. Lane raised his pistol and pulled the trigger, at a distance of a yard. He knew he hit the black but the latter did not pause in his rush.

His second slug shook the big man, made him hesitate a moment; but then the negro was on him, knocking him back flat in the rush. Lane was pinned under the heavy body, and his efforts to fight were futile, beaten down by a pair of steel-muscled arms; hot breath fanned his face as his head was banged furiously on the ground.

He tried to hit the black's face with his gun barrel, tried to kick and punch, but he was shaken and beaten. The negro's breath came in great gasps; warm, sticky blood from the bullet wounds Lane had dealt him flowed onto Lane's flesh. Lane was growing weaker, was unable to fight effectively. His lungs rasped for air.

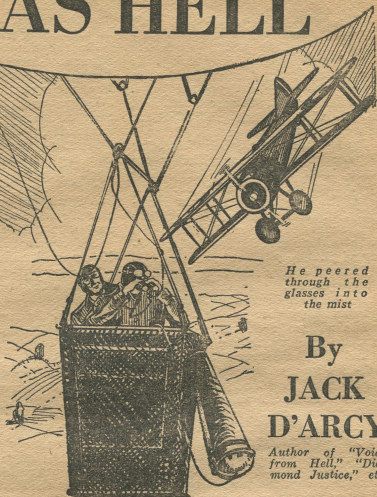
Suddenly a figure loomed in the door of the shack. Dizzily, Lane saw a flash of fire, close to him. Then a second one. The pounding fists and punishing, heavy legs of the black giant ceased. Flat on his spine, blinking, pain racking his bruised muscles, Lane saw Fitzhugh, tottering there, holding Marty Carson's pistol against the black man's skull.

He heard the driller curse shrilly, and then Fitzhugh fired a third time, gun muzzle against the negro's temple. The huge black tried to turn, but he was paralyzed, helpless; his body slacked, and he fell on his side, head doubled under his mighty shoulder.

(Continued on page 122)

GAS HELL

Death
and
Treachery
Meet
in the
Clouds!



*He peered
through the
glasses into
the mist*

By
**JACK
D'ARCY**

*Author of "Voice
from Hell," "Dia-
mond Justice," etc.*

IT WAS a cold, grey morning. A dim mist enveloped the landscape, concealing the furrowing ravages that Mars had put upon the earth. From support, the artillery spoke infrequently and dispiritedly. In the trenches, wet, miserable men vainly sought warmth and comfort. It was a dismal day, a day in which only hate and evil would thrive.

Like a chunk of dirty, buoyant ambergris, the observation balloon floated ungracefully in the air. From her bag, the long cord which held her to the earth ran through the center of the basket and disappeared in the greying mist beneath. In her nacelle were two men, who stared into the mist.

Gregory grunted.

"Why the hell they ever took me

off flying detail and gave us this damned job is more than I can tell," he said savagely. "I'm going goofy up here."

Parsons did not answer. He stared at his partner and an odd smile crawled about the corners of his mouth.

Around them the mist closed in. The visibility was practically zero. They could just about see as far as their own front lines. Gregory spoke again.

"Hell, there's no sense to it. Observation balloon? God, we can't see a thing."

Parsons' smile—it was not a pleasant one—grew broader.

"You should have thought of this when you established your reputation as the crack observer of the Western

Front," he said, and there was a strange bitterness in his voice. "Naturally, the artillery was out to grab a guy as good as you."

Gregory looked at him quickly. It seemed as if for a moment he was tempted to make a sharp rejoinder. But he refrained. He rose to his feet, lifted his field glasses and peered out into the mist.

Parsons sat silent, motionless. Out there in the mist an Allied plane roared up and down the lines. For more than an hour, now, they had heard its pounding motor intermittently. Save for sporadic artillery fire, it was the only sound which had come to their ears during their morning vigil.

Parsons' little eyes were riveted to Gregory's face. Unmistakable hatred shone in their depths. His face was ugly and distorted.

The phone in the nacelle buzzed angrily. Gregory set down the glasses, raised the headphones to his ears.

Still Parsons did not move. His sullen gaze remained fixed on the other's face, with an expression as cold and unpleasant as the drizzling mist which surrounded them. Within him he was aware of a tense excitement, the crystallization of the simmering emotion he had felt ever since that day, two weeks ago, when Gregory had been assigned to the same balloon as himself.

For this lucky chance that war had thrown him had given him the opportunity for which he had waited. For years he had harbored a burning hatred of Gregory. It was a smoldering, intense thing born of a gnawing sense of inferiority. Even in school, fifteen years ago, he had hated Gregory. Hated him because of his easy popularity, his effortless skill at games and study.

It seemed to Parsons that, as far back as he could remember, he had been eclipsed by Gregory. It had been Gregory who had won for his wife the only girl that Parsons had ever loved. It had been Gregory who, in France, had won for himself the flying laurels which Parsons coveted.

An insane, obsessed hatred lived in Parsons' heart, a hatred that could be obliterated only by murder.

And now, a Fate which had been adamant for all these years had at last become kindly. Had played into Parsons' eager hands.

Gregory removed the headpiece. He took his water bottle from his side, uncorked it. A flickering excitement flared for a moment in Parsons' eyes. Gregory lifted the bottle and drank deep. Parsons bit his lips. Off in the distance the allied Spad, which had for some queer reason hovered over its own lines all morning, roared around in a deft bank.

Gregory replaced the water bottle. He screwed up his face.

"Lousy water," he said. "God, where do they get this stuff?"

STILL Parsons made no answer. The smile on his face was an ugly thing to see. Within him was a sense of surging triumph. He glanced at the watch on his wrist. In less than fifteen minutes, now, the thing which had always cast its dominating shadow over his life would be gone. In less than fifteen minutes, the thing—

Gregory came to his feet abruptly. His field glasses were in his hand. His brow wrinkled in perplexity.

"What the devil's that?" he asked. "Looks like someone's signaling from the line in semaphore. That's odd."

He put the glasses to his eyes and peered out into the mist.

Parsons paid scant attention to his words. Intently he studied the face of the man he hated. He was obsessed with but a single thought. He wanted to see Gregory die. The fact that signals were coming in semaphore from the line instead of from artillery over the phone wire failed to interest him at that moment.

Suddenly, Gregory lowered his glasses.

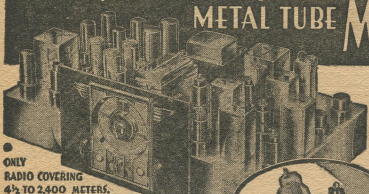
"My God," he said suddenly. "That's—" an odd expression came over his face as he broke off. White pain came like a distorted mask across his features. His hand suddenly covered his heart. He lurched
(Continued on page 118)

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(Continued from page 116)

crazily, then fell heavily to the bottom of the nacelle. "Parsons," he gasped. "For God's sake. We—"

Parsons rose to his feet and spoke for the second time that morning.

"Shut up," he said and there was a terrible triumph in his voice. Gregory stared at him through eyes be-dimmed with pain. "You needn't tell me how you feel," went on Parsons. "I know. In fact, it's I that caused you to feel that way. You're going to die, Gregory, within the next five minutes. You've got a belly full of oxalic acid. Your canteen was full of it."

Gregory stared stupidly up at him. Parsons grinned evilly.

"And don't think they'll get me for it, either," he continued. "My own bottle is also loaded. But I didn't drink any of mine. The rap'll go to some careless private in the cookhouse. They use oxalic acid for polishing. Somehow it got into our water bottles. You just happened to drink yours. I wasn't thirsty. Get it, Gregory?"

Gregory lay at his feet, twisted with pain. Yet a strange, enigmatic smile was on his face. It was with an effort that he spoke. "So you hated me this much, Parsons?"

Parsons laughed bitterly.

"You'll never know, not even in death, how much I hated you. Always you've beaten me. You've always frustrated everything, every desire I ever had. This is the first time I've ever beaten you. I defy you to take this, my happiest moment, away from me." He glanced at his wrist-watch. "You ought to last about three more minutes," he added.

Beneath the pain in Gregory's eyes there was something else. Something which Parsons saw, but could not define. Off in the distance he again heard the roaring drone of the lone ship that had patrolled the line that morning. Now it grew louder, came closer.

Some of the pain left Gregory's face. A quiet serenity seemed to replace it. "Parsons," he said slowly,

deliberately. "I shan't die alone."

Parsons stared at him. Something of the old fear he had of Gregory returned. "What do you mean?"

"That semaphore from the line," said Gregory, raising his voice as the pounding of the Spad's engine became louder—"that ship that's been out there all morning—it's a fake! It's a Boche using our insignia! It's been observing our front line all morning. Got so low at one time they could see the uniform of the pilot. They signaled us to get the hell out of here before it got us. Figured that after it was through observation, it would knock us down. I was going to tell you that, but you told me your little story first."

Parsons' face was white. A terrible fear was in his heart. Had Gregory once again defeated him? Or was this a desperate, last-minute bluff?

Now through the mist the deafening chant of an airplane engine became thunder in his ears. A crazy, roaring grey bird raced toward them from the greyness. Parsons saw the dark arc its pounding prop made. He saw the sinister muzzle of a machine-gun. And all too clearly he knew that a single incendiary bullet from that muzzle into his gas bag would send him to a literal flaming hell. At his feet Gregory lay still and silent. Perhaps, after all, he lied, had bluffed. Perhaps this was a Yankee ship. Perhaps—

Then hope died a-borning in Parsons' breast. The Spad's nose maneuvered abruptly, until the balloon's gas bag was centered in its ring-sights. The staccato chatter of a Vickers gun screeched.

Paralyzed with horror, Parsons saw the bag above his head suddenly evolve into a maddened yellow mass. The gas billowed forth from the ripped bag. The flame reached out with blanketing, avid hands. A terrible heat enveloped Parsons. Hell encompassed his body. His flesh crackled. He fell, a blackened hulk, across the still body of the man at his feet.

And before he died, he cursed with his last breath the man who even in death had beaten him.

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Here's a letter on the subject from Painton himself:

Dear Globe Trotter:

Most of the incidents in **DEATH SAFARI** happened, but not to the same characters, and not in this fashion. In Hollywood two years ago, I met two mentally ill persons, and watched them as you watch a fly under a microscope. One of them killed himself last year; and the other is in San Quentin serving life imprisonment for murder.

Every so often the newspapers tell of this or that movie actor bitten, stung, or badly wounded by the many wild animals which are used in the making of pictures. I myself have seen them take chances with only rifle guards and their quickness to save them in case the animal fell into a pan.

Out of these episodes and a "bring-'em-back-alive" character, I have woven a story of the Africa which I love so well. Strange things have happened there; and if you don't believe me read a few of the fact books which men who boldly plunge into

her mysterious depths write when they are lucky enough to emerge alive.

They can tell you that paved roads, and motor cars, and rich hunters shooting game from a galloping Ford on the *veldt* have destroyed all that was Africa. But they are wrong. Africa's interior will take a lot more exploring before you can str through it as you would a side street off Broadway.

—Frederick C. Painton.

Sea Gypsies of the Sulu

A COLORFUL letter comes from Lieut. John Dane, author of **WHITE GOD OF THE BAJAOS**. I've seen very little information anywhere about the Sea Gypsies of the Sulu Sea.

The world they live in is largely unknown and yet glowingly studded with exotic atmosphere and opportunity for adventure. The lieutenant has taken the trouble to find out all he could on the subject.

His letter to us follows:

Dear Globe Trotter:

These Sea Gypsies are a band of hard-fighting pagans who for centuries have resisted outside influence. They live all their lives on water and are intensely superstitious. Hence the ease with which the half-crazed white man in my true-experience story was able to establish domination over them. His story is in itself a fascinating subject for the adventurous mind to play with, and I expect at some future date to set it down in greater detail.

Queerly enough, only last year, I came across his tracks in Zanzibar. As many as fifteen years ago he had been a runner for a ship's chandler there, named Carl Dortmeier. Dortmeier remembered him well and said the man had always a curious hold over the natives.

But to get back to the Sea Gypsies—nobody I've met in the western world knows a great deal about them and I find I'm by way of becoming something of an authority on them. They are indigenous to the Sulu Archipelago, although their *vin-tas*, more like cockle-shells than the famed

(Continued on page 125)

The only man
who could talk
to the
Superintendent



For several years, he was just like a score of other men in the plant—a good, honest, fairly capable worker, but only that. There was nothing distinctive about him or his ability—nothing to make him stand out from the crowd—no reason, as a matter of fact, why he should ever receive a raise.

Then one fortunate day he decided that the reason he wasn't getting anywhere was because he lacked special training. He searched around a bit—asked a great many questions—and then enrolled for a home-study course with the International Correspondence Schools.

"Soon after I began studying," he wrote to us the other day, "we had a change in management at our plant. The new superintendent said that only

men who had really studied their work were in line for positions as foremen.

"I certainly was glad then that I had decided to study in my spare time. For, thanks to my I.C.S. course, I was the only man in the organization who could talk to the superintendent in his own language. As a result, I was promoted over men who had been here from ten to twenty years."

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JUNGLE ENEMY

(Continued from page 114)

Fitzhugh was swearing a blue streak. He was half mad as he stood there shaking. He emptied Carson's pistol into the still form of the negro. Then he collapsed, falling across the body of the black.

RED dawn found Driller Fitzhugh and Lane in their bunks. The driller, recovered partially from his beating, was first up; he was moving around the shack when Lane opened his eyes. He was stiff, bruised, but sleep had given Dan new strength. Fitzhugh's back was sore and his legs would hardly hold him, but he grinned at Lane.

"Come on, kid," the driller ordered. "We'll get back on the job."

Lane cursed him. "To hell with you. I'm quitting."

Fitzhugh hobbled over, stood beside him. He shook his head at the young derrick man.

"I won't let you quit, Lane. You're too good a man. I need you on the rig. We've got to finish this hole."

"We've got no peons."

"They're in the bush, they'll come back as soon as they see Carson and that black wizard are done for."

"Was it a wizard?" asked Lane curiously.

"Sure. That big black was a witch doctor from Maracaibo way. I've just been lookin' him over. Come take a peek at him."

Lane rose stiffly, had a long drink of water, stepped out into the sunlight. Carson and his giant friend lay close together in death. The black man was a huge creature, and the feather headdress he had worn, pulled off by Fitzhugh and exposing a naked skull, had made him seem even larger. The dirty leather mask, yanked aside, showed the thick negroid lips and gleaming ivories.

"I know this *hombre*," Fitzhugh said, lighting up a cigarette. "And now I realize how Carson found out about that map and the diamonds. I was out on a spree, got drunk in Maracaibo. Bumped into Carson,

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and he took me around to have a look at this witch doctor, who was doing a rushing business among the black breeds in town. Voodoo stuff.

"Later on, I was pretty soused, and I suppose I spilled the beans about that treasure to Marty, though I don't recall that part of it very well. Didn't have the map on me then, or they might have rolled me for it. It was hidden in my luggage.

"Carson teamed up with this black guy and followed me down here to trim me and get the diamonds. I suppose the witch doctor wore his disguise to scare us, or maybe he enjoyed going around that way—made him feel powerful."

Lane shuddered as he stared down at the two corpses. Flies covered the bodies, and, in the blue above, black vultures hovered.

"Did you find your map?" he growled. "It made plenty of trouble, Fitzhugh."

The driller shook his head. "It wasn't on either of 'em. It's gone. I'll never find that mine again without the map. I wanted to ask you about it."

"I saw the black run off with your money belt," Lane told him. "That's all I know. Maybe he hid it in the jungle."

"But the map wasn't in my money belt. I kept it and the diamonds I had in the rear pockets of my cartridge belt. I was always having to dig into my money belt for cash for the peons, so I put the map in my gun belt."

Lane's brow corrugated. Finally he said, "Now I remember. Wait." He strode toward the western bush.

Twenty minutes later he was back, Fitzhugh's cartridge belt in his hand. The driller seized it eagerly, opened one of the pockets, drew out a paper wrapped in oiled silk.

"This is it," he cried.

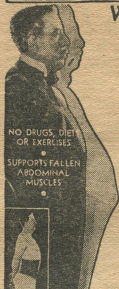
"When I carried you in after the wizard beat you up," Lane said, "your belt brushed off on the bushes. It was lying out there, and I found it a few yards from the clearing."

Fitzhugh came close to him. "Dan,"

(Concluded on page 124)

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(Concluded from page 123)

he said, "you're in on this, fifty-fifty, with me. I meant to do it all along, that's why I brought you down here. I needed someone to help get those diamonds out, and picked you. You're honest, and a fine worker."

"You—you picked me?" stammered Lane.

"Sure I did. I asked the boss to send you on this job with me, because I always liked you, and knew you could stand the pace. I wanted to hurry this job through so we could go after that treasure. We'll be rich together."

Fitzhugh was obviously embarrassed; he was a roughneck, tough and hard, and such a declaration of friendship was hard for him to make. And Lane, staring at the red-bearded face, found in the green eyes a gleam of kindness he had never noticed before. He took his new friend's hand and shook it heartily.

The peons were slowly coming out of the jungle, stopping to stare at the dead witch doctor and Marty Carson. Fitzhugh shook himself, turned.

"Come on, Lane," he growled, "let's go. We want to get this lousy hole down before the end of the world."

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(Continued from last month)

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THE GLOBE TROTTER

(Continued from page 120)

Malayan proas, are sometimes to be seen as far from their native waters as the southwest coast of Mindanao. However, at Siasi they can always be found.

The constabulary station at Siasi is the only one among their islands, and so tickle a tribe to handle are they that standing orders from Manila forbid any interference with their customs or traditions. In fact, three-quarters of the constabulary's duties consist of keeping the Moros from Jolo away from the Bajaos, lest a religious war break forth. The Moros, as you probably know are Moslems and true believers hate all pagans. Another reason is the Moros' covetousness.

The Sea Gypsies, also called *Luwaan* sometimes, possess what is probably the finest collection of pearls on the face of this globe. Moros have always had their eyes on these pearls, and ever since the dawn of history, pearls have been a valued commodity in the commerce of the Eastern world.

I can't say that I bear any grudge to the Bajaos. I, and my comrade, Tommy Hearn, were the aggressors. But Ed Grinnell, whom they'd revered as a god, was the real offender, according to my lights. As I said before, I hope some day to publish his full biography. Murderer, blackguard, and worse, he undoubtedly was, but I think his story will make good reading.

Lieut. John Dane.

Armchairs Forward!

For those Globe Trotters who are all ready to cut loose and see what the rest of the world is made of, there are dozens of us who can only wish them *bon voyage*—and perhaps wish that we could go along. The members of our Armchair Brigade.

England starts them off this month:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I am an armchair Globe Trotter, having never been out of England, only for a day trip to the Isle of Wight, which, of course, is *still* England. I like your sea stories best, but the others take quite a lot to beat. So carry on with the good work, and may the Globe Trotters keep on trotting!

H. F. Gray.

89 Bridge St.,
Peterborough, England.

And right behind his British cousin comes a Highlander:

Dear Globe Trotter:

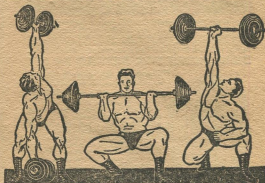
I often read of other adventures in far-off places. But there are some who cannot get away. I am one of them, but I can always find some fun right here at

(Continued on page 126)

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THE BEACON

22 West 48th Street Dept. 2 New York City

(Continued from page 125)

home. Scotland, as you know, is rich in hills and history, yet I never see any stories about Scotland in your book. Why not? There are lots of brave deeds by Scottish men all over the world.

I'll be glad to tell any Globe Trotter about Scotland if they care to write to me.

Bob Campbell.

74 Cedar St., Glasgow, N. W., Scotland.

Nearer home is this chap:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I have just finished the June issue of THRILLING ADVENTURES. It is the first I've read, but you can bet your last cent it isn't going to be the last. I haven't traveled much, but if anyone wants to know anything about the Windy City I think I can satisfy them. I'll be glad to answer all letters coming my way.

Joe Scalabrini.

8 South Canal St., Chicago, Illinois.

Now comes a Globe Trotter who is interested in the Philippines:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I have not traveled as extensively as I should like, but the descriptions in many stories in THRILLING ADVENTURES strike familiar chords in my memory. I've always had a desire to see the Philippines, and the story, "One Man Army," by Anson Hard, has whetted that ambition.

I am also greatly interested in South America, especially Brazil and the Argentine.

H. L. ("Brandy") Ladd.

Belle Glade, Florida.

Wish We Could

Ye Olde Globe Trotter is always mighty glad to hear from you, but there is one sort of letter that affords me only regret. Such as this one from Carsonville, Mo.:

Dear Globe Trotter:

In your contacts with the world at large have you any information about positions open for men in foreign countries and tropical climates? If so I would very much like to know of them and what the requirements for such positions are.

Edward T. Sears.

To Bro. Sears and the dozen others who have sent in similar requests during the past week—Ye Olde Globe Trotter is sorry, but there is nothing he can do about it. Attempting to act in the capacity of an employment agent would involve entirely too much work and responsibility. However, if you are looking for a job in a foreign country I

(Concluded on page 128)

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"I ate with my plate 15 minutes after I put them in my mouth. I slept with them in my mouth, never bothered me a bit."—E. F., Lake City, Colorado.

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(Concluded from page 126)

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