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FEATURING

THE RIVER DEVILS

An Action Novel of
the Amazon

By

**CRAWFORD
SULLIVAN**

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

**LAIR
OF THE
PYTHON**

A Novelette of
the Philippines

By **HUGH B. CAVE**

DYNAMITE WAR

A Western Novelette

By **OSCAR SCHISGALL**



Missing Page

Inside front cover

New 6-Volt TRINDL Electric ARC WELDER

PATENTS PENDING

Works on Storage Battery
or 110 Volt Light Circuit
A REAL WELDER



Man, here is the hottest specialty item that has come along in years. A real honest to goodness electric arc welder that does a man size job. Built sturdily of the finest materials. Requires no mechanical knowledge—any one can use it. Every demonstration should make a sale. This new Trindl Electric Arc Welder is made possible by the invention of a low voltage carbon which gets white hot from the current of an ordinary 6 volt storage battery such as in your automobile. It only uses about 20 to 25 amperes of current which is about the same current drain as 4 headlight bulbs, yet develops about 7000 degrees of heat.

MELTS IRON AND STEEL INSTANTLY

The Trindl Welder is simple to use. Expert welding can be done by anyone. The

Trindl Arc Welder is the only battery welder that, after a rigid test, has been approved by the Automotive Test Laboratories of America. It is ideal for making permanent fender repairs—also for broken castings, radiators, cylinders, water jackets, holes in auto bodies, hog troughs, boilers, tanks, milk cans, radios, batteries, etc. Iron, Steel, Brass, Copper and Tin can be worked on for a quick and permanent repair. The repaired part will be as strong as before.

NEW 110 VOLT CONVERTER MAKES FULL SIZE PROFESSIONAL UNIT

This new converter is used on any 110 volt 60 cycle electric light socket in place of a storage battery. It is especially designed to be used with the Trindl Electric Arc Welder—COSTS LESS THAN A GOOD BATTERY—The combination makes a full size professional electric arc welder that everybody can use. Ideal for fender and repair shop needs. This is a sensation, not only in price but also in actual results. The converter represents the same fine construction and engineering skill as the arc welder. The complete outfit, including the transformer, is easily portable so that it can be brought right to the job.

USERS SWEAR BY IT—The price is so low that now anyone can afford to have a real welding outfit. Think of the profit you can make introducing this Trindl Welder and Converter—a simple five minute demonstration should make a sale to every interested prospect, especially when they hear the amazingly low price. Garages, radio and battery men, tinner, sheet metal workers, janitors, farmers and home-owners all need the Trindl Welder and Converter.

ACTION NOW! There are big profits and a steady business waiting for you taking care of your territory for us. Don't let someone else get in before you—Send coupon Today.

TRINDL PRODUCTS
2229-SC Calumet Ave., Chicago, Ill.

RETAILS
FOR



FACTS

Here are just a few excerpts from the many letters of praise we have received from Trindl Electric Arc boosters.

"Please find enclosed for 12 welders by return mail for I am about sold out now. They are selling fine."—W. C. Anderson, Neb.

"Received my Trindl Arc-Welder and am both pleased and surprised."—Louis F. Glier, Ohio.

"Results are very gratifying with your welder. I am enclosing an order for 12 more Electric Arc Welders."—Nelson O. Lyster, Florida.

"I received my welder, and it is a regular repair shop in itself."—J. R. Harper, La.

"I sold 4 of your Trindl Electric Arc Welders in three minutes."—C. Gillies, Canada.

"I sold 9 welders in my first ten calls."—F. W. Stice, Iowa.

\$10.50 a day profit for you for only selling 6 Trindl Arc Welders. No matter where you turn, you will find people who will want to buy arc welders from you. Garages, shop men, radio repair men, farmers, home-owners, mechanics, janitors, all of them need Trindl Electric Arc Welders. Be the man in your territory to clean up with Trindl.

MAIL COUPON NOW!

TRINDL PRODUCTS
2229-SC Calumet Ave.,
Chicago, Illinois

Yes! Rush me free particulars of how I can make big money with Trindl Electric Arc Welders and Converter. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name
Local Address.....
City
State

THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. XXIII, No. 1

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

September, 1937

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Join THE GLOBE TROTTERS' CLUB! Coupon on Page 123

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Proof*



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Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as \$200 to \$500 a year—full time jobs with Radio Jobbing manufacturers, dealers as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts operate their own full time or part time Radio sales and service businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$5,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay, see the world besides. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loud speaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I have trained are holding good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read their statements. Mail the coupon.

There's a Real Future in Radio for Well Trained Men

Radio already gives good jobs to more than 350,000 people. And in 1936, Radio enjoyed one of its most prosperous years. More than \$500,000,000 worth of sets, tubes, and parts were sold—in an increase of more than 60% over 1935. Over a million Auto Radios were sold, a big increase over 1935. 24,000,000 homes now have one or more Radio sets, and more than 4,000,000 autos are Radio equipped. Every year millions of these sets go out of date and are replaced with newer models. More millions need servicing, new tubes, repairs, etc. A few hundred \$30, \$50, \$75 a week jobs have grown to thousands in 20 years. And Radio is still a new industry—growing fast!

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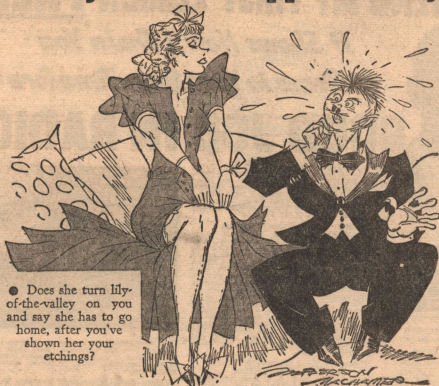
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He knows, in a given business, what per cent of one's working capital can safely be tied up in merchandise on hand, what per cent is safe and adequate for sales promotion. And these, by the way, are but two of *scores* of percentage-figures where-with he points the way to successful operation.

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Robin Hood and
Outlaw-Sleuth
Whose Exploits Have Thrilled
Millions of Readers
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Within the next two weeks, over 350 men and women will be given the opportunity to open up fine-paying Coffee Agencies right in their own home localities. If you are looking for a bona fide chance to make as high as \$60.00 in a week, starting at once, this company will send you everything you need, give you all the help you require, and back you up with its proven successful plans. You risk no money. A chance to be independent, work as you please, and make more than just a modest living. If you want to know whether there is an opening for you in your own or nearby locality, mail the Application below. By return mail you will be notified whether we have an opening for you, and if we have, you will receive full information about this Coffee Agency Plan. You don't send a penny—just mail the Application. No obligation—you decide after you read the plan. Don't delay. Send your Application at once.

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ADDRESS HERE!**

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Address.....

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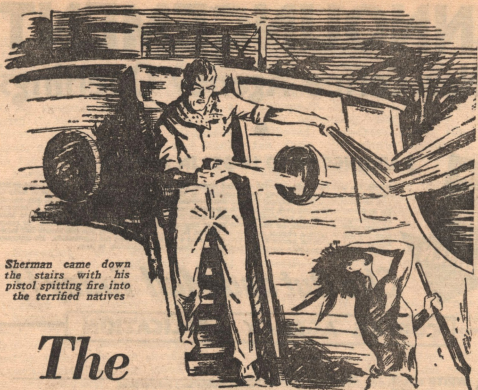
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Sherman came down
the stairs with his
pistol spitting fire into
the terrified natives

The River Devils

*Carlos Vega and the Rio Japura Rubber Company
Prompt a Reign of Terror Among the Natives of the
Amazon Jungle-lands, Until Bill Sherman Projects
Himself Into a Turmoil of Blood and Mystery!*

By **CRAWFORD SULLIVAN**

Author of "The Condor's Claw," "Gambler's Chance," etc.

CHAPTER I

A Jungle Jove

A STREAMER of black smoke poured from the Jaribu's slim funnel and melted into the grey haze which had settled over the river. Slushing up a lacy spray, the little sternwheeler creaked in every joint as she chugged against

the current. Away from the flashing paddles and racketing engine, the world was dead. Stretches of green silent jungle lay rotting on both sides of the river as far as the eye could reach.

Bill Sherman perched himself on a rum keg near the starboard rail and proceeded to oil a blue steel .45 which rested in a holster at his hip.

*An Action
Novel of
the Amazon*



Seven years in the Amazon basin had taught Bill Sherman the value of a gun and an oil can; but even those years of experience had not taught him to keep out of trouble. In fact, Sherman was headed for trouble right now. He knew it; and he rather enjoyed the prospect.

Extending his long legs, he dug splinters out of the deck with his heels. The deck was rotten—like everything else on the river. Men with listless eyes reclined in the hammocks slung aft. A few negroes and half-breeds were sprawled up forward, snoring loudly. At a crude table on the port side sat the customary group of river gamblers: hawk-faced individuals in sweat-stained garments, who thumbed their cards nervously and indulged in occasional swigs of rum and *guarana*.

Bill Sherman clicked the gun shut and returned it to his holster. The gamblers had come to life and were arguing about something. Sherman pivoted on the keg.

"I saw you!" exclaimed a shrill voice. A small bald-headed man stood up and pointed his finger at a burly Brazilian. "You pulled that card out of your hat!"

The Brazilian glared back, his eyes snapping. His right hand darted beneath his coat and emerged holding a gleaming knife. With a sudden lunge, he leaped forward, overturning the table. Cards fluttered to the floor; bottles clattered. The bald man shrank back to the rail and kicked out with one foot. Cloth ripped, as the knife missed its mark and slashed the man's shirt.

As the blade descended again, a heavy fist thumped the gambler's oily scalp with the force of a falling hammer. The Brazilian reeled to one side, tried to turn the knife on his new assailant and was immediately sent tumbling across the deck.

His knife flew from his hand and stuck quivering in the engine house. When the Brazilian regained his senses, he saw a tall, broad-shouldered man standing over him. The man had a firm, muscular jaw, a creased chin and steely eyes that narrowed to pinpoints.

"Hah—" gasped the gambler, rubbing a smear of blood from his mouth. "Senhor Sherman!"

"I don't like knifeplay, Manoel," said Bill Sherman. "You've been trying to gyp the little guy all morning. As a rule, I don't interfere in these affairs; but—"

"You will pay for this," muttered Manoel blackly.

SHERMAN shrugged his shoulders, pulled the knife from the planking and tossed it overboard. The Brazilian arose and staggered to a hammock. Sherman turned; gazed at the bald man's round face, the lashless eyes and the full lips.

"You're Peter Berthold," he said finally. "Funny I didn't recognize you before. You used to own a rubber station on the Madeira."

The man nodded mechanically. "That was five years ago," he said, his voice scarcely above a whisper.

"What are you doing on this mud scow?" asked Sherman. "Your *seringal* was one of the richest on the river."

Peter Berthold glanced about furtively. "I can't talk here," he replied. "Let's go to the upper deck."

The two men climbed a rickety ladder and walked back to the stern, where their voices would be muffled by the churning paddles. Berthold pointed to a purple and white flag which hung limply from the flag-staff.

"I killed a man," he said grimly. "One of the Rio Japura officials. He got what he deserved; but the company took my land away from me and hoisted that damn flag over it."

"The Rio Japura Company took your land?"

"It was that or death," answered Berthold. "Ever since then, I've been practically a prisoner. I've worked on their dirty river boats, lived in their *seringals* like a slave. As soon as I've outlived my usefulness, they'll murder me — just as they've done with others."

"Why didn't you report it to the Brazilian government?" Sherman asked.

"The Rio Japura Company is pow-

erful," said Berthold meekly. "What can one man do?"

Bill Sherman took off his hat; ran his fingers through an untamed shock of coffee-colored hair. He was well aware of the power possessed by the Rio Japura Rubber Company. Like a greedy octopus, the organization had spread over the upper reaches of the Amazon, crushing every small landowner who stood in its path. Peter Berthold was only one of its victims.

"We must not be seen together too long," said Berthold nervously. "There are informers—"

"Hold on," clipped Sherman. "There are a few more things I'd like to know."

Berthold wagged his head. "Later," he said. "It is dangerous to talk on one of the company vessels." He hustled down the ladder as fast as his short legs would carry him.

Sherman placed his crushed Panama back on his head and lit a cigarette. The purple and white flag flapped idly in the sticky air; the paddle wheel creaked and groaned. Berthold's conversation had made him feel uneasy, feel that he, too, was being spied upon. The upper deck was deserted, and yet he had the disturbing sensation of being watched by hidden eyes. He inhaled deeply of the cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke through his nostrils.

He saw it then. A white face was staring at him from the Number Three cabin, just abaft the funnel. The sun was partly hidden behind the sweltering haze; but a streak of light had been thrown against the black porthole by one of the flashing paddles. The face was visible only for an instant, and once again the porthole became vacantly dark.

Bill Sherman was puzzled. To his knowledge, the Number Three cabin had not been occupied since the boat left Para. On most of the Rio Japura vessels that cabin was reserved for company officials. Sherman could think of but one explanation: Someone had crept aboard the *Jaribu* when she was docked at Manaos and was stowing away in the empty cabin.

Striding across the deck, he tried the cabin door. It was locked. Sherman braced one arm close to his body, gave a quick, powerful lunge and threw his weight against the panel. Wood splintered, and the door swung open.

The cabin was like a furnace inside—hot, gloomy. Bill Sherman stepped in, his hand resting on his holster. Before him was a disheveled bunk. Suitcases littered the floor.

"Put up your hands!"

Sherman's cigarette dropped from his mouth. Instead of raising his hands, he turned to his left and planted both fists against his hips. For several seconds he stood in that position, surprise written on his bronzed features. Then he moistened his lips; removed the battered Panama from his head.

"I'll be damned!" said Bill Sherman, and the words came out automatically. "It's a woman!"

CHAPTER II

Queen on the Jaribu



SHE was standing in one corner of the cabin, a blue cotton robe wrapped around her body. Strands of hair curled over her shoulders like threads of spun gold, shining brightly against the blue of the robe and wisping across her creamy throat.

Bill Sherman noticed her eyes first of all. They too were blue—dark and translucent, like water shimmering in a still cove. The girl's face, her mass of gleaming hair gave an impression of cleanliness and health. Sherman was glad to see something healthy and clean for a change. It made him think of dry open fields, away from the stench of a decaying jungle.

As he scanned the girl's delicate features, Bill Sherman paid little attention to a nicked .32 which she clutched in one hand. The revolver was pointed at Sherman's heart, its hammer cocked back.

"Sorry to intrude, Miss," said Sherman blandly. "But I thought this cabin was unoccupied—"

"Get out of here," snapped the girl. "Captain Perez knows I'm aboard."

"You're traveling in mighty bad company," Sherman told her. "What're you doing on this tub anyhow?"

"That's none of your business," she flared. "But if you must know—I'm bound for Maloa."

"So am I," said Sherman. "Seems we might as well be friends. You may need a friend before you get to Maloa."

I last saw him, he was too drunk to move. Does anyone else know you're aboard?"

The girl shook her head. "I came on board at Manaos," she stated.

"The captain told me to stay in my cabin. He said that a woman on board was liable to cause trouble."

"If any of those tramps lay a hand on you, they'll answer to me," growled Sherman. "You're getting off this boat as soon as possible. There's a Brazilian outpost up the river where boats stop—"

"I'm staying right here," she retorted. "I don't let strangers manage my business."



Lurking in the jungle O Ladrao's scouts

The girl stared at Bill Sherman squarely. Sherman's wild, brownish hair was standing up almost straight. She wondered how he might look if that hair was plastered down—or even combed. His face was pleasant enough: young, clean-shaven, with little curved wrinkles coming down from the edges of his nose. With a little grooming, he might be considered rather handsome.

She lowered her gun; placed it on the bunk.

"I don't trust you," she said. "However, Captain Perez is up in the wheel-house. If you make one wrong move I'll call him."

"Captain Perez is in his cabin below," Sherman corrected. "When

"We're not strangers any longer," was the calm reply. "My name's Bill Sherman, and I'm headed for the company *seringal* at Maloa. It's a dirty rotten place and run by an equally rotten company."

"The Rio Japura Company is a fine organization," she declared. "My brother is the agent at Maloa. His name is John Winters. Perhaps you know him."

Glancing down at one of the open suitcases, Bill Sherman noticed a photograph encased in a leather frame. He picked it up; scrutinized it carefully. The portrait was of a thin-faced man with blond hair and a long slender nose. It had not been retouched, and a long scar was

plainly visible above the man's left eye. "Is this your brother?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, taking the picture from him. "I haven't seen John for several years. You see, I just arrived from the States."

"Is he expecting you?"

"No, but—"

"That settles it," said Bill Sherman definitely. "You're going back to Manaos. I'll tell your brother that you've come; and if he wants you to join him—"

"Why shouldn't he want me?" she demanded. "I'm going on, I tell you!"

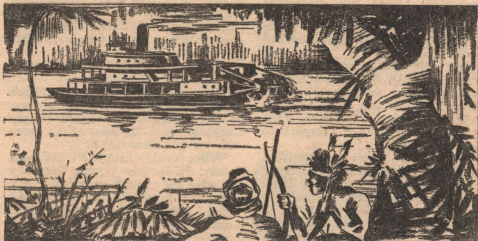
"That girl on the upper deck," said Sherman abruptly. "Who is she?"

Captain Perez batted his eyes nervously. "You discovered her, eh, Senhor?" he said. "I knew she could not remain hidden forever. Her name is Lois Winters."

"She's decided to return to Manaos," Sherman stated. "Pull your boat into the wharf."

"We make no stop at this outpost," said Captain Perez. "My orders were to carry Senhora Winters to the company station at Malao. Her brother, you know—"

"I'll answer to her brother," in-



watched the passage of the sternwheeler

"Suit yourself," said Bill Sherman. "But I intend to talk with the captain about it—after he sobers up." He bowed stiffly, clamped his hat to his head and stalked from the cabin.

Towards evening, as the boat splashed its way up the broad Japura River, the twinkling lights of a village loomed on the starboard side. By seven o'clock, Captain Perez had come out of his sodden coma and was sitting on the edge of his bunk sipping a glass of pinkish guarana. When Bill Sherman entered, the captain's hand was shaking perceptibly. His small eyes were bloodshot, and he looked like a man with the fever.

interrupted Sherman. "He doesn't even know she's coming. And besides—have you forgotten *O Ladrao*?"

"I do not fear *O Ladrao*," said Captain Perez sleepily. "Rest assured, the girl will be safe."

"You're putting in at this village!" rasped Sherman. "If you won't, I'll give the order myself!"

"Be seated, Senhor Sherman," said the captain harshly. The black muzzle of an automatic slid from under his dirty pillow. Bill Sherman gnawed at his lower lip; then reluctantly dropped his big body into a creaking chair.

"You have much to learn," observed Captain Perez. "We who work for the Rio Japura Company

take orders only from our superiors. To disobey those orders means death. I have instructions to take Senhora Winters to Maloa."

"Who gave you those instructions?" rumbled Sherman.

"Carlos Vega, himself!"

Bill Sherman remained silent. An order from Carlos Vega had a sinister meaning in the Amazon basin; for Vega was president of the entire Rio Japura organization.

It was he who controlled the tentacles of the octopus from his elaborate offices in Para and, like a paunchy Satan, directed the movements of his river devils. Rubber was Carlos Vega's one obsession; and the fat *pelles* which his boats hauled down to Para were the product of human suffering, bloodshed and destruction.

Under the circumstances, there was nothing Bill Sherman could do except gaze out through the cabin door and watch the lights of the village skim past. If Carlos Vega had given the girl her passport to Maloa, Sherman was helpless.

A thousand thoughts scurried through his mind while he watched the trembling captain gulp his drink—the pistol nodding menacingly from the pillow. The hand on a rusted alarm clock crept about the face slowly. Sherman listened to the seconds ticking by.

"You may go now, Senhor," said Captain Perez. "And remember—I still give the orders!"

Sherman looked pityingly at the blasted hulk which had once been a man. Like Peter Berthold, the captain had become only a living tool of the Rio Japura Company. Heading aft, Bill Sherman climbed the ladder to the upper deck. A yellow moon was emerging from the river, carving a wavy golden path across the water. The paddle-wheel seemed to be raking up a myriad of crystals and hurling them into the hot fragrant air. As Bill Sherman rounded the boxlike cabin structure, his heart gave a queer unexpected leap.

Lois Winters was standing beside the port rail, gazing across at the jungle. A trim, slender figure

clad entirely in white, she appeared more beautiful than Bill Sherman had first imagined. He approached her silently; stood at her elbow for a few moments without speaking. The night was warm but not oppressive. The sticky mist had cleared, leaving the jungle sparkling.

"WELL, I'm still with you," said the girl. Sherman caught an amused tinkle in her voice. It annoyed him. He had been thinking only of her safety, and she regarded his warning as a huge joke.

"I spoke to the captain," he told her. "Perez refused to put you ashore. I believe there's something fishy about all this. About your coming aboard secretly. Do any of your relatives know where you are going?"

"I haven't any relatives—except my brother," she answered.

Sherman stroked his chin. "Then if anything should happen to you, no one would know. You'd simply disappear from the face of the earth with no questions asked."

"What could happen?" she said lightly. "The Rio Japura Company will give me enough protection. Mr. Vega, the president, is my friend."

Bill Sherman gave a guttural laugh. "Did you ever hear of *O Ladrao*?" he asked.

Lois Winters glanced up at him inquiringly.

"*O Ladrao* is a river pirate," Sherman stated. "For the past year he has been attacking vessels in this territory. If he keeps up the good work, the Rio Japura Company will have to quit operating on the Maloa River. They've lost three boats in the last six months."

"Can't they capture him?"

"Did you ever try to capture a ghost?" asked Sherman. "No? Well, *O Ladrao* is more crafty than a ghost. He and his men strike quickly and then scoot back into the jungle."

"Is he an Indian?" she asked.

"One of the smartest. They say he's leader of the Three Tribes and has his *maloka* near the headwaters of the Maloa River."

"You're trying to frighten me,"

came the stubborn retort. "I don't believe—"

Sherman grasped her by the arm and hurled her roughly across the deck. Before she could scream or struggle, he plumped down beside her, clapping his hand over her mouth. The girl kicked, tried to bite his fingers; but Sherman held her in a viselike grip, pinning her squirming body against the deck house.

Gradually he released his hold and helped the stunned girl to her feet. "Don't make a sound," he warned, removing his hand from her mouth. "Look over there."

Lois Winters followed his gaze. In midstream, just behind the *chuncking* paddles, lay a long black object.

And it appeared to be a floating log; but as the girl watched it closely, she saw something moving on top. Then, like a running black streak, the object shot toward the bank, moving against the current.

"That was a native canoe," stated Sherman. "I saw it as he came alongside."

"Did you have to knock me half-way across the boat?" demanded the girl irately.

Sherman made no answer. Lighting a match, he inspected the wall of the deck house. As the match flickered out, he gingerly drew a thin needlelike dart from the wood.

"O *Ladrao's* warriors seldom use blowguns," he said. "His sentinels are less civilized."

The girl stared at him, her lips trembling. "You saved my life—" she muttered weakly.

"I probably saved my own life," was the gruff reply. "Anyway, I didn't want you to make an outcry. The Indians mustn't know that we expect an attack. News travels fast in this country, and by tomorrow all the jungle will know that we're coming. You'd better stay out of sight a while longer."

Lois pressed her cool fingers against Bill Sherman's broad palm. "I guess you're all right," she admitted, smiling. There was a strange vibrant quality in her voice. "Until

we reach the station at Maloa, I'll take your advice."

Sherman watched her enter the small cabin, then he scowled and kicked lustily at a stanchion. He had more to think about than being nursemaid to a crazy, headstrong girl. From now on Lois Winters could take care of herself. He kicked at the stanchion again.

By midnight, Captain Perez was thoroughly drunk, and most of the men were snoring lustily in their hammocks. Bill Sherman remained outside the girl's cabin, listening to the swishing river and chattering jungle. It was well after dawn when he returned to his bunk below.

CHAPTER III

O *Ladrao* Strikes



A HIGH noonday sun sucked up a veil of mist from the river as the *Jaribu* swung her bow up the narrow tributary of Maloa. With every mile the jungle edged in closer, sweeping the decks with lianas, clogging the stream with moist green rushes and black logs.

Suddenly it was twilight, and the vast forest began to stir with life. A jaguar howled from some distant treetop. A red heron hovered in the sky, and a hundred small spider monkeys swung across a bridge of vines.

In fifteen minutes the sun disappeared like a snuffed candle; and the river became a black void filled with a sickly stench and weird disturbing sounds. To travel up the river at night was possible, but hazardous; so the foaming paddles stopped, and the yellow lights of the river boat threw distorted shadows over the dark water.

Bill Sherman sat on a capstan near the bow, a rifle resting on his knees. Peter Berthold paced the deck anxiously. "I'm not afraid of dying," said Berthold. "No more than the next man. It's this infernal waiting!

If the jungle doesn't get you, the Rio Japura Company will. But you never know when it's going to come!" He glanced about hastily, feeling that he had spoken too much.

"Maybe they won't attack," said Sherman. "The Indian I saw last night may not have been one of *O Ladrao's* men."

Berthold mopped the perspiration from his bald head. "I'll tell you something," he said in a whisper. "If I thought *O Ladrao* could break the Rio Japura Company—I'd help him. But it's impossible."

Sherman leaned forward, trying to probe the velvety darkness. A faint splash sounded off the port bow. Perhaps it was only a restless crocodile, a tapir sludging through the shallows. Or perhaps—

As though released by a strong spring, Bill Sherman jumped to his feet and blasted a ribbon of fire across the water. A horrible, blood-chilling scream slit the air. The splashing sound became louder. Sherman pumped at the rifle, raking lead through the darkness. Something was out there. He could not see it; but he could follow the sound. He heard Captain Perez screeching in Portuguese. Men were running for their guns. From every side came the thrumming beat of paddles. Sherman could make out the shadows now—the sharp, knifelike prows of native canoes. The river was littered with them!

A clear, crisp voice sounded over the water, rapping out an order in some strange tongue. Instantly flashes of flame popped up in all directions, and the jungle roared with volleying gunfire. Bullets whined past Bill Sherman's head, whanging against metal posts, grinding chips from the deck house.

Peter Berthold fell flat on his face and began to fire over the gunwale with a snub-nosed revolver. A scantily clad half-breed lay squirming by the engine house, blood oozing from a shredded hole in his neck. The *Jaribu's* men had barricaded themselves behind boxes and barrels. Manoel the gambler blus-

tered across the after deck, brandishing an automatic.

Skilfully, the canoes maneuvered into position until they completely surrounded the river boat, their prows all pointing toward the *Jaribu's* sides. Except for a few scattered shots, the rifle fire ceased. Bill Sherman crouched low, a hard lump wedged in his throat.

A glimmer of starlight filtered through the lianas, and for an instant he saw rows of naked bodies and the glint of polished steel. This was no ordinary Indian attack, conducted by yelling, half-crazed savages.

Against the spears and blowguns, the *Jaribu* might have stood a fair chance; but these Indians were armed with repeating rifles.

"It's *O Ladrao*, all right," said Peter Berthold huskily. "We might as well give up right now."

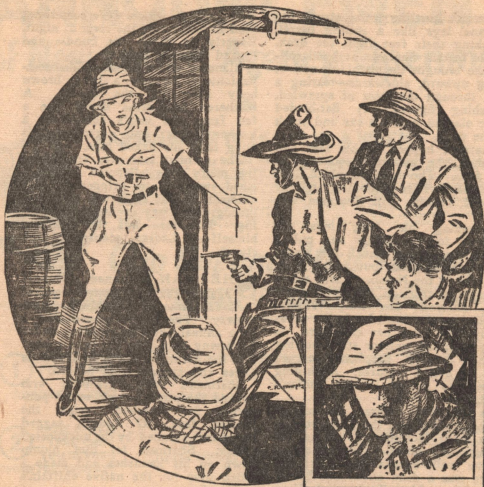
"You can at least die fighting," growled Sherman. "Or haven't you any fight left in that worthless body?"

"Why should I fight?" was the lifeless reply. "I don't care what happens to this boat, or to the scum on board it—"

"What are you waiting for?" belated Captain Perez, lurching to the rail. "Fire, men! We will show these savages—"

A FURRY yellow flame cracked across the water. Captain Perez stiffened, dug his fingers into his ragged shirt and toppled over. His men stared at the jerking body in horror as they unleashed a hail of lead at the surrounding canoes. The same crisp voice barked out another order; and like needles darting toward a magnet, the long canoes made for the river boat.

Shouldering his rifle, Bill Sherman drew a bead on the largest craft. At the prow sat a brightly painted warrior wearing a gaudy head-dress of feathers. The man's costume, the golden bracelets covering his arms and his sharp crackling voice marked him as the chieftain. Sherman raked a bullet through the warrior's tall head-dress; but before he could



"Raise your hands!" Lois Wilson snapped out the command as she stepped in front of the doorway

fire again, the canoe glided out of range.

A score of grim, paint-smeared faces leered over the rails, and a hot acrid odor wafted up from the deck, while guns rattled at close range. Uttering jubilant, inhuman sounds, the warriors lunged for the barricade of boxes which had been thrown up by the *Jaribu's* defenders. A smashing volley mowed them down; but other natives took their places, flailing rifle butts and slashing out with long-bladed knives.

His ammunition spent, Bill Sherman backed against the windlass and shouted for Peter Berthold. Berthold was not in sight. Sher-

man threw the rifle away and dug for his pistol. A horde of scowling savages pressed toward him, blocking all avenues of escape. The young man's first thought was to plunge over the side, taking his chances with the river.

As he spun to the rail, he heard a shrill high-pitched cry from the *Jaribu's* upper deck. The voice jolted him forward like a sudden electrical shock. The savages had discovered Lois Winters; and she was calling his name!

With a pantherlike lunge, Bill Sherman hurled himself at the row of brown legs. Lead whizzed over him, clanging on the windlass; but

Sherman's hurtling frame struck the Indians' legs like a rolling barrel, knocking their feet from the deck.

The instant Sherman stopped rolling, he brought the pistol into action, firing upward, sideways—tearing a path through the mass of sprawled, thrashing figures. A flat-bladed spear slashed past his ear and stuck in the deck.

Sherman hopped to his feet and smashed the assailant squarely in the face. The man stumbled into the sticky welter of bodies; and for a brief instant, Bill Sherman was free.

Spreading his long legs, he sprinted for the ladder and pulled himself to the next level. The upper deck was deserted; but an oil lamp flickered in the Number Three cabin.

Stepping through the open doorway, Sherman saw Lois Winters huddled in the small bunk, her dress partly torn from her shoulders. A brown-skinned warrior stood staring at her dumbly, perplexity carved into his stolid features. A shining knife was poised in the Indian's hand.

As Sherman entered the savage heeled around, and the knife started on a swift looping arc toward the young man's chest. Sherman sidled to the wall, squeezing his trigger. There was a dead *click*; but before the knife could strike its mark, Sherman hurled his gun straight at the Indian's face. A crimson stream dripped from the man's nose and he stumbled out the door, dragging himself to the deck ladder on his hands and knees.

"Stay hidden!" ordered Sherman, elbowing the sweat from his forehead. "You've got a chance—as long as the others don't find you!"

The girl nodded fearfully. Sherman blew out the lamp; slipped back to the deck. The Brazilians were still fighting for their lives below, making the boat a howling hell. Bill Sherman searched in the darkness for something he could use as a weapon.

Opening a wooden chest built next to the wheel house, he discovered a bundle of flares—powder sticks with

long handles, which were sometimes used in navigating the river at night. Eagerly he lifted the bundle and lugged it to the ladder.

Glancing down the cowl-like companionway, he saw a lithe, brown body ascending the ladder. A feathered head-dress flared like a fan from the man's shoulders; a leather holster and cartridge belt hung from his naked hips.

The painted face was tense, and the man's eyes glistened like polished stones as he gripped a black automatic. The sight was strangely incongruous; but in no way amusing. This man was the chieftain himself—*O Ladrão*, scourge of the river.

SHERMAN flattened himself against the deck house, watched *O Ladrão* emerge from the companionway. The pirate moved like a lithe animal, muscles rippling under his tawny skin. As the man peered into the darkness, Sherman flexed his knees and sprang from behind.

Sherman's long, grasping arm hooked the pirate's neck, and a ponderous fist smacked against the painted face. *O Ladrão* sagged backward, stunned by the unexpected attack. Sherman let him plump down on his haunches and made a quick dive for the native chieftain's automatic.

With a powerful twist, he succeeded in wrenching the gun from the warrior's long fingers; but as he tried to twirl the handle into his palm, the brown man threw a staggering uppercut at Bill Sherman's chin.

Sherman executed a half-somersault across the deck. The gun skated from his hand and went rattling into the scupper. A violent oath exploded from Bill Sherman's bleeding lips. He had met many Indians; but never one who could trade punches with a white man. *O Ladrão* was no exception; and Sherman intended to teach the savage his place.

Both men gained their feet at the same time. Dancing to one side, Bill Sherman feinted and then drove

over a slicing right which should have sent the chieftain toppling. Instead, Sherman's fist slid through space, and a ridge of tough caloused knuckles thudded against the young man's chest.

Sherman clamped his square jaw, stepped in close and whipped over three quick blows to his opponent's face. The plumed head-dress slipped from *O Ladrao's* temples and fluttered to the deck. A dark rivulet trickled from the warrior's left eye. Retreating to the rail, *O Ladrao* jabbed at Sherman's ear and stood his ground, pouring out swift breath-taking punches.

Bill Sherman took the punishment solidly, a sardonic smile forming on his bruised features. The brown man could fight, no doubt about it; but Sherman was searching for an opening. One swift, clean blow—that was all he wanted. Keeping his head low, he burrowed into *O Ladrao's* stomach, grunting with satisfaction each time his knuckles thumped the smooth, satiny flesh.

He could feel the wiry muscles weaken, feel the man's midsection become softer—like taut cables pounded by a sledgehammer. His legs wobbling, the pirate staggered toward the deck ladder. A faint glow from the swinging lanterns shimmered up through the square opening, making his sweaty body glisten like drenched bronze.

At that instant, Bill Sherman saw his chance.

His right fist thudded against *O Ladrao's* jaw with a bone-crunching impact. The man keeled over drunkenly, striking the companion-way cowl with his head and pitching limply down the slanting ladder.

For a second, Bill Sherman glimpsed the man's face. It was drawn, bloody, the mouth hanging agape. Sherman stood rigid as a statue, staring at the twisted brown form which lay at the foot of the ladder.

A wild frantic cry arose from the Indians as they gathered around their fallen chieftain and, under a barrage of gunfire, carried him to a canoe. Shrieking madly, about ten

of their number started up the ladder.

Bill Sherman had no time to search for the fallen pistol. In another instant the savages would be upon him, thirsting for vengeance. Hastily he grabbed up one of the flares, thumbing a match to the fuse and tossed the flaming brand at the gleaming brown backs. A horrid bedlam broke loose when the scorching flame sprayed the ladder. The warriors fell back, tripping over one another in an attempt to flee from this new disaster.

Darting to the rail, Sherman obtained the automatic. The Indians had to be routed somehow. His life—everything depended upon it. Grasping three flares in one hand, he touched them off. A terrifying sheet of reddish yellow fire spurted out, singeing his hair and eyebrows. Holding the flares at arm's length, he descended the ladder like a demon from hell, the gun cracking.

CHAPTER IV

Rendezvous at Malao



THE *Jaribu's* crew stopped firing for a moment and stared over the barricade in amazement. The flame swished in a devastating curve, blistering the panicky natives, searing their sweating skins.

Yelping with terror, men plunged into the river to allay the maddening pain. Others took to their canoes, dragging the wounded with them. Evidently the Indians were low on ammunition; for only a few rifles banged as they made their retreat. Within five minutes the river was heavy with silence; and there was not a live native in sight.

Bill Sherman made his way to the bow, straining his eyes into the darkness. "They won't come back," said a low whispering voice. "At least not tonight." The round face of Peter Berthold appeared over the gunwale.

Sherman gave a grunt of disgust

as the little man pulled his dripping body over the side. "You're certainly a brave man," he said scornfully. "Climbing overboard to save your skin! Too bad the *piranhas* didn't get you!"

"My skin isn't valued at much," said Berthold. "But I wouldn't lift a hand to help Carlos Vega and his hired killers. I was hoping *O Ladrao* would win. I have a lot of respect for that Indian."

"So have I," admitted Bill Sherman, rubbing his bruised jaw. As he gazed into the night, he was thinking of *O Ladrao's* battered, gaping features. The Indian's face had seemed familiar; and yet—

Bill Sherman dismissed the idea. It was too fantastic.

EARLY the next afternoon, with blood-stained decks and only half a crew, the *Jaribu* neared the Rio Japura's rubber station on the Maloa. No one seemed to show much remorse over the fact that Captain Perez and ten others had been weighted to the bottom of the river.

Manoel the gambler placidly shuffled the cards in his usual position. Men snored in bullet-riddled hammocks, and the *Jaribu* snorted torpidly through the lush green jungle.

The *seringal* came suddenly into view as the boat rounded a corkscrew bend in the river. From the upper deck, Bill Sherman saw a spidery pier headed by a lane of rush huts which looked as if they were built on toothpicks. At the end of the land stood a square white house with a pyramid roof.

A purple and white flag fluttered from a pole in front of the house, giving it a mark of authority. There were other buildings scattered about the clearing: a windowless warehouse and a shedlike structure, where the rubber gatherers were outfitted, being the most prominent. At a distance, the village resembled a brown fester eating malignantly into the jungle's heart.

"I'm beginning to believe you were right, Bill," said Lois Winters. "I don't think I'll like it here."

Sherman kept his eyes trained on the bank. "Intending to stay long?" he said brusquely.

"No longer than I can help," she replied. "I want my brother to go back with me. There's no need for John to bury himself in this place. He should be a rich man by now."

Sherman raised an eyebrow quizzically. "Men don't get rich working for the Rio Japura Company," he said.

"But John's case is different," Lois insisted. "He discovered this territory a long time ago, and found it contained the finest type of rubber tree. The Brazilian government deeded the land to him; and he leased it to the Rio Japura Company on a percentage. John was made the agent and he gets a share of all the rubber that goes down the river."

"Your brother's a very lucky man," stated Sherman. "It's not often that this company cuts a worker in on the profits."

By now the *Jaribu* was edging against the wharf, her paddles boiling up mud from the shallow bank. Lines were made fast, and a gang of natives clambered aboard to remove supplies.

Bill Sherman dropped to the wharf and lifted Lois ashore. The girl glanced about anxiously. A few cadaverous-looking Brazilians loafed along the bank, staring at the boat sleepily.

"I don't see him," she said to Sherman. "He must be around here some place."

"We'd better go to the agent's house," Sherman advised. "After all your brother didn't know you were coming."

They trudged up the brown spongy lane, past groups of silently curious Indians. These natives were in no way similar to the stalwart warriors of *O Ladrao*. Clad in ragged cotton garments, they resembled walking scarecrows.

Lois' lips quivered excitedly as they approached the white house. Through the screened doorway came the sound of muffled voices. Bill Sherman rapped on the door frame and was answered by a guttural

grunt. The words were unintelligible; so Sherman yanked open the screen. "I guess we're supposed to go in," he said. Lois nodded and stepped into the house.

The place was dingy and gave the instant impression of being unwholesome. Smears of mud were caked on the bare rotting floor. A legless chair lay upside down in one corner. An ancient gramophone with a twisted horn rested squarely in the center of the room.

Under the front window was a chipped mahogany table strewn with blot-stained papers; and hunched at the table sat a scowling, bushy-browed man.

Massive in build, the man looked like some great animal strayed from the jungle. His flabby face was covered with a grizzle of bluish beard. A mat of furry hair coated the backs of his splayed hands. As far as Sherman could see, there were no pupils in his eyes.

They were bulging grey orbs, and they glared at him idiotically, as though the brain behind them had long since decayed. Sherman's glance was pinned on the big man only momentarily. He noticed another person squatted on the rusty iron bed to his right. It was Manoel the gambler.

The apelike individual raised his bulky frame from the chair and bowed low. A curved slit appeared beneath his crooked nose, as his mouth stretched into a carnivorous smile. "I am Muhlen," he rumbled. "Frederick Muhlen—at your service."

"Where is my brother?" asked the girl. "John Winters. He's the agent here, you know."

"Please be seated," said Muhlen. His grating voice became unctuous, suave. He thrust out the chair, but Lois declined it with a shake of her head.

"I want to find my brother," she persisted.

Muhlen rubbed his hairy paws together; gazed intently at the floor. "It is a painful task, Miss Winters," he said slowly. "But I must inform you that your brother is dead. He succumbed to the fever two years

ago, and I have been appointed agent in his place. A terrible thing, the fever."

Bill Sherman caught the girl by the shoulders, holding her steady. "See here," he demanded. "If Miss Winters' brother died two years ago why wasn't she informed? Why did the company allow her to go on this wild goose chase?"

"The Rio Japura Company is a large organization," Muhlen replied. "Possibly the main office did not look up the record of John Winters' death when the girl was given her passage."

"IT'S possible," said Sherman. "But not very probable. I have no interest in the company's private affairs."

"You are wise, Mr. Sherman," purred Muhlen. "Manoel has already told me of your bravery during the encounter with *O Ladrao*. We should get along very nicely. Very nicely."

"I suppose Manoel has told you other things also," Sherman ventured. "Get this straight, Muhlen. I came here to help you collect rubber, and I'll take orders from no one but you. It wasn't in my contract to be bossed by a cheap river gambler!" He flashed a sharp glance at Manoel.

"May I see your credentials?" inquired Muhlen coldly. "If they are in order, I will accept you as my assistant without question."

Bill Sherman took several papers from his coat and handed them to Muhlen. "Here's my passport to the Rio Japura country," he said. "And here's a letter signed by Carlos Vega."

Muhlen's cheeks bunched up around his eyes as he perused the papers. "The word of Carlos Vega is law," he droned profoundly. "You will find the laws of Maloa well administered."

Sherman glanced out the doorway. From down the street came a wild wailing, like the moaning of waves on a rocky strand. A ragged Brazilian marched toward the house, followed by a herd of frightened natives. A badly battered Indian walked in front of the Brazilian, his

head bent low, a leather thong binding his wrists.

Muhlen elbowed Bill Sherman aside and went out to meet them. "More stealing, eh, Paolo?" Muhlen snapped. The suave, sticky politeness had vanished; his features became those of a snarling beast. "Won't these filthy savages ever learn that the white man's goods can only be purchased with rubber? What's the charge?"

The prisoner dropped to his knees, gibbering frantically. "He was stealing knives," supplied Paolo. "Kitchen knives from the *Jaribu*."

Muhlen's hand went to his hip. A shiny .45 emerged from his holster. "The white man's laws are just," he intoned. "To break them is rewarded by death. Look—you stupid cows—and be warned!"

The gun cracked close to the kneeling Indian's ear. Loud mournful cries sprang from the onlookers' throats as the brown body slumped head down into a ghastly crimson pool. For an instant, the crowd pushed forward menacingly. Muhlen faced them, feet apart, his mouth twisted to a devilish grin.

"Come on!" he challenged. "The first man to lift a hand gets a trip to hell!" He concluded with a tirade of sordid obscenity. Grumbling lowly, the Indians broke into scattered groups. The Brazilian gave a rasping command, and four men carried the body away.

Lois Winters clung to Sherman's arm, watching from the doorway. Sherman's jaw was set tightly. He was tempted to shoot Muhlen in the back. It would have been a pleasure to drop this gross monster in the same manner in which he had murdered the helpless Indian. The girl's face had turned sickly pale. Sherman lifted her swaying body; carried her to a chair.

"This is indeed unfortunate," said Muhlen, clumping into the room. "I am grieved that Miss Winters had to witness the execution. But it is the law—"

"What law gave you the power of life and death?" demanded Lois Winters, struggling to her feet. A

flush of hot blood rushed to her features. "I'll have you removed from this station within a month! If John Winters is dead, this property belongs to me—and I intend to see it managed decently."

"You have no claim to the Maloa territory," Muhlen returned rigidly. "When your brother died, no one claimed his estate, and the property reverted to Brazil. The Rio Japura Company bought the land from Brazil at a good price."

"I understand now," said the girl. "Your company wanted the land for themselves; so they got rid of my brother—they murdered him!"

"He died of the fever," insisted Muhlen.

"I'll give you a chance to prove that!" she threatened. "I'm going back to Para and enter a charge of murder against you and Carlos Vega. When I'm finished, all Brazil will know the truth."

"As you wish," said Muhlen.

Bill Sherman watched him silently. There were pupils in Muhlen's eyes now—little black circles which gleamed wickedly. He could see that Muhlen was revolving some plan in his mind. The low forehead was furrowed; the eyebrows verged to a bushy black "V."

"I'll take Miss Winters back to the boat," said Sherman. "She can stay aboard until the *Jaribu*'s ready to leave."

Muhlen bobbed his head. Bill Sherman took hold of the girl's arm and led her from the house. She leaned upon him wearily, her slender body trembling with rage and exhaustion.

A SMILE crept over Muhlen's face as he followed them down the lane with his eyes. Manoel the gambler slipped across the room silently and stood by Muhlen's side. "Sherman is in love with the Senhora," he hissed. "I don't trust him!" Muhlen fingered the credentials which Sherman had given him. "We shall see if he is to be trusted," Muhlen muttered. "We shall find out whether Sherman will take orders from me—or from a woman!"

CHAPTER V

Rubber Empire Intrigue

IT was well after dark when Bill Sherman returned to Muhlen's headquarters. A flickering candle was on the table. Muhlen was squatted on his sagging bed like a bloated gargoyle, a bottle of rum gripped in one hand. He leered at Sherman drunkenly. "Did you take good care of the woman?" he asked in a throaty tone.

"I took her back to the boat," retorted Sherman. "She's plenty broken up by her brother's death."

Muhlen clucked his tongue, wobbled his hairy head sideways. "She is a very beautiful woman," he said irrelevantly. "I suppose you have become quite fond of her?"

"She doesn't mean anything to me," Sherman answered. "I told her not to come here in the first place."

"If Miss Winters returned to Para," said Muhlen, "she might cause some difficulty for the Rio Japura Company. I think it best to keep her here as long as possible."

"She's determined to go back," Sherman told him. "Besides, you couldn't keep a woman in this rotten hole."

"There is a chance she might contract the fever," said Muhlen slyly. "A horrible thing, the Amazon fever. Its victims seldom recover."

"You aren't suggesting—"

"Have you any objection?" roared Muhlen, pouncing to his feet. "The woman means nothing to you. Have you forgotten the allegiance you swore to Carlos Vega? His letter states that you are a worthy representative of the company—a man to be trusted in any capacity!"

"I don't murder women!" blazed Sherman. "No one but a filthy swine would stoop to such a—"

Muhlen's arm shot back, and the bottle swooped at Sherman's head. Sherman dodged the blow and

grasped Muhlen's throat, collaring the pulpy neck with a grip of steel. Falling back on the bed, Muhlen brought up both knees and drove them into Bill Sherman's groin.

His thick stubby arms rapped the young man's cheeks like bell clappers.

Sherman tightened his grasp, bringing purple cords to Muhlen's temples.

Muhlen grunted piggishly; foam dripped from his wide mouth, slavered into his beard. Desperately he clawed at Sherman's circling hands. The saccharine odor of spilled rum permeated the room.

As Sherman felt the big man's throat throb under his fingers, his bronzed face became hard, strained with temptation. Muhlen was practically helpless. It would be an easy task to increase the pressure slowly—to squeeze the last ounce of life from the sodden, squirming hulk.

His muscles tightened; bunched into great lumps on his arms. His hands seemed to be working independently of his mind—contracting, strangling. Muhlen's mouth sagged. The grey eyeballs were latticed with tiny clotted veins.

Suddenly Bill Sherman remembered his duty. He had come to Maloa to work with Muhlen—not to kill him. The Rio Japura Company was mighty. To throttle one of their agents would be the same as writing his own death warrant. Sherman released his grip and jumped back, one hand close to his holster.

Muhlen wallowed on the bed, his body racked with a spasm of coughing. Finally he sat upright, gasping for air. Sweat poured from his forehead and dripped in streams from his grizzled chin.

"You'll pay for this!" he croaked harshly. "I'll have you flogged—"

"I could have killed you," Bill Sherman reminded him. "Did you expect me to stand still when you slugged me with the bottle?"

Muhlen gnawed his lip, and his flushed face gradually took on an expression of remorse.

"It was the rum talking," he explained, wagging his head. "I had

no intention of killing the girl. I only wanted to keep her here for a while—for the good of the company. From now on we shall be friends."

Bill Sherman did not believe him. Nevertheless, he nodded agreeably and shook Muhlen's outstretched paw. "You will stay aboard the river boat tonight," said Muhlen. "I will explain your duties tomorrow."

Sherman's steady gaze bored into Muhlen's face for several seconds. Then the young man bobbed his head curtly and stalked out.

MUHLEN sprang to the window, watching Sherman vanish in the darkness. A door at the other end of the room opened quietly, and Manoel the gambler padded into view. Muhlen swung around.

"Fool!" he spluttered. "Why didn't you shoot him? You saw him trying to throttle me!"

"It happened too suddenly, senhor," stammered Manoel. "I could not shoot without the risk of hitting you. And you told me not to kill—unless it was necessary."

Muhlen tapped on the table with a pencil. "We must get rid of Sherman," he said positively. "The man claims to be a representative of Carlos Vega; yet he is protecting that woman, who is an enemy of the company."

"He may be a spy," suggested Manoel. "Two operatives of the Brazilian government were caught on the Madeira last year."

"Sherman is an American," said Muhlen in a puzzled manner. "His credentials are in perfect order, and the letter from Carlos Vega indicates that he is a trusted employee. If we killed him, there might be trouble from headquarters."

"The jungle is treacherous," said Manoel. "Men have been known to wander out in it and disappear entirely. If Senhor Sherman should disappear—"

"It would be unfortunate," concluded Muhlen. "But to me it would be worth a thousand *milreis*!"

Manoel bared his brown fangs greedily. "I have a grudge to settle with Sherman," he said. "It shall

be done before morning!" He patted a bulge under his armpit and hastened out the doorway.

Muhlen kicked the top off a wooden case which lay next to the bed and withdrew another bottle of rum. He sat on the liquor-stained blanket, drinking deeply, staring at the hands of a big gold watch. Suddenly, from the river bank, came the sharp crack of a gun.

Muhlen jumped to his feet; listened intently. The jungle was strangely quiet and seemed to be listening with him. The sound was not repeated. One shot—and no more. Muhlen grinned evilly and lifted the bottle high. "To the late Mr. Sherman," he chuckled, placing the bottle to his lips. "And a pleasant journey!"

AFTER leaving Muhlen, Bill Sherman stood on the wharf, thoughtfully puffing a cigarette. The smoke was restful, and it protected his face from the stinging midges which swarmed over the bank. The village was pitch black, the only light being a luminous square from Muhlen's window far up the lane.

Even the lanterns on the *Jaribu* had been extinguished, and its decks were deserted, as the crew had slung their hammocks in the netted shed which stood next to the warehouse.

Bill Sherman's mind was in a turmoil. In the past few hours Sherman had learned several important facts. First—Muhlen wanted Lois Winters out of the way. A good representative of Carlos Vega would not hesitate in such a small matter as murdering an innocent woman; but Sherman had done more than hesitate. He had choked Muhlen until his fishy eyes nearly popped from his head, and as a result Muhlen distrusted him, hated him thoroughly.

The second fact was much more important. Sherman was confident that no one—not even Muhlen—knew about it; and he intended to keep the secret to himself.

But why should Muhlen want to keep Lois Winters from returning to Para? And why had she been al-

lowed to make this fruitless journey in the first place? Captain Perez had said that the girl was traveling on an order from Carlos Vega himself.

Sherman tossed his cigarette into the river and leaped on board the river boat. Perhaps the answer was in Captain Perez' cabin. None of the captain's belongings had been removed, and Muhlen had not taken the trouble to inspect the dead man's papers. Hurrying forward, he entered the captain's cabin and lighted the lamp.

Opening a small chest which stood beside the bunk, he discovered some old clothes, several bottles of whiskey and a jar of tobacco. Underneath the clothes was a tin box. He jimmied the box open with a pen-knife. Inside were some papers—the top one addressed to Frederick Muhlen. Sherman ripped open the envelope. The letter was scrawled in a round, even hand. It read:

Frederick Muhlen
Agent Rio Japura Company
Maloa, Brazil

Am entrusting to your care a certain Lois Winters, sister of the late John Winters. I trust you will show her the same consideration which you gave to her brother.

Carlos Vega.

Sherman reread the letter, touched it to the flue of the lamp and watched it crumble to ashes. Veiled as it was, the wording could mean only one thing. Lois Winters was marked for death. She had been led to Maloa secretly, blindly.

Carlos Vega wanted her out of the way because she was the rightful owner of the Maloa territory and could at least claim her brother's percentage of the profits. Muhlen's fear of her was also understandable. The man was a murderer and a thief. He did not want Lois to inquire too deeply into her brother's death.

Blowing out the lamp, Bill Sherman returned to the deck and headed aft. His first intention was to warn the girl of her danger; not that it was any of his affair—but he admired her pluck, her dauntless en-

ergy. It was too bad, he thought, that her energy was so misplaced.

Lois Winters belonged to the civilization he had left behind, instead of to this wilderness. Sherman was amazed to find himself suddenly longing for a taste of civilization again. He had shipped out of San Francisco eight years ago and had never returned. "Damn fool," he muttered to himself.

Climbing to the upper deck, Sherman observed a tip of moon over the tangled forest. Shadows began to creep along the river as the moon scooted out of the trees like a sagging balloon. Bill Sherman failed to see a strange creeping shadow that crawled behind him, keeping close to the starboard rail. Approaching the darkened Number Three cabin, Sherman raised his hand to knock on the door. The shadow raised up also. A metal gun barrel glistened in the moonlight.

Crack!

The shadow hinged forward, emitting a rasping gurgle. Sherman flipped out his pistol, whirled. He saw a twitching black form contorting on the deck. The thing was a shadow no longer; for the moonlight revealed it as the body of a man. Blood gushed from the man's open mouth; he twisted like a thrashing shark and became limp.

Peter Berthold emerged from the side of the wheel house, a rifle smoking in his hands. "It's Manoel," he said softly. "I saw him laying for you; so I drilled him. You saved me from the brute once. This makes us even."

"He's dead," said Sherman, bending over the corpse. "We've got to get rid of the body at once. Muhlen mustn't know who killed him."

"The *piranhas* will attend to that," replied Berthold. "Once they catch the smell of blood, they'll eat bones and all." He lifted the dead man's shoulders. Sherman hoisted the feet, and they dropped the gruesome burden over the side.

Manoel's body sank slowly. Before it had half disappeared the river

CHAPTER VI

The Wrath of Carlos Vega

spluttered ominously. Sherman then caught sight of hundreds of shiny fins. The water seethed; bubbled red. As Sherman turned away, he noticed Lois Winters framed in the cabin doorway, a white flimsy robe draped over her body. "That man you threw overboard," she faltered. "Who—was he?"

"A worthless river rat," said Sherman grimly. "Muhlen sent him to murder me. You would probably have been next."

"That coward," she muttered. "If I ever get to Para alive—"

"You haven't a chance," Sherman cut in, "unless I can make some sort of bargain with Muhlen for your safety."

"What sort of a bargain?"

"I don't exactly know," he replied. "Perhaps I can figure out something by morning. There's no more danger tonight. Berthold and I will stand watch." He climbed down the deck ladder, Berthold following him.

Lois Winters looked after him longingly. The moon had climbed high above, turning the river to quicksilver and covering the vined forest with a film of gossamer. There was beauty in the jungle that night—if beauty could be combined with bloodshed and terror.

The girl drew back into her cabin feeling uncomfortably alone and helpless. Bill Sherman—in spite of his curt, hard-shelled manner—was her only protector. She felt deeply grateful to him. No. It was more than gratitude. Outside of her brother, Bill Sherman was the only man she had ever respected, admired—and loved.

The last thought came suddenly, and it left her weak and shaking. She was sure of it now. Her love for Sherman was real—as real as life and death. She gazed into the moonlight with wide, misty eyes—and the jungle seemed to radiate with a new brightness.

Sherman, himself, usually did not give much thought to sentiment, but he found that Lois Winters was bringing to life his most tender thoughts.



HIS dirty white helmet perched on the back of his head Frederick Muhlen lumbered down the lane to the wharf.

A blazing morning sun burned his face; but Muhlen scarcely noticed the heat. His grey eyes glinted with savage elation. He felt positive that Bill Sherman was dead. There had been only one shot the night before. Sherman had evidently been dropped in his tracks without having time to return the fire. Manoel's aim was deadly.

Nearing the wharf, Muhlen saw a tall, bronzed man walking out to greet him. "Hello, Muhlen," said Bill Sherman casually. "Surprised to see me?"

Muhlen doubled his fists. His jaw seemed to have dropped off its hinges.

Bill Sherman's face became stern. "I'm wise to you," he said abruptly. "You don't trust me. You don't believe I have the best interests of the Rio Japura Company at heart. Well, you're wrong. And to prove it—I'll make a deal with you."

"So?" said Muhlen warily. "What kind of a deal?"

"You allow Miss Winters to return to Para—and I'll show you how to capture *O Ladrao*."

Muhlen's mouth curled at the corners. "What makes you think you can capture *O Ladrao*?" he sneered. "That pirate is cautious. He attacks only when least expected."

"I have seen him attack," said Sherman. "And I know how to trap him. Is it a bargain?"

Muhlen licked his lips eagerly. A chance of capturing *O Ladrao* was too much for the agent to resist. He could settle with Bill Sherman later.

"Very well," he agreed. "What is your plan?"

"Load the *Jaribu* with rubber," proposed Sherman. "Announce to everyone that the boat will sail in three days with a small crew and very

little ammunition. That will be the bait."

"How will *O Ladrao* know about it?" asked Muhlen.

"He is an Indian," Sherman reminded him. "All your rubber gatherers are Indians also. News travels quickly through the native grapevine; and *O Ladrao* will be certain to attack an unarmed vessel. I'll take care of him after that!"

"You are clever," said Muhlen. "If this plan works, I will see that you receive full credit." He mopped his streaming forehead and went aboard the river boat.

All that day a line of silent, sweating natives carried large pelles of rubber to the wharf, piling the grey balls in tiers around the *Jaribu's* deck. Smoke from the many ovens spiraled into the sky. Gatherers labored until after dark, slashing trees, draining the precious latex.

Late at night, when the workers were asleep, bands of white men shuttled between the river boat and the warehouse, bearing guns and ammunition. Bill Sherman took charge of the loading, hiding each weapon carefully, burying ammunition boxes beneath the balls of rubber.

"I've got a regular arsenal on board," said Bill Sherman as he shoved the last rifle out of sight. *O Ladrao* will have a surprise in store for him when he attacks this boat."

Muhlen leered in anticipation. "I have informed the natives that the *Jaribu* will leave the day after tomorrow at noon. When *O Ladrao* attacks, the boat will be only a short distance down the river. We will then come back to Maloa—"

"We?" said Bill Sherman sharply. "Do you intend to go along also?"

"Of course," was the smooth reply. "I am anxious to meet *O Ladrao*."

"How about the girl?" inquired Sherman. "She must be kept in a place of safety."

"Miss Winters will be quartered in my own house," said Muhlen. "When this affair is over, she may return to Para as I promised."

In spite of Muhlen's earnest tone, his voice had a faint ring of insincerity. Sherman could still make out a glimmer of hatred in the man's dullish eyes. As Muhlen climbed heavily to the wharf, Peter Berthold slipped around the engine house and tugged at Sherman's sleeve.

"The pig is trying to trick you," whispered Berthold. "I overheard him talking to Paolo this evening. Miss Winters is to be left in Paolo's care. If you leave her, she will not be alive when you return."

SHERMAN nodded. "I'm beginning to believe you're a good man, Peter Berthold," he said. "Even if you are a coward."

Berthold turned crimson around the temples. "I am not a coward," he said firmly. "A coward fears to die. I do not fight—simply because I have nothing to fight for."

Bill Sherman looked into Berthold's eyes. They were blank, vacant. There was no animation in the little man's face. Berthold was crushed and beaten—the slave of an inhuman leechlike monster that tore men's souls from their bodies; sucked their life's blood and turned it into rubber.

"You hate the Rio Japura Company," stated Sherman softly. "Do you hate it enough to destroy it?"

For a moment Berthold's face seemed to light up. "It is impossible," he said dully. "I have dreamed of such a thing many times—ever since Carlos Vega stole my land. But it is impossible."

Sherman seized the man by the shoulders and shook him violently. "Look," he snapped. "This boat isn't sailing at the time scheduled. It's leaving tomorrow night—with a crew of two! You're going to stoke the furnace; I'll steer. I must get Miss Winters to Para."

Berthold's mouth hung open. "It's madness!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "The river is perilous at night; and *O Ladrao*—"

"I'm not afraid of *O Ladrao*," rasped Sherman. "Are you with me—or are you a coward?"

"I—am with you," mumbled Berthold.

"See to it that the boiler is fired," Sherman ordered. "We may have to leave sooner than expected."

As Sherman reached his cabin, he saw a black patch moving swiftly down the river. A shiver tingled up his spine. It was the same object he had seen several days before on the *Japura*, a long black log with a pointed end. He searched the river for more patches; but the black canoe drifted idly by, and the river was again a spotless ribbon.

There would be no attack just yet. *O Ladrao* had heard the news—and he was watching.

BILL SHERMAN was up early the next morning, slogging through circling jungle lanes which the rubber gatherers tramped daily. Now and then he stopped to inspect a tapped tree or to talk with one of the natives. Every Indian eyed him with distrust; even the Brazilian overseers were surly and suspicious. At noon Sherman returned to the *seringal*.

He found Muhlen alone in the warehouse, taking stock of supplies. The agent's beard had grown nearly an inch in the past two days; his face appeared more flabby and sodden than ever.

"I've been looking for you," Muhlen growled. "Where have you been?"

"On a tour of inspection," said Sherman. "I've learned that a number of trees are dead from being improperly tapped, that the workers have at least three different kinds of contagious diseases—and that they aren't paid a cent for their labor."

"What of it?" said Muhlen, arching his thick eyebrows. "We give the rats their food and clothing. It's not my fault if they die off. We can always get more Indians."

"Does the Rio *Japura* Company know how you're running this station?" Sherman asked.

"I'm following orders," returned Muhlen. "The *seringal* has been paying twice as much since John Winters was—since Winters died."

"Why not tell the truth," said Sherman. "I know that Winters

didn't die of the fever. What became of him?"

Muhlen became suspicious. "Spying on me, eh?" he thundered. "You have been trying to find out about Winters ever since you came. You are a damned dirty snooper, that's what! You think you can get evidence on me—"

"Careful," warned Sherman. "You are liable to give yourself away."

Muhlen bristled with rage. "I've stood for enough of your talk," he flared. "From now on—"

Muhlen's right hand plummeted to his holster. Bill Sherman was close enough to grab the man's gun arm and turn the muzzle aside as it slid over the leather. A thumping bullet bored through the wooden wall.

Sherman pressed Muhlen's hand downward and jerked a swift upercut to the agent's jaw. Muhlen groaned; pressed his heavy body against Sherman's shoulder, trying to push him to the floor. Clutching Muhlen's wrist with both hands, Bill Sherman braced his legs and stood firmly upright.

Muhlen hammered his left fist on Sherman's chest and let his feet slide back, putting his ponderous bulk into full effect. Bill Sherman felt himself slowly being thrown off balance. The crushing weight was pushing him to his knees.

To loose his hold on Muhlen's wrist for a second would be fatal. Muhlen's free arm slid down, trying to snatch Sherman's pistol from its holster. Sherman's knees trembled. Then he went limp.

It was a smart move; for as he dropped to the floor Muhlen flopped awkwardly beside him. Sherman rolled on his side twisting the big man's wrist mercilessly. Muhlen yanked the trigger, tearing a furrow across the wooden floor. Instantly Sherman jerked the weapon from his fingers.

Bounding to his feet, Bill Sherman flailed the gun butt at his enemy's black hair. A spurt of scarlet welled from Muhlen's scalp, and the agent stretched out on the floor, clawing at his forehead.

Sherman extracted the cartridges

and threw Muhlen's gun into a far corner. Pulling a length of stout hemp from a rafter, he bound the dazed man's wrists and ankles.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Muhlen," he said. "But you won't be able to keep that date with *O Ladrao*. Miss Winters and I are taking the river boat to Para. That's what I counted on doing from the first.

Muhlen glared at him hatefully. The ashen face became suddenly tense. Muhlen's eyes were riveted on something directly behind Bill Sherman. His wide mouth worked frantically; but he managed to say only two words:

"Carlos Vega!"

Bill Sherman pivoted; raised his hands slowly. Three men stood in the doorway back of him, two of them leveling shiny revolvers. The men with the guns were tall, preda-



tory-looking creatures with faces like grey flint. Sherman recognized them at once. They were Carlos Vega's bodyguards—men who killed for pleasure.

Between them stood Carlos Vega. There was nothing fearful about Vega's appearance. He was a paunchy, medium-sized man dressed in spotless white. His bloated face had the yellow tinge of an over-ripe melon, and two dark beady eyes looked out from sunken sockets.

"I see I have come just in time," said Carlos Vega. His voice had a sinister, throaty burr. "This man Sherman is a spy for the Brazilian government!"

"I suspected as much," grated Muhlen, trying vainly to remove his ropes. "But he had a letter from you—"

"Forged," said Vega. "All his credentials were forged. I managed to learn about it from one of my operatives in the government offices at Para. I immediately took a special steamer to the Japura River and came the rest of the way in a fast launch. If this spy had returned to Para, the entire company might have been ruined."

"There was a woman with him," said Muhlen. "Lois Winters. Is she a spy also?"

"That girl—she is still alive?" demanded Vega angrily. "Didn't you receive my instructions—"

"Raise your hands!"

Lois Winters lashed out the command shrilly. The blood was gone from her lips as she stepped in front of the doorway, her .32 clenched tightly in her fingers.

VEGA'S arms went toward the roof. His bodyguards swung around. The girl's gun kicked flame. Sherman grabbed for his holster; pumped four quick shots from his hip. Vega's companions sagged to the floor like jerky puppets. Splashes of crimson stained their shirts; the face of one had turned to a frightful foaming blotch.

"Don't shoot!" yelled Vega. I am unarmed—"

Sherman grasped Vega by the collar; threw him against the wall. Hastily he rushed Lois from the warehouse, closed the door and clicked the padlock. "We've got to leave here pronto," he muttered, starting toward the river.

"But how?" asked the girl. "There is no way—"

Sherman noticed that her arm was bleeding. "The *Jaribu's* ready to push off," he hastened. "We'll have to get aboard. Damn those swine! You hurt bad?"

She shook her head. Sherman circled her waist with his arm and helped her along the tangled river bank. Once he looked back and saw a band of Muhlen's men scampering up the pathway which led to the warehouse. The men had heard the shots; but so far Sherman and the girl had escaped notice.

CHAPTER VII

Flight Into Green Hell

A THREAD of smoke was drifting from the river boat's funnel. Berthold had obeyed instructions, and the *Jaribu* was fully steamed. Nearing the wharf, Sherman observed a trim white launch tied

opposite the river boat.

"That's Carlos Vega's launch," said Lois. "I saw him arrive in it; so I followed him to the warehouse. Why couldn't we—"

Sherman was already in the launch inspecting the controls. "It's low on gas," he replied. "But we might make it. I'll get Berthold—"

A sound like that of a huge angry bee whizzed over the wharf. Sherman heard the crack of rifles. Muhlen's followers had broken into the warehouse and were raising the alarm. A group of tattered Brazilians sprinted toward the shore, guns banging. Above the rising commotion, they could distinguish the angry cries of Carlos Vega.

"Jump in," said Sherman quickly. "It's our only chance!" He lifted the girl in his arms, placed her on the leather cushions and turned to the controls. Bullets screamed past the windshield as he diligently searched for the starter. Finding it, he kicked the motor over. The launch coughed, spluttered, roared into action. Muhlen's men reached the foot of the wharf, and a shot splintered into the craft's gleaming side. Sherman shoved the girl out of sight; tugged at the throttle.

The launch rocketed forward, taking part of the wharf with it. Hawse lines dragged behind, trailing the stumps of rotted pilings. Careening crazily, the sleek white boat smacked against the current, twisting up a bubbling white froth.

"Bill—" gasped Lois Winters, glancing back at the receding *seringal*. "We're going the wrong way. We're heading up the river!"

Without replying Sherman ripped

up the front of his shirt and handed her the torn cloth. "Bandage that arm of yours," he told her. "I'll fix it up when we get out of range."

Lois wrapped the white linen around her arm. She could not understand Bill Sherman's actions. Why had he headed in this direction—toward an unexplored jungle? Her brother's letters had informed her of the Three Tribes who dwelled near the headwaters of the Maloa. They were head-hunters, cannibals. Even John Winters had not dared to journey farther than the *seringal*.

Hours passed, and Bill Sherman showed no intention of changing his course. Lois watched the narrowing river silently. Her arm still ached, although Sherman had doctored the wound, wrapping it with fresh bandages from a medicine kit which had been found under the launch's seat.

The current became more turbulent; the green banks, steeper. Trelises of matted vines welded the trees into an endless interlocking mass of vegetation. An arch of foliage canopied the stream, veiling the fading sun. The river was transformed into a dark foaming channel, its vaulted ceiling supported by slanting pillars of blood-red sunlight.

Bill Sherman's lean face was troubled. "We can't go very much farther," he announced. "We're low on gas; and before long we'll hit the rapids."

"Why didn't you go down stream?" asked Lois. "We could have drifted with the current."

"I took another long chance," replied Sherman. "And it looks like I've lost."

A U-shaped cleft appeared on the left bank. Sherman turned the wheel nosing the launch into a wide lagoon which branched at an angle over a flat spread of jungle. In a few moments, he nuzzled the bow against a mossy shore and switched off the motor.

"This seems to be the end of the line," he stated. "We'd better stay here for the night."

The somber, glossy water of the *igarape* glinted like a pool of tar.

Slowly, the light faded; and winked out. Lois shivered, although the night was oppressively sticky and warm. For once the jungle was unnaturally silent. No monkey chattered—no jaguar uttered its familiar anguished howl. The velvet-coated silence was terrifying. It seemed as though all life had instantly been snuffed out with the vanished sun.

LOIS edged nervously to Bill's side. His arm slipped around her shoulders. It was impossible for either one to speak—to break that awful silence which hung over the forest like an evil spell.

Bill Sherman's body tightened. He strained forward, staring into the night.

A prickly sensation made the roots of his hair tingle. The pall of silent darkness remained unchanged; but Sherman felt instinctively that some unseen enemy was approaching.

His fingers folded around the girl's hand.

Her pulse was thumping. Lois was aware of it also.

Reaching for the control board, Bill Sherman snapped on the running lights.

A bright ruddy glare illuminated the lagoon; a pale green glow swept over the bank. The newcomers were standing even with the launch—almost at arm's length—their hideous painted faces looming from the darkness like expressionless masks.

Glittering metal pendants hung from elongated ears. Red heron feathers protruded from oily black scalps. Sherman counted them hastily. They numbered at least ten—ten naked, stone-faced savages armed with spears, blowguns and rifles.

Sherman stood up in the launch; raised one hand in a gesture of peace. Three bright-bladed spears were poised toward his heart. "I am your friend," he said, speaking the guttural *Lingua Geral* of the Tupis. There was no response. Sherman repeated his statement, this time in English. One of the warriors uttered a snarling grunt, lowered his

spear and motioned to Sherman with his head.

"They want us to come ashore," said Sherman. He helped the girl from the launch and stepped to the bank. Instantly the leading warrior relieved him of his pistol. A powerful arm whirled him around roughly, and at spear's point the two captives were prodded into the dense underbrush.

Three Indians took the lead, the rest following behind in single file. Now and then an extended spear nudged the captives away from a clump of thorny brambles or an unseen tree. Sherman marveled at the savages' catlike assurance. Either the brown men were traveling by instinct alone, or they had the ability to see in the dark.

"I wonder where they're taking us?" murmured Lois.

"To their village," replied Sherman. "And to *O Ladrao*."

Faint patches of starlight began to seep through the ceiling of overlapping boughs, tracing the forest with eerie shadows. The trees were now farther apart; and Bill Sherman noticed that the Indians were following a definite path, like the *estradas* followed by rubber gatherers.

A WAVERING light flickered up ahead. Soon Bill could make out a large circular clearing, centered by a huge house with a pointed roof.

This was undoubtedly the *maloka* of the Three Tribes, the headquarters of *O Ladrao*.

As they neared the village, swarms of howling warriors flocked out to greet them. A deep-toned drum boomed inside the *maloka*. The roaring fire in the middle of the clearing shot toward the sky like a giant's torch. Shrill piping whistles screeched in Sherman's ears. Gleaming knives whirled in front of his face, and spears clashed together in a wild jerking rhythm.

Yet none of the savages showed an inclination to attack; it was like a jubilant dance of victory. Two powerful warriors separated Sherman

from the girl and hustled him forward. The thunderous drum stopped booming, and the revelers ceased their antics and stood in fixed, stony positions.

A tall, imperious figure appeared at the entrance to the *maloka*. Sherman immediately recognized the thin face, the long slender nose. This time the man wore no head-dress; and his hair glistened like pale yellow fire. He scowled at Sherman wrathfully, and a livid scar could be seen above his left eye.

SHERMAN pulled a cigarette from his pocket, whipped a match against his trousers unconcernedly.

"Nice to see you again," he said calmly. "I came here especially to apologize for socking you on the jaw. You see, I didn't know that *O Ladrao* was—John Winters!"

The man stepped forward, eyes blazing. "How did you find out?" he demanded. "No one knew—not even Muhlen!"

"I saw your picture," said Sherman. "And I recognized you after knocking you down the ladder. But by then it was too late."

"You're lying," accused John Winters. "You're one of Muhlen's spies."

"I'm a spy, all right," admitted Sherman. "Although not for Muhlen. I'm working for the Brazilian government on a little matter that concerns the Rio Japura Rubber Company. If you don't believe me, ask your sister."

Winters grasped Bill Sherman by the arm. "My sister—" he exploded. "What do you know about my sister?"

Sherman motioned behind him. She was standing beside the fire, wide-eyed, speechless. John Winters rushed to her; clasped her to him. "Lois—" he faltered, "—how did you get here? This man. Who is he?"

Bill Sherman cut him off short. "I came up here for help," he stated. "I knew that your *maloka* was near the headwaters of the river, and I was pretty certain we'd be captured if we ventured into this territory"

"What can I do to help you?" replied John Winters.

"Accompany me to Para," said Sherman. "It'll be dangerous; but if I can get you there alive, we'll write a finish to the Rio Japura Company."

Winters' face brightened. "I'd sell my soul to ruin that outfit," he declared fiercely.

"Good," returned Sherman. "I suppose you heard that the *Jaribu* was going to leave tomorrow with a full cargo and very few men?"

"Yes," said John Winters. "The river is being watched night and day by my men. We expected some kind of a trick, however."

"It was a trick," admitted Sherman. "I expect to take charge of the river boat myself and escape down the river. It seemed fairly certain that you would attack, so I managed to load the vessel with weapons and ammunition. Knowing who you were, I felt sure you and your men would join up with me. Unfortunately, Carlos Vega arrived at the last moment and spiked my plans."

"You say the *Jaribu* is loaded with ammunition?"

"Enough for an army."

"Then we shall attack at once," announced Winters. "My warriors are trained in the use of guns; but they need cartridges. I'll return to Para with you—as soon as I've settled matters with Frederick Muhlen!"

"I've got a few things to settle with that guy myself," said Bill Sherman firmly.

JOHN WINTERS turned, picked up a spear leaning against the *maloka*. The crowd of Indians watched him in awe as he broke the spear over his knee and cast it into the flames. A sharp, crisp command started the deep-throated drum booming again—this time with a wilder, quicker beat.

The flames leaped higher; the noise swelled to a maddened barbaric chant.

The great drum was still pounding as a fleet of slender canoes slid down the river, gliding silently toward the rubber station of Maloa.

CHAPTER VIII

Assault of the Three Tribes

JOHN WINTERS flexed his bare shoulders and dipped the paddle with an even, graceful sweep, shooting the canoe forward swiftly.

"My sister owes her life to you, Sherman," he said. "Muhlen would have murdered her instantly if he had seen that letter from Vega. The man is a devil!"

"How did you manage to escape him?" asked Sherman.

Winters placed the paddle over his knees and allowed the canoe to skim along with the current. Lois glanced back at him from her place in the prow. "Muhlen said you had died of the fever," she stated.

"The fat pig!" snarled Winters. "About two years ago he came to the *seringal* as an overseer; but I know now that Carlos Vega sent him for another purpose. One afternoon, as I was exploring the jungle a few miles above the station, Muhlen followed me. I didn't see him until it was too late. He shot me twice and left me for dead.

"Hours later, an Indian of the Three Tribes discovered me and took me to his village. I taught the natives many things; and in return they made me their chief. It was then that I swore vengeance on the Rio Japura Company and began attacking their boats. The Indians have learned to hate those river devils as much as I do."

"Your men understand the instructions?" said Sherman, as the craft angled around a bend.

"Perfectly," replied Winters. "One gunshot is the signal to attack."

The two men plied their paddles vigorously, while the other canoes slipped ahead like large black needles. A late lop-sided moon barreled over the trees and hung suspended in the sky, resembling a cold lantern.

A spot of yellow light glimmered ahead; and when Bill Sherman

glanced around again, he noticed that the accompanying canoes had vanished as though swallowed up by the river.

"There is the *Jaribu*," said John Winters, steering into the bank. "My men are ready."

Sherman slid from the canoe and hauled the prow onto shore. "You'll be out of danger here," he said to Lois. "Don't leave this spot until one of us comes after you. You're not afraid?"

"No," replied the girl coolly. "But don't take any foolish risks." Her hands cupped Bill Sherman's face, and she brushed her lips against his rough cheek. Sherman stared at her in astonishment. He wanted to say something, but the words failed to come out. "I'll be back soon—" he said fervently. "Then maybe I can tell you that—"

"Let's get moving," interrupted John Winters, grasping Sherman by the arm. "In an hour it will be dawn."

Bill Sherman gave a brisk nod, and the two men followed the rim of the jungle, making for the rubber station.

Entering the clearing, they sidled along the shore until they reached the sagging wharf. With Winters behind him, Sherman waded under the wharf and climbed quietly over the river boat's flat bow. A ragged half-breed was seated on the capstan, holding a rifle. As Sherman sneaked up in back of him, the man pivoted to his feet. Sherman's looping left fist smacked the man squarely on the chin, and he fell into a tangle of ropes as if unjointed.

"Keep a watch on the port side," Sherman instructed, "and be prepared to run for the village. If we can get the *Jaribu's* crew ashore, your Indians will have an easy time grabbing the ammunition."

Winters grunted an affirmative reply and crouched low by the deckhouse. Hugging the starboard wall, Sherman progressed aft. Under the swaying lantern light he could see a number of armed men sprawled behind the barricade of rubber which had been piled against the stern

railing. Open boxes of ammunition lay in the center of the deck.

Unnoticed, Bill Sherman advanced to the captain's cabin and peered through the square window. The lamp was burning, and a portly individual was sleeping in the bunk, fully clad. Sherman twisted the knob; entered the cabin. The squeaking door brought the sleeping man to his feet instantly. Sherman pointed his gun barrel between the man's bleary eyes.

"I hope you act nice, Vega," said Sherman gruffly. "Where's Muhlen?"

"Up—up at his house," sputtered Carlos Vega. "How did you—"

"If you don't want any bloodshed, do as I say," clipped Sherman. "Tell your men to go ashore at once. I'm taking command of this boat!" He seized Vega by the collar and shoved him on deck. Vega's arm suddenly made a quick downward movement, and a glittering steel blade appeared in his hand as if by magic.

Before Sherman could withdraw his fingers from the man's collar, Vega squirmed around and tried to drive the knife into Sherman's heart. Sherman jumped backwards. A razor edge sliced a thin red line across his bare chest, then swooped for another blow.

Bill Sherman could easily have sent a bullet tearing through Vega's yellowish distorted face. Instead, he grasped the man's arm with his left hand and knocked Vega's knuckles against the deck railing. Vega shrieked for assistance as the knife splashed into the river. Sherman choked off his wind, lifted him by the throat and cracked the gun butt down on Vega's skull. Roughly he hurled the unconscious figure back into the cabin.

Carlos Vega's cry for help sent the entire crew of the *Jaribu* scurrying forward. Sherman whirled and sent a single shot whanging into their midst. A man stumbled to his knees, screaming with pain.

His companions halted, stared at Sherman for a second and then cracked out a rattling volley of rifle fire. The shots sang through the air

as Sherman rounded the deck house, hurdled the port rail and jumped to the wharf. John Winters was already standing on the jetty, waiting for him.

"Run like hell!" Sherman shouted. "Head for the village!" Winters needed no instructions. His long paint-smear legs were covering distance in a twinkling.

YELPING like curs, the pack of riflemen started in pursuit, their guns barking as they jogged up the sloping bank. Sherman cut across the clearing toward the warehouse, while Winters scooted in the opposite direction. After plunging several hundred yards through wet underbrush, Bill Sherman paused; looked behind.

The riflemen were no longer behind him. They had turned in a body and were scudding back to the *Jaribu*. Sherman could see that the river had become dotted with black canoes. Streaks of angry flame snapped over the water while the canoes clustered around the *Jaribu*'s bulging stern. Naked figures swarmed across the river boat's deck and clambered ashore, laden with guns and full cartridge belts.

The sleeping village at once turned into a howling bedlam, teeming with crashes of gunfire, Portuguese oaths and the bestial war cries of the natives. Near the wharf an ever-increasing band of Brazilians battled desperately, but were being pushed farther and farther up the slope. A matted hut roared into flame, casting a weird roving glare over the entire station.

Bill Sherman hastened to the *seringal* and crouched underneath one of the stilted dwellings. He was searching for Muhlen; but there was no sign of the agent among the retreating Brazilians. Glancing up the lane, he saw a lumbering, white-garbed figure emerge from the agent's house and start westward toward the jungle.

A sneer of contempt formed on Bill Sherman's lips. Muhlen had seen how the tide of battle was turning, and he was trying to escape un-

noticed into the forest. Sherman raised his automatic. A bright flare of light made the big man an excellent target.

At that moment John Winters lunged across the clearing and sprang tigerishly at Muhlen's throat. Muhlen staggered backward as if staring at a ghost. His feet slipped on the soggy earth, and he snatched at his holster as he fell. It was the fall that saved him.

Two guns banged at once; but Winters' bullet merely grazed the lobe of Muhlen's ear. Winters strained to his toes and keeled over, clutching his side. Muhlen started to lash out a second shot, when a bullet slashed over his head from another direction. Pivoting on one knee, Muhlen saw Bill Sherman sprinting up the lane, his gun blazing.

A whistling slug caught Muhlen in the shoulder, sprawling him flat. Shifting the .45 to his other hand, Muhlen lay on his belly and jerked the trigger frantically.

Bill Sherman felt something hot sear his thigh. He stumbled, gained his feet again and fired his last cartridge blindly. Muhlen gave an agonized yell and sprang upright, his arm dangling loosely. Dropping his gun, he wheeled around and ran for the jungle.

Sherman followed him doggedly, fighting his way past tangled vines, struggling through the viscous morass that had been left by the winter rains. A shooting pain stabbed the very marrow of his leg; his trousers became sticky with blood. Faint lances of moonlight poked between the dense foliage, making the jungle faintly luminous. Muhlen was out of sight; but Sherman could hear him threshing through the underbrush like a wounded boar.

Suddenly Bill Sherman halted. The threshing sound had stopped. Muhlen was probably lying in wait for him, hiding in the thicket just ahead. Every muscle tense, Sherman plodded onward.

As he came to the dark skein of interwoven lianas, he parted the underbrush carefully. Nothing moved;

there was not even the sound of a crackling twig. He started in one direction; then retraced his path and headed in another. Still no sign of Muhlen.

A grinning black monkey hung by his tail from a nearby limb and emitted a ghastly, chattering laugh. Bill Sherman slowly realized that Muhlen had escaped him. The man seemed to have vanished into empty air.

CHAPTER IX

Justice on the Rio Japura



A GREY cast of dawn began to seep through the towering *mora* trees. Sherman knew that the river lay to the south so he tramped wearily in that direction. A broken bush gave him the first clue to Muhlen's whereabouts. As the light became clearer, he could make out a distinct furrow gouged in the wet earth.

Muhlen had tricked him by lying flat on the ground and wriggling noiselessly under the mass of brush. A trail of blood offered additional evidence.

A few yards farther, Muhlen's trail became easier to follow. Small pools of clotted blood marked the places where the man had stopped to rest, and a wide swathe had been torn through the underbrush. A musical swishing sound told Sherman that the river was not far ahead. Soon a bright glare of sunlight flared in front of him like a golden curtain.

Peering out from the tangle of vines, Bill Sherman rubbed his eyes dazedly.

On his left hand was the beached canoe in which he had journeyed down the river. Lois Winters lay in a heap beside it, her shimmering hair straggling across her forehead, an ugly bruise on one cheek.

A hulking, blood-stained man stood over the fallen girl. Muhlen's pulpy face was streaming with sweat; his

eyes were empty as the eyes of a corpse.

"Another move like that, and I'll kill you right here!" he snarled. "I want this canoe, and you're going to help me paddle it. That damn Sherman mangled my arm—"

"I'd rather die than help you!" Lois retorted stubbornly.

Muhlen bent over and grasped the girl's throat. "Get into that canoe!" he scowled. "I'll give you one more chance—"

Before he could finish the sentence, Bill Sherman limped across the bank, whirled him around and sent a smashing right hook into Muhlen's spongy mouth. The big man reeled drunkenly, gained his balance and threw the weight of his body against Sherman's chest. Bill Sherman's wounded leg doubled like a jackknife, and the ponderous Muhlen slammed him to the ground heavily.

SHERMAN tried to slither from his enemy's grasp; but gnarled knuckles smacked his cheekbone, jerking him rigid. Muhlen gouged both knees into Sherman's stomach and pounded the fallen man's face ruthlessly.

Arching his back, Sherman strained at the crushing weight, burying his fingers in Muhlen's long, black hair. Inch by inch, he succeeded in pulling Muhlen's head downward, until the flabby jowls were smeared with mud.

As the agent's body gradually stretched out, Bill Sherman's stomach was relieved of the pressure behind Muhlen's gouging knees. With a powerful twisting movement, Sherman pushed his adversary to one side and rolled clear of the oppressing weight.

Laboriously, Bill Sherman pulled himself to his knees and tried to arise.

Muhlen wallowed in the mud for a second; then scrambled to his feet and thudded his nailed boot against Sherman's shoulder. The young man sprawled backwards once more, expecting Muhlen to pounce; but at the same instant, a heavy

wooden cudgel thwacked the base of Muhlen's skull.

Muhlen swung around, glaring hatefully at the unexpected assailant. He saw Lois Winters, armed with a short canoe paddle. Muhlen's face became livid. Cursing wrathfully, he wrenched the paddle from the girl's grasp and thumped his forearm against her mouth, dropping her to the edge of the bank.

In a split second Bill Sherman was back on his feet. A hot, raging fire seemed to be scorching the young man's chest, running like molten metal to his legs and fingertips. In spite of his wound, he felt no pain. Mad, burning anger seethed in his veins, making his whole body feel like a bubbling caldron.

If ever he had hated a man, he hated Frederick Muhlen, and for the first time in Bill Sherman's life, he experienced the instinct to kill—not in self-protection—but solely for hate!

With a guttural snarling cry, Sherman waded into his enemy like an executioner swinging an ax. Muhlen lashed out with the paddle, laying open a red gash in Sherman's temple.

Bill Sherman was conscious only of something hot dripping into his eyes and of the leering grey face before him. His left fist whipped against Muhlen's jaw viciously. Muhlen stepped away, letting go the paddle. A jabbing right brought the foam from his enemy's mouth; and Muhlen stiffened, pawing out furiously with one hand.

Sherman edged in closer, stabbed a blow at Muhlen's heart and hammered him in the stomach cruelly. The grey flabby face turned to a sickly hue; the lips curled downward. Whirling around, Muhlen started to run toward the river.

Bill Sherman caught up with him just as he reached the canoe. Grasping Muhlen's lapel, Sherman cocked his right arm and whipped over a punch that snapped the big man's head to a grotesque angle.

Muhlen's eyes turned to glass, and he flopped into the canoe, his legs hanging across the prow. The im-

pack sent the light craft sliding into the river. Instantly the current whirled it to mid-stream.

His boots dragging in the water, Muhlen grasped the sides of the canoe and tried to pull himself backward. With the first movement, he uttered a horrible, spine-chilling shriek. The canoe lurched from side to side as Muhlen contorted his body spasmodically roaring like a wounded bull. With a quick roll, the frail craft barreled over.

Bill Sherman watched the overturned canoe skim out of sight. Muhlen had disappeared beneath the surface.

"He was dead the moment I hit him," Sherman remarked quietly. "Only he didn't know it."

"But what happened?" asked Lois. "I thought—"

"He was rotten to the core," said Sherman. "That last punch broke his neck. I could tell it instantly."

Lois Winters stood staring at the river. Sherman took her hand gently and led her along the bank. "The firing's stopped," he observed. "We can go back to the village. I have one more score to settle—with Carlos Vega!"

VEGA stirred feebly, sat upright and felt his gashed scalp. A bright morning sun was glaring through the window of the cabin. Vega arose, grumbling fiercely. Emerging from the cabin he rounded the deck house and halted suddenly, his dark eyes squinting at the shore.

The rubber station was overrun with half-naked savages. They milled up and down the lane, carrying boxes, rifles and booty of all descriptions to the slender canoes which rested on the bank. Vega turned quickly and hurried aft. The *Jaribu's* deck was empty. Men, weapons, ammunition had all disappeared. He gasped sharply. A stiff, bloodstained body lay near the stern—the body of a Rio Japura worker. Hastily Vega searched about for a means of escape.

Slinking to the port side, he noticed an empty canoe wedged between the *Jaribu's* stern and the

wharf. His heart bumped wildly. If he could steal that canoe and slip down the river unnoticed—

The sound of footfalls caused him to whirl around. Standing on the deck behind him was a small man with a round bald head. Vega gave a sigh of relief. The man was white—one of his own workers.

"Come here," snapped Vega. "I've found a canoe, a way to escape—"

The man did not move. He was looking at Carlos Vega with a queer, fish-eyed stare. "The others are dead," he said slowly. "We are the only ones left. I've dreamed it would be this way!"

Vega gave the man an inquisitive glance. Suddenly his mouth gaped open. "Peter Berthold!" he gasped.

Peter Berthold's gaze was no longer dull and lifeless. His eyes sparkled like flashing sapphires. And he smiled. For the first time in many years Peter Berthold smiled.

Vega scarcely knew what had happened. In a second he was sprawled flat on the deck, Berthold's fist smashing into his face. Vega moaned, tried to fight back, but the man's stubby fingers clawed at his throat ferociously. *Crack!* Vega's black head jerked up and was immediately whacked against the deck. Berthold squeezed the yellow neck until the man's tongue lolled from his mouth.

"I intend to kill you," said Berthold softly. "It's a better end than you deserve. I only wish I could make you pay for the years of misery your rotten company has caused—not to me alone, but to hundreds of others."

Vega's face became threaded with purple. A gurgling rattle escaped from his dry lips. Peter Berthold smiled again, his fingers tightened.

A strong hand grasped Berthold's shoulder, pulling the little man to his feet. As Berthold felt his prey slipping from him, he gave a rasping curse and turned angrily.

Bill Sherman was looking down at him. "You can't accomplish anything by killing Vega," Sherman said. "The Rio Japura Company is what we're after. Vega built it, and he's the only man who can destroy

it. I was hired to investigate the company's operations, but I didn't think I'd get a confession from Vega's own lips."

"You won't," snarled Vega. "I'll see you in hell first!"

"How about John Winters?" said Sherman, glancing over his shoulder. John and Lois Winters were standing behind him. Vega gazed at Winters' painted face in amazement. A crude bandage was tied to the man's wounded side.

"John—John Winters!" muttered Vega. "Muhlen told me you were dead!"

"Do we get the confession?" rumbled Sherman. "Or shall I let Berthold finish the good work?"

Carlos Vega crawled to his feet.

"I am beaten," he said abjectly. "Do what you will with me."

"Get up steam, Berthold," ordered Sherman curtly. "And then tear that dirty purple rag off the stern flag-staff. It seems that the Rio Japura Company has folded!"

With more pressing matters taken care of, Sherman turned his attention to Lois. Something of the hardness of his face relaxed as he said softly: "When we get down-river, we'll head for San Francisco—together. I hear they're looking for good engineers on their bridges, world's fair and things."

The girl's face was beaming, and as Bill Sherman held her in his arms he felt certain that she would not gainsay his plans.



IN NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE

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BY OSCAR SCHISGALL



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"Lerner, kill this meddling fool!"

*In Burning Desert Sands, Young Ray Howard Rallies
a Counter-Attack Against the Wild
Men of Baluchistan!*

By CARL JACOBI

Author of "Tiger Island," "Dead Man's River," etc.

NIGHT, and Quetta's native quarter lay coiled in shadows like a great furtive-eyed snake. From somewhere in the gloom of the winding alleys ahead, a reed flute sent its wailing into the hot, sultry air. Behind, the darkness continued unbroken to the dismal gleam of a solitary street lamp.

Tom Cameron paced slowly for-

ward, his Cawnpore sun helmet pushed far back on his head, his teeth clenched tightly around the stem of a bulldog pipe. The place hadn't changed since he had been here two years before. Everything was the same, even to the half sweet, half sour odor of smoked charas and unwashed bodies that crawled down his throat.

Baluchistan was like that, he

mused. Once within its blistering boundaries a man hated it as Satan's own country, the world's jumping-off spot. Once away, a certain magnetic attraction kept him unhappy until he returned.

As he walked, Cameron let his right hand hang, unswinging, close to the pocket of his duck coat. There was an automatic there, a Webley-Scott British navy regulation, ready for instant use. Things happened quickly in this sinister spiderweb, he knew, and it was well not to lower one's guard.

He moved past the *serai* of the coppersmiths, turned a corner and drew up before a dim and yellowed sign. "Mahmud Deh's, The Tribesmen's Earthly Heaven," it said in faded print, and went into a further description of the attractions that awaited one within.

CAMERON knocked the ashes from his pipe, stepped down to the level of the drink shop, and entered. A long, low-ceilinged room, half hidden by a fog of tobacco smoke and the reek of opium, confronted him. There was a bar in the rear, a scattered dozen tables in the foreground, and a cleared space off to one side where a Baluchi dancing girl whirled and swayed to the rhythm of a pounded drum.

Cameron chose a table near the door, waved aside the native who shambled forward to meet him, and relaxed in the chair. For a while he was content to sit there, letting his eyes survey the scene before him. It was Baluchistan at its worst. Evil-faced tribesmen, their cloaks and turbans still grey with desert dust, mingled with sodden wrecks of Europeans. Guttural voices droned in a medley of tongues.

Cameron shrugged. He would go out presently, leave this dirty hole and return to the European quarter. Tomorrow in the freshness of a new day he would continue his search. But just now his attention was drawn to three white men who occupied a table a few yards from his own.

Two of those men fitted into the

background perfectly. One was a Russian, heavily bearded, with an apelike body and little pig eyes. The other, red-haired and rat-faced, might have been anything. But the third—

Cameron found himself staring at the third man. The fellow was little more than a boy; a boy with light brown hair, a frank, open face and square shoulders. He was sitting there looking at the Russian, and his eyes were blazing with anger. Abruptly he swept bottle and glasses from the table and lurched to his feet.

"I tell you I'm through with you and your dirty, rotten work. You've been hounding me a little too long, Korloff, and I'm quitting right here and now."

The Russian slid a cheroot between his lips and looked up indifferently. "Have you forgotten Leiah Street so soon?" he asked. "Bah, you stay with me or I shoot your face full of holes. Sit down."

It happened quickly then. With a quick movement of his right arm the Russian knocked the boy heavily backward into the chair. The youth was up again like a released spring, lips quivering, fists clenched. And an instant later he had planted a smashing blow straight into that bearded face.

With a bellow of rage the Russian stumbled to his feet, whipped out a black revolver and pulled the trigger. A deafening explosion followed a flash of flame, and a round hole appeared like magic in the crown of the boy's sun helmet.

Cameron, watching it all ten feet away, felt his muscles tense with excitement. Here was the diversion he had been looking for. He was out of his chair and across the intervening space with the speed of a gazelle. His right hand reached forward, grasped the muzzle of the revolver and twisted sharply. The weapon clattered to the floor.

"By hell, who are you?" the Russian snarled harshly.

Cameron stood there easily, looking downward. "We'll drop the introductions," he said. "The boy here doesn't seem to want your company."

The Russian choked. "You—you damned pig!" he roared. "This is one private matter. Pig, I say, get out!"

A GLEAM shot into Cameron's eyes. Color left his cheeks. His lips tightened.

"I think I'll stay," he said. "There were odds before I came. It's two against two now. You can leave any time."

With a snarl the Russian spat the cheroot from his mouth. "Larner," he cried, "kill this meddling fool!"

The red-haired man in the other chair needed no urging. He leaped upward and shot a clenched fist at Cameron's face. It was not an unskilled blow for all of its clumsy delivery, but Cameron was even faster. He ducked his head to the side, and the hairy arm smashed into open space.

That started it. Up to that moment the two dozen tribesmen in the room had been watching the argument between the four white men with only casual interest. Now as one man they rose to their feet, scimitars gleaming in the dull light of the wall-bracket lamps. A fight was the life-blood of Allah, and the many glasses of Makran whiskey they had drunk had not dulled their courage. They crept forward slowly.

Cameron, darting his eyes side-ward, took in the situation at a glance. With a lunge he turned once again to the red-haired man called Larner, seized his moving gun hand at the wrist and struck a pile-driver blow straight to the face. Blood gushed to the ugly mouth, and the man staggered backward with an oath.

The boy had seen all he needed to see. He gave a cry of delight, leaped toward the Russian and slammed his fists into action. For a split second the four men struggled there, answering blow for blow. Then Cameron grabbed the boy by the shoulder, spun him around and sent him stumbling toward the door.

"Out of here!" he cried. "The whole outfit'll be at our throats in a minute."

He delivered another bone-cracking blow upon the ugly features of Larner, ducked a chair thrown by the enraged Russian, and raced after the boy toward the door.

Two steps forward he stopped a brief instant, scooped his hand downward and snatched up a piece of crumpled yellow paper from the floor. He thrust the paper into his pocket, overturned a table behind him.

With cries the tribesmen sought to cut them off. Shouts split the air; a pistol sent its slug thudding into the wall a scant inch from Cameron's head.

The two men reached the door simultaneously, ripped it open and pounded up the flight of steps. Then they were in the darkness of the street, running wildly over the cobblestones.

Deep into the twisting, turning alleys of the native quarter they sped. And not until their lungs ached in their chests and the confusion behind them had lost itself in a distant murmur did Cameron draw up.

"I think we've lost 'em, son," he said. "We'll cross here and head for the *caravanserai*. I know a place where we can talk."

Five minutes later in a little room next to the stables, the resting place of camel drivers, Cameron threw himself down on an old saddle, drew forth his bulldog pipe and looked across at the boy questioningly.

"That was mighty nice of you, stranger," the youth said slowly. "If you hadn't interfered when you did, I'd've been in a bad way."

Cameron nodded. "What started it?" he asked.

The boy frowned. "Just a quarrel," he said. "Korloff—the Russian—and I had some trouble in Bombay. He—he's a trader—buys rugs and things and I worked for him. We had a falling out. He's a killer," he added shortly.

Cameron lit his pipe. "Glad I was of any help," he said. "My name is Cameron, Tom Cameron, and if I'm not mistaken, we both hail from the same place. You look American."

The boy grinned and stretched out

his hand. "Ray Howard," he said. "Chicago, U.S.A." He sobered abruptly. "I suppose," he added, "I was a bit rash, at that. As it is, I'm sort of left high and dry."

"Broke?" Tom Cameron inquired quietly.

"Not a single rupee."

FOR a long time Cameron said nothing. He had taken from his pocket the crumpled piece of yellow paper he had found on the floor of the drink shop, and now unfolding it, was studying it carefully. He did not inform Howard that he had seen it drop from the red-haired man's pocket during the mêlée. But for a long time he stared down at the clumsy penciled writing scrawled upon it. It read:

Larner:

Last shipment coming with American. Be ready to leave at once for Kut-i-Kafter. Get word to Mehrab Khan. No blunders. Korloff.

Then he returned the paper to his coat and leaned forward.

"Suppose I offered you employment, engaging in an enterprise that is packed full of danger. Would you be interested?"

Howard's frank eyes opened wider. "Doing what?" he asked after a moment's hesitation.

Cameron chose his words carefully. "I'm working for a company known as British Asiatic Mining," he explained. "Geologist of sorts, I suppose you might call me. Reports have been coming in for some time of signs of gold deposits several hundred miles west of Jutput. That's practically unexplored territory, you know, and the officials of the company seem to think it not at all an improbability.

"At any rate, I leave tomorrow for the open country to do a little prospecting. The Marri tribes in the district are on the warpath, of course, and it'll be ticklish business. I was thinking of taking a native along, Baluchi or Afghan, but neither are to be trusted. If I could find a white man assistant—"

For the space of a minute Howard

sat there in silence. Then abruptly he rose to his feet.

"You've got your assistant right now," he said, and his face was full of eagerness.

Half an hour later as they walked once more through the streets of the native quarter, Cameron was smiling in satisfaction. Lady luck, it seemed, was playing into his hands.

DAYS behind lay Quetta, days of blinding heat, and miles of desert and low hills that rolled away into the distance, barren and desolate. It was a world of utter emptiness without a single tree or starveling bush to break the horrible monotony.

Howard gritted his teeth. A white-hot hammer seemed pounding at the core of his brain, and his body was sick to the soul from the maddening roll of the camel.

"God, what a country!" he said to Cameron.

Cameron nodded heavily. "The Gobi and Kizil-Kum are fertile gardens in comparison," he replied. "You know even the tribes here have an ancient proverb that when the Almighty created the world Baluchistan was formed from the refuse material. But we haven't much farther to go. That higher rise of hills forms a valley known as Kut-i-Kaftar, and the valley happens to be our destination."

They moved on again in silence, the two riding camels and one pack camel plodding dully through the sand. But the distance was deceptive, and not until the sun dropped, a blood-red ball of fire in the west, did they reach those hills. Then night closed in on them with the suddenness of a blown-out lamp.

They camped there that night, sleeping in turns. This was the beginning of Marri country, the home of the wildest, most blood-crazed tribesmen in Baluchistan, and they could not afford to take chances.

Morning, and they began to follow the range of hills in a westerly direction, searching for an entrance to the valley. At noon they reached their goal. It was a sharp knife-

thrust leading like a corridor through the hills.

Following it, they emerged on a flat tableland, a valley regular as though cast from a vast die and apparently completely walled in. The desolation was complete. A few stunted *mimosa* trees clung despondently to the arid ground, but the rest was only gravel and grey sand that moved in hot swirls with the wind.

Keeping close to the cliff walls, they began to circle the valley, Cameron examining with care the smooth cinder-colored limestone barrier that towered above him. The hills were almost sheer here, upright walls that offered no means of ascent. Abruptly, however, they sighted the yawning blackness of a cave entrance opening fifty feet above them.

Cameron gave an exclamation of satisfaction. "Up we go," he said. "That cave ought to reveal something. An outcropping vein perhaps, or at least traces of a deposit."

It was hard, slow work. A series of rough jags in the rock served them as a staircase, but a full half hour elapsed before they stood at length, panting, on the little shelf that jutted out in front of the cave.

"Looks like it runs pretty far back," Howard said, his eyes striving to pierce the blackness of the tunnel.

For a moment Cameron made no answer. He had suddenly dropped to his knees, staring hard at something on the limestone shelf. It was a cigarette, a long, slender cigarette of typical Russian manufacture. The ash was still undisturbed, mute evidence that it had been dropped there only a short time past. Even as Cameron looked at it, the wind rolled it gently to the edge of the shelf and pushed it off into space. Cameron's face tightened, but he said nothing.

They lit an electric torch and cautiously entered the tunnel. Straight as an arrow the passage ran into the heart of the cliff; then abruptly it turned to the right. For a quarter of an hour they continued inward. And then the walls and roof seemed to melt away, and they found them-

selves in a large, circular chamber.

In the center, revealed by the glare of the flash, piled high as a man could reach, was a double row of unpainted wooden cases.

Quickly Cameron strode to the nearest one, stooped down and ripped it open.

"Rifles!" said Howard shortly, a strange note in his voice.

Cameron continued to stare downward. "Yes," he said slowly, "rifles!" He seized one of the weapons and began to study it closely. "Not only rifles," he continued without looking up, "but the latest model, short magazine Lee-Enfields, improved type. Why man, those guns haven't been released to the service yet. Do you know what that means?"

HOWARD'S face had suddenly become ashen in the torch light. His eyes shifted under Cameron's keen gaze.

"Smuggling, I suppose," he answered.

Cameron reached for another case, one of different size and kicked it open.

"Worse yet," he said, "whoever's behind this is doing it up brown. A machine-gun." He turned away from the Hotchkiss and looked across at Howard, his eyes like gimlets.

"Somebody smuggled those rifles into Baluchistan and is planning to sell them to the Marrs. The tribe is already on the warpath, and they will pay any price to get them."

Howard shifted uneasily. "You think there's any danger to white men in the country?"

Cameron's voice came back like the snap of a whip. "Danger?" he repeated. "Listen. West of here, scarcely a day's journey by camel is Fort Khynabad, the last British outpost. Work it out for yourself. All the way to Quetta there's nothing but desert. No road. No telegraph. Those men are absolutely cut off, and it will be the Marrs first striking place."

Howard groaned. "God," he muttered, "and to think—"

Calmness came over Tom Cameron

then. He pulled one of the rifle cases forward, sat down upon it.

"Howard," he said, "this pretense has gone far enough. I didn't come out here looking for gold, son. That's not my business. I was sent here by British Indian Intelligence. Just what do you know about these rifles?"

THE boy slumped forward in resignation. "Secret Service, eh?" he repeated dully. "Well, I've thought as much for a long time. You'll probably hand me over to the authorities when we get back to civilization. I deserve it, I suppose, but I—"

"Go on," said Cameron.

Howard cleared his throat. "It all began in Bombay in a little back alley called Leiah Street. There was a gambling joint there, a dirty hole run by a Chinese. Some way or other my brother Jerry went in, got excited and played over his head. The place was crooked, of course, and he lost quite a sum of money. Much more than he actually had. And that's where Korloff came in, the dirty rat. He got hold of my brother's I.O.U.s and used them as blackmail weapons to get him in his power.

"But Jerry's only a kid, and I couldn't see him mixed up in any trouble. Finally I agreed to work for Korloff, providing he forgot all about my brother. The first thing I knew I was overseeing the transportation of these rifles bound for Baluchistan and the southern tribes. I stood it until I got to Quetta. Had to for Jerry's sake. Then I quit flat. You know the rest."

Cameron rose to his feet. "Well," he said. But he got no further. From the tunnel behind them came the distant mumbling of approaching voices. Quick as a flash Cameron leaped forward, replaced the covers on the two cases, and extinguished the electric flash.

"Over here," he said softly, grasping Howard's arm. "And not a sound."

The voices rumbled nearer. Presently light swept into the cavern,

and two men appeared with a lantern. Cameron felt Howard suddenly grow tense at his side. The men were Korloff and Larner!

The Russian was talking loudly in his heavy gutturals.

"Mehrab Khan and his tribesmen will reach the valley tonight," he said. "We must open the cases and get the rifles ready for him."

Larner gave a derisive laugh. "Well," he said, "if you ask me, it's a dumb idea makin' the devils wait until a certain time. Why not let 'em straggle in in twos and threes, get their guns, and beat it?"

The coarse voice became silky in reply. "That is because you do not understand the bargain, Larner. Mehrab Khan comes tonight on a horse as a true son of the desert. He comes with his servants and his warriors. It makes him very proud. After that is through we are given a safe journey to the coast, and that is very, very important. If we gave the guns in twos and threes as you advise, we should be left here in this damned country at the mercy of these British pig-dogs. Here, man of strength, place your lantern here and help me open these cases."

They fell to work, ripping open boards, splintering the box covers with heavy kicks, and piling the rifles at one side, ready for easy transportation to the mouth of the cave.

Then Cameron tapped Howard on the shoulder and motioned significantly. Slowly, stealthily they began to inch their way toward the entrance to the tunnel. They kept well in the shadow, away from the flickering flare of the lantern, and stopped dead in their tracks every time one of the renegades turned slightly as he worked.

At the edge of the pile of cases, Cameron stooped downward, grasped the case containing the Hotchkiss machine-gun and slung it noiselessly under his arm. Foot by foot they made their way forward. Once Howard's heart leaped to his throat when an unseen splinter from one of the cases crackled loudly under his foot. But Larner and the Russian were

absorbed in their task and did not hear.

Then they were in the safe darkness of the tunnel, advancing toward the outer world. At the cave entrance in the glare of daylight Cameron blinked and breathed a sigh of relief.

"That was too close for comfort," he said.

"Why didn't we jump them in there while we had the chance?" Howard wanted to know. "We could've trussed them up, taken the firing pins out of the rifles and—"

Cameron shook his head. "I also thought of that," he replied. "But there was too big a chance. There's a lot at stake, son, and if we'd bungled— No, I've got a better plan. But first we've got to hide those camels of ours."

NOT until dusk did Cameron reveal his plan. For six blazing hours he and Howard lay concealed in a clump of *salsola* bushes at the far end of the valley, watching the darker blotch on the cliff side that marked the tunnel entrance.

They saw no sign of Korloff nor Larnar.

But with the valley changed to a ghost amphitheatre masked in night shadows, Cameron roused himself and, carrying the Hotchkiss, made his way once more in the direction of the cave. Reaching the cliff wall he veered off to the right for a distance of twenty yards or so, then turned to Howard and spoke softly in the darkness.

"If I haven't missed my bearings," he said, "there's a small outthrust of rock jutting out from the cliff side directly above us. It caught my eye just before we saw the cave. There's room for two men there, and there's a ridge protection that's as good as a fort."

Again the two men took to climbing the limestone escarpment. Encumbered by the machine-gun Cameron made slow progress, and a long time passed before he had fought his way up the declivity to the projecting ridge. Howard joined him

there in the blackness a moment later.

"I think I see," the boy panted slowly. "With that machine-gun we've got complete range of the cave entrance and this section of the valley too."

"Exactly," replied Cameron, "and we've got enough ammunition and water and food for quite a long siege. Quiet!"

Howard turned his eyes and ahead of him through the gloom saw two figures emerge from the tunnel entrance and begin to lower themselves to the valley floor. The Russian's voice drifted up to them.

"Mehrab Khan and his men will arrive shortly, Larnar. We will meet them at the valley entrance."

The sounds died away, and Cameron and Howard found themselves crouching behind the natural bulwark of stone in silence. Time interminable seemed to snail past. They loaded the Hotchkiss and examined it carefully to see that it was in working condition. Then the boy, staring off to the southeast, gave an exclamation.

"There's a signal fire," he said. "Two—three—four of them. The big show starts in a minute, I guess. But I'm not so sure I like these grandstand seats."

A low muttering like distant thunder came to their ears then, swelling and dying as the wind changed. Far down in the valley torches appeared. And in their glow swam a sea of faces. More torches, and the muttering increased to a low roar. Then came the pounding of many feet and the guttural jargon of Asiatic throats.

Men were streaming through the pass. Baluchis! Marris! The wild, uncontrollable tribesmen of Mehrab Khan! They were coming at the double, urged on by the thought that ahead of them lay modern *tupaks* with which they could kill the hated infidels.

Silently the two white men on the jutting ridge stared down at the confusion. They could see Korloff and Larnar striding in advance, and they could see a colossus of a man

mounted on a white stallion, white desert cloak billowing behind him, one arm high in the air in symbol of command.

To a point directly below the cave entrance they moved. Then Korloff said something to Mehrab Khan and the procession came to a sudden halt.

EYES glinting with determination, Cameron slipped the unlighted bulldog pipe between his teeth and was staring coolly below him.

"Time to let them know that we're here," he said quietly.

He pushed the barrel of the Hotchkiss over the edge of the protecting ridge and aimed it harmlessly into open space. A moment later he pressed the trigger, and the machine-gun broke into crashing staccato.

The result was instantaneous. Mehrab Khan's horse reared upward on its haunches and plunged backward. Cries and hoarse shouts split the night air. Korloff and Larnier stood in the glare of the flickering torches, looking upward, stupefied.

Then from somewhere in the white-robed mass a rifle spanged, and the horde leaped into life. A hail of lead began pounding the rock sides around the white men. Mehrab Khan screamed an order, and three tribesmen rushed forward, attempting to scale the cliff. The Hotchkiss swung into its death message again. The three tribesmen fell backward like pushed dominoes.

Back and forth Cameron swung the barrel of the thundering Hotchkiss. In a short moment the Baluchis had had enough. They extinguished their torches and drew farther back in the darkness, out of range. Cameron stopped firing.

But when he turned, his voice was filled with seriousness. "I hadn't counted on so many of them, son," he said. "I'm afraid that we're in trouble."

Howard glanced down into the blackness below him. The valley had suddenly become silent, but he knew it was a strained silence, pregnant with death and danger.

"They can't get to the rifles in the cave," he said. "Even if they all tried

at once, we could mow them down before they could climb the cliff. But we can't hold them forever. Sooner or later they're bound to tire us out. No, one of us has got to go for help."

"Help? Where?"

"At Fort Khynabad. The post is due west of here by the compass. If one of us can get out of the valley, it's only a question of endurance. The sun will be a blast furnace all the way, and you won't be able to take your camel. Do you think you can make it?"

For answer Howard bent downward, seized the extra canteen and began to fasten it to his belt.

"I'll try," he said. "Which way do I start?"

An hour later Howard was plodding across a sea of sand and gravel, heading west. His brain was sharp and clear, and he moved with an even, mechanical pace. Yet all the trials and hardships of his exit from the valley existed in his brain only as a vague dream. He remembered climbing up and up a dizzy limestone wall, moving like some strange mountain goat, while Cameron kept the tribesmen's attention with steady blasts from the machine-gun.

He remembered reaching the top of the cliff and casting one last look below him. And the Moslem cry which had come to him there in the blackness still rang defiantly in his ears:

"Akbar! Akbar! Inshallah!"

On and on Howard walked, at intervals lighting matches to glance at his compass. His was a race against time, he knew. He was treading on counted minutes. Every hour back there might find Cameron in a crucial position.

Night blurred into dawn, and a copper sun began to mount in the heavens. Howard did not lessen his pace. It was *Khurma-paz*, the season of the hot winds, date-ripening time when the *Kachh Gandava* and *Las* provinces are a burning hell, when caravans wait at sweltering *serais* and even gypsy *Povindahs* are content to remain in camp.

Like a scorching breath from a

steel furnace the wind seared across his face. It whipped the sand in clouds of fine pulverized dust that crept into his lungs like hot smoke.

Miles, miles of shifting, horrible sand and gleaming gravel passed by him. Khynabad—could he reach it? His legs were dragging now, his body lurching from side to side. His pulse was pounding at his sweat-dipped temples.

He shook a little water from the canteen into the palm of his hand and rubbed it slowly over his forehead. He couldn't stop. He had brought this on himself, had escorted those rifles into the country. Now he must make amends.

Hour after hour crawled by, and a dull feeling of nausea began to gnaw at the pit of his stomach. The sun seemed to swim before him in mockery.

And then suddenly a blurred mass rose up out of the sand near the vanishing point. It grew in size slowly, became round and even.

Fort Khynabad! It lay squatting there like a monstrous toad, a grim and blackened outpost. Yet all the temples and crystal palaces of Benares could not have thrilled the young adventurer more.

A moment later he was pounding frantically on the great steel-studded door.

"Your officer in charge!" he gasped as the barrier slowly swung open to him. "Quick!"

MAJOR CLINTON knew his business. As he halted his company at the opening of the pass to the valley, he appeared as unconcerned as a weary tourist.

"Captain Erhart," he called, "take twelve men, two forty-pound short-range Maxims. Head directly around the hills to a small cut just opposite from here. Enter the valley firing, at the signal of a discharged grenade."

The captain whipped his hand in salute and sped off.

"Lieutenant Manning!"

"Here, sir."

"Ten men. Follow Mr. Howard up the cliff side. Allow Captain Er-

hart sufficient time to circle the hills. Then throw one grenade for a signal to advance. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The company split into three. As Howard paced forward by the side of the young British officer, he felt his legs trembling beneath him with anxiety. Since their arrival they had not heard a single shot fired. Had Cameron been killed? Over and over again the question beat into Howard's brain.

Then he was fighting his way upward, the ten men and the lieutenant climbing after him. The long distance to the top of the cliffside seemed an eternity, but halfway the boy let out a whoop of joy. He had suddenly heard the machine-gun rattle hollowly from its place in the valley. A few minutes later he was peering over the cliff, staring with relief at a figure who crouched on a little shelf far below.

The Marris were massed near the center of the valley well out of range of Cameron's Hotchkiss. Dimly Howard could make out Mehrab Khan and Korloff, the Russian. Larner was nowhere to be seen.

At the boy's side Lieutenant Manning was studying his wrist-watch. He looked up abruptly and turned to the nearest Tommy.

"Hopkins, a grenade!"

The black missile sailed far out into the valley like a falling hawk. Then a roar, and a cloud of earth vomited upward.

Like frightened ants the Baluchis fell back as from the opposite end of the valley a bugle rang out. The tribesmen turned undecidedly. They had heard that hated sound before. It meant English soldiers with modern rifles who fought like demons. But there could be no soldiers here. The outpost was miles away.

A howl went up as through the pass came the first advance of British troopers. Uniformed men rushed forward. In a moment nests of Vickers and Hotchkisses were hurling waves of death into the packed native masses.

The tribesmen were falling back now, retreating toward the tiny cut

directly across the valley. Then on their flank two short-range Maxims opened up, ripping down evil faces by the tens and twenties. Desperate Marris lunged across the valley floor, ran into a hive of steel-jacketed bullets.

Howard, peering over the cliffside, broke into a shout.

"They're massing for another attack," he cried. "Look, it's Mehrab Khan."

INTO the center of the mêlée, a giant on a white horse rode at a gallop. Arm above his head, the jeweled sword gleaming in the sunlight. Back and forth he rode, marshalling his forces, shouting invocations to Mohammed, urging his men on. He sawed on his reins, reared his steed on its hind legs in a forward gesture and pointed to the lone man and the machine-gun on the shelf. The yelling in response rose to a rumbling, defiant roar.

"They're going to try and get Cameron and then reach the cave," Howard groaned. "Mehrab Khan knows that if his men have the rifles that are concealed there the odds will be on his side."

His glance turned to the tiny shelf below him where his friend lay crouched behind the Hotchkiss, and he started violently.

Taking advantage of the confusion a lone figure had detached himself from the turbaned mass, circled to the side, and now was slowly making his way up the natural ladder in the cliffside toward the unsuspecting Cameron. It was Korloff!

Cameron turned just as the Russian emerged on the shelf. From his place high above Howard could see the tired body of his friend whirl from the machine-gun and leap toward this new enemy. Back and forth they struggled there on the jutting shelf, trading blows, seeking each other's throats.

Then suddenly new life seemed to come to Cameron. He freed himself from the Russian's flailing arms, seized the animal-like body around the middle and raised the burly figure high over his head. An instant

and the British Indian Intelligence man had staggered to the edge of the cliff and catapulted his living burden off into space. Korloff fell with a scream.

But down in the center of the valley the tribesmen had massed like a horde of white rats. And with a roar they lurched into a run and began their last advance.

Howard turned to Lieutenant Manning. "Only one thing will stop them," he said. "Give me a rifle!"

He grabbed a Lee-Enfield from a soldier's hands, poised the gun at his shoulder and squinted down the sights.

Howard took long aim. Eyes strained, he peered down the barrel. The oncoming horde was but a blur in his vision. He saw only one man in the foreground, a black-turbaned colossus of a man with a Mephisto face, galloping on a white horse. Mehrab Khan!

Slowly the young American's muscles tightened. Then a sharp crack, and the rifle jerked in recoil.

The figure on the horse stiffened, rose up in the saddle, then lurched forward and crashed to the sand.

The war cries changed to howls of anguish as the tribesmen looked upon the riderless stallion. Had their eyes lied in their sockets? Was it the immortal Mehrab Khan they saw dead on the ground? *Allah! Allah!* Heaven had deserted them. The Prophet had turned his face.

With a roar of consternation they drew up short. British guns mowed them down as they stood there swaying in indecision. Grenades rained upon their heads, ripping their lines to shreds.

For only a moment they hesitated, staring at the turbaned figure motionless on the sand. Then they turned and raced madly for the pass. Along the valley they swept, their blood quest forgotten. And on into the desert from which they had come.

Five days later two men, grey with desert *mish* swung out of the desert from the southwest and passed by the old wall into the town of Quetta. Hobbling their camels at the *cara-vansera*, they proceeded on foot to

the government residence where they held an earnest conversation with a most surprised commissioner. Then they made their way to the railway station.

There was no train. Only once a week did those roach-infested wooden coaches crawl down the Bolan pass to Jacobabad and the outside world. And this week's allotment of transportation had come and gone.

There was, however, a telegraph office, and after a moment's scribbling, the older of the two men handed the sleepy operator the following message:

British Indian Secret Service
Headquarters, Bombay.

Case closed here. Contraband rifles safely in charge Major James Clinton, commander Fort Khynabad. Korloff and Lerner dead. Detailed report later. Wire instructions. Stop. Could not have succeeded without help of young American, name Ray Howard. Earnestly recommend him fill place of Stendall who resigns next month.

T. Cameron.

Howard grinned broadly.
"You know," he said slowly, "I'm beginning to like this country. What next?"

"Next," said Cameron as he lit his bulldog pipe, "next we're going to find a nice cool place where we can get some sleep."



IN NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE
MAVERICK ON THE PROD

A Quick-Trigger Western Novelette

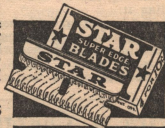
BY T. W. FORD

AND MANY STORIES OF ACTION THE WORLD OVER



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You've caught up with shaving comfort when you ask for a package of Star Single-edge Blades! Made since 1880 by the makers of the original safety razor, Star Blades have keener, longer-lasting, uniform edges! 4 for 10¢ everywhere. Star Blade Div., Brooklyn, N. Y.



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Novelette
of the West*



DYNAMITE

CHAPTER I
Branded Bad

WHEN he rode into Colton Center that afternoon, "Tip" Rackett knew he was pushing straight into trouble. It lay everywhere about him, brooding, waiting, and he had no way of evading it.

"Still," he muttered, "I shore don't aim to hunt for it. If it comes, it'll be because some other hombre makes the first move."

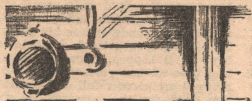
He rode slowly, a lean and sun-

baked young cowpuncher on a dusty palomino. The brim of an old sombrero shaded a countenance that was hard and long. He kept his horse in the middle of Colton Center's single street, a position from which he could watch the store fronts on both sides.

The glare of the afternoon sun was pitilessly hot, and few people moved in it. Ahead, in the shade of the general store, however, he could see a little group of idlers. As he approached them the line of his lips tightened.

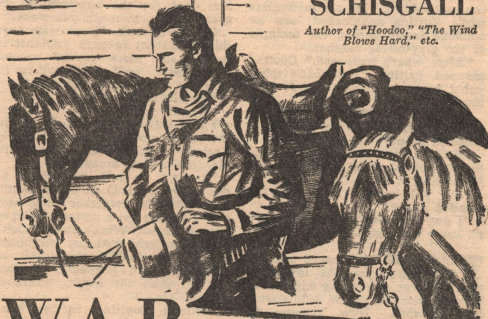
With a Courageous Girl at His Side,

Nothing to a Cowboy with Savvy!



By
**OSCAR
SCHISGALL**

Author of "Hoodoo," "The Wind
Blows Hard," etc.



WAR

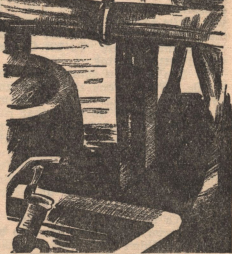
"Reckon," he mused, "I'll be 'bout as welcome as a rattler."

Nevertheless, he moved on stubbornly. He had to buy supplies. He needed them badly. And if obtaining them meant incurring a risk, he was ready.

"Rackett!"

The call, as sharp as a shot, made him rein in, turn in his saddle—and stiffen.

A tall, grey-haired man stepped out of the harness store. He had a massive figure. Despite the heat, he wore a long black coat that might



"You don't think I'm a rustler, do you?" he asked.

Tip Rackett Defies a Necktie Party!

have marked him as a gambler. As a matter of fact, this was James L. Cutting, owner of the tremendous J C cattle outfit.

Of its own accord Tip Rackett's hand moved an inch toward the six-gun in his holster. But he checked the movement, let his palm clutch the saddle-horn. He sat motionless while Cutting approached; saw an ominous frown harden the features of the grey-haired rancher.

"After what's happened," Cutting snapped, halting, "I wouldn't think yuh'd have the nerve to ride into town!"

"Mebbe I wouldn't," Tip Rackett conceded, "if I'd done anything to be ashamed about."

Cutting's lips twisted. "Meanin' there's nothin' to be ashamed about in rustlin'?"

"Are yuh accusin' me?" Tip demanded coldly.

"I don't have to accuse yuh! We all know what happened."

TIP RACKETT frowned into the big man's eyes. At any other time a charge of rustling might have brought him out of his saddle with fists clenched. Now, however he compelled himself to sit still. It was futile to fight Jim Cutting. The man was merely voicing the opinion of the entire town. To hit Cutting would settle nothing.

So Tip said in tones that were brittle, "There's one thing you and everybody else has to git straight: I had nothin' to do with that rustlin'. Didn't even know about it."

A derisive laugh burst from the cattleman. "So that's the stand yuh aim to take, is it?" he jeered. "Yuh admit that yore partner was rustlin', but you won't take none of the responsibility. Is that it?"

"That's the way it shapes up."

"And you expect this town to believe yuh didn't know what was happenin' on yore own ranch?"

Tip Rackett's eyes thinned. He bent forward slightly. "Looka here, Cutting." His voice became so low that only the rancher could hear it. "You know doggone well I had nothin' to do with stealin' yore cat-

tle. I was away when it happened. I was two hundred miles south of here. If my partner suddenly took to changin' brands, it was his doing. Me, if I'd been around, I wouldn't have let it happen. Now you hombres have all had yore revenge. Yuh plugged my partner full o' lead. Left him dead for the buzzards to rip apart. What more do yuh want?"

Cutting flushed. "Don't want anything! Except to warn yuh that if there's any more rustlin' around these parts, we'll know where to turn for the party responsible!"

"Meanin' me?"

"Meanin' you!"

There was a harsh challenge in the older man's words. But Tip Rackett forced himself to ignore it. He drew a long breath.

"Cuttin'," he said, "I've tried to make my Double O an honest outfit. Now that it's altogether mine, now that I haven't got a partner, I aim to keep it honest. What's more, I don't hanker to fight with my neighbors. So I'm overlookin' the insult in everything yuh jest said. Reckon we kin drop the matter where it stands."

Without awaiting further comment, he sent his palomino on along the dusty street. Jim Cutting, a little bewildered, stood still in the middle of the road, watching him go. It was as if he couldn't think of the proper comment to make.

After a moment, however, he scowled and turned back to the store from which he had emerged. When he entered, the man behind the counter, who had been watching anxiously through the door, asked uneasily:

"Well?"

"Claims to be innocent as a dove!" snorted Cutting. "But I give him warnin', all right." His eyes suddenly flared. "It's doggone easy to change my J C brand to his Double O with a runnin' iron! If it ever happens again, the last thing that hombre'll hear on this earth is the crash of gunfire!"

Nobody spoke to Tip Rackett when he entered the general store. The men on its porch became

strangely silent, a silence blended of hostility and distrust. They looked away.

The storekeeper himself responded to his orders mechanically. All his usual geniality toward customers was gone. And ten minutes later, when Tip rode out of Colton Center with heavily laden saddlebags he smiled mirthlessly.

"I've shore come to be a dose of pure pizen to this community!"

The grim mood persisted even while he sent his palomino loping across dusty, sun-scorched range. Here and there he passed grazing cows—J C cattle, for the most part. He crossed a sandy mesa, where only cactus and yuccas thrived and descended its far slope into the grassy domain that was his own Double O ranch—his alone, now that his partner was dead.

ONLY two cowpunchers worked for him. The rest, unwilling to be identified with an outfit that had been found guilty of rustling, had deserted. Tip, riding through the slanting light of a setting sun, saw neither of his waddies. Yet, when he approached his ranchhouse, he was startled to find a white stallion hitched to the corral fence.

He recognized that horse. The very sight of it set something to thumping in his chest.

A moment later, when he swung out of his saddle, he saw Anne Cutting waiting on his porch. She rose quickly, a tall, blond girl wearing a man's broad-brimmed Stetson. There was anxiety in her manner. As she came toward him, she looked lovelier than ever to Tip Rackett.

"Tip!" She spoke quickly, in a low voice. "I—I just had to come over to talk to you."

He nodded, drew off his sombrero. "Thanks. Met up with yore pa back in town."

Anne Cutting halted, frowning. "Hope you didn't have another run-in with him."

"Well, we didn't actually fight," Tip answered dryly. "On the other hand, though, he didn't offer me no pipe o' peace."

Her hand suddenly leaped out to catch his arm. She looked at him with a hint of fear.

"Tip, why—why don't you go somewhere else?"

"Yuh mean quit the Double O?"

"I think it's the wisest thing you could do. What's the use of staying here, waiting for trouble?"

"There won't be no trouble," he assured her tightly, "if I kin help it."

"You know the way everybody feels about this outfit."

"The only thing that interests me," he shot back, "is how you feel! You don't think I'm a rustler, do yuh?"

"Oh, Tip, of course not," she said desperately. "But—"

He laughed. It was a harsh laugh. He started toward the porch, and she walked beside him. He sat on the porch rail and looked at her with bitter amusement.

"Yore pa," he said, "would like nothing better than to see me git out. He wants my land. He's wanted it for years. Now that the railroad is buildin' its right-of-way across my north stretch, yore pa would be willin' to pay a heap for my holdin's. He'd give plenty to have the railroad right on his own property, so's he could ship beef from a way-station of his own. But yuh've got to remember, Anne, that this land has come to be more valuable to me, too. I aim to hold onto it!"

"Tip," she retorted in dismay, "you don't think I'm doing this for Dad's sake, do you?"

"No—not exactly."

"It's only you I'm thinking about," she protested. "Can't you understand? Now that the Double O has been branded as a rustler's outfit, you won't have a friend in Colton Center. They'll make life miserable for you. At—at the slightest provocation, Tip, they'll pick a fight. Don't you see what I mean? I don't want you to live that kind of life. If only you'd—"

"Anne," he interrupted, "I shore appreciate the way yuh feel. But there's somethin' else to remember,"

He peered narrowly over the land

that was his domain. It was dusty and dry, but there were long reaches of good grass on which his cattle grazed. To the west, purple mountains loomed like low clouds on the horizon—mountains through which the railroad was already blasting its right-of-way.

It was a good ranch. True, it had some defects. For example, there was the acre of huge boulders behind the house. In winter they served as a barricade against cold north winds. To Tip Rackett, however, they had always been an eyesore. He had dreamed of the day when he would remove those rocks to leave a fertile acre for a truck garden. And now, after years of planning, he saw an easy way of getting rid of those boulders.

He looked back at Anne Cutting and smiled. "No," he said, "I'm not goin' to clear out. I aim to stay. To grow."

"But, Tip," she pleaded in despair, "don't you see what you're doin'? You're actually begging for a fight."

"Mebbe." He slipped off the porch rail and hitched up his gunbelt. "Anne, I don't hanker to draw iron against no man. But if they force me to do it, if they make me protect my holdin's with gunfire—all right, I'll be ready any time they come!"

CHAPTER II

The Cows In the Hollow



EVEN Tip Rackett's old cook had deserted the Double O. And he hadn't yet been able to hire another. So he prepared supper himself that evening. He was in the kitchen, frying bacon and potatoes over the cook stove when his two cowpunchers came in for their meal.

They were dusty, tired, gangling men, newly hired. The younger of them, "Red" Weaver, had come out of the Ozarks, and his was the typical gauntness of the mountain man.

The other, "Butcher" McCord, had wandered south from the Chicago stockyards. He had a broken nose and a disfigured ear, and he had tougher muscles on his lean body than any man Tip Rackett had ever known.

"Sit down, boys," Tip said. "Grab'll be ready in a couple of minutes."

He waited, frowning at the sizzling bacon, while they settled wearily at the kitchen table. Then he peered at them over his shoulder.

"I better have a straight talk with you gents. Looks like I'm headin' into serious trouble. I don't want yuh to ride into it with me unless yuh know what it's all about."

"Reckon we know, Tip," Butcher McCord growled. "We been hearin' plenty."

"An' yuh're still willin' to stick?"

"Why not?"

For a while Tip stared at the frying pan in silence. Then, without turning his head, he went on:

"Mebbe you two boys better know the whole truth. My old partner and me got along pretty well on this outfit until they started buildin' the railroad. The rail folks bought a right-of-way along the northern border of this ranch. So everybody—specially Jim Cuttin'—wanted to buy my land from me. And I wouldn't sell. I didn't come out here to speculate on land. I'm a cattleman."

There was a new grimness in his voice.

"A couple of months ago I had to go south. Got word my pa was dyin' in San Antonio. So I left the Double O to my partner. Reckon he musta gone a little money loco. Yuh see, we'd been sellin' beef right along to the railroad. They've got a gang of fifteen hundred hombres on the job, and them gents eat plenty meat. A lot of it was bought from us, seeing as how we was so handy. Well, while I was gone, it looks like my partner got the bright idea of sellin' other people's beef to the railroad. He could change the J C brand to a Double O easy enough with a runnin' iron. He'd deliver the cows and they were slaughtered before anybody could

examine their hides close. Only—he was caught at it.”

“Don’t see why they should hold that against you, Tip,” Red Weaver said contemptuously. “From all I’ve heard around town, yuh’ve been ridin’ pretty straight.”

“Reckon a man’s got to pay for the sins of his partner,” Tip Rackett answered dryly.

He brought food to the table, served it. There was silence while they ate. Presently he looked at the two men sharply.

“The point is this, gents: I’m not any too popular around here. What’s more, Jim Cuttin’ is mighty anxious to git me off this spread, hankerin’ to force me to sell out to him, jest so he kin be on the railroad. There’s bound to be a fight sooner or later. A showdown. It may wind up in plenty shootin’. If yuh’d rather not stick it out with me—”

“Shucks!” interrupted Red McCord. “We’re workin’ for yuh, ain’t we? Talkin’ for myself, I don’t aim to quit jest because there’s signs o’ trouble! How about yuh, Red?”

“Same goes for me.”

Tip Rackett smiled. “Thanks,” he said quietly. “I kind of figgered yuh’d take it thataway.” He then straightened, looked out of the window into darkness. “Well, we’ll jest tend to our own business and handle what comes. Tomorrow I’m goin’ over to the railroad and see if I kin make a deal with their dynamite man.”

Both cowpunchers started, glanced up at him quickly. Red Weaver repeated incredulously, “Dynamite? What for?”

“Them rocks behind the house. If I could git ‘em blasted out of the ground it would be easy enough to haul ‘em away. That would give me an extra acre. The land is plumb wasted now. I figger—”

“But them hombres over on the railroad ain’t comin’ over here to blast up yore back yard,” protested Butch McCord. “They got their own job to do.”

“I’m willin’ to pay.”

“All the same I don’t see why—”

“I’ve already talked to the boss over there,” Tip explained. “He said if I’d be willin’ to pay for the dynamite and other expenses, he could send a couple o’ blasters over here on a Sunday—when they ain’t working—and mebbe help me out. I’ll ride over tomorrow and fix up details.”

“Meanwhile—” He rose to get the coffee, but paused to toss over his shoulder, “I’m advisin’ you gents to ride with loaded six-guns. There’s no tellin’ what’s apt to pop on this range.”

That night Tip Rackett rode alone. Not that there was any necessary nighthawking to do; it was simply that he wanted a chance to think in the peace that lay under the Texas stars. He rode in a brooding mood. His head was lowered and his brows were contracted in a frown.

HE WAS thinking how strange it was, how ironic, that he had fallen in love with Anne Cutting, of all women.

She probably knew how he felt about her. True, he had never actually put his emotions into words; yet he hadn’t been able to prevent his eyes from betraying him. And sometimes he had imagined, while gazing into her lovely young face, that she would have welcomed the truth from him.

“But how,” he groaned, “how kin I tell her now? With her pa and me standing on opposite sides of the fence? No, it would only make her miserable. It’d make all of us miserable.”

He was still thinking of Anne Cutting when he topped a low ridge and saw, in the hollow below him, two cowpunchers herding a dozen longhorns in the direction of the low-hanging moon.

That startled him. He drew rein, staring. In the moonlight he recognized those waddies. They were JC riders—Andy Blake and “Oregon Ike” Pawling.

“What in thunder,” he asked himself, “are they doin’ on my spread? They wouldn’t be poking my cattle along like that.”

That was when they saw him.

Both JC men instantly stopped. Tip had a vague impression that their hands moved toward their six-guns; but in the darkness he couldn't be sure. He called a sharp:

"Hi, there!"

"Well?" a challenging voice replied.

"What's all this about?"

The men below hesitated, glanced at one another. Then Oregon Ike cleared his throat.

"We been huntin' strays," he threw back rapidly. "Found a dozen of these JC dogies on yore land."

"What yuh doin' with them?"

"Herdin' 'em back home, of course.



"You ain't headin' home. Seems to me yuh're headin' for my place."

Again Oregon Ike noisily cleared his throat. It was his companion, however, who put in:

"We're jest running them around the hollow to keep from goin' over the rise. Yuh don't mind us bein' over here, do yuh?" There was a touch of sarcasm in that.

That was all. The men below growled something to the cows and continued poking them out of the hollow. Tip Rackett, motionless on the low ridge, watched in perplexity. The presence of these two cow-punchers stirred strange thoughts in his mind; dark thoughts which he preferred not to crystallize. He watched, unmoving, until the JC riders had disappeared with the cows. Then he turned slowly and headed back toward his own house.

"It's shore a kind of queer thing," he mumbled to his horse. "If them hombres are tryin' to plant JC stock on my spread, jest so's they kin accuse me of rustlin'— But doggone it!" His head rose and his jaws became suddenly dogged. "They

ain't goin' to do anything like that while I got my eyes open!"

In the morning he made his deal with the boss of the blasters at the railroad cut. And in the afternoon two ruddy giants drove to the Double O ranchhouse on a rattling buckboard. They brought a case of dynamite and two batteries; stored them in a corner of the shed behind the kitchen.

"We'll be around Sunday mornin' to do the blastin'," one of the men promised. Then he grinned and winked. "Only remember that if the railroad ever gets wind of this, we'll lose our jobs and so will the boss. We're doin' this on our own hook— on the understanding, of course, that you're payin' for all the dynamite."

"I git it," Tip agreed. "Figger yuh kin blast all them rocks away in one mornin'?"

"Sure. Nothin' to it."

When the men had driven away he glanced at the case of dynamite dubiously. He didn't like to have the stuff around the house. But he supposed nothing could happen if he left it alone. He went outside, looked at the jagged boulders that marred the ground, and smiled.

"By next year," he told himself, "I'll have plenty truck growin' back there, all fenced in."

He was a little surprised to see the buckboard returning.

"Say, Rackett," one of the red-faced men called, "Ever see the way we blast over on the railroad?"

"Shore. Watched yuh often."

"You know how we drill them holes?"

"Uh-huh."

"You could save us a lot of time over here."

"How?"

"Getting a few holes dug under some of them boulders. If you could sink a crowbar five-six feet under some of the bigger ones, it would help plenty. We won't have any too much time Sunday."

Tip Rackett nodded. "I'll do as much as I kin. Start today."

Then the ruddy men departed, and he turned back to the shed for a crowbar.

CHAPTER III

Visitor at Night

AND that night fury struck the Double O.

It happened just before midnight. Tip was home alone, both Red Weaver and Butcher McCord having gone nighthawking. He sat in his kitchen, smoking a pipe and frowning meditatively into a corner. He knew he ought to go to sleep. But there were many things that troubled him. And he was still pondering when he heard the distant cry of pain.

It was a sound that made him leap to his feet. He yanked the pipe from his mouth, thrust it shakily to a table. For it wasn't a man's cry. It came from a girl. And even at a distance he recognized it as Anne Cutting's!

Wide-eyed, Tip lunged out into the moonlight. He couldn't understand Anne's coming here at such an hour. He looked around bewilderedly and saw nothing.

"Anne!" he shouted, and presently her voice came to him again. It floated through the night silence on a note of agony. He ran toward the outcry blindly, stumbling, yelling her name.

And then he saw her.

She was crawling through brush, dragging herself along like a wounded beast. Her hat had been lost and moonbeams glimmered in her yellow hair. Even as he ran toward her, with a new kind of horror to choke him, Tip saw that she could bend only one leg. The other—the left—she pulled along uselessly.

Perspiration burst from every pore in his body as he dashed to her. He fell to his knees beside the girl, lifted her in his arms. His own agony was almost as profound as hers when he gaped down into a dead-white face contorted by pain.

"Anne!" he gasped. "Anne! What in thunder—"

"My—my leg," she groaned. "Oh, Tip, my leg!"

He looked down at it. Whether it was broken or not, he couldn't tell. The possibility strangled him. He rose with the girl in his arms, crushed tight against his chest. He moved drunkenly, like a figure in a dream; carried her to the house. His eyes were wide and stunned and feverish.

"What happened?" he blurted time after time. "Anne, what is it?"

She couldn't reply. Her eyes were shut in pain. Her teeth bit fiercely into her lip. That left leg dangled limply.

Inside the house Tip placed her on his own cot. His hands fell to her leg as though he dared not touch it. She groaned again when his fingers rested above her ankle.

"I just can't—move it!" she forced out.

"How'd it happen?"

"My horse stepped into a hole. Couldn't get off in time. He—fell on me. He—"

"For the love o' heaven, Anne, what—"

"I—I was following them!"

"Them? Who?"

"There were five or six of them. I'd already gone to bed. But they—they talked under my window. Couldn't help hearing. They—they were going to run some of Dad's cows over on your spread and—brand them with Double O's! And then—"

She couldn't immediately continue. Tip gaped down at her in a mixture of incredulity and terror. He saw the pain she was suffering. He knew he ought to be doing things. He knew he ought to dash into Colton Center and find old Doc Gaylord and bring him back. Yet, for a moment, he knelt there in a kind of paralysis. And Anne went on:

"There wasn't anybody I could talk to. Dad wasn't home. He went to town. So I—so I thought I'd better ride here and—tell you—before they—"

By this time Tip Rackett was unlacing her boot. His fingers, though they worked swiftly, seemed to him

brutally awkward. He tried to keep his touch gentle. Yet again and again, while she talked, he could see Anne Cutting wince.

"Tip," she said, "they're trying to make you look like a rustler! From what I heard, they—they'll claim they found those JC cattle on your spread. They're going to build branding fires. Some of them said they'd round up Red Weaver and Butcher McCord and swear they'd caught those two men changing our brand!"

"They're doing it, Tip, to run you off this spread! Either that or they—they'll do to you what they did to your partner. So, for heaven's sake, ride while you can!"

"Never mind that now," he grated. "It's this leg of yores I'm thinkin' of."

"Tip, they'll be coming here inside of fifteen minutes! With six-guns in their hands!"

"The devil with 'em!"

SHE lifted her head, looked at him desperately. "Tip, you've got to get away!"

"I won't!"

"Don't you understand? The whole thing is a plant! They'll round up a lot of hombres in Colton Center, show them those cows and the branding fires. And then they'll all high-tail this way, ready for—for—"

"Yeah, I know," he said savagely, "for another killin'!" He paused in unlacing her boot, looked at her hard. "Anne, why'd yuh come to tell me this?"

"I couldn't let them do it to you."

"But if yore pa is behind it—"

"I don't care who's behind it!" she groaned. "They mustn't find you here, Tip. Please!"

"If yuh think I'm goin' to leave yuh here like this—"

"You must!"

"No."

Gently, yet firmly, he managed to pull off her boot. As it came away in his hands, she uttered a stifled scream. He saw her go limp. Her face was as white as the pillow on which she lay. Her eyes were closed. He whispered her name in fear, but

there was no response. He caught her hands, bent over her.

Then he knew she had fainted.

In a daze, Tip Rackett swung away from the bed. He sent shaking fingers through his hair. He looked around wildly.

Just what to do, he didn't know. Of one thing, however, he was certain. He had no intention of leaving



Anne Cutting here alone, in a faint. He guessed, moreover, that she was in no condition to be rushed to Colton Center on horseback.

The only way to get her there was on a buckboard. And it would take time to harness a horse to the wagon. Before he'd finish—certainly before he could get her to town—JC riders might come thundering up, six-guns blazing.

"What's more," he told himself harshly, "if I leave here, no matter what the reason is, they'll swear I was runnin' away to keep from bein' caught for rustlin' cows. They'll gun me on sight!"

Yet he realized, too, that he couldn't remain to face an armed, infuriated crowd single-handed. He knew how his partner had fared. He himself had no greater reason to expect mercy.

He looked at Anne again, and rage against her father flared up in him fiercely. It was a horrible way to fight for land rights, he grated to himself—to force a man off his ranch by making him appear a cattle thief. Perhaps Jim Cutting thought that with Tip dead or driven out of the country he would have no difficulty in buying the rights to this range.

Suddenly Tip Rackett's mind darted to the box in the lean-to behind the kitchen.

Dynamite!

His eyes widened. They glowed with a wild idea. A mad idea. Yet it was one which might permit him to remain here in his ranchhouse and face any number of men.

He snapped his fingers in abrupt resolve. His face hardened, flushed. He cast a final glance at the unconscious Anne Cutting. Then he raced out to the shed.

That afternoon he had drilled half a dozen holes under rocks. Now he ran to them with sticks of dynamite, jammed those sticks into one of the holes.

Straightening, he tried hard to remember all the things he had seen the blasters do on the railroad cut. He recalled how they had connected the wires to a fuse at the tips of the dynamite; how those wires had been run back to the batteries a hundred yards away.

WELL, he had batteries! He had wire, too! The men from the railroad gang had left their entire equipment in the shed.

Tip Rackett sent a long look up at the stars—a look like a prayer. Then he ran back to the shed and began to uncoil wire.

Twenty minutes later he heard the thunder of distant, oncoming hoofs. On his knees in the house, Tip listened tensely. It seemed to him that more than two dozen horses were galloping in this direction. His eyes narrowed. He glanced over his shoulder and discovered, with a start, that Anne Cutting had regained consciousness.

She was propping herself up on an elbow, her wide eyes fixed upon him in amazement.

"Tip," she whispered. "What's all that?"

She saw that he was bending over a storage battery. From it wires ran out through the window to disappear in the darkness outside.

"I'm ready for 'em," he said tightly.

"What is it?"

"There's going to be a dynamite blast!"

Anne rose higher, her eyes terrified. Before she could speak, he snapped:

"Don't worry. Nobody's goin' to be killed if I kin help it." He nodded to her leg. "I looked over it pretty careful, Anne. I don't think it's broke. Jest a bad twist. Once we git yuh to Doc Gaylord, he'll probably straighten it out. Does it hurt bad?"

"Not—not as bad as before."

She seemed unwilling to consider her leg now. Her eyes were fastened in a kind of hypnosis on the battery whose switch he gripped. Then she, too, heard the poundings of horses. She jerked up her head. New fear sprang into her pallid features.

"Tip, you shouldn't have waited here!"

"I shore don't aim to run away," he rasped, "when I haven't got nothin' to run away for."

"They won't stop to consider that!"

"They'll have to."

"There'll be a mob!"

"The more the merrier. I kin handle 'em." He nodded to the battery. "With this!"

HE turned to watch through the window.

Presently he saw them. They were pouring over the crest of a moonlit ridge—thirty hard-riding men. He could hear their yells. He could see the vast cloud of dark dust that trailed them in the moonlight. They raced down the long slope. In a few seconds they would charge upon the house, six-guns in their hands, ready to shoot.

Anne, too, could see them through the window. Propping herself higher, she was able to look far out across the dark range. The men were hardly two hundred yards away now. The night was alive with the sounds of banging hoofs.

"Tip!" she gasped.

"Wait! Watch what happens. Don't git scared. There's goin' to be considerable bang."

CHAPTER IV

Deadlock

TIP waited until the riders were less than a hundred yards from the house. Already a few of them had fired warning shots. He heard bullets crack into the walls.

Then Tip Rackett

moved the switch.

There was a blast that shook the earth. It pounded in his ears. Its detonation was hurled back in a terrific echo from the mountains. The crash came from the side of the house, where flame leaped into darkness. A rain of stones and earth rattled on the roof, on the ground, everywhere.

The blast had occurred at a safe distance from those thirty riders. Yet its suddenness, its deafening crash, abruptly halted them.

Their horses reared. One or two, in panic, started to dash away, to buck crazily. Their riders had to fight the mounts to bring them under control. Men shouted. Some swung out of their saddles, six-guns in hand. Exactly what had happened, nobody seemed to understand. But the charge of those thirty men had been effectively halted.

His face close to the window Tip yelled hoarsely:

"Stay right where yuh are, gents! If yuh don't, I'll blow yuh all plumb to kingdom come!"

There was something magic in the raspy quality of his voice. It crashed clearly through the night. It stilled the crowd. Seventy yards from the house they stood motionless, gaping, not comprehending what was happening.

"Yuh saw that first blast!" Tip shouted. "If yuh look, yuh'll see plenty wires stretched all around yuh on the ground! Every one of them leads to another stick of dynamite! Yuh're right smack in the middle of the danger zone, gents! All I got to do is throw another switch and I'll blow everything un-

der yuh sky high. If one of yuh moves, I'll let her go!"

Stillness.

It was an uncanny hush. Even the horses, as though sensing the danger into which they had plunged were suddenly quiet, ears raised, legs rigid. Not a man out there spoke. They looked around in the moonlight and saw wires running out from the house like the spokes jutting from the hub of a wheel. Here and there those wires vanished in the ground.

And that mob which had come to string up a man for rustling cattle found itself petrified.

"All yuh got to do is move!" Tip Rackett called again, his voice menacing. "Come a yard nearer or try to back a yard away—and I'll let the whole works go! How about it?"

Nobody replied.

He shot a swift glance at Anne. Her face was ghastly. Her lips were parted. For half a second he smiled at her; a reassuring smile. Then he turned back to the window.

"All right, gents! Listen careful to every word I say. Do what I tell yuh or yuh'll go up the way that rock went a minute ago." He paused. "Everyone of yuh lift yore six-guns high and throw 'em this way! I want 'em to land outside my front door. *Sabe?*"

He heard a protesting mutter of voices. There was panic in the sound. Unbelief, too.

"All ready!" he cried. "Let's see them guns come flyin' this way! I'll count to three. If they ain't comin' when I've finished, up she goes!" Again he paused. Then: "One!—Two!—"

He had no need to go further. There were oaths, ejaculations. He could see thirty arms swing up, one after another, and hurl weapons toward the house. There was a clattering shower as the guns fell on gravel.

Tip couldn't restrain a hard chuckle. "Disarmed thirty of 'em!" he rasped to Anne. Then he lifted his voice. "Is Jim Cuttin' out there?"

"No!" half a dozen unsteady voices answered.

"The general stays away from war," he thought sardonically. But he remembered Anne behind him and didn't utter the jibe. Instead he called:

"Oregon Ike Pawling and Andy Bates! You two polecats are out there, ain't yuh?" He caught grudging sounds of assent. "All right," he snapped. "Listen to me close. The two of yuh come forward. There's my buckboard over by the corral fence. Take a hoss outa the corral and hitch it up!"

"What's the idea?" blustered Oregon Ike.

"Yuh'll find out soon enough!" Tip retorted. "Do like yuh're told—pronto!"

FOR thirty seconds the two men hesitated. Judging by the murmur in the crowd, however, the others were urging them forward. They were caught in a horrible trap, the men all realized, and the only thing to do was make the best of it.

Some of them remembered seeing a couple of railroad men drive a wagon here that afternoon—a wagon loaded with batteries and a suspicious-looking case. Now they understood, and the word swiftly passed among them.

Slowly Andy Blake and Oregon Ike moved forward, heading for the corral at the side of the house.

"Don't forgit I got my eyes on yuh every second!" warned Tip. "Do just like yuh're told." Then he called to the rest of the crowd: "Now one of yuh speak up! What's the idee o' charging down on my spread like this?"

"Yore two riders, Weaver and McCord," a voice flung back loudly, "was caught changin' brands on JC cattle! We've had enough o' this rustlin'! We don't aim to stand for no more!"

"Who caught Weaver and McCord?"

"Nighthawkin' JC riders!" And after a pause the voice added: "We got Weaver and McCord prisoners back in a hollow. They were found over brandin' fires with a dozen JC cows around 'em!"

"Tip, they're lying!" Anne Cutting suddenly whispered. "Some of the men went out and trapped your two riders, tied them up. Now they're going to claim—"

Tip nodded. "I get the whole set-up," he assured her tightly. "They won't git away with it."

"But how long can you hold them out there?"

"Long enough. You watch."

He lifted his voice to shout: "Then a few JC riders rode into Colton Center and rounded up all the hombres in the saloon, got 'em primed for a necktie party over here! Is that it?"

Only silence was his answer.

"Gents," he threw at them, "yuh'd better load yoreselves up on this! Anne Cuttin' is here in my house. She's got a wrenched leg and can't move. That's why I'm havin' Andy and Oregon Ike hitch up the wagon. They're goin' to drive her to Doc Gaylord's place in town."

"Tip!" the girl cried. "No! I—"

He ignored her cry. To the mob outside he called:

"Anne Cuttin' heard half a dozen JC riders plannin' this whole thing tonight, and come here to tell me. It was JC men that run them cows over onto my spread! It was JC men that started the brandin' fires! Then they found and hamstrung my two riders. The idea was to git the rest of you hombres to make me a cottonwood apple. Once I'm outa the way, the JC kin find ways of annexin' my land!"

His words roused a low chorus of surprise blended with unbelief. But the fact that Anne Cutting was here to support his assertion, Tip realized, must be working in his favor. He watched the crowd keenly, wondering what the men's reaction would be.

But something happened that destroyed all his hope—and brought a gasp to his throat.

One of the men, in moving tripped over a wire. And its end promptly flew out of the ground, lying harmless, unattached to any stick of dynamite!

The man stared at it. So did

those about him. A few waddies exchanged startled glances. Then one of them, more reckless than the rest, deliberately kicked at another piece of wire.

This, too, flew out of the ground—without trace of dynamite!

"What in blazes!" somebody blurted hoarsely.

Tip Rackett, gaping through the window, felt his body become icy. He straightened, his grip on the six-gun tightening. His lean face lost all color.

"They're onto me!" he whispered hoarsely.

"What is it?" cried Anne.

"I jest had time to connect only one stick o' dynamite—the one I blew up as a warnin'! The rest o' them wires are fakes! I—I run 'em out and buried their ends in hopes they'd help me hold them hombres off! But it looks like—like they've found out the trick!"

"Tip!" she cried in horror.

"In a second," he grated, starting toward the door, "they'll let out Comanche war whoops an' come racin' for their guns! Once they quit bein' afraid of a blast—"

Anne was sitting up, the pain of her leg forgotten. Her face was ghastly.

"Tip, what are you going to do?" She caught her breath. "You can't fight thirty of them!"

He stabbed a fiery glance at her. "No," he said thickly. "No, reckon not." And then, "Anne, you'll be all right. They got no call to harm yuh. Most likely they'll ride yuh into town to yore pa and a doctor. As for me, it looks like I'll have to try to ride for it."

"But—"

She couldn't finish. From out in the darkness burst a sudden chorus of yells—the shouts of men outraged by the discovery that they had been tricked.

"Here they come!" Tip rasped. He sprang to the door, yanked it open. "If they git me," he flung over his shoulder, "I'll die thankin' yuh for— for coming here tonight! *Adios!*"

He lunged out into the heavy darkness.

CHAPTER V

The Whiz of Bullets



RACING toward the corral, Tip's heart pounded wildly. From the corners of his eyes he could see the crowd surging forward. Now that they had been relieved of fear, they

cursed and roared and dashed to retrieve their weapons. Some were already mounted. Others were vaulting into saddles or dragging their horses along.

Tip ran straight toward the buckboard. Andy Bates and Oregon Ike Pawling had just led a bay mare out of the corral. They hadn't yet begun to harness the horse. Seeing Tip Rackett plunging toward them, six-gun in hand and doom in his eyes, they shouted and abandoned the mare. Both men, unarmed, darted behind the buckboard and crouched, as if to dodge a shower of bullets.

The mare reared just as Tip reached her.

As she lowered her forelegs, he leaped to her bare back. He had seized the hackamore.

"Come on, Suel!" he blurted. "Stretch yoreself!"

He had a fifty yards start; that was all. By the time he started galloping away through the darkness, some of the men had snatched up weapons. He heard a dozen quick shots behind him. He looked back to see spurts of flame like so many fireflies.

Tip bent so low that the mare's flying mane whipped his pallid face. She thundered along with the utmost power of her heavy body, nostrils flaring, tail streaming. And Tip urged her on with a hundred imprecations.

His only plan was to put distance between himself and the mob behind. They were shouting hoarsely as they galloped after him. A dozen cowpunchers fired again and again.

Tip looked back—and crushed a groan.

"Looks like we're done for!" he panted.

For the bay mare which Bates and Pawling had led out of the corral was by no means his fastest horse. There had been no time to get another. At least twenty mounts in the pursuing crowd were speedier than this Sue. And they were gaining ground at every wild lunge!

"Hell, if I got to die I'll die fightin'!" Tip thought savagely. He sent two shots over his shoulder.

And that was all he could manage. Even as the second shot banged in his ears, lead ripped its way through his side. He winced in pain.

AFTER that Tip Rackett had no notion of what happened. He knew he had fallen off the bay mare. He could feel the impact with the ground. But there was no pain, for sudden blackness overwhelmed him. And his last thought was that he had come to the end of life.

There's no fun in hanging an unconscious man. Unless the victim is aware of what's being done to him, of the fact that he is being punished, the hanging loses its whole point. So these taciturn and scowling cow-punchers, with a noosed rope ready, waited for Tip Rackett to regain his senses.

Some of them worked over him, pouring water on his head, even ministering to his wound. They had carried him to a tree beside a creek. In the moonlight, they tried to restore his mind so that he'd appreciate what was happening to him.

All were there except one old cattleman who had driven Anne Cuttin into Colton Center.

That was more than an hour ago, and Tip Rackett still lay senseless.

"I shore hope he don't die *this* way!" Oregon Ike Pawling growled.

Another man, a cattleman not connected with the JC, peered at Oregon Ike narrowly. Possibly he voiced the feelings of quite a few in the crowd when he muttered:

"I ain't so shore we *ought* to string him up."

"Why not?" challenged Oregon. "Ain't he a rustler?"

"That's what I'm wonderin'."

"Say, listen, didn't we ketch his riders with—"

"Mebbe so, Oregon." The bearded man hesitated. "But I'm thinkin' o' what Anne Cuttin' said about all this bein' fixed up. Bein' Jim Cuttin's daughter, why would she say a thing like that unless it was true?"

Oregon snorted in disgust. "Because she's in love with Tip Rackett, that's why! She said anything that popped into her mind on the chance o' savin' his hide!"

"Still—"

"Besides, it was Rackett that made up the story! She jest sort o' backed him up, like she'd backed up anything he thought to say. If he wasn't guilty, why in thunder did he try to hightail? Why did he—"

"Wait a minute!" suddenly snapped Andy Bates, who was kneeling beside the unconscious man. "He's comin' to!"

Tip Rackett groaned. His eyes were still shut in pain and when he tried to move, agony contorted his features. Yet it was clear that at last his senses were returning. Oregon Ike at once tossed an end of his lariat over the branch of a tree. He looked grim, sure of himself.

And at that moment, from somewhere far off in the night, came the crack of a shot.

The men turned, startled. They stared through the moonlight, across rolling range. Presently they heard another shot—nearer—and a third.

"Sounds like a signal, sort of," somebody mumbled uneasily.

"Let's git this hangin' over with before there's any trouble!" Oregon Ike rasped. "This hombre's a rustler, an' rustlin' calls for—"

He noticed, however, that nobody was paying him much heed. The men were watching a distant ridge in perplexity; they could hear the thuds of a single oncoming horse. And soon they saw a rider.

"It's Jim Cuttin'!" somebody exclaimed.

Tip Rackett opened his eyes. Despite the pain in his side, he pushed himself up on an elbow, feebly, and gazed around dazedly. By the time

he could focus his eyes, Jim Cutting was swinging out of his saddle—a breathless man, eyes blazing.

He glared at Tip Rackett, then swung his eyes to the crowd.

"Reckon if I'd come a few minutes later, he'd be swinging, eh?" he rapped out.

"He's gonna swing!" Oregon Ike snapped.

"No. He won't!" Jim Cutting, massive and grey-haired, slowly led his horse forward. His fiery eyes traveled over the crowd. "You gents might jest as well get it straight," he said tightly. "I'll admit I wouldn't be tellin' yuh this if it wasn't for my—my daughter. I've jest talked to her. I never knew just how she felt about Tip Rackett. She—" He faltered, and his voice dropped. But he forced himself to go on: "She's determined to marry him. Sabe? And she swore if I didn't tell you gents the truth, she—she'd be through with me. It happens that there's nothin' I care about so much as the respect o' my daughter. So—"

"What in tarnation yuh gittin' at?" a voice demanded.

"Jest this: Tip Rackett didn't rustle them cows. It was my own men I sent to fix it to look like he did. I sent Oregon Ike and Andy Bates to start some brandin' fires an'—"

Exactly what happened nobody saw clearly. Perhaps Oregon Ike Pawling completely lost control of himself. Perhaps he realized that Cutting's confession would brand him as a would-be murderer. Certainly these cattlemen would not

forget his eagerness to hang Tip Rackett. In their fury they might even use the rope on him. In any case, he was through. And because he felt he had been doublecrossed by his boss, his temper flared.

He drew his gun. Somebody jumped at him, tried to beat down his arm. But the move was too late. Oregon Ike fired, his lips drawn back from clenched teeth. He fired from the hip—and sent a bullet straight into Jim Cutting's heart.

They didn't lynch Oregon Ike. These men were sobered beyond lynching now. They overpowered him, beat him senseless, and tied him hand and foot, like a hamstrung maverick. Then they rode him into town for the sheriff.

And they took Tip Rackett along, too—a limp Tip whom two men supported on the back of Jim Cutting's horse. "Reckon we better leave yuh at yore place, hey?" a man asked.

But Tip shook his dangling head. "No," he whispered huskily. "Take me into Colton Center. I want to see Anne. And Doc Gaylord."

The cattleman considered, then shrugged. "All right," he said dryly. "Somebody's got to break the news to her, and if yuh want the job, yuh're plumb welcome to it!" The man glanced grimly at Tip's wound. "That is, if yuh last long enough."

At that Tip Rackett raised his head. His eyes shone strangely through the darkness. He saw a future of peace now; peace shared by Anne Cutting.

"I'll live," he said hoarsely. "I'll live! Doggone it, I've got to!"

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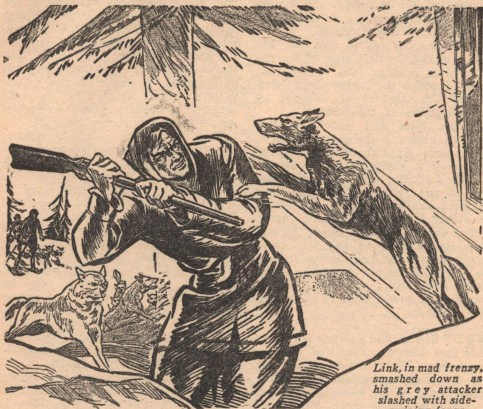
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Link, in mad frenzy, smashed down as his grey attacker slashed with side-swiping fangs

*Olak, the White Phantom, Provides Fangs for the Law
When Constable Malone Pursues a Desperate
Killer Through Northland Wilderness!*

By HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK

Author of "Devil's Flume," "Hell's Rendezvous," etc.

"O H-H-H-H — O-o-o-o-o —
Ah-h-h-h—"

Olak, the White Phantom wolf leader, poured a desolate wail deep into the hinterland of the wilderness.

In a small log cabin beyond the tamarack swamp, Netan, a comely young squaw, started. She lifted her large sloe eyes to Tuk Cramer, her half-breed husband. Cramer swung, as if to strike her as he had done

many times in the past. But as the great albino wolf boomed another resonant call, Cramer drew back.

That wail had freshened his memory, his vow never again to strike Netan. Cramer had sworn to turn over a new leaf: to cut out the distillation of fruit juices into rot-gut liquor; to trap his own lines. His resolution had been put into effect.

But fate had stepped in with a grim decree this winter. The wilder-

ness lay in the grip of famine—a stern white famine which was fast taking its toll of animal and human life. One could sense it in the dismal wail of the White Phantom.

Wapoos, the rabbit, and his kin had brought the first sign of the approaching scourge, for it was the year in which the rabbit plague destroyed the families of Wapoos by the hundreds of thousands.

Foxes, lynx and wolverines had already begun a hurried exodus to other parts. Even the deer and moose had wisely shifted off to distant ranges, knowing that with the passing of the rabbits, they and their antlered cousins would be the center of attack from all predatory forces.

Tuk Cramer's eyes glinted. He had still one chance to get by. Only yesterday he had been propositioned by a former shady associate, Link Bass. Bass was a man the R.C.M.P. would have given a lot to pin something definite on.

BUT Cramer had a strong suspicion that Link's proposition was too dangerous. It involved trespass on the Government buffalo reserves—a slaughter of young bison with a view to the sale of the meat. Not above a bit of poaching on his own, Tuk was, nevertheless, a bit afraid of Bass' proposition.

As Tuk fastened a long gaze on the comely, oval face of his young wife, another poignant thought occurred: Netan was prettier than ever, and now more mature than when she first married Tuk. She was clever with rifle, trap, skinning knife and cooking pot.

Link Bass was well aware of this. Tuk never liked the way the other 'breed ogled Netan. It did something to Tuk.

Netan had tried to persuade her husband that they should move away. She was afraid of Link Bass. She had suggested the Nahanni country to Tuk—that strange country far to the northwest, about which the Indians weaved some of their strangest legends. Nahanni was a land of spirits.

Still, at Nahanni there was always fat game, and many species of fine fur. Netan had been schooled at the missions of the white people and many of her own people's legends had not the same impressive element of dread for her. But even Tuk Cramer had shuddered at the mention of Nahanni. It was a country whose valleys were warm in sub-zero weather; a country where no Indian would have voluntarily lingered.

Link Bass' way would be easier, yet—Tuk's whiskered jaw sank into his cupped hands. Today Link was coming for his final answer.

As Netan's husband attempted to arrive at a decision there came from the wilds another deathly call from Olak, the great. Both occupants of the cabin shuddered. What grim portent did that hunger call convey?

Tuk could not make up his mind. He had promised Netan that he would bring her and her young brother, Tan, a stripling of thirteen, safely through this famine. Netan had already sent for Tan. That must be him now, for there was a *crunch-crunch* of snowshoes outside.

But when the door opened, Netan shrank back. It was Link Bass who entered, the pock-marked half-breed, whose scruples were fewer than the fingers of his left hand—but one finger and a thumb remaining.

"Ayaie! But it is col'," Bass called. "Ah-h—you were waitin' on me, Tuk. But bring some cups, woman." He whirled on Netan, his cold grey eyes lighting with a lustful gleam as they roved over her comely form. At the same time he snatched a squarefaced bottle from a hip pocket.

Tuk Cramer started. That bottle was the type used by old Red-Eye Carn, a hermit moonshiner who would as soon lose a hand as to part with a single bottle of his hootch.

"You—you got a bottle from—Red-Eye?" Cramer gulped.

"Yeah. Sure t'ing, an' why not?" Bass chuckled. "D' ol' porcupine allus gives me what I want." Link reached forward and closed a hand over Netan's as she passed him a cup.

Tuk Cramer started impulsively forward. *'Cre nom!* He would kill Link Bass if he ever touched Netan again.

Tuk had promised never again to drink moonshine liquor. Once it had come very close to involving him in a murder, the murder of his wife. Now Link was pouring out copious jolts of the dynamite swamp brew.

As Cramer raised the cup to his lips, an almost inaudible throat sound escaped Netan. Slowly, suppressing an oath, Tuk lowered his cup.

"Well?" Link Bass swung his glance from the girl to her husband. "Made up y' min', Tuk?" he half snarled.

"Yeah." Tuk had made up his mind in the last twenty seconds. He had at last fathomed the true designs of the other. Link Bass wanted Tuk in partnership for the sole purpose of getting him out of the way—leaving Bass a clear field with Netan. He had always wanted her.

"We're movin' out tomorrow, Link." Tuk's voice was cold and full of meaning. "We're headin' for Nahanni."

"Nahanni? Why, y'r craz-ee. That country ain't fit to take y'r wife to. Ayaie!" Link Bass got to his feet and shifted over to Netan's side. In an affected, big brotherly way, he placed an arm about her shoulders, and Netan shrank back, her frightened eyes burning into Tuk's.

Cramer leaped to his feet.

"I've give' you my answer, Bass," he husked. "Dat's all—Now take you paw off Netan, an' get the hell out."

He took a sharp step forward. Netan rolled out of Bass' grip and stepped between them.

Bass had now lost all his honied drawl. His face distorted savagely, reflecting the aboriginal cast as he snarled at Cramer.

"So y'aint got no more use for Link Bass, huh?" he gruffed. "Okay—Mebbeso y'll wish y'd horned in wit' my plan. *Tonnerre!* I only got to whisper somethin' in the ears uh Constable Malone, an—"

Cramer uttered a strange Cree Indian oath and stepped in. A hand

shot out and gripped the throat piece of Link's parka.

"You wouldn't be seen wit'in ten miles uh Malone's Post cabin," he snarled. "Y'can't bluff me, damn you. Now git out, or—*nom d'un chien!*—"

With a little inarticulate cry, Netan moved closer to her husband's threatening form.

Bass jerked up the hood of his parka, but not even this concealed the malice in his face.

"Some'ow—I don't t'ink y'll get to—Nahanni," he sneered, striding to the door.

TUK CRAMER followed him. Outside, as Link reached for his snowshoes, Tuk started. Name of a sheep! Those rackets were the property of old Red-Eye Carn.

A shudder rippled through Cramer's being. First, Link had produced a bottle of Carn's guarded hootch; and now—the old hermit's snowshoes, rackets only Red-Eye could design.

Link uttered a sharp throat sound which brought Tuk round in his tracks. Coming over a rise of land from the northeast was the slim, fur-clad form of young Tan, Netan's brother.

Bass hurriedly kicked into his rackets and swung off towards the swamp at the back of the cabin.

Cramer was puzzled. What was Link doing heading out in that direction, directly opposite to that which would lead him to his own cabin?

Young Tan had the answer. Excitedly, the boy flung himself into Netan's embrace.

"Ayaie!" he croaked. "Mucha Satan." He half turned and shot a furtive glance at the retreating form of Bass.

"Go on, Tan," his sister urged, in a soft reassuring voice. "What, little one?"

"Red-Eye," he gulped. "I stopped at his cabin, as I always do, for Red-Eye was always good to me. But he—ayaie! He is dead. Killed!"

A sharp cry broke from Cramer's throat. His eyes met Netan's and a swift glance of understanding flashed

back and forth between them. They knew. They knew that Bass had killed the old hermit.

But they didn't know that Link had already planted evidence that would incriminate Tuk.

Tuk suddenly pulled himself together. Link was a killer. Tuk must get his wife and her brother to safety.

Quickly he outlined his plans, issuing instructions to both the others.

"You, Tan, will help me rig up d' dog outfit. You, Netan, gather up what grub we got, an' robes."

Their grub supply wasn't much—some jerky and a few beans and tea.

By dusk, they were ready for the trail. With a last swift glance back at the cabin, Tuk paid out his trail whip and the half-starved members of his dog team yelped as they lurched into the collars.

Deep in the cover of a thicket, Link Bass chuckled thickly. First, by some means, he would get word to Constable Malone, advising him of the killing of Carn. Ah-h! It was a good thought. Malone would never let up until he had tracked Cramer down.

Meanwhile, Link Bass would also take the Nahanni trail. It would look good in the eyes of Malone. It would appear as if Bass wanted to keep the murder trail hot for the constable. There couldn't be any slip-up in the evidence Link had planted against Cramer. *'Cre nom!* It had been cleverly arranged.

MANY days on short rations had made Tuk Cramer irritable. He had begun to snarl at Netan and young Tan. The boy was receiving extra rations from his sister along the bitter famine trail.

Tonight, Tuk Cramer sat alone before his campfire, in front of their crude sleeping tent. He started suddenly at a long, familiar wail.

"*Mon dieu!* Olak!" he gulped. "*Tonnerre!* He follows our trail." Netan too had heard. She moved out to her husband's side.

"You heard it, Tuk?" she breathed. "I thought, two days ago, that I saw

the big tracks of Olak. Not only those, Tuk, but snowshoe tracks—the tracks of Red-Eye's rackets."

Cramer pushed himself to his feet. "*Mon-dieu!* Den it is true," he husked. "*Ayaie!*" He leaned over and pressed a hand down on Netan's shoulder, a hand that quivered.

"Say not'ing to Tan," he jerked. "We mus' now sleep wit' our eyes open. But—listen—Olak ag'in. 'E an' 'is pack. We mus' watch d' dogs close, Netan— Only t're left now." "Oh-h-h-h—O-o-o-o—Ah-h-h-h—"

"What was that?" Young Tan had parted the smoked flaps of the tent. "Is that not Olak? Or—is it some strange beast of Nahanni?" he asked.

"Get back to sleep, young Tan," Cramer barked. "You talk lak some young *Iskwa*—girl— 'Tis not'in' but d' call of some 'ongry wolf."

Tan did as he was bid.

Netan's full young bosom undulated fiercely. *Ayaie!* This long white trail was fraught with much terror for her now.

A CONSUMING hunger was stirring the White Phantom and his pack of grey devils to a boldness that was unusual.

Olak's pack members began to lag at his flanks; not one of them could match his seemingly tireless lope.

Man was mushing along the valley trail and in the extremity of a torturesome hunger, Olak's pack was trailing along, hoping to snatch a sled dog, scraps of food, skins—anything that could be bolted into hungry maws.

Olak now swung his panting greys down a slope. Not that he had any thought of a direct attack on the man now resting in the spruce thicket. But there was the hope that this man might have secured some form of game, some fresh meat; or there might even be offal to plunder.

A pale half moon struggled against a swirl of scudding clouds. Now and then a streamer of weird lemon-yellow light cascaded down to the snowland, filling the valley with fearsome shadow-shapes.

Olak came to a sudden halt. His

pack staggered up, red tongues, lolling, eyes coldly yellow. They flopped to their bellies, almost completely exhausted, yet ready in a flash to strike their fangs into each other. They glared fiercely at their huge albino leader.

Olak's nose wrinkled. He suddenly leaped to a rise of land and hoiked his muzzle into wind. The man scent was very strong now. It purged the big leader's nostrils. There returned to him that age-old instinctive dread of man, which set up a ripple along his spine. But his muzzle went gradually higher—higher, then from his deep chest there boomed that horrible killer call:

"Oh-h-h-h-h—O-o-o-o-o—Ah-h-h—"

The valley rang with its deep reverberations, *cul-de-sacs* hurling it back in weird echoes.

From a small spruce thicket, a man jerked himself from his bed roll, snatching up his Winchester. His eyes were staring wildly as his lip quivered.

"Olak—Mucha Satan," he croaked.

Link Bass, the renegade half-breed, was suddenly very much afraid. He had come along a grim killer trail, leaving a murder trail behind. He had intended to fetch up with Tuk Cramer before this, but the trekking had been too much for his dissipated condition.

Two days back he had run out of grub, and had been forced to kill one of his dogs. But in spite of his misfortune, there still blazed in his brain his desire to seize Netan and make off with her to the hinterland of the weird Nahanni country. He was surprised that Constable Malone hadn't put in an appearance yet.

Link was close to the Cramer camp now. With the predawn lights he had hoped to complete his treacherous plans. At first he had hoped that the Mounted would pick up Cramer for Red-Eye's killing. Then Netan would be left for him. But somehow Bass' scheme had failed. There was only one other thing for it—his lips firmed as he gripped his carbine closely.

But the call of that White Phan-

tom wolf leader had filled Bass with a new fear. Olak and his pack were starving. They were desperate now.

"By gar," he croaked. "I bettaire go fix Cramer tonight. D' whelp, Tan, mus' be lef' for d' wolves. Unh!"

He tugged his parka about him and dug up the remaining couple of dogs—two whimpering, starved devils who sensed the danger of the wolf pack.

Bass dragged them into their harness. Flailing them into action with the wood of his trail whip, he was soon stealing off towards the camp of Cramer and Netan.

IN the shadows, Olak bellied forward, the scent of the man's sled dogs playing the devil with his sensitive nostrils.

All at once, Olak made a signal to his pack. It was time to strike and strike boldly. No longer did that dread fear of man gnaw into his vitals. The primary law of nature, of the wilderness—the right to kill for food, was predominant in the White Phantom's brain now: those two mongrel sled dogs meant temporary sustenance for the starving wolf pack.

Olak leaped out, running like the very wind itself. He crossed a rise, then swung his pack along the shadows of a small spruce belt. He was wise in the craft of his forebears. He was loping along parallel to the sled outfit of Link Bass.

On silent pads, the pack closed in on their unsuspecting prey. The moon had won its battle with the clouds, and now, allied with the shuddering northern lights, drenched the valley with a flood of eerie brilliance.

Olak brought the pack to a sudden halt. They chopped threateningly about their leader, hackles up, ready to charge him. This was no time to halt—within striking distance of their quarry. But Olak had made a signal to a big gaunt she-wolf. She was being given command of the pack, while he leaped out, to shift around the neck of the timber belt.

Soon, the clearing night was shat-

tered by that blood-curdling call of the White Phantom.

Link Bass swung sharply, croaking a gasp of fear. Olak was alone, craftily baiting the man.

A low, hysterical chuckle broke from the man's throat. He tugged his almost spent dogs to a thicket and tied them to a sapling.

Intoxicated with a bombastic false courage, Bass drew back and commenced to stalk the White Phantom.

"*Tonnerre!*" he breathed. "I weel show dis great white phantom pelt to Cramer, before I bump heem off. Wan beeg weddin' present for Netan. Unh!"

He moved on for a hundred yards, straining his eyes to catch Olak's shadowy form long enough to draw down on it.

Now! Suppressing a sharp cry of exultation, Link jerked the lever of his carbine? The hammer was back. He was ready to pull when a furious chorus of mad snarls sounded along his back trail. He whirled. The entire pack of grey devils was tearing into his two frantic dogs.

Then from the front, in wicked mockery, came the dread death wail of Olak. It snapped at Link's eardrums. He quaked at the legs, and his craven voice began to invoke the gods of his aboriginal forefathers.

Scarcely conscious of his act, he jerked up his carbine and pulled. He fired again and again, blindly, madly. But his bullets whistled into empty air. Mingled with the Winchester fire was the terrible bedlam of sound as the timber wolves ripped the sled dogs to convenient hunks for gulping. They tore at robes, at anything that could be bolted.

A sudden fierce anger purged the breed's mind. He swung and blazed shot after shot at the thicket. A young dog wolf leaped high, to flop half dead in the snow. In another moment he was very dead, and as obscure as Bass' sled dogs. Ravenous fangs made short work of him.

Bass hurled himself into crazed action, but in a flash the entire pack had melted into the shadows. There they bellied down to lick their

bloodied chops, to await the further signals of their leader.

But Olak's keen nose was sniffing excitedly. His ears were cocked sharply. The White Phantom had picked up the scent and sound of other man movement.

HELL had broken out along the famine trail. From his encampment, Tuk Cramer had listened to the mad sounds of the plundering wolf pack. He suddenly started forward at a human yell.

"No—no, Tuk," Netan protested, catching at her husband's arm. "You must not. He will keel you."

"I will be careful, *mon enfant*," he husked. "But I cannot res' until I 'ave seen what is goin' on. Ayaie! It is d' pack of Olak." He was kicking into his snowshoes, and now broke from Netan's grasp. Carbine snugged in the crook of his right arm, he trotted off.

A long wail from Olak brought Tuk up short in his tracks. The wolf call was suddenly punctuated by a blast of Winchester fire. Wolves broke out in a mad chorus again. Their tongues had tasted the first warm blood in many days, and with its subtle tang had gone their inherent fear of man.

Cramer hurled himself forward. He could likely break up the attack on Bass, and then get the drop on Link. At the crack of Link's Winchester Tuk swore bitterly.

"Wan damn fool," he gulped. "'E wastes all 'is ammunition."

Tuk started the descent of a slope, but came back to a sudden halt. *Nom d'un chien!* That was no bluff attack on the part of the White Phantom's devils. They were actually closing in on Bass in that belling circle of death. Tuk could see the green-yellow gleam of their eyes.

Bass shrieked and backed off.

Crack! S-s-supp! Tuk's carbine barked. A lean grey shape leaped high, to whirl in mid air and flop to the snow. In a flash the doomed wolf fell victim to a hundred slashing fangs. His limp shape was dragged to the thicket. But not all the pack

had gone; some were now on the near side of the cringing half-breed when Tuk Cramer pulled again and again.

In the shadows, Olak the Great snarled at his unruly pack members, attempting to beat them back from further attack on the man.

Link Bass was suddenly conscious of the presence of Tuk Cramer. Tuk had probably saved him from a horrible death, but to Link's warped mind, that did nothing more than to bolster up a false courage. Not only that, here was the man who stood between Link and the comely Netan.

LINK, all along the trail, had had a haunting suspicion that Tuk Cramer had recognized Red-Eye Carn's snow rackets back at the Cramer cabin.

Uttering a low throat sound, Link slipped a fresh cartridge into the breech of his carbine. Backing off slowly, deliberately towards the shadows, his warped brain became refreshed with his killer instincts. He suddenly flung up his carbine and pulled. Once—twice!

Mad flame spat from his Winchester. Tuk Cramer swallowed a half scream. Clutching madly at his left shoulder, he whirled and flopped to the snow.

Link Bass gasped, shrinking farther back from the fallen man. A low, half-hysterical chuckle escaped him as he crept around the shadow-draped thicket which only a few moments ago was filled with strong-fanged wilderness hellers.

Now Netan would belong to Bass!

He crept on, his dominant mood ousting all other thoughts. As he was forced to pass closer to Cramer's inert shape, he started, but told himself that of course that body hadn't stirred.

"Jus' d' moon playin' tricks," he ruminated. "E didn't move. By gar—he'll nevaire move no more—"

But there were no more moon shadows. The eager, hungry hills had already swallowed the half moon. And—Tuk Cramer's body had stirred, ever so slightly.

Back at her campsite, Netan paced back and forth in front of the sleeping tent. She had heard the mad, shattering carbine fire. Tuk had not come back. Now Tan was stirring.

Netan suddenly whirled, a hand flying to her throat. Was that crunching noise the sound of Tuk's returning steps along the back trail? Those snowshoe steps were in close, beyond the tent.

It was a sudden sharp cry from Tan which sent Netan lurching inside the tent. She recoiled in horror, for she was staring into the leering face of Link Bass, who had entered from the back of the sleeping quarters.

"So I fin' you alone at las'—d' so beautiful Netan?" he drooled.

The cold voice of the killer struck stark terror to the young woman's heart. She caught Tan to her, but he suddenly swung clear, his right hand flashing down to his belt. A skinning knife whipped up. Tan struck. But Link Bass was ready, he smashed the boy cruelly across the wrists with the barrel of his carbine. Tan dropped to the floor, writhing in pain.

Like lightning Netan stooped and swept up the boy's fallen knife. She struck hard, but she faced a maniac, a man whose soul was purged with lust. Link dropped her with a side-swipe across the temple.

When Netan regained her sensibility, she found herself bound. The tent had been struck and Link Bass was jerking the last of Cramer's dogs into their harness. The dogs hitched, he swung sharply on the pretty young squaw.

"Promise no tricks, an' I cut you free," he snarled. "Mak' one fonny play, an' I tie you up again, an' keel d' kid."

"Very well, mucha Satan," Netan agreed. "But—harm Tan, and one day I will kill you."

• Link Bass stepped in and pressed his heavy lips hard against hers, almost choking her. She struggled in vain.

Bass backed off, chuckling insanely.

"Bon," he husked. "More later. Now I go scout out d' bes' trail ahead. I weel cut you free when I come back."

As he shuffled off well ahead, Netan called up young Tan from the shadows.

"Quickly, brave one," she breathed. "Take my carbine and the small sack of food. Go back along the trail and find out what happened to Tuk. Then—may the great Manitou guide you. He will forgive if you—kill Link Bass."

Young Tan showed no outer expression of emotion. As stolidly and as coldly as his elders would have acted, he gathered up Netan's carbine and a small sack of food, then turned and was quickly swallowed by the gloom.

ON his return Link broke into a volley of oaths when he discovered that Tan had gone. He seized Netan by the throat and shook her mercilessly. But again the soft touch of her warm flesh fired him. He pressed his face to hers until she sagged out almost into a swoon.

Then the man's laughter rang in the night, laughter of conquest. To hell with young Tan! Let the wolves pick him up.

Link bent over the girl once more, but made no further effort to kiss her. She was his anyhow now.

"When we reach Nahanni, you become my woman," he chuckled. "Cramer will nevaire come back. Now—I free d' hands."

He slit the rawhides which bound Netan's wrists, then after a moment's hesitation freed her ankles, but he secured her to the back of the sled on a long length of rawhide.

"It will be well if you don't try to mak' escape," he warned her.

His long trail lash leaped out and he stung the lead dog cruelly between the ears. They struggled on—on, deeper into the forbidding wilderness along the grim famine trail, and as she shuffled on in the rear of the sled trail, Netan wondered what young Tan would find.

Tan had no difficulty at all in pick-

ing up his brother-in-law's trail. There was now a suggestion of cold dawn greys in the sky as the young Indian trotted on.

A wolf call knifed the grim silence of the wilds—the weird death call of Olak, the White Phantom.

But Olak was pouring his death wail prematurely into the wilderness, for Tuk Cramer was not dead.

As Tan fetched up with the wounded 'breed, Cramer was struggling to keep his nether limbs from freezing, but his actions were weak, puny efforts. He was badly spent.

Tan choked back a half sob as he dropped to his knees and lifted Tuk's lolling head. He purred to the older man in soft Cree.

"It is I, Tan," he called. "Ayaie! There is much blood on the snow. Now lie still till I find and attend the wound."

The boy's right hand contacted a sticky mass of congealed blood at Tuk's left shoulder. But he steeled himself against the surge of nausea which threatened. He must help Cramer, for wasn't Netan in the hands of the mucha Satan, Link Bass?"

"Ah-h—*Mon dieu!* It is you—Tan," Cramer gasped. "So strong, like Mistoos, the musk-ox. But—what of Netan? What 'appened?"

"Netan is gone, Tuk," the boy replied. "But wait until I fix your wound. Then we will have fire. I brought food. Ayaie! It was Netan's idea. Link Bass must be killed."

Tuk squeezed the boy's arm weakly.

Quickly Tan knifed away the fur and underclothing from about the wound. He cleansed the wound with clean snow, applying compresses until the shoulder was quite numb.

"Now—Tuk, I must hurt," he gasped. "The bullet. It must come out. I can feel it when I press against the bone. Lean hard on me while I—"

Tan scoured the blade of his knife thoroughly, then slid the point into the wound. He sickened, but hung on to his nerve and then, with a deft flick of the wrist, he snicked the slug out clean. His grandfather had

taught him this, during an operation on a half-wolf sled dog.

Tan's surgery was crude. He had no bandage save the flour sack in which he carried the small supply of grub. But soon he had the wound plugged with clean snow, and Tuk's arm strapped tightly to his side.

Inside fifteen minutes, Tuk Cramer was drowsing before a crackling tamarack fire, while young Tan kept a lonely vigil.

Tuk Cramer dropped off to sleep at last, and did not waken until a fitful sun began to play on his eyes. He started from his sleep, eyes staring wildly, until he recognized young Tan.

"Ay—tah, but you 'ave done well, Tan," he called. "You 'ave some tea. 'Cre nom! But wan day you weel mak' a greater man than your grandfather. Now—we mus' mak' 'aste, else that carcajou, Link Bass—" He broke off, his lips tightening. He was watching the play of emotion in the boy's face as Tan looked back furtively along the out trail.

"What, Tan?" he gulped.

"I do not know, Tuk. But twice in the night I thought I heard the yelps of sled dogs. I—"

"It is the spirit sounds of the near Nahanni country, son," Cramer husked in the Cree language. "I—too, have been hearing those sounds. Now—the tea, O brave one."

LINK BASS had reached the fringes of the forbidding Nahanni country. But to his lust-filled mind had come an element of torture. Since leaving Cramer's camp, he had been shadowed by haunting shapes; the wilderness had seemed to whisper his crimes to him. Now, out of a clear sky, weird shuddering lights cascaded—ominously beautiful dancers whose trains swept the very snow plain. The Indian in Bass revived the strange legends woven out of these shimmering lights.

He stooped and scooped up a handful of snow with which to lave his parched throat and mouth. He was all at once very conscious of his crimes. This night was even fuller

of those dread whisperings and padding footsteps.

But a surge of false courage came to him as he glimpsed Netan's form. Soon they would be deep in the hinterland, where there was game in plenty, and warm springs beside which to camp; and—better than all—gold!

Ayaie! He must oust all other thoughts.

Half turning he swept the immobile form of Netan again. She looked more lovely than ever as the brilliance of the avalanching Aurora splashed her face. Lips parted, the man moved towards her, arms outstretched. But suddenly he recoiled for, out of the haunted wilderness came the dread defiant wail of Olak, the White Phantom!

"Oh-h-h-h—O-o-o-o—Ah-h-h-h—"

Link Bass quailed. Those soft footfalls he had heard were, after all, the true physical paddings of the White Phantom's pack. Olak had trailed him down.

Olak hadn't been thinking of the man, though. There were those two sled dogs left, and the famine trail had produced no other sign of food. He was loping in fast now, his eager devil mates almost beyond his control.

Link Bass rushed to Netan and cut her lashing free of the sled.

"Quick, Netan," he gasped. "A beeg fire. Olak, the devil wolf, is comin'. We mus' fight heem off. I will kill a dog, an' if necessaire, feed heem to d' wolf pack. Ayaie!" His voice cracked.

A thin smile crossed the girl's lovely face. She was thankful to the great Manitou for the presence of Olak once again.

As she hurried to collect fuel, Netan slyly lifted the man's carbine—later, she placed it down again. A dog yelped. Link's knife had slashed down to its heart. As Netan built a big fire, Link Bass skinned and gutted the sled dog.

Later, as they chewed roasted, stringy dog meat, Netan suddenly cocked up her head. Was that strange sound the crunching of a snowshoe?

Could it be Tan? Her heart began to hammer fiercely beneath her breast.

All at once Link Bass wheeled, snatching at his carbine. He, too, had heard. His face went ashen beneath its whisker stubble. Lips mumbling an unintelligible jargon, he backed away from the fire, but he was moving in the opposite direction to that from which that crunching sound had struck Netan's ears.

Again that slow smile crossed the girl's mouth. As she gathered the wood, she had emptied Link's carbine of every single cartridge.

NOT more than fifty feet off, Olak, the White Phantom, bellied down. His recalcitrant pack had become hard to manage. Olak was holding back, because his sharp ears had picked up new man sounds along the out-trail. Now he stirred. A man was slinking towards him. Still on his belly, the big albino wolf snaked back—back. Never, yet, had Olak's fangs sunk into the flesh of man.

Suddenly like a bolt from the blackness, a young dog wolf leaped. Olak snarled and tried to strike the young dog down, but the other bounded well over his head.

With a shriek of fright, Link Bass pulled his trigger. The very click of the hammer on a dead pin startled the leaping wolf which tried to whirl off in mid-leap. A furry shape struck Link's face. In a mad frenzy he struck out, smashing down with the barrel of his Winchester. His grey attacker took the full force of the blow, but in his own fear whirled and slashed with long, side-swinging fangs.

Link Bass yelled, as he rocked back on his haunches, blood gouting hard from the side of his neck.

Fear had now transformed him into a helpless huddle of humanity. He was grovelling in the snow, reaching for his fallen carbine, when a sharp clipped voice barked at him.

"Hold it, Bass! Don't move! I'm arresting you for the murder of

Carn, and the attempted murder of Tuk Cramer!"

"Ma—lone!" Link's voice was no more than a craven whisper. He gulped hard as the tall form of Constable Malone swung through a small scrub thicket, handcuffs dangling from the thumb of his left mitten.

"*Cre nom d'un chien!* You lie," Bass croaked. "I nevaire keel ol' Red—" He broke off, with a throaty gurgle, for the bandaged form of Tuk Cramer broke through the willows.

"Ayaie!" Link Bass groaned, as he relaxed helplessly.

"Anything you say will be taken down and used as evidence against you, Bass," Constable Malone intoned the customary warning at the arrest.

"Now get onto your feet, you dirty crook. By God! I ought to turn you over to Cramer, or throw you to Olak and his pack. You thought you were smart planting that evidence to incriminate Cramer, but it didn't wash. When you stole Red-Eye's snowshoes, you foolishly left your own at his cabin; also, your knife, with which you stabbed the old moonshiner. There's a lot more, but I've got the goods on you."

Malone snapped on the cuffs and jerked the man along to the campfire, where Netan and young Tan watched through dilated eyes. Cramer slipped his good arm about his wife's shoulders and pressed her close to him. Ayaie! He was glad he had reformed some time back. Malone was one of the best men in the north force. He—

"Oh-h-h-h—O-o-o-o—Ah-h-h-h—"

The long penetrating call of Olak lanced the wilderness quiet, sending a creepy shudder along Cramer's spine.

Ayaie, yes! He was glad he had been good to his young wife. He turned to look deep into her sloe eyes and then together they watched the skilful fingers of the young constable dress the fang wound in Link Bass' neck—a neck that would soon jerk in the noose of a hempen rope.

Young Tan pressed in close to his

sister's side, his eyes still ogling the constable who had come hurricaning down on Tan's and Cramer's back trail.

Tan had told the Mountie the story of the finding of Red-Eye's body; and the constable had squeezed the boy's shoulders. He had promised him a good reward.

Now as the youngster listened to the defiant call of Olak, he straightened his shoulders. Olak was as great as the legends woven about him.

What a story Tan would have for the children in the lodges! He

would tell them of the White Phantom; of Nahanni.

Malone jerked Link Bass towards the fire, and beckoned to Netan.

"Now, some grub, Netan," he called. "There's plenty in my sled. You, young Tan, can toss some fish to my dogs."

And as the night flung down a rich sable mantle which muted all earthly sounds, Netan slept soundly, close to young Tan's side. Tan twitched sharply in his sleep, his subconscious roving the spirit-filled Nahanni hinterland, in the company of Olak, the White Phantom.



IN NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE

HOUSE OF PERIL

A Novelette of Quebec Treasure

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

— AND —

MIDWINTER MADNESS

A Northwest Mounted Police Story

By BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

PLUS MANY OTHER STORIES OF PULSE-STIRRING ADVENTURE

5¢



BIG BROTHER TO THE FAMOUS 1¢ CHOCOLATE TOOTSIE ROLLS

Ace Jordan

By
Bob Mackay

IN THE YEAR 2237 SIMON MACCA-
BEUS "A NOBLE OF PALESTINE"--AND
MYSELF HAD RETURNED TO HIS
COUNTRY TO MARK CIVILIZATION OF
THE CALAMITY THAT THREATENED IT.

TSING QUONG, A MONGOLIAN,
PLANNED A WORLDWIDE CONQUEST.
HIS LIEUTENANT, LILLITH SARK--"A
EURASIAN GIRL"--WAS LEADING AN
ARMY OF BLACKS ON EUROPE, VIA
EGYPT AND PALESTINE. ALREADY,
EGYPT WAS IN THE HANDS OF TSING
QUONG'S AGENTS.

IN PALESTINE, WE WERE
BROUGHT BEFORE UZDEK, TEMPORARY
RULER, WHO HAILED SIMON AS
KING. JUST AS HE WAS ABOUT
TO HAND OVER THE KINGDOM TO
SIMON, THE PALACE GUARD, LED
BY A MONGOL, BROKE INTO THE
THRONE ROOM.

UZDEK PRESSED A BUTTON
RELEASING DEADLY MORPHOL GAS
THROUGH HIDDEN VENTS INTO
THE ROOM. THE TRAITOROUS
GUARDS WERE OVERCOME, AND
SIMON AND I ALSO FELL UN-
CONSCIOUS TO THE FLOOR.

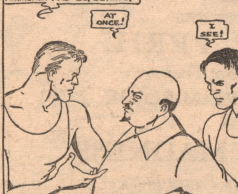
UZDEK REVIVED US BY
FORCING A SMALL, BITTER
PELLET DOWN OUR THROATS.



"I SURE FEEL ROCKY, WILL
ACE SURVIVE?"

"THIS PILL WILL RESTORE HIM COM-
PLETELY. IT IS AN ANTIDOTE, DE-
VELOPED WHEN WE INVENTED THE
MORPHOL GAS. I HAVE BEEN
INOCULATED AGAINST IT, SO AM
IMMUNE. THE OTHERS ARE ----
DEAD!"

UZDEK--GET ME A SOLUTION OF
AMMONIA AND GLYCERINE!



"AT
ONCE!"

"I
SEE!"

"SEE! A MARK
APPEARING! AN
AGENT OF
TSING QUONG."

"I REMEMBER. WE OVERHEARD THAT
TELEVISION CONVERSATION BETWEEN
LILLITH AND TSING QUONG, WHEN HE
TOLD HER HIS AGENTS BORE SUCH A
MARK. UZDEK--CALL
THE HEAD OF THE
SECRET
SERVICE."

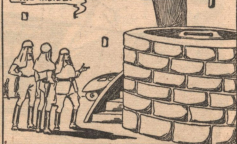


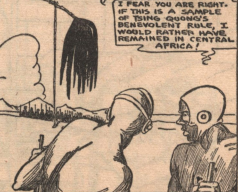
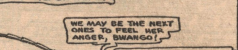
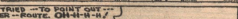
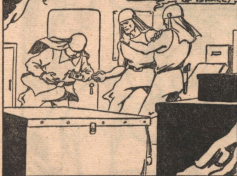
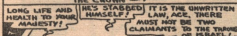
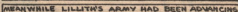
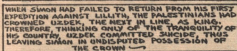
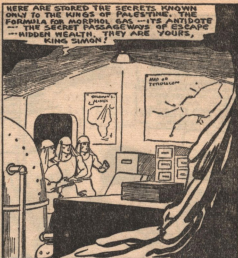
THE SECRET SERVICE CHIEF ARRIVED--
SEARCH THROUGH THE GUARDS AND THE
ARMY. SEEK OUT THOSE WHO BEAR A MARK
UNDER THE LEFT EAR. UZDEK, AN AMMONIA
AND GLYCERINE SOLUTION WILL DISCLOSE
THE MARK. SEGREGATE THE MEN AND GIVE
THEM THE SLEEP GAS. WE WILL HOLD
THEM UNTIL THIS TROUBLE IS OVER.



"YES, YOUR
MAJESTY!"

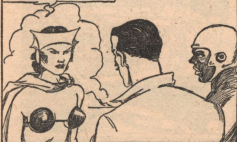
UZDEK LED US TO A WALLED-IN, ANCIENT SPRING
SINCE YOU ARE NOW KING, YOUR MAJESTY, I MUST
DISCLOSE THE SECRETS THAT ONLY A KING MAY
KNOW. THIS IS THE ANCIENT, NEVER-FAILING SPRING
OF JERUSALEM, FROM WHICH THE ANCIENT JEWELERS
GOT THEIR WATER. DAVID'S ARMY CAPTURED JERU-
SALEM BY SENDING TWENTY MEN, UNDER THE
LEADERSHIP OF JOAB, THROUGH THE OUTLET
OF THIS SPRING AND UP THE SHAFT.
THEY OPENED THE CITY GATES FROM
THE INSIDE.





LILITH HAILED HER ARMY AS THE AIR FLEET THAT HAD BEEN PROMISED BY TING QUONG ARRIVED TO TAKE PART IN THE INVASION.

BOLLOCK, COUNT OFF FIVE THOUSAND CRACK TROOPS TO BOARD THE AIR FLEET AND ACCOMPANY US. YOU, BWANGO, WILL LEAD THE GROUND FORCES. BY FORCED MARCHES YOU SHOULD REACH THE PLAINS OF BEERSHEVA IN TWO DAYS' TIME. WE WILL REST HERE TWO DAYS TO ALLOW OUR ATTACK TO BE TIMED WITH YOURS.

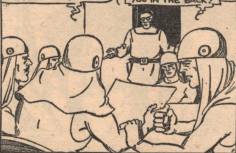


SIMON AND I RETURNED TO THE OFFICES OF THE GENERAL STAFF TO ASSIST IN PREPARATIONS FOR THE DEFENSE OF PALESTINE. THE SECRET SERVICE CHIEF ENTERED.

I HAVE FOLLOWED YOUR INSTRUCTIONS, YOUR MAJESTY. WE FOUND NEARLY HALF THE ARMY MARKED WITH THE SIGN OF TING QUONG. FURTHERMORE, THE DELICATE MECHANISMS OF THE AIR FLEET HAVE BEEN CRIPPLED. THEY CAN BE REPAIRED— BUT IT WILL TAKE DAYS!

WHAT A NIGHT THIS HAS BEEN! THE AIR FLEET WRECKED—THE ARMY DEMORALIZED—NO TIME TO MANUFACTURE MORPHOL GAS!

BUT AT LEAST THE REBELLION HAS BEEN CRUSHED. YOU NEED NOT FEAR TING QUONG STRIKING YOU IN THE BACK!



SHORTLY AFTER SIMON HAD DISMISSED THE STAFF OFFICERS, A RADIO OPERATOR RUSHED IN.

THE AIR DETECTORS HAVE PICKED UP THE APPROACH OF AN AIR FLEET. IT IS STILL MILES AWAY—BUT IT'S A QUEER SOUND. I CAN'T QUOTE MAKE IT OUT!

WHAT?

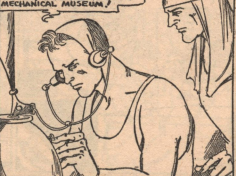
TAKE ME TO THE DETECTORS! COME ON, SIMON!



I CLAMPED ON THE HEAD PHONES AND ADJUSTED THE DETECTOR.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE PECOLAR RHYTHM OF SO MANY SHIPS. IT'S TOO UNIFORM—THAT'S IT! UNI-CONTROL! IT HAS NEVER BEEN DONE BEFORE WITH MORE THAN FIVE SHIPS—BUT LILITH IS FLYING THE WHOLE FLEET WITH IT. QUICK, SIMON, TAKE ME TO YOUR MECHANICAL MUSEUM!

THE MECHANICAL MUSEUM?

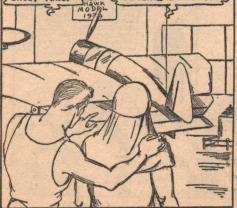


SIMON TOOK ME TO THE MUSEUM WHERE ANCIENT MECHANICAL CONTRIVANCES WERE ON EXHIBITION.

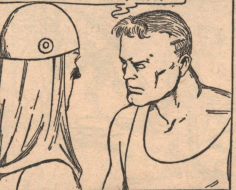
THAT'S THE BEST PRESERVED ONE. GET IT IN FLYING CONDITION. IT WILL ONLY TAKE A SHORT TIME!

BUT IT'S AN ANCIENT 1939 "HAWK" AIRPLANE, GASOLINE-POWERED!

HAWK MODEL 1939

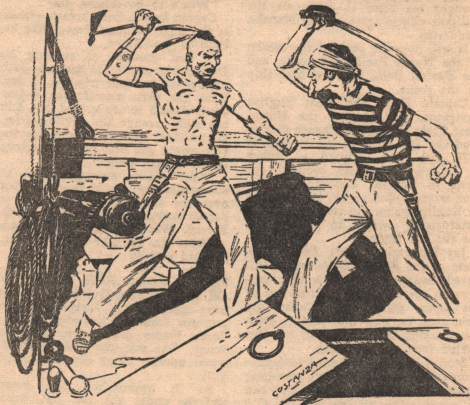


I KNOW IT, BUT IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE. WHEEL IT OUT—PAINT IT AN ALUMINUM SHADE—AND FILL IT WITH GASOLINE. I KNOW—YOU ONLY USE GASOLINE FOR MAKING EXPLOSIVES—BUT TAKE SOME OF IT! I MUST GET INTO A FLYING SUIT—I'M GOING UP IN THAT THING!



WILL ACE SUCCEED IN HIS ANCIENT AIRPLANE? SEE THE OCTOBER ISSUE OF THRILLING ADVENTURES

DEATH SHIP



His first blow decapitated the savage

The Sturdy Crew of the "Boston Belle" Hurls into the Fray Against Primitive Savages on Nootka Island

By WILLIAM McCLELLAND

Author of "Thunderbird," "Pioneer," etc.

JAY STONE leaned against the *Boston Belle's* rail, broad shoulders hunched to support his weight, but his quiet attitude belied the ominous sense of foreboding that stirred through him, dark and mysterious as the coast ahead.

Vancouver Island off the starboard side reared sullen peaks against a sodden sky and glowered on the grey

seas and dirty foam that surged around a ship's death-bed called Escalante Rocks on the chart.

Jay Stone saw Nootka Island loom dead ahead like a corpse shaking off a grey shroud.

"Sea otter," Stone muttered.

In Canton the suave Orientals bid for the soft, velvety pelts found on this coast with a zeal that disturbed

traditional dignity. The wealth of Cathay waited the bold trader who brought sea otter to ornament the brilliant silken robes of the Manchu mandarins.

It was now the peak of the season of the North Pacific fur trade, and the *Boston Belle* was the first ship on the scene.

Captain Cook, the great English navigator, had charted the Northwest Coast and had by chance discovered the fur trade in his voyage of 1778, and John Ledyard, a Yankee in Cook's crew, had brought the news to Boston. Ledyard and his plan were scoffed at, but in time word of English gains and fortune had led enterprising owners to outfit ships for the fur trade.

Jay Stone glanced aft. Peter Dike, mate of the *Boston Belle*, ape-shouldered, swarthy, blue-black chin sagging in the hair that spouted out of his open collar, stood near the helmsman on legs like piling. Dike was looking at Stone with his lips curled from yellow teeth.

Stone's square jaw jutted with contempt. During the barque's year-long voyage hatred between the two had rolled up like an icy sea off Old Horny. It crowded the ship and the crew was weary with waiting.

Captain Caleb Carven's brittle voice at his elbow brought Jay Stone about. Carven, lean, angular and somewhat red of nose, said:

"There's Nootka Island, boy, and in a month's time with luck, we'll have cargo rich enough to pay the Continental Debt!" He pointed a long forefinger. "As soon as we round yonder headland, we'll sight Chief Quina's principal village."

The captain paused as the barque heeled over and split the choppy waves of Nootka Sound with hissing prow.

"We'll stand off tonight and wait. I don't trust any of these savages too much. They are a fierce people, though friendly enough if you've something they want in the way of trade." He added drily: "And they can't take it away from you."

Stone shifted the armorer's hammer in his hand.

"Who's to go ashore, sir?"

Carven drew a deep breath, glanced at the huge form of Peter Dike and back to Jay Stone.

"I had thought of sending Mr. Dike and yourself. He has met Quina before—on my first trip out. I don't leave the ship myself; the Indians come aboard to trade, and Mr. Dike can well arrange the preliminaries." He nodded. "I told your father that you would get first hand experience in the Indian trade."

"Aye." Stone swung toward the companionway, back to his labors over the ship's forge where he repaired broken muskets, relics of the French Wars, for the native trade.

"Aye, sir, I'd like to go ashore," he said slowly.

THE *Boston Belle* anchored in the bay below Quina's village the next morning. A forty-foot canoe put out from the crowded shore, a dozen blades drove deep into the water. The war canoe skimmed the water moving along like a wheeling gull.

As it approached and swept smartly under the lee rail, Stone marveled at its construction. Hollowed out of a single cedar log with fire and flint knives, the canoe was as perfect as though it had been designed from blue prints. It was seaworthy and strong.

The feather-crowned chief of the Nootkas trotted up the Jacob's ladder. Quina was an almond-eyed man of medium height, thick and stocky. His beady black eyes flitted over the *Boston Belle's* crew as he made his way aft where Captain Carven was waiting on the poop-deck.

Quina paused in front of Jay Stone, and looked at Stone's short leather apron. His lipless mouth cracked open.

"You blacksmith?" The chief jabbed at Stone's broad chest.

Surprised at the savage's English, Stone nodded.

As though answering Jay Stone's unspoken thought, Quina said:

"I learn your talk from Mears,

Vancouver, Gray, Cap'n Cook, long time ago, he stop too."

Quina turned and with four sub-chiefs trailing at his heels continued down the deck to meet Carven. Quina, Carven, Dike and the four sub-chiefs entered the cabin.

The crew had been instructed to keep the Indian paddlers off the *Boston Belle*. They would steal any loose metal they could lay their hands on, to speed the slow construction of their canoes.

As Quina's canoe swept clear of the trim barque an hour later, Captain Carven called to Jay Stone. Stone stepped smartly aft.

"You took the old boy's eye," Carven laughed. "He wants to buy you!"

"The old devil! I hope you didn't sell me, sir." Stone grinned.

The captain's face was suddenly sober. "As soon as Quina learned that you had been serving as armorer's mate and could make tools and weapons, he got interested. Don't know why. Be careful when you go ashore with Mr. Dike in the morning."

* * * * *

JAY STONE stood beside one of the posts of Quina's long log lodge, a building constructed of roughly hewn timbers. Two small fires and a big center fire sent thick drifts of smoke swirling through the dark beams. Chief Quina's totem near the doorway glared with sightless scarlet eyes.

Stone had been ashore with Dike every day, and of late the mate had been watching him with a sly, satisfied look. There had been few words between them, and Stone served only as a silent observer in the slow trading.

Quina wanted rum as well as tools, weapons, beads and calico, but Carven had hesitated. It was risky business to give the Indians alcohol in large quantities.

At Peter Dike's insistence Carven had reluctantly sent four small casks of rum to Quina, as a gift, to hasten the trading, and the *Boston Belle* had been warped close to shore. The

crew worked feverishly aboard the barque; boxes, bundles, kegs, came out of the hold. And the Indians had carried huge bales of sea otter down to the bay shore.

Peter Dike and Quina had preceded Stone into the lodge, and the two of them were squatting beside the center fire. Dike gestured and leaned toward the blank-faced savage. He jumped up angrily and pointed to Stone. Quina shook his head violently. Dike sat down.

Stone pulled his eyes away from the weirdly carved totem. Quina's symbolic deity had fascinated him ever since he had entered the chief's lodge.

He started to walk toward Dike and the chief. An Indian warrior barred his way. Another stood at his elbow. He stopped as the skin on the back of his neck crinkled. That warning had once saved him before, when a press gang had rushed out of a dark alley in Bristol to haul him off for service in His Majesty's Navy.

Stone twisted from the waist. He saw Quina nod and heard Peter Dike's exultant laugh. A painted brave, war-club in hand, stood right behind him. The firelight glistened on the brave's oily skin, as he crouched, ready to spring.

Stone drew his case-knife just as the savage leaped. The six-inch blade flashed in the firelight. Hot blood spurted into Stone's face. The warrior staggered back, the haft of Stone's knife jutting out of his neck!

Arms coiled around Stone's neck; choked as they tightened. He doubled forward. He felt a greasy body slide across his back and catapult into the log wall of the lodge.

Fists doubled, head down, he charged a yelling knot of savages. Neither Dike nor Quina had moved. Stone's powerful right drove into the open mouth of a yowling warrior. The man went down.

Stone lashed left and right. Screams of rage and pain beat in his ears. He stepped on a squirming body. Hands seized his ankle. He lost balance. A clawed hand raked at his eyes as an avalanche of bodies

smothered his driving short-arm jabs.

Stone toppled and crashed to the floor. A welter of blows rained down on him. A bare foot, solid as iron, kept driving into his unprotected ribs.

He sensed the coming blow and tried to move his head. Lights exploded in his brain. Then he dropped into an endless well of darkness—

Insistent sound beat in Jay Stone's ears. He could not place himself. It seemed that he was pinioned beneath the dunnage deep in the hold during a storm at sea. He could feel the jerking roll of the vessel.

HIS eyes opened. He was securely tied, and had been thrown on a rubbish pile in a dark corner of Quina's lodge. The roar of sound was the frenzied howling of a hundred drunken warriors. Four casks of rum had been broached near the center fire!

Naked Indian braves leaped through the shadows, scooped up the fiery liquor in cupped hands, drank, and darted back to the circle of warriors leaping in a solid ring around the fire. Quina was pushing Peter Dike through the close press of braves.

The big mate was laughing and shaking his head. They broke through the circle, and passed close to Stone.

"Naw, they won't bother me," Dike said sullenly.

Quina's nostrils quivered, his eyes glared evilly, he spoke jerkily.

"Go! Hide! I kill! All kill when we drink your strong water!" Quina's face thrust into Dike's. The chief's lips curled back, teeth fanged, neck corded.

Dike pulled back and said: "You go after the ship tonight?"

"Yes!" Quina screamed. "We get ship! Kill! Kill! Kill!"

Dike broke from Quina's grip and ran stumbling through the curtained doorway.

With a shrill whoop, Quina sprang for the center of the lodge. He beat his way through the dancing war-

riors. The earth trembled with the regular thud of their bare heels.

Stone heaved at the thongs that bound his wrists. Dike was a traitor! Fury lashed Stone's struggles.

A savage reeled out of the pack. He stumbled over Stone's legs. The young Yankee doubled his knees and drove both bound legs at the slobbering brave.

His heels caught the Indian in the belly. The man sagged, arms down. Stone kicked again. His square-toed shoes smashed the warrior's face. The savage toppled over.

Stone fumbled at the retching man's belt. His arms were pinioned at the elbows but he worked frantically and grasped the warrior's knife. In a moment his ankles were free. He sank back, letting the blood circulate through his numb legs. His teeth clamped over the blade of the knife, he squirmed and sawed at his wrists. The knife slashed into his own flesh as the leather thongs parted.

The swirling, shrieking savages surged to the doorway. A gust of wind whipped the fire until there was a brilliant blaze of light in the lodge. Someone had thrown an empty rum cask on the fire!

Stone crouched behind the weird, squat carving of Quina's totem. He crawled on his hands and knees toward the door. The lodge emptied by half, but it immediately refilled. The whole tribe would be murdered in another few minutes, and Carven and twenty-five men aboard the *Boston Belle* would face certain death in the attack if Stone could not warn them.

Keeping close to the wall Stone inched forward. A warrior saw him and leaped, war-club swinging. Stone rolled over and met the charge. His knife stabbed twice. The war-club clattered off the logs as the dead Indian's grip relaxed. No one had noticed the commotion and the dying brave's shriek had only blended with the drunken war cries.

Ten feet from the door Stone leaped to his feet and ran for the curtained entrance. He collided with a heavy body, stabbed blindly with

his knife and drove hard with his left fist. The way was clear.

Dodging into the darkness, he zigzagged through some smaller log houses and ran to the fringe of fir that bordered the Indian village. Whooping warriors poured out from Quina's lodge. They scattered, reformed, and assembled on the beach, making a distorted, jerking, leaping, thousand-legged serpent around a huge fire!

The *Boston Belle* swung at anchor about a hundred and fifty yards off shore. Jay Stone crashed through the underbrush and halted at the water's edge. He kicked off his shoes, thrust the knife into his belt and plunged into the bay.

It was three hundred yards through freezing water to the *Boston Belle*. The Indians were already putting off in their swift canoes. Suddenly the beach was empty—sixty-odd canoes were churning the water between the shore and the barque. Half a thousand rum-primed Indians were rushing the ship!

Stone lengthened his stroke. It was too late to warn Carven, but it was not too late to die with the crew! He cursed the cowardly, treacherous Dike and plowed with long overhand strokes toward the distant barque.

Boom!

The dull thud of the *Boston Belle's* stern swivel rolled over the water. Carven and the crew had not been asleep. Stone saw a long flame leap from a starboard port. They had unlimbered one of the barque's nine-pounders. The reverberating roll of the cannon rumbled deafeningly across the bay.

Above the thunder of the gun shrieks of human terror ripped through the night. A knot of canoes had disappeared, blown out of the water by the deadly grape-shot. The savage armada hesitated, then swept forward as a second gun crew went into action.

Even, powerful, Stone's strokes hurled his body through the water. His feet threshed a creamy foam. He cursed his slowness. The Indians were swinging aboard. The light

swivel barked again from the poop-deck.

The seaman swung in a close circle to the port side. Quina's tribe was swarming over the starboard waist. A bobbing, jagged stern of a canoe drifted by. It had been shattered by the barque's first shot. The headless body of an Indian trailed over a thwart.

Jay Stone treaded water, seized the dead man's leg and head low, guided the wreckage toward the bow chains. The bowsprit was directly above his head. He reached out and curved a water-blue arm over the anchor chains. It was an effort to keep his chattering teeth quiet, for the forty-degree water had numbed his body to the marrow.

The *Boston Belle's* cannon was silent. An unholy roar thundered on the deck. Aft, a brace of pepper-boxes kept up an angry spitting. The sharp crack of a flintlock sounded. Another joined. Then a volley rolled, ragged and hateful. They would be fighting at close quarters in a moment.

Hand over hand, Stone went up the chains. He hung against the hawse holes. Balanced. Sprang over the rail. His feet thudded to the forecastle deck.

FRED NEEDY, one of the crew, toppled into Stones' arms. The sailor's head fell in two halves. One on either shoulder! Jay Stone caught the cutlass falling out of Needy's hand. With a yell of fury he was slashing into the fight.

His first blow decapitated the savage who had killed Needy. He parried a spear thrust, felt his blade bite bone. He fought, back to the rail, and hewed a bloody circle the length of the cutlass blade.

Captain Carven and five men were backed against the mizzen mast. A swarm of howling savages encircled them. The lank form of the *Boston Belle's* master towered above the snarling mass of warriors. A cutlass in Carven's hand swished a deadly figure eight.

A stone ax whizzed, flashed in the lantern light, and buried itself in

Carven's forehead. He fell forward stiffly. The deck was a writhing swirl of naked arms and weapons.

On the poop a match flared, hung a moment in the darkness. The swivel boomed. Little John Andrews, of the crew, had raked the deck with a final charge of grape-shot. Fractionally, the mob in front of Jay Stone thinned.

Stone jumped across the fore-castle, poised, then leaped down onto the main deck.

He lit straddle of naked shoulders. With a grunt, the brave went down. Stone sprang to his feet, slipped on the bloody deck. He cut viciously with the short sword, once.

A GLANCING blow caught him in the back of the head. Stone staggered. Searing pain was in his left shoulder. The brittle point of a flint-tipped arrow protruded out of the muscle.

Stone tripped on the hatch coamings and fell forward into the open forward hatch as another blow took him in the head. He bounded, rolled and stopped sickeningly as the arrow in his shoulder snagged the bundle of calico on which he had fallen.

On deck he could hear triumphant whoops. The turmoil aft on the poop had ceased. The gun-crew at the swivel had fallen. The cool darkness of the hold crowded close.

Aching and sick, Jay Stone crawled deep into the hold. Peter Dike was ashore. Stone could not fathom the mate's purpose in betraying the crew. But whatever that purpose was Peter Dike would never use the *Boston Belle*!

Slowly Stone dragged himself amidships. He swung down through the heavy darkness to the second level, heedless of the blood that seeped down his arm.

Indians were whooping through the upper hold. They would whoop louder when they found where the rum was stored. Stone reached the powder locker. Braced on his knees he heaved the iron bar off its cleats. The door swung inward.

Bitter curses rolled out of Jay Stone's mouth. He had lost his flint

and steel. He felt through the darkness for the iron door-bar, and with a single vicious jab he broached a ten-pound powder keg. Then, the keg canted at an angle clamped under his wounded arm, painfully he retraced his way through the hold.

If the unrestrained frenzy in Quina's lodge had been wild, the uproar on the decks could only be duplicated in the nether pits of hell. Swilling the potent West India rum, the tribesmen had reached the zenith of madness. The sturdy barque trembled, shuddered, lurched as blood-drunk Indians pounded through their victory dance.

For an agonizing ten minutes Jay Stone waited in the darkness under the forward hatch. The powder had been spilled through the hold. All he had to do was find flint and steel to finish the job. He smiled grimly. That would be as easy as to swim back to Boston!

Painfully, a rung at a time, he mounted the curved cleats out of the hold. Above cold stars pricked through the darkness and the high rigging. Flares blazed on deck. He hooked his fingers over the coaming and lifted his head above the edge of the hatch.

Directly in front of him was the sprawled body of the boatswain. Stone knew that in the upper right hand pocket of the boatswain's short seaman's jacket he would find flint and steel.

The warriors were massed under the poop-deck. A dozen casks of rum were objects of sudden sloppy forays. Indian women had come aboard, too, and they were more fiendish than the braves.

A white torso flashed in the light of the flare and splashed into the bay. Arms and legs followed. The blond head of the cabin boy reared aloft on a spear point.

Quina was seated on Captain Carven's chair. A staggering mob around him mimicked the dead crew's actions with drunken laughter. All eyes watched Quina as he rose and lifted his right arm.

Stone heaved himself on deck. Crablike he scuttled to the boat-

swain. Rolled him over, fumbled, fished out flint and steel.

A flat-faced woman saw him. With a shriek she hurled her broad body at him. Stone flung up a rigid right arm. The hell-cat reeled from the impact of his knotty fist.

Gathering his strength, Stone sprang desperately for the hold. He slid down the ladder and landed in a heap. The broken arrow in his shoulder ground against the bone.

Heads appeared in the opening. Contorted faces stared down into the hold. Shining bare legs swung over the coaming. A ten-inch knife quivered in the deck beside him.

Stone gripped the steel in his wounded left hand, knee under it. The flint crashed, sparks showered. He struck again. The powder flared, sputtered, and swift leaping flame sizzled through the darkness of the hold.

It trembled, wavered, then glared brightly as it traveled to the hold and the powder locker below, down the rope Stone had dusted liberally with powder.

Jay Stone leaned back against the bulkhead. In another instant it would be over. The barque seemed to gather herself, as though to withstand the coming shock. Stone relaxed; a tired smile crossed his face.

Then the *Boston Belle* humped, seemed to fly apart as Stone was slammed against the bulkhead.

The black night yawned overhead. A brief vision of sky-touching flame stabbed into his eyes. That awful flame was spotted by dark bodies whirling, separating, flying through its dazzling brightness.

Then it felt as if the whole Pacific Ocean slammed into Stone's back. The breath wheezed out of his lungs. Freezing water engulfed his hot flesh. Corklike, the timber under his back bobbed out of the bay.

Jay Stone realized what had happened then. The barque's powder locker was not the mighty magazine of a warship.

The explosion had been great enough to break the *Boston Belle* in half, killing the Indians immediately above the powder locker, but it had

not blasted the ship to nothingness as he had hoped.

His chin sagged to his chest. He felt the timbers beneath him bump. The backward sliding motion stopped. The starboard fragment of the barque's hull had grounded. His bare feet were awash. Stone sighed and closed his eyes.

INDIAN women exploring the wreckage found Stone the next day. With greedy hands they clutched him. They dragged the delirious seaman to Quina's lodge.

Here was a captive to torture! Here was the object that would silence the wailing death dirge for those who had died in the night's calamity, rising and falling eerily in the village.

The battered Quina who had survived the explosion, looked upon Jay Stone's reopened wounds. For a moment he, too, was swayed by a fierce desire for vengeance. But then the chief shook his head slowly.

"Make him well," Quina commanded. "He is a maker of weapons. As a slave he will make iron weapons and tools. We will fight our enemy Tatoosh. We will win. This man will make the weapons. He is the man I wanted to buy."

On the tenth day Stone opened his eyes. He tried to lift his hand. It fell back on the skins with which he was covered. His eyes traveled around the low hut in which he was confined. Sunlight streamed through the skin-curtained doorway.

An old crone hobbled through the door. Roughly she seized his matted sailor's queue and held a water-tight basket to his lips. Stone gulped hot venison gruel. When the basket was empty the wrinkled old woman jerked his head and threw it back on the mat.

She jibbered at him in a high, squealing voice. Spat. Wobbled as she turned around and walked stiffly out of the hut.

What had happened to Dike, Stone wondered.

"Speak of the devil—" the words blurted from his mouth.

For Peter Dike's huge body

blocked the doorway! A tremor of hate shook Stone's weakened frame. He struggled feebly and sank back exhausted on the mat. His glaring eyes followed the mate across the room.

Dike squatted down in front of him. The mate's big teeth showed to the molars in an evil grin. He reached out and poked a blunt forefinger into Stone's ribs.

"Quina took five of the crew alive," Dike said. "The Indians had quite a time. Choked 'em to death with hot rocks."

DIKE gloated. His shifty eyes watched the seaman narrowly.

"You'll die here, too, Dike."

Peter Dike laughed mockingly. "Like that with the big chief." His fingers crossed. "I'll be out of here before long. More ships will come up the coast this spring. And when I tell my yarn they'll wipe out Quina—like that!" His hand brushed away a swarming clot of flies.

Something had caught in Stone's throat, his stomach was squeamish and for a moment he thought he was going to be sick. He turned his face to the wall.

Gloating over the look of repulsion that had crossed Stone's face, Dike went on:

"I'll split Quina's big cache of sea otter with the first ship into the Sound. Me slave on another man's ship?" He laughed. "After this haul, I'll have a ship of my own."

The big mate rocked on his heels. The dirty skins that curtained the door parted again, and Chief Quina entered. He stood over Jay Stone's mat.

"You live—get strong," he grunted.

"When are you goin' to kill him, Chief?"

"Huh!" Quina's expressionless face turned on Dike. "No kill this man. He make weapons. I fight Tatoosh."

A slow scarlet mounted Peter Dike's neck. He seemed to strangle. "Not going to kill him! Why—"

The Indian chief was stern, regal; his voice compelled obedience.

"My daughter your woman," he said to Dike. "You wise and strong.

You my son. But this man lives to be my slave. I have spoken."

Stone closed his eyes as weakness swept over him, his jaw set.

"If a ship puts in, keep him out of sight," Dike mumbled.

A flat grin widened Quina's face. "I keep you both out of sight," he said.

From dawn to dusk and into the night Jay Stone slaved over the forge Quina had salvaged from the *Boston Belle*. The wreck of that fine ship had been burned. The wiley Indian chief had seen to that.

A dozen warriors guarded the forest-hidden hut where Stone toiled. He was watched day and night. Once each day Quina himself came to the forge and inspected the results. Cleverly the young armorer's helper beat out the arrowheads, spear points, the long, curved blades Quina desired.

At night Stone was shackled in Quina's big lodge. He was constantly vigilant. Seldom seeing Peter Dike, Stone knew that the renegade was plotting his death when Quina was glutted with weapons. It was only a question of days now until the tribe would be ready to attack Tatoosh.

Preparations were proceeding apace. Half a hundred big war canoes were drawn up on the beach. The Indian women were storing supplies. The braves were practicing daily with their new weapons.

Drums boomed slowly; steady, unaccented strokes. They had started the night before, continued through the day. Fires burned in the village as the drums pounded. The great fir trees blended their moaning with that of the drums as the wind blew in from the Pacific.

Nootka Sound was as restless as the Indians. Big cloud banks piled in from the south. Night closed down. The velocity of the wind increased. Drums beat steadily.

From his rubbish heap in Quina's lodge, Stone watched the council gathered around the center fire. Peter Dike was with them, dressed in the flowing cape of a war chief! His white skin looked strange in that dark gathering.

Silently warriors were filing into the lodge. Their feet moved in a curious sliding shuffle. The drums beat louder. Closely the warriors packed into the long lodge.

Jay Stone looked at the eaves of the building. There was an eighteen-inch gap between log wall and roof. If he could free his arms, it would be a simple thing to scale that wall!

A foul-smelling warrior grabbed Stone by the hair. Grunting, the squat savage yanked him through tight ranks of painted braves. Blows, kicks, spear butts hastened his passage. Hands closed over him.

Stone was hurled into the ring. Peter Dike stood over him. Triumphant. Huge. In his hand was the *Boston Belle's* cat-o-nine-tails! The renegade dragged the leaded lashes over his palm.

A knife slashed Stone's bonds. A lane was opening to the door. Drums beat! In the clearing outside, a stake jutted out of an unlit fire. And Stone knew he would have to run the gauntlet, then die on the stake!

Inhumanly, Dike screamed. The cat-o-nine-tails hissed. Stone's back was ribbed with long, angry welts. A high-pitched, sobbing cry rose from the warriors. The drums beat.

Stone bounded to his feet. He ran. Dike's whip cracked. Clubs lashed. Painted faces flashed past. He fell. Up again. He was in the doorway, running. The beat of the drums reached crescendo.

A single line of warriors and women spread a wide circle around the stake. The wind tossed their robes and lent a gruesome motion to their convulsive leaping.

Pounding, dodging, straining, Stone burst through the thin line of warriors behind the stake!

His mighty arms and shoulders, molded over anvil and forge, were irresistible. His course was strewn with Indians smashed out of his path.

Jay Stone ran straight to the beach, straight to the war canoes. A sentinel stood in his way, but Stone's cocked fist flashed out and the guard dropped. A slim, eighteen-foot dug-out rested at the edge of the water, provisioned for voyage.

Warriors were streaming across the village clearing. Long, quivering shafts smacked into the cedar canoe. A barb of his own making grazed Stone's naked back. Blood spurted from one leg.

The wind had reached a gale by then. Nootka Sound was a mad jumble of rough water. The drums pounded frantically. With one mighty shove, Stone launched the canoe. Bow up, he headed it into the wind.

He splashed knee deep through the water, bent low and jumped over the gunwale. The paddle drove deeply. The canoe leaped out. A shower of arrows splashed around him!

Into the night and rough water! Spray swept over him as the canoe sliced through the storm. Stone could no longer hear the drums. The wild rush of the wind drowned all sound. He threw a quick look over his shoulder. Not a canoe had been launched in pursuit.

So they knew he would die at sea! Capsize and drown! But it would be better than being burned alive at the stake, and he was free!

* * * * *

LOW, scudding clouds were torn, shredded on Vancouver Island. The sea, the clouds, the early light, were grey, dim, murky. Wind-lashed waves broke at the crest, long streamers of spume faded in the wind.

As the canoe surged to the crest of a big sea, Jay Stone caught brief glimpses of the grey-white surf piling into the rock-strewn beach.

He had fought wind and water all night. The canoe nosed over and coasted down to the bottom of a valley of water. Stone paddled steadily. Up, up, up until the canoe hung on the crest of the wave.

Were those the masts of a ship, due south? Down, down, down into the endless valleys of the Pacific. The wind slackened. Stone got another look. It was a ship!

She was sailing, close-reefed, with the wind. By the rake of her masts she was Yankee! Shouting, yelling with new life tingling through him, Stone paddled. An hour dragged by.

At the end of the second hour the

brig was so close Stone could see her bare topmasts from the bottom of the swells.

They had seen him! The brig luffed dead to the wind. Stone could see men braced against the lee rail. One seaman was whirling a heaving line around his head. The brig had hove to. Stone's shoulders were ropes of muscle, as the sturdy paddle in his hands plunged, showered.

Racing down a swell, Stone brought the small craft under the lee side of the ship. He was about fifty feet from the brig. The sailor threw the line. It arced through the air; sagged as the wind hit it. Then it thudded across the thwarts of the dugout.

Stone grabbed the Turk's-head at the end of the line. He jumped into the sea. The line was taut. A half dozen seamen were hauling him through the water. As he came up over the side, Stone saw the cockleshell canoe splinter against the side of the brig.

A short time later, John Hawkins, skipper of the *Helen Kennedy* out of Boston, leaned back, his bright red hair a vivid spot of color in the dimness of the brig's cabin. He ran a lean hand over the wiry bristle on his chin. "So that's the story," Hawkins said.

"Yes, sir." Jay Stone was grim, emphatic. "If you will put into Nootka Sound—"

"It will be a pleasure, Mr. Stone, a pleasure!"

The brig's crew responded to a man. Thirty Yankee seamen were more than a match for five hundred Indians! Fight? Sea otter were an inducement, but Captain Hawkins' sketchy outline of Jay Stone's tale put a silent and grim determination to the workaday action of the crew.

"Break out more canvas, Mr. Steele," Captain Hawkins ordered the mate.

The staunch brig heeled over, decks were cleared for action, port and starboard guns unlashed, small arms issued. Gun crews hovered near their posts.

From the poop-deck Stone watched the orderly commotion. His body felt new, after his back had been

treated by the ship's carpenter, and the slop chest had been put at his disposal.

"Mr. Stone," Hawkins said, as he faced him squarely, "I have unpleasant news. To put it bluntly, your father lost two ships last year. Hurricanes in the Caribbean. I heard talk in Boston before we sailed that Franklin Stone was hard pressed, and counted on a successful voyage for the *Boston Belle*. It will not be easy for him to learn of this disaster."

Stone's eyes searched the desolate waste of water as Hawkins turned away. He had a fleeting vision of his mother's face, the staid white house overlooking Boston Bay, his father's dull eyes gazing at steepled fingers. The knuckles of Jay Stone's hand were white, as he seemed to hear Captain Carven's voice again: "—round yonder headland is Quina's principal village—"

THE water of Nootka Sound had quieted to sullen, oily swells. The brig hugged the deep water near the shore as she surged around the point.

There was a turmoil of action on the narrow beach below the Indian village. The war canoes were ready to cross the Sound and fight Tatoosh. The brig's sudden appearance halted the embarkation.

Motionless the whole tribe watched the *Helen Kennedy* bear down upon the beach. She swept in as though to run on shore. Jay Stone was on the bowsprit, musket in hand, cutlass at his side, and a brace of long-barreled flintlock pistols were stuck in his belt as he watched the crowded beach.

He searched the swirling mob for the lumbering figure of Peter Dike. He cocked the musket. The brig rushed in, the sea sucking and gurgling around her prow. Dike was nowhere to be seen.

On the very beach, the brig veered, swung broadside. Captain Hawkins' voice cracked:

"Let 'em have it, men!"

Boom-baloom-boom!

Grape and canister raked the howling mob of warriors. Gaps widened through the throng. The brig luffed. Came around. The starboard guns

blazed and a deadly hail cut down the scattering savages!

"Give 'em round shot next time, men!" Hawkins ordered.

Through a choking cloud of cannon smoke Jay Stone strained to see Peter Dike. The *Helen Kennedy* shook. The port guns belched again. Round shot tore chunks out of Quina's big lodge.

"You will lead the shore party, Mr. Stone!" Captain Hawkins barked.

Stone stood in the bow of the *Helen Kennedy's* long-boat. He was leaping through the shallows before the boat had grounded. Iron shot pounded the Indian village up the bank. When the barrage lifted, a few stragglers were running into the forest. Stone saw Quina sprawled on the ground. He did not stop. There was no need.

Jay Stone was hunting one man!

Peter Dike ran out of the wide doorway of the dead chief's lodge. He was swinging a knobby-headed war-club. His heavy face was distorted by mingled fear and rage. The mate's blue-black beard, snarled over his chin, was flecked with foam.

Stone leveled the flintlock pistol. The report thundered. The ball tore the war-club out of Dike's hand. Stone dropped the smoking pistol and, running, unbuckled his heavy sword belt, and the cutlass clattered to the ground.

The two men collided. Stone drove a hard one-two into Dike's paunch. The double shock staggered the renegade. He reeled back. Stone smashed into him again.

Dike's arms clamped around Stone's

shoulders. His huge biceps bulged. The mate's neck swelled as he strained. He jerked, swayed and threw his whole weight into the grip.

For a moment they teetered, wrestled, then crashed to the ground.

Stone lit on his back with Dike on top of him. Stunned, the wind went out of him. The young seaman doubled his arms against his chest. He felt the sweat roll off his body.

Stone's forge-made muscles tensed. He wrenched in the mate's grip. The renegade's hands slipped. Stone wrenched again and threw his body upward.

Dike's grip burst and he crashed back into the dirt. Stone smashed down on him. The young seaman's powerful fingers squeezed into Dike's throat until the mate's eyes popped.

But Stone's fingers only tightened. He kept slamming Dike's head against the ground.

Through clamped teeth Stone repeated over and over:

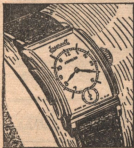
"—and that's for Caleb Carven—
and that's for the *Boston Belle*—
and that's for the crew!"

* * * * *

The brig's canvas was taut with the wind. The golden disk of the sun hung where sky and water met. Beneath that sun the crooked streets of Canton wound past palaces and hovels, and there almond-eyed merchants would buy the smooth sea otter pelts stowed in the brig's hold.

Jay Stone turned against the rail. He looked at the flowing pattern of the *Helen Kennedy's* wake. The creak of the wheel under the helmsman's hand was a pleasant sound.

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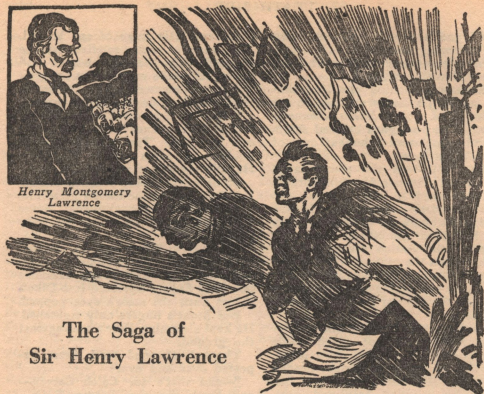


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Henry Montgomery
Lawrence



The Saga of
Sir Henry Lawrence

A Dreamer of Empire

By JACK KOFOED

Author of "Mystery Man of Spain," "Rosetta of the Legion," etc.

AN orderly appeared at the door of the lavishly furnished office. As the lean, tired man behind the desk looked up, he snapped to rigid attention.

"Captain Carnegie to see you, sir," he announced.

There was no need for further in-

troduction. The captain was in the room already; uniform torn and dirty; dried blood from a bayonet slash etching a livid line across one cheek. His appearance was no great surprise to his commander.

The expression of the man behind the desk did not change. It was

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evident that nothing could shake him from his immutable calm.

"Sit down, Captain," he said, "and tell me what has happened. You command a company of the 7th Oudh Infantry, I believe."

"Yes, Sir Henry. They mutinied this morning."

Sir Henry Lawrence rose, and walked to and fro across the width of his great office, chin sunk on his chest, considering the potentialities of this news.

He knew that within a few weeks the fate of the British Empire would hang in the balance; that it would be decided by what he and a few

other Englishmen did. It was not important that a company of discontented Sepoys had mutinied. They were grains of sand on a vast beach. All India was bursting into revolt, enlisting under the green banner of the Grand Mogul. They meant to sweep the English into the sea—and against these millions were a few thousand white men, who had dreamed of Empire.

Lawrence strapped on his sword belt, still pondering the problem. He had seen the mutiny coming. He had warned Higher Authority against the factors that were fostering it. He knew, as well as any man,



Sir Henry was half buried
under the masonry

of Enemies—But Not Armchair Diplomats!

that the stupidity of British government officials and the East India Company—a commercial organization controlling its own army, judges, commissioners, and exercising a monopoly on all trade in India—was directly responsible for it. The Sepoys believed they had conquered the Punjab for John Company, and were given no credit for it.

They believed the cartridges served them were greased with the fat of pigs—an animal unclean to the Moslems. Their native gentlemen were not permitted to rise beyond a certain grade in the army. Their poor—despite the efforts of Lawrence—were ground beneath intolerable taxes, while deposed Rajahs lived on pensions of hundreds of thousands of pounds a year. No wonder the flame of rebellion was burning high in India.

"You stay here, Captain," said Sir Henry. "See that the regiment follows me. I'm off to Oudh."

"It will be as much as your life is worth, sir," protested Carnegie.

"I'll chance that."

WITHIN five minutes Lawrence was headed for the scene of the mutiny. The Sepoys knew him. Everyone in India knew how he had worked toward alleviating the wretched conditions of the poor. He believed in Justice as the panacea for the ills of the world. Justice must conquer in the long run.

The parade ground at Oudh was jammed with mutineers, who cursed in their heavy beards, with no name too dirty for the English they were planning to exterminate. Their leaders stood to one side, conversing. The gaunt faced Commissioner rode up beside them.

"It is no use, Sahib," said one. "We have chosen the path of strife. Toward you we have nothing but amity, but if you stand before us you will be crushed."

Lawrence fixed the giant with his lancelike eyes.

"Mohammed Khan," he said. "We have fought together. You have taken my orders in the past. You

will take them now. Bring your men to attention."

For a moment their glances locked. Then the Sepoy saluted, and walked away. Within fifteen minutes the Seventh Regiment stood at attention. Sir Henry rode his horse along their lines, talking. He told them of the power and glory of England; how impossible it was that the mutiny could succeed. Then, when his red-coated battalions, bayonets fixed, marched onto the field, he ordered the Sepoys to stack arms. After a moment's hesitation, they obeyed. The ringleaders were brought before the court-martial for an immediate drum-head court-martial.

It was a difficult moment for Lawrence; more difficult than risking his life facing the mutineers. These men had been his comrades. He liked them for their courage and honesty. But there could be no parleying with disloyalty.

The leaders stood at stiff attention. Their eyes were level and unfraid. Theirs was a cause worth dying for.

"You understand," said Sir Henry, "that your action here today constitutes treason. You know how treason has been punished elsewhere in India. Mutineers have been blown from the mouths of cannon. I shall not condemn you to such a fate. For you, Mohammed Khan and your co-leaders—in recognition of your bravery on other occasions—I sentence you each to ten years penal servitude!"

There was a faint smile on each bearded face. Lawrence understood it. They believed that within a few months the mutiny would have destroyed English power—and they would be free men once more. But, for the moment, Britain was still in the saddle. Bugles shrilled; drums beat. There were sharp commands from the officers, and the regiment, with their prisoners and the arms of the Sepoys, returned to the fortified area of Lucknow.

Lawrence rode at the head of the marching troops, eyes occasionally turning to the proud Sepoys who

were chained together. No man in India understood the natives as he did—Sikh or Punjab or Sepoy. But he was a soldier and an Englishman, and had a duty to do.

His family had always been soldiers. His father, Colonel Alexander Lawrence, a veteran of many Indian campaigns, had led the forlorn hope at Seringapatam during the third Mysore War. Sir Henry himself, had been born in Ceylon. He felt a touch of nostalgia now for the place, as he rode through the dust. How peaceful it had been in the shadow of Adam's Peak, in the groves of sacred Bo trees and along the sticky roads of Trinkomalee. There had not been much peace in his life since then.

While still a boy he was appointed to a cadetship at Addiscombe, and at eighteen gazetted, by the Honorable East India Company, to the Bengal artillery at Dum Dum. What a place that had been! Yellow, dusty, stinking; the women in dirty cotton *chuddahs*; the men in dingy muslin drawers. Nothing but heat and dust and barracks and smells. It was at Dum Dum that he first felt pity for the downtrodden and oppressed. Since then he had worked to help them. He *had* helped—but not enough, or there would be no mutiny in India now.

SIR HENRY'S action with the men of Oudh could not stem the wrath of the gigantic, sweating peninsula that had hemmed in the British. All he could do was defend Lucknow—hold it at all costs, while the rest of the army and the East India Company's servants did their jobs elsewhere. A less stubborn soul might have considered the task impossible. Lawrence didn't.

On May 10th, 1857, came news of the mutiny at Meerut and the march on Delhi. It seemed as though all the work he had done was to be wiped out in blood. Sir Henry drew his lines closer—waiting for the struggle that was bound to come.

The physical shock of battle was an old story to him. At eighteen

he had commanded a battery at Arakan against the Burmese. He had fought the Afghan tribesmen—fierce and bearded—who swarmed, with a crackle of steel out of Kabul, and turned the homes of the Indian plain into charred timbers through which mournful winds whistled. He had helped conquer the Sikhs at Gujrat.

So much of his life had been tintured by the thunder of guns, and the slash of swords. Now it was culminating in war once more—war with a people he had dedicated so many of his years to serving. But Sir Henry Lawrence, who had dreamed so greatly of welding this marvelous Indian country into an integral part of the British Empire, did not feel himself let down by the stupidity and imbecility of his superiors, whose heavy fingered handling of the situation had brought about the mutiny. The job was there. He had to do it.

Except for roving cavalry patrols that maintained contact with the Sepoys, the Lucknow garrison was kept within close bounds. All but one of the native regiments there had gone over to the enemy. On the 29th news came that rebellion had spread everywhere. Lawrence, working twenty hours a day to coördinate his lines and gather supplies for a siege, collapsed under the strain. During the first week of June he retired to bed—leaving his task in the hands of a council.

Lying there in the oppressive heat, his thoughts gave him no rest. They roved from the work in hand to ten years before when he had been appointed commissioner of the Punjab. The problems had been never ending. He had ferreted out conspiracies, written new treaties, revised taxation, built roads, codified the laws. There was never a day—never a minute—when he did anything but work for the welfare of India—and of England. What could he do now—what—what—what?

The wonder of it kept pounding in his brain. They had knighted him Sir Henry Lawrence, K.C.B. As a reward for his efforts. Titles! What

did they mean? What did anything mean but settling a damnable situation that was getting more out of hand each day?

In one meeting the council passed orders directly opposite to Lawrence's desires. In spite of protests from the surgeon, Sir Henry rose, and donned his uniform with shaking hands. It was time for him to be about again—if Lucknow was to be saved.

The mutineers were moving in. The Commissioner gathered his staff and the recalcitrant members of the Council.

"We must make a counter-attack," he said.

"It is suicide," protested several of the officers. "The only thing to do is stay here."

"Nevertheless, we attack," declared Lawrence.

He moved out the regulars and the 13th Native Infantry, and drove the mutineers across the river. He did more than that. He showed the Sepoys that the British Lion still possessed claws.

BUT the battle, the enervating heat, the continual strain, almost caused him to collapse. It required desperate physical effort to keep on his feet. Cholera broke out in the Lucknow garrison, with too few doctors, nurses and medical supplies to fight it. Years of India do something to a white man's constitution—if he is lucky enough to survive them.

Lawrence fought on. In the month that followed he was the defense of the city itself. Without him it would have crumbled. Evil tidings rolled in every day—tidings of murder and burning and looting—death everywhere.

The worst came from Cawnpore. The British garrison there had held out gallantly until food and ammunition were almost gone. Then Nana Sahib, last heir of the Peishwas, admitting his admiration of the heroic defenders, offered them safe conduct.

There was nothing to do but

accept. Men and women and children, carrying their pitiful possessions, came unarmd from the beleaguered fort, pale and drawn and hungry.

Nana Sahib watched with his hungry wolf's eyes. When they were all in the open his troops poured a withering fire into them. Babies died in their mothers' arms. Soldiers clutched brown throats with bare hands before they were bayoneted. Only four men escaped the massacre by swimming across the river.

"That's what we can expect to happen to us," Lawrence told his council. "Campbell and Havelock and Outram are leading columns to our relief. It will take them months to get here, however. In the meantime we must do things for ourselves."

"Another counter-attack?" asked one of his officers.

"Exactly. I know those rebels out there. I know them as well as I do you. While we sit here idly they think we are afraid. Their own courage rises. They become more dangerous."

"But they outnumber us fifty-to-one. We cannot afford to weaken our forces."

"We can afford to do nothing else at the moment. You gentlemen will have your companies ready to move out the Faizabad road at five o'clock tomorrow morning. The fall of Cawnpore has released thousands of men to aid in the siege. We must strike before they arrive."

That was Lawrence's way. Action. Movement. Well planned and thoughtful action. He had never become accustomed to the pudgy ways of fat and red-faced Sahibs, who came out from England to rule India for the Queen and John Company. He was a soldier of fortune—a pacificator when there was a way to avoid battle, a fighter when it became certain.

The regiments marched along the famous road, with Sir Henry Lawrence and his staff at their head. His skin had gone pasty with illness under the deep burn of the Eastern sun. His hand on the bridle was not

steady as it had once been—but his purpose was as firm as ever.

Skirmishers made contact with the Sepoys on the edge of Chinhat. The guns came rumbling up. They blasted the ranks of the mutineers—but for every Sepoy who fell a dozen seemed to take his place. The Tommies were veterans of dozens of battles. Sweat-stained, powder-smearred, they fought coolly and bravely, but no force ever organized could have conquered such an overwhelmingly superior one.

Sir Henry ordered a retreat. There was nothing of rout about it.

The soldiers fell back in perfect order, yard by bitter yard, doing frightful execution on the advancing horde. They reached Lucknow, retreated through the streets, their muskets clattering, until they retired within the fortifications of the Residence. Sir Henry was the last man inside the gates. His sortie had failed, but it was a gallant failure—and served one purpose. The Sepoys were in no hurry to attack these men, who would be even more desperate in a defense of their own.

Familiar faces were absent from mess that night. Officers as well as soldiers who died in the fierce fighting at Chinhat. Friend looked for friend and saw him not.

"This has always been the price we paid for India," said Lawrence. "Elphinstone's martyred troops in the Khyber Pass—slaughtered women and children at Cawnpore—our own dead along the Faizabad Road. War is madness—and I have been at war all my life. This one we must win—and we will win it—no matter what the cost. I remember a song (or part of it) that the Afghans used to sing in the streets of Kabul:

They say Dost Mohammed, the Amir,
Has chosen the path of strife.
He has proclaimed Holy War.
He is leading his young warriors.
Grant them victory, Oh, Allah!

"We are asking God to grant us victory—and I feel in my heart that He will!"

But he wondered, this pale, hol-

low man, whether his prayers would be heard—or would they be circumvented by the red tape that had kept the relief columns so long in getting started. He remembered how he had been cooped in Ali Majid years before—waiting—waiting—always waiting for the pompous ass of a Governor-General, Lord Ellenborough, to send a promised support brigade that arrived too late. Now he was waiting again.

Sir Henry's whole life had been shaped for war. So had that of his family. His brother, John, was in Lahore. Another brother had died in the Afghan war, and that brother's son was here in Lucknow with him. His father—his grandfather before him—all had worn the sword. They that live by the sword shall die by the sword! This was as true of the noble Lawrences as it was of the bearded Sikhs, whose chief reliance were their razor edged *kripans*. He had never given much thought to dying. He had been too busy—too busy fighting from Arakan to Lucknow—fighting for the glory of the British Empire.

NO MORE sorties. There was nothing to do but hold the fort and wait for Havelock and the others to arrive—if they ever did. It was like being trapped in a cabin surrounded by a raging forest fire. There was no way of getting out—only one hope of escape—that of the rescuing columns. Day and night the sound of gunfire was heavy on the ears. For himself Sir Henry had no concern. Death had been his bedmate for too many years. He wanted to live only that the things he had worked and fought for might come true.

Harassed by restlessness, he made a tour of inspection with his nephew, George, and Captain Wilson. Everything was as well as might be expected. The epidemic had become less virulent. The wounded were being cared for. The soldiers on duty were alert and ready.

"Why don't you rest, uncle?" asked George. "You look as though

you were about to collapse on your feet."

"That's right, sir," agreed Wilson. "Why not go to your room?"

Lawrence sighed. "I am tired. Come with me. I can't sleep. I'd rather talk."

They retired to the commander's room. An orderly brought whiskey and water. There was an air of nostalgia about Sir Henry; a touch of melancholy.

"I wonder," he said, "when the British will learn that India cannot be ruled as England is. There is such a vast difference in the psychology of the peoples; so much greater difference between Sikh and Rajput than Cornishman and Yorkshireman. But the fat-headed men who come here to rule never seem to understand that."

He walked to the window, and stared into the hot darkness that was lanced with threads of flame and cracked with the never-ceasing rumble of the guns.

"Carnegie is dead," he said sadly, "and Arbutnot, a dozen officers I could illy afford to lose. They are well out of it, I imagine. Perhaps we shall be one with them before long. Mohammed Khan and his mates, down there in the cells are praying to Allah that we will be."

"It makes me laugh sometimes that they called me the Pacificator, because I smoothed the ruffled feathers of the Sikhs on the Sutlej River, and the Sepoys at Peshawar. Those people believed in me. They could not keep on believing when I was over-ridden time and again by my superiors—even by my brother, John. Ah, but John knows better than I how to get along with the brass hats. He will be viceroy yet, take my word for it."

Wilson nodded.

"Like as not," he said, "but you will have memories that none of the others can have, sir. Who took Kabul during the Afghan troubles? You. Who received the credit? Ellenborough. But could Ellenborough have ridden into Oudh as you did—and made those Sepoys lay down

their arms? Neither Ellenborough nor anyone else. You are as close to being India as any white man can be. If we hold it, the credit is yours—no matter who is given a dukedom for it."

LAURENCE listened sadly to the clatter of the guns.

"Some day the peoples of India will know you as we do," Wilson continued. "Who but you could have done what you accomplished in Rajputana? You suppressed *suttee*, the suicide of wives on their husband's funeral pyres, and the killing of surplus female infants. You improved the miserable native prisons—eliminated unfair taxes."

The ascetic face of Sir Henry turned to them.

"Yes, I did those things—and the doing of them is reward enough for me. What does it mean to me that I have been made Knight Commander of the Bath and Commissioner of Oudh? I did not work here all my life for that. First, I wanted to save India for England—then to make life better for these poor people. Justice is the greatest word in our language. I wanted to give them justice."

His voice was so tired that the others looked at him in alarm. He was sick and worn to the bone. But he squared his shoulders, and turned once more toward the window, beyond which his India was exploding.

At that moment an eight-inch howitzer shell smashed through the wall. It lay hissing on the floor for the barest fraction of a second. None of the men had time to move before it burst with a tremendous clamor and flash of flame.

Lawrence knew at that moment he was a dead man. He felt himself hurled down. There was a frightful impact. Everything went black. He felt himself falling—falling—but there was an infinite sense of peace in his heart.

The other two were covered by the debris, too—but unhurt. They clawed their way out, with a mounting sense of horror in their hearts.

Their commander was the hope of India. He could not be dead. God would not allow such a thing to happen!

Sir Henry was half buried under the shattered masonry and plaster. They dragged him out. His right leg had been blown off, high up, toward the hip. Protruding from the torn breeches was a horrible jumble of bone and flesh and blood.

Wilson ran for the regimental surgeon, while the nephew propped his uncle's head on his knee. Tears ran down the young soldier's face—as tears would run down a hundred thousand cheeks when the world learned what had happened to Sir Henry Lawrence.

The surgeon came instantly—but saw there was nothing for him to do that would really matter. No surgeon in the world could have saved this man.

Lawrence was carried off to the hospital, where he lay unconscious for hours. Then, gradually, reason came back to his tired brain. It would have been better for him had he remained in a coma to the end, for he suffered unspeakable agony in the forty-eight hours that were still left him.

Sir Henry knew as well as anyone that his time had come. He was fifty-one years old, but worn thin by what he had endured. But he would have chosen to endure pain had choice been given him. There was so much to do. One way or another the city must be held. There were

no two ways about that—and it was his task to see that his most able subordinates were properly placed in charge.

He named the chiefs of defense—appointed heads of civil departments. He planned against all contingencies, and dictated long reports on conditions of affairs to the Central Government that had so often neglected him. There were times when he could hardly talk through the miasma of pain—but he pulled himself above his weakness.

At last he called in Mohammed Singh and his comrades. They stood proudly but sorrowfully at his bedside—these tall turbaned Sepoys who had been the leaders of the mutiny in Oudh.

"I know you men," Lawrence said. "You have fought beside me. You were mistaken in your mutiny, but because you have been brave and my friends I shall order your release if you give me your parole."

MOHAMMED KHAN dropped on one knee beside Sir Henry. "Sahib," he said, "we give you that parole gladly. No men in England will mourn you more deeply than we."

Sir Henry nodded and motioned for them to go. The breath was choking in his throat. There were only a few moments left of this fourth of July, 1857. He spoke thickly to his officers.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I leave the
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THE BEST COMEDY IN AMERICA

FICTION • SATIRE • CARTOONS

ON SALE EVERYWHERE!

Dead Men's Spirits Guide the Bloody

A Complete Novelette of Moro Peril



The monster had White in

LAIR

CHAPTER I

The Blow-Gun's Breath

IT WAS a queer way to die. The almost inaudible zung of the *sumpit* dart was smothered completely by the sudden chatter of flying-foxes in the cottonwoods.

The Moro stopped quickly, clawing at his breast. A tiny trickle of blood ran down his chest, staining his *sarong*. He stared at the thing

Moro Darts and Slithering Pythons Beset the

Course of a Tropical Treasure Hunt!

By
HUGH B. CAVE

Author of "The Spider of K'ruka,"
"Dyak Torture," etc.



its grip. Mason raised his gun

of the PYTHONS

in his fingers—a steel barb tufted with soft, fluttering feathers—and fear welled into his face. He sat down abruptly, muttering prayers to his Mahomet.

Thus he died, from the merciless poison of the *ipoh* tree into which the dart had been dipped before insertion into the blow-gun.

Two hundred yards distant along the peninsular road, lights gleamed in a row of thatch-roofed houses, in

one of which two men pondered over a crudely drawn map.

Colonel Bill Mason, in charge of the Bongao detachment of the 23rd U.S. Infantry, stared across the table into the frowning eyes of Steven White, contract surgeon, and said quietly:

"The whole affair happened about a month ago in Jolo, where Furman and I were awaiting orders. This Lajoie fellow flopped down at our

Path of Bill Mason's Philippine Expedition!

table in a lobbygow joint and we got to talking with him. He was drunk. He spilled a weird story about the ancient, deserted capital of the Sultanate of Bolu, on Tawi-Tawi."

Steven White glanced at the map and nodded. "I've been to the place, Bill. Nothing left of it but a curious flight of marble steps leading down into a dismal swamp."

"And a legend," said Bill Mason softly, "that the Arab Sultan who is buried there took a fortune in precious stones into the grave with him. This Lajoie fellow claimed he had found the cache. We arranged to go to Dungun with him, left him in the lobbygow joint that night, and found him dead the next morning. Murdered. Twelve hours later I was ordered here to Bongao. Furman remained in Jolo, promised to investigate and let me know."

"And now?"

"Now, with the new order of things here in the Philippines, our duties are reduced to a minimum. You and Furman and I can take time off for a bit of exploring. We—"

A RAP on the door interrupted him. Mason said impatiently: "Come in!"

Then his eyes widened, for the man who shoved the door open and came stumbling over the threshold was a soldier, and was carrying a limp, grotesque burden of death!

Mason lurched erect. "Good Lord, McGrath! What—"

Martin McGrath dropped his burden to the floor. Red-faced, gasping, he passed a soiled envelope to his superior.

"Found him up the road, sir," he said. "This letter was stickin' out of his *sarong*."

"You opened this?"

"No, sir. It was already ripped open."

Bill Mason was frowning at the message. Part of it was missing. He smoothed the paper on the table, studied it intently, then glanced at Steve White and motioned McGrath out.

When the door had clicked shut,

Mason bent forward and said grimly: "It's from Furman. Read it."

The letter said:

Dear Bill:

This is my last note to you, I guess. They got me with their damned blow-pipes, and the *ipoh* poison is doing for me an inch at a time. The staff surgeon has checked it for a while with strychnine. I learned too much about Lajoie's death and the Dungun treasure.

I discovered nothing at all in Jolo, where Lajoie was murdered. But when I was sent down here with a handful of men to see about erecting a post on Tamgagaan, I got into the thick of things. Tamgagaan, as you know, is close to Dungun. I went there and learned more than was healthy for me.

But the Moro who pinged me was captured by some of my men, Bill. I got a confession out of him. It's not one man we're working against, but—

Steve White lowered the paper slowly. "First Lajoie," he muttered, "then Furman, poor devil. And now the messenger."

"The messenger is one of Furman's trusted natives," Mason said. "And a white man did this, Steve—blow-gun or no blow-gun! No Moro in Bolu would have left that *kris* in the fellow's belt. It's a beauty. He'd have stolen it!"

"But the note. Why—"

"It was left as a warning. A warning to me, to us, that we'll share this poor chap's fate if we don't keep our noses out of the affair." Bill Mason sat down heavily, his mouth dry, eyes gleaming. "Well, by God, we'll not only stick our noses into it, Steve; we'll stick both fists! Tomorrow morning we leave for Tamgagaan!"

The Moro *prau*, worming out of Bongao that morning, carried a dozen men. Bill Mason and Steve White sat close together in the waist. Flung out on the *nipa*-thatch deck-covering in the bow, under the huge square sail, lay a handful of Bongao Moros. There were two other white men, Martin McGrath and a husky Irishman named Monogan, who might be needed when the *prau* reached its destination.

Tataan appeared and disappeared, with its forgotten Spanish garrison, scene of the Aguinaldo revolution. The western coast of Tawi-Tawi

reeled out, mile after mile, dotted with tiny islands.

With the coming of darkness the *prau* nosed in at Tamgagaan, where Furman's soldiers were encamped.

Bill Mason went straight to the shack where the officer had died. There he talked with one of Furman's trusted men.

"Where," Mason demanded, "is the Moro who killed him?"

"Dead, sir," the soldier said simply. "We were holding him here for you, but they got him last night. With blow-guns."

"Who did it?"

"We don't know, sir."

"You've taken care of Captain Furman?"

"Yes, sir. This morning."

"Look here—" Mason seized the man's arm and pulled him close. "Did the captain leave any verbal message for me? Did he say anything?"

"He was delirious, sir. He kept mumbling to himself, that's all."

"What was he mumbling, man?"

"Well, it didn't make much sense. He kept repeating your name and saying over and over, 'The python's head!' Then he'd lift himself up on one elbow and yell out, 'Be careful, Bill! In God's name, be careful! There's more to it than we thought!' That's all, sir. But he was out of his mind, the doctor said."

"Before he died," Mason demanded, "did he say anything about Dungun?"

"No, sir. Nothing. He wrote a letter to you and then was unconscious for about an hour. When he woke up, he was raving, and after that he died."

Mason exhaled heavily, moved across the threshold. The clearing was black as pitch now, with lights winking in the shacks occupied by his own and Furman's men. With heavy steps he strode through the gloom.

Suddenly, dead ahead, something moved. A crouching shape, flattened against a hut wall, reached up with hooked fingers to draw aside the window covering of mosquito netting. A long ebony stick, upheld to the fel-

low's mouth, had already intruded through the aperture!

Mason stopped abruptly. His hand whipped up, snatching a .45 from his holster. Without hesitation he squeezed the trigger.

He was too late by a full second. That deadly ominous *zung* had already sounded. The roar of the gun provided only an echo. Then a mad medley of sounds burst through the clearing.

FROM the interior of the shack came a scream of agony as the *sumpit* dart struck its intended victim. With it boomed the thud of the killer's falling body as Bill Mason's bullet slaughtered him in his tracks. The blow-pipe fell beneath him as he pitched to the ground and lay still.

Mason strode forward. Two steps he took; then another sound spewed through the sudden quiet behind him. It was a warning yell from the soldier who had trailed him from Furman's house. With it came the crash of a revolver.

Bill Mason lunged sideward. The thing that whined past him, missing its mark by only a few inches, was another of those infernal feathered darts! Silent, spinning death!

White-faced, he swung around. The soldier was lurching toward him. Less than ten feet distant, in the shadow of a coconut palm, lay a second half-naked figure, a second Moro devil with a blow-gun!

"Got him just in time, sir!" the soldier gasped. "Soon as your back was turned, he stepped into the open with that damned pipe! He'd have nailed you if my bullet hadn't twisted him around!"

Mason muttered curt words of gratitude and stumbled toward the shack again, knowing what he would find. There would be a man gone mad, a man clawing at a *sumpit* dart imbedded in his flesh. Who would it be?

He flung the door open. A little knot of men crowded around the table where a man lay moaning. Steve White was there, and McGrath, and a couple of Furman's men. The

wounded soldier was Monogan, the burly Irishman from Bongao.

White was busy with knife and tourniquet. The others were very quiet. Bill Mason stared a moment, then turned away, shuddering. He knew the answer.

Outside, he found the soldier who had saved his life bending over the dead form by the window. The man looked up as he approached.

"I've found something, sir."

Mason's eyes narrowed when he peered into the dead Moro's face. It was the face of one of his own boatmen, one of the Bongao Moros who had been sprawled in the bow of the *prau* all the way up the coast.

"It's this mark, sir," the soldier muttered. "The same mark was tattooed on the native who killed Captain Furman!"

Mason looked closer. Tattooing in itself was not significant. Nearly all natives of the South Seas went in for it. But the thing to which the soldier was pointing was a fantastic design on the dead man's thigh—a design which Mason had seen before and recognized as being native to a tribe of Dyaks on the Lower Katangan River in Borneo!

It represented a *nagah*, an evil spirit, with the uplifted head of a python.

Significant, that mark! Such designs were common enough in Borneo, on *parang* handles and spear hilts, but never before had Bill Mason seen one in these particular islands, in any form whatever.

Mason straightened; muttered half aloud: "Small enough to be concealed by the fellow's *sarong*. Otherwise we'd have seen it. And Furman in his delirium raved about a python's head!" Eyes blazing, he swung on the soldier. "Keep your mouth closed about this! Understand?"

The soldier nodded, followed him through the darkness to where that other sprawled shape lay near the bole of the coconut palm. This one, too, was one of Bill Mason's own men, with the same python-headed *nagah* tattooed on his thigh!

But how had these slinking murderers hidden their infernal *sumpits*

on the long trip from Bongao? The *sumpits* themselves were all of four feet long and—

Mason scooped up the dead man's blow-pipe and examined it, then grimly smiled. It was made in sections, telescope style. Easily enough concealed in a *kris* scabbard or beneath a man's *sarong*!

Hardly aware of the soldier who was standing close to him, Mason turned and strode across the clearing to the shack assigned to his Moros. He was very careful when he opened that door, but need not have been. The natives, frightened by the shooting outside, were huddled together like monkeys.

One after another Mason examined them. But the significant tattoo was not in evidence. When he left the shack his scowl was blacker than ever and his lips were a thin white line of bewilderment.

CHAPTER II

Quest of the Python's Head



THERE was no breeze when the Bongao *prau* left Tamgagaan at daylight the following morning. The long oars were out and the Moro boatmen, lessened in number by the two dead men

who had been left behind for burial, sweated over their labor.

Tamgagaan, with Furman's men waving farewell from the beach, vanished behind a line of islands. Hours later the *prau* reached its destination—a vast stretch of mangrove swamp studded with rotted piles upon which the ancient houses of Dungun had once stood.

Bill Mason rose to his feet and stood staring, realizing that additional dangers confronted him. The city of Dungun was a death-swamp!

The *prau* nosed in-shore slowly. The Moros drew in their oars.

"Ready, Steve?" Mason muttered.

Steve White merely nodded.

"All right. Come along, McGrath. And you—" indicating one of the

four Moros. "The rest of you stay here and keep awake. If anything happens, send up a shout."

In grim silence the four men began their trip to higher ground. Bill Mason led the way, along irregular rows of man-made piles in a weird world of slime-covered, brackish water.

IT WAS perilous work. A misstep would mean a headlong plunge into pools bloated with fever-scum, deep enough to drown a man.

Never before, Mason realized, had he seen so many snakes in one place. Sea-snakes of the smaller species—black, yellow and red-banded *hydrophinae*—paddled lazily in the deeper pools, eyeing him covertly as he passed. Tree vipers, whip snakes, kraits with vivid cream and black stripes, lurked everywhere.

He had to be wary, and it was difficult to be wary. The swamp, previously silent, was resenting the intrusion of human beings. In the high *lallang* grass at the edge of solid ground, a brain-fever bird had begun its monotonous, maddening chant of ascending and descending notes. A racket-tailed *drongo*, luxuriously beautiful, came out of nowhere and perched on a nearby creeping vine.

Twenty yards ahead, an adjutant bird, rising from a gnarled root of sago-palm, swooped forward and circled Mason's head. He glanced up at it, saw those leering, dissipated eyes fixed on him, and shuddered.

And then with hideous abruptness a human scream shrilled out behind him, sibilant with terror. Seizing a thick vine, Mason swung around.

Twenty feet to the rear, separated by a black pool covered with matted vegetation, Steve White was fighting a death battle. Evidently he had reached out to grasp a slime-covered root, and discovered too late that the thing was no root at all but the body of a slumbering python!

The monster had him in its grip. It was huge, powerful, its coils as thick as the human arms which tore at them. And it was dragging Steve

White off balance, forcing him into the water below.

"Keep still!" Mason yelled. "Don't fight it!"

Steve White heard him and bent backward. The python's head weaved in mid-air before his face.

Thrice in quick succession Mason's gun spat flame. The huge snake stiffened as the bullets ripped into it. For one ghastly instant it seemed to shudder; and then, writhing in agony, it dragged its struggling victim into the pool.

Mason stumbled forward. The pool before him had gone mad, as the dying monster turned and twisted in torment. But those fiendish coils had released their grip on White. His head was above water. Weakly he was endeavoring to reach solid ground.

It was McGrath who reached him first, seized his upflung arm and pulled him to safety. Before Bill Mason had scrambled and crawled to the scene, White was out, drenched, shivering, white-faced, but alive.

Ten minutes passed before he was able to continue. Then, even more carefully than before, the four men—three whites and one Moro—fought their way to the rise of solid ground in the center of the swamp.

The island was about two hundred yards long and half that in width. It rose in the shape of a mushroom, covered throughout with weeds and scattered clumps of *lallang* grass.

Mason led the way. The others trailed him in single file, White first, then McGrath, then the native. Thus it was Mason who first came upon the last remnant of Dungun's decayed glory.

The thing was grotesquely out of place there in the midst of the fever swamp. It rose to the level of Bill Mason's head and there terminated—a flight of massive marble steps rising out of the swamp and leading nowhere.

At one time, that block of stone had been part of some magnificent structure. The colonel counted fifteen steps. Perhaps there were more beneath the surface.

"Queer thing," Steve White muttered. "Looks as if it might lead to heaven."

Mason climbed slowly, staring all about him. When he reached the top, the swamp extended around him on all sides. Looking back over the waste through which he and the others had gone, he shuddered. Far in the distance lay the *prau*, too far for him to discern the shapes of its Moro guardians.

He felt small, insignificant up there, remembering that Dungun had been the capital city of the once mighty Sultanate of Bolu. These very steps were reputed to be the entrance to the Sultan's palace. And somewhere within a hundred yards radius the Arab Sultan himself lay buried—perhaps with his treasure!

He started down again, and suddenly stopped. Crouching, he examined something which had been carved many hundreds of years ago on the perpendicular surface of one of the steps.

"Steve!" he called hoarsely. "Look here!"

In an instant Steve White was beside him.

"Look at it!" Mason whispered. "That same design! The same python's head with the body of a *nagah*!"

WHITE'S mouth screwed tight. There was no denying that engraved mark. It was the same as those tattooed on the murdering Moros back in Tamagagaan.

"Furman's last words," Bill Mason muttered, "were something about the python's head. I thought he meant the tattoo. I wonder if he meant this!"

On his knees he pawed at the smooth surface. But there was no niche or crevice, nothing but a slab of smooth marble. He pressed it, threw his weight against it without avail. What he expected he did not know, but that inscription had put wild thoughts into his mind.

At last he stumbled erect, turned to descend the steps. "About all we can do," he said, "is look the place over and then move on to the next

settlement. Datto Kaynim, the chief there, has appointed himself guardian of Dungun. We'll question him."

The heel of his right boot caught on the edge of the marked slab. He tripped, would have plunged headlong if White had not caught him. As it was, he kicked out frantically, seeking support. His boot thudded squarely against the carved mark of the *nagah*.

He felt the stone give beneath the impact. Regaining his balance, he gripped Steve White's arm and said hoarsely: "It moved!"

White stared. Once again Mason swung back his foot and kicked the design, this time with more force. Then he and Steve White gaped in amazement at what lay before them.

With a sullen, rasping sound the stone slab had swung inward, leveling two of the marble steps. As if by magic, a dark aperture appeared where none had been before. And then slowly, as if worked by a counterbalance, the steps began to return to their former position.

Mason jammed a foot into the opening. The closing movement ceased. The slanting rays of the sun revealed a gaping black hole and a flight of inner stone steps.

"The python's head!" Mason muttered. "Furman was right! When I kicked it—" Savagely he jerked White forward. "I'm going down there! For God's sake keep the entrance open!"

His clawing hands supported him while his dangling feet groped for the top step of the inner stairway. He found a foothold, started down. Darkness enveloped him.

He felt his way into the pit, counting the steps as he went. Ten, fifteen, twenty—he knew then that he was below the level of the swamp itself. When he reached bottom he groped for matches, struck one.

The glimmer of light revealed granite walls looming to a stone ceiling. A tunnel snaked away into the gloom.

The match burned out. Bill Mason scratched another, held it before him as he advanced. Ten paces in, he found a stone shelf and a torch of

huhu wood. Lighting it, he proceeded.

The tunnel wound on and on before him, and at intervals along the wall were more torches, some of which had recently been used. And more of those infernal carvings—*nagahs* with the heads of pythons!

Not until he turned and retraced his steps did he realize how far underground he had wandered. Fully five minutes passed before he reached the stone steps leading out of the depths.

He ascended cautiously, reached up and pulled himself into the sunlight.

"Found a passageway," he began, groping to his feet. "It—"

His words clipped off. He stared about him. Steve White had vanished!

CHAPTER III

Secret of the Cavern



FOR a moment Bill Mason stood motionless. Below him lay the swamp. A big black and white hornbill with orange and red beak was booming its way across the rise of solid ground. There

was nothing else to be seen.

"Steve!" Bill Mason's voice echoed wildly across the waste. "Steve! What's wrong?"

In response, a clump of reeds at the water's edge cracked apart. Steve White stepped into the open, stared a moment, then beckoned.

When Mason reached him, he was crouching again, peering at something which floated face down, far out of reach, in a pool of stagnant water.

"My God!" Mason whispered.

The thing out there wore a soldier's uniform. Nothing else was visible. The man's arms and legs were evidently hanging below the black murk. But enough was in sight to carry its horrible message. The man was McGrath.

Mechanically, White muttered: "I didn't see it happen, Bill. I was up there on the steps, paying no attention to McGrath or the Moro, and suddenly I heard a splash. When I turned, McGrath was—was out here like this—dead—and the Moro had vanished."

Mason peered sharply into his comrade's face. "The Moro vanished?"

"There was no sign of him. I've searched, but—"

Mason's scowl increased. He said nothing, then, but turned his attention to the thing in the pool. There was no way of getting McGrath's body to shore; it was madness even to think of swimming through that snake-infested fever slime. Besides, McGrath was dead.

But where was the Moro? There was no way off the island except back through the swamp. The fiend never would have attempted such an escape. Steve White could have shot him down before he covered a hundred yards!

Very quietly Mason walked back to the marble steps. Vague suspicions were forming in his mind. Staring straight into Steve White's face, he said grimly. "I'm going down there again. Are you coming?"

Without hesitation, White nodded.

Mason led the way, stopped on the floor of the pit to light torches, and then paced into the tunnel. His hand hovered near his holstered gun, ready to jerk into action at the slightest sound of peril.

This time, the journey through subterranean darkness seemed endless, but finally he stopped, waited for White to catch up, and said: "This is as far as I went before. From now on we'll have to be doubly careful. There may be unseen pitfalls.

The passage had narrowed to a serpentine tube of pitch. The glare of the two torches revealed deep niches and, every now and then, the sign of the python-headed *nagah*.

For ten minutes Mason strode on in silence. His arm, holding the torch aloft, had grown heavy. His eyes, unused to the glare, were shot

with crimson. The granite walls were damp now, and cold.

"This stone," White said, scowling, "must have been brought here from an outside source. Never saw it in such quantity in these islands."

Mason nodded. Stooping, he picked up a circular bit of steel. "Brass," he observed. "The carving is Moro but these *nagah* signs are from Borneo. There's something queer here, Steve—"

He had stopped trying to estimate how far they had traveled. His senses were dulled by the nerve-wracking scrape of his boots, and he was no longer on the alert for danger.

Then, at long last, the passage widened into a vast sunken chamber, and Mason stopped.

White's hand pawed at his arm. "We're being watched, Bill. I can feel it!"

Mason scowled his understanding. He too had felt it, but had put it down to the condition of his nerves. Now, however, that premonition of impending danger was like a strangling hand at his throat.

THE walls around him were broken by apertures, barely visible in the feeble light from the *huhu* torches. He stepped toward the nearest opening. Suddenly, in the gloom of it, something moved.

Bill Mason jerked backward, and whipped his gun out. The movement carried him aside at the critical moment. The weird stillness of the chamber was shattered by the ominous, unmistakable spit of a blow-gun!

But the *sumpit* dart missed its intended mark. It whined past Bill Mason's face hideously close, and the nearness of it wiped all the sluggish inaction out of his system.

Spinning back, he dashed his torch to the floor, bellowed at White to do the same, and ground the blazing brand under his heel. White's flame met the same sudden fate, and the chamber was plunged into darkness.

Screams of baffled rage poured from half a hundred unseen throats and filled the vast vault with deafen-

ing echoes. Human shapes surged from the wall-openings.

"Back, Steve!" Mason roared. "Back to the wall!"

Even as he yelled the warning, his suspicions seethed to life again and he wondered if White were really in danger. But there was no time then for wondering. The fiends were upon him.

He emptied his gun into them, jerking the trigger with savage fury. The flashes revealed enough to shatter any hope of escape. At least fifty Moro warriors, stripped down to breech-clouts and flaying the air with their murderous *krises*, had stormed into the chamber!

Mason fought his way clear. His revolver was empty, good only as a bludgeon, and with it he laid about him, snarling with satisfaction as the weapon crunched against naked flesh.

Already the Moros were swarming on him from all angles. Some, crawling on hands and knees, were seeking to rake him upward with their blades.

On the far side of the room, Steve White was apparently fighting a similar battle against the same hopeless odds.

A blade slashed the air in front of Bill Mason's face and buried itself in the muscles of his arm. He staggered.

His fingers were suddenly without feeling, and his revolver clattered to the floor.

In the center of a squirming mob of savages he caromed across the room, away from the wall, into the open.

Somewhere in front of him a torch blazed out, throwing the whole scene into lurid detail. Blood was trickling from a *kris* slash in his forehead, blinding him. Writhing loose, he swept his arm up, cleared his vision.

Faces, forms, took blurred shape before him and he recognized his assailants.

They were Moros from the nearby village of Datto Kaynim, who had appointed himself guardian of Dun-gun!

The chief himself was among them, leading them on, urging them to finish the affair. Suddenly Mason realized why the matter had not been finished long ago. These natives were not trying to kill him. They were endeavoring to drag him down and overpower him without snuffing out his life!

They succeeded, but not before a Moro *kris* sank hilt-deep in his thigh. He stumbled back, clawing at the weapon, and went down with a dozen shrieking devils on top of him. The sounds of conflict from the other end of the room had ceased.

But even when the *kris* was yanked out, Bill Mason clung to consciousness, knew everything that was done to him. He felt the hemp ropes burning his arms and ankles as they bound him.

They carried him into an adjoining chamber, a narrow stone cell with but one entrance. They set a sputtering torch beside him, where its ghastly light fell upon his bloody face.

They brought Steve White in, and then, obeying the commands barked at them by Datto Kaynim, they departed.

"Well—what's next?" White muttered. He too had felt the keen blades of those savage *kris*es. His right arm was slashed from shoulder to wrist and he was weak from loss of blood.

"No telling," Mason said dully. "Anything's likely to—"

A SOUND of approaching footsteps silenced him. He raised his head to stare at the man who was entering the ante-chamber.

It would be Datto Kaynim, of course, come perhaps to bargain for something or to gloat over his victims.

The intruder paced forward into the torchlight. Mason, with a gasp, became rigid.

The man standing there was no Moro! He was half naked, wearing only a Moro breech-clout and a *kris*, but he was no native.

The man was Martin McGrath!

CHAPTER IV

Subterranean Showdown



MCGRATH advanced slowly, his lips curled in a triumphant leer. He was no longer an American soldier. He seemed to have died and been born again in metamorphosis.

He stared down into Mason's face. His own features, always bronzed and dark, were now unnaturally so. Oval, with sunken black eyes, they were more Arabic than American.

There was nothing puny about McGrath. He was tall, muscular. Corded sinews rippled beneath his dark skin.

"My God—" Steve White muttered. "Are you a ghost?"

McGrath fingered the handle of the *kris*. No, he was no ghost; he was very much alive and more savage at that moment than any of the skulking Moro devils in the outer vault.

"So you found my body, did you?" he said sibilantly. "But you could not drag it ashore, out of the pool. Had you done so, you might have learned that the body was brown—that it belonged to the Moro, not to me!"

"You—" Bill Mason choked back the oath that welled to his lips. Something strange had happened to McGrath, and it would take very little to bring that gleaming *kris* into play.

McGrath smiled cunningly. "They did a nice job, those Moros. I warned them not to kill you, but was afraid they would go blood-mad and do it their own way. It is not a nice way, Mason, I assure you."

"What do you want?" Mason said slowly.

"What do I want? Very little, considering the trouble I have taken to keep you and your infernal meddlers from discovering the secret of this place!"

Warily, Mason sized up the situation. There was apparently no way out. He was trussed up, helpless.

But the Moros had retreated to the huge chamber outside, and the three white men were alone in the ante-room. Only one door separated the two chambers, and it was a hewn granite block hanging open on iron hinges.

His hands were bound behind him. He tested the hemp ropes cautiously, and felt them give. The Moros had bound him hurriedly, doing a slipshod job!

"What do you want?" he demanded again, fighting for time.

"I'm not an American, Mason," McGrath said grimly. "Perhaps you have already guessed that. I am three-fourths Arab, born and reared in the States, but still an Arab."

"I thought as much."

"When I was sent to the Philippines three years ago, I heard a great deal about this lost city of Dungun. I looked up Datto Kaynim. Kaynim had already seen Arabic designs on the walls of these pits, Mason. I talked to him for days, showed him similar designs of my own, and in the end convinced him that I was a creature from out of the past.

"I was, in short, a direct descendant of the Arab Sultan who built these dungeons. In fact, Kaynim half believes that I am the Sultan himself, returned in reincarnation! The Moros are superstitious creatures!"

"So—he brought you here?" Bill Mason muttered.

"And made me his blood brother, in true Moro style!"

McGrath's eyes were glittering. Lust was in them—savage, uncontrolled lust. More than ever Mason realized the necessity of working those hemp ropes free in as short a time as possible. And they were loosening, slowly, surely, despite the fact that the effort brought excruciating agony to the wound in his thigh. But if McGrath discovered the ruse—

Mason shuddered as he eyed the *kris* in the Arab's girdle. It would be a hideous death.

"Those tattooed marks," he mumbled, stalling for more time. "Were they—"

"They were here on these walls when Kaynim first found the pits. More of the Arab Sultan's work, Mason. He ran across them, evidently, in his Borneo campaigns, and carried out the idea in his palace decorations. Kaynim thought them of religious significance and had them copied, in tattoo, on his own natives."

MASON'S right hand was free. He struggled to work his left out of a tangle of ropes. Struggled too, to keep the wavering torchlight from revealing what he was doing.

"There would have been no murders," McGrath said bitterly, "if Lajoie, the derelict, had not stumbled on the secret of Dungun. Until that time I was simply awaiting the proper opportunity to come here, unknown to Kaynim, and secure the treasure."

"And—" Mason's hands were free. He was setting himself for the final test. "—and Kaynim's Moros killed Lajoie?"

"They did. But not before he told part of the secret to you and Furman, in the Jolo hop-joint."

"And then?"

"Furman came here to investigate. He learned too much. I myself, Mason, destroyed the messenger whom Furman sent with a letter to you. Kaynim's men warned me of his coming. I left just enough of that letter to be a warning to you, but being an utter fool you ignored it."

Mason's fists clenched. He tensed himself as McGrath stepped back, fingering the blade of the *kris*.

There was no shadow of doubt now that McGrath was an Arab, a killer. His eyes narrowed to slits as he glanced behind him at the open door. Evidently he realized that Datto Kaynim's Moros would be getting restless.

"We've wasted enough time," he rasped, stepping close again. "Here is my proposition, Mason. Take it or leave it, and God help you if you leave it! I want the Sultan's treasure that is hidden here. The treasure is stored in the vault next to this,

and there is a connecting door. From that room there is a passage leading back under the swamp to the island—the same passage I came in by, after getting rid of the Moro.”

“And you want us to help you. Is that it?”

“I can’t make it alone,” McGrath declared bitterly. “Kaynim’s devils are too many for me. I might get out of here and across the swamp without being caught, but I would be an outcast in the islands, fleeing from soldiers and Moros alike. Help me and a generous portion of the treasure is



yours to split between you, if you swear to keep your mouths closed about me. Refuse and—well, you know Moro customs as well as I do. They are not pleasant.”

Mason hesitated. He knew that Steve White was staring at him, awaiting his decision.

With a sudden whirl, Mason doubled up. His bound legs jackknifed beneath him and lashed out again with the force of a battering-ram. Squarely in the middle of McGrath’s body those solid boots drove home.

With a sob of agony the Arab reeled backward and crashed into the far wall.

With lightning rapidity Mason flung himself over, seized the blazing torch and jammed it against the ropes that held his legs. The hemp burned, broke under pressure. Then he was on his feet, lurching across the floor.

With both hands he gripped the edge of the great door and hurled it shut, slammed the iron bar down into place.

A smothered yell then went up from the outer chamber as Datto Kaynim’s devils realized what had

occurred. But even as they hurled themselves upon that immovable wall of granite, clawing and screeching for admittance, Mason swung about again, crouching defensively.

“Now we’ll settle it!” he snarled.

Across the room, Martin McGrath had already regained his feet. He stood there, bent almost double, glaring hideously. His face was a mask of hate, red and ugly in the glare of the torch that sputtered on the floor.

Gripping the *kris*, he moved forward with wary, catlike steps, cautiously awaiting an opening.

Mason’s mouth twitched as he eyed the knife. He had seen those hellish blades before and knew that if he did not move first, the murder would be swift and complete—and he would be signing Steve White’s death warrant at the same time.

He waited until McGrath had slunk to within ten feet. Then he hurled himself forward.

It was a cunning move, based entirely on its unexpectedness, but McGrath was prepared for it. The *kris* swept down, point first. Mason, boring in, groped up to ward off the stroke—and missed.

The *kris* descended savagely. Its long blade bit through his upraised hand.

WITH a sob of sheer agony he wrenched his arm down, jerking the weapon from the Arab’s grasp. Then he hurled himself forward, carrying McGrath with him toward the opposite wall.

Steve White’s legs settled it. Out-thrust in the path of the two combatants, they provided a stumbling-block. McGrath’s groping feet tangled with them. He tripped, went down off balance with Mason crashing on top of him.

The *kris*, protruding through Mason’s bloody hand, bit into McGrath’s throat, sank to its limit and choked the scream that welled from the Arab’s lips.

There was no need for a second thrust.

It required all of Mason’s strength to pull the blade out. With his free

hand he gripped the handle and yanked savagely.

The steel came clear—out of his own torn hand.

Ignoring the yells of the Moros in the outer chamber, he reeled across the room, slumped to his knees and slashed White's bonds.

"The door!" he mumbled. "The door McGrath spoke of. We've got to find it!"

White scrambled up, clapped his arms around those drooping shoulders. He wasted no time. Ripping a strip of cloth from his shirt, he wrapped it relentlessly around Mason's wrist, to form a tourniquet. Then, grasping the torch, he ran to the wall.

The door was there, visible now in the glare.

He wrenched it open, disclosing a narrow passage beyond.

"Go ahead," Mason groaned. "Lead the way!"

Holding the flame high, White plunged on, found himself suddenly in an adjoining chamber—the treasure room. Impulsively he snatched up a pair of pig-skin sacks which lay near the wall. "We'll take this stuff," he snapped. "There'll be no more slaughter on account of it!" Then: "We've got to hurry, old man. They know what we're up to, and they'll go around the other way, to head us off when we reach the swamp!"

BILL MASON squared his shoulders, shook off his companion's supporting hand, and grimly nodded.

The torch had burned low. The light was merely a winking tongue of fire as White hurried on. The passage seemed endless until at last, abruptly, White stopped again, with upraised hand.

"Listen!"

Bill Mason labored to a halt and stood swaying. He heard nothing for a moment except the reverberating echoes of White's voice. Then there were other sounds—dull, distant reports of rifle fire!

"Soldiers," Mason said dully.

His hand had swollen to twice its normal size. He could not hold up much longer, but he kept on. The

rifle reports were closer now, and louder.

For another five minutes the din continued, beating erratic time to the plodding steps of the two men. Then it ceased.

Bill Mason stumbled, went down, could not rise. He heard his companion's voice close to his ear. "I can't carry you, old man. Too weak. I'll get out, get help and then I'll come back."

THEN the torch blinked out, and Mason was alone.

He was only half aware that footsteps were returning along the tunnel, and hardly knew it when he was lifted and carried. The glare of torches hurt his eyes. He heard White's voice, and the voices of other men.

There was no sound of rifle fire. Nothing but the scrape of boots on the stone floor. And then the crimson torchlight was smothered by a glare of whiter, more intense light. Overhanging creepers brushed his face, reopening wounds which were clotted with blood.

When his eyes flickered open, he looked up into White's face, and White was smiling.

"You can thank Furman's soldiers," White said.

"Thank—what?"

"The Moros we left in the *prau* got scared and hot-footed back to Tamgagaan in the outrigger. They spilled their story to Furman's men and the soldiers came down in full force, in the station-boat. They were just going down into the pits when Datto Kaynim's devils came up. The horde is wiped out completely, in good old 23rd style."

Mason stared about him silently. He saw where he was, then. The tunnel's mouth was concealed by a tangle of creepers close to the pool where McGrath had vanished.

"It—it seems like a nightmare, Steve," he said feebly.

"Does it?" White grinned, holding up two pig-skin sacks. "You won't think it's a nightmare," he drawled, "when you get a look at the payoff."

Adventure THRILLS!



ADVENTURER, AFTER KILLING SNARLING BEAST WITH HIS BARE HANDS, IS NAMED 'LION-MAN' BY NATIVES!

WHILE HUNTING A MAN-EATING LION THAT HAD ATTACKED AND KILLED THREE NATIVES NEAR NAIROBI, AFRICA, 1931, JAMES HENDERSON, YOUNG ENGLISH ADVENTURER AND PLANTER, WAS SUDDENLY HALTED BY THE SHRIEL CRY OF HIS FLEEING NATIVE GUIDE.

HE TURNED TO FACE THE SNARLING BEAST CREEPING TOWARD HIM. AS THE MAN-EATER SPRANG, HENDERSON WAS KNOCKED TO A CROUCHING POSITION—HIS GUN FALLING TO THE GROUND. THE ADVENTURER, REMEMBERING THE ADVICE OF AN OLD HUNTER, GRASPED THE TONGUE OF THE BEAST.

THE FEROCIOUS LION LASHED HIS SHOULDER AS HE ROLLED OVER AND OVER BUT HENDERSON JAMMED THE TONGUE FAR BACK INTO THE HUGE MOUTH, FINALLY SUFFOCATING HIM.



MAKES HIS FIRST SOLO FLIGHT WHEN ONLY ELEVEN YEARS OLD!

AMERICA'S YOUNGEST SOLO PILOT, WILLIAM (BILLY) LEE, 11 YEARS OLD, OF AUGUSTA, GEORGIA, —AND A GRADUATE OF A FLYING SCHOOL— BEGAN SOARING IN THE AIR WITH HIS FATHER WHEN ONLY 7 YEARS OLD. BILLY SET THE RECORD FOR THE FIRST U.S. FLIGHT ALONE BY A JUNIOR OF HIS AGE ON HIS BIRTHDAY—1936.



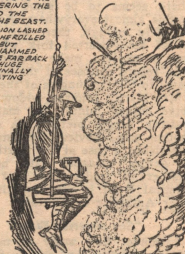
DRIFTED ALONE ABOARD SHIP IN NORTH SEA FOR 108 DAYS

DURING A STORM AT NIGHT THE CREW OF A BARK "COLUMBIAS" DESERTING THEIR SHIP—WHICH THEY EXPECTED WOULD SINK—IN THEIR HASTE FORGOT A WOMAN PASSENGER, MISS INGE BODIN. AFTER SHE DRIFTED ALONE FOR 108 DAYS BETWEEN ICELAND AND NORWAY HER SIGNALS WERE NOTICED BY FISHERMEN AND SHE WAS RESCUED.



ENTERED HOSTILE CAMP AND CAPTURED GENERAL

COLONEL JOHN MOSBY, CONFEDERATE CAVALRY LEADER, IN ONE OF THE MOST AUDACIOUS NIGHT RAIDS DURING THE CIVIL WAR SLIPPED INTO A UNION CAMP AND CARRIED AWAY GENERAL STOUTEN, WHO WAS SURROUNDED BY HIS STAFF AND HUNDREDS OF UNION MEN. DISGUISED AS A UNION SOLDIER MOSBY ENTERED THE CAMP THROUGH A GAP IN THE FEDERAL LINES. WAKING THE GENERAL FROM A SOUND SLEEP, YOUNG MOSBY HAD HIM PLACED ON HORSEBACK AND WAS ACROSS THE LINES BEFORE THE STAFF AND GUARD REALIZED WHAT HAD HAPPENED.



LOWERED INTO A ROARING VOLCANO CRATER!

DESCENDING INTO THE CRATER OF KILAUEA TO PHOTOGRAPH CLOSE-UPS, NICK CAVALIERE, FAMOUS CAMERAMAN-ADVENTURER, NARROWLY ESCAPED WITH HIS LIFE WHEN HE BECAME UNCONSCIOUS FROM THE DEADLY FUMES.

HOWEVER, HE SECURED SOME OF THE MOST REMARKABLE PHOTOS EVER TAKEN OF VOLCANIC ACTION.

The GLOBE TROTTER



HOWDY, Globe Trotters! These summer "dog days" it's too doggone hot to do much but sit around on the porch and take it easy. So draw up your chairs, light up a pipe, and let's get goin' on a good old-fashioned chin-fest.

From the looks of the papers nowadays, you'd think the world was in a heck of a stew, wouldn't you? There seems to be some kind of trouble almost everywhere. And yet, strangely enough, there are still a lot of stout-hearted folk who find time to explore, make aviation records, record eclipses of the sun, and travel to the far jungles of the earth.

Mrs. Martin Johnson, widow of the noted animal hunter and maker of exciting jungle pictures, is off on another trip; Soviet scientists have established a base at the North Pole to gather valuable data on the weather; I understand that Rear Admiral Byrd is contemplating another Antarctic expedition.

"See America First"

I wonder how many of us have ever considered that there's just as much adventure in the United States itself as in any other country—or continent, for that matter. In fact, the old travel slogan, "See America First," was never truer than today.

Thousands of people, with nothing in particular to keep them at home, have locked the front door, put the kids in the back seat, and set out to see America via trailer.

Roads are excellent in almost every section of the country. Trailer camps have been set up on every highway, and you can live at one

just as comfortably as at home. Besides, it's lots more fun, and something's nearly always bound to crop up in the way of adventure.

So advanced has trailer travel become that a lot of folks roll over the highways with the season. In the summer, New England trails are very inviting, and in the winter regular trailer cities sprout up in Florida.

An Experience in Democracy

Traveling the country trailer fashion is a real experience in American democracy, and especially interesting to those folks who have never been east of the Hudson River. The Appalachian Mountain section; the great plain states, divided by the mighty Mississippi; the prairie states, and the great Western mountain ranges and national parks—no other country has such an amazing richness!

And as a side trip, by all means let me recommend Mexico to you. A few weeks ago I saw a cousin of mine from Chicago, who had just returned from Mexico after a real automobile vacation trip with his wife and two boys. They had the time of their lives, although one of the kids did get sick. But a competent English doctor cured him.

According to my cousin, Mexico is still unspoiled. The merchants and the people don't go in for rooking the traveler, which is a lot more than can be said for certain foreign countries.

It is the policy of President Lazaro Cardenas that Mexico shall be independent of any foreign country, America included, and that the peo-

ple shall retain and improve upon their own inherited culture. And that is why Mexico is so interesting to visit today. The people are really kindly, eager to make you feel at home, and in every section are still to be seen the traditional ways of life that have so charmed artists and writers.

Yes, there's still plenty of adventure in the good old U. S. A., in Mexico, and in Canada, too. Don't let me forget to mention Canada; Canadians are always grand to visitors, and I've never heard any complaints yet.

So come on, you Globe Trotters making America via the trailer route. Get out the old pen and paper, and let me hear from you. The rest of us Globe Trotters would like to know what sections of the country you've seen, what adventures you've had, and what routes you'd recommend for a real trailer vacation.

But Not the 36th

THE difference between 35 and 36 is a great deal more than 1. In a letter to THE GLOBE TROTTER for the July issue, your pal and mine, Frederick C. Painton, spoke of the "sense of victory" which leads men to do great things in life, in sport—and in war.

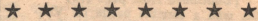
Specifically, Fred wrote of the American "36th" Division which in

(Continued on page 120)

LIST OF MEMBERS THE GLOBE TROTTERS' CLUB

(Continued from last month)

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Howard D. Gaines, Route 2, Dayton, Washington.
Douglas L. Keegan, 19 Bridgeport Rd., Dorchester, Eng.
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I Want to Be Happy!

I Want to Be Loved!

I Want to Be Popular!

WHAT a thrill it is to get what you want! Imagine having a magic wand that makes every wish come true. Futile? But think of what astrology is asked to reveal:

Was I born to be rich or poor?

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Who and where is my soul mate?

Don't be afraid to use your *inherent* magic—the gifts with which you were endowed at birth, according to solar astrology. Here is your chance to ascertain your trends and potentialities, also your zodiacal identity with the Air, Fire, Water and Earth Signs.

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MONTH (1st to 31st) YEAR

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....

TA-9

(Continued from page 119)

1918, won a terrible battle on Vauquois Hill, after having twice been reported as wiped out by high-class Bavarian troops.

Now, it so happens that it was the 35th Division that put up this magnificent forty-eight hour fight. But here's the correspondence between Fred, whose finger hit a "6" instead of a "5", and E. T. Nokes, of 2318 Myrtle Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri. Yep, that's right. Mr. Nokes, who caught the error, is from *Missouri*!

He writes Fred Painton:

Dear Buddy:

I read your letter to THE GLOBE TROTTER in the July issue of THRILLING ADVENTURES, regarding the 36th Division before Vauquois Hill in the Argonne. Wasn't it the 35th? I was a member of the artillery of the 35th, and our gun was planted on a knob called Hill 290, which our French interpreter said was directly in front of Vauquois. Our aiming point was a skeletonlike trunk of a tree on a line with the center of that impregnable hill.

The 35th's officers were changed the night before the jump-off. In fact, the infantry had no high "brass hats." Majors of infantry wandered around in the rain searching for troops they had never seen before. General Berry, our artillery commander, was relieved after several days, and that made the scrapping of the 35th complete.

We dragged our guns around Vauquois during the advance, strung out in a line under direct fire of the Germans. Varennes, Cheppy, Bois de Rossignol, Chadron Felm, Charpentry and Exermont were some of the hot spots taken after the 35th ceased to exist as a unit. A member of the grave service stated:

"Some of the 35th were buried twelve miles from the jump-off, and they don't carry dead men forward."

I am only writing you regarding this because I have read your stories and enjoyed them for a long time. I also try to write some, with a little success myself. I am disabled now, and have been for years—too much gas around Vauquois.

I do not know if the 36th Division was on the line at the start of the Argonne, not having an account of the battle at hand. But I hope that two divisions did not get the same raw deal on the same night before a major battle!

As a member of those ragamuffin hill-billies of the 35th, I wish to stick out my neck and put in a word for them; they deserve a break. And, Mr. Painton, if this happened to the 36th also, I doff my Disabled American Veterans' cap to them.

Keep up your good work. I think your Foreign Legion stories are great. Give us some more! I would appreciate a line from you in regards to the above, if you have the time, although I know that as an author you are very busy.

Best regards and good luck,

E. T. Nokes.

2318 Myrtle Ave., Kansas City, Mo.

And the Reply

So Fred Painton sat down and answered in the following letter. Which certainly proves he knew what he was writing about, even though his typing finger slipped.

My dear Mr. Nokes:

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of June 3rd regarding my letter to THE GLOBE TROTTER in the July issue of THRILLING ADVENTURES.

Of course, you're right. It was the 35th Division, and since the story appeared I have been racking my brain trying to discover what cloudburst had caused me to write a "six" instead of a "five."

You see, I came on part of that division when I was with the *Stars and Stripes*, the official newspaper of the A.E.F., and so I had first-hand information. And besides that, Corporal Sid Houston, of the Kansas City Star, then attached to the *Stars and Stripes*, was from that hill-billy 35th, and he wept when he heard what had been done the night before the jump-off.

The 35th, as you probably know, made a lot of history, winning that fight after the division was marked "non-existent." Several years ago a German historian wrote the detailed account of the German side—how the Bavarians, knowing tactically that they had won, expected the Yanks to retreat.

Thus, the Bavarians exposed their own positions—only to be hammered flat suddenly by grenade-throwing combat patrols, and hard-hitting one-pounders. How your artillery ever functioned at all, Mr. Nokes, was a mystery to me, considering the tremendous difficulties in the way.

Anyway, the German historian claimed the Germans three times won the field of battle—strategically, tactically, and theoretically; and he has since said that if the Americans had known the least thing about military technique, the Germans would have turned Pershing's flank by holding on to Vauquois Hill.

The trouble was, the hill-billies from Missouri and Arkansas didn't know they were beaten, and kept on fighting! The Germans, who fought by the book and the rules, didn't understand that.

Well, anyway, it was nice to have your letter, and I hope you keep on with your writing.

It's a hellish hard job, but it has its

(Continued on page 122)

I POSED IN THE NUDE



*When Another Girl's Disgrace Drove
Me to the Brink of Despair!*

MY HEART beat a strange tattoo when Garth Endicott took me in his arms and we danced. I suddenly felt as if I were floating in flower-scented space, and that only Garth's strong arms were holding me to earth as they were holding me to him.

Nor did I know that in that astoundingly blissful moment of love's first realization that I was shivering, until he said, his deep voice smooth, a little amused: "You're trembling, Karen. Cold?"

I laughed, and the sound of my own laughter in the warm, crowded, dim-lit nightclub seemed to bring me back to earth, give me confidence.

"No," I said. "I'm not used to champagne. This is only the second time I've ever tasted it."

"Really?" He was staring down at me, his eyes scrutinizing the upturned earnestness of my face. "Funny! But you don't look like a champagne girl—even if you are Penny Hayden's friend."

Something queer struck into my heart. Of course, Garth must know all about Penny and Talbot Langley. Did he imagine—

When we went back to our table, I made a gallant pretense of trying to be nice to Nap Durat, yet throughout the evening I was aware of Garth Endicott's dark eyes upon me, mocking, quizzical.

Nap and I left Penny and Talbot at the club about two. In his car I felt his hand closing over mine. "Don't be frightened," he said and laughed. "I am not going to make love to you."

I withdrew my fingers. "Should I be disappointed?"

"That," he shrugged, "is as you will. But I have another purpose. I wish you to pose for me. You have the loveliest figure of any girl I've ever seen."

"But I've never done that sort of work," I told him. "Wouldn't you be better off with someone more experienced?"

"No," said Nap Durat. "I want you. I will pay you fifty dollars if you will come to my studio tomorrow afternoon. Bring your friend, Miss Hayden, with you, if you wish."

"I—" I started breathlessly to accept, but he was speaking again.

"Of course you will pose in the nude." I felt myself choke. Then—

CONTINUE THIS GIRL'S SENSATIONAL REVELATIONS IN

THRILLING

Confessions

A NEW MAGAZINE OF REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES

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(Continued from page 120)
moments, and some of us madmen like it.
Thanks for your letter.

Sincerely,
Frederick C. Painton.
Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Truth and Fiction

PROVING that truth is stranger than fiction—which I've always contended, anyway—Crawford Sullivan, author of this month's exciting novel, *THE RIVER DEVILS*, gives us the following account. No reference, of course, is intended to apply to any individual, company or business enterprise having the same name or title as pointed out in the following letter.

Dear Globe Trotter:

Some years ago, an American mining engineer named Hardenberg decided to investigate the operations of the Peruvian Amazon Company, a concern which for years had been terrorizing the region of the upper Amazon. Starting out from the headwaters of the Putumayo, Hardenberg and a companion fought their way through the jungle until they reached "The Devil's Paradise," a lush, tangled country which was once the peaceful abode of the Huitoto Indians.

Here they found the Peruvian Amazon Company going at full blast. Bands of Indian slaves were sent out armed with machetes to hack up rubber trees, gashing each tree frightfully in an effort to obtain the last drop of milk.

Leaving a forest of dying trees in their wake, the Indians carried the rubber to the company headquarters. Any Indian who failed to bring in his quota was hung up by the heels and flogged. After that, he was summarily shot.

One of the company managers was a suave, shifty-eyed half-breed called Miguel S. Loayza. Senor Loayza had a custom of sending "commissions" to the independent rubber plantations, advising the owner that he had better take a long trip to some healthier locality. If the owner refused, he was usually chained to some convenient tree and tortured until he changed his mind.

Continuing down the river, Hardenberg neared the headquarters of Loayza. As his canoe swung around a bend in the stream, two river boats loomed up before him. Someone shouted:

"Fire! Fire! Sink the canoe!" and a slashing volley cracked from one of the vessels. Suddenly the firing stopped, and a loud voice ordered the travelers to come closer.

Leaning over the rail of the nearest boat were twenty-five or thirty men, gun-hammers cocked back, waiting only for the sig-

nal to fire. As the canoe reached the side of the boat, its two occupants were jerked on board, beaten soundly with gun butts and kicked into a cage-like prison. In a short time, Miguel S. Loayza peered into the prison, favoring the captives with a peculiar snaky smile.

Engineer Hardenberg immediately got an idea. He told Loayza that a huge American syndicate had sent him to explore this region, and that if he were murdered, the American Government itself would investigate the Putumayo country and wipe the Peruvian Amazon Company out of existence.

This statement seemed to disturb Senor Loayza quite a bit. He didn't mind killing a Peruvian or a Colombian—but an American was bad medicine. Consequently, Loayza decided to get rid of Mr. Hardenberg as quickly and gently as possible.

Packing Hardenberg onto a rusty stern-wheeler captained by the infamous river pirate, Carlos Zubiaur, Loayza ordered that the American be taken to Iquitos.

Upon his return to civilization, Hardenberg began to cause plenty of trouble for the rubber concern by broadcasting his experiences far and wide. Great Britain was the first to give an attentive ear, and then the other nations stepped in, one by one, to curb the Putumayo atrocities.

As a result, the Peruvian Amazon Company died a quick and timely death. No one seems to know what happened to Miguel S. Loayza; but in all probabilities, his bones now rest in some decaying jungle swamp.

The story of Hardenberg and "The Devil's Paradise" is true. *THE RIVER DEVILS* is purely fiction. I've only repeated Hardenberg's yarn so that you Globe Trotters will see how close the two come to being alike.

Very truly yours,
Crawford Sullivan.

Hollywood, Cal.

From all accounts, Mr. Sullivan, this Loayza fellow must have been a prize specimen. Well, it all adds up to the same thing, doesn't it? Sooner or later, a man of this type gets what's coming to him. Retribution may take a long time, but it's inescapable.

Oscar Schisgall Reports

BUSY as the proverbial bee, Oscar Schisgall takes time out to let us in on the inspiration for his bang-up Western yarn, *DYNAMITE WAR*, in this issue. Says Oscar:

Dear Globe Trotter:

Did I ever tell you the one about Jimmy Welford and Dud Hanneberry? If not,

this is a good time to put the story on record, since it furnished the idea that I adopted—in a somewhat revised form—in DYNAMITE WAR.

If I've mentioned it to you before, stop me.

Otherwise, will you please quit fidgeting, and listen?

This Jimmy Welford and Dud Hanneberry (I'm altering their names slightly, to avoid embarrassment) were working down in Brazil with an American gang of railroad builders.

A right-of-way was being hacked and blasted through wilderness; and, what with tropical fevers, insects, heat and occasional Indian raids, the men were having a pretty tough time.

Jimmy and Dud, who were close friends, had a dozen times considered dropping the whole business and returning to civilization.

Yet some touch of Yankee doggedness kept them on the job.

Then one night Dud Hanneberry, in spite of quinine and whiskey, came down with fever. He had it in a way that left him almost delirious. The boss of the gang decided he'd better be put away to rest for a time, and so he was stretched on a cot in a shanty that was also used to house the dynamite supply. And Jimmy Welford was assigned to play nurse.

One morning the whole camp gang went off to climb a nearby mountain for a view of the country ahead, over which tracks would have to be pushed. The only ones to remain behind were Jimmy and the sick Dud and a half-breed named Nacio Guadarez.

This Nacio went fishing, but within an hour he came dashing back to the shanty, his eyes popping with terror.

(Continued on page 124)

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THRILLING ADVENTURES,
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(Continued from page 123)

"Parécis!" he yelled. "Parécis on the river!"

The Parécis, I'd better tell you, were man-killers—a tribe of savages who flatly refused to make friends with the white men.

Their answer to all advances had been a shower of poisoned arrows. And now they were coming along the river on whose banks stood the shanty.

Jimmy Welford at once sent Nacio Guadarez to notify the rest of the gang who'd gone to the mountain. He himself couldn't leave. Couldn't leave Dud Hanberry alone to be slaughtered and couldn't move the sick man.

Moreover, there wasn't much hope of holding off several hundred Parécis with a single rifle; and Jimmy didn't think his friends could return from the mountain in time to be of help.

So what did Jimmy do? He took unto his chest a dozen sticks of dynamite and rushed out of the shanty. For a while he was busy with wires, dynamite and storage battery.

Then he returned to the shack and waited, the battery's switch in his hand.

After a while the Parécis appeared around a bend of the river. They came yelling like demons, paddling their dugouts furiously in a charge on the white men's camp. They'd probably have destroyed everything in sight, including Jimmy and Dud.

But suddenly the jungle on the broad river banks heaved up crazily. There was terrific detonation, and the river itself splashed up mightily, in a gigantic wave. Trees toppled into the water, rocks and dirt and brush sailed through the air to shower down on the Indians. The terrible roar echoed everywhere; twenty dugouts were capsized.

And by the time the air cleared and silence returned to the jungle, Jimmy Welford could see the rest of the Parécis dugouts dashing away twice as fast as they had arrived.

Those savages were scared out of their skins!

Never before had they seen or heard anything as awful as that blast. They kept going and going, lashed by terror. And it was the last trouble that ever came to that camp from the Parécis.

Brazil is a long way from our own West; but I've used my writer's license to adapt the dynamite idea to a locale nearer home.

Sincerely,

Oscar Schisgall.

Great Neck, Long Island.

On behalf of all Globe Trotters, Oscar, let me say that your "writer's license" is hereby extended for such a period of time as you shall continue to give us such action-

crammed yarns as **DYNAMITE WAR!**

Almost anything can happen in the Philippine Islands. Let's hear from Hugh B. Cave, whose **LAIR OF THE PYTHONS** is in this issue:

Dear Globe Trotter:

My novelette, **LAIR OF THE PYTHONS**, whose locale is in the Philippines, is a peculiar medley of fiction and of fact, and in this case the fact element is rather strong. The deserted city of Dungun still exists on the northern shore of Tawi-Tawi, in the Sulu archipelago.

Travelers who journey to these remote islands of the Philippines, looking for adventure, may still find the stumps of Dungun's pile-houses rising out of an immense mangrove swamp, where pythons and poisonous snakes abound.

The singular flight of marble steps, which occupies a prominent place in **LAIR OF THE PYTHONS**, is very much in evidence, also. There are many rumors and legends associated with the place, not the least of them being the one mentioned in my story.

"Somewhere," say the Moros of the adjoining islands, "the Sultan's treasure is hidden. It is not above ground; therefore, it must be beneath the ground—beneath the swamp itself, perhaps."

Perhaps some day this reputedly fabulous treasure will be found. Treasure hunting seems to be a popular pastime these days, and I rather imagine someone will make a scientific attempt to locate Dungun's hidden wealth—unless the snakes have something to say about it.

Not too long ago, a certain Datto in the islands made himself guardian of Dungun, and rumors were rife concerning his suspected means of "guarding" his trust. He, at least, was apparently positive that he had something worthwhile to guard.

Who knows?

Best of luck,
Hugh B. Cave.

West Palm Beach, Florida.
(Continued on page 126)

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(Continued from page 125)

Who knows, indeed? Anyway, it's a darn interesting thing to speculate on. But I'll let someone else take the risk of digging up this horde of gems. I like my pythons, all right—in the zoo!

A Novel of China

CHINA! Huge, teeming with unnumbered millions, writhing in the grip of foreign powers! Age-old land of intrigue, famine, civil war and plague! Nation which may yet give birth to a horde of conquerors sweeping over the Western world!

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What evil fate befalls him? With what desperate adventures does he meet? Is "General" Lin Su able to pursue and slaughter General Yang? That's what Oscar Schisgall tells you in his dynamic, pulsating novel, **A FRIEND OF GENERAL YANG**, in next month's issue!

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What is the danger-fraught mission that Arthur Lawrence is called upon to undertake? What of the great rope of rose diamonds in the Dufresne chateau? You'll thrill with excitement when you read William Merriam Rouse's **HOUSE OF PERIL**.

A Western Novelette

MAVERICK ON THE PROD! Eyed with suspicion everywhere, his only protection the speed of his lightning-fast gun hand! Men looking for him out on the backtrail, ready to shoot on sight!

That's the story of Sam Sells, fightin' cowhand, which T. W. Ford, famous writer of Western yarns, tells for you in **MAVERICK ON THE PROD**, in our next issue! You'll hold your breath in suspense as young Sam Sells is taken for Sam "White-Hat" Slittern, gunman.

You'll grip your chair as hell—
(Concluded on page 128)

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(Concluded from page 127)

roarin' Sam Sells gets himself into a passel of trouble and peril! You'll agree that we've never published a better Western yarn than T. W. Ford's MAVERICK ON THE PROD, thrilling novelette in the next issue!

And that's not all! Exciting short stories, features, and timely true stories of adventure in the October number.

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That's all for this time. Hope you've liked this month's issue. If you have, get out the old pen and paper, and send a few words to your friend

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Mechanics AND HANDICRAFT

The Magazine of Science—Invention—Experiments

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CANDID CAMERA CATCHES CO-EDS IN

(Concluded from page 103)

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Size	Area	Perim	Area	Perim	Area	Perim	Area	Perim
20x14-0-21	32.15	31.05	32.15	31.05	32.15	31.05	32.15	31.05
20x14-0-21	2.35	1.05	2.35	1.05	2.35	1.05	2.35	1.05
20x14-0-21	2.40	1.10	2.40	1.10	2.40	1.10	2.40	1.10
20x14-0-21	2.45	1.15	2.45	1.15	2.45	1.15	2.45	1.15
20x14-0-21	2.50	1.20	2.50	1.20	2.50	1.20	2.50	1.20

20x5.00-19	2.85	1.25	HEAVY DUTY T Black P
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25	
4.25-17	2.80	1.25	

[illegible]

22x5.50-19	3.35	L48	TRUCK BAL
6.00-17	3.40	L40	

31x25.00-19	3.40	1.40	5.00-20	\$3.75	\$1.05	5.00-20	\$6.95	\$3.75
31x25.00-19	3.40	1.40	5.00-20	4.45	1.95	3.00-20	8.95	4.95
32x25.00-20	3.45	1.50	7.00-20	5.95	2.95	5.00-20	10.95	5.95
32x25.00-21	3.65	1.65				6.75-20	13.95	6.45
32x25.00-20	3.75	1.75	ALL OTHER					
6.00-25	3.75	1.45	SIZES					

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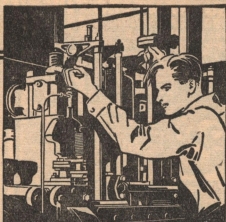
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