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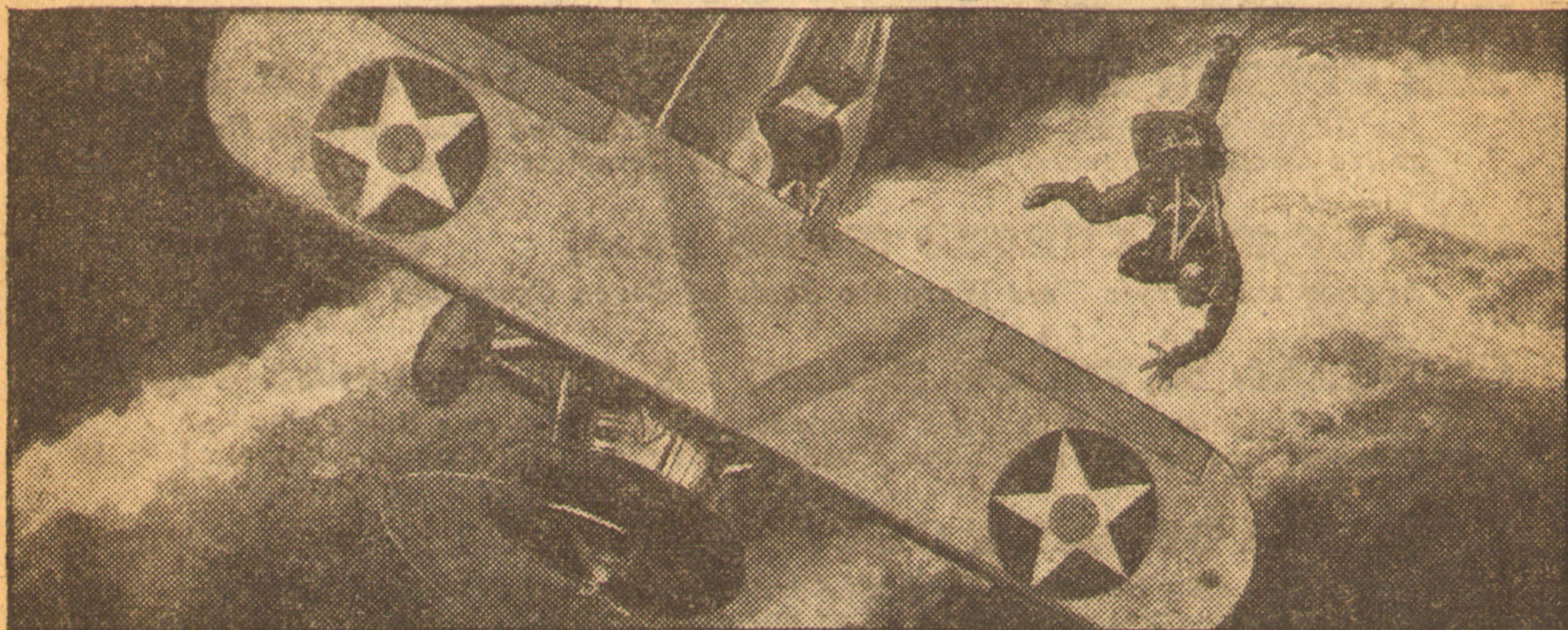
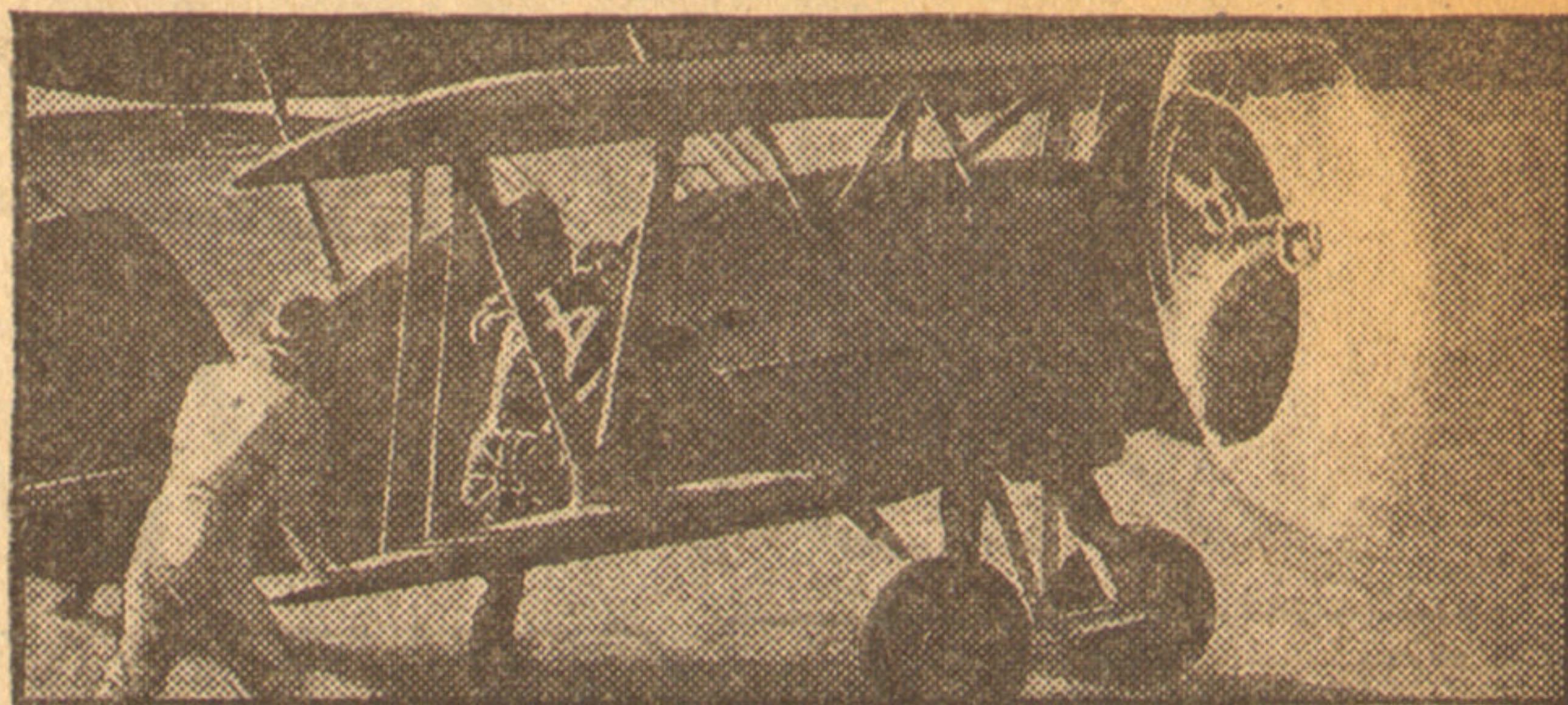
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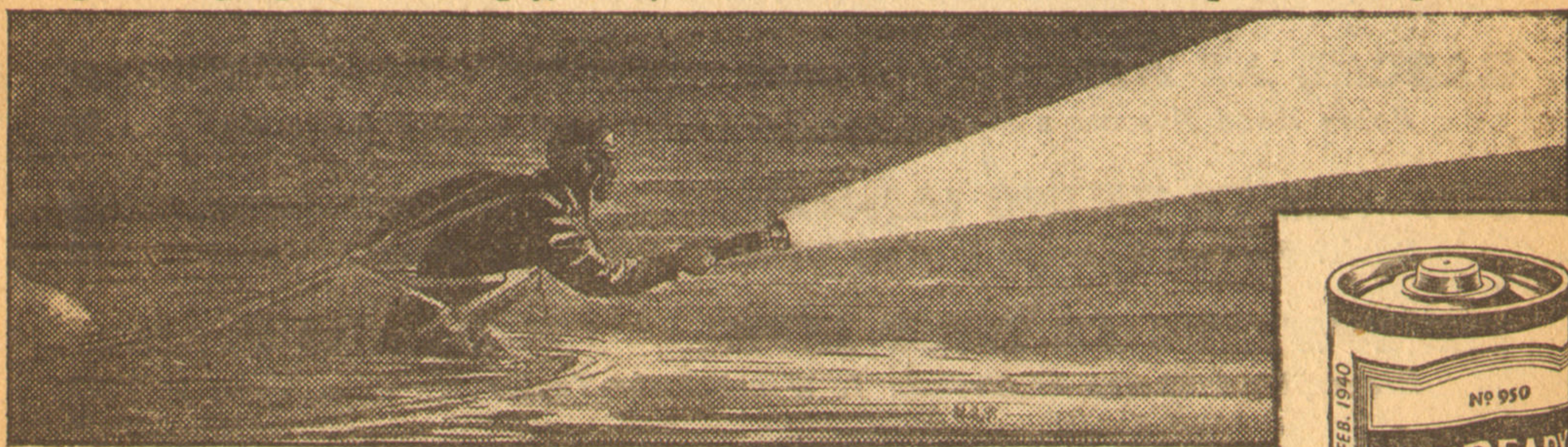
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THRILLING ADVENTURES

VOL. XXXII, NO. 1

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Jobs Like These Go to Men Who Know Radio

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay well for trained men. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good pay jobs with opportunities for advancement. Radio jobbers and dealers employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices, are newer fields offering good opportunities to qualified men. And my Course includes Television, which promises to open many good jobs soon.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Radio is already one of the country's large industries even though it is still young and growing. The arrival of Television, the use of Radio principles in industry, are but a few of many recent Radio developments. More than 28,000,000 homes have one or more Radios. There are more Radios than telephones. Every year millions of Radios get out of date and are replaced. Millions more need new tubes, repairs, etc. Over 5,000,000 auto Radios are in use and thousands more are being sold every day. In every branch Radio is offering more opportunities—opportunities for which I give you the required knowledge of Radio at home in your spare time. Yes, the few hundred \$30, \$40, \$50 a week jobs of 20 years ago have grown to thousands.

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FOOT ITCH

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According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

HERE'S HOW TO RELIEVE IT

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to kill the germ; so you can see why Athlete's Foot is so hard to relieve.

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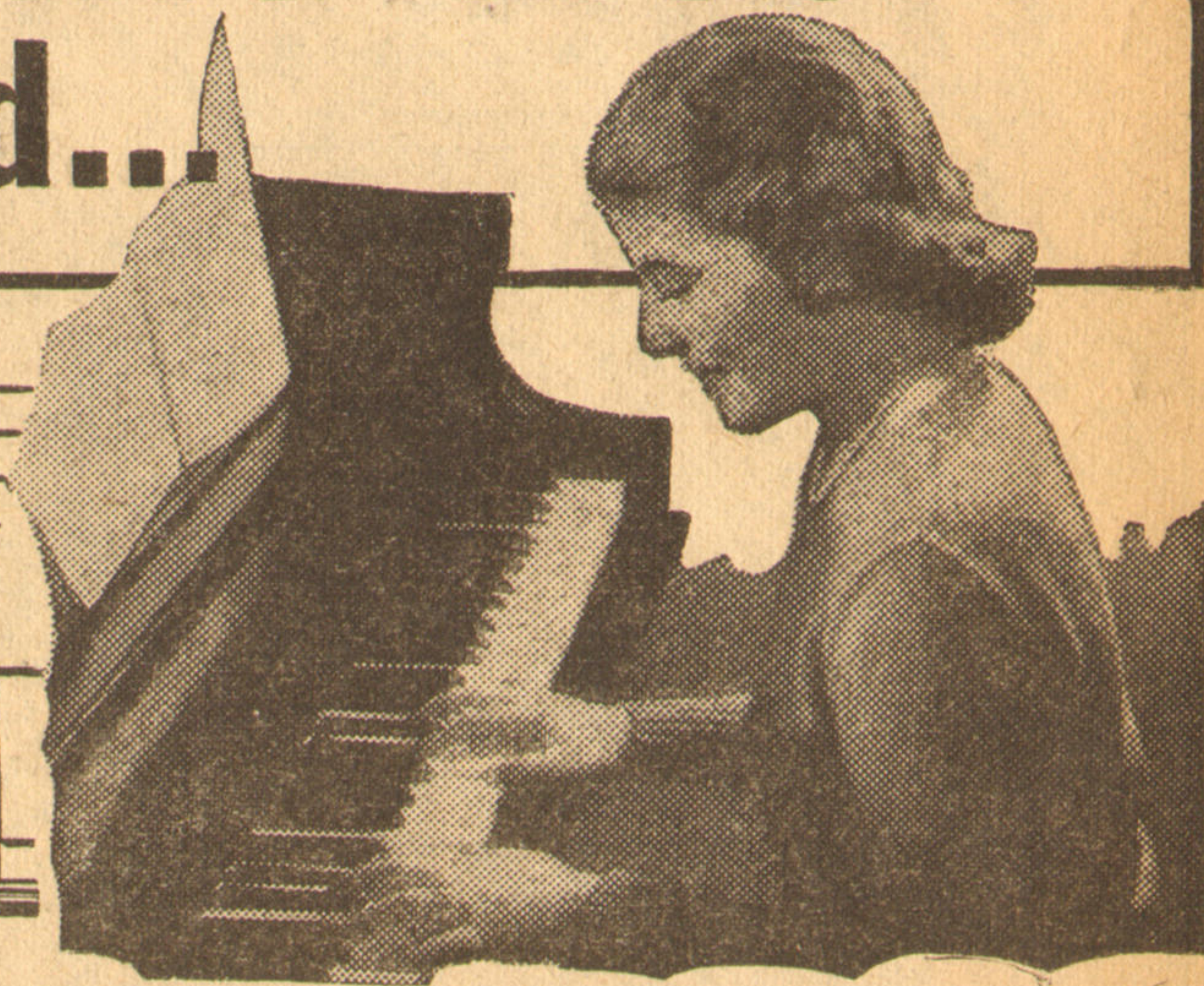
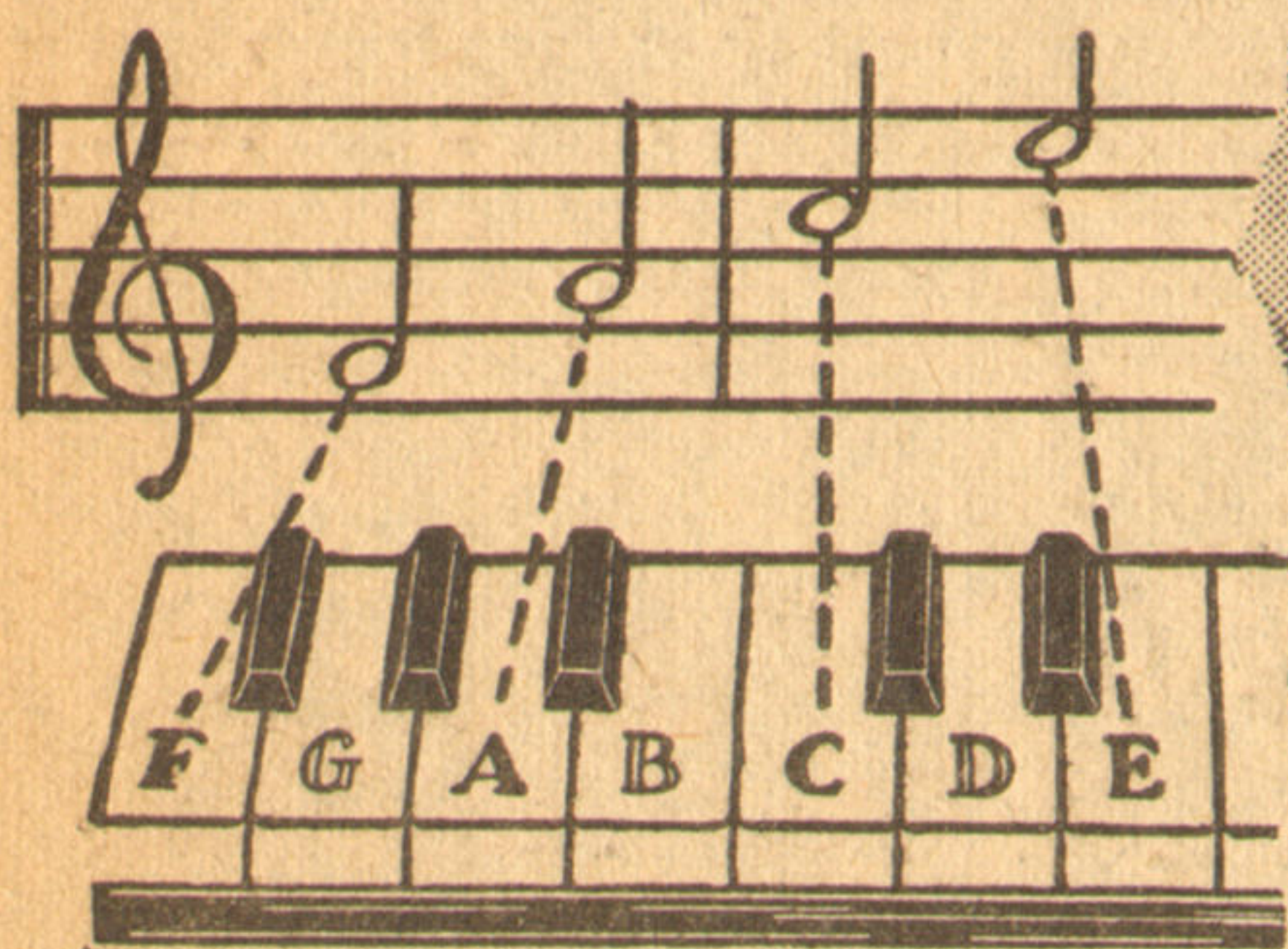
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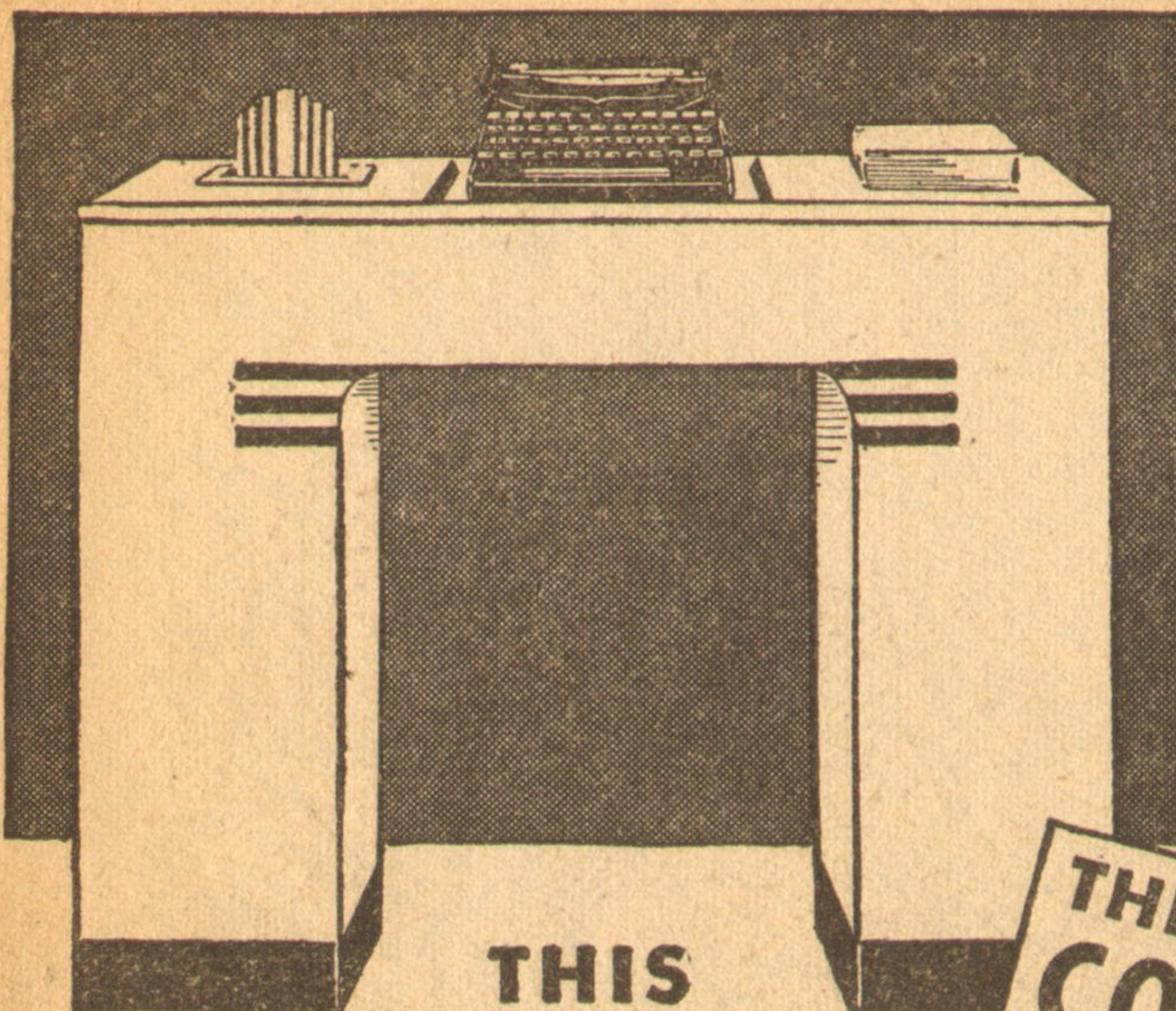
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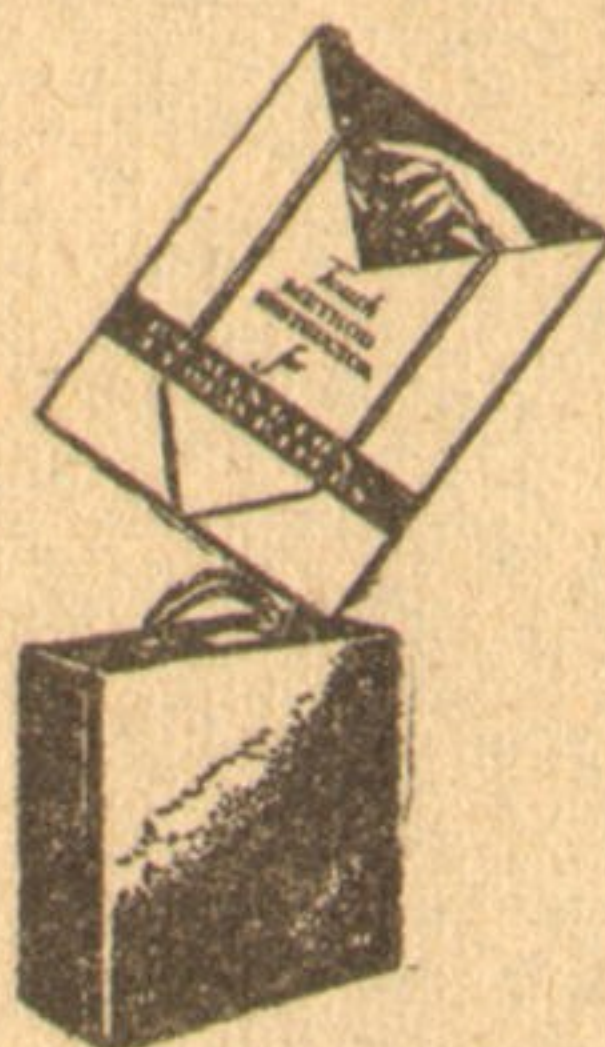
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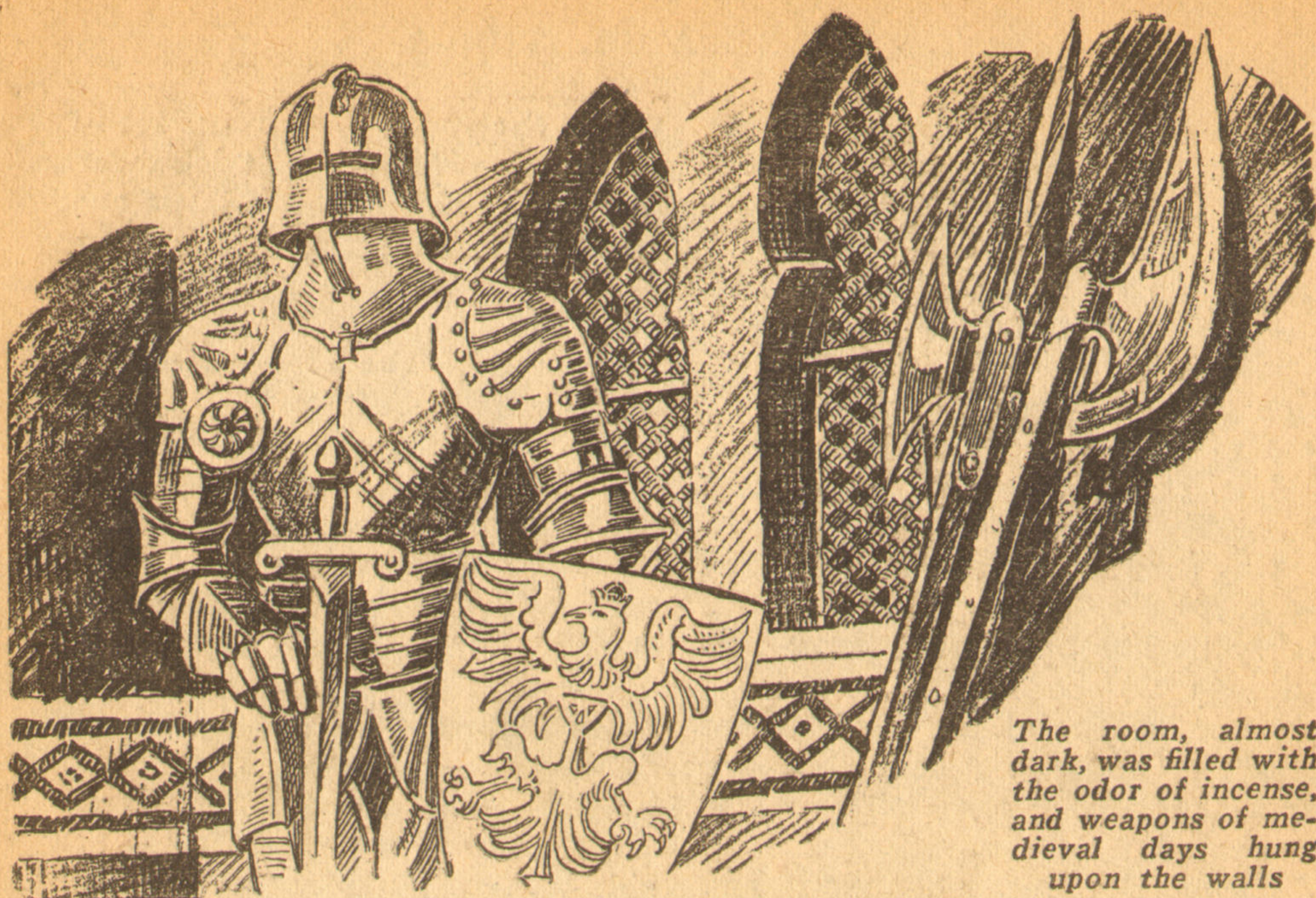
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Vangrifi's eyes were greedy as he snatched the chain with the Knight Templar ring



The room, almost dark, was filled with the odor of incense, and weapons of medieval days hung upon the walls

The Golden Hauberk

Jeff Shannon, Antique Buyer, Is Plunged Seven Hundred Years into the Past as He Combats Greed and Treachery in the Orient

By HOWARD R. MARSH

Author of "Wild Butch Braden," "Town of the Dead," etc.

CHAPTER I

The Armenian Dealer

JEFF SHANNON told the droshky driver to wait, then turned through the grilled entrance to the old stone house. He noted, as he jerked the bell cord, that the door was of Circassian walnut, heavily studded

with iron and deep-set in the thick walls.

Faintly, far in the dark interior, he heard a bell sound. He lighted a cigarette and waited. All things move slowly in the Caucasus—except Americans.

Below him and around him sprawled the little town of Passanaur, swarm-

ing with Soviet military, with Turks and Persians, Jews and Armenians, Tartars and Georgians. Above the town reared the great mountains, marching across the horizon like giants stooped low with the weight of centuries.

The glowing cigarette had reduced itself to less than an inch when a panel in the heavy door finally slid open. Two eyes, black and faintly mocking beneath long lashes, stared at him curiously, only to be replaced quickly by another pair, narrow and beady.

"Narriman Erzinkian," Jeff Shannon spoke quickly. "Tell him that Jeff Shannon from the United States is here at last."

The panel shut. Shannon had lighted a second cigarette and half-smoked it before again the panel opened.

"Narriman Erzinkian not home," came a voice.

Jeff Shannon thrust his big hand quickly into the opening, prevented the slide from closing.

"Cut out the run-around!" he ordered. "I can get that in New York, without coming across two continents for it. Tell Mr. Erzinkian that it's Jeff Shannon who's waiting at his door. The guy who wrote him about the armor, the golden armor of Richard the Lion-hearted. Hell's bells, man, I've come thousands of miles to see him and—"

THE servant had already departed. He returned and opened the door. Shannon stared at him curiously. The little fellow was not a Persian, but he was dressed like one. His English was very fair.

"I take you to him," he said. "This way."

Shannon followed the man along a dark, musty passage which led into another, even mustier corridor which in turn opened into another. Always he had to keep his head low. These passages were not made for a man as

tall as the young American. He began to wonder how the trick worked. Surely the house wasn't large enough to require so many long hallways. They must wind back and forth, like a maze.

"Ah," said the servant, opening a door at the end of the third passage.

Shannon stepped through. The room was almost dark. It was hot, but cooler than the blazing street, and it smelled of incense and olive oil. The rug was the thickest Shannon had ever sunk into.

On all four walls hung shirts of chain mail, cross-hilted broadswords, helmets, daggers, and circular shields bearing superimposed iron crosses. Over a saw-horse arrangement at one side hung small prayer rugs, and an ancient armoire of beautifully carved Circassian walnut stood in the far corner.

A short, stringy-looking man dressed in black alpaca and a high collar rose from a cushion.

"Yiss," he hissed in English. "Yiss, I am Narriman Erzinkian. You are Jeff Shannon. You wrote me about the all-gold armor of King Richard the Lion-hearted, no?"

He stepped forward, reached high with a limp hand. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Shannon. I know your New York. I am Armenian. Once I sold the pretty rugs there."

Now that he could see him better, Shannon found his host looked like a very hungry Napoleon. Something as Napoleon must have looked on the retreat from Moscow.

"You will please sit," Napoleon-Erzinkian invited, indicating a brocaded cushion. "That dog Xuri will bring coffee."

Xuri entered with small, eggshell cups of sweet, black coffee, pickled fruit wrapped in grape leaves, and small chunks of broiled lamb skewered on a stick. All the time the Armenian was appraising Jeff Shannon with bright, twinkling eyes.

He had seen much of the world, had

Narriman Erzinkian, and many of its people. The name told him that this young man came of Irish ancestry, and was therefore incurably romantic. There was that in Jeff Shannon's eyes which spoke of pixies and the end of the rainbow—strange in a man who stood six feet two. He looked at Shannon's hands—big and square, heavy in the palm. He had seen such hands among stevedore gangs on the East River docks.

He looked at Shannon's tanned skin, his square, hard jaw, his unruly blond hair. He had seen such features on a sergeant of Marines at Peiping. But the clear blue eyes, the broad forehead—ah, they were the features of a man who could dream dreams.

"A long journey, Mr. Shannon. A pleasant one?"

"Fair enough. New York to Paris, then the Oriental Express to Istanbul and across the Black Sea on an oil tanker to Batum. That part was pretty foul. Up here by way of Tiflis. An ox team for the last twenty miles, which took exactly one day. Seven weeks and a day from New York to Passanaur."

"Your companion did it in seven weeks, even," said Erzinkian, mockery in his voice. "He arrived yesterday."

JEFF SHANNON started. "My companion?"

"Yiss. Mr. Vangrift."

"That damn' pup!" Shannon looked less a dreamer and more like a sergeant of Marines. "He was on the same boat. He had me held up by customs in Batum. Told the authorities I was a Fascist agent."

"You know why?" demanded Erzinkian.

"I suspect it. He's after the same thing I am—the gold armor. That's okay. The more after it the merrier. But not fourflushers and blowhards like Vangrift. He's a crook and a liar!"

"Ah, so you are not in partners with him!" observed his host softly. "That

Vangrift. I know him. He has been here, and in the Caucasus before. He knows many tricks. He is a rascal, eh?"

"Let's forget Vangrift," suggested Shannon, "and get down to business."

"Good! My business!" The Armenian waved an emaciated hand toward the armor lining the wall, but his manner had subtly changed. "I sell armor and rugs, Mr. Shannon. The old armor I get from the Khevsurs back in the Caucasus, the rugs from my own people. But you are interested only in the armor, eh?"

"Yes. One suit of armor alone. The gold suit of Richard Coeur de Lion. For three years we have heard in the United States that such a suit exists, that it is among the Khevsur people, close by this village. I have been commissioned by a wealthy organization to get that suit."

"Yiss. It is worth—"

"The real thing is worth about fifty thousand dollars." Shannon eyed the Armenian hopefully.

"I have not got it," Erzinkian said. "I cannot get it. Many things I can buy from the Khevsurs, but I would not even dare ask for the golden armor. They treasure it and guard it as much as life itself."

"Then it actually exists? I haven't come on a wild goose chase?"

Narriman Erzinkian blinked his little black eyes wisely. "You should separate your questions, my friend. The answer to the first one is, yiss, the armor does exist. And the answer to the second is, yiss, you have come on a wild goose chase."

"No!" declared Jeff Shannon. "Would you mind telling me what you know of the armor? Where you think it is? Have you seen it?"

"Slow, and I tell you," said Erzinkian, his little eyes gleaming. "Listen carefully. These are the facts which I tell you. Perhaps they sound *fantastique*, but they are as true as you sit there, Mr. Jeff Shannon."

Carefully, calmly, logically, Erzinkian

kian outlined the golden armor's history. A Scotch knight named Sir John of Kinloch had been armor-bearer to King Richard during the Crusade in Palestine. Once, while out hawking, Richard and a small party of knights and men-at-arms were surprised by a horde of Saracen tribesmen.

After a running fight, the Crusaders had become separated. King Richard and a few others had finally reached the safety of their encampment. But Sir John of Kinloch with twenty other knights and their men-at-arms had been driven off to the northward. From that time they were in desperate flight. As fast as they outdistanced one band, they ran into another.

COUNTLESS skirmishes they fought. They replenished their own horses with the animals of their slain foes. Week after week they pressed forward, past Mount Ararat, past the Kura River. Finally Sir John and the miserable handful of warriors remaining to him had entered the Caucasus Mountains, that incredibly rugged and precipitous barrier between the Mongols to the north and the Moslems to the south.

"Why not remain here?" Sir John of Kinloch must have asked himself. "Farther we cannot go. Nor can we hope to return to Europe or Palestine with our throats uncut. These simple folk like us, and their women are beautiful. Perhaps one day we shall go back. If not, the crags are like our native Scotland, save that they tower monstrous high."

So, deep in the Caucasus, southwest of Mount Kasbeck, Sir John and his men drew rein forever. With them remained King Richard's golden armor, for on that fatal day in Palestine the monarch had been clad only in hunting dress. His faithful armor-bearer, at the risk of slowing his horse to the point of capture, had carried the golden armor from the plains of the Holy Land to the heights of the Caucasus.

"From time to time," Narriman Erzinkian finished, "other fugitive knights joined them. They married, had many children. They are now known as the Khevsurs, a people with whom I deal. Their armor has been kept burnished, their swords always unsheathed. Never have they been conquered.

"Many times, even in my lifetime, the Russians have tried to penetrate these mountains, to subdue the Khevsurs, and that is blood-stained fact. It is these wild people who have the golden armor. But no man will ever live to take it from them!"

CHAPTER II

The Knight Templar Ring



SHANNON sat silent on his silken cushion after Erzinkian finished. What Irishman ever listened to a brave tale of the past without his soul showing in his eyes?

So, suddenly he found himself liking this hissing little Erzinkian better. For the armor dealer had told the legend with something like reverence in his voice, a ring of absolute belief in his words.

"You'll help me—for a price—into the Khevsur land in search of the armor, Mr. Erzinkian?"

"Ah, no. It would ruin me. Never would the Khevsurs deal with me again. But I like you. You listen with your soul. Not like that Vangrift. He is a beast who listens only for profit, counting dollars with every word. For that I shall do something for you, something I would not do for him."

He bent forward, spreading his palms outward for emphasis. "When you reach the valleys of the Khevsurs you will find strange customs, as you know. They wear crosses on their clothing and call themselves Christian, yet they never heard of Christ. Also they celebrate the sabbaths of the

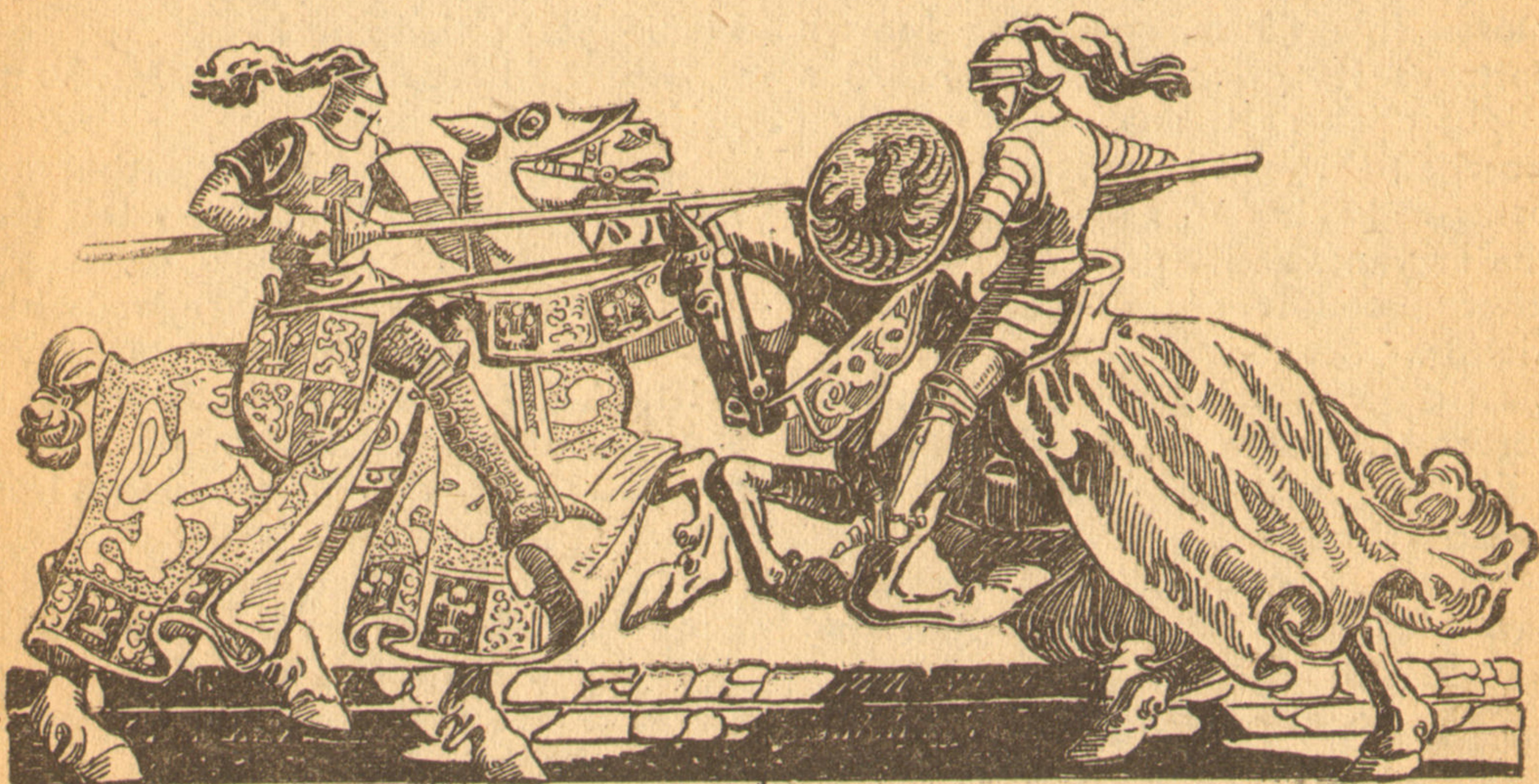
Jews and the Mohammedans—three Sundays each week—but at bottom they are pagans. They, Mr. Shannon, are the Middle Ages—preserved till this day.”

Jeff Shannon leaned toward him. “Have you seen them?”

Pride shown in the jet-black eyes. “Yiss! Once, in Khevsuretia, I saved a coward’s life, one who would not fight a blood feud, which are everyday affairs up there. This one, I smuggled him out to Passanaur. He had a daughter. She was grateful. She gave me a talisman. Like the Middle Ages,

“Yiss!” Erzinkian hissed, and then broke off as a bell tinkled in the corner of the room. “Wait!” he exclaimed, grabbing the ring and chain. “We have a visitor!”

He glided softly across the rug, lifted a shield from the wall. A small, grilled opening was uncovered there, with yellow rays of sunlight streaming through. Erzinkian beckoned to Jeff Shannon, who hastened to peer through the tiny window. He stiffened as he looked, remembering that maze of passages which he had followed to this room.



There was a splintering shock as the charging horses met

eh? She said that if ever I get in trouble in my deals with her people, this would help me.”

Erzinkian unbuttoned his collar and drew forth a gold ring suspended by a heavy gold chain. He handed it to Shannon.

The gold was so old and worn that but little of the Latin engraving remained visible, yet Shannon managed to decipher: *Milites Templi* above a crest, while below it were the words, *Non nobis Domine*.

“That’s a Knight Templar ring! They were the chief military and religious order of the Crusades. That ring must be at least seven hundred years old!”

Maze it was, a maze to hold back an invader—for there, across an angle of the foyer, not ten feet away, was the heavy door. Beyond it, impatiently jerking the bell cord and visible through the grilled panel, was the man he hated—Eric Vangrift.

“I think,” Erzinkian murmured, “that it would be better if he did not find you here! Come! I show you something.”

HE LED Shannon to a complete suit of burnished plate armor standing in the corner. He pressed a rivet on the breast-plate, then grabbed one of the steel gauntlets crossed over the great sword-hilt, and pulled. The

entire suit swung open on hinges, revealing a space the size of a huge man within.

"It was a little joke of a Shah of Persia, many centuries ago," Erzinkian explained, obviously enjoying Shannon's wide-eyed stare. "Some time I explain it to you, but now you must get in."

"Get into that thing?"

"Yiss. Our friend Vangrift will not see you, but you will see him. Through the barred visor."

Obediently, Shannon stepped into the steel shell, shoving his arms into the jointed sleeves as the front half closed in on him, squeezing him in spite of its great size. He heard a slight click as it snapped shut, then watched through the visor. Xuri appeared. Erzinkian said something to the servant, and Xuri left, to return after a couple of minutes with the visitor.

Eric Vangrift stepped quickly across the room. He was a heavily built, florid man, handsome in a coarse, theatrical way.

"Hello, Erzinkian," he boomed. "I saw a droshky outside. Is that fool Shannon here?"

"Ah, no, Mr. Vangrift." The Armenian smiled. "The droshky? Perhaps it is calling at the house across the hill. Some very beautiful ladies there have many visitors."

Vangrift removed his Panama hat and wiped his moist forehead with a silk handkerchief.

"You're lying, Erzinkian. I never saw an Armenian who didn't. But no matter. Let's get down to cases! What about that golden armor?"

The dealer's face was bland. "Ah, yiss. What about it, Mr. Vangrift?"

"I want it, that's what. And I know how to get it. I learned a lot about the Khevsurs when I was up here two years ago. I know what I need, Erzinkian, and I know you've got it. It's a certain talisman, a ring."

Xuri padded into the room with a crystal decanter and tiny crystal

glasses on a lacquered tray. Erzinkian poured two glasses of thick, amber-colored liquid and motioned to Vangrift to accept one.

Vangrift took the proffered glass and raised it to his nostrils.

"Murderer!" he snarled. "Poisoner! Cyanide, eh? I know it well. It has the same odor as burnt almond. You'd poison me, eh?" He smashed the priceless crystal glass on the floor.

"This time it is burnt almond," Erzinkian said, raising the other glass and drinking its contents calmly.

Eric Vangrift gulped. "All right," he said. "To hell with it! Now, Erzinkian, where's that ring?"

"Ring? I have many rings, Mr. Vangrift."

"You know the one I mean—that old Knight Templar ring. Don't tell me you haven't got it. I know you have."

The armor dealer shrugged his shoulders. "You know much, Mr. Vangrift. A go-getter, as you Americans say. But this time you are too late. I sold the ring to a London museum last year."

"Trash!" Vangrift exploded. "I keep up with museum purchases, and I'd know about a sale like that. Quit stalling. I'll give you two thousand dollars for it."

ERZINKIAN smiled. "The same kind of dollars you gave Ahmed Vejik in Istanbul? The American banks call it counterfeit."

Vangrift's florid face flushed redder. One great arm flashed out and clutched the Armenian by the collar.

"Either you cough up that ring, or I'll tear you apart!"

The dealer's body remained relaxed; only a gleam of perspiration on his dark forehead betrayed his fear.

"I am very sorry—"

Jeff Shannon, standing in his hot steel observation post, decided he had seen enough. Vangrift would not commit murder when there was any chance of hanging for it, but he wouldn't hesitate to torture the secret

out of this defenseless little Armenian. Shannon couldn't see that occur. He shoved forward against the steel shell. Nothing happened. He shoved harder. Only then did he realize that the infernal thing closed with a spring catch. The armor fitted so tightly there was no room to use his full strength.

"Like a sardine in a can," he muttered, and caught himself just in time from crying out. He was defenseless here, and Erzinkian could not spring him loose. Better to wait. Maybe Xuri could prevent Vangrift going too far.

Xuri tried. He sprang silently into Shannon's field of vision, a native dagger known as a *kindjal* in his hand. Vangrift wasn't afraid of these two little fellows. Still keeping his grip on Erzinkian's collar, he swung around with the Armenian held in front of him, and caught Xuri's upraised arm in his left hand. He tripped him with one outstretched foot, and flung his weight forward.

The three of them went down in one writhing jumble, but Xuri was on the bottom, with Vangrift's knee in the pit of his stomach. The shock stretched the servant out cold, and before Erzinkian could wriggle away, Vangrift had renewed his grip on his collar, which tore open.

The Knight Templar ring was revealed, hanging from its gold chain. Vangrift's eyes were greedy as he snatched it. The heavy chain broke, cutting Erzinkian's scrawny neck so deeply that blood welled.

"British museum, huh?" Vangrift exulted. He rose to his feet. "The old Armenian run-around. But I happen to need this ring."

He hauled a wallet from his pocket, snatched out some bills and threw them down in the dealer's face.

"There's a hundred bucks—real money. That's just so you can't claim I stole this trinket." He straightened his rumpled linen suit and picked his hat from the floor.

"The next time I see you I'll have that gold armor. Explain that to your friend Shannon when you pull him out of whatever closet you've stuck him in. The droshky was waiting for somebody else, huh? Say, don't you think I can speak French as well as that droshky driver?"

Eric Vangrift swaggered from the room. Narriman Erzinkian rose slowly to his feet and stared after him, absently wiping blood from his neck and speaking very softly to himself. His eyes blazed with tigerish hatred.

CHAPTER III

An Assassin Strikes



"HEY!" Jeff Shannon called. "Let me out of this contraption!"

Only then did Erzinkian remember him. He released the catch and threw the hinge half back.

Shannon leaped out and started down the maze of passages after Vangrift.

"I'll get that ring!" he yelled.

"Hi! Yi-yi!" shrilled Erzinkian. "Come back here, you wild man! Vangrift is a mile away by now!"

He was right. Outside there was no sign of Vangrift. Ruefully Shannon reentered the stone house.

Erzinkian was holding a small vial to Xuri's nose, while the servant writhed and mumbled. The Armenian was grave.

"The thing I fear is that Vangrift will use the talisman ring with the Khevsurs and perhaps get the gold armor before—but come, Mr. Shannon, I said that I would tell you what the Shah of Persia used that armor for."

"You mean the sardine can?"

"Yiss. The Shah used to place Christian knights in there as a decoration for his banquet hall. While the Shah ate and drank and watched the beautiful *hareem* girls dance, the im-

prisoned knight was forced to look on, being given neither food nor water until he died. Very clever, no?"

Shannon grimaced. "Very clever. That's my first taste of the inside of armor. I don't care if it's the last. What was the idea of locking the thing on me?"

"Vangrift is a treacherous man," Erzinkian said, "and you perhaps have a quick temper. I thought to prevent trouble. But come! You were not the only one locked up in this room."

The little Armenian crossed to the ancient Circassian walnut armoire in the corner, pressed a spring catch and opened the two doors. There, revealed like a doll in a box, stood a girl. But unlike a doll, she held a revolver in her hand. She leaped out and down.

"Whew! What heat in there!" Her voice was light and musical. "Papa Erzinkian, you told me not to shoot until you were in mortal danger, but how my finger ached to kill that *Feringi*! One more second and—"

"The Soviet prisons are not pleasant, my daughter. You did well to check your impulse."

"Check my impulse!" the girl repeated. "Always you tell me that. Soon I will become a stuffed pillow!"

She dropped the revolver on one of the cushions and fled from the room in a flash of color. Her rapid steps echoed and died in the depths of the house.

Jeff Shannon stared after her, his eyes wide. There was a catch in his throat and he felt his heart leap. Never had he seen such a beautiful woman. Oval face the color of old ivory, surmounted by curly black hair; black eyes shining with roguery and challenge, glinting with mischief and amusement at the sensation she had created; a small slender body garbed in a silken robe of blue and gold which revealed her liveness and perfect grace of figure. Those roguish black eyes—

Shannon gulped, turned questioningly to Narriman Erzinkian, who was

chuckling without sound at the American's surprise.

"The girl I spoke to you about," he explained. "Eylai, whose father I saved from his Khevsur enemies and who brought me the Knight Templar ring. She comes from noble blood among the Khevsurs, which accounts for her beauty, her intelligence. Her education she received here. English, French, dancing, the violin. Unfortunately"—Erzinkian lowered his voice—"her father died. So she is now my ward, my adopted daughter. I love her as if she were my own."

"Then why stick her in a closet like that?" demanded Jeff Shannon as if he, personally, had been affronted.

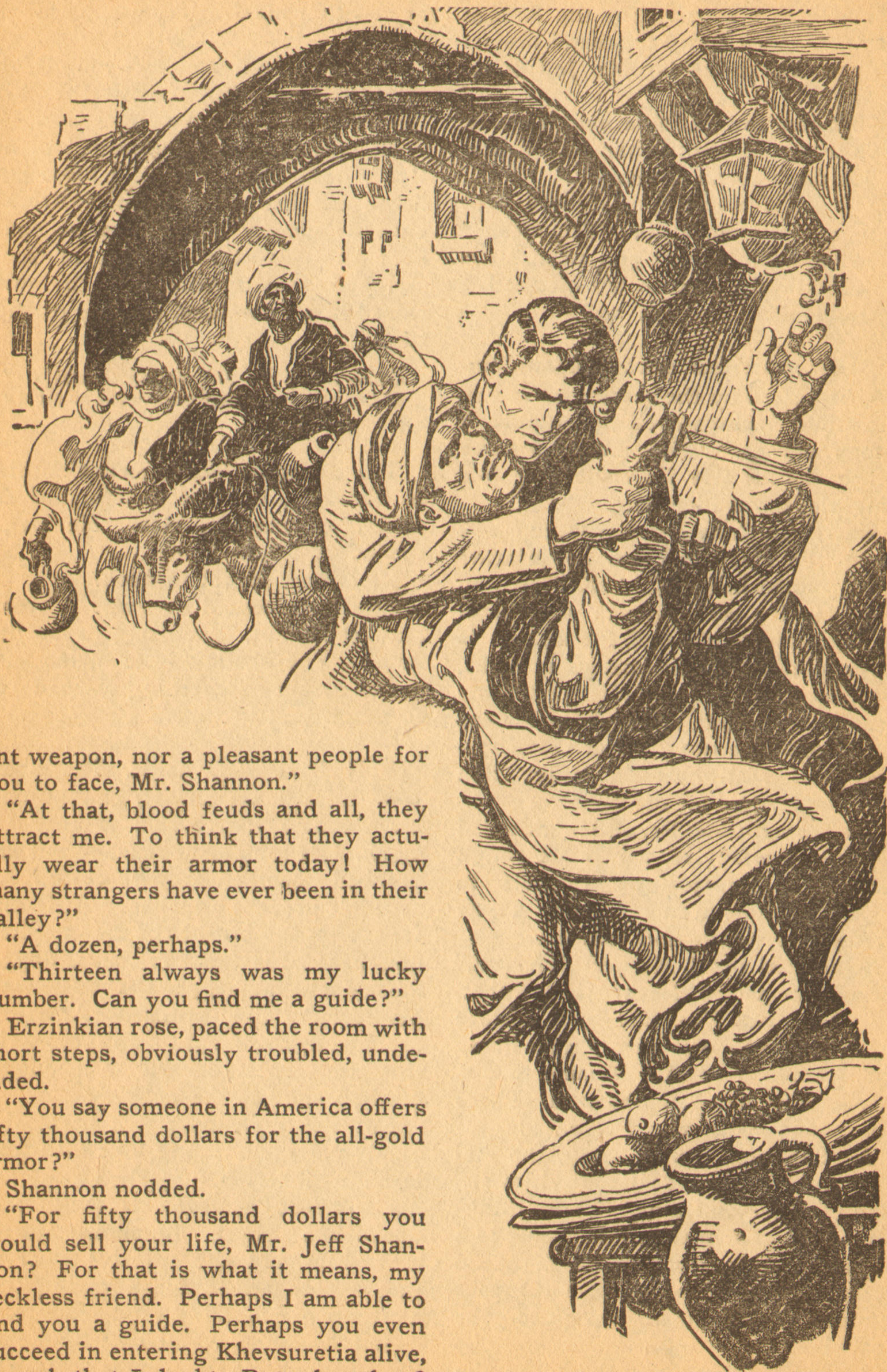
"Is it not always best for an Armenian when he talks business with foreigners to have a witness?" Erzinkian asked. "It is also best for him to have a guard. A panel in the armoire slides easily. Eylai is a perfect shot with a revolver. She is fearless. If things had been too hot—but no, no, she kept her head well. There are other ways to get the ring back—ways which won't ruin my rugs with blood, or ruin me with the Soviet authorities."

SHANNON remained staring at the brocaded curtains through which the girl had departed. Erzinkian shook his head with mock pity and touched the American's shoulder.

"Vangrift is probably starting even now after the gold armor," he suggested. "Perhaps we should make plans, yiss?"

"You're damn' right!" Jeff Shannon cried, brought back to his own problem. "You'll help me, Mr. Erzinkian?"

"Remember I have been there," Erzinkian said. "No man is safe there. They kill easily and often. They always wear shield, sword and dagger. Scarcely a man in the tribe who has not suffered hideous wounds on his face from one weapon they use—a spike-studded ring worn on the right thumb, which bites deep. Not a pleas-



ant weapon, nor a pleasant people for you to face, Mr. Shannon."

"At that, blood feuds and all, they attract me. To think that they actually wear their armor today! How many strangers have ever been in their valley?"

"A dozen, perhaps."

"Thirteen always was my lucky number. Can you find me a guide?"

Erzinkian rose, paced the room with short steps, obviously troubled, undecided.

"You say someone in America offers fifty thousand dollars for the all-gold armor?"

Shannon nodded.

"For fifty thousand dollars you would sell your life, Mr. Jeff Shannon? For that is what it means, my reckless friend. Perhaps I am able to find you a guide. Perhaps you even succeed in entering Khevsuretia alive, though that I doubt. But what then? It becomes known you desire the armor, and you are a dead man. Par-

The aroused American grabbed the slippery wrist, twisted hard

ticularly as Vangrift has the Knight Templar ring. Fifty thousand dollars is not worth dying for, Mr. Jeff Shannon!"

Shannon smiled, blue eyes serious. "It's worth far more than that to me, and I don't mean in money."

The little man's eyes lighted with half-fearful admiration. "You mean—ah, yiss, I know what you mean. It is a—a mountain no man has climbed, a veritable Mt. Everest, no?"

THE American nodded again, embarrassed by the respect he saw in the armor dealer's eyes, the respect of a man who grabs after money for one who risks his life for something less tangible, more idealistic.

Narriman Erzinkian hesitated. "You know the risks and are not afraid? Then I must help you. I shall get you a guide. He will come to your hotel at midnight with two horses. It is safer to climb the mountains at night. Besides, the Soviet soldiers have orders to let no one start. Even the tax collectors dare not go near the Khevsurs—not with half an army. You must depart by stealth."

For some time Erzinkian detailed routes, gave advice, mapped a rough campaign, interrupting himself to make the American memorize a few names and words and customs.

"One final word, Mr. Jeff Shannon," Erzinkian said. "Never forget that, above all, the Khevsurs love a brave man! Bravery will save a man many times when a coward is sure to die. Good luck, Mr. Jeff Shannon. There are things about you I like."

As Shannon turned away, the Armenian muttered softly to himself, "He climbs mountains." Then, thinking of the golden armor, inviolate in a pagan temple for seven hundred years: "But can he climb a Khevsur mountain? Man, man, you go to your death!"

After the darkness of the house, the bright sunlight of the street made Jeff Shannon blink. He blinked again as

he saw that his droshky was no longer there.

"So my friend Vangrift took it," he muttered, starting down the hill. "Score another for the opposition!"

He was far too preoccupied to notice a dark little man in a loose bur-noose tagging along behind. From a shaded balcony above him, he could hear the plaintive strains of some stringed instrument, a high voice raised in a tremulous, weirdly pitched tune:

Once more the old wound throbs,
O land of mine that once wast so richly
gifted. . . .

The Georgian words meant nothing to Shannon, but the meaning of the nostalgic tune was clear. He forgot the odors of the street.

He almost forgot to duck.

From a recessed doorway a brown arm shot out, uncoiling a rolling noose. The shadow—the swish of a brown sleeve—something warned Jeff Shannon just in time.

HE DODGED aside. The noose missed his throat, caught only his Panama hat, sailed it into the muck. His long arms reached out and grabbed coarse brown cloth, but couldn't prevent a turbaned little man from slipping out of the cloak. Shannon heard his lapel rip as a dagger flashed and the beggar snaked beneath his arm. The aroused American grabbed again, caught a slippery wrist this time, twisted hard. The dagger clinked against the cobbles.

But the little man was incredibly elusive. Eyes popping, lips mouthing strange gibberish, he jerked away and his bare feet flayed the street in frank, unabashed flight. Shannon started after him, but the fugitive swerved into a side street, disappearing into a clutter of jabbering food vendors.

Jeff Shannon walked back, picked up the cloak. It was coarse and dirty. There were hundreds like it in Passanaur. He examined the dagger, a

keen-bladed, brass-hilted *kindjal*. Every street boy had one.

"So Vangrift still thinks I'm dangerous," Jeff Shannon mused, "even though he's got the Templar ring. I might've known he wouldn't pay off my droshky just for spite. He wanted me on foot so this little rat would have a chance to knife me. All right, Vangrift, now we know, at least, that you'll stop at nothing."

CHAPTER IV

Avalanche



FOR hours, which seemed days to Jeff Shannon, he had been following that little figure ahead of him up the black mountainside.

"This," thought Shannon, "is one form of hell."

It was not the racking of the harsh-angled saddle with its high pommel and cantle, nor the rough gait of the horse, nor the fact that he could feel rather than see the chasm at the right of the trail from which occasional rocks dropped and splashed long after in a stream far below. It was not these physical tortures that really concerned him. He had endured much worse punishment many times.

The attitude of the guide worried him. In a region in which most men seemed suspicious, this one took the prize. He had appeared at ten o'clock, two hours before the appointed time, with two shaggy horses, and called Jeff Shannon from the hotel.

"From Narriman Erzinkian," he said in the darkness of the yard. He spoke French, and that not too well. "Mount! Your enemy, Monsieur Vangrift, has already started, soon after sunset."

All the American could see was a small burnoose-clad figure. From the lowered hood came a sullen voice,

husky and roughened. In answer to Shannon's questions, the fellow said that he was an *Ashuk*—a wandering poet. This was hard to believe, considering that rasping voice. He assured Shannon he had been in Khevsuretia several times, knew some of the language.

Jeff Shannon had wished to ask him numerous other questions, but the fellow had immediately mounted and taken the lead. The trail was too narrow for the riders to proceed abreast. Besides which, a person needed all his effort, all his breath, to keep balanced on the swaying, climbing horse.

"Don't suppose Eric Vangrift has put over another fast one on me?" Shannon asked himself. "How do I know this is Erzinkian's man? For that matter, how about Erzinkian and Vangrift being in cahoots? What trap am I falling into? That devil ahead!"

Shannon touched the Luger automatic in his belt. Its feel was reassuring, but his foreboding thoughts didn't shorten the night, which seemed without end.

The first faint glow of morning brought savage crags into harsh relief against the graying sky. Jeff Shannon felt awe creep over him so overpoweringly that he could feel it in the small of his back, the pit of his stomach.

It wasn't beauty. It was a rugged brutality, a cruelty of line, a menace of barrenness and sheer heights and great depths, reeking of blood, mystery and violence. Even when the sun rose there remained a chill in the mountain air, a grim depression that twisted cold fingers around a man's soul.

The little guide, as if aroused by daylight, spurred his horse ahead more rapidly. The fellow was tireless and rode with a certain careless grace. Jeff Shannon swore and tried to keep up. His horse wasn't equal to it. Eventually the guide disappeared around a cliff ahead.

Shannon cursed many things, but

principally the deserting guide. What to do now? Return down the mountain? Confess himself defeated before he had barely started? He thought of Eric Vangrift.

"Like hell!" snapped the American. "I'll lick him yet!"

HE CLIMBED the steep slopes. He slid down cliffs so precipitous that the horse's rear hoofs touched its belly. He followed defiles so narrow that his knees scraped the rock on either side. He came to bridges across dizzy chasms that were not bridges but merely two logs laid across the void and pegged down with rocks.

Mid-morning he saw an old man and woman, garbed in ragged robes, standing in front of a flat-roofed dwelling which was pressed into a hillside. Beside them stood the guide, one arm resting negligently on his horse.

Anger rasped Jeff Shannon. He spurred forward, threw himself from his horse and grabbed the guide by the neck and shoulders.

"Damn you!" he said, shaking the fellow. "What's the idea of—" He jerked the hood from the guide's face. Instantly his hands dropped to his sides. "You!" he cried.

Staring up at him, mockery in her eyes, mischief in her smile, was Eylai, the girl he had first seen like a doll in a box at Narriman Erzinkian's. Before he thought of anything else there was time for the certainty to flash through his mind that she was even more beautiful in broad sunlight. Her lips were redder, her hair blacker, her eyes more lively.

"You!" he repeated.

"You!" she mocked. "You!"

"But you—you—"

"You're sputtering," she said, and her low laughter sounded. "Why shouldn't it be I? Once each year I come up here to see my family. Papa Erzinkian told you that my dead father was driven out, disgraced. But my family still lives up here. I, too,

am well known. If anyone can get you near that golden armor which you seek, it is probably I.

"At least, Papa Erzinkian thinks so and he is very wise. He likes you, Mr. Shannon. He told me that perhaps you are the reincarnation of Richard the Lion-hearted, returning for his golden armor. Perhaps you are the king we Khevsurs have awaited so long. He said that, because you are big as Richard was and blonde and strong."

"Thanks," said Jeff Shannon shortly. "But I'm not accustomed to putting women in danger for my own profit."

"Thanks, yourself!" she said. "Don't you think I guessed that? What about my disguise, my voice last night? I did it well, did I not? But come, these good people have prepared us breakfast. Milk, some cheese and unleavened bread of a sort. And they'll care for our horses. They say that a big blond *Feringi*, a foreigner, passed here at daybreak with five tribesmen, all heavily armed and moving fast."

"Vangrift, naturally," cried Jeff Shannon. "Quick! Let's go! We have to stop him!"

"First, we eat," said Eylai firmly. "There is time."

And Shannon subsided without further argument, following her into the house. He found she had arranged a number of details, besides breakfast.

FOR a time that morning the trail widened and Jeff Shannon was able to ride beside the girl, but even her presence couldn't make him forget for long his aching bones, his cramped muscles. Her set face and half-shut eyes showed that she, too, was utterly weary.

"Damn this burnoose you made me put on!" he called, as they started across a soft mountain meadow and the clack of the horses' hoofs was silenced. "It's in the way. And it smells like stale goat!"

"I suppose," the girl said, "you'd expect to ride into Khevsuretia in full dress?"

"You also managed to leave my gun behind. Now I'm easy fish for anyone. When we catch up with Vangrifi—"

Eylai turned to stare straight at him. "Mr. Jeff Shannon, up here a gun would do you no good. You haven't the slightest idea of the danger ahead of you, danger beyond that of bullets. I'd rather that you not even guess at it. Because I, too, would like to see you get the golden armor of Richard the Lion-hearted. In a way it seems to—to suit you."

"Thanks!" he said dryly. "But a gun might do me some good with Vangrifi. It speaks a patois he understands very well."

"But we shall be long in catching Vangrifi, if we ever do. He is ahead of us. His horses are as fast as ours. Do not fret about Vangrifi."

"We've got to catch Vangrifi!" Shannon exploded. "We've got to reach that armor ahead of him. You know this country. There must be shortcuts. Find us a shortcut and we'll beat him to the punch!"

"Punch? Shortcut? Must you Americans always find a way—or die?" The girl's eyes were somber. "Mr. Jeff Shannon, you have the body of a king. Must you break it to pieces on jagged rocks?"

Shannon was not to be parried with questions. "What have rocks and broken bodies got to do with it? All I'm asking is to be shown a way to overtake that fourflusher, Vangrifi!"

Eylai was silent a long moment. Then, reluctantly: "You ask for a shortcut, and all I can offer you is a chance to die. There is a trail— No, it is not a trail; it is merely a way for goats. No one has even tried it in over forty years. We have a legend that seven out of every ten men who use that trail must die in the attempt."

Jeff Shannon nodded. "Does it shorten the way? Do you know where it begins?"

"I know where it begins. Only the buzzards know where it ends."

"Then show me! Show me the beginning, and I'll risk it alone."

The girl drew herself up. "Mr. Jeff Shannon, you are a reckless fool, but I am your guide. A guide doesn't show the way. A guide leads. Come."

Beside a tall, red pinnacle upraised like a bloody sword that forbidding shortcut began. There they left the horses, for no hoofed animal other than a goat could attempt that mockery of a trail. Even Jeff Shannon's respectful memories of the Jungfrau and Mt. Denali dimmed as he contemplated this fearful climb. The girl, born of a race of mountaineers, was pale as she flatly refused to be left behind.

They were in a hell of aching muscles, bleeding hands and knees, lungs burdened beyond belief. The two tether-lines taken from the horses acted as a safety rope; they saved Eylai's life twice. She had expected strength of this tall *Feringi*, but she was not prepared for his lithe agility, for his calmness when he glanced down into fissures and saw the bleached bones of fallen men.

THEN came a moment when she all but believed he was a god. The two were skirting the base of a huge, overhanging precipice of red rock. Under their feet stones rolled and turned, to crash down into an abyss a thousand feet below them. The ledge itself was scarcely a yard wide. Often it was almost entirely blocked by the projecting edges of jagged rock. Suddenly they were in an inferno.

Shannon had pushed aside a large boulder which blocked the trail, and paused to listen to it as it bounded and crashed into the great crevasse below. The girl was just behind him and so loud was the roar which rose to their ears that they both seemed momentarily numbed.

Then another rumble started. It was a throbbing reverberation which made the ground shake. It seemed to come from nowhere, to come from every-

where. At the last moment Shannon looked up. His eyes widened in horror. That great red overhanging butte was breaking loose, was toppling straight down on them. There seemed no escape.

"God in heaven!" he thought. "This is the end!"

He turned, lifted the slight figure of Eylai in his arms. He leaped ahead. Gone was all thought of the dangerous trail, gone was every thought except the mortal necessity of escaping those thousands of tons of rock and rubble which were toppling down on them.

Jeff Shannon did things that no man in his senses could ever do. He leaped boulders on the narrow ledge, he broad-jumped fissures. At times it seemed that he ran along perpendicular walls, and all the time Eylai was held close in his arms.

The roar, the rumble, the terrible reverberation of the avalanche increased. It was on him now and he would go down under it, he and Eylai. He gave a last despairing leap.

A jagged rock cut his face and brought blood; another one struck his shoulder, numbing it. Smaller rocks crashed into his ankles. They knocked him down. He pitched ahead, protecting Eylai with his body as they went down together. The rocks flowed over his legs. He wondered when they would engulf him completely.

The noise was deafening now. Red dust choked him, blinded him. He pulled his legs from the rubble and crawled ahead to safety, still carrying Eylai. He would never forget how white was her face or how wide her eyes.

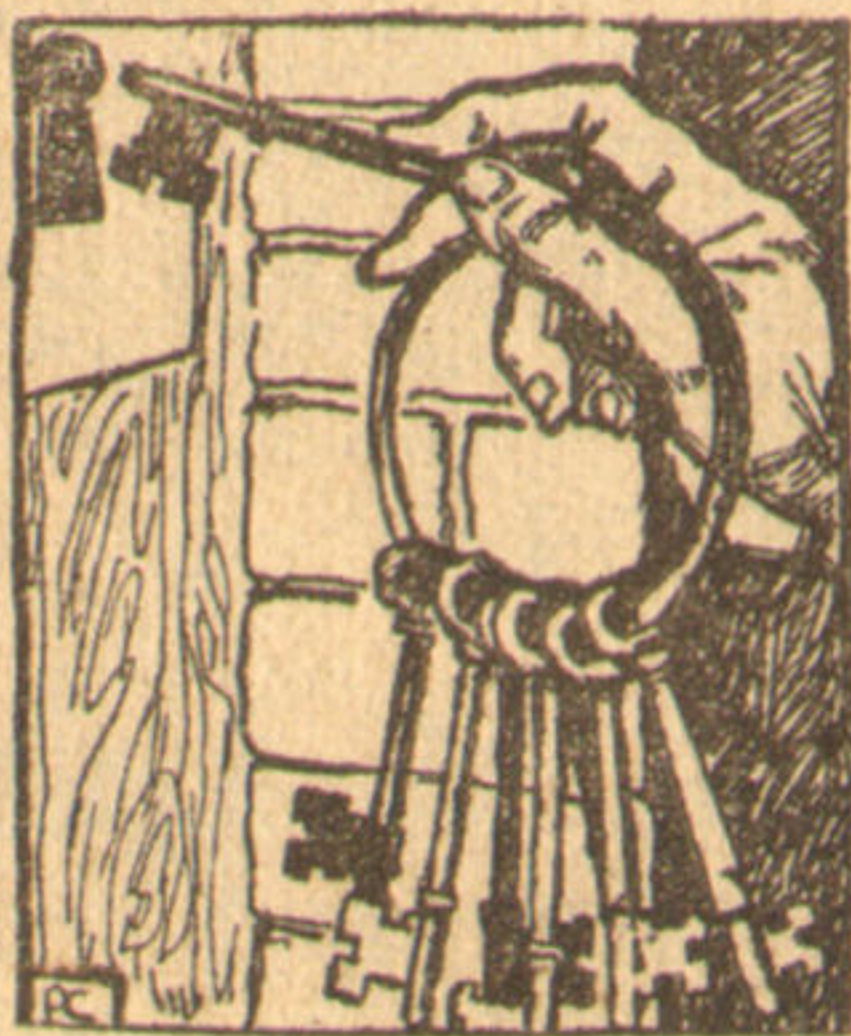
The avalanche roared on down the mountainside, and the two sat and watched it, every sense numbed by the grandeur of it, the terrible force and fear of it. They sat there and wondered whether or not they were still alive.

Eylai wondered, too, looking at this great bronzed foreigner, cut and

bleeding, the superhuman man who had done the impossible. She looked at him and wondered if perhaps he were not a god.

CHAPTER V

Capture



AN hour later Eylai crept toward a huddle of houses, Shannon's money bag in her hand. When she returned she led two horses whose spindly legs supported starving bodies.

"We have saved nearly three hours," she said. "We are ahead of Vangrift. Come."

She led the way forward on a trail which again was only a ledge cut into the mountainside. Suddenly she paused.

"Listen!" she cried.

Shannon didn't need to listen. The sound came distinctly enough. It was the clatter of hoofs and the rumble of rolling stones.

"Vangrift!" he said. "We can't keep ahead of him aboard these saw-horses. Why not wait? Vangrift and I have a little game to finish—"

Eylai reached over and slapped Shannon's horse on the rump.

"Don't be a fool!" she cried. "He's got five tribesmen with him. He'd love to finish you off! The trail narrows ahead. There's a bridge. We must reach that."

"What about blocking the trail with boulders?"

"No good! Too long. But there's a place where two logs bridge a crevasse. We could break it down—if we reach there. Listen! They're very near!"

As if to emphasize her words a sudden shout sounded behind them. It was followed by shots, and bullets ricocheted from the rocks over their heads to whine across the great defiles of the mountains. It was only a

warning volley. Jeff Shannon knew that. It was an order to stop, but the American now had no idea of stopping. The trail had widened a little.

"The horses!" he cried. "We'll turn them around, send 'em back. That'll stop 'em. They can't get past. It'll hold 'em up for a time at least. Damn it, why'd you take my gun?"

The girl nodded and slipped from the saddle. She managed adeptly to turn her horse, then helped Jeff Shannon with his. They thwacked the beasts on the rump and sent them clattering down the trail.

"Ahead," the girl ordered. "The bridge! It's not far!"

She started to run. Despite her slender fragileness and his own great strength, Jeff Shannon found her pace plenty fast enough. The altitude was great, the mountain air was thin. Heart and lungs labored and his bruised legs ached.

Two shots sounded, distinct, ominous, followed by a roar of crashing rocks as heavy bodies moved down the mountainside, gathering an avalanche with them.

"The horses!" the girl cried. "He shot them and they toppled over the edge. Nothing will stop him."

She tried to run faster. She fell, almost rolled from the trail. The American snatched her up, put her on her feet.

That flight was a nightmare now. His lungs were filled with fiery coals, his entire body seemed to throb with the beat of his heart. His burnoose was torn to rags and his knees were bloody from innumerable falls. He was certain it was a hundred years since he had drawn a full breath.

They came to a place where the trail was straight for at least two hundred yards. The mountainside echoed with the deep-throated sound of guns and the whistle of bullets.

"Sounds like business this time," Shannon panted, and he whisked the flagging Eylai from her feet.

"The bridge!" she cried. "The

bridge—over to the right! Put me down!"

THEY crawled over the two logs that were called a bridge. They began clawing hurriedly at the rocks that pegged them down. Blowing of horses and creak of leather sounded just around the rock point. Desperately they inched the near ends of the logs over the ledge.

The plunging roar of their descent was still loud as the two of them staggered up the trail to the safety of the first angle. Then the sound of gunfire ceased. Across the chasm came Vangrift's angry bellow.

"Hold up, Shannon! Don't be a fool all your life!"

Color had returned to Eylai's cheeks. Her black eyes sparkled with excitement.

"That'll stop them for a time!" she triumphed. "But we have to hurry. They'll rebuild it. There's a shelter up on the summit which I have used before. *Vite, mon ami, vite!*"

"But they'll catch us again!" Shannon protested. "And you're all in!"

"And you, Mr. Shannon," she mocked him, "are a fool all your life, because Vangrift said so." All levity left her voice. "There are ten miles of hell ahead of us, *mon ami*, so it is good you are a fool, for only a fool would attempt it."

Jeff Shannon struggled and tossed, nothing between him and a stone floor but a sheepskin robe. As bright sunlight filtered through the grilled door and reached his face, he rubbed his eyes, finally ventured to open them.

The tiny, almost circular room was strange to him, though he had seen it by candlelight the night before. But then it had been merely a cave of shadows, of no interest to a man who had gone thirty torturing hours without sleep.

The American lifted himself to one elbow, groaned as overtaxed muscles sent little darts of pain through his body.

"Eylai!" he called. "Eylai!"

There was nothing in the room but himself and the sheepskin. The chamber was possibly eight feet in diameter and cut into the wall of the mountain—cold and dank despite the small stream of checkered sunlight.

He remembered now. He remembered the fearful avalanche, the flight to the log bridge. Then the toilsome descent into another valley in which cows scarcely bigger than dogs browsed, the fording of an icy stream, the girl hobbling along, and at times, despite her brave words sobbing aloud with pain.

From then on exhaustion had merged the passage into a jumble of brief, painful visions. It had been dark when he and Eylai had reached this retreat, deserted and gloomy, but a shelter.

From a hiding place above a ruined stable she had produced two sheepskin robes and a candle.

"This stable for me," she had announced with a brave attempt at lightness. "You find your own shelter." She had hesitated, then, "You are brave, Jeff Shannon. Good night."

Where was she now? He rose stretched his arms over his head to limber his muscles and crossed to the grilled door. He tried to open it. It was locked.

For a moment the situation was so stupid that Jeff Shannon was tempted to laugh. Had she locked him in on purpose?

"Eylai!" he called. "Time for breakfast! Me, I'll take waffles and bacon and two cups of black coffee."

HIS words echoed hollowly from the rock walls. He listened, long after the echo had ceased. All seemed serene around him—not a person, not a sound.

Then motion on the mountainside to his right and above him caught his eye. He pressed his face to the rusty bars.

Horsemen! Six horsemen angling

up the mountainside, already a half mile away as the crow flies, probably three or four miles by trail. One man was riding ahead; behind came five others.

And the leading horse carried a double burden.

The heart of Jeff Shannon told him the truth even before his eyes revealed it. The five riders in a group were the tribesmen hired by Vangrift; the leading horse carried Vangrift himself—and on the saddle in front of him was Eylai!

"Damn me!" cried Jeff Shannon. "While I slept that pup sneaked up and took Eylai! Because she was my guide. Because I'm utterly helpless without her. He has the ring; he has my guide. But he can't get away with them!"

He backed across the room. Then he charged for the iron door, hurled into it. He hit it with his right shoulder, with all the angry impact of his hundred and eighty pounds. The door bulged, the bolt gave. He drew back and charged again, and pitched out into the sunlight.

BRUISED and shaken, he pushed to his feet. He stared up the trail, far above.

Did he imagine that Vangrift waved a mocking hand at him?

He turned to seek the beginning of that trail. Only then did he fully realize how great were the odds against him, what little chance he had of success. Or even life, in this strange, wild country. But he would follow the tracks of those horses foot by foot and mile by mile, straight into the enemy's camp.

The goal, strangely enough, was no longer the golden armor of Richard the Lion-hearted alone. That had once seemed of value beyond price, worth any risk, any suffering and peril. But hate is beyond price, too, and hate rode ahead with Vangrift. Because Eylai also rode with Vangrift.

CHAPTER VI

Face to Face

EYLAI talked over her shoulder to Vangrift as the horse jogged the two of them up the mountain trail.

"It is well that you rescued me from that adventurer who calls himself Jeff Shannon," she said, and tried to sound convincing. She had made up her mind quickly what she must do. To resist Vangrift was impossible; therefore she must try to betray him.

"At first I resisted you," she went on, "but that was when I thought you were a wild tribesman. Tell me, aren't you a friend of Narriman Erzinkian? Haven't I heard him speak admiringly of you?"

Eric Vangrift grunted. His mind, too, was considering many things.

"Then why did you help that fool Shannon escape us? Help him destroy the bridge? And this morning we could have popped him off while he slept."

"And gain what?" demanded Eylai. "Leave that job to Nature—and the natives. He'll not last long. In the mountains I helped him because I thought we were being chased by murdering nomads. Besides, at that time I trusted him."

"And you don't trust him now?"

"No!" Eylai spat the word. "Not since you have told me he is such a villain. And he tried to make love to me. Any man who tries that I hate! I will kill such a man! Always!" She made a motion of stabbing with a knife, and her eyes themselves stabbed with fiery darts.

"Whew!" breathed Vangrift. "A regular spitfire! But how did you happen to be guiding Shannon?"

"Because he hired me to guide him. He heard in Passanaur that I grew up in this country. He offered me five

thousand American dollars if I helped him get—get a certain thing."

"What was it he wanted so badly?"

"I mustn't say."

Eric Vangrift threw back his florid face and laughed aloud.

"You don't have to tell me," he said. "I know well enough. It's the golden armor of Richard the Lion-hearted."

Eylai started with feigned surprise, turned again and studied his face.

"How did you know?" she asked. "Is it possible you—"

"I'm after the same thing," Vangrift declared. "And listen! If I get it and you help me, I'll pay you ten thousand dollars American."

"You mean it?" she said. "You really mean it?" She was silent a long moment and when she spoke it was as if she were musing aloud. "Ten thousand dollars will buy me many things," she murmured. "It will take me out of Passanaur. To Paris. Beautiful gowns and jewels. Ten thousand dollars is a great sum of money."

"And if you help me enough," declared Vangrift, anxious to seal a bargain, "I'll make it even more. But tell me! How do you happen to speak English?"

Again Eylai hesitated. This man, who knew so much, could he have heard of her in Passanaur? Well, this whole game was a chance, and any chance which might help Jeff Shannon, which might hinder Vangrift, was worth the taking.

"I was brought up in the family of an English missionary. Then for a time I was a servant to Narriman Erzinkian. That is when I learned to hate all men."

VANGRIFT took a deep breath and smiled to himself. What the girl told him sounded very good. He had found a tool, a valuable tool. This girl knew the country. Perhaps she even knew—

"Have you ever seen the golden armor?" he demanded.

"Yes, of course. As a child. Many times. They call it the Golden Hau-berk. It is the most valuable possession of one of the inner tribes—my tribe. They keep it under guard and always shining like new. They think that some day Richard the Lion-hearted himself will return and claim it for greater deeds of glory. They keep the armor ready for the return of Richard."

Vangrft nodded his head. "I heard that story first two years ago when I was here. And I have heard it again this time. How will they know King Richard when he returns?"

Eylai considered rapidly. How best to help Jeff Shannon, the man who was a near-god? Perhaps she could betray Vangrft by half-truths.

"First," she said, "my people will know the real King Richard because he will be able to answer several secrets and sacred questions. Then he will have a ring, a Knight Templar ring which bears a crest with the words, '*Milites Templi*', and other words on it. That's the ring Richard will wear on his right thumb when he comes for his armor."

"You mean a ring like this?" From a pocket inside his chamois vest Vangrft produced the Knight Templar ring.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh!" She slid from the horse to the ground, turned and looked up at Vangrft, pretending awe and innocence.

"Oh, maybe it is true! You are big like Richard was. You are fair and English. Anyway, it is more simple now. You will show them the ring. The armor will be yours. Ten thousand dollars will be mine."

"Sounds pretty good," Vangrft conceded. "Here! Get up here again! We'll ride straight into the village and do our stuff, eh?"

He swung the girl on the saddle in front of him. Suddenly he caught her arm and twisted it behind her back.

"If you betray me," he said, "I'll tear you apart." He twisted the arm

again, higher. Eylai's face went white. The torture was unendurable. She tried not to scream, but a scream of agony burst forth from her and echoed down the mountainside. "If you betray me," repeated Vangrft.

Just after sunset they reached the village where the presence of Eylai quickly gained them admission.

ERIC VANGRIFT stood at last in the center of a large conical room vastly pleased with himself. He assumed a kingly attitude—shoulders back, head up, one hand on a dagger in his belt, the other arm thrown behind his back.

Standing thus, he reviewed the situation. He had gained entrance into this guarded Khevsur village because he had the captured Eylai with him. At the gate—an iron-studded barrier between two stone pillars—they had been stopped by a dozen men with sharpened pikes, hairy men who wore chain mail and were hostile. With a few rapid words the girl had changed the attitude of the guardians from enmity to suspicious awe and wonder. They had lowered their pikes as Vangrft and the girl entered, but they had raised their weapons again to bar the other five horsemen, the tribesmen who had escorted Vangrft.

"Let the dirty fellows take care of themselves," Vangrft declared. "We have no further use for them, eh?"

"Not if you are brave enough," the girl said, and smiled wisely, remembering how Vangrft had twisted her arm.

She had led him straight to this central building with its huge sunken fire, where he was now practising his kingly postures.

"Now you must act like a king," she had instructed Vangrft. "Like Richard the Lion-hearted."

The regal attitude came easily to one of Vangrft's arrogant nature; he loved the idea of being a second Richard the Lion-hearted. The more he strutted and posed, the more con-

vinced he was that the Khevsurs would accept him, if not as a reincarnated king, at least as a very powerful and heroic man—a man not to be defied. But his role was that of Richard, and he would concentrate on playing it as long as it got him anywhere.

"While you sleep the Khevsur high priests and tribal leaders will be called from all places," Eylai had said. "All must be here to—to welcome the reincarnated king who has come to claim his golden armor."

"The armor!" Vangrift had repeated. "Where is it?"

"You will see it soon enough! Good night, sire!"

During the night Vangrift's slumber had been disturbed fitfully by the sound of many pounding hoofs. It was morning now, a pink and gray morning with sun and fog competing for dominance, as they so often do high in the Caucasus. Through a slit-like window he could see a portion of the village itself.

The houses were three and four stories high and built of the same rock and trees as their surroundings. So tightly were they pressed against the mountain wall that they seemed a part of it. In the windows of the second floors appeared the heads of women and children.

The whole town was buzzing almost audibly with excitement. Down the steep slope of the mountainside a lone horseman came plunging. At the gate of the village a half-dozen guards waited, their tattered chain mail and bits of armor revealing rust and dilapidation in the light of day.

Why didn't something happen? Were they waiting for some powerful tribal leader to arrive? Where was the girl? If she betrayed him, if she played him false, he would wring her pretty neck with his two hands. But no! He had bought her, all right. Ten thousand dollars will buy almost anyone.

And perhaps he could save some of that ten thousand dollars of purchase price. After he got the golden armor, perhaps he could go with her to Paris and—

A BRIEF knock sounded on the door. It opened. A middle-aged man entered, and behind him twelve other men were grouped.

The spokesman advanced. At first sight he was an unprepossessing-looking fellow with his beard falling far down a loose surcoat which covered a shirt of steel links. His legs were clad in skin-tight trousers which were thrust into short chamois boots.

[Turn Page]

THE
AWAKENING
OF
MR. A.



MR. A.: Whew! I hate the very thought of having to take a cathartic.

MR. B.: You wouldn't if you'd only try Ex-Lax. It tastes swell—just like chocolate.



MR. A.: Why, that's what we give to the youngsters. What I need is dynamite!

MR. B.: Don't kid yourself! Ex-Lax is plenty effective, but it won't upset you.



LATER

MR. A.: Boy, I feel like a million this morning! That Ex-Lax sure is great stuff!

MR. B.: You said it, pal! We've been using Ex-Lax in our family for 30 years!

The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle*! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family

10¢ and 25¢



The men behind him were younger, but equally ragged, with pieces of armor revealed by rents in their clothing. Yet there was nothing squalid about them. Their eyes were straightforward, almost fierce in their intentness. Their well shaped heads were held high. They were serious men and intelligent ones, and Vangrift wondered momentarily just how far his pose of King Richard would go with them.

THE leader of the Khevsurs obviously was of importance, a *mirza*, a prince of princes in a land where there were no kings—as yet. Vangrift wished Eylai were there to help him. He remembered her instructions, and spoke first in French, imperious and loud.

“Why have you kept me waiting, you dog? This delay pleases me not at all.”

The Khevsur bowed and folded his hands across his breast. Obviously he had understood the words, yet when he answered there was little similarity in the speech. Vangrift understood it, however. It was old Norman French, the tongue of King Richard and his crusading knights, related to the French he had heard around Neufchatelle, a French with strange inflections and outmoded words, but not too difficult for the quick ear of a linguist like Vangrift.

“We have been delayed, sire,” the man said, and Vangrift failed to notice the anger in the fierce eyes. “Another *Feringi* has been found at the gate. This morning at daylight he fell there, dirty and bloody and half-dead, and the guards brought him in. At first we wished to kill him, but the same girl who came with you has interceded for him.

“Now he casts doubts on your claims, and the girl agrees with him. We”—the old man indicated his followers—“after due consultation, have decided that it would be well for you to face each other, you and this *Fe-*

ringi, who is also big and fair-haired.”

“I can’t waste time on such dogs!” roared Vangrift, furious that Eylai had taken up the cause of Jeff Shannon. “Take him out and throw him over a cliff!”

The old Khevsur leader tugged perplexedly at his beard. “No, you must face him.” He turned to his followers. “Bring the other *Feringi* in.”

The door was flung open. Vangrift turned toward it as, like an enraged panther, Jeff Shannon broke from his guards and sprang at him.

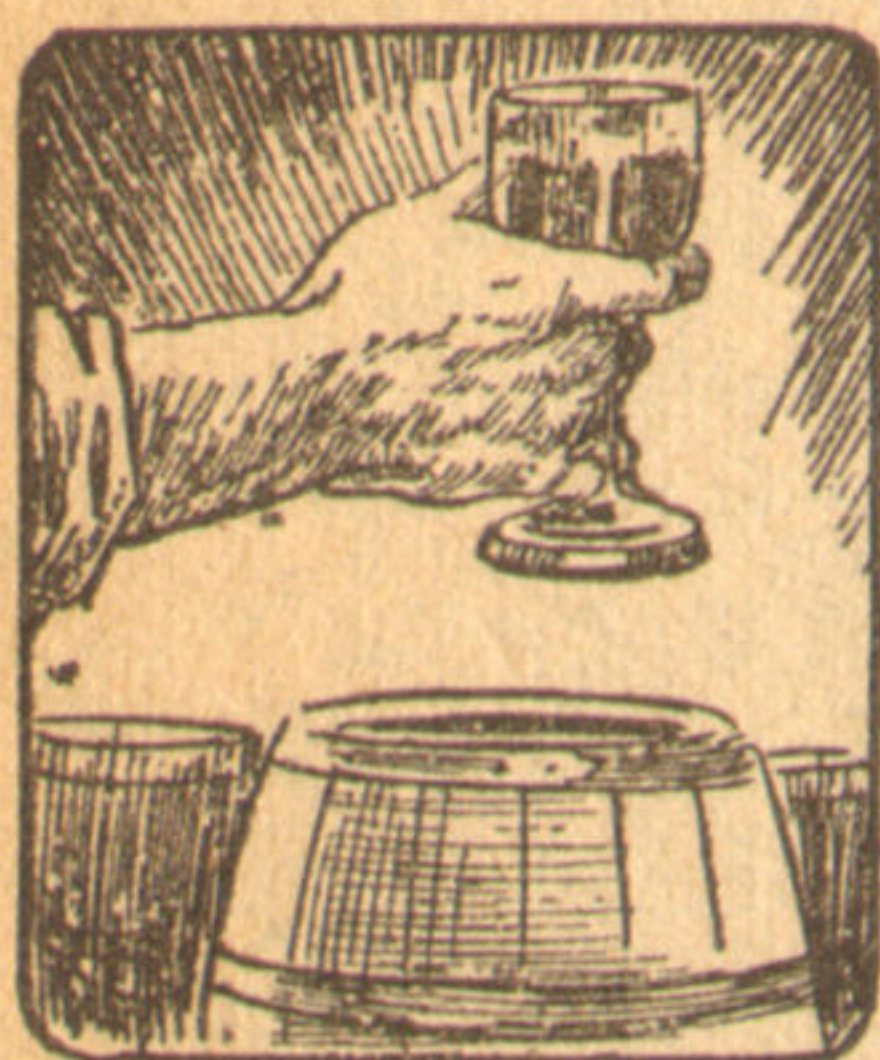
Shannon swarmed over Vangrift. His right arm shot out in a single, jolting blow which twisted as it struck Vangrift’s jaw. The latter fell backward, reeling, falling. Someone caught him, helped him to his feet. He blinked momentarily and rubbed his jaw. Then he thrust himself forward, hatred and cold murder in his eyes.

This was a scene the Khevsurs would talk about for years, which would perhaps be related down the centuries. Two yellow-haired *Feringis*, two blue-eyed giants glaring like wild animals at each other, eager and anxious to kill. One had struck the other a blow which would have felled an ox. Such a blow! Something to tell one’s children and grandchildren. Not a blow with a spike-studded iron ring attached to the thumb—they knew from experience how terrible that could be—but a blow with a bare fist which had veritably lifted a gigantic man from his feet.

Vangrift felt for his revolver. It was gone. That girl, Eylai, must have taken it. But he carried a dagger. He sprang at Shannon, and the dagger cut a glistening arc in the air.

The Khevsurs formed naturally into a ring. Here was a blood feud much like their own, except that the fighters were bigger and stronger. Too bad, perhaps, that one man was unarmed, but someone would have to die, anyway. That was the way of blood feuds, and all Khevsurs knew it.

CHAPTER VII

The Inquisition

THE moment of mortal combat between these great blond *Feringis* was near. But this was not it. It was Eylai who prevented the unarmed Jeff Shannon and the armed

Vangrift from fighting their blood feud.

Her cry sounded, and everyone turned. She was in the throng at the door. Neither Shannon nor Vangrift could see her, although both recognized her voice. She spoke rapidly, passionately, and as she spoke the guards seized both Shannon and Vangrift.

The old Khevsur leader, the *mirza*, nodded.

"The girl is right," he explained. "Either of these men might possibly be the great king returned. True, one of them has the sacred ring, but the girl claims it was stolen from the other one. The gods have surely sent King Richard to claim his armor, but which of these is the king? There is but one way to answer that."

The Khevsurs shouted their agreement. "The test of the secrets! The contest in the *masjid*!"

"Yes," agreed the *mirza*. "Then later, if necessary, the mortal combat to see who dies—to see who is the true Richard. Now to the *masjid*!"

Breathing hard and eyes metallically bright, Jeff Shannon and Vangrift were marched under heavy guard across the stone flags to the *masjid*, the sacred templelike structure beyond the square. From the doors of this temple, blatantly pagan despite its decorations of Christian crosses, the chief priest appeared.

With him he brought a horn cup of *muzzhu*, the sacred beer brewed only by the priests. Drops of this were sprinkled to the four winds while the

priests murmured prayers in a chanting cadence. Next a sheep, which seemed to appear by magic on the steps of the temple, was slaughtered, and the chief priest painted a cross of fresh blood on his forehead.

Jeff Shannon glanced around him. He realized for the first time that the village was perched atop a huge, mesa-like rock, apparently unscalable. The only approach to it was by a high bridge which led from the great gate to a notch in the adjoining mountain-side.

Evidently the notch was a pass leading through the divide.

Shannon gazed at the bridge. It was built of blocks of reddish stone, almost purple. He must have crawled across that great span when entering the village, but he had been so exhausted that he could remember none of it. Now the sight of it filled him with a new respect for this strange people, so starkly primitive and yet capable of such an engineering feat.

Heavy and crude it was, yet its length and its great height made it seem almost graceful and spidery. That bridge, thick at the base and narrowing to a scant eight feet in width along the top, without railings of any kind to prevent a fall to the half-seen rocks below, was this village's defense. A single Horatius could hold it against any primitive army.

Jeff Shannon was oppressed by an unexplainable feeling that those stone blocks and the sharper stones far below had seen such strange, grim things again. As he turned away he felt cold, like tiny fingers, tingling at the base of his spine.

His guards urged Shannon through the crudely carved entrance of the *masjid*. Inside every man, woman and child of the village had gathered, as if by magic. Dimly seen above the heads of the crowd, hanging against the walls, were broad-swords and shields, black with the smoke of centuries.

AT ONE end of the huge room lay tier after tier of primitive hogsheads filled with *muzzhu*. Shannon thought of the Vikings and their sacred beer. Someone pressed close to him. He heard a whisper.

"Wield the sword when it is offered!" It was Eylai's voice, but he could not see her.

The windowless interior would have been dark but for the roaring fire in the center and the sputtering torches in the hands of the priests. Red light and black smoke. The clank of arms and armor as men moved to peer curiously at the tall blond *Feringis*. The tight breathing and hushed voices of human beings faced with something they considered divine.

Shannon was led to a place beside the high flames. He scanned the crowd again for a glimpse of Eylai. But the girl seemed to have vanished as mysteriously as she had appeared, ages back, in that hotel yard at Passanaur. Among all these peering eyes, Shannon felt more alone than ever he had in the jungles of Brazil or on the peaks of the Alps.

Neither Shannon nor Vangrft moved a muscle as they faced each other. Zhawhan *Mirza* spoke first, explaining to the two men that this was a questioning both spiritual and temporal. Then the high priest held up a broadsword which, unlike its dingy counterparts on the walls, was burnished bright. He held it close to Vangrft's eyes and pointed to the three intertwined letter, A. M. D., exquisitely engraved on it. He asked what they signified.

"The glorious battle-cry of the Crusaders," Eric Vangrft answered nonchalantly. "'*Ave Mater Dei*'—'Glory to the Mother of God!'"

The high priest nodded and moved on to Jeff Shannon, held the sword up as before, then asked the same question.

"Score one for Vangrft," Shannon thought.

He could have answered just as cor-

rectly, but Vangrft had been given first chance and so had stolen his thunder. How to get around it? He remembered Eylai's whispered advice.

"It is my sword," he said with all the majesty he could muster. "The sword of Richard of England." It was no guess, he felt, he just *knew* he was right, else why the sword's obvious sacred character among these people? He raised his voice. "Song and story tell you how I may prove that this weapon is mine!"

Amazed, the priests muttered among themselves. Shannon felt a quick thrill run through him. He took the sword from the venerable hands, thanking his stars for his great stature and strength as he recalled the legendary tales of Richard's prowess with the great sword no other man could wield. He remembered one of these facts. Would it be the same one Sir John of Kinloch had handed down to his descendants?

Striding to the entrance doors he picked a spot where the wood, inches thick, was not reinforced by metal. Then, holding the hilt designed for a two-handed grip in his right fist alone, he drew a deep breath and thrust that mighty weapon through the entire thickness of the wood, so that nearly a foot of the blade protruded from the far side.

A gasp and then a cheer from the audience told him that this was the feat they knew. This was something only one man could perform—Richard *Coeur de Lion*!

Tight-lipped, Jeff Shannon hid the numbing pain which paralyzed his forearm after the shock of that tremendous thrust. Withdrawing the weapon, he turned and handed the sword back to the priest. He felt the honors were even so far.

HE MORE than held his own during the long inquisition that followed, and it was due to his real respect and sympathy for these people and their simple faith. Some of his

answers to their questions were halting. But in his favor was a kinship of spirit and a lack of that contempt which colored his opponent's voice. Vangrift—misled by Eylai—was too brutally contemptuous for a proud people, and often scarcely bothered to reply.

And suddenly Jeff Shannon forgot his opponent and the strain of this inquisition. Just a flash of a mail-clad arm among a hundred others like it, but it was enough. Beneath a round, steel helmet, oval face framed by a protective fringe of dangling steel mesh, was Eylai!

Where had she come from? Had she been there all along? And why the warrior's dress? Well, what did those things matter as long as she was there, lending him her sympathy and aid.

Zhawhan *Mirza* suddenly raised his right fist high above his head, and the spiked iron ring on his thumb gleamed dully.

As if this were a salute calling for a response, every man's right hand in the entire assembly rose, displaying its heavy, brutal ring.

Wondering, Jeff Shannon glanced at Vangrift, saw his eyes lower quickly to the gold Knight Templar ring on his own right thumb. There was a moment before anyone spoke, and Jeff Shannon was conscious of a great suspense here.

Through the lurid swirls of flame-tinted smoke he searched for a clue in Eylai's face, but her eyes stared back at him with the fixed blankness of a martial statue. The high priest was speaking.

"These questions of the sacred catechism have been correctly answered by both of these giant blond *Feringis*. Yet we know that the great king of whom our forefathers told us cannot be two men. One of these is true, one false. We shall know how to deal with the false!"

The great room filled with sound. "The bridge! They'll fight on the

bridge. They will fight to the death on the bridge!"

Eylai came to Jeff in his narrow cell in the round tower, where his guards had placed him. She was still clad in her masculine dress, still wearing her ragged shirt of mail and her steel helmet.

Shannon forgot the ogling, curious guards as she came through the door, but then, before he spoke her name, he remembered them and stood silent, pretending not to recognize her. If this were a disguise she wore, ineffective though it was, he wouldn't give her away.

She understood and tried to smile.

"It's all very silly," she said in English. "You will laugh when I tell you. You see, when I rode into the village with that dog Vangrift I was sitting with him on his horse. That is taboo with us, but I had forgotten. My relatives locked me in my room for such a violation of etiquette."

He gazed at her very earnestly. "Eylai, I laugh at nothing here. It isn't because I'm probably going to die soon; it's just because I don't find this people laughable. But you couldn't fool your people with that outfit."

"No. I fool nobody. But even in Khevsuretia we wink at some of our customs. My relatives knew they couldn't keep me away from the catechism, so they let me go as a man, because as a girl I was supposed to be doing penance. Everybody knows, but everybody is satisfied, do you see?"

Shannon grinned. "Just like everybody knows Vangrift and I are a couple of impostors who ought to be kicked out on our ears, eh? But they want to see somebody wear that golden armor so they pretend to believe one of us, is that it?"

SHE came close to him, and her eyes were solemn.

"You know that is not true. These people—my people—sincerely believe one of you is King Richard returned."

Something in her voice warmed him.

"But you, Eylai, you don't believe all this stuff?"

She hesitated. "No. I don't really believe it. But I believe the spirit of it. I believe the man who wins on the bridge—the man in armor and on horseback who wins this mortal tourney—will be everything a returning king should be."

"Armor? Horses?" repeated Shannon. "So that's the way it will be! That's all right. It's fitting. But what if Vangrift wins? Will you believe that fourflusher is everything a king should be?"

"He won't win," Eylai replied, leaning toward Shannon in the intensity of her conviction. "When you ride your horse into Vangrift's on the bridge tomorrow you will still know that the bravest, most honorable man always wins."

Shannon took one of the two remaining cigarettes from his pack and lighted it. He was completely serious now, speaking as much to himself as to Eylai.

"I'm going to give the devil a good run for his money, that's all I know." He looked down at the girl. "That's fun, Eylai. That's as near pure ecstasy as a man ever gets, except—"

He turned away from her, and didn't finish. After all, he was in no position to finish. But there was something else he could say, something he owed to himself and to this girl to say.

"Look, I didn't feel this way when I started. I started out to get a valuable suit of armor, something that would be envied by every museum in the world. I wanted to do what no other man had ever done before, and I wanted to beat Eric Vangrift doing it."

He ground the cigarette under his heel.

"But now the thing that bothers me is that when Vangrift and I pile on a couple of horses and fight on that bridge tomorrow, we're both four-

flushers. We're acting like a couple of chivalrous knights of old, when what we're really doing is putting on a fight for a fifty-thousand-dollar purse with the added attraction that death takes the loser!"

She understood him. His words were plain enough. Yet she knew he was missing something here. He was a man who, during the inquisition, had been very close in spirit to the men around him, very close to the Middle Ages.

She knew that, because she had seen it in his face, heard it in his voice. It had not been acting with him, not a role played with eyes fixed on the main chance, as Eric Vangrift had played it.

"Jeff Shannon," she said, forgetting the guards, the cold stones, forgetting everything but his strong, troubled face, "perhaps you will die tomorrow. You will win, that I know, but usually both winner and loser are knocked by the shock of their meeting over the edge." She lowered her eyes. "It was from such a combat that—that my own father fled."

HALF fearfully she put her hands on his shoulders.

"In spite of all I could do, Vangrift has taken almost every advantage. He will wear the best armor. His spear will be sharper and his sword keener. The fight is at dawn so the sun will be in his favor. For you I have done my best. The horse you will have under you will be the strongest, bravest horse in the village. It belongs to my uncle. He has promised it. It is a great black, and may give you more chance.

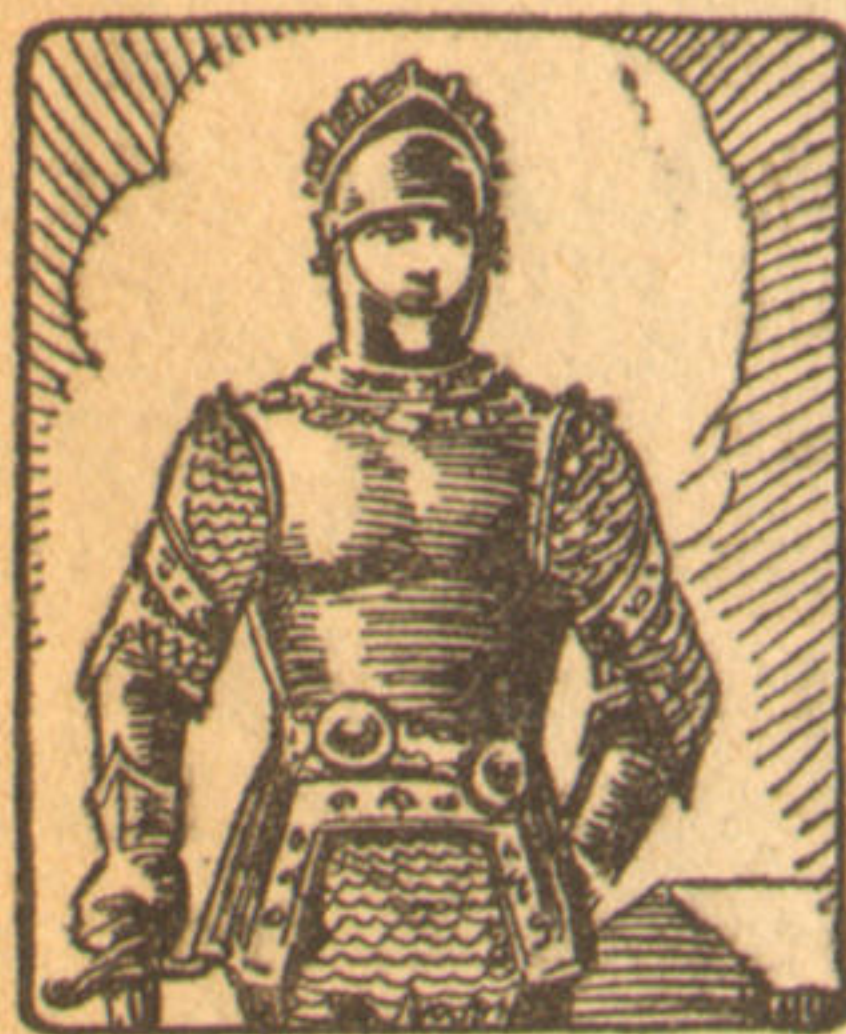
"Oh, you must win! If Vangrift wins it will ruin my people, for anything he touches is ruined. No matter what you felt before coming here, tomorrow you will be fighting to save the spirit of the Khevsurs, and their spirit is their life! I mean it, Jeff Shannon. Tomorrow Eric Vangrift will have the devil riding with him!"

He comprehended her in amazement. The devil was something very real to her, something very real to every Khevsur. And something, devil or not, was very real to him then. Because it was so real, he grinned and tried his best to appear as bluntly casual. He looked again like that sergeant of marines whom Narriman Erzinkian had seen in Peiping.

"Okay," he said. "Bring all your friends. It'll be a whale of a fight tomorrow, anyhow—a fight to death!"

CHAPTER VIII

Trial by Combat



COLD, dank mist shrouded that high mountain dawn. Jeff Shannon impatiently sat his horse at the far end of the bridge, with the notch behind him seeming to pierce the black cliffs like a sharp gray sword rending them.

Shivering in the cold, Shannon looked back at it, wondering if he would ever travel that narrow pass again. Above him, the windows of the houses were filled with the heads of curious, excited people. Armor-clad warriors and small, oddly mature boys milled around him, yet kept the distance due a claimant of the Golden Hauberk.

Across the narrow bridge, barely visible in the fog, stood the high gates of the village. The walls were nearly obscured by the spectators there. The dark browns, the reds, the purples of their clothing were robbed of color by the mist.

Jeff Shannon shifted restlessly in the high-pommeled saddle, trying to accustom himself to the weight of the armor he was wearing. Steel helmet was harsh against his forehead. Long-sleeved, long-skirted link mail reached from his throat to his knees and was covered by a tattered surcoat bearing a crudely embroidered cross. There

were dark stains on that surcoat, and Shannon, glancing down at the sharp rocks below the bridge, wondered what had happened to its former owner.

He adjusted the shield on his left arm, marveling at the dents and deep gouges in the solid iron he saw there. Why didn't Vangrift appear? This was timeless agony, this waiting.

Drawing his sword a few inches from its scabbard, he studied the sharp-ground edges of it. Armor, swords, and bucklers—what a masquerade! But Jeff Shannon knew it wasn't that. Nothing that is life and death can be masquerade. Richard of England and countless other champions must have gone through just these same sensations, felt this same weight of armor, seen these same gray dawns before battle. What were seven or eight hundred years? Men didn't change.

With his tall black horse standing like a rock beneath him, Shannon forced himself to relax. This should be a good fair fight. Neither he nor Vangrift knew much about the management of a lance; neither of them was accustomed to the weight of armor. But it would be a good fight. Vangrift was a crook, a ham actor, and a ruthless thief, but he had the strength and courage to fight.

Fumbling awkwardly, Shannon pawed under his surcoat, under his shirt of mail, and drew out a crumpled package. From it he took his last cigarette—saved for this moment. He started to light it, and then, suddenly, he found he couldn't. You could wear armor and smoke a cigarette during a masquerade. But, damn it, this wasn't a masquerade! This was real, this was the Middle Ages.

He returned the cigarette to his pocket. Perhaps, if he lived, he would feel like smoking it some time. But if he died, he would die exactly as King Richard would have died—with a horse beneath him, and a lance in his hand, and a battle cry on his lips.

His head jerked up at the abrupt metallic blare of a trumpet from across the chasm. Through the wispy layers of mist he saw a huge white horse appear at the far end of the bridge. Seated upon it was a broad, heavy-shouldered man clad in gold armor, who raised his lance high, lowered it, raised it again in response to a burst of cheering.

AND then Eric Vangrift's luck, which had run strong before, ran even stronger. Within a few seconds of his appearance the mists gathered themselves in headlong flight, and the morning sun glinted and blazed against his golden armor like light gone mad. Seven hundred years old, that ancient gold, but it had been cared for with such reverence that it shone like metal fresh from the furnace. Jeff Shannon, looking at it, was dazzled by a brightness which made his eyes waver.

Eric Vangrift had chosen his time well; it lent majesty to his appearance and blinded his opponent. Damn him! He had all the breaks. The villagers were largely on his side, because he had arrived at their gates first, on horseback, while Shannon had crept to the gates, a half-dead man. They had given Vangrift, despite all Eylai could do, the best of weapons, positions, armor. All right, let him have them! There was such a thing as raw courage, worth more than shining gold.

The trumpet sounded again. Two men in purple rushed up to Jeff Shannon to adjust his accoutrements, to tighten the girths, to check bridle and bit. Then Shannon swung his tall mount around, urging him a few feet up the road. He turned him again for a headlong gallop toward the narrow bridgehead.

Just as the black's hoofs thundered hollowly upon the first stones of the bridge, the trumpets blared a third time, and then Jeff Shannon was lost in a soundless, motionless, timeless

world where nothing mattered but the point of his own lance and, far out ahead, the tip of another lance with a blinding flash of gold behind it which grew ever larger, and larger, and larger.

There was a splintering shock as the charging horses passed. And then his shield, and the arm holding it, seemed to disappear and leave him with nothing but a great, numb ache along his entire left side. But it didn't matter. Nothing mattered but the thrill of the shock to his right arm which told him that his own lance had met something solid. Even that was forgotten as the flowing mane of his black horse rose up before his eyes, like a smothering cloud, and he felt himself rising higher and higher, until it seemed nothing could save him from going over backward.

The big black caught himself just in time, and as Shannon flung his weight forward, he settled back, front hoofs pawing into space as he fought to stay on that narrow width of stone. Shannon caught a glimpse of jagged rocks far below, and then the length of the bridge was before him again.

Swinging his black around, he saw the white horse struggling up from its haunches and Vangrift staggering uncertainly to his feet, his golden helmet gone and his blond hair lank and wet against his head.

Only then did Shannon give thought to his left arm and the shield that should be there. The shield was gone, torn away by the impact. As he flexed the fingers of his hand he felt pain flow along his arm to the shoulder.

The trumpet blared warning. A warrior unhorsed must fight on foot or surrender. Eric Vangrift understood this. He stared irresolutely at Jeff Shannon, wondering whether his enemy would exercise his right and run him down.

But Jeff Shannon couldn't fight that way. He dismounted, tossed away what was left of his lance, and drew his long sword. Vangrift, pale with

relief, unsheathed the bright blade bearing the sacred letters, "AMD," and rushed toward him.

THEY faced each other eagerly, swords flashing aloft in the sunlight. Then came the clank of steel, the harsh, ringing clamor of metal against metal. A blow fell on Jeff Shannon's mailed shoulder like a sledge. Having no shield for protection, he staggered backward. Vangrift pressed his advantage, hammering him back to the edge of the bridge, back until he struck against the black horse standing behind him.

Aided by the horse, Shannon regained his balance. He rushed desperately forward, wielding his long blade with both hands. One mighty stroke sheared Vangrift's shield in two, and every Khevsur on either side of the chasm could hear the clang of its upper half as it fell upon the stones. Vangrift sank to his knee under the terrible blow. He gained his feet again, and in his turn gave ground. There was no science of weapons here. No science was necessary with those heavy blades. Victory belonged to the man who could strike the hardest.

Vangrift went down again. Jeff Shannon stood over him, trying to see him through the film of blood and sweat dimming his eyes. From every housetop, every window, every wall on either side of the gulf, he could hear a roar that beat upon the mountainside like thunder.

The roar of a crowd which had changed its favorite:

"Kill him! Kill him! *Kill him!*"

But Jeff Shannon couldn't kill this fellow American, richly though he deserved it. Panting for breath, he leaned on the great crossed hilt of his sword and looked down at Vangrift, waiting for him to speak.

Vangrift's face was so white that it seemed green against the yellow of his hair and armor. All his blustering pride was gone. The crowd fell silent.

"You win," he sobbed. "Take this

damned sword so they'll know I've surrendered."

Jeff Shannon took the proffered sword without a word, and started walking toward the gate. Above the rising clamor that greeted this merciful act, he recognized one voice, a feminine voice raised in warning. Eylai was screaming at him. Or perhaps it was only in his head. Nevertheless, he stopped and turned sharply around.

The sharp point of Vangrift's *kindjal* struck him in the chest just as he turned. Exhausted as he was under the weight of his heavy armor, the blow almost knocked him down, but that same armor saved him. The steel links held.

Before Vangrift could strike again, Shannon had forgotten such things as swords and daggers. He forgot he had anything to fight with but his hands, forgot there was anything important in the world but seeing the treacherous Eric Vangrift's body hurtling down to those hungry rocks. The two swords dropped unheeded from his hands as he lunged under the dagger, clasped Vangrift around the waist, crushed him to his chest and swung him around.

A greater terror than she had ever known before gripped Eylai, watching from the bridgehead. All along she had feared that both men would go over together, and now she was sure of it. No Khevsur chief had ever stopped a fight while both men remained alive. No other Khevsur girl would have so much as dreamed of it. But Eylai forgot codes and traditions in that moment. Frantically, she wormed through the clamoring crowd, past the tense figure of the high priest, past the intent guards.

And then she was out on the narrow bridge, running toward the two men who were reeling and staggering together as if blindly determined to hurl themselves to destruction before she could save either of them.

She was still a hundred feet away

when she saw them locked together on the edge, straining so equally that they seemed still as stone. Then Eric Vangrift began slowly to bend backward.

His dagger slipped from his wildly clutching hand.

Jeff Shannon steadied himself, shifted his grip. He could kill this man now, and he knew it. The knowledge swept some of the blind anger from his brain, and suddenly it didn't seem important to kill Vangrift.

Vangrift was licked. Vangrift was a champion defeated. Worse, he was a man defeated after trying to stab his adversary in the back. Vangrift might have been a menace to the Khevsurs once, but he was no menace now. He was only a ham actor who would be laughed off the stage.

Jeff Shannon slammed his right fist hard against Vangrift's upturned jaw, then caught him as he slumped and swung him around to the safety of the bridge.

He looked up from his deflated enemy's pale, vacant face to see Eylai coming toward him. He knew it was she, though he could scarcely recognize her in her brilliant colors. He couldn't think of anything to say, and besides, his throat was so tight that he couldn't have said it.

He discovered that words weren't necessary. It seemed that when you won a fight in Khevsuretia you didn't have to talk. You didn't have to propose to the girl, either, or anything as stiff and awkward as that.

No, the girl was suddenly right there with you, soft and warm and trembling against you, and she was crying or laughing or something, but you didn't bother to figure it out. You didn't give a damn about all those people swarming toward you from both ends of the bridge, either.

Yet when they got so close that you could hear them talking to you, cheering and shouting something about Richard Coeur de Lion, it was time to make yourself understood. A man

couldn't travel under false pretenses forever.

Eylai saw in his eyes what he meant to say, and she stopped him.

"You can't!" she shouted in English. "You can't tell them anything!" She pointed to Eric Vangrift's inert body. "Look at him! Look at him lying there! He's a fine King Richard, isn't he? He is the man my people allowed to profane the golden armor they have guarded for seven hundred years. That armor is Khevsuretia, and if it is humbled now one of the proudest peoples in the world will be no better than any other backward Caucasus tribe!"

"You mean the fake Richard has fallen, so his conqueror must be the real one! But I'm not the real Richard," Shannon protested. "I'm just a man ready to admit that though these Khevsurs sort of lean to the bloody side, they're a fine people, and I'm for 'em. I'm not going to steal their armor away from 'em!"

As she had done once before, she rested her hands on his shoulders and gazed up into his face. "It isn't stealing. It's what I've been trying to tell you. It's the truth that came to me during that inquisition in the *masjid*. Who can say you are not King Richard returned? You fought like him. You must have felt like him. Can you say you are not King Richard?"

JEFF SHANNON remembered that moment before the trumpets first sounded, a moment when he had sloughed off seven hundred years. He really understood now. He understood that not to take this armor and ride away as a triumphant monarch, would be to rob this people of their soul, of the intangible spirit which had enabled them to maintain their customs and defeat every attempt to conquer them since Sir John of Kinloch had first drawn rein in these high mountains.

If he took this armor he left no sense of loss, for they had expected their Richard to come, to claim the

armor, to ride away with it to yet greater glories. A shrine needs no relic to be still a shrine. But if he left the armor on the bruised body of a discredited champion, if he seemed to spurn it, he would be robbing the Khevsurs of the very thing which had made them what they were.

"All right, Eylai," he said to her. "We'll strip that armor from our friend Vangrift—and Erzinkian's ring, too. I'll put them on. I'll wear them and be proud I'm wearing 'em.

We'll feast and we'll sing songs like a king and his queen should."

"A king—and his queen?" Eylai questioned him.

"That's what I said, a king and his queen." Jeff Shannon glanced up at the pass through the mountains, warm now in the sunshine, and he smiled tenderly as he brought his gaze back to this girl.

"We'll feast, you and I, and then we'll ride away as a king and his queen should—in a blaze of glory!"

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BREATH SWEETENER...DELIGHTFUL CONFECTION

Isle of the Cursed

By CLAUDE RISTER

Author of "Pirate Seas," "Human Treasure," etc.



Bucko sent the aged man sprawling

THE rotten old barkentine, *Island Belle*, was a hellship if ever there were one, but now she was heading for her doom. She rolled, and pitched, and shuddered as she battled a terrific typhoon. It had been this way for three days and two nights. Now, the *Island Belle* was leaking rather badly.

The pitch-black night seemed filled with a thousand banshees. Wind screamed through the rigging, and howled about the three bare poles. Waves boomed and sloshed and foaming floods snarled over the deck.

It would have been a night of terror for ordinary seamen, but the shellbacks aboard the *Island Belle* were not ordinary sailors. The old

*Avarice and Tropic Heat
Warp the Souls of the
Seven Castaways on Lona!*

barkentine carried one of the toughest crews ever to sail the Southern seas.

Back in the wheel-house, sturdy legs set wide, big hands gripping the wheel, stood "Tiny" Beal. The pale glow of the binnacle light showed his rugged, massive face, hard square jaws and somber eyes. His blunt nose seemed to be more pugnacious than usual, in that grim battle with the elements.

"Bloomin' dirty night!" he mut-

tered. "One of the worst whizzers I was ever out in."

The door of the wheelhouse opened, and a gust of wind and rain came in. Tiny looked over one shoulder, as the door banged shut and his pal, Scotty Kildare, entered. There was a deeply worried look in Scotty's round blue eyes.

"How's she going?" he asked, as he peered earnestly into the black night.

"Storm's dying down some, but she's still plenty bad," answered Tiny. "I wouldn't be so uneasy if this was a good, staunch craft. How's things below?"

"A madhouse, and getting worse every minute. Everybody's drunk and raising hell, just as if there were no storm at all. I've seen some tough crews in my time, but nothing like that one below. They're just a bunch of wharf-rats. I'm glad we rigged that lifeboat for sea. We may have to use it before morning."

YESTERDAY the slave-driving captain had been killed by a falling timber. Early tonight the first mate had disappeared—slugged and thrown overboard by some member of the cutthroat crew, Tiny and Scotty believed.

The second mate, a swart, piratical bucko, was in charge now. The first thing he had done was to open the liquor stores, and invite all hands to help themselves. So tonight, in spite of the storm and danger, an orgy of drunken debauchery was in progress below.

Suddenly it happened.

"Reef ahead! Reef ahead!" the lookout screamed. A vivid glare of lightning showed dashing breakers, dead ahead. There was no hope of avoiding them. A wreck was inevitable.

"Rotten scum!" snarled brawny Beal. "This might not've happened if he'd kept sober."

Then came the jarring impact. The whole forepart of the *Island Belle* was crushing like an eggshell. A mast

fell, smashing the bridge. A boom broke adrift and splintered itself against the main-stick. On the deck there was a riotous welter of rigging, broken timbers, and foaming water.

Scotty Kildare had come to relieve his big pal. Now he sprang to the wheel, but Tiny shoved him roughly away.

"It's no use. Let's get out of here."

They flung open the door and reeled out onto the rolling deck. Below, sounded a bedlam of hoarse cries.

He and Tiny went staggering and slipping to the lifeboat which they had made ready. They swung the davits and got in, straining their eyes to see if there was any one near whom they could take.

Forward, the horrible crashing and grinding was going on, as giant waves pounded the *Island Belle* to kindling against the hidden reef.

"This way! Lifeboat waiting! This way! This way!" Tiny bellowed again and again, but no one came. The human rats below had been caught in a trap. Already the barkentine was sinking.

A glare of lightning showed a single drunken sailor, emerge from the after companionway. Instantly a comber dashed over the starboard side and swept him out to sea.

As if in mad glee, veins of lightning quivered wickedly, thunder boomed, waves pounded, and the wind shrieked insanely.

"Let's shove off," advised Scotty. "There's nothing we can do here. If we don't chop-chop we'll go down with the ship. She's starting to slide under, already."

They dropped the boat, unhooked the tackle, and the next moment were being tossed wildly by the giant waves. Another flash of lightning showed the wreck, diving for Davy Jones' locker.

"That's the last of the *Island Belle*," Tiny's deep voice boomed out.

"And her cutthroat crew," supplemented Scotty. "The drunken devils

didn't have any more chance than the rats in the hold. Lucky we didn't go with 'em. Why the devil did we ever sign on with such a hellship?"

"Well, we were both broke, and figured we should get out of Singapore, regardless."

THROUGHOUT the remainder of the night there was a new battle; the battle of two men in a small boat, adrift on the stormswept deep. The brawny Beal labored at the oars, while Scotty Kildare constantly wielded a bucket.

Strange are the whims of the South Seas. At dawn the typhoon which had raged for three days and nights, suddenly ceased. Exhausted the two men curled up in the boat and went to sleep.

A burning noonday sun awoke Tiny Beal and the hearty boom of his voice brought Scotty Kildare to a sitting position, rubbing his eyes. The surface of the sea was almost glassy now, but beneath that smooth exterior it was still heaving. They had drifted far since the wreck. Behind them lay a little smudge which they guessed to be an atoll.

"I suppose that's where she crashed, huh, mate?" asked Tiny.

"I imagine so. Look, there's an island forward. We'll make for her, eh?"

As Tiny Beal stared, his dark brows frowned low over his eyes. His blunt, massive face took on a grim expression. Tiny held a mate's papers, and he knew the South Seas like a book.

"Looks like out of the fat into the fire," he growled. "Unless I'm mighty mistaken that's the isle of Lona, most God-forsaken place in the South Seas."

"Don't worry about it. Some ship will pick us up."

"Ships never call at Lona. She's uninhabited, and nearly barren, and far out of the trading lanes," said Tiny shaking his big head glumly.

"Well, the island is our only bet, so let's make for it."

"All right, let's shuck off these oilskins and lay to."

Hour after hour, all through the day the two men toiled. The sun beat down upon them fiercely. Sweat streaked their faces and their bodies. The twilight came, and still they were far from their destination.

They took turns at the oars that night. Tiny Beal seemed indefatigable, his strength inexhaustible. He was stripped to the waist now, and his muscles rippled beautifully to the stroking of the oars. Scotty Kildare was a chunky, sturdy little fellow, but he was no sort of match for his giant shipmate, in strength or endurance.

Another sun came up. Finally at mid-day they beached their little craft on a silvery shore, and carried their meager supplies over the sand to the shade of a palm.

"We've got about enough chow to keep a canary alive for a week," grumbled Tiny. "Good thing we were thoughtful enough to put a couple of rifles and some ammunition in the boat."

"Good thing we thought of preparing the boat at all; but I had a hunch we might need her, with that rotten old tub under us, and that wharf-rat crew aboard."

There beneath the palm they prepared and ate a snack consisting of hardtack and tinned meat. They had just finished, and were enjoying cigarettes when Scotty Kildare stiffened. His mouth fell open, and his blue eyes grew large.

"Blow me down!" he exclaimed huskily. "Do you see what I do?"

BOTH men were seated cross-legged on the ground. Tiny Beal twisted his columnar neck and looked at the spot toward which his pal was staring.

"Blast my timbers!" he ejaculated. The foliage of a bush was being

held apart by two skinny hands. Framed in the opening was a veritable spectre of a face, long and cadaverous with wild hair. He wore a beard that was twelve inches long and both hair and whiskers were snow-white. His eyes were china-blue, and burned with an insane light.

As Tiny and Scotty scrambled to their feet, the old man stepped into full view. He was totally naked, except for a breech of deerskin, and so skinny that he seemed all knobs and bones.

In his right hand he held a bow and a few arrows.

"Ahoy, matey," boomed Tiny. "Who are you?"

The old man emitted a weird, cackling laugh.

"Two more victims of the seas," he yelped in a cracked falsetto. "Two more men to go mad from waiting for a ship that will never come. Do you know where you are? On Lona, the isle of the damned, that's where. You'll never get away! No ships ever come here! I've been on the accursed island for ten years." He wheeled and sped away. As he ran he shrilled wildly:

"You've come to the isle of the living dead! The isle of the damned! You'll go mad with the rest of us! You'll never get away, I tell you! Never, never, never!" He plunged into some bushes. Again came the weird, cackling laugh, and then all was quiet.

"Well, there's one castaway who won't go nuts on the island," declared Scotty. "The skinny old snipe's already there."

"Come on, let's overhaul him and make him show his colors."

Big Tiny Beal dashed away with bandy legged Scotty Kildare sprinting after him. They crashed through the bushes and soon saw the old man still running.

He looked back and saw them coming. A screech went up, like that

of some animal, and he put on a fresh burst of speed.

"Old Shanks can run," panted Scotty. Tiny said nothing.

The adventurous shipmates had grabbed their rifles before taking up pursuit, and their running was somewhat impeded by the weapons; but they held on to them, nevertheless. They might be needed at any time.

The chase led them up a slope and to the top of a great, flat knoll. Now a fresh shock brought them to an abrupt halt.

The old man was forgotten for the moment.

Before them was a field of stone images of all sizes and shapes. There were birds, animals, human faces, and strange creatures that were combinations of two or all of these. Some of the stone faces were stern, some mawkish, some grotesque gargoyles. And every one was turned toward the east.

That the figures had been carved and set up there by some ancient, vanished race, there was not a doubt. It would have taken ages for such hard stone to weather as these monuments had.

SCOTTY KILDARE broke the astounded silence.

"Bellowing sea-cows! The whole island is nutty! What in blazes is this?"

"Religious images left by some prehistoric race, I guess. I've seen things like 'em on Easter Island. They're a puzzle to science."

"And me, too. But where'd old spider-legs go?"

"No savvy. We'll just search around and see what we can find. There must be other castaways here. The old lubber said: 'Go mad with the rest of us!' That indicates he doesn't hold down the island alone."

They left the eerie field of stone and went down onto the lower land. After a while Tiny pointed a thick finger.

"Ah, didn't I tell you? Look, camp-fire smoke!"

The two adventurers emerged suddenly into a small opening that was shadowed by coco-palms. They saw a dying campfire, crude cooking utensils and supplies—indubitable evidences of human habitation—but no living thing.

Again they heard the crazy cackling of the old man. They wheeled to face the spot from which it had come, and received still another shock. Out of the bushes came men with primitive weapons. They once had been white, but now their bodies were burnt to mahogany darkness by fierce tropic suns. Each man wore long hair and a beard, and was clad solely in breech skins and moc-casins.

The two Americans threw their rifles to a ready position and looked about them. Seven men completely surrounded them.

"What a crew!" grunted Scotty. "Thought you said this island was uninhabited. Do you suppose these people are descendants of the race that carved them things we saw on the knoll?"

"Naw, they're castaways, same as us, I'll lay you. Am I right, sailor?"

The question had been addressed to a man who was fully as big as Tiny, and who carried an ironwood spear. He wore a breech-clout of leopard skin from which his biceps bulged almost as thick as an ordinary man's thighs. He seemed to wear a perpetual contemptuous sneer.

"You said it, mate," he answered. "And who are you swabs?"

"I'm Tiny Beal; my shipmate here is Scotty Kildare. We're castaways from the barkentine *Island Belle*. She went down at the atoll of Tuanga. We're the only survivors, I suppose."

The other laughed harshly, showing strong, white teeth.

"The *Island Belle*! That damned, rotten old tub should have been at

the bottom of Davey Jones' locker long ago!"

"Another ship went down!" screeched the skinny old man gleefully. "And now they're here! They'll never get away! This is the isle of the damned!" He pointed a bony finger and again burst into a wild laugh.

"Shut up, Socrates, you cackling old idiot, or I'll pin you to that palm-tree with my spear," blasted the brown giant.

The old man quieted. "All right, Bucko! All right!" Evidently Bucko had established himself as king of this little group of castaways.

"I wonder what would happen if that sailor and Tiny should tangle?" Scotty asked himself silently.

BUCKO turned back to Tiny.

"Let's all set down and chin-chin. We've been ten years on this God-forsaken island. Like you, we were wrecked on a reef. The *Lady May*, our craft was. There were more of us at first, but the battle for leadership, little differences of opinion now and then—you understand."

The two Americans nodded, studying the group. There was a big Lascar, with a deep scar and poisonous eyes. There was a Swede, with a battered nose and piggish eyes. There was a blond youth of about twenty-five. There were two men of uncertain nativity, whose faces showed all the evil of the seven seas. Bucko and Socrates completed the hard looking group.

The blond youth was different. His face was wistful and his blue eyes held a look of perpetual longing for things that lay beyond the Southern seas. Tiny and Scotty learned later that he was "Blondy" Ryan, and that he had been cabin boy aboard the ill fated *Lady May*.

Bucko said that he and his followers had become adept in the use of primitive weapons, and in devising dead-falls and snares. Old "Socrates"

had been a missionary, whom the *Lady May* had picked up on a Pagan island. He had gradually gone crazy.

"Rifles!" Bucko said in a low, gloating voice, avidity gleaming in his hard blue eyes. "Long time no see. Now we can knock over some of the big game that has been too wary for us. Let's have a look-see."

He held a tattooed hand toward Tiny Beal. Tiny thought swiftly, and then handed over his gun. With the exception of Blondy, he had no doubt that these men were as hard as the human rats who had drowned aboard the *Island Belle*. But what had he and Scotty to fear? Why should this tough crew harm them? They carried nothing of value.

Bucko handled the rifle fondly; aimed with it and smacked his lips with satisfaction.

"Do you mind if me and Swede go out and knock over a deer? We're a little shy of meat in camp right now."

"No, shove right off," consented Tiny.

"Get the other rifle, Swede, and let's pull the mudhook," Bucko ordered.

Scotty looked a bit dubious as the Swede reached a big, knuckled hand for the weapon. He shot a glance at his partner. Tiny nodded slightly, and Scotty gave over the rifle.

Bucko and Swede quickly disappeared into the brush, leaving the men about the campfire to talk.

Within a comparatively short time Bucko and Swede were back but they carried no game, nor had any one heard a shot. The sneer on Bucko's cruelly handsome face was one of triumph now and Swede was grinning openly, his little pig-eyes squinted. Both Tiny and Scotty showed suspicion and uneasiness.

Bucko threw out his great chest and looked about the group. He ran iron-hook fingers through his brown beard and exchanged glances with Swede. Suddenly both men pitched

their rifles to their shoulders. One covered Tiny, the other Scotty.

"Rise and stand anchored!" Bucko ordered, his voice like the sound of a saw, ripping through hardwood.

SLOWLY, without a word, the two American adventurers got up. Tiny's blunt features once more were like those of a stone face. His dark eyes were smoky. Scotty's round face was red, his blue eyes snapping.

"What's this?" he burst out angrily.

Bucko smirked at him; then jerked his head aside and commanded:

"Lash them to a couple of palm-trees, Lascar, you and Blondy."

"I say, Bucko, what do you mean to—" Blondy started to protest.

"Shut up! Do as I tell you, or I'll knock your head off!" Once more his voice had blasted, and once more the explosion brought immediate obedience. The scarfaced Lascar and Blondy moved forward. Bucko waved slightly with the leveled rifle.

"Get over there and stand-to, with your sterns against a couple of them palm trees!"

They were bound to the slender stems of coco-palms; then Bucko and Swede lowered the rifles. "All right, my hearties, gather round and squat for a powwow. I've got big news for you," called Bucko.

Curiously the men drew into a close group and sat down, ringing Bucko and Swede.

"These two swabs come ashore in a staunch boat. Rigged with sail, she could make the Isle of Ilili, in good weather, and from there she could follow a chain of lesser isles until she reached a trade route. Rescue, then, would be certain," explained Bucko.

Howls of delight went up from the crowd.

"But!" supplemented Bucko, and immediately the howling ceased. There was a tense silence now, as his cold gaze roved over the group.

"There will be room in the craft for only four men. Since me and Swede hold the rifles"—he grinned, and once more looked slowly over the crowd—"we'll be two of that four. The rest of you can draw to see who'll be the other two. The newcomers are out. They don't belong to our crew."

Skinny old Socrates scrambled to his feet and flew at Bucko.

"I'm going, draw or no draw! This is the isle of lost souls! There'll never be another chance! Never, never, never!" he screeched.

A powerful hand slapped onto his long, thin neck and sent him spinning away, to land in a sitting position.

"You can't leave me, I tell you. I won't take a chance. I'm going! I—"

A shot cracked out. Bucko had fired from the hip. Socrates lurched to a stop, an amazed expression on his face, his eyes rolling dazedly. A bright serpent of blood sprang from a small hole in his ribby chest and started streaking down his skinny body. A shocked silence lay upon the group.

With a whimpering cry, Socrates collapsed. For a moment he writhed, then shuddered and became still.

"That was a damned lousy trick," Tiny Beal stated in a matter of fact tone.

"Nobody but a yellow-belly would have done it," joined in Scotty Kildare.

BUCKO sneered. He squared around, cocked the rifle. Tiny's brows drew like a stormcloud over the pools of his eyes. His square, massive face was defiant.

"Go ahead and shoot, you scum! You'd better, for if I ever get a chance at you I'll—"

"No!" called Swede, as the rifle swung up to a nut-brown cheek. "Remember! We can use them. We no want to do das work ourselves!"

"Yeh! That's right." Bucko whirled. "Bring the dice and the cup, Blondy. We'll see who goes with me and Swede. Wish I could take all you sailors, but on such a long trip the boat will stand only four men aboard."

Silently Blondy brought five dice, made from wood. He placed them in a bamboo cup and set them in the center of the circle. Tiny and Scotty watched, fascinated.

"The two high men go," stated Bucko. "Since Socrates is out, that leaves only two men who must stay. Go to it, sailors."

The scarfaced Lascar was first to cast. His score was very low. Next a flat-faced, hard-mouthed ruffian took the dice. The Lascar, desperate because of his low score, accused the man of cheating. Then both men leaped up and flew at each other with knives, the only weapons they had brought with them from the *Lady May*.

The battle which followed was sickening to the two captive Americans. The Lascar and his opponent were like animals. Teeth gritted, eyes flaming, they literally slashed each other to ribbons. The stamping of their moccasined feet, and the hissing of their hot breaths were the only sounds to be heard. The others watched tense, wordless.

With a gurgling groan, the flat-faced man went down, his throat cut from ear to ear. The Lascar stood panting, clutching his dripping knife, he grinned venomously at Bucko.

"I go, yes?"

"You will stand by your score. Now Blondy, you and Singapore shoot."

The curly haired young fellow and a squat, ugly, ruffian moved to the center of the ring and knelt. Blondy raked up the dice and dropped them into the bamboo cup. Tiny Beal and Scotty Kildare watched, fascinated.

Blondy won. The two contestants stood up. Singapore had shot an even lower score than Lascar. For a mo-

ment he stood glaring, as if hating them both for beating him.

Suddenly Singapore spat out a bitter oath, wheeled, and went racing for the brush.

"He go for das boat," yapped Swede. His and Bucko's rifles went up and both weapons cracked simultaneously. Singapore's nearly naked body whipped forward and crashed lifelessly into the bushes.

"That leaves only four of us," exulted the Lascar. "Which mean I go, yes?"

Bucko's sneer was gone. He was deadly grim. Slowly he shook his head, staring at the scarfaced man in a deadly way.

"You're all slashed up, Lascar. You're dead on your feet and don't know it. This is an act of mercy for you."

CRACK went the rifle and the fellow's head flew back. The bullet had struck him in the face. He whirled around and hit the ground hard. A moment later his death-throes had ceased.

"And that leaves only three," Bucko remarked callously, as he levered a fresh cartridge into the firing chamber.

"It's just as well. The boat will carry safer, and there'll be just a three-way split of the pearls."

He shifted around on his powerful legs and again faced the captives.

"Maybe you're surprised to've heard me mention pearls, eh? Well, we've got 'em. The pickings have been poor, but within ten years we've accumulated what'll be a small fortune for three of us."

"You bane 'fraid we kill you, ya?" leered Swede. "No, we bane wery claver men. There is wor-ruk to be done, and by yiminy you do her. We bane yentlemen of leisure." He chuckled. Bucko grinned. Blondy's young face was taut, worried. It was plain that he had no taste for the situation.

Tiny and Scotty were unlashd from the trees. Bucko and Swede backed away keeping them covered with the rifles.

"We will need sails," stated Bucko. "You two sailors will make 'em. You know, the matting kind the Chinese use on their junks?"

All that day under cover of the guns, the two adventurers worked. There was no chance to get at their guards. To have attempted it would have been sheer suicide. Blondy's young face remained grim as he buried the dead.

At nightfall the prisoners were bound to trees, some distance from the campfire. The flickering firelight played fantastically upon the naked bodies, as the three men sat eating their meals. Circling the fire-glow was blue darkness.

It could be seen that the men were arguing. Blondy against the other two.

"I wonder what's up now?" rasped Tiny.

"No telling," growled Scotty. "The young fellow seems all right, but the other two are waterfront rats. They're apt to do anything."

They heard Bucko blast his: "Shut up!" and snatch a rifle. Blondy hung his head and thereafter ate in silence.

Bucko and Swede picked up their rifles and rose to their feet. They were a brawny pair, one with dark hair and beard, the other with blond thatch and whiskers. Now they started striding in the direction of the two bound prisoners.

"I think they're coming to murder us," Tiny stated flatly, and then gritting his teeth he began struggling desperately to break the plaited bonds that secured him to the coco-palm.

Suddenly Blondy did just what Singapore had done. He wheeled and ran for the brush. The other two men heard the scurrying of his moccasins, and let out a yell. Both

rifles cracked, but Blondy had plunged into the darkness. Tiny and his partner heard the bullets slash wickedly through foliage.

"I hope to God he escaped," breathed Scotty.

"Me, too, but one or both of them bullets might have caught him," rejoined Tiny.

CURSING furiously the two nearly naked men plunged away in pursuit of the fleeing one. Blondy had fled in the opposite direction from the beached lifeboat, but of course he might have intended to circle. The captives heard a thrashing of brush, growing swiftly fainter, and then it died out.

Suddenly the brush thrashing came closer. Panting, Blondy dashed into the clear. As he came sprinting up to the place where they stood, he opened a sailor's clasp-knife.

A single long run of the sharp blade, and Scotty was free. Blondy sprang to Tiny. Another rake of the knife, and the big fellow, too, stood released.

"They're murder bent," Blondy husked. "Let's run for the boat." He wheeled and fled into the bushes.

"Run, nothing!" growled Tiny. "Let's take them two wharf-rats. If we ran they'd gun us down, as soon as we broke into the open. They've separated. You lay for the nearest one. I'll cut across and head off the other."

Tiny placed himself right in the path of his selected opponent. Crouched within a dense clump of foliage he waited. Soon Bucko's form burst into the little opening. He was plunging along with his rifle clasped in his right hand. Tiny left his place of concealment and made a tiger-rush.

Bucko heard him coming. The giant fellow stopped and flung up the rifle. It barked, the red spurt from its muzzle searing the gloom, but Tiny Beal had ducked.

The next instant his right shoulder struck the other man's stomach and Bucko catapulted backward. The terrific impact sent his gun flying into the night.

Immediately Tiny was upon him. They grappled like ferocious wild animals; struggled upright, tore apart and began banging away at each other.

First one man and then the other went to the ground, only to spring up and lunge to the attack again. Out in the night a rifle cracked.

A glancing blow half tore Bucko's right ear away. It hung at a grotesque angle. The fellow's left fist closed one of Tiny's eyes. Both men were bruised and gory, but still battling like tigers.

Bucko was the first to give ground. He was getting the worst of it. Tiny drove on relentlessly, with renewed fury. And then Bucko jerked a knife from his belt. He did not raise it aloft, but in the manner of the expert knife-fighter, held it low and rushed in for an upward thrust into the guts.

It was largely by chance that Tiny managed to grab the wrist, there in the dark. He twisted the arm around. They struggled desperately and went down, Tiny on top, still holding the other's wrist.

Bucko sucked in a great gasp and shuddered violently from head to toes. Then suddenly he slumped onto his face in the vines. Tiny rolled the man over. Bucko's knife was driven to the hilt in the great, brown breast. Already the man was dead. The blade had gone straight to the heart.

TINY got up, panting, bleeding, dazed. He was thinking of the shot he had heard, wondering if his pal had been killed.

A rustling of bushes snapped him out of his daze. He swayed down and reached to jerk the knife from Bucko's breast, but the next instant Scotty and Blondy broke out into

the little opening. Blondy was carrying a rifle.

Tiny described his battle.

"How'd you fellows get Swede?" he asked.

"I give Blondy all the credit," declared Scotty. "I hopped onto Swede and was trying to wrestle his gun away, but the big swab was getting the best of me. Then Blondy rushed out of the darkness and clubbed him down. He dropped his rifle and staggered back. Blondy snatched up the gun. The flat nosed ape rushed and Blondy shot him dead."

"They meant to murder you two," explained Blondy. "That's what the argument at the campfire was about. They figured that it wouldn't be safe

to leave this island for a week or two yet, on account of the tail of the storm season, and that you two fellows would be constant danger. Therefore they decided to put you out of the way.

"Within two weeks at the most, it'll be safe to put out to sea, and I know we can make it to the ship-lanes. Will you fellows take me along? I'll let you share with me in those pearls Bucko mentioned."

"Will we!" exulted Scotty.

Tiny's one open eye sparkled. His swollen lips parted in a grin. Blood trickled down to his chin.

"Say, Blondy; you, and me, and that sawed-off Scotchman are ship-mates from now on!"

●
NEXT MONTH

WHEEL OF FORTUNE

A Novelet of Big-Town Intrigue

By DAVID BRANDT

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GUERRILLA



*Havoc and Misery Stalk in the Wake of Nippon's
Ruthless Hordes as a Brave Band of Mongols Led
by a Gallant Yank Makes a Last Stand!*

By CAPTAIN J. WINCHCOMBE-TAYLOR

Author of "Shanghai Horror," "Guerillas for China," etc.

CHAPTER I

Death Hovers Near

THE plane swooped to within twenty feet above the humanity-packed road before its twin guns chattered their cacophony of death. Old men, burden-bowed women, children in arms, all felt the sting of the merciless steel hail.

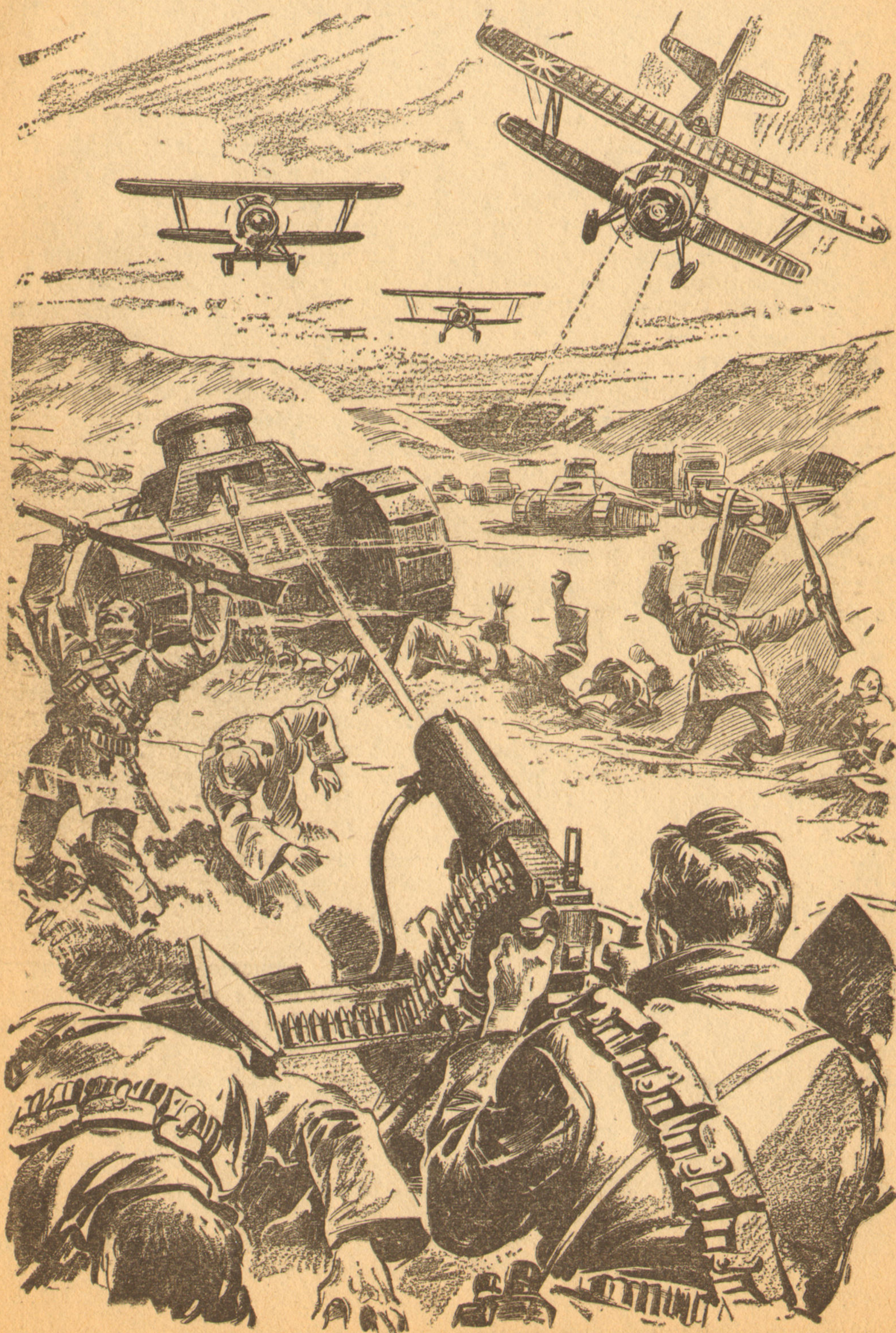
Yet there was possible justification for the Japanese pilot's attack, since among the horde, now scattering

wildly into the bordering fields, were uniformed and armed soldiers—stragglers from the armies that had already retired to new positions in the west. Many of these shook impotent fists and, in high-pitched Mandarin, cursed the plane and its squat, grim occupant, or unslung rifles and fired after it futilely.

For a full mile along the road the pilot left a swath of maimed and dead. Now he approached the ford over a river where the press of refugees was

REVENGE

Featuring
"Club Fist" Mayne



They hoped only to escape this death from the sky

greatest. Then, from a man-borne palanquin about to cross the yellow-churned stream, the snout of a Lewis gun was upthrust and a long burst struck the oncoming ship. It zoomed erratically, sideslipped and crashed among the screaming fugitives, crumpling one wing like paper as it turned over on its back.

Instantly a mob swarmed upon the wreck, tearing at it with vengeance-crazed hands in an effort to reach the limp figure in the cockpit. Ghastly, half animal sounds arose as men—and women—reached the body. What ensued then was unspeakable.

Momentarily the Japanese pilot seemed to float above the crowd as a cork floats upon the tide. Then he disappeared—to be literally torn to pieces in a frenzy of revenge, until nothing remained but spattered blood, shreds of clothing and obscene, nameless chunks of flesh and bone.

Among the involuntary witnesses of this horror was the driver of a Red Cross truck, awaiting its turn at the ford. A white woman! Despite wide-flaired jodhpurs, khaki shirt and military blouse, there was no concealing the soft, feminine curves, the peaches-and-cream complexion, or the wisps of Titian hair that strayed rebelliously from beneath the Chinese military cap.

"Oh!" she shuddered. Then, steadying herself, she called in hesitant Mandarin. "Wong! Wong, where are you?"

But Wong was not within call. He was, instead, pressing through the awed group now gathering around the palanquin, whence the Lewis gun had poured retribution upon the Japanese.

Its eight sturdy bearers, rubbing aching shoulders, had now retired a little to rest at the roadside. Tough, armed men all, some wore shreds of uniform, though the majority were garbed as coolies or peasants. A tall officer, Feng Ma, wearing colonel's insignia, joined them from the litter's side.

"Even though he lies low of his wound, again our lord proves himself the only man among us," he told them almost reverently. "While we, toads that we are, cowered under the Dwarf Islander's attack, the Heaven Born arose from his weakness and dealt death to the accursed invader. Quickly then, drive the rabble from the ford and bear him onward toward rest and, perhaps, the skilled care of a doctor."

But then he cursed and, whipping out his automatic, hurried back toward the palanquin. For the man Wong, whom the white woman still called fruitlessly, had edged through the crowd and swiftly raised the protecting flaps of the litter, as if to stare in curiously at its occupant.

Instantly a hand shot out from within and caught his left wrist, twisting it so savagely that the knife he held hidden up his sleeve dropped upon the dusty road. Desperately he tried to free himself. But there was something uncannily unbreakable in the grip of that hand.

For its owner was the famous Yank adventurer, Allen Mayne. Years before, another would-be assassin had thrust at Mayne's heart, but he had deflected the blow by gripping the blade with his right hand. As a result, three of his fingers had healed permanently crooked, earning him his sobriquet throughout Eastern Asia of "Club Fist."

NOW, muscle-locked fingers hooked like steel bands around his wrist, Wong was held helpless until the colonel, followed by the palanquin bearers, had leaped upon him.

"He's Li Mow," Mayne said contemptuously from within. "Better settle him pronto, Feng."

"Aie, but I crawl before your august presence, Born-Before-I-Was," the colonel muttered, distressed. "By my unwatchfulness have I left you unguarded to the traitor's knife."

"Not your fault, old friend," Mayne denied. "But get the business over

and let's push on. I'm not feeling so hot right now."

Feng spat a command at the bearers. The prisoner screeched something about confessing "many things," but his protestations were ignored as he was dragged into a field, where he was forced upon his knees, a pistol's muzzle thrust behind his left ear and the trigger pressed.

"Wong!" Even before the body had toppled, there came the white girl's horrified scream, as she raced forward in a vain effort to intervene.

"You beast!" she panted in English. Then, in her halting Mandarin: "You have slain my assistant! I shall make representations to the Generalissimo himself, who will hunt you down and kill you like the curs you are!"

Feng saluted gravely. "Madam," he returned in English, "Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek will have no need to hunt us down, since our lord is bound for the new General Headquarters and will himself report that another traitor to China has been dealt with."

"Traitor! You dare call Wong a traitor?" Though Feng understood English perfectly, he could not identify the lilting brogue in the girl's angry tone.

"Perhaps, Honorable Madam, you will permit my lord himself to explain," he suggested. "He is very weak, but he will wish to speak with a lady of his own race. Come."

Doubtfully, slim fingers gripping a small pistol within a side pocket, she followed him to the palanquin. At once and despite Feng's protests, Mayne climbed out and, somewhat unsteadily, saluted her. He was acutely aware of his weakness and his gaunt raggedness.

Momentarily they examined each other—the girl, conscious of the mockery in his handsome, hawklike face. Mayne knew that she must be in her late twenties, was normally pretty and now really beautiful from indignation. Her eyes, he observed, of lighter blue

than his own, had a tint of angry green in them.

"Did you order those bandits to murder Wong?" she demanded.

"He was a friend of yours? You have known him long?" There was definite challenge in his tone.

"He was my assistant and guide," she flung back. "Besides, what business is it of yours how long I've known him? You, a white man, to murder him in cold blood! Wasn't it enough horror to see that unfortunate Japanese pilot literally torn to pieces before your eyes?"

He smiled to mask a spasm of weakness. "Who are you?"

"I'm Dr. O'Hara," she answered defiantly. "I came from Dublin to help, because I felt sorry for the Chinese and thought the Japanese were brutes. But since I've seen what Chinese do, I've a mind now to offer my services to the Japanese instead."

"They're already entering Hankow," Club Fist Mayne said levelly. "So, if you wish to join them, I'll give you a pass to protect you from possible Chinese molestation on the way. But first you'd better listen to those explosions."

Faint reverberations from eastward were thudding through the late afternoon air.

"Chinese rearguards are following our usual 'Scorched Earth' policy and destroying all Hankow's important buildings, so none will be left for the enemy's use," he continued grimly. "When people destroy their finest cities behind them, they must feel that no sacrifice is too great against the invaders of their land."

SHE stared, puzzled. "Who are you?" she breathed.

He shrugged. "Officially, I'm Major-General Allen Mayne, of the Kuomintang Army. But I guess I'm better known as Club Fist."

"Club Fist!" she gasped. "No wonder you killed Wong! Why, you're nothing but a murderous adventurer,

who's a disgrace to the entire white race! I've heard of you, Mr. Club Fist."

Swiftly his crippled fingers slid around her wrist, as recently they had around Wong's.

"Did General Ota tell you those pretty tales?" he mocked, very softly.

"General Ota!" She seemed flustered. "What if he did? He's a courteous Japanese gentleman, and when I see him again, I'll tell him I thoroughly agree with his opinion of you. Let go my wrist!"

"My old pal Ota must be slipping, when he has to use Irish women as spies," he derided.

"I'm no spy!" she flared. "How dare you!"

"You must be, if Wong was your assistant," he grated, wishing the ground would stop rising and falling so alarmingly before his eyes. "His real name was Li Mow. Once he was one of my officers, but he turned traitor and then became a spy for Ota."

"You lie!" she blazed.

"Look!" Twisting her wrist, he forced her to stare down at Wong's knife in the dust. "That's why we executed him. He knew if he could murder me, the Japs would pay him a hundred thousand Shanghai dollars—gold!"

Club Fist laughed sardonically. "In the old days, it wasn't only the Japs who offered rewards for me, dead or alive. But now that I'm a Kuomintang general, they've raised the ante on me so high, there's only one man in all China with a bigger price on his head—Chiang Kai-shek himself!"

THE girl's face swam hazily before him. "Go back and tell Ota that Li Mow wasn't big enough to get me," he rasped, his tongue suddenly clogged. "Tell him I always thought he was a pretty square guy to fight, until he started using pretty Irish girls to do his dirty work for him. And—"

Terrible, searing pain tore his half-healed wound. Then he crumpled into the arms of Maureen O'Hara, M.D., whom he had just accused of being a Japanese spy.

Club Fist Mayne's collapse petrified Feng Ma. For years they had shared every danger. They had starved in the Gobi, pursued as outlaws; had feasted over great loot, with thousands of warriors under their banners; had performed miracles of daring and, since the Japanese invasion, had fought tirelessly as guerilla leaders, whose pinpricks were already threatening to bleed the vast Nipponese war god to death. Small wonder then that Feng Ma was stunned when Club Fist collapsed.

But Maureen O'Hara became coolly professional. "Into the palanquin with him!" she ordered. "Send someone to the ambulance for my black bag—quickly! Hm-m—an old wound reopened, eh? When was he hurt?"

Her decisiveness rallied Feng. "Two weeks ago," he explained, as deftly she ripped Mayne's shirt, exposing bandages through which fresh blood was seeping.

"We were fighting a rearguard action, when an accursed Island plane swooped—as did that other just now. Scorning shelter, my lord remained upright, directing our unworthy troops to cover—until a bullet pierced his shoulder, passing out between his ribs. *Aie*, he will not die?"

"Not if I can get him to a hospital," she decided. "His fever's rising, but he must have a marvelous constitution, or he couldn't have stood all he has today with a wound like this. Stop those people using the ford and get my ambulance across immediately."

Feng flung orders at his ragged command. The bearers carried their insensible chief over the river as gently as if he were a sleeping babe, while the ambulance, Feng himself at the wheel, bumped over in turn. Mayne was placed in it and, the bearers trotting ahead to clear the way,

Feng drove westward in search of a possible hospital.

CHAPTER II

Treachery



FROM the compound gateway Mayne watched the metal-laden rickshas passing endlessly, each drawn by the coolie who had pulled it from Hankow, a hundred miles eastward,

and who would pull it hundreds more to Chungking, China's new capital in the west.

"It's incredible—there must be thousands of them!" he heard a woman's dry voice say.

Turning, he found Maureen beside him. He frowned. Though during the past three weeks her skill and care had undoubtedly saved his life, he could not forget her connection with his great enemy, General Kenji Ota, of the Japanese Intelligence.

"Quite a stunt, gutting Hankow of old iron—manhole covers, gratings and so on, and bringing it west in rickshas," he remarked, coldly civil. "It prevents the Japs melting it down for munitions."

"So *that's* the reason!" she exclaimed. "But, General, you're not so strong yet as you think you are. Better go and rest."

He checked an angry denial, realizing suddenly how spent she herself seemed. For, finding no hospital to take him to, she had commandeered this dilapidated inn and transformed it into one. Then, chancing upon Columbia-trained Dr. Yun among the refugees, she had made him her assistant and filled the place with scores of sick and wounded.

"You don't look so strong yourself," Mayne countered. "How much sleep have you had lately?"

"Enough," she retorted succinctly. "I've work to do, and the sleep I lose

won't harm me. But you're a sick man yet, and don't forget it."

"Okay, Doctor, you win." Mayne shrugged, turned to watch a large, officer-filled auto that was breasting eastward against the rickshas.

Some of Maureen's convalescents were also watching from the gateway, though keeping respectful distance from the famous Club Fist and the red-haired barbarian girl doctor to whom so many owed their lives.

Mayne knew several by sight. Wang the peasant, whose gangrene arm Maureen had amputated. Tan Chun the soldier, his eyes alone showing from bandages that swathed his grenade-torn face. Tzi La, the girl child Maureen had saved from death by typhus, and others. Spy or not, the Yank conceded, Dr. O'Hara was doing a swell job.

The approaching car swung into the compound and stopped. Amazed, Mayne recognized one of the officers—Chiang Kai-shek himself! The Yank saluted, disturbed. Why was the Generalissimo here, escorted only by his staff? Why wasn't he at his secret H.Q. in Honan province, instead of here, near the advancing enemy, where a plane's bomb or an assassin's bullet might rob China of the one man who gave it hope?

Chiang recognized Mayne in turn and a smile lighted his tired features.

"I did not hope to find you so recovered, General," he greeted. "But you are Club Fist the Indomitable. Soon, perhaps, you will again offer China your valuable services?"

"I offer them now, Great Man," Mayne said, genuinely touched that this slim, graying leader, bowed by constant defeat and treacheries, with the fate of a huge nation upon his shoulders, should come to visit him.

"Excellent!" Chiang exclaimed. "As I must leave again immediately, is there a room in which we can talk?"

"I have one, though small, in the hospital, Great Man." Mayne indicated the converted inn.

"Hospital?" Chiang echoed. "Ah, now I remember. And this is the lady doctor who is doing so much good for our sufferers?"

The Yank introduced Maureen, wondering sardonically whether she would take this opportunity to demand punishment for Wong's execution. Instead, however, Maureen said in her halting Mandarin that she was overjoyed her small services pleased the man whom his compatriots called "The Savior of China."

Then, the gaping, worshipful convalescents standing aside, the Generalissimo and his officers followed Mayne to his small hospital room, where Chiang ordered an aide to unroll a large-scale map.

THOUGH fighting desperately in south and center, the Chinese leader explained, his armies had been forced back before Japan's mechanized power, so that all munitions from British Hongkong and French Indo-China were cut off. Only from Russia could guns and ammunition still be obtained.

From Alma Ata in Asiatic Russia, across vast Sinkiang and through Inner Mongolia, a three-thousand mile auto highway had been developed, with a parallel railroad already under construction.

Strong Japanese forces were concentrating in Inner Mongolia to attack this lifeline, and Chinese regulars were being brought up to oppose them. But the sole way to hold back the enemy at present was to organize the Mongols as guerillas and attack every Nipponese column and post. Club Fist, Chiang Kai-shek admitted, knew barren Mongolia better than did most Chinese and moreover was famous among the fierce desert men. Would he then organize them and lead them against the enemy?

Mayne's eyes lighted as he realized the terrific trust Chiang was imposing on him. He, an American, whom once the generalissimo himself had

deemed an outlaw, was to hold Mongolia against the Japanese!

"A few details to settle, Great Man, and I will start tonight," he promised.

A discussion followed as to specific plans, and Club Fist was proposing the area in which he intended to operate first when he broke off suddenly. Maureen O'Hara had entered the room.

An aide drew an automatic and Mayne himself tensed furiously. What had she overheard? Was she really a spy who would get news of the move to Ota?

"I insist you rest at once, General," she told Mayne sharply. "I'm not going to let you break down again just because you imagine you're stronger than you are."

"Thanks, but you needn't bother about me any longer," he retorted bleakly. "I'm leaving here—right now."

"But you're not fit to travel!" she flared. "It's ridiculous for a man who was almost dead three weeks ago to try."

But then Maureen realized his hostility, saw the black frowns of the Chinese officers.

"Since you consider yourself no longer under my care, there's no more to be said," she told him and, bowing to Chiang, passed frigidly from the room.

* * * * *

It was cold, with leaden clouds threatening snow, as Mayne's binoculars once again swept the deserted road toward its crest.

"No sign of 'em yet," he scowled at Feng, who lay beside him. "Maybe the column didn't start."

"Our spies were sure it would, Lord," Feng insisted. His eyes slued around the boulder-strewn plain below their hillock, confident no enemy could see the five hundred Mongol guerillas who were hiding there so skilfully.

Much had passed since Mayne and

Feng Ma had left Maureen's little hospital, a month before. Here, hundreds of miles north, in Inner Mongolia, the name "Club Fist" was a rallying cry for all who hated Japanese penetration. Here Club Fist was almost a legend, the great Outer Barbarian who could never fail, whose exploits were told in the nomads' black felt *yurts* as men told of the deeds of Genghis Khan himself.

Feng grinned thinly in anticipation of the trap set for the long supply column the Japanese were due to send to their growing base in the western desert, the base for their projected attack against the vital highway from Russia. Thanks to Club Fist, that base would soon become isolated, cut off from reinforcements, munitions, food.

"Here they come," Mayne reported suddenly, "riding like hell."

The three scouts he had sent to give warning of the column's approach were racing back parallel with the road.

HIS whistle shrilled and the Mongols shrank even lower behind their boulders, their huge sheepskin *terliks* blending perfectly with the barren soil.

The scouts were flogging their wiry little Manchu ponies in their urge to gain cover. Their leader waved thrice, indicating the column was only three *li* beyond the road's crest. Then he and his fellows disappeared into a long gully, where the guerillas' mounts were being held.

Rolling on his side, Mayne regarded the oblong box beside him.

"Take post!" he ordered Feng leisurely.

Feng's beady eyes were glittering. "It will be a great killing, Lord," he breathed. "Before nightfall, many Dwarf Islanders will never again cry 'Banzai' for their emperor."

"You bloody-minded old reprobate," the Yank grunted. "Get going!"

While Feng wormed downward

from boulder to boulder toward the left flank, Mayne maneuvered behind the hillock's solitary rock and peered around it toward the distant crest. Soon an auto appeared on the skyline and began descending, to be followed by a second, a third and, after an interval, a fourth. The first three were armored cars, the fourth was the foremost car of the column's laden trucks.

The Yank's features hardened. Mayne had no love of killing, he who had killed many men since that day in 1915 when, as a British Royal Flying corps pilot, he had downed his first Hun over Armentières. Yet he had seen overmuch of the agony Japanese imperialism had wrought in Asia. Noncombatant Chinese had been shot, bombed, burned and slaughtered in heartless fashion. Club Fist Mayne felt no compunction for what must now befall.

Watching the approaching armored cars, he went coolly over his preparations. His long experience in guerilla tactics had made for perfection and he knew that, barring accidents, this would be his deadliest blow against the enemy.

The leading armored car was almost abreast him now, with trucks following in a cloud of wind-stirred dust. Mayne's hand closed over the plunger of the box beside him.

Now! He pressed downward sharply. Simultaneously the roadway under the three armored cars mushroomed in a triple detonation. The first car was hurled upon its side, its uppermost wheels spinning crazily. The second piled into it, while the third ran off the road and smashed against a large rock.

A machine gun burst into song. Mayne smiled coldly. Armor-piercing bullets were spitting from that gun, ripping pinpoint sparks from the stricken cars as those slugs tore through steel hides. Nothing had been left to chance; no possibility that, should the land mines fail, the cars' crews could get their own guns

into action against the guerillas. At the same instant, blasting rifle fire lashed the hooded trucks, splintering wooden sides, tearing into motor cowlings.

Momentarily there was ghastly confusion. Then, amazingly, the trucks halted and, despite the hail of death, runways were dropped from them to allow the descent of several fighting tanks!

As Mayne stared incredulously, a droning tore his eyes skyward. Bursting through the low clouds was an entire flight of Japanese ground strafers!

CHAPTER III

Bloody Battle



BETRAYED! Even in the shock of frustration, Club Fist's mind leaped to that dreadful fact. Here was no supply column, but a cleverly disguised bait, and the Japanese had even known the exact spot he had selected for his ambush!

Two factors alone could now save the guerillas—the bouldery nature of the area and the armor-piercing machine gun. Mayne raced down from his hillock, disregarding the zip and spang of slugs all around him. Already tanks were in action, nosing among the boulders, spitting death at the Mongols who crouched behind them.

"Away!" Club Fist snarled, flinging himself down behind the machine gun, whose crew had recoiled in terror at the holocaust that had burst upon them. He trained the gun upon the nearest tank and triggered fifty rounds at its cab, the bullets biting through the steel as if through butter. Immediately the machine halted. But it was only one of twelve, and Mayne had but one more belt of ammunition.

He engaged the second machine.

But, even as he got off a burst, he was flung sideward by a terrific concussion. An air bomb! A Mongol screamed horribly, his *terlik* drenched with blood as steel tore through him. Stone splinters flew everywhere, deadly as fragments of the bomb itself. From above, too, came down-plunging streams of slugs as the Japanese planes opened fire.

The finest European troops could not stand such punishment, far less undisciplined Mongol guerillas. Men rose from behind their shelter and, discarding their speed-impeding *terliks*, raced half naked through the maelstrom toward the gully where their ponies were held.

"Down, fools!" Mayne raged after them. "Down for your lives!"

But they hoped only to escape the death from the sky and from the spitting tanks. Club Fist exposed himself recklessly, striving to force those around him who survived to take cover. But they, too, fled into the open, where they made perfect targets and were ripped and blown into eternity.

Squatting again at the machine gun, the Yank reloaded it with the remaining belt of ammunition, then opened upon the nearest tank, whose own guns were concentrating upon a group of fugitive Mongols. The slugs ate through its side and it ceased fire, its gunners killed. An instant more and it halted, as death reached its driver also. Flame and black, greasy smoke began belching from its gas tanks.

Mayne's lips parted in a savage, fighting grin. He had knocked out two tanks already and had still nearly two hundred rounds left. With luck, he might settle three or four more.

"Up and help me, son of a toad!" he snarled at a Mongol who, nerve-shattered by the *claquement* of the Nipponese guns, crouched behind a nearby boulder. "Up, lest it be told in the *yurts* you were born of a—"

But then a tank's blunt nose appeared around the side of the Mon-

gol's boulder, and there came a dreadful screech as the machine's tracks crushed him into a bloody pulp.

Mayne swung his gun upon this new menace, knew the air was filled with hostile bullets. Stone splinters flew around him. His gun's jacket was hit, releasing boiling water in steamy jets. Yet he fought on, flinging his precious shells at the oncoming monster that was spouting death toward him.

Split seconds counted now. Either he must find the tank's vitals or—die! It was approaching at an angle, making it a difficult target, so that many of his shots caromed harmlessly off the case-hardened plates of its right track. Then it shifted course to bring its forward machine gun into play against him.

Now! A long, clean burst full at the cab. The lumbering machine lurched spasmodically as its driver died, then rolled to a halt within a dozen feet of Mayne, whose next burst tore into the turret and caught the gunners.

"Three!" he exulted though scarcely a dozen cartridges remained. He stared around. The planes were now strafing the bunched ponies in the gully or slaughtering groups of fleeing Mongols.

THE tanks, however, were "mopping up" among the boulders and one was heading straight toward him. Though aware he had but small chance of damaging it, Club Fist fired his remaining rounds at it, then dodged behind a rock to avoid its answering fire. When this came, it was so concentrated that countless chips from the boulder's outer side cascaded upon him, slashing his face and hands, even ripping through his tough *terlik*.

Suddenly Mayne realized that the canvas bag in the stiffening hands of a dead Mongol beside him held bombs! The man, with others, was to have lobbed the grenades at the truck column.

The tank was perilously close as Mayne snatched up the bag and withdrew one of a dozen crude bombs. One alone would be useless against the tank, but—

Detonating it, he dropped it back among its fellows. Then, with a great swing, he hurled bag and contents over the boulder and into the path of the tank. Almost instantly the grenade exploded, detonating the rest with devastating effect. Instantly the tank ceased fire, leaving a momentary void of sound that brought an actual ache to the Yank's ears.

Cautiously he peered around the boulder. A huge hole gaped in the tank's cab and its right track was ripped from its rollers. His stunt had succeeded beyond his wildest hopes.

Something featherlike and cold touched Mayne's bloodied face. He glanced upward. Snow was falling, would soon be coming down in a thick pall. Great! It would blind the Japs both in the air and on the ground, would give him a chance to escape. But first he must find Feng, living or dead.

The old mocking gleam came into Club Fist's eyes as he stared at the bomb-destroyed tank. No, not this one, but the second he had knocked out. . . .

The snow was thicker now, driven by sharp, gusty wind, as Mayne warily retraced his steps toward his second victim. Reaching it, he listened. No sound came from within. Firing everywhere was sporadic now and muffled by the snow.

The tank's doors were locked, but he climbed up between the horns and found the flap of the cab open. Fumes of hot oil and expended ammunition stung his nostrils as he wriggled within. Blinded by the darkness, he stumbled over the driver's body, then went aft to where a gunner lay crumpled. Tiny shafts of light came through the holes his armor-piercing slugs had made.

Mayne found two more bodies.

None had survived his fire. Unlocking the main door, he bore the dead outside, relocked the door, and went forward again. Precious minutes passed before he could get the engine running. It backfired constantly, clearly damaged by his own bullets. But there was enough power to give traction and, though scarcely an experienced tankateer, he got the machine moving and headed toward where he hoped Feng might be.

Club Fist began a slow search, peering out at the many contorted bodies. Sick fear assailed him lest Feng, too, be dead or that, thinking the tank Japanese-manned, Feng might flee at its approach. But this snow, Mayne realized, was a grand break. The pursuit of his unfortunate men must end, since the planes would have difficulty even in returning to their drome, while the tank men could scarcely see a dozen yards ahead of them.

He himself almost came to grief several times as he maneuvered among the boulders, but at last he halted and stuck his head through the flap.

"Feng!" he yelled. "Feng!"

Faintly, so faintly that at first he doubted his ears, came an answer. He drove toward the sound.

"I'm in this tank!" he warned.

"Aie, Born-Before-I-Was, but I knew you would come!"

A figure came crawling painfully toward the machine. Club Fist cursed. Feng was hit!

"A bullet through the left leg only, Lord," Colonel Feng Ma muttered, as Mayne helped him into the machine. "Clean enough, but cold has stiffened the limb, making movement difficult."

MAYNE was relieved, realizing only danger would be of frost getting into the wound. He must get Feng quickly to rest and warmth.

But the engine balked again, and while he was wrestling with it, another tank appeared out of the increasing blizzard and halted alongside. A fur-clad officer climbed from

it and came between the horns of the Yank's tank.

"You have done well, Sergeant Nichi, though I see the dogs' armored bullets have struck you many times," he called, staring up at the partly closed flap. "What casualties?"

Mayne's Japanese was only fair, but he muffled his voice and trusted to luck.

"Merely a slight wound to my unworthy self, Excellency," he reported. "What orders?"

"We rally here," was the reply. "The Mongols and their accursed barbarian leader fought harder than we expected, and many good comrades have fallen in glory, but the general is well pleased. See, he comes himself to congratulate you."

Another officer came over, and at sight of him Mayne froze. Ota himself!

"Your tank has gained honorable scars in the emperor's service, Sergeant," the latter praised. "I am well pleased."

The staring Yank was puzzled at first by what appeared to be snowflakes sticking to the other's upturned face, but then saw they were small patches of adhesive plaster. Evidently Ota had been in the wars!

Despite his desperate situation, Mayne grinned. Not only did the patches make Ota look ludicrous, but the idea of his praising his most implacable enemy, in the belief he was a Jap sergeant, was distinctly amusing.

Then the Yank's grin faded. Ota was worth an entire army corps, and to capture him would mean an enormous loss to Japan. Club Fist toyed with the idea of jumping out and dragging the Nipponese general into the tank, hoping the tank could elude pursuit in the blizzard. But, even as he was leaving his seat, he saw Ota turn away and climb into a third tank that had just arrived.

Disappointed, Mayne tried the motor again, confident the other tank

men would assume he was merely trying to warm it up against the penetrating cold. It picked up at last, though misfiring badly. As the machine began moving, someone appeared ahead, waving his arms to stop, but Mayne kept on twisting among the boulders, knowing pursuit must be short-lived through the storm.

By the tank's compass and his own uncanny sense of direction, he gained the gully. It was a shambles. Planes and tanks had taken terrible toll and among the heaps of slaughtered ponies lay many slain Mongols.

For an hour he drove down a widening valley toward Chufan, his headquarters, occasionally overtaking individual fugitives all of whom spurred away frantically at sight of the tank. Then the engine spluttered and died, its fuel tanks empty.

Numbing weariness overtook him and his old wound began throbbing abominably. Failure! True, he had single-handed knocked out several tanks and caused the Japanese great damage. But he had been crushed by the very troops he had planned to ambush, and now the Japs' real supply column could move unmolested.

Worse, he—Club Fist Mayne—had suffered defeat as a Mongol leader. He would lose "face," and in the *yurts* there would be wailing for dead husbands and sons, and hatred for the white man who had led them to death.

CHAPTER IV

Desperate Resolve



THE blizzard had blown itself out when, the following day, Mayne reached Chufan, leading a pony he had rounded up so that Colonel Feng Ma, half frozen and exhausted, could ride.

Already fugitives had brought news of the disaster, and as he entered the

village "square," Mongoloid faces stared at him with hatred and contempt. No longer was Club Fist a legendary hero, but a despised Outer Barbarian who had led the tribesmen to destruction.

Expressionless, he plodded on to the ruined temple that was his headquarters. Turning into its compound, he recognized a group of the recruits he had not taken on the raid with him.

"Carry within Feng Ma, the colonel," he ordered them in the Ural-Altai dialect. But no man moved. They, too, had heard the news and no longer gave obedience to a leader who had failed.

All the bitterness and frustration within Mayne burst into white-hot fury at this supreme insult. Crossing swiftly, he seized the most massive of the rebels by the throat.

"Garbage-eating toad, obey—or die!" he snarled, and his crippled right fist lashed upward at the flat, leering face.

Unmindful of the knife the other whipped out, unmindful of the savage yells of the rest, of their swiftly drawn weapons, unmindful even that Feng, though verging on collapse, had drawn a protecting automatic, Club Fist lashed again and again at the hate-contorted features until, nose mashed and blood gushing from pulped lips, the big man crashed like a felled oak and lay still.

Silence followed. Never before had these Mongols seen an armed man laid low, bloody and stunned, by another's bare hands. It must be some strange barbarian trick, such as only Club Fist the Terrible could use!

"Bear the colonel within!" Mayne repeated and, awed now, they obeyed.

But as Club Fist was about to follow, a figure emerged and stood on the crumbling stone steps, looking down at him anxiously. Maureen O'Hara!

"Oh, thank God you're safe!" she cried thankfully.

He stared, wondering what had

brought her to this desolate spot. As if reading his thoughts, she spoke hurriedly.

"You must be frozen! Come in and eat. We can talk later."

Wordlessly Mayne followed her into the ruined temple which, surprisingly, had been transformed into a hospital. Wounded guerillas lay on blanketed mattresses. Mongol women acted as nurses and glowing braziers threw out a cheerful heat.

Many hate-filled eyes were upon Club Fist as he watched Feng being placed upon a mattress, but not until Maureen had examined and dressed his friend's wound did he consent to go with her to where a great cauldron of stew bubbled.

"It's bully and dehydrated vegetables," she explained, serving him a smoking bowl. "I brought it in the ambulance. I couldn't get the natives to touch it at first—I suspect they thought it was some foreign poison—but they soon wolfed it down—and asked for more!"

"Why are you here?" he demanded, after he had eaten ravenously. "How did you find me?"

Her facade of confidence melted abruptly. "That soldier, Tan Chun—the one with the bandaged face," she began. "He was no Chinese. He was—" Her voice failed and her eyes brimmed.

Mayne's memory leaped back to the previous day, when he had been puzzled by the adhesive patches upon his arch enemy's face. Now he understood. Tan Chun, supposedly wounded by a bursting grenade, had been General Ota himself! And—Maureen had known it!

"So, you were working for Ota all the time!" he gritted. "You helped him spy on me—and on the generalissimo!"

"No!" she denied, sobbing. "When he first came to the hospital, Dr. Yun dressed his face. The doctor told me later Ota had deliberately cut himself to simulate bomb wounds. Yun didn't

know him, of course, but at last I recognized him. I intended telling you, but you were so unfriendly, I—well, he'd been kind to me when I met him first in Shanghai and he'd even let me work among the sick Chinese there. Besides, you'd had Wong executed, so I wasn't going to betray Ota so you'd shoot him, too."

BREATHLESSLY defiant now, the girl continued. "When Chiang visited you, I found Ota listening outside your door. He vanished when he saw me and I decided to tell you at once. But you were so brutal and the Chinese officers seemed ready to kill me, so I said nothing."

A terrible cold anger gripped Mayne. He knew now why his ambush had failed, how his every movement had been known beforehand to the Japanese. Knew, too, that while Chiang Kai-shek had been confiding to him things of vital importance, Ota had been listening. And this pretty girl doctor to whom, despite himself, he felt strangely drawn—she had helped the spy!

"Go on," Mayne bade her hoarsely.

"You left that night," Maureen resumed bitterly. "I was still too furious with you to speak, but I did go to Ota and beg him not to make use of what he'd overheard. He refused, of course, and left also. I realized then just what it all meant to you—to China. I tried to learn where you'd gone, but no one could tell me.

"All I knew was what I'd overheard when I came into your room—about your coming here. I packed the ambulance and started north. I don't understand Mongolian, but whenever I met a Chinese, I asked where Club Fist was, and at last I traced you here—too late!"

Mayne's left hand closed over his heavy automatic. "I should kill you!" he breathed at last. "You, one of my own race, have done irreparable harm. Not to me alone nor to these poor devils"—his eyes swept the wounded

Mongols—"but to Chiang—the one man who can save China!"

"But I didn't realize!" she sobbed. Then she stiffened and met his gaze unwaveringly. "Well, why don't you shoot? It's your right—perhaps it's your duty. I tried to save a man who'd once helped me, but instead I brought death to hundreds. Well, there's only one thing you can do now. I'm—I'm ready."

For a long while he gazed at her, thrilled by her fearlessness.

"Go!" he grated at last, and turned away.

* * * * *

Corporal Tangi cursed the cold and snuggled deeper into his fur coat as, in what he believed to be fluent Ural-Altai, he bawled irate commands at the gang of Mongol laborers.

From his stance atop the enormous dump, he watched critically as the Mongols added to it box after box, each containing two two-gallon cans of gasoline. A sense of Nippon's greatness brought an inward glow. *Hai*, but all was well, since these desert dogs were cowed into working as subject laborers!

Clearly they had no stomach, as had the Chinese, for guerilla fighting. That business, two weeks before, when an ambush party of them, under the European, Club Fist, had been exterminated, had been a decisive lesson.

He scowled officiously as a native climbed up slowly with a box.

"Dog!" he barked. "Strip, that you

may work unimpeded by that great-coat."

Obediently the man shrugged out of his *terlik* and flung it to the ground below, his torso bare now to the sub-zero temperature. Idly the noncom noted two puckered, scarified spots on the Mongol's dark skin—one on the right shoulder, the other under the right ribs.

Corporal Tangi decided they must be lately healed bullet wounds. He would have interrogated the man had he then not had to bark curses at another laggard worker. Thus he lost certain promotion to commissioned rank, besides the great monetary reward offered for the capture of the American adventurer whom men called Club Fist.

For Mayne was attempting the most desperate exploit of his career. Here, in the very midst of the great Japanese base, he planned to deal a stunning blow against Nipponese imperialism. Posing as a Torgut Mongol, his body skilfully stained, his danger was enormous, since not only must he avoid detection by the alert soldiers, but also by some of the locally recruited laborers, who might recognize him as their discredited leader.

TRUE, when the time came, a hundred guerillas under Feng were to cooperate, twenty-five of whom were Chinese students from the North Shensi Academy. An institution which

[Turn page]

CLOTHESPIN NOSE



Cold make breathing difficult? Nose feel "clamped in a clothespin?" Put a Luden's in your mouth. As it dissolves it releases cool menthol vapor—which, with every breath, helps relieve clogged nasal passages, unclamp "clothespin nose!"



specialized in training patriots as guerilla leaders, and had sent its men to gain experience under the famous Club Fist, unaware of his defeat and disgrace.

But the Mongols of the band followed Mayne without trust. If he won, they would claim they alone of their compatriots had foreseen his eventual comeback. If he failed, they would swear he had forced them to follow him against their will. Already, too, their mistrust had communicated itself to the students, so that at the least setback, all would desert him. Only Feng, their immediate leader, still limping from his wound, was dependable.

As he toted yet another box atop the ever-heightening pile, Mayne stared around the humming base. Nearby was a second gasoline dump. A mile northward were several smaller piles—the camp's great ammunition dump, strictly guarded. Countless trucks crawled over new-made roads or were neatly aligned in the vast transport park. Yonder was the big tankodrome, and beyond it, laborers were leveling ground for an airdrome.

Everywhere were huts and tents, housing regiments and brigades. Soon now all would be ready for the great thrust to cut off China's munitions from Russia.

Mayne's eyes narrowed. One man alone—himself—must ward off that paralyzing blow. Failure meant death and, perhaps, collapse of Chinese resistance. Steel-nerved though he was, the awareness of his terrific responsibility almost overwhelmed Club Fist.

"Son of a dog, who are you to stand gaping?" Corporal Tangi was bellowing, so Mayne climbed down to bring up yet another box from a waiting truck.

DARKNESS at last brought an end to labor. Escorted by infantrymen, the Mongols were marched to join others in a wire-enclosed camp

of yurts. A high-raised floodlight gave a bright glare from the gateway, making it virtually impossible to leave unseen by guards.

As Mayne was eating his meager rations, a commotion among his fellows drew him with them toward the wire, outside which a tiny procession had halted. Escorted by a lieutenant and two soldiers was—Maureen! Her hands were lashed behind her and her fur coat was torn, but her preternaturally pale face was calm and her head held high.

Some Mongols at the wire demanded whence this fair barbarian had come. A guard, airing his knowledge of their tongue, answered she was a spy and was being taken to General Ota, who would have her shot, as all would be shot who dared hostile acts against Nippon.

Mayne moved behind his more inquisitive fellows. Was this a trick? Did Ota suspect Club Fist's presence among the laborers and hope to make him betray himself upon seeing Maureen foredoomed to execution?

Even as the thought crossed his mind, a staff car drew up beside the girl and Ota himself stepped out.

She limped to meet him. "Two weeks ago, General, while I was driving my ambulance back toward Hankow, I was arrested and accused of being a traitor to Japan," she called in English. "I'm an Irish Free State citizen, and I demand to be put in touch with the British authorities."

His face no longer decorated with adhesive, though scars showed where he had cut himself, Ota regarded her blandly.

"I regret the necessity of this, Doctor," he said. "But at our last meeting, you threatened to betray me to Club Fist—a distinctly traitorous act toward Japan. Further, after I'd returned to my own army, you deliberately went seeking Club Fist to tell him I had learned his plans. Can you wonder, then, that I ordered your arrest?"

"I can't appreciate your logic," she flared. "I could have betrayed you to Club Fist, but I knew it would mean your death. Yet when I found you plotted *his* death and I tried, too late, to warn him and was driven away for my pains, I'm considered a traitor to Japan! The world won't condone this when it gets out, General."

Ota's answer was grim. "It won't get out," he said. "It is doubly regrettable that you are a beautiful foreign lady, but military laws knows no distinction. We do not enjoy making war on women, but when thousands of lives are at stake, there can be no hesitation. The court-martial convenes in an hour. As a man, I am horrified you must die. As a soldier, I have no option but to see that justice is served."

Ordering the lieutenant to take her to headquarters, Ota climbed into his car and was driven away, while Maureen's guards shoved her onward and she became swallowed up by the night.

Mayne remained among the gaping, uncomprehending Mongols. Was this a trick? It seemed too melodramatic, too coincidental, to be genuine. Besides, though Ota was his enemy, there was grudging admiration between them and Mayne could not believe he'd murder a woman.

But, if it were true, it must mean the Japanese were becoming more ruthless through sheer desperation. Though winning battles constantly, they had overextended themselves until a hidden weakness was developing.

Suddenly Mayne scowled. He dared not worry about Maureen's possible fate now. After all, he reasoned, she was nothing to him. Restlessly he watched the Mongols going into their yurts. When at last he went to his own, his tent sharers were snoring.

He lay in his place near the opening. Three hours to wait. Three? No, two! Abruptly he knew he must start sooner and, though it meant additional risk, he must rescue Maureen!

He began forming a scheme to dovetail in with his major plan. God! If he only could—

Save for snores and the distant tread of sentries, silence had come to the compound as Mayne began opening flaps of his cleverly built body belt. From one little pocket he drew out a luminous watch and strapped it on his wrist. Another yielded a small pair of wire cutters. From a third he took a tiny automatic, its butt fitting snugly within his crippled hand so that he could fire it with his uninjured index finger. Then, shadowlike, he crawled outside.

CHAPTER V

Fight to the Finish



KEEPING close to the yurt's side, Mayne gained its rear and halted. This was among the few spots unlighted by the searchlights at the gates, and immediately before him

loomed the rear belt of wire, the yurt's shadow reaching beyond it.

Crouched in this small patch of darkness, Club Fist waited until the sentry passed outside the wire, then crept forward and noiselessly severed the three lower strands. From another pocket of his belt he took a small chloroform bottle and soaked a gauze pad with its contents.

Another wait, until footsteps heralded the sentry's return. He tensed, the pad held ready. Now! The startled Japanese had time only for a strangled gasp before the overpowering fumes assailed him. Momentarily he struggled in the viselike grip of his phantomlike attacker, then crumpled within the small area of shadow.

Making sure the man was not shamming, Mayne divested him of his equipment—cap, fur coat and gloves—and donned them himself, covering the unconscious soldier with his own

discarded *terlik*. The Japanese was much smaller than he and the clothes fitted badly, but they would present a satisfactory silhouette to watching eyes.

Shouldering his victim's bayoneted rifle, Mayne continued along the latter's beat in the full glare of the light. Toward its end, however, was another shadowy spot and here he turned away and ran swiftly into the darkness until he came into the lines of an infantry brigade.

Club Fist proceeded through these confidently, was promptly challenged. He explained he was an orderly sent by his commander to general headquarters, then walked on audaciously.

Mayne's reconnaissances from atop the gasoline dump had made every location in the vast camp known to him, and now he headed toward headquarters' rear, wary against fresh challengers. It took him time and considerable risk, however, to locate Ota's hut. Creeping now, he reached its rear window and peered within. His blouse discarded, Ota was absorbedly studying a map on a small table.

Mayne watched him grimly. Had he condemned Maureen? Was she already dead? Once the court-martial had reached a verdict, the Yank guessed there would be no delay. Instead of facing a formal firing squad, she would be done to death secretly, lest even the soldiers themselves learn that a woman, citizen of a friendly power, had been executed.

Cautiously Mayne gained the hut's door.

He tried it and it opened. The next instant he was inside, his automatic pointing at Ota's heart.

"Don't move!" he warned softly. "Ota, I want the girl—alive!"

The other stiffened. If he refused to obey, he knew this devilish American would kill him. Obviously Mayne hoped to rescue the girl. Very well, let him try. He himself would cooperate—until some slip on Mayne's part enabled him to settle with the

barbarian adventurer once and for all.

So Ota answered truthfully enough. "Dr. O'Hara still lives. The court gave her time in which to prepare her soul. The executioner will not visit her for another hour."

Mayne's smile was thin. "He's visiting her right away, understand? If the guards are inquisitive, I'm a Manchurian auxiliary, who's taken on the job an ordinary Jap would balk at. You're coming, too. So let's go! And remember—I'm keeping close to you."

A moment later Ota and his "Manchurian" follower, rifle slung, passed outside. They were challenged by a sentry and Ota gave the password. Then both walked toward the camp's fringe, where a small, lighted tent was guarded by two soldiers.

Here, too, Ota gave the password and entered, Mayne at his heels. Maureen was kneeling, a rosary in her hands, her face Madonnalike in the flickering light. She glanced up and recognized Ota.

"So soon?" she asked quietly.

"Come," he ordered, Mayne's automatic pressing against his spine.

SIGHING, she replaced the rosary in her blouse and slipped into her fur coat.

"Is it far to go?" Her voice was amazingly steady. Once only did she stare at the tall figure of Ota's companion, obviously her destined executioner, and she shivered. Then wordlessly she passed outside ahead of her two captors.

Aware Mayne understood Japanese, Ota told the two sentries merely to remain until relieved. The moon was rising as the trio moved away from the tent.

"Now where?" Ota demanded.

"Face me," the Yank ordered brusquely.

Then Ota sprang. Mayne's left hand was wrenched painfully in a ju-jutsu hold, but he merely laughed mockingly. He had anticipated the attack and, instead of the pistol the Japanese

had expected to wrest from his left hand, Ota grasped a finger that had projected to simulate a pistol's barrel against his spine. The real weapon was fitting snugly in the Yank's crippled right hand.

Then, before Ota could recoil, Mayne knocked off his heavy fur cap and brought the butt down crushingly on his skull, so that he crumpled, gurgling.

"You've got to do your part now!" Mayne whispered sharply.

"You!" Maureen gasped incredulously. Then: "What must I do?"

Already Mayne had trussed Ota up with the general's own Sam Browne belt.

"I've other things to do," he whispered. "When you see a gasoline dump explode, lie beside our friend here and see he doesn't come to. If you're discovered, kill him and work your way south to the tank park, where I'll pick you up. Get it?"

Thrusting his automatic into her hands, Mayne hurried away. Orienting himself by the floodlight at the laborers' compound and careful to avoid sentries, he reached the rear of the big dump. Emptying the magazine of the rifle he still carried, he recharged it with three cartridges from his body belt—cartridges which he had had made especially for this purpose.

Then he fired at the pile! Instantly a terrific sheet of flame told that the incendiary bullet had exploded a gasoline can which, in turn, had ignited the entire dump. One shot had been enough.

Mayne turned and ran purposefully in the opposite direction. Already alarm gongs were awakening the entire camp to astounded consciousness. Sentries challenged as he padded northward. Men were pouring from tents and huts and forming up in company streets. The floodlight was dulled now by the greater glare of the exploding gasoline, tongues of liquid fire spuming aloft from the burst cans

and raining upon the adjacent second dump and igniting it, also.

Club Fist's breath came in great sobs as he forged on. Once he blundered into a forming platoon and rough hands grabbed him.

"To the fire!" he panted. "Quickly—it will destroy the entire base!"

Believing him a messenger, they let him go and he plowed on. He was near the ammunition dumps now. Far to his left the crews at the tankodrome were assembling, ready to help fight the fire.

"Halt!" Mayne was pulled up short by the unyielding point of a sentry's bayonet. He had reached his goal.

"Turn out the guard!" Club Fist panted desperately. "Everyone must go to fight the fire."

The soldier's grip relaxed on his weapon, and instantly Mayne swept it aside and jumped in, his right fist shooting unerringly to the man's jaw. Caught off balance, the Japanese went down, and Mayne smashed his own rifle butt down upon his skull.

The gate of the protective wire around the dump loomed ahead. Opening it, the Yank raced within. He pulled two small objects from his body belt—the last it contained. Swiftly he screwed one into the other. The ammunition—charges in canvas bags for the heavy artillery—was covered by a lashed-down tarpaulin. He ripped it with his wire cutters. Detonating the flat bomb he had taken from his belt, Mayne thrust the thing arm deep among the charges.

ALREADY other guards had seen him and were racing up, not daring to fire so close to the munitions. Club Fist tore out of the wire barrier. One soldier, outstripping the rest, charged at him, his bayonet seeming aflame in the glare of the distant fire.

Mayne unslung his own rifle, hoping his shot would be fatal. He fired and the soldier gave an inhuman scream as the incendiary bullet tore into his vitals. The Yank shuddered

compassionately, but there was no time to pause. Each second saw that bomb fuse burning shorter.

He glanced back over his shoulder. A guard had spotted the rent in the tarpaulin and was running toward it. Would he reach it in time? Curiously the Yank half hoped he would.

But, no! A terrible tongue of flame burst outward through the tarpaulin and, with a mighty hiss, the entire pile ignited. The charges did not explode as shells would have done, but burst their bags in a mighty spume of flame that seemed to reach into infinity. Fragments of burning bags came floating down, some to fall, as Mayne hoped they would, upon other ammunition piles.

He found himself thrusting through a mass of terrified men who were also trying desperately to escape the deadly zone. He had progressed only a scant hundred yards more, however, when a colossal detonation told that the shell dump, too, had exploded.

The concussion was so great that Mayne was flung down, stunned and deafened. A deluge of burst artillery shells rained down—one jagged piece burying itself in the ground not a foot from his head.

Club Fist arose at last. From everywhere came screams and cries from stricken men. Once more he ran, this time heading for the tankodrome. He had done his part. Had the guerillas done theirs?

Reeling from exhaustion he reached the tankodrome.

"Feng!" he croaked, when he heard a few shots and yells. "Feng!"

A few yards more and a familiar figure loomed ahead.

"Older-Than-I-Am, you are indeed great! All has gone well and the tanks are ours!"

"Give me one tank and a crew," Mayne panted. "The Irish girl—the doctor—is holding Ota a prisoner for me. Lead the rest away as per orders. Hurry!"

Soon he was being driven in a tank,

manned by some of the Chinese students, toward where he had left Maureen and her prisoner. The gasoline still flared, and periodic explosions told that the munitions were still being destroyed by the holocaust. Soldiers were everywhere, seeking cover or trying gallantly to rescue wounded comrades.

Then Mayne had reached the spot where he had left the girl. He climbed out, calling her name. No answer came. A terrible reaction gripped him.

Had Ota been rescued? Had Maureen died in a vain attempt to obey his—Mayne's—orders?

"Maureen!" he cried again loudly, urgently.

"Here!" came a weak reply. "Ota's all right. But, for heaven's sake, what happened?"

He hurried toward the two prone figures. "Pronto!" he ordered. "We're escaping in this tank."

"Splendid!" Maureen laughed from sheer relief. "But you'll have to help me up. You see, I got sideswiped by a burst shell and I'm afraid it's cracked some of my ribs!"

CHAPTER VI

Ota Bows Out



AT DAWN, thirty miles away, Club Fist Mayne counted his gains. The Japanese base was a blackened ruin that would take weeks to reestablish. The guerillas had gotten clear with an entire regiment of tanks and, best of all, General Ota was a prisoner. Small wonder the guerillas were swearing there had never been a hero leader like Club Fist! No difficulty now in raising recruits!

Exultant then, Mayne approached the stone hut he was using as his headquarters. Within, Maureen was

resting on an improvised cot. The burst shell had broken two of her ribs, but she had taped her side up herself and seemed happy. Ota, disconsolate, was in there also.

The Yank froze, however, when he entered.

Ota stood beside Maureen, brutally pressing Mayne's own small automatic against her cringing body!

"You admire this lady greatly," the Japanese stated sibilantly. "I make a bargain. Give your word I go free and no harm will come to her. Otherwise—" He shrugged expressively.

"You rat!" Yet Mayne made no move to draw a weapon, aware Ota was making no idle threat. Though he died the next instant, the Jap would send a bullet ripping through the girl's body.

"He stole the gun when I wasn't looking!" she cried. "Don't listen to him. What's my life, compared with keeping him prisoner?"

Cold sweat dewed Mayne's brow. "If you kill her, I'll have you tortured—Mongol style!" he promised terribly.

Ota shrugged. "As you will. But first—she dies!"

"She'll have safe conduct through the Japanese zone?"

Ota nodded.

"Okay! Drop that gun and go!" The Yank's lips twisted sardonically as he allowed the Japanese to pass from the hut before him.

"We'll meet again," Mayne prom-

ised grimly, then called Feng to escort Ota out of the area.

Somberly he returned into the hut. Maureen was standing and came to him, taking his right hand and regarding his crippled fingers reverently.

"I wasn't worth it," she whispered. "I know what it must have meant to you to let him go."

"Forget it!" The old mocking glint flashed in his eyes. "Now, get those ribs healed pronto, because I'm sending you back where you belong—to Shanghai or somewhere, where folks of your own kind live. You're not meant to come doctoring among the tough bunch we've got around here."

"But, don't you think I could—well—stick around awhile, in case you need doctoring again?"

Somehow, Maureen found it hard to maintain a pretense of light humor now.

Long he gazed at her hungrily, drinking in her beauty, her fearlessness. But then came realization of what must befall before this war's end—cold, hunger, pain, horror. No girl, however brave, could be expected to share such a life.

"No!" Mayne refused explosively. "You see, my dear, I'm the guy you once called a disgrace to the white race. I'm Club Fist, and I've got a job to do—fast. You don't suppose I'm letting General Ota get away cold, do you? Why, I'll take him again if I have to swim to Tokio to do it!"

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THE SAGA OF SAINT OLAV

By CHARLES S. STRONG

Explorer, Traveler and Historian

Author of "The Search for Inca Gold," "The Sacking of Visby," etc.

MANY people are of the opinion that the United States of America and the United States of Brazil, the British Commonwealth of Nations, and other modern governmental Unions are the originators of the union type of government. A close study of the past, however, shows plainly that this is not strictly so. We might mention the Greek City-States, for example, but there are other examples closer to the present, yet antedating the unions mentioned above.

One of the oldest modern forms of a United country is that of Norway.

There is still in existence a document setting this forth, entitled "Three Towns." The "towns" are Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim, the ancient Nidaros, and these towns form the triangle that can be called the pulsing heart of Norway, a heart with three auricles — governmental, commercial and religious.

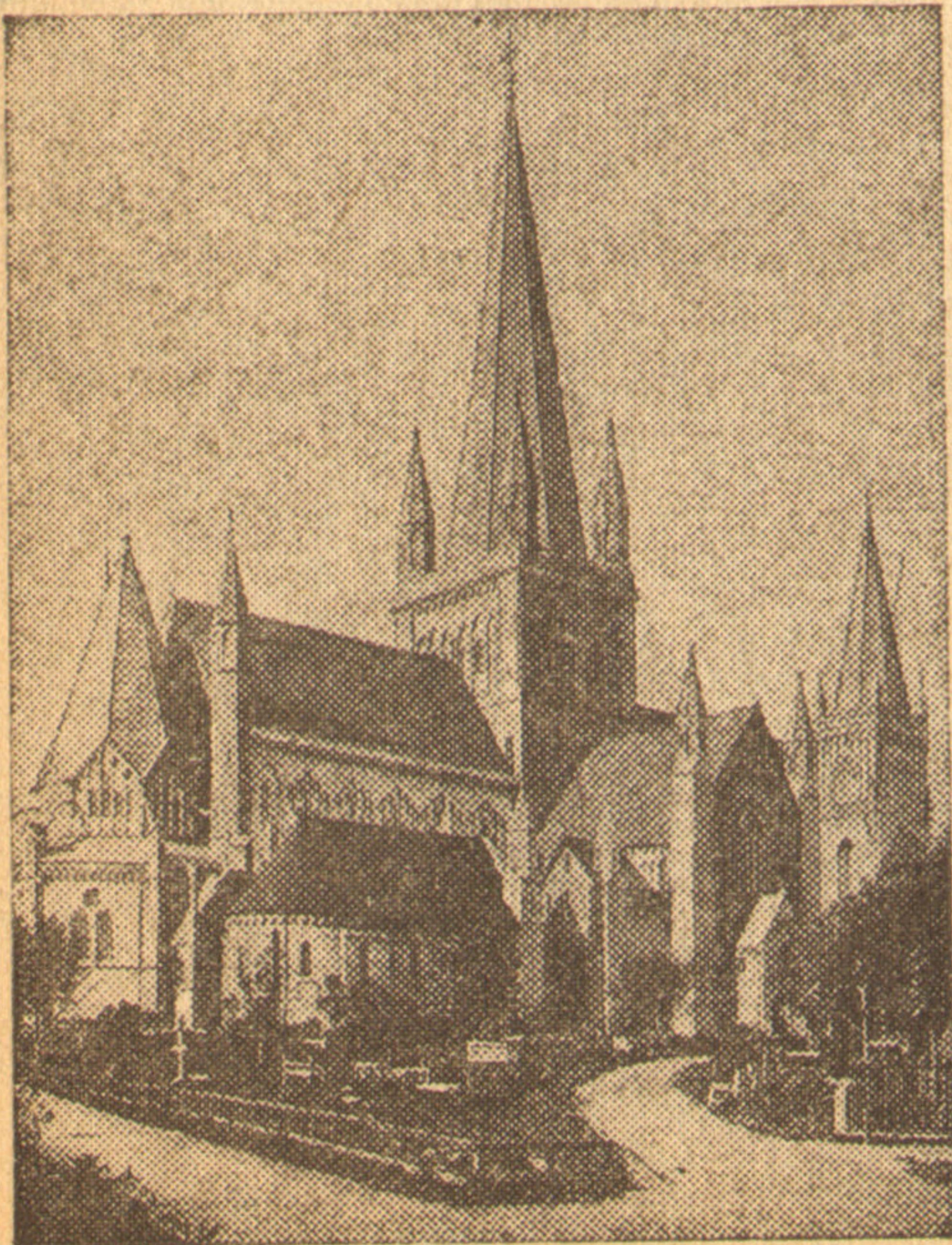
How this union was achieved is one of history's Thrilling Adventures.

Our curtain of time moves back almost a thousand years to the late nine-hundreds. It was the time of the Viking sea-raiders. But first let us speak of a single man.

Gunnar, a sturdy Norwegian farmer, spending most of the summer months on his rocky acres in the vicinity of the little wooden village of Nidaros, and his winters on fishing boats in the fjords, cared little about armed Vikings and their forays in England, Normandy, or the far shores of the Mediterranean.

Harald the Fair-haired

Gunnar had several sons, all of them as robust as himself, and they tilled



Trondheim Cathedral erected on the site of the last resting place of St. Olav

PRESENTING THE LATEST
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Leif Ericsson Landing in North America—from a painting by Hans Dahl. When petty kings of Norway disorganized the country, some of the hardier chieftains turned their eyes toward Iceland, Greenland and America.

their acres and harvested their crops, salted their fish, and wore the *vadmal* homespun clothes their women made for them. But now and then the traveling *skalds* or ballad singers would visit the little village and sing songs or tell stories of the Viking chiefs. Interested as Gunnar was in his own practical and limited affairs, nevertheless, he could not help but listen and learn.

Thus it was that he learned of the exploits of Harald, the Fair-haired. Until his time, Norway had been nothing more than a number of small communities scattered along the seacoasts in the Skaggerrack, the Cattegat, and along the Norwegian Sea. After the naval battle of Stavanger in 872, however, Harald had united these far-flung groups. Unfortunately, upon his death, there was no one strong enough to rule the combined tribes with military might.

Gunnar learned, too, that defeat at the hands of Harald hadn't been the end for some of the individualistic chieftains. To some it had meant a new beginning, for they set out to colonize Iceland in the wake of the Irish priests and fishermen. One of these chiefs was the father of Erik the Red. A combination of his pioneering and belligerent tactics had resulted in a further migration from Iceland to Greenland, where Erik's son, Leif, was growing to sturdy manhood.

All of this Gunnar and his sons heard, and they were proud of their traditions. But that they themselves would ever have a part in the problems of the petty kings was a thought very far from their minds. Nevertheless, the year 995 was the turning point in Gunnar's life, although he did not know it. Two things happened—two events that had to do with

*He Fell in Seeming Defeat, but His Idealism and Courage
Live Enshrined in the Hearts of His Countrymen Forever!*

the two Norwegian Kings, Olav I and Olav II.

The Coming of Olav I

It was in 995 that Olav I, known as Olav Tryggvesson, born in exile, and brought up as a slave in Esthonia, came to Norway. Before his arrival in the land of his fathers, he had engaged in the true Viking pursuits of raiding the British Isles and France. During one of these raids he was wrecked on the Scilly Islands, and was succored by a hermit, who told him something of the Christian Faith. Olav Tryggvesson was converted, gave up his warlike, barbaric assaults, and sailed for Norway.

That same year saw the birth of Olav II, or Olav Haraldsson, a descendant of Harald the Fair-haired, and entitled to the throne of Norway, if he could secure and maintain it.

Before Olav II, who is called to-day the St. Olav of Norway, was five years old, Olav Tryggvesson had run his course in the Viking land. Upon assuming the crown of Norway in 995, King Olav I sought the hand of Princess Thyre of Denmark, after she had fled from her heathen husband, Burislav. This marriage brought down the ire of both the Danes and the Swedes upon the head of the Norwegian King, and when he sought to lay claim to Thyre's lands, he was met in a naval battle off the Island of Svold near Rugen by the combined Danish and Swedish fleets, together with the ships of Earl Haakon, the ruler that Olav had deposed five years before.

Hand-to-Hand Conflict

The battle was a long and bloody one, with hand-to-hand conflict the order of the day. Olav I was among the last of those to go down, fighting from the deck of his ship, *Long Snake*, until there was no possibility any longer of victory. Then Olav, heroic to the last, in full armor and carrying sword and shield, leaped overboard into the sea.

With Norway in the constant state of unrest, it was not surprising that Olav Haraldsson began his Viking raids with his own bands almost as soon as he was physically able to don armor and carry a sword and shield. Like Olav I, his activities also led him in the direction of the British Isles and Norman France. His chief adversary in England, however, was not the English, but the forces of Canute, the Dane. During his forays in the West and South, he, too, had embraced Christianity, and was much more active in spreading the faith among his followers than Olav I had been.

In 1015 Olav Haraldsson returned to Norway, and immediately set himself up as the ruler of the five tribes of the Uplands. Earl Sveyn, the ruler of Denmark, who had become the virtual ruler of Norway after the defeat of Olav Tryggvesson, was the one stumbling block to Haraldsson's rule of the country. It took Olav II more than a year to round up a force strong enough to meet and defeat Sveyn at the battle of Nesje.

King Canute

Following this, his chain of successes included the annihilation of the petty kings of the South, the destruction of the aristocracy, the spread of Christianity, the conquest of the Orkney Islands, the humbling of the King of Sweden, and a successful raid upon Denmark. The Swedish portion of the drama was partly due to Olav's wooing and winning of the daughter of the king.

Naturally, with the petty kings in the mood that they usually were, Olav's position was still not as secure as it might have been. Finally the nobles started a revolution and Canute the Great came to Norway with his army to assist them. A pitched battle was fought. The odds were overwhelmingly against Olav II, and he fled to Russia with his wife and son, Magnus.

Now to get back to Gunnar.

Gunnar, our Trondelagen farmer, and his sons, had been among those converted to Christianity by St. Olav, and after the arrival of King Canute, and the latter's assumption of the crown of Norway, they gathered together in the *saeter* on the rocky acres, and discussed the future of Norway.

The *skalds* still came and went, bringing stories of Leif's discovery of Vineland, of the successes of the Vikings on the seas, and on land.

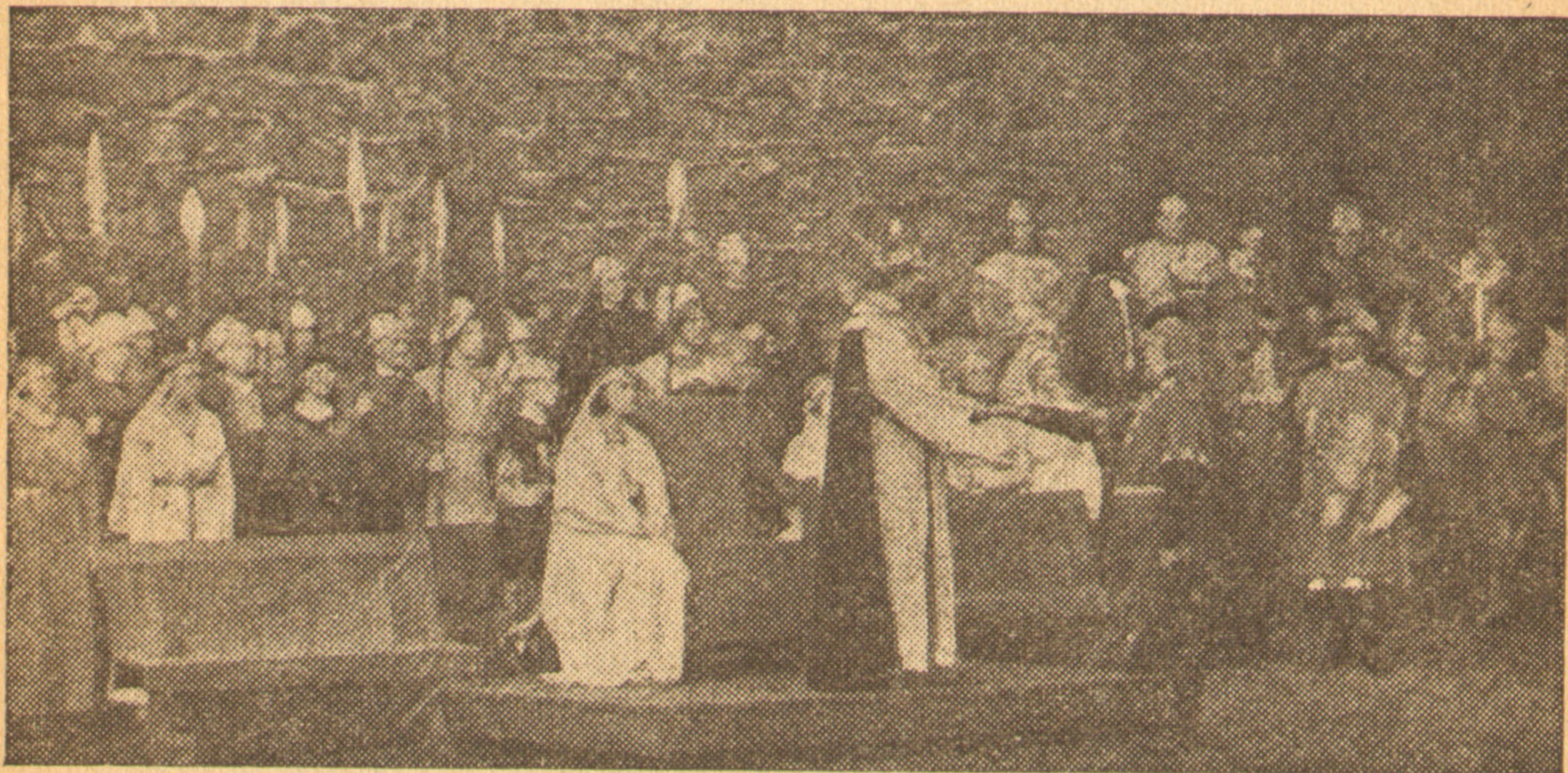
"What do you think of the future

on the door and was admitted by the farmer. That farmer was Gunnar.

Gunnar extended typical Norwegian hospitality to his king. His sons broadcast the news of the king's coming. The people responded with patriotic fervor. Many of Olav's old cohorts rejoined him. "Drive out Canute," was the slogan.

War's Aftermath

Gunnar, the peaceful farmer, found that he was going to have war right in his own dooryard. He offered his services to Olav, but the king knew



Incidents in the St. Olav Saga provided many thrilling scenes in a recent historical festival at Old Akershus Castle, Oslo, Norway.

of Norway?" Gunnar asked his eldest son.

"The future of Norway has gone with Olav Haraldsson," he said.

Gunnar shrugged his shoulders, nodded dismally, and said:

"And with him has gone the future of Christianity in Norway."

King and Farmer

No doubt Olav Haraldsson thought the same thing, for less than a year after his defeat and flight before Canute the Dane, he returned over the northern part of Finland and Sweden to Norway. One dark night he came to the door of the little farmhouse in the Trondelagen, pounded

that neither Gunnar nor his sons were schooled in war, and advised them to seek shelter in the surrounding forests. The Norwegians came up through the peninsula overland, while Canute brought his forces through the fjord on Viking ships.

The battle waged up and down the banks of the Vaerdals River, with each side gaining the ascendancy temporarily. Olav was ever in the forefront of his troops, but before the fight had been waged for many hours he saw that the day was going against him. His men were dead and dying all about him, and he knew that with this defeat there would be no rallying.

Canute and his swordsmen swept

upon Olav and the small group that remained about him. Olav's shield was cleft by a mighty blow from a double-edged sword, and Olav Haraldsson fell upon the blood-stained heath. With the death of their leader, the further resistance to Canute and his Norwegian allies quickly dissipated.

When the clash of sword on shield had died away, and the cold Norwegian moon showed its dead light down upon the battlefield, Gunnar and his family returned to Stiklestad farm. It was the night of July 29, 1030, a date that would long remain in their minds.

It seemed like the end for Olav and his converts, but as in the case of so many prophets who are without honor in their own countries, the death of Olav Haraldsson at Stiklestad was the beginning, not the end of the saga that has grown up about him. Gunnar and his sons, and some of the bloody survivors of the gruesome battle, went about the task of burying the dead. The Stiklestad farm would have a crop such as it had never had before.

A Hero's Grave

A marker was placed at the spot where Olav had fallen, and many years later this was replaced by a stone shaft.

Gunnar and his party decided that the last resting place of Olav Haraldsson should be in the town of Nidaros, the largest timbered town in Northern Norway, forerunner of the present Trondheim. They started the ninety-mile trek southward, and with great ceremony several days later they buried Olav on the banks of the Nid.

Magnus Olavsson, who had remained in Russia, received news of the death of his father from Gunnar, and was anxious to return to Norway. His advisers dissuaded him. But other events following the Battle of Stiklestad soon convinced the Norwegians

that Canute was not the ruler for them. The bonds of Denmark had never been soothing to them. At a national assembly a few years after Stiklestad, therefore, Olav was declared a martyr, and Magnus was recalled. Under his leadership, which lasted twelve years, from 1035 to 1047, the Danes were expelled. Since then the unity, independence and religion of the kingdom have been undisturbed.

Saint Olav

To many readers, who feel that a defeated hero is anything but a hero, the failure of St. Olav on the two occasions that he faced King Canute may seem to be an indication of weakness. But the followers of St. Olav recall that while hundreds lost their lives at Stiklestad, millions of their countrymen were preserved in their physical and spiritual independence in the years that followed.

So it can be said that while St. Olav won no important battles after his defeat of Earl Sveyn at the battle of Nesje, nevertheless his was the sort of a lasting victory that cannot be measured by captures of military value.

With the founding of the state church of Norway by Olav Kyrre, new attention was given to St. Olav, as Olav Haraldsson had come to be known. Previous to this, when the martyr's crown had been placed upon him by public opinion, Gunnar had been called in and asked to reveal the burial place of the dead king. He led the churchmen to the spot beside the River Nid, and they disinterred the body. Even though it had been buried for several years, it was reported to be in a complete state of preservation, and this fact added to the belief that Olav was indeed holy.

As the cortege was moving away from the burial site to entomb Olav's remains in the high altar of St. Clement's Church (founded by Olav Tryggvesson in 996), a spring of pure,

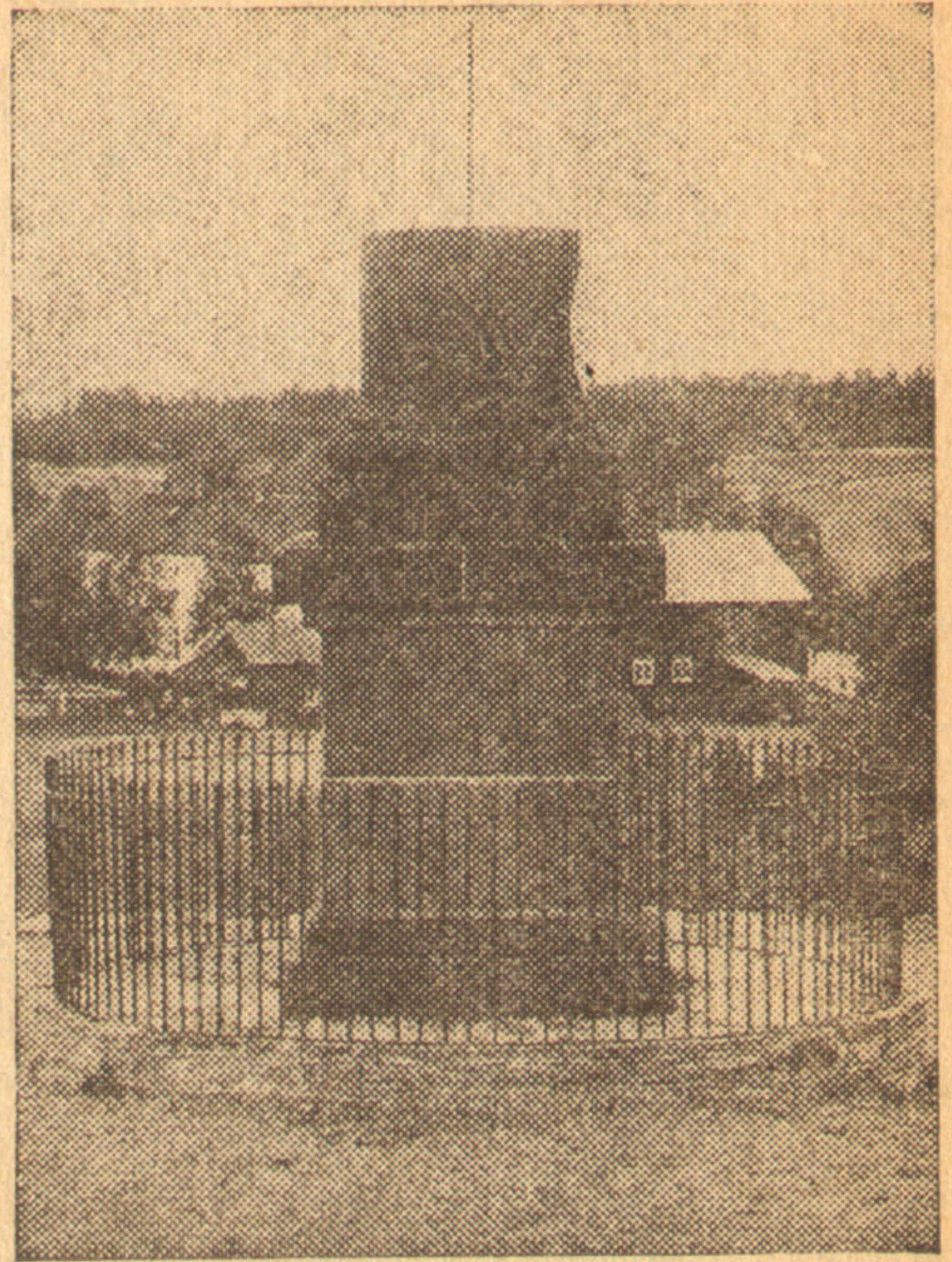
fresh water burst forth from the ground, and according to tradition has been flowing ever since.

The People Triumph

Olav Kyrre felt that Norway's church deserved something better than St. Clement's Church, and between 1066 and 1093 he started the Cathedral at Trondheim. This has been one of the focal points for Norwegian religious activity in the years that followed, and the completion of the church was one of the incidents in the Celebration of the 900th Anniversary of the death of St. Olav in 1930.

Even though Olav Haraldsson died at Stiklestad, his name will never die in Norway, nor anywhere in the world where Norwegians have foregathered. They know, too, of the Gunnars that have stood behind their rulers in the battles through the centuries for unity and independence and freedom of religion, and these unnamed heroes of the land are not forgotten either.

Evidence of this is daily presented to tourists in Trondheim and the small towns to the North along the



St. Olav Stone, on Stiklestad Battlefield, marking the site of King Olav's Death

route from Stiklestad to the Cathedral. They know that a big man is usually made by the still small voices of many little people.

Photos by Courtesy of Norwegian Government Railways.

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MACKAY

DONNA INCALLA, A BRAZILIAN OPERATIVE, AND I HAD BEEN DISPATCHED ON A SECRET MISSION TO SOUTH AMERICA, WHERE WORLD-SHAKING EVENTS WERE IN PROGRESS

IT WAS THE YEAR 2239. AFTER A SERIES OF AMAZING ADVENTURES ON THE UPPER AMAZON, DONNA AND I LEARNED THAT A MAN NAMED KASKABEL, KNOWN AS THE EQUATOR, HAD PROCLAIMED A NEW MASS MOVEMENT CALLED EQUATISM.

HE HAD LOCATED THE LOST GOLD MINES OF THE INCAS AND HAD INVENTED A POWERFUL NEW ANTI-MENTAL RAY. THUS EQUIPPED WITH BOTH ECONOMIC AND MILITARY WEAPONS, HE WAS ABOUT TO FORCE EQUATISM UPON AN UNSUSPECTING WORLD.

DONNA AND I WERE CAPTURED. DONNA PRETENDED THAT SHE HAD LOST HER MIND, AND I MADE IT APPEAR AS THOUGH I HAD BEEN WON OVER TO THE CAUSE OF EQUATISM.

I WAS FORCED TO RESIGN MY COMMISSION AS AN AMERICAN AGENT AND SOON HAD BECOME ONE OF THE EQUATOR'S CHIEF ADVISERS. HIS OTHER LIEUTENANTS, BRUSTILOV, SANCHEZ, STUMPFER AND LAVAL BECAME JEALOUS OF ME AND SUSPECTED THAT I WAS TRYING TO SABOTAGE EQUATISM

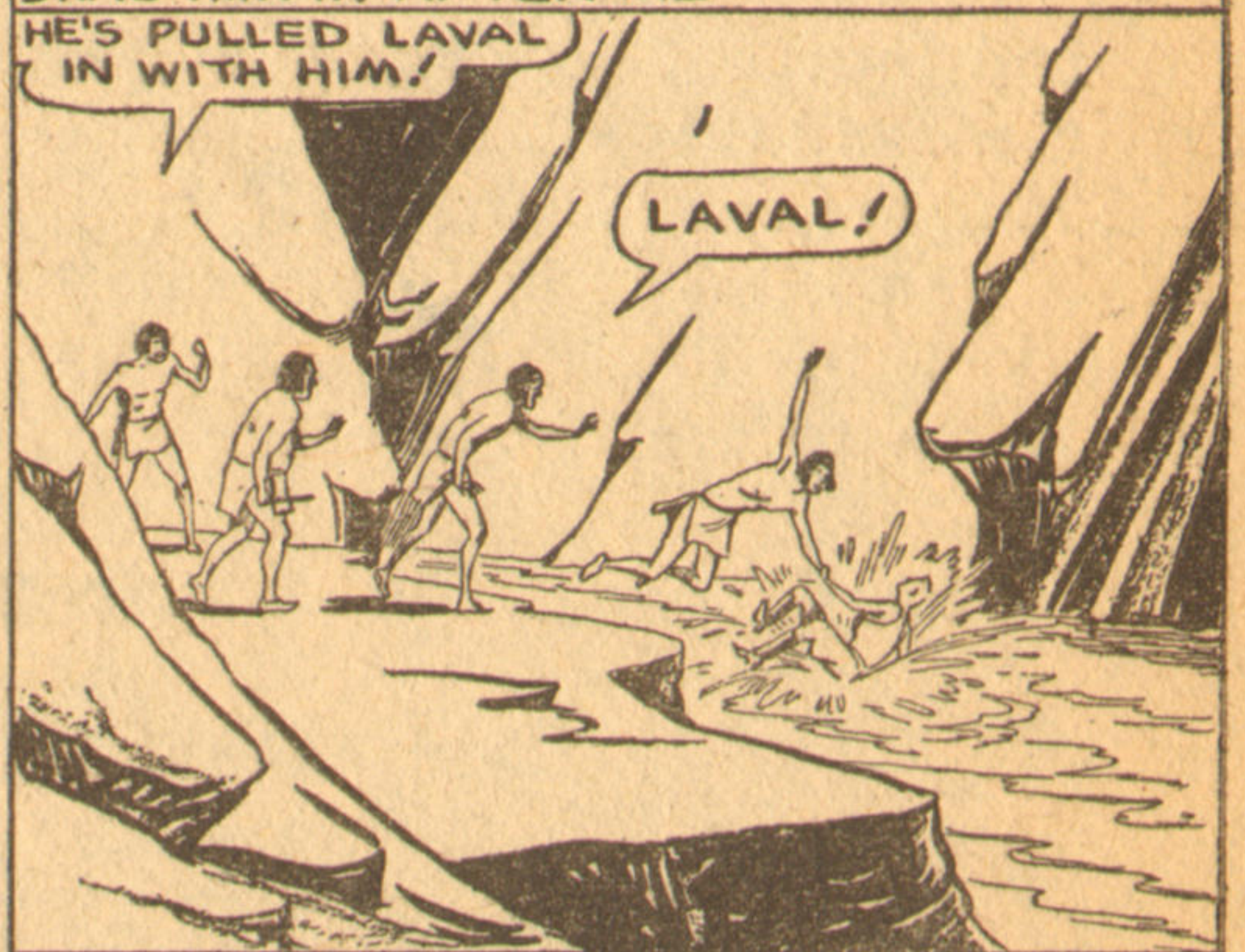
ONE NIGHT FOUR "INCAS" SET UPON ME IN THE STREET AND BEAT ME INTO INSENSIBILITY. I CAME TO AS THEY WERE CARRYING ME UP A SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGE. THEY FINALLY PUT ME DOWN ON THE BANK OF AN UNDERGROUND RIVER, A TRIBUTARY OF THE AMAZON. I COULD TELL FROM THEIR CONVERSATION THAT THEY WERE WHITES, DISGUISED AS NATIVE INCAS



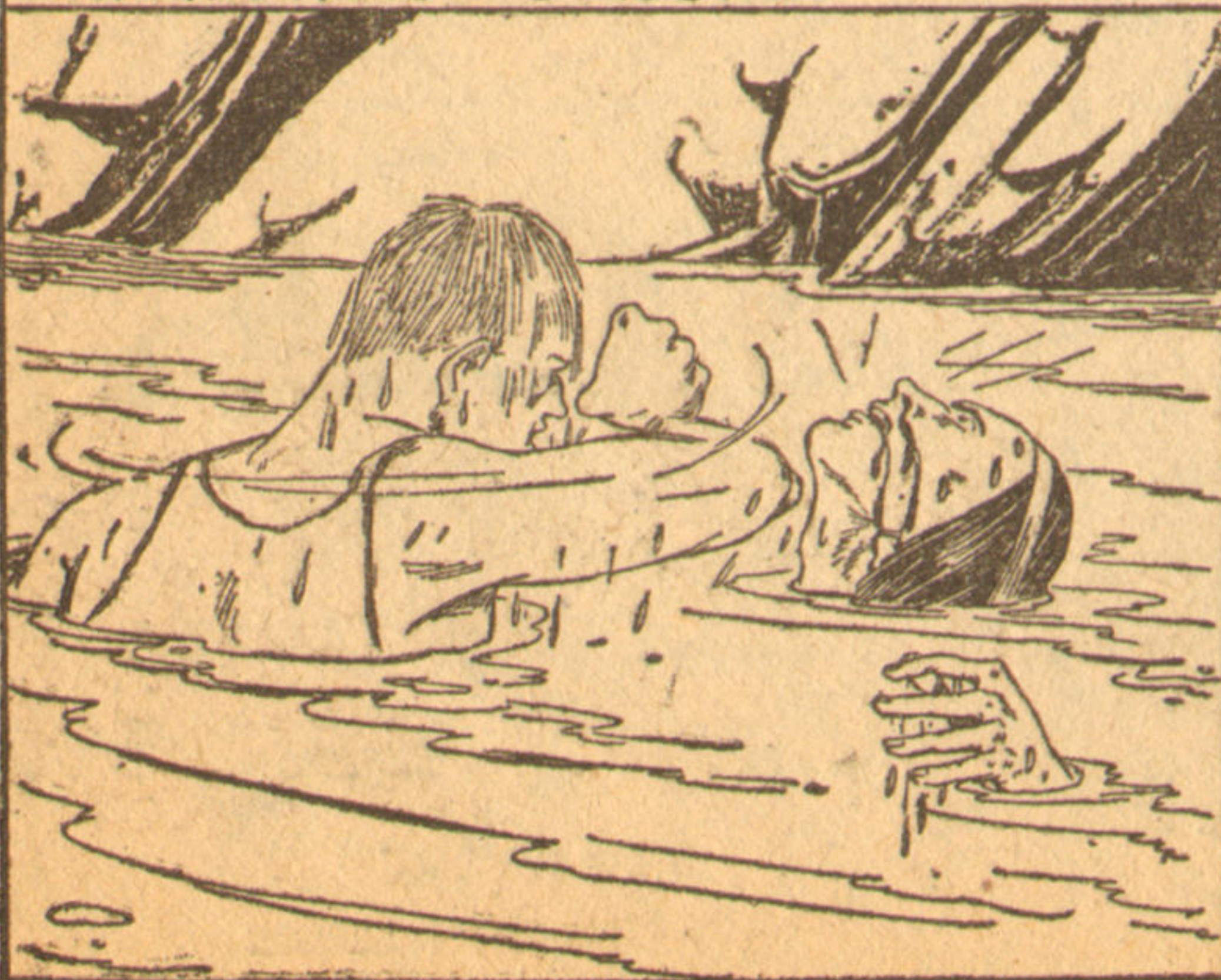
AS THEY SWUNG MY BODY, I RESOLVED TO PULL ONE OF MY CAPTORS IN WITH ME



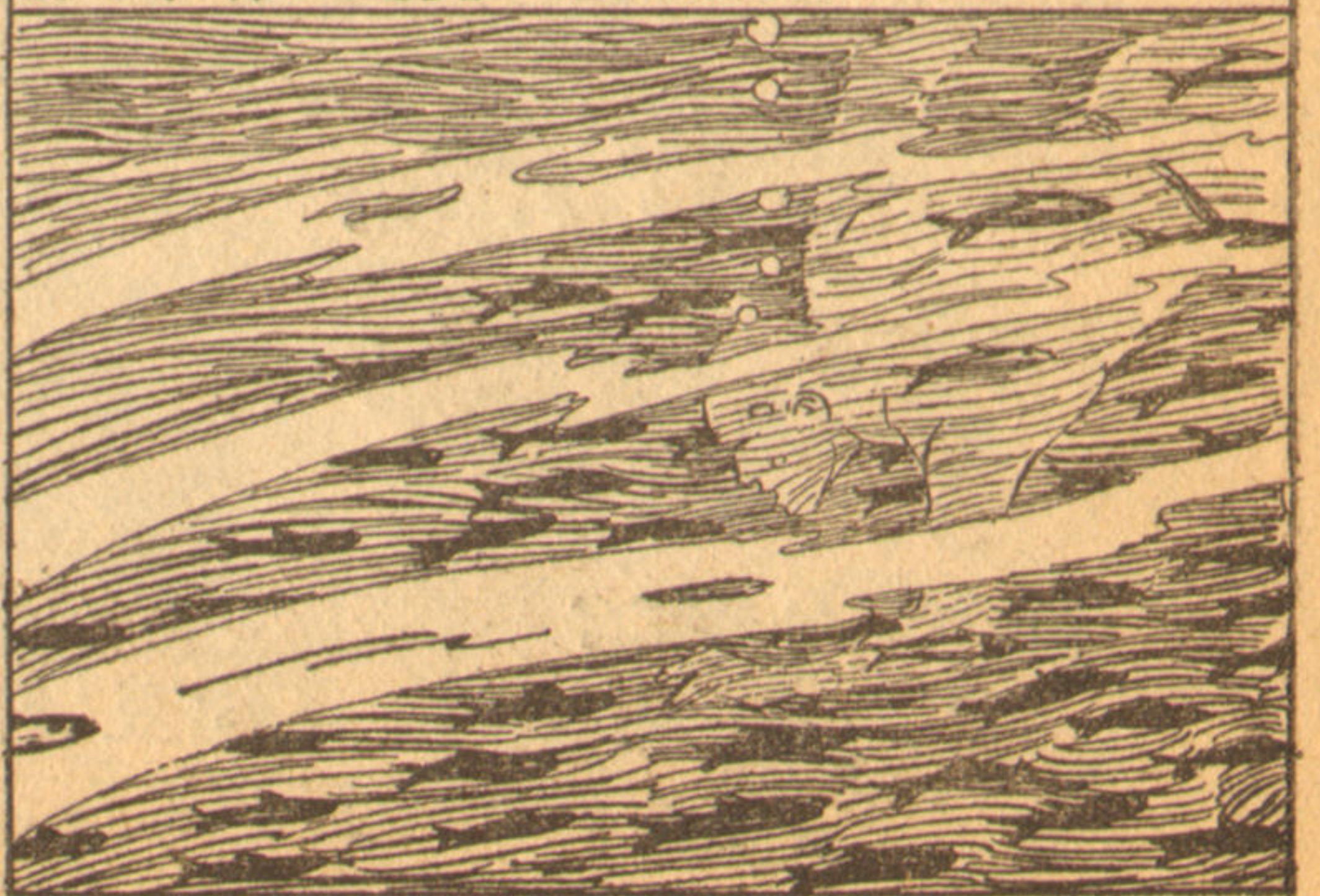
AS THEY LET GO OF ME, I MANAGED TO SEIZE ONE OF THEM BY THE WRIST AND DRAG HIM IN AFTER ME



WHEN WE ROSE TO THE SURFACE I SMASHED MY FIST IN LAVAL'S FACE. BLOOD SPURTED FROM HIS NOSE AND MOUTH



KNOWING THAT THE BLOOD WOULD QUICKLY DRAW THE PIRANHAS, I DIVED TO THE BOTTOM AND SWAM UNDER WATER. SWARMS OF THE SAVAGE LITTLE FISHES DARTED PAST ME, DRAWN BY THE BLOOD OF MY HAPLESS ASSAILANT



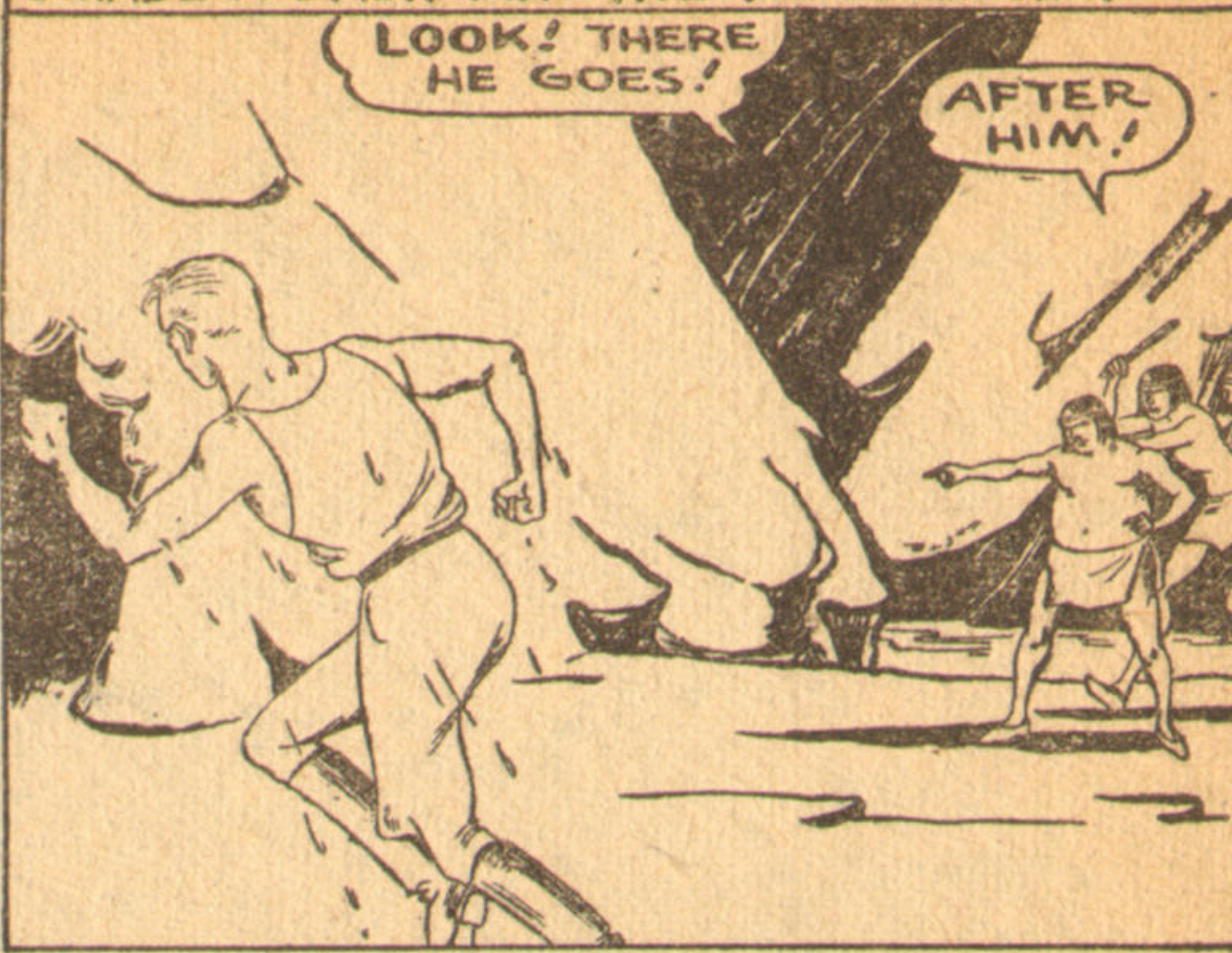
I CLIMBED OUT SOME DISTANCE DOWN THE RIVER. THE THREE OF THEM STOOD FASCINATED, GAZING IN HORROR AT THE RIVER WHERE WE WENT IN. BLOOD COVERED THE SURFACE OF THE WATER. THE PIRANHAS WERE MAKING SHORT WORK OF LAVAL.



I MADE A DASH FOR THE PASSAGEWAY —

LOOK! THERE HE GOES!

AFTER HIM!

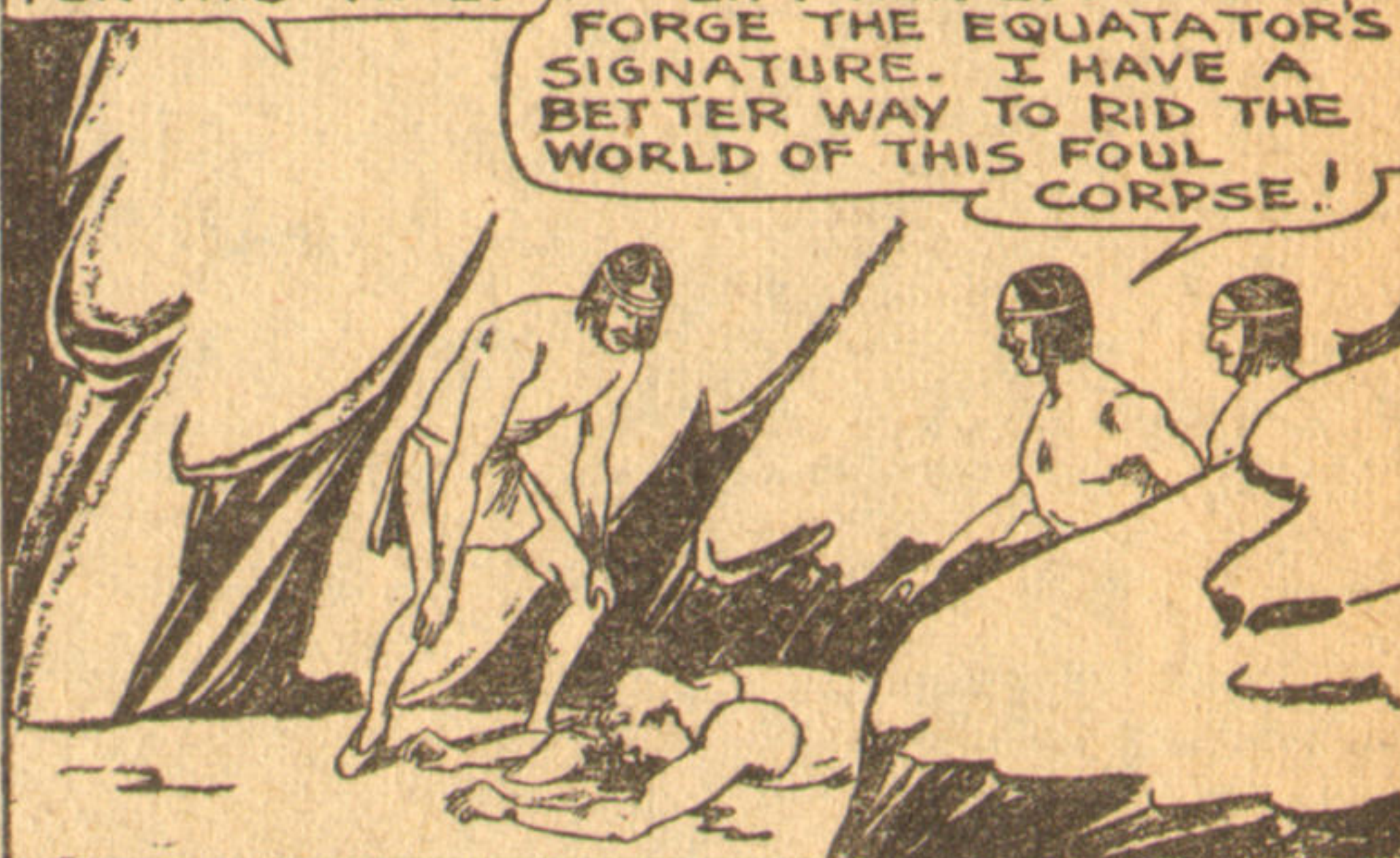


I WAS RIGHT -- MY "INCA" ASSAILANTS ARE NONE OTHER THAN STUMPFER, BRUSTILOV, AND SANCHEZ. OUCH! DARN THAT ROCK!

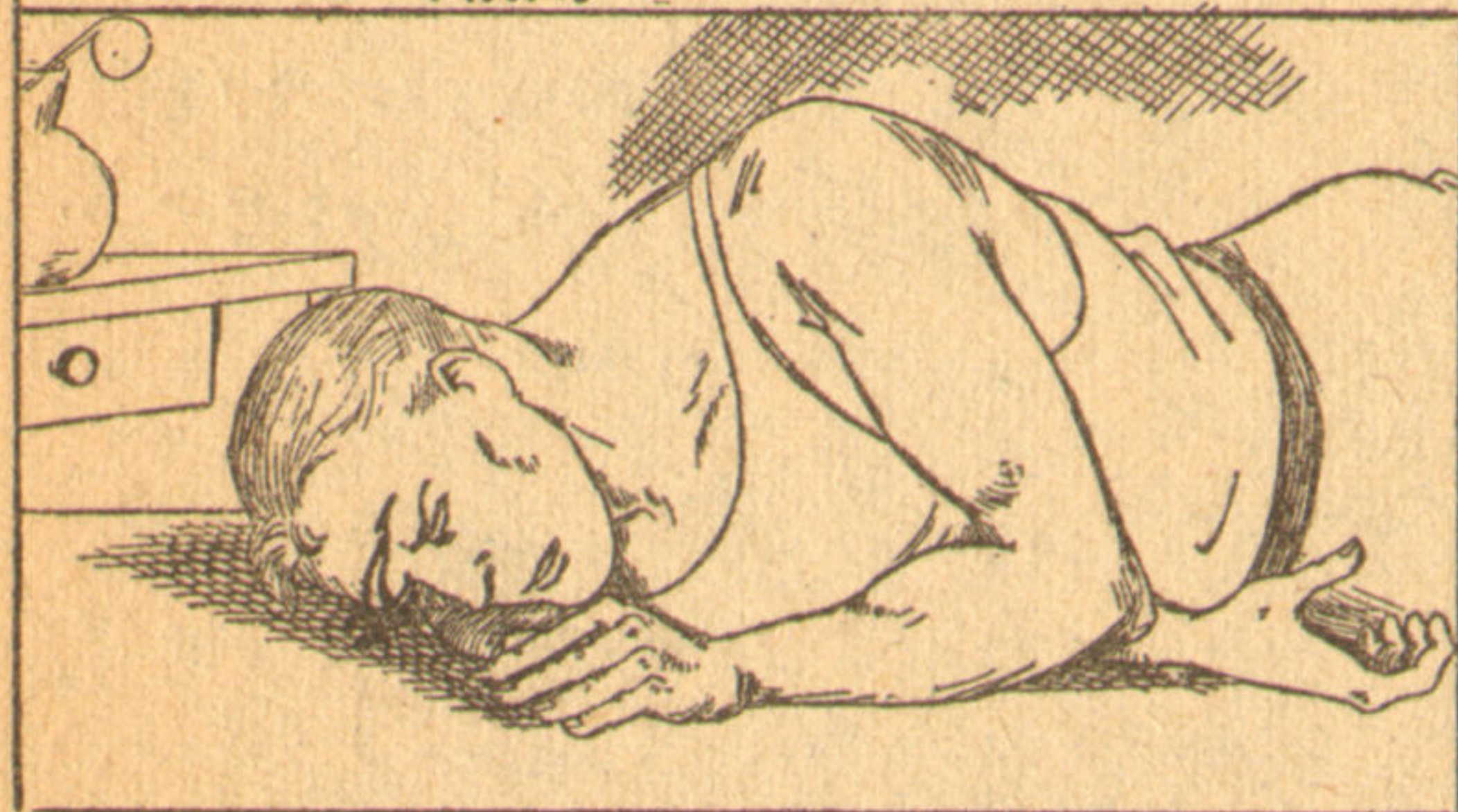


I FELL, STRIKING MY HEAD ON A ROCK. AS I LAY THERE UNCONSCIOUS, WITH BLOOD FLOWING FROM A DEEP CUT IN MY HEAD, MY ENEMIES ARRIVED AT THE SCENE. I GUESS HE'S DONE FOR THIS TIME!

LIFT HIM UP! I CAN FORGE THE EQUATOR'S SIGNATURE. I HAVE A BETTER WAY TO RID THE WORLD OF THIS FOUL CORPSE!

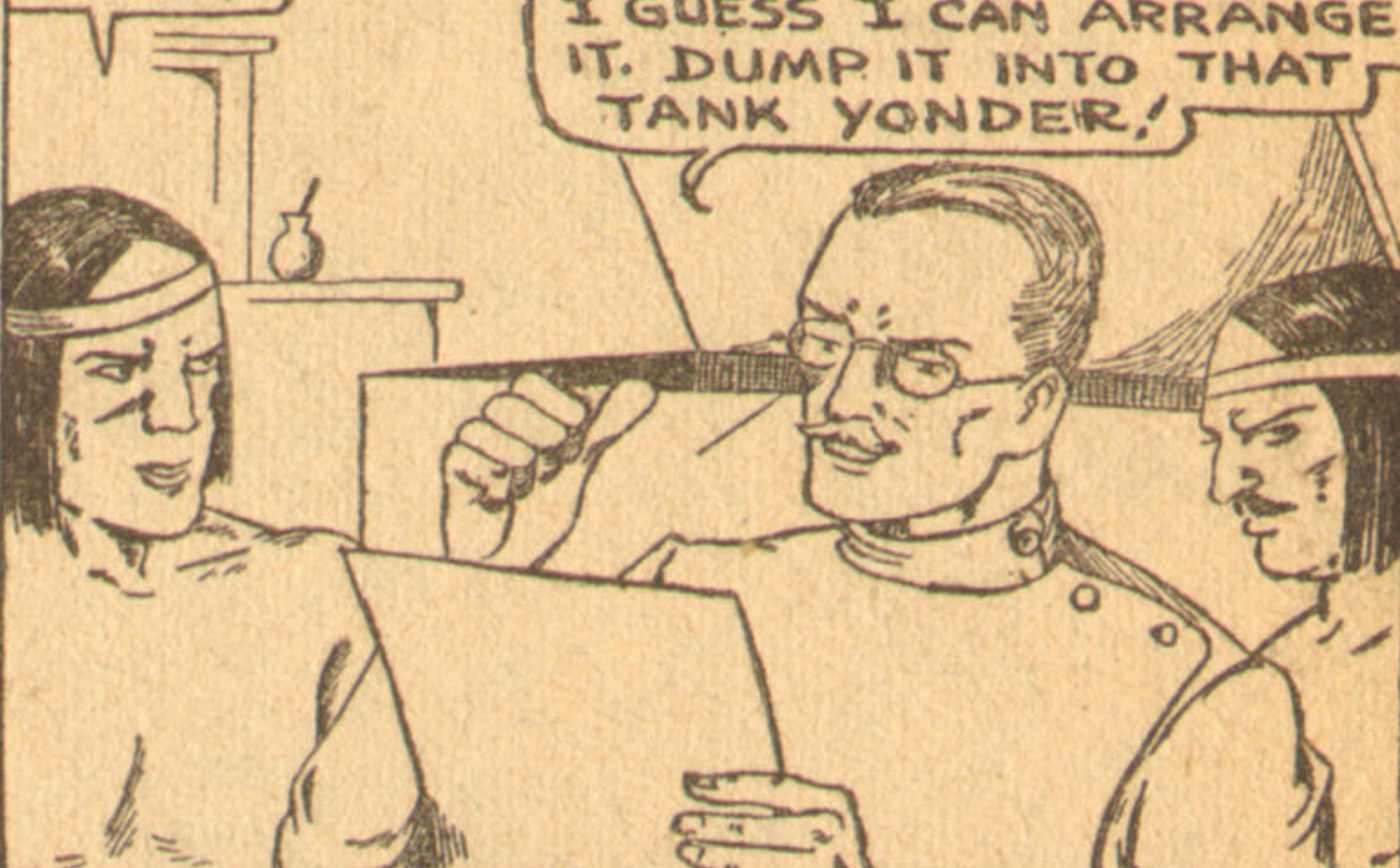


WHEN I CAME TO, I HAD BEEN DUMPED ON A HARD SLAB. FROM THE ODOR OF CHEMICALS I KNEW I WAS IN A LABORATORY. I WAS SO WEAK AND EXHAUSTED I COULD NEITHER MOVE NOR SPEAK. I COULD HEAR A RUMBLE OF VOICES -- THEY SEEMED MILES AWAY.

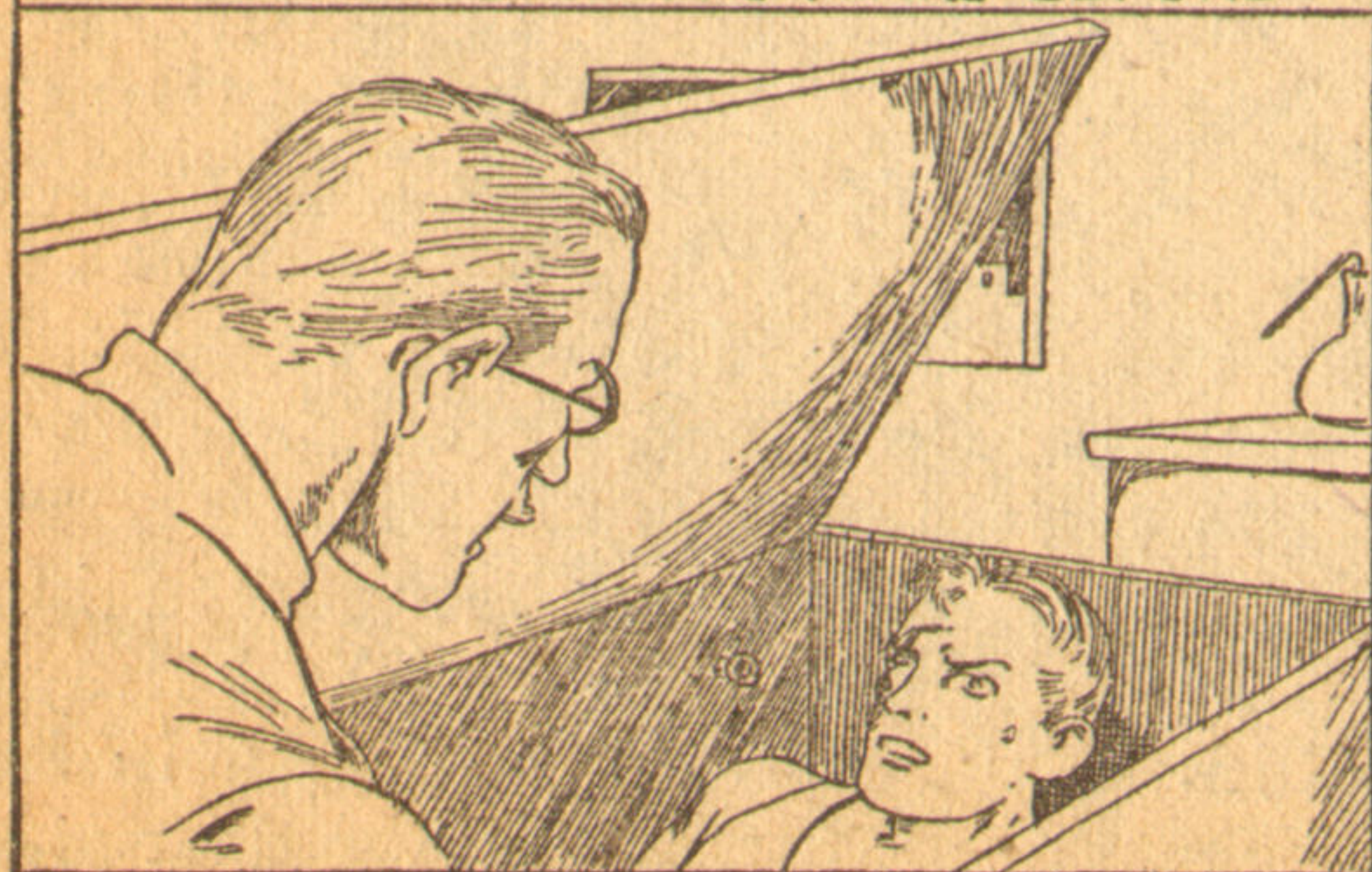


EQUATOR TELLS US INCAS TO BRING YOU THIS BODY. SEE -- PAPER WITH EQUATOR'S NAME!

SO -- THE EQUATOR WISHES THIS CORPSE DISSOLVED. WELL, I GUESS I CAN ARRANGE IT. DUMP IT INTO THAT TANK YONDER!

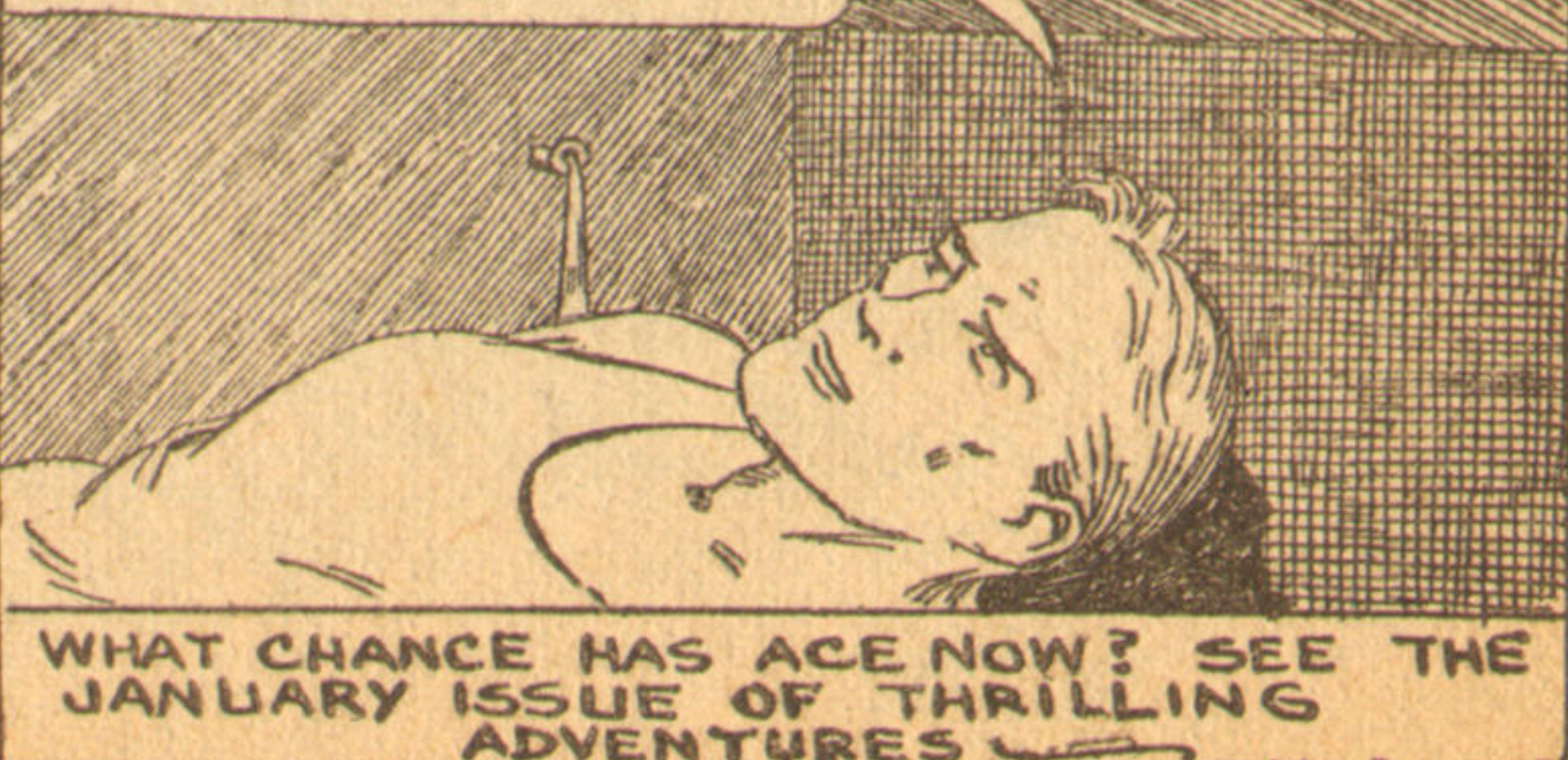


THEY THREW ME INTO A METAL TANK. DR. BALDWIN LEANED OVER. HE RECOGNIZED ME -- AND I HIM! HE HAD BEEN A FAMOUS AMERICAN SCIENTIST WHO HAD DISAPPEARED OVER TWO YEARS BEFORE --



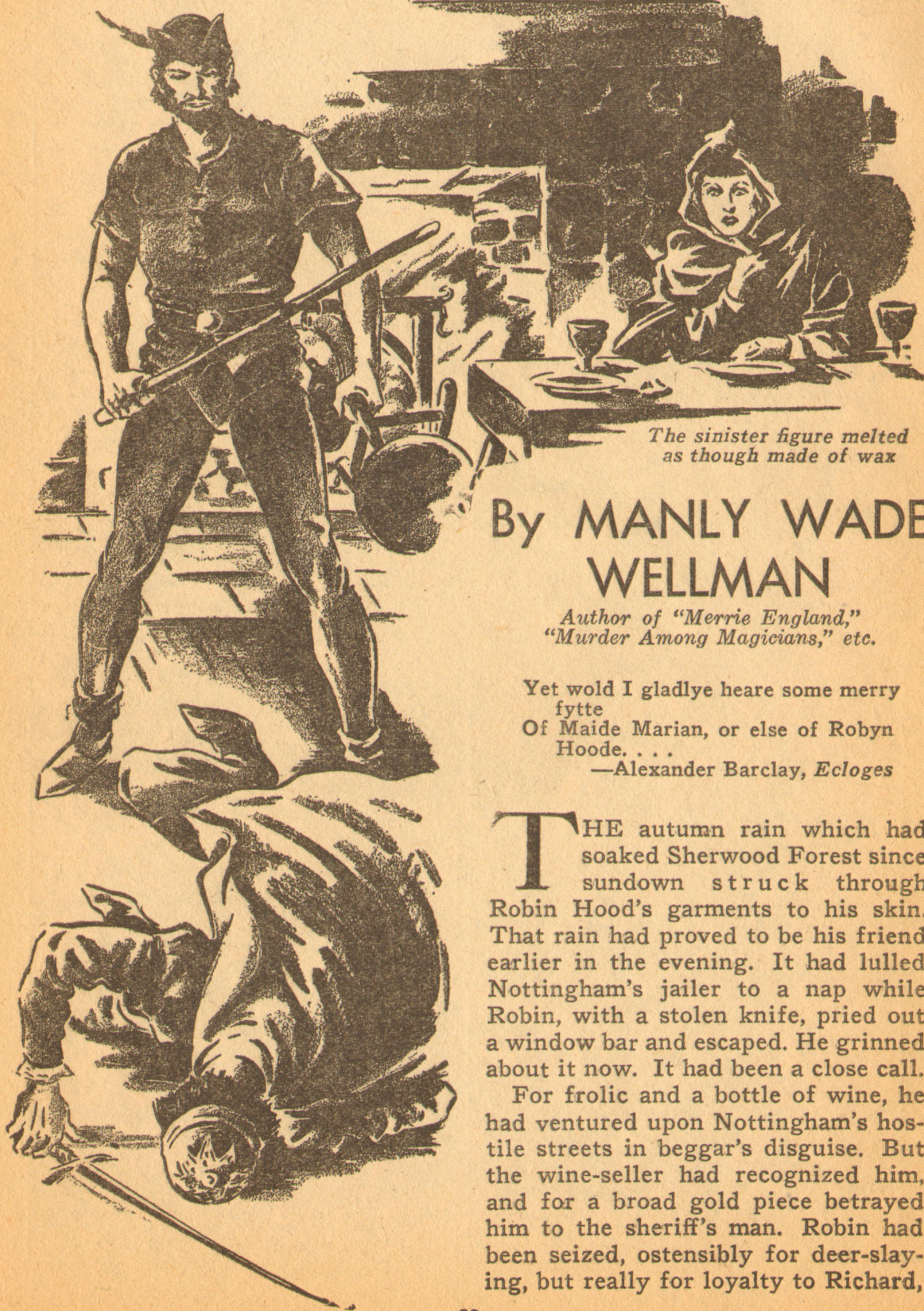
BEFORE I COULD SPEAK DR. BALDWIN SLAMMED DOWN THE COVER OF THE TANK. A PUNGENT-SMELLING LIQUID WAS FORCED INTO THE TANK THROUGH A SMALL TUBE.

CURTAINS AT LAST, I GUESS. AND BY DR. BALDWIN -- WE'VE WORKED ON THINGS TOGETHER -- YEARS AGO. UGH -- I THINK I'M GOING TO PASS OUT AGAIN!



WHAT CHANCE HAS ACE NOW? SEE THE JANUARY ISSUE OF THRILLING ADVENTURES

Rascal at Arms



*The sinister figure melted
as though made of wax*

By **MANLY WADE
WELLMAN**

*Author of "Merrie England,"
"Murder Among Magicians," etc.*

Yet wold I gladlye heare some merry
fytte
Of Maide Marian, or else of Robyn
Hoode. . . .

—Alexander Barclay, *Ecloges*

THE autumn rain which had soaked Sherwood Forest since sundown struck through Robin Hood's garments to his skin. That rain had proved to be his friend earlier in the evening. It had lulled Nottingham's jailer to a nap while Robin, with a stolen knife, pried out a window bar and escaped. He grinned about it now. It had been a close call.

For frolic and a bottle of wine, he had ventured upon Nottingham's hostile streets in beggar's disguise. But the wine-seller had recognized him, and for a broad gold piece betrayed him to the sheriff's man. Robin had been seized, ostensibly for deer-slaying, but really for loyalty to Richard,

With Doughty Courage, Robin Hood Wrests a Maiden and Her Father from the Clutches of a Robber Captain!

the absent crusader-king, and for capturing certain stout refugees in their defiance of Prince John, the usurper, patron of Nottingham's sheriff.

At dawn he was to have graced a gallows, before his outlaw foresters could hear of his plight and gather to the rescue. But he had won free. Now it was long past midnight, and he had come miles. He doubted if any had followed him closely. Meanwhile, up ahead shone the ruddy window-holes of a tree-girt woodland inn.

Robin Hood approached, but did not knock. The innkeeper would demand money, and Robin had not a farthing in his damp pouch. Lifting a sinewy arm to shield his eyes from the downpour, he circled the squat, thatched building and saw that one of the three windows gave dimmer light than the others. That would be the dark corner of the great common room.

He pushed through rain-soaked bracken, hoisted himself upon the sill. Sliding in as noiselessly as befitted the master woodsman he was, he crouched behind an unoccupied settle and reconnoitered.

At the far end of the apartment burned an open fire, around which rough-seeming men huddled. Robin spied the flash of weapons at their girdles. Nearer, in the center of the rush-strewn floor, a table had been set and lighted with candles, as for entertainment of quality. Here sat a couple, plainly lady and gentleman—both handsome and richly dressed, leaning close for earnest, soft conversation that Robin could barely hear.

"I am afraid, Dennis," the lady was saying, and Robin well understood her Norman French.

"Nay, are we not as warm and safe as any in England?" reassured her companion. "Aye, and as good as wed this moment, my sweet Marian?"

ROBIN listened no further, for his quick eye, glancing kitchenward, saw that the portly back of the innkeeper was toward him. Now to steal out and join the group at the fire, perhaps partake of their cheer. He wrung some of the water from his tawny pointed beard, rose quickly to his feet and strode across to the hearth.

The flames revealed him to the company as smallish but compact and springy-footed, clad in forester's gear—leather jerkin and green hose and bonnet, the fabrics worn and rain-soaked. His belt carried a limp pouch and the dagger he had stolen to dig free with. His face, tanned and merry and set with astonishingly fine blue eyes, was one that evoked responsive grins from most beholders. But none of the heavy, hairy visages at the fire-side did more than stare, above the rims of ale cups.

"By holy Cuthbert, your faces are as long as so many bowstaves," quoth Robin Hood. "Fear ye that a second deluge is upon us? Nay, this inn is as tight as Noah's ark."

"'Tis not that," grumbled the nearest squatter, a huge man with a scrub of black beard. "One of our band is lost in this storm—mayhap in danger."

"Simon speaks truth," seconded his neighbor. "Only eight of us came to the inn."

"Eight?" echoed Robin, counting quickly. He made it nine, but did not say so. "Which of ye is missing?"

"I know not," said the black-jowled giant called Simon. "We do not remember which of our fellowship started out today. Yet one is gone, for we have counted."

"And nine began the journey?" asked the forester. "Count again," he urged, and Simon did so, darting a heavy finger from one to another.

Robin Hood, following this process,

saw that the simpleton neglected to count himself.

"Eight I make it," said Simon at last, and the others nodded dolefully.

"Shall I make ye nine then?" cried Robin, and at that all gazed at him with mingled hope and wonder on their heavy faces.

Beyond them, the gentleman at the table grimaced sourly, as if he did not like the chatter.

"Nay," went on Robin as big Simon opened his mouth to reply, "ask me not how—'tis simple black art. I have conned wizard's grimoires ere this. Hark, will ye do as I bid, so that your comrade return?"

"Soothly," said one, and "Soothly, soothly," echoed the others.

"Dip, then, each man his finger in his ale cup," commanded Robin. "Come, ye promised to obey me. Dip."

Slowly they did so.

"Now," Robin directed them, "wet your noses with your fingers. So! Well done. Next, down on your four bones, every man, and lay your noses on the floor!"

He spoke these last words with sudden ringing authority, and made a downward sweep with his lean, expressive hands. This time there was no hesitation. The nine groveled as one. Robin tweaked his beard point and grinned to himself at the roof-regarding hips of the company, then spoke once more.

"Up again, and quickly!" he ordered. "Count the ale marks on the floor."

Stooping their heads together, they counted.

"Nine marks!" cried the quickest-minded of them.

"Aye," laughed Robin. "Nine marks—nine noses—nine men. Your companion is returned from the storm."

LOUDLY they clamored in wonder, and the gentleman at the table again scowled.

"Thank me not," cried Robin. "Had I not the high joy of seeing ye nose

the floor? Well, if ye press me, I take a mug of ale."

"Hark, forest-runner," intruded the gentleman's cold voice. "I weary of thy clack. Here's for thee, and stow thy noise."

He flung something that gleamed, and Robin caught it.

"A silver shilling!" he said. "I'll not sneeze or snore the night long. Thank your worship." He pouched the coin and drank the ale.

The gentleman, disdaining to answer, swept the rest of the company with his hard, pale eye.

"Get up to your beds in the loft," said he.

Apparently the nine served him, for all rose obediently and mounted the rough ladderway that took them out of sight above the sooty rafters. The innkeeper discreetly set ajar the door to the best bed chamber, then also retired from sight.

So did not Robin Hood who, leather-clad back to the warm stones of the fireplace, remained shadow-hidden to commune with his mug. He had not been at any man's order since King Richard had gone crusading.

The couple at the table, not seeing him, resumed conversation. Robin could hear plainly.

"Thou'rt mine own Marian—didst swear it," the man urged. His resonant voice had thickened with too much wine. "We are even now man and wife, in sight of heaven."

"I cannot think so," was the soft, tremulous reply.

Robin studied the lady's pale face, candle-lit like a saint's image in a shrine, and framed with abundant midnight hair under a coif. It was the fairest he had ever seen—pure and noble to boot, or Robin was no judge. By contrast, her companion was wheat-haired, showily handsome, and flushed with wine. His rich dress was in something less than good taste. Robin proceeded to judge the gentleman an adventurer and probably a scoundrel.

Just now the fellow was trying to capture her white hand. When she drew it away, he tried another tack.

"Thou hast remembered thine ancient and prideful lineage," he charged mournfully. "The daughter of Sir William Fitzwilliam, Knight of Pendarvis, cannot stoop as low as the simple esquire, Dennis Lincroft." His voice shook craftily. "I had hoped that thine eyes pierced mine humble seeming to find a greater worth within. But, if thou hast repented fleeing home with me—"

The appeal had its effect. "No, Dennis," she protested generously. "I do not scorn. I but fear my father. Remember how angrily he ordered thee from his hall. He may follow us."

"Heaven forefend!" cried the man who called himself Dennis Lincroft, in sudden terror. Then he recovered himself. "That is to say, heaven forefend that he and I should come to blows. Thine eyes would be horrified, Marian."

He gulped wine from his goblet. It inspired him to improve on the theme he had started.

"Ha, follow us, will he? I fear him not, though he brought all the knights of Arthur's table!" He sprang up theatrically, and Maid Marian was impressed. "I wear a sword," bawled the gallant, smacking his hilt with his palm. "Here and now, I defy Sir William Fitzwilliam!"

At those words, Robin Hood heaved himself up and took three long, quick steps forward. As the fine echo of Dennis Lincroft's boast died away, he found himself looking into the blue eyes of the rain-drenched stranger whose silence he had bought with a shilling.

"I once served Sir William Fitzwilliam as body squire," said Robin coldly, "and do take his quarrel upon me. I tell thee, Dennis Lincroft, if that be thy name, that thou'rt a knave to have coaxed this, his fair daughter, from him—a coward to brave him behind his back. And when thou say'st

thou dost not fear him, thou liest foully in thy throat."

AS HE hurled his defy, Robin leaped nimbly backward. He escaped by a thumb's width the darting sword which Dennis Lincroft had drawn.

Had Lincroft drunk less that night, Robin's defiance would have been the last act of his rash life. As it was, the sword was a thought slow, and Robin retreated with half an instant to spare. In that half instant he snatched from the chimney side a whittled ash stake that was used as a poker for the fire.

Lincroft charged, thrusting. But the ashen poker caught and deflected his steel, swung down and whacked his shins. Lincroft cursed and Robin, breaking ground, grinned fleetingly at the horrified Maid Marian who had drawn back against the table.

Recovering, Lincroft wagged the wine fumes from his blond head. This damp vagabond postured and foined with the wooden stake like any master-swordsman. He must be taken seriously, Lincroft snarled, and Robin, chuckling, put a thumb to his straight, handsome nose.

"Come hither and be basted," he taunted.

The sword sang in air, hard enough to slice through wood, flesh and bone all at once. But it found only emptiness as Robin once more hopped away. His quick left hand caught up a stool, presenting its top like a buckler. Lincroft's edge was turned from it, and Robin struck out with all the strength of his tough right arm. He came home on the wheat-haired pate with a resounding thwack.

The smitten man melted down like a figure of hot wax. His sword, falling from his hand, barely struck the rushes ere Robin had caught it up. But Dennis Lincroft lay silently, limply on his face.

"Hast killed him?" whispered the terrified Maid Marian.

"Not I, milady. That thump scattered his five wits but for the nonce." Then, as Lincroft groaned and rose on hands and knees: "Softly, fellow. I hold thy sword. Rouse not thy men, who sleep away their ale."

The fight was out of Lincroft. He rose, cherished his bruised head with shaky fingers, and leaned on the table edge. Nobody spoke. It was from the rain-shaken outside that the silence was broken.

Loud rapping shook the door. The innkeeper, who had watched the fight aghast from his chamber threshold, ventured forth half clad. Another thump almost drove in the panel. The host pattered across the rushes, flinging up the latch and opening the portal.

Four men pushed in amid swirling raindrops—one in soaked russet, then two in mail, finally a black-gowned priest. When Robin saw the leader's roan-gray head and lined face, he took no thought for any other. Almost running forward, he dropped to one knee.

"My fair Sir William!" he cried tremulously. "Blest be the day that I could do you and yours a poor service!"

The old knight checked his rush only in time to avoid trampling on Robin.

"Eh? Nay, I have seen that face, though without a beard—"

Robin rose, saluting with Lincroft's sword.

"I am Robert Fitz-Hood of Huntingdon, once your body squire. Ten years gone, when I was but a lad, I followed you to the French wars. Once, when I fell, you fought back the men at arms from me."

"Why, so it is!" cried Sir William. "My little squire, Robin, grown to be a man. Why go you in a base forester's gear?"

Then, even as the burning old eyes softened in recognition, they found Marian and the dazed Lincroft. Back rushed the fierceness to that seamed

face, and the Knight of Pendarvis strode forward, his two armed warders at his heels.

"By God's tooth," he swore grimly, "shalt pay, Squire Dennis, for stealing my daughter!"

THE girl ran to her father. Robin saw a sudden tenderness creep over the old soldier's face, like a veil of mist over a rocky crag, but even as Marian would have cast herself into his arms, he motioned her to wait.

"Peace, child." Sir William Fitzwilliam brought the warders up with a jerk of his head. "Stand up, Squire Dennis Lincroft."

Lincroft straightened. The dizziness had left him, and the drink as well.

"Aye?" he prompted.

"When you looked too warmly long upon my child, I showed you the way from my gate," said the old man, as formally as though charging the esquire before a court. "You abused my hospitality and her innocence by creeping back and tempting her away. Your knave servants left a trail in the forest that I made shift to follow, even in this rainy rak. Now shall reckoning be made." He turned to Marian. "Child, didst come with this spark of thine own will, though I forbade thy thinking of him?" He seemed to see a faint nod. "I shall stand in thy way no longer. Ye two shall wed."

Robin glanced quickly from Marian to Lincroft. Neither betrayed joy at the assurance. Robin laid aside the captured sword and spoke.

"If't please you, Sir William—"

"It doth not please me, Fitz-Hood, that thou putt's spoon into my dish. Wert pert forward in old days, and now. . . . Ha, bethink me, I have heard rumor that thou're runagate outlaw, with a band of archers?"

"Rebel only against Prince John, who is himself a rebel. But let me speak of this present matter. I came to this inn by chance, and heard speak of you by this esquire. I guessed that

milady was your daughter. She seemed to repent her action. When this man spoke slightly of you, I saw a chance to help her, and provoked a quarrel."

"It sounds a sorry lie," rumbled Sir William, and his warders glanced at him, as though waiting a command to seize Robin.

But corroboration came from one hitherto silent and fearful—the inn-keeper, who had stood with eyes starting from his fat face.

"'Tis true, worshipful knight," this man assured Sir William. "The for-ester whom you name Robert Fitz-Hood did fight and triumph, with but a stick against the esquire's sword. I did wonder to see it."

THE Knight of Pendarvis glanced at Marian, then at Lincroft. Their faces bore expressions that supported Robin and the host.

"Well," he said, "shalt be rewarded, Fitz-Hood. But where is my confessor? Good Father Martin, come hither to me." As the priest approached, Sir William said, "I trust that thy book is not too damp. Marry this pair."

"Hark, sir, I'll not be told when to wed," blustered Lincroft.

The bright eyes of the Knight of Pendarvis fell to hard lists, his teeth showed like a wolf's.

"Not be told?" he repeated, deadly soft. "Not be told — when thou brought'st her to this inn, alone and at night, with no priest to bless the bringing? And now, darest challenge me?"

He snapped hard fingers, and the two men in mail sprang at Lincroft. One whipped a cord around the esquire's elbows, the other drew it fast. Sir William pointed to the table. The prisoner was set upon it and, at yet another motion from their master, the warders flung a second rope across a ceiling beam and began to form it into a noose.

Lincroft saw the intent, and had an inspiration.

"Piers, Simon, Hewitt!" he very loudly roared. "Lads, all of ye, to me!"

A bustle sounded above, where the nine awakened. But Sir William sprang upon the table and whipped the noose about Lincroft's neck.

"Come at us, and your master dances on air," he growled at the foremost head that thrust down from the loft.

The rogues paused, and the knight leaped lightly to the floor.

"Marry, Lincroft, or hang!" he cried.

"Nay, Father," Marian cried out to him, in a voice that shook pitifully. "I'll not wed him—not with a rope at his throat, nor otherwise. Take me home! I repent this madness!"

"Didst want him once," was the grim reply. "Shalt have him now."

"Have mercy on her!" spoke up Robin Hood, suddenly and clearly.

The roan-gray brows of the knight descended dangerously into a frown.

"Cross me, Fitz-Hood, and shalt hang beside this thief of women."

He patently meant it, but Robin did not fall silent.

"Sir, if milady was foolish, will her folly mend by wedding her to a rogue? Because she was your daughter, I fought for her against this knave squire. You speak now of hanging, and I seek to aid her, at mine own peril. If by swinging to a beam I can hold her back from this ill marriage—"

"Enow, enow," interrupted the Knight of Pendarvis. His voice was suddenly gentle, and a little shaken. "Robert Fitz-Hood, thou art of wit. I am minded to be merciful."

"And then?" prompted Robin hopefully.

"The man shall not hang, nor yet marry. Thou hast put me in thy debt, Fitz-Hood. No harm hath been done, and none shall be to do."

Marian burst into happy tears, and at last her father caught her in his arms.

"We go home, child," he soothed

her. "Think no more on this sorry spark. Where is thy cloak?"

With his arm around her shoulders, he turned to the door.

"What of me?" grumbled Lincroft, from where he stood bound and haltered. "Am I to bide thus?"

"Loose him," said Sir William, and one of the warders mounted the table.

"Wait," cried Robin, pointing to the loft, but already the dagger of the unheeding retainer had cut Lincroft free—free to spring down, rush to the foot of the ladder and shout an order to his men, who clustered above all silent and forgotten by any save Robin Hood.

They responded with fierce yells, and tumbled down with drawn weapons.

Lincroft's men, for all their dull wit, were no ordinary yokels. The dispatch with which they cut down the two mailed warders showed that. Robin sprang in front of Sir William, drawing his dagger, his only weapon since he had laid down Lincroft's sword. He was quickly beaten down with a blunt mace, but he had given Sir William time to bare his own blade, sweep his daughter into a corner, and defend himself.

And well Sir William did it. One of the nine fell with his neck slashed almost through. A thrust through the right shoulder disabled big Simon, and a third man staggered back, his face drenched with sudden blood. For a moment Sir William Fitzwilliam bade fair to fight off the varlets.

But it was Lincroft who, for lack of better weapon, seized and hurled a heavy pewter tankard. It struck the knight in the face. He staggered and was swarmed over by his remaining adversaries. A moment later, the priest and lady were likewise secured.

"Dost not tremble," protested the churchman, "thus to handle a gentle knight, a fair lady and a tonsured priest?"

"Tremble?" echoed big, black-jowled Simon, who stood apart cher-

ishing his wound. "When did Dead-Hand's men ever tremble?"

"Who names Dead-Hand the Butcher?" cried Fitzwilliam, also tightly held by his captors.

THE wheat-haired fellow who called himself Dennis Lincroft chuckled.

"Ye'd best know," he replied, "that I am Dead-Hand."

The captives stared. Dead-Hand, the fiercest thief and rebel in all the strife-torn marshes of England, whose touch, as his name betokened, was death! Dead-Hand, who valued spilt blood even above plundered gold! Could this erstwhile companion be that infamous monster? Something in his face bade them believe it.

"Well," he bantered, "think ye I'm pretty?"

"I mind," growled Fitzwilliam, "that the false robber Dead-Hand is told to have a jagged scar on his left forearm. Show us that, ere boasting."

The other smiled more broadly, and stripped up his left sleeve. The bared arm bore a zigzag red scar, shaped like a lightning flash.

"Will that content," he asked, "or needs it a touch of my torture to convince?"

Fitzwilliam stared back levelly.

"Dead-Hand or devil, I fear thee not. Give me a sword, and I'll mark thy head to match thine arm."

"Nay," demurred Dead-Hand. "Thou art my prisoner, Sir William. I'll hold thee in thine own castle vaults. Glare not, for from what I saw as thy guest, thy castle likes me well. I hoped to win the place as thy son-in-law, but 'twill be as good if I am thy jailer. As soon as the rain abates we go thither, and find it all unguarded. With King Richard abroad and strife here, I fear no force large enough to turn me out."

His eyes swept to the priest.

"Father, I would fain make my peace with the church. No help canst thou fetch ere I am gone. Wrap thy

gown about thee and go thy ways. . . . Nay? Stay'st thou? Stir up the fire, lads, and set him in it."

The priest emitted a gasping cry and dashed out. Dead-Hand's laugh was like a snarl. He leered at Marian.

"The priest flees, milady. In his absence, my word to love thee must suffice. When I move into Castle Pendarvis, thou shalt come as mistress."

She shuddered in horror, and a curse ripped from her father's throat.

"Bind and gag him," nodded Dead-Hand, and bound and gagged the knight was, with thongs around his arms and a dagger-sheath between his jaws. "As to the rogue forester," continued Dead-Hand, "he seems less pert."

Robin Hood stood on his feet, a robber holding him by either arm. The blow that had knocked him down was a glancing one, and he was none the worse for it.

His mind was already planning a way to survive and escape.

"Since I am thy captive," he addressed Dead-Hand, with a show of reluctance, "I must obey thy commands, and exert my skill."

"Skill?" spat Dead-Hand fiercely. "What is this paltering? What think'st that I require of thee, thou costril vagabond?"

"Why"—and Robin smiled disarmingly—"what but to medicine thy wounded? Thou hast perceived my talents, wilt have divined that I can—"

"Can cure wounds!" finished Simon for him. The giant still checked the flow of blood from his shoulder with a pressing palm. "If art a leech, heal me and delay not."

"Aye," muttered a villain named Hewitt, whose cheek had been slashed by Sir William's sword. "He must medicine me, too."

"And me," chimed in a third. "I wrenched my knee as I came down ladder."

Dead-Hand, hearing, shelved his

previous decision as to Robin Hood's fate.

"To it, then," he ordered. "What need'st for it—basins, bandages? Inn-keeper, fetch them. And thou, Piers"—he spoke to a shabby little ruffian with a squint eye—"see to him. An he fail in his leechcraft, or seek to flee or fight, put thy point into his body."

ROBIN tweaked his beard and then moved toward the rogues. Grouped around the fire again, they numbered eight in very sooth, not imagination. The ninth lay in a corner with the bodies of Sir William's warders, covered with rushes from the floor.

Robin had not lied about his skill at healing. His own hundred merry men looked naturally to him for such treatment. First he ministered to Simon—compresses at the two mouths of the wound, before and behind the shoulder, bandages to hold them, and a looped scarf for a sling. Working, he managed to slip Simon's knife from his sheath and hide it under his own leather jerkin.

Hewitt's cheek slash he plugged with a linen rag, spreading another piece upon it to stick in the drying blood. The man with the wrenched knee was not badly hurt, but Robin chose to shake his head seriously and to wrap the leg in splints. Those would hold it stiff, and keep the fellow out of any sudden skirmish that might arise. Finishing, he gestured away the growled thanks of his patients and turned back to Dead-Hand.

That triumphant master of felons lounged on a settle and smirked at Maid Marian, whom he held fast by one elbow. Across the table, helpless in bonds and gag, glared Sir William.

"Nay, lass," coaxed Dead-Hand, "kiss me. I can be kind as well as cruel."

Robin walked quickly over to them. Squint-eyed Piers hurried after, hand on his cross-hilt sword. But Robin

only set his basin on the table and put his hand on the tousled blond hair of the chief. Dead-Hand swore in pain.

"Good lack, 'tis worse than I thought," muttered Robin, simulating concern. "Thy scone is sorely cracked, Master."

Dead-Hand glared, still clutching Marian's arm.

"Cease prodding!" he bade.

"Nay, I did but touch it gently—so." Again Robin pressed the bruise he himself had dealt, and forebore to grin as Dead-Hand winced. "Look, thou," continued Robin to Piers. "Lay thy finger to thy master's skull—ever so gently, here."

Piers obediently fingered the place, with gingerly care, but Robin, at the same moment, applied all the pressure of his own sinewy wrist. A third time Dead-Hand writhed and groaned.

"Is't so bad?" he said between set teeth. "Heal that wound, forester, or know a worse hurt thyself."

As Dead-Hand spoke, he released the lady's arm, and she drew out of reach. Robin bathed the head and set Piers to tearing bandages from the landlord's linen. Then he swathed his patient's head tightly across brow and top.

Dead-hand cursed.

"My head throbs in the temples," he complained.

Robin had hoped for that, and drew the bindings tighter still.

"I medicined thee but in time," he pronounced, "If thou'rt wise, sir, thou'lt lie down a full hour. The pain will be great, yet lie still, and 'twill pass."

Dead-Hand obeyed, and Robin's heart rose. For the time he had saved the lady from unwelcome scufflings. But he bent a concerned face above the form of the robber chief, now stretched upon the rushes near the door.

"Hearken," quoth Robin, "I have done good to mitigate my harm. We be both outlaws. We could do worse

than stand together. Shall I join thy band?"

"Mayhap," growled Dead-Hand. "Thou'rt a clever leech. Let me rest."

It was enough for Robin. He went back to the fireside, where Dead-Hand's followers broached a new firkin of ale.

"Gossips," he said, "your master is now mine. I have brave news for our fellowship, to our great profit all around."

EVERY stupid eye regarded him roundly, some with disbelief. But Piers upheld Robin.

"'Tis true," he said. "Dead-Hand is better for this hedge-doctor's labors. The forester is now one of us."

"What news, then?" prompted Simon. "An easy plundering?"

"Treasure!" cried Robin, and then tweaked his bright little beard.

At the word, a wave of delighted exclamations ran through the group, and even Dead-Hand sat up among the rushes. But the growing headache under that tight bandage shot through his brain, and he lay back.

The bound Sir William also stared, and the landlord. Marian alone drew deep into a shadowy corner. She hoped to be forgotten.

"Treasure," repeated Robin Hood, "here in this house."

"Nay, by the rood," gasped the fat innkeeper. "I have not twenty silver pence, I do swear."

Robin glared at him. "Wouldst cheat poor men? Do not forswear thyself. Well I know of the wealth hidden in thy wine cellar."

Simon got up, heavily and fearsomely, like a roused bear.

"Bring a bowstring, lads. A turn of it round mine host's fat neck—"

"It shall not need," quoth Robin. "I know a better way. Aye, for all his lies we can find the trove. Wouldst see a feat of magic, my hearts? White magic, with gold to come at the end?"

The robbers wanted nothing so much in the world, as their cries as-

sured him. Robin stooped and took from the pile of firewood a short, forked branch, which he thrust into his belt.

"Into the kitchen," said he. "For there, as I guess, is the trap that leadeth to cellar and gold."

All started up, but ere they hurried kitchenward, Dead-Hand spoke from where he lay.

"Not all of ye. We must guard this knight and lady, to say naught of the host."

"Nay, Master," objected Robin, "'twill need every man to fetch forth the good red gold."

"Is't so much?" demanded Dead-Hand, forgetting his headache.

"I take oath before every saint in the calendar that I have no treasure," whimpered the landlord, but Robin Hood laughed.

"Thy manner would convince, host, had I not the word from one who watched thee bury it. Gold in sacks, wine casks, chests — the store of a great abbey, ordered hidden here lest Prince John learn of it and ask for its loan, forgetting to pay. Is't not so?"

Robin walked to the landlord and twitched away the leather thong that girdled the fat middle. "Cross thy hands behind thee. . . . Yes, so."

And Robin bound them.

"Now, for the lady," and he approached her in turn.

"Why bind these people?" demanded Dead-Hand.

"So that they will need no guard save thyself, good Master. By your leave, Maid Marian."

Silently she held out her slim hands. He wrapped their wrists around with the cord of his belt-pouch, and tried to look deep and meaningly into her eyes. Perhaps she saw reason to trust him; perhaps not. Finally he went to Sir William Fitzwilliam, who had spat forth his gag.

"Wert ever a saucy squire," grumbled the knight. "Art now a false outlaw, who shall yet know the gallows."

"Doubtless, fair sir," agreed Robin cheerfully, and tested the strength of the bonds. "Ha, these are well tied. Without a knife to cut them, Sir William will bide here till Doomsday horn."

SO SAYING, unobserved in the dimness, he pressed into the knight's hand the dagger that he had filched from Simon.

"Away, and dig me up the treasure, with my fellows to bear it hither," Dead-Hand was bidding. "Shalt have a fair share. I can guard here, headache and all."

"Touching that headache—"

Robin came to the chief. He appeared to study him professionally in the candlelight. Outside, the rain died from a patter to a purr.

"Doth it mend?" asked Robin. He loosened the bandage and waited a moment. "How fares it now?"

"Better, I do think."

"When I return, thou shalt have recovered. But rest now." For Robin saw the Maid Marian cower. "Give thyself no reason to bring on the fit."

He gestured his companions into the kitchen. At the rear limped the man with the sprained knee. The landlord's final howl of protested poverty floated after them.

A stout trap-door showed in the kitchen floor, and two men hoisted it by its chain. Robin, with a torch from the cooking fire, climbed down the ladder, the others following. They came into a musty, dirt-walled hole, its sides lined with casks, pyramided jugs and bottles, while hams, sausages and bacon flitches festooned the beams overhead. Damp clung to the stone floor.

Robin handed the torch to big Simon, and spoke to Piers in a new, hollow voice.

"Arrange these men in a circle—so," he bade.

Robin stationed the man with the sprain at the point nearest the ladder.

"Now say prayers, each man, if so

be ye remember any." And he drew from his belt the forked branch.

"What is this thou doest?" asked Piers suspiciously, but Robin snubbed him with a gesture for obedience.

He held out the stick, a fork in each hand, the butt straight before him. He moved his lips silently, as though chanting a spell, took a slow, heavy step and another. Pacing a circle, he twitched the forked stick adroitly, so that it seemed to stir of itself in the torchlight. The hum of the paternosters rose obediently from the ring of onlooking rascals.

"I have seen the thing done," whispered a robber. "'Tis witchcraft."

"Such walking and posturing with a twig is to find a well of water," said Piers, "and water anow falleth from the sky."

"'Twill discover gold, too," the other assured him. "I have so heard."

"Pray, all," intoned Robin, and at last Piers joined the muttered chorus.

ROBIN moved swiftly, and the forked branch fairly writhed in his cunning hands. He finished a circle commenced a smaller one—finished it, walked another—came to the center of the damp, flagstoned floor. Then he gasped tensely. He let the stick droop, its butt tapping the stones.

"Mark where it points!" he exclaimed earnestly. "Beneath that place lieth gold—tons! Pull away the stones, comrades! We have found it!"

With a gusty chorus of shouts, the greedy watchers sprang in. Even Simon stuck the torch stick into the earthen wall and bent to scoop with his one good hand, while the robber with the sprained knee sprawled, his feet toward the ladder, to help. They tugged and heaved at the flagstones.

Robin stepped back, and dropped the stick with which he had pretended magic. Again the louts were on their knees, noses to floor, as he had caused them to be earlier that night.

No, not at all, for as he drew clear of the scramblers, he saw that little

squint-eyed Piers had also remained on his feet, drawing close.

"This witchery likes me not," said Piers harshly. "I have sins enow on my soul. I shall not dig."

"No," agreed Robin Hood blandly. "Others shall dig for thee — thy grave!"

Quick as two snakes, his hands darted at Piers' throat.

So sudden was the attack, so immediate and complete the shutting off of the little ruffian's wind, that there was not so much as a flurry or cry to warn the scrabblers on the floor. Piers forgot sword and dagger at his belt, tearing ineffectually at Robin's hands.

Robin grinned in his pointed beard. Without moving or speaking, he poured all his strength into his tightening fingers. Piers' mouth opened like that of a hungry bird, his eyes turned up sickly. His hands relaxed, slipped away. Robin let his body sink down and, sinking, drew with a whispering scrape the sword at the throttled one's side.

Then he turned and sprang up the ladder. A wolfen roar sped him the faster. The others had seen his retreat, guessed betrayal. But as they would rush after them, they tripped over the clumsy man with the sprained knee, set purposely by Robin at the foot of the ladder.

Gaining the kitchen level, Robin yanked up the ladder after him and flung down the heavy trap-door. He made it fast, with chain and staple. Then, with Piers' sword in his right fist, he hurried into the great common room.

Dead-Hand, plainly much recovered, started up from his bench.

"My thanks to thee. Indeed, my head aches no more, and I feel strong again."

"I hoped that," snapped Robin. "Dead-Hand, few words are best. I have locked thy men in the cellar. Since I purpose to kill thee, I wanted thee strong enough to give me sport."

"What?" snapped Dead-Hand, as he

clutched his own hilt. "Treachery?"

"I am but false to a false villain," shouted Robin. "Two wrongs make a right. Says not the philosopher so?"

Sir William had risen. His severed bonds fell away, and in his right hand gleamed the dagger that Robin had smuggled to him. He closed in on Dear-Hand's other side.

"Piers!" roared the robber chief. "Simon! Hewitt!"

"They cannot come to thy help," Robin told him. "Let be, noble knight, and with that knife free milady and the host. 'Tis almost dawn, and I have not many minutes. Fall on, Dead-Hand, and make a good fight of it."

With that, the two came to strokes, and at once Dead-Hand was finished. Quicker than eye could follow, Robin slid under his enemy's guard, lunged, and spitted the other through the breast. As Dead-Hand fell, Robin cleared his blade.

"Like thralls take warning," he said, and cleaned his bloody steel on a handful of rushes.

From the kitchen came a muffled commotion. The prisoners in the cellar were trying to get out.

"As I think," continued Robin, "the sheriff's men from Nottingham will follow my trail hither, even as it groweth day. They will find yonder slain Dead-Hand and a cellarful of gallows-birds. Pausing to make them fast—"

"What of thee, sir?" asked Maid Marian softly, her face full of concern.

"I come to that, milady. The rain abates, and light rises on Sherwood Forest. I will escape while the sheriff's men take custody of these rascals."

He turned toward the outer door, when old Sir William spoke.

"Fitz-Hood," he said and, crossing, laid his hard hand on Robin's leathern shoulder. "I spoke hastily and foolishly of thee."

"Nay"—the younger man smiled—"I pleased to hear it. If I befooled you, how much more were Dead-Hand and his rabble cozened."

"Yet I spoke amiss, naming you false. No truer heart beats."

ROBIN was silent, strangely embarrassed, and the knight went on. "'Tis not meet that thou, a man of gentle blood, should bide a runner from the sheriff's justice. Wert once my squire—come to me again. If art proscribed, myself beseech and gain the king's pardon."

Maid Marian also prayed him with her eyes. Robin looked long at her, and at her father.

"I do thank you for the thought and bidding," he said finally. "Yet, in Sherwood Forest I have merry men to feed and lead, wrongs to make right, poor folk to help, churls to punish. I do this as a service to the people until such time as England's hard times be eased."

Sir William bowed his head. "I wish you well," said he.

(Continued on page 112)

"I TALKED WITH GOD"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-

Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 711-12, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 711-12, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

The White Rhino

By BERNARD BRESLAUER

Author of "Fighting Courage," "A Touch of Shark," etc.

THE sunset, turning the peaks of Mikenno, Karisimbi and Kibo to blood, gave Daniel Farnum enough light to complete the letter he was writing. He sat in his lean-to, his knees drawn up to hold the pad across which his pencil scribbled. That his



Daniel Farnum

pursuits were sometimes less peaceful than letter-writing was indicated by the elephant-gun on the ground beside him, the cartridge belt around his waist, and the holstered revolver at his hip.

He was a lonely figure, there in the shadow of the Gorilla Triangle, with the jungle curving about him. But there was something in his aspect that showed that he was used to loneliness, that he was as much at home in the jungle as other men are in cities.

He was writing to one of those city men, and the soft expression on an otherwise stern countenance betokened that the addressee was one he knew—nay more, one who was close to him.

And in truth he was writing to Martin Farnum, his brother in the States.

Dear Mart:

The sun is setting on the Gorilla Triangle but rising on your hopes. You're going to be a doctor!

Don't worry about the expense any longer. I've got the wherewithal—not in cash, yet, but in the equivalent of it. I've bagged the rarest of all animals—the white rhinoceros—and the American Zoological Gardens will turn over \$10,000 to you just as soon as I turn over the white rhino to their representative in Dar-es-salaam.

Every professional hunter in Africa has been after the prize, but your Nimrod of a brother turned out to be the lucky one.

"Emdee"—that's the name I've given the young fellow, short for M.D.—is at present asleep in the staked corral I've built for him. He's a baby, of course—you can't capture an adult rhino single-handed. He weighs about two hundred pounds. His parents, needless to say, are dead—which explains why I am still alive. They pretty near got me.

Well, there isn't much more to say. You asked me in your last letter when I was pulling out of Africa. I'll answer that question now—I'll pull out of Africa when you hang out your shingle, Doctor.

"Emdee" and I are starting for Dar-es-salaam tomorrow—

The pencil stopped in the middle of the last word, did not complete it. For an instant Dan Farnum's head was cocked to one side. His hunter's ears had heard something—some-

*Daniel Farnum Risks All to Keep "Emdee" His
Jungle Prize—and Gets Unexpected Help!*

thing that did not quite belong in the sunset silence.

Softly he got to his feet, like a great jungle cat, and his rifle came up with him. On padded feet he moved down the trail. He had purposely selected his camping spot because of its defensive terrain. It had an entrance and an egress, and could not be flanked.

He moved toward the opening from whence the sounds came, reached it and stopped.

He saw three men. In the still-remaining light he recognized them. But he did not speak, merely waited. They were armed as he was, silent as he was, eyeing him with a threat that was made eloquent by its very silence.

Yet no weapon was raised. For that first tense moment they just looked at each other. Then one of the three spoke.

"*Jambo*, Farnum. Long time no see."

The speaker was big, fleshy and bearded. But his eyes were small and cruel, and at the moment snapping with greedy lights. Farnum read sign and thought:

"They know I've got a white rhino and have come in order to take it away from me."

"*Jambo*, Belcher," he greeted in return. "When did you get out of Matadi jail?"

Belcher's voice was low, conversational, but the words that slowly left his lips were hate-packed and envenomed.

"Three months ago, blast your soul."

"You got what was coming to you, Belcher," Farnum said, low-voiced. "You beat your native carriers with the outlawed *shikat*. Punishment belongs to the courts, not to individual white men. The court needed my testimony. I gave it, was glad to give it. They sent you up for a year. It should have been more."

"I'm sending you up for all eter-

nity, Farnum," Belcher answered in the same grim monotone. "And making a profit besides—a ten-thousand-dollar profit. We know you've got a white rhino. The native drums have been spilling plenty, and when the natives describe a man, they describe him down to the last toenail. We want that rhino, Farnum."

"It's bad morals to want what belongs to somebody else, Belcher."

"We're three against one, Farnum."

"I can count," Farnum said calmly, belying the tumult raging within him. "You're none of you as fast as I am, though. Eh, Hyatt? Been doing any ivory piracy lately? And Monkhouse, where've you been peddling your hashish now that the Congo Constabulary has put the clamps on. Three against one, but one with the speed of three. And none of you want to die. Quite so. I haven't a chance against three. But each one of you knows that even though you're able to kill me collectively, one or even two of you would not live to tell of it."

FARNUM lowered his voice still more.

"Maybe even . . . three of you . . . would not live to tell of it, eh?" he said softly. "So I'm going back in. You can follow. But I'll be waiting for you. Yes, the rhino is back there. I'll be back there with it . . . waiting . . . for you. . . ."

It was a strange scene—three killers, mad to kill, yet too uncertain to kill in the open, each fearing death on his own account.

Dan Farnum began his backward walk.

His eyes—his keen hunter's eyes—were on them, and his body was ready to erupt into action faster than any that they could muster. And none of the three wanted to die.

"You won't see the sunrise, Farnum," Belcher said.

Farnum was already a shadow, fading back into the cavernous ter-

rain. Then only his eyes were there—and then he was gone altogether.

"Scum!" Belcher turned on his two companions in fury. "You let him bluff you—"

"Where were you, Belcher?" Hyatt, the ivory pirate, asked in soft menace. "If he bluffed us, he bluffed you too."

BELCHER had no argument against this logic.

"Forget what I said," he muttered. "He's in our bag anyway. He's got to eat, he's got to sleep. We're three, and can do those things in shifts. He can't get away."

Daniel Farnum reached the same conclusion at about the same time. He could leave this spot. They would follow. Burdened with the rhino, which had been getting used to being led by a rope, his speed would be cut to a minimum. He added up the ultimate score. It came to: Daniel Farnum, dead; no rhino; and no doctor in the family.

He moved softly over to the pen, leaned over and scratched the rhino's head.

"Mart," he whispered softly. "You're going to be a doctor. . . ."

The setting sun no longer reached Farnum's encampment. But there was still the glow of the dying day out in the open.

Ten minutes later, into the lam-bent glow of that dying day and out toward the trio of killers who had not yet made up their minds as to what their immediate next step should be, a baby white rhino trotted.

The three killers reacted. Two of them had a single motive—a simple one—the rhino, which represented ten thousand dollars in cash. One of them, Belcher, had a double motive—the rhino, and vengeance. They reacted in ways that matched their motives. The two went for the rhino.

But Belcher—Belcher had enough sense *not* to go for the rhino.

Thus, when Daniel Farnum erupted into the open, Belcher was not altogether unprepared for him! But Daniel Farnum had accomplished his objective—he had cut down the odds of three to one. He had made it one to one! Only for an instant, but that one instant was precious.

Belcher's gun blazed. But the speed with which Daniel Farnum, professional hunter, was credited, was no exaggeration. His revolver blazed a time-tick sooner, and Belcher toppled, his skull shattered!

Hyatt and Monkhouse, ropes out and guns in, wheeled. Their hot brains grasped the trick, commanded their hands to keep the odds at least two to one! But even as the order speeded from brain to hand, the odds were gone! It was one to one! Monkhouse alone remained alive. Hyatt's heart was punctured.

To Monkhouse, Farnum appeared in that moment like a destroying angel. He fired and missed, and Farnum was upon him. Farnum's revolver barrel swooped down and caved in his skull.

Panting, Farnum looked about him, shook his head dazedly. His eyes saddened as realization swept over him. Yes, he thought he had saved his life, and taken three worthless ones. But the rhino—the rhino that was to put Mart through med school and make him a doctor—was gone.

Daniel Farnum's shoulders sagged dejectedly . . . and the little rhino trotted up to him!

Yes, the rhino had grown used to him, and, having no father and mother rhino to turn to, had come back to the captor that had taken such good care of it.

"'Emdee'," Farnum thought. "Martin Farnum, M.D."

Next Month: WOLF WORSHIP, a White Phantom
Story by HAROLD CRUICKSHANK



THEY WRITE AS THEY LIVE

THE LIFE-STORIES OF YOUR
FAVORITE AUTHORS



CAPTAIN J. WINCHCOMBE-TAYLOR

THE handsome-looking gentleman whose photograph appears on this page, did not always wear a ten-gallon hat and dream of owning a ranch some day in sunny Arizona.

No, it wasn't so many years ago that this bangup writer of adventure and western stories—Captain J. Winchcombe-Taylor—was chalking up an admirable war record in France. At that time such a thing as fiction was farthest from his mind.

Captain Winchcombe-Taylor's World War exploits were notable, but then he didn't come by his fighting talents by accident. The captain informs us quite modestly that his forebears were men-at-arms, too.

"I was born in Manhattan in January, 1898," he reports. "My father was a Baltimorean of Irish-Scottish descent. His only brother was in the Seventh U. S. Cavalry, and would have been massacred with General Custer—had he not been sent back a few hours before with a dispatch to the main body!

"Military service seems to have been a family habit. My grandfather on my father's side served in the Union Army during the Civil War, and *his* father was a general in the Maryland militia during the War of 1812."

We wondered if the same was true of the maternal side, but the captain was coming to that. Honors were not distributed one-sidedly in the Winchcombe-Taylor clan.

"My mother was English," says Captain Taylor, "though her father had been a Forty-Niner in California. His father was a captain in the same British regiment in which I myself afterward served—the King's Royal Rifle Corps, then known as the Sixtieth Rifles, but raised originally in Pennsylvania in 1756 as 'The Royal Americans' to fight the French on the Ohio and in Canada."

His Baptism of Fire

True to tradition, Captain Winchcombe-Taylor was only a youngster when he, too, first underwent his baptism of fire.

"I was taken to England when a baby, and was in London in August, 1914, when the late war broke out. I couldn't enlist at first, because recruiting sergeants seemed to think I was too young. But by October I'd learned not to be so darned truthful when asked my age.

"So when I'd added on three years overnight, I was accepted, though the examining doctor made cracks about my being a bit puny for one who claimed he was almost twenty.

"I joined my battalion in France as a



Capt. J. Winchcombe-Taylor

replacement in March, 1915," the captain goes on. "It was then holding a position at 'Plugstreet' Wood, near Armentières, birthplace of the immortal 'Mademoiselle,' of the celebrated war song. Just after I'd been up in the front line and imagined I knew all about war, the outfit was taken out of the sector and hurried north to Ypres.

"It seems the Boches had used gas for the first time, and the French Colonial troops—natives from Senegal, in French West Africa, and Annam, French Indo-China—didn't like it a bit. They broke badly and left the flank of the First Canadian Division exposed."

"It looked for a few hours as if the Germans would break right through and capture the Channel ports and end the war right there. But the Canucks put up such a magnificent defense that my outfit and some others had time to get up and plug the wide gap on their left flank."

"But my crowd was virtually wiped out in plugging that gap. We were gassed once, but the wind changed at the crucial moment and blew back on the gassers—which was mighty lucky, as masks were unheard of then and all we had to protect ourselves against the gray-green clouds were bits of cloth, handkerchiefs and socks."

The war went on, and Captain Winchcombe-Taylor was destined to play an ever larger rôle. He was made a second lieutenant in a Regular battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, thus maintaining the family tradition.

With his regiment he went to Salonika by way of Egypt, and later became a machine-gunner. He fought against the Bulgarians and the Turks, came down with malaria, dysentery and jaundice, and was hospitalized in Malta.

"On the Receiving End"

Sent back to England, the captain transferred to the new Tank Corps, and went back to France in December, 1917, taking part in the great German offensive of March-April, 1918—"distinctly on the receiving end," he admits.

But his outfit made its comeback that summer. The captain was hit just once—but it was only a minor injury. After that, things wound up rapidly. He was attached briefly as a liaison officer to the old 301st U. S. Heavy Tank battalion when it arrived overseas, and was promoted to be a captain—"after more scrapping."

Back in America in 1922, this soldier from a family of soldiers, was still in no mood to settle down. So, logically enough, he became an actor and covered most of

the country. He had always wanted to write—so began on plays, not without success, and then turned to straight fiction writing.

"I got into serious fiction production," the captain tells us, "and sold war, mystery, animal and adventure yarns. I came to Arizona in 1933 and married the daughter of a pioneer family here, herself a writer and ex-war correspondent. Last year (1938) we sold an article on which we had collaborated to the *Saturday Evening Post*."

Future Plans

Living right in Tucson, Arizona, the captain naturally drifted into western fiction, and today is one of the topnotchers in the field. But, more than that, he has ambitions now toward turning out the biggest single item in his writing career—and eighteenth-century historical novel. He expects to have read over a thousand books—histories, biographies, diaries—before he types out a line.

That is, such were the plans of the author of our fast-action "Club Fist" Mayne yarns in THRILLING ADVENTURES until the Second World War got under way. He also wanted to own his own ranch "somewhere in the mountains near Tucson, and run a few head of cows and horses."

"Maybe I'll achieve these modest ambitions," was Captain J. Winchcombe-Taylor's way of putting it, "unless Mr. Hitler gets too rambunctious. For, if he does, I'll probably act like an old troop horse when the 'Charge!' is sounded—and go back and get into the whole darned mess all over again!"

POSTSCRIPT

Even while this true-life account was being set in type, Captain Winchcombe-Taylor walked into the office, fresh from his Arizona home, to announce his departure for Canada, to enlist with the Canadian forces. However, whenever he can find time during the Second World War, Captain Winchcombe-Taylor will return to his typewriter, this time to send THRILLING ADVENTURES fictionized versions of the war now in progress.

COMING IN NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE

*The Mysterious, Peril-Laden Trails of
Darkest Africa Echo to a Grim
Struggle for Power in*

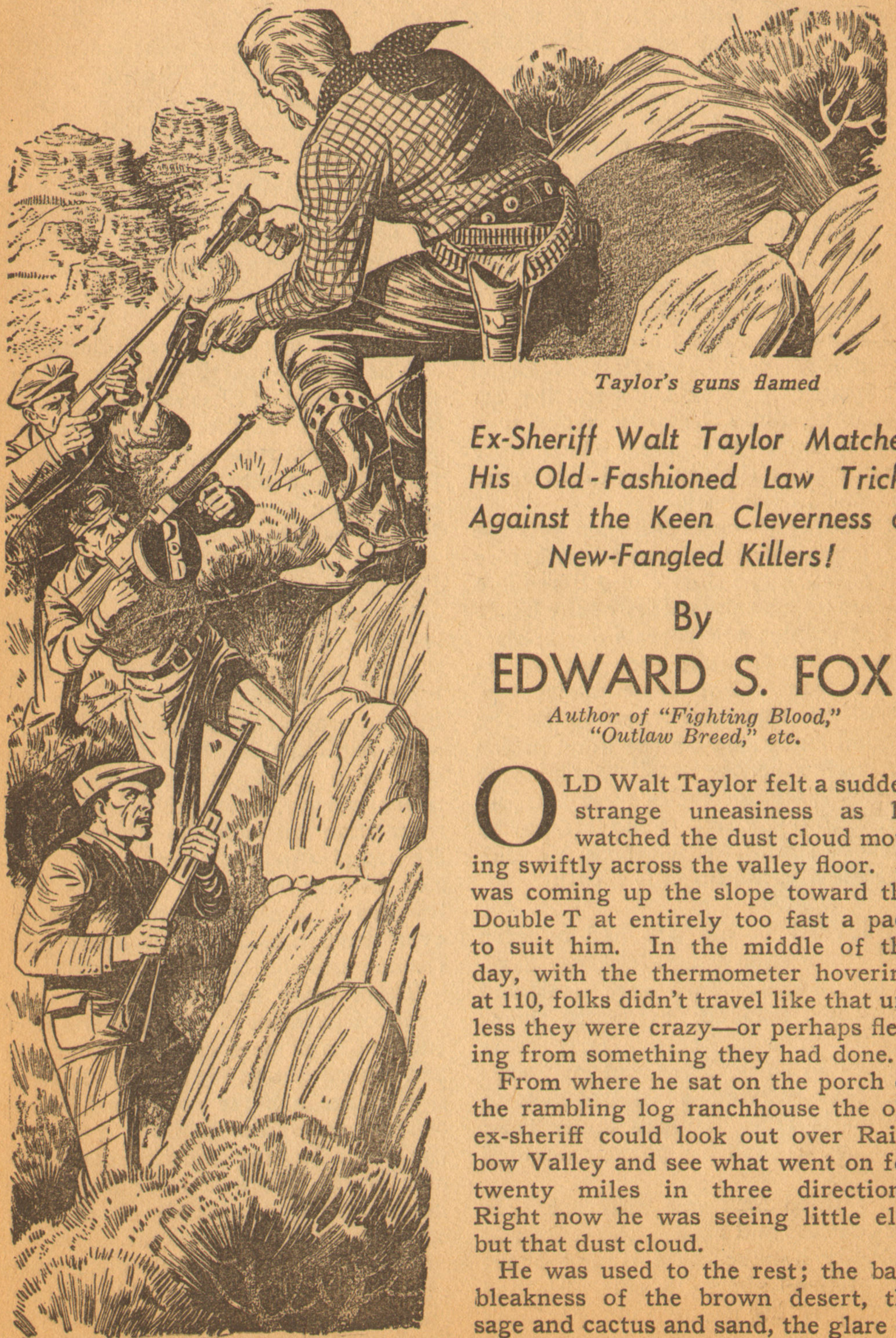
MAGIC OF THE M'LIMO

An Exciting Complete Action-Packed Novel

By **MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON**



Old Crow-Bait



Taylor's guns flamed

*Ex-Sheriff Walt Taylor Matches
His Old-Fashioned Law Tricks
Against the Keen Cleverness of
New-Fangled Killers!*

By
EDWARD S. FOX

*Author of "Fighting Blood,"
"Outlaw Breed," etc.*

OLD Walt Taylor felt a sudden strange uneasiness as he watched the dust cloud moving swiftly across the valley floor. It was coming up the slope toward the Double T at entirely too fast a pace to suit him. In the middle of the day, with the thermometer hovering at 110, folks didn't travel like that unless they were crazy—or perhaps fleeing from something they had done.

From where he sat on the porch of the rambling log ranchhouse the old ex-sheriff could look out over Rainbow Valley and see what went on for twenty miles in three directions. Right now he was seeing little else but that dust cloud.

He was used to the rest; the bare bleakness of the brown desert, the sage and cactus and sand, the glare of

the sun and the shimmering heat waves that danced and whirled before his straining eyes.

East, west, and south the flat desert stretched away unbroken to merge with the blue horizon. To the north, rising up almost from his back door, were the jagged hills and towering peaks of the Sawtooth Range, a wild and rocky piece of uninhabited land.

With a grunt of annoyance he sat up straighter in his cane-bottom chair, a slow frown stealing across his seamed, leathery face as he peered over the gallery railing.

Already he could hear the sound of a motor, could catch occasional glimpses of a sleek black touring car careening along the rutty wagon road leading up to the gate. There were three men in the car, two in the front and one in the back.

Skidding through the open gate the touring car screeched to a halt before the porch. The dust cloud lifted and drifted on past the corner of the house to the stables and corrals out back.

Walt Taylor half rose out of his chair, face paling beneath its tan, when the three men sprang to the ground and stood by the hood of the car, sizing up the small ranch about them. Walt's gunbelts were hanging just within the door to his left, but he knew he couldn't reach them. He sank back slowly, holding his breath.

NEVER in his life had he seen three such tough-looking, heavily-armed men. Two were small and dark-complexioned, evidently foreigners of some sort. They were dressed in suits, shoes and gray caps and each carried a wicked-looking automatic rifle. Bulges under their coats and at their hip pockets denoted hideouts.

The third man was different. He was coatless and hatless and there was a bloody handkerchief wound about his forehead above his ears. He had a wide sneering mouth and flat brutish features. He was standing on spread

legs, a queer-looking gun held waist high. Walt knew what it was. He'd seen pictures of these tommy guns before.

It was the sight of that gun and the hidden ones coming into view and the blood-soaked bandage that sent a wave of apprehension tingling up old Walt's spine. He was alone here at the Double T and unarmed. He knew by the strained looks on their faces and the way they were nervously fingering their guns that these men were running from something, had taken the wrong turn down by Eagle Rock and were cornered now and desperate.

The old ex-sheriff had spotted the second cloud of dust sweeping up the valley from the direction of Paisano, guessed what it meant. It was coming fast like the other had. But it was still a long ways off. It might be too late to help him.

Walt Taylor felt no sense of fear. He was used to facing killers and killer guns; though none like these before, either men or weapons. As a youth he had fought everything from lobos to lunatics. He had been rancher, hunter, trapper and finally lawman.

He had built up an enviable reputation as a gun-fighter and an honest peace officer, as marshal had tamed more than one wild Kansas cowtown. He had cleaned up Paisano and Brewster County, of which Rainbow Valley was a part, and he had stayed on ever since, making it his home until friends and old times were gone.

Then, when he couldn't stand the smell of gasoline, the bustle and confusion of a modern city any longer, he had moved out to the Double T, turning it into a horse ranch and hiring on two wranglers to help him with the bronc busting and the more difficult work. Here at least he felt at home, was in the saddle from early morning until late at night.

There had been a time once when every man, woman and child in Brewster County knew and respected Walt Taylor. Now when he rode to town

he never saw a single familiar or friendly face. Ragged little boys, playing in the gutters, laughed when he passed and imitated his limping stride, the limp caused by a .45 slug in his knee-cap, reminder of the time he had shot it out with Denver Fallon and his men. Older folks still turned to stare after him but he knew it was only out of curiosity, because of his ragged clothes and his flowing white hair. They didn't know who he was. And they didn't care.

Getting to his feet, Walt stepped to the porch railing. At the sound of his boots scraping across the rough boards the three men whirled. Their guns swung up again and sudden fear flashed into their hard-bitten faces. Because of that fear and their nervous fingers Walt knew he was closer to death at that moment than he had been for a long time.

"No use shootin'," he said calmly, and raised his hands on a level with his shoulder. "I ain't heeled."

For a moment the three men stared at him in icy silence. Their eyes swept up over his six-feet-two of gaunt frame, from his worn boots and levis, up over his white shirt and flopping vest to his gray Stetson and the tufts of bushy hair jutting out from beneath the wide brim.

Then the big leader suddenly relaxed.

"Hell," he grunted. "It's only an old crow-bait." He beckoned the old man with a wave of the gun. "Come down here, you. Step lively."

CLENCHING his teeth, old Walt turned and limped down the steps into the blazing sunlight of the yard. It went against the grain to be taking orders from such as these. But they had the drop on him and he had read enough about modern gangsters to know that they would shoot him down at the slightest provocation.

Walt felt his muscles freezing as he walked toward the trio. In the past he had always been able to judge

a man by his eyes. These men's eyes were unlike any he had ever seen before. They were glazed and cold as dead fish.

At a sharp command from the leader, Walt stopped. The old sheriff's face was expressionless, his manner listless. Little white lines about his mouth were the only sign he gave of the slow rage mounting within his breast.

"Hey, you, we need ten gallons of gas," the stocky man facing him growled.

An angry scowl flashed across the old officer's face.

"This is a hoss ranch yuh're at," he said softly. "No gas here."

At a nod from the leader one of the gangsters turned and ran off toward the stables. In a minute he came back.

"Nothin' there," he said, "but a buggy an' a pen full of horses."

Murder blazed suddenly in the leader's eyes.

He whirled on the speaker who shrank back fearfully as the other's tommy gun swung toward him.

"Hold it," he gasped, turning pale. "It ain't my fault. I didn't know we was out of gas. The horses, Duke. They'll take us to the next settlement. We can cop a car there maybe and lam for the Border. That's what we can do. Don't you see, Duke?"

The little rat-faced gangster was all eagerness. He was talking fast, and for his very life. Walt was staring at the stocky leader as though he had seen a ghost. Duke, the other man had called him.

Like a flash it dawned on him who these thugs were. Their faces had been vaguely familiar, and no wonder, he thought excitedly. Only an hour ago he had seen their pictures plastered over the front page of yesterday's newspaper. It was in the house now, lying on the table where he had tossed it after breakfast. It had told in glaring headlines how Duke Slade and his cronies were wanted by every

sheriff and police officer in the country.

They had broken out of the Yuma jail only recently. With flaming guns they had blazed a trail of death across three states, killing several men and women. The report said they had cold-bloodedly run down a child playing in the street. As he remembered the account Walt suddenly wished he had his two wranglers with him then, instead of out in the hills where they were rounding up a batch of wild horses.

"He's right, Duke," the third gangster put in. "We'll have to leave the car here an' go on with the nags."

Old Walt tensed as Slade hesitated. The mobster's brain didn't seem capable of making split-second decisions.

"Okay," he finally agreed and then whirled suddenly upon the rancher. "Get goin', you, and bring three horses."

Followed by the gangsters who watched his every move in frosty silence, old Walt shuffled to the corral where thirty or more of his broncs were kept, and dropped a noose over a small, docile-looking mustang.

"Hey!"

Turning, Walt saw Duke Slade striding toward him, anger flushing his flat brutal face. The gangster's fist shot out and smashed viciously into Walt's teeth.

The old lawdog staggered back under the impact of the blow, every bit of color draining from his face as his hand came up and wiped away the blood oozing out from between his lips.

Without stopping to think he had dropped his rope over the best cowpony in the corral. It didn't look like much, but it was wiry and could go a long ways. The black one Slade now indicated with a grimy thumb was a nervous, short-winded, spooky devil, flashy-looking but worthless for rocky country and hard running.

Five minutes later Walt stood by the corral watching Slade and his

companions climbing unfamiliarly into their saddles. A slow scornful smile twisted the corners of his bruised mouth.

He continued to watch and smile as the trio bounced out of the yard and disappeared up the yawning mouth of a canyon that led into the hills. Walt knew what they were getting into. It was fifty miles to the next town and there was no water between here and there, unless you knew where to look for it in a barrel cactus or a giant saguaro. They were riding into a hell of heat and blowing sands.

"Damn fools," Walt muttered as he limped back to the house and hunkered down on the porch steps. "Crazy fools ought to go back to the city where they belong. They may think they've seen the last of me, but they ain't."

WALT'S piercing eyes flashed now and again at the second dust cloud that was sweeping up the road out of the valley. The blood had dried and caked on his chin but he had not bothered to wash it off. His seamed old face was set in grim lines of determination and deep down inside of him he felt a savage surge of joy. This was more like old times, he thought, though modern style.

Twenty minutes later Walt rose to his feet and limped across the yard to meet the two cars. A dark scowl furrowed his leathery face when he saw Sheriff Harry Paine there in the front seat beside the driver in the lead car. Sheriff Paine was a young, loud-mouthed political leader of the small-time variety. With guile, and a slick tongue he had talked his way into being sheriff of Brewster County. Walt had never met the man, but from all accounts he was a braggart and a four-flusher.

"That's their car all right," one of the five men with the sheriff sang out as they all sprang to the ground clutching rifles and shotguns.

Walt shook his head as they looked at him for confirmation.

"Don't bother lookin' for 'em," he said quietly. "They was here but they rid off into the hills several minutes ago."

"They did huh?" Paine strode up and looked Walt over coldly. "Say, you're the old hermit they tell me was an outlaw or something years ago. That right?"

Walt looked steadily at the youthful sheriff. Paine was flashily dressed in cowboy attire. He had plenty of beef in his wide shoulders, but his face was weak and flabby.

Walt spat out a stream of tobacco juice.

"I used to be sheriff of this county," he said, "but you wouldn't remember."

"A has-been sheriff, eh?"

Walt smiled thinly. "That's about the size of it," he growled.

"Then why didn't you stop them bandits? Scared?"

Old Walt took a step forward, fists clenching at his sides.

"It's all right, Pop," Paine said, turning away on his heel. "We can't expect too much from an old coot like you." To his grinning deputies he said, "We'll have to follow 'em, boys, so saddle up some horses."

"Had the nerve to come riding into Paisano," he said, swinging back on Walt, "to stick up the bank. Jeff Teagle, the cashier, was a friend of mine and they killed him. I'll shoot them down like coyotes when I overtake them, and believe me, old whatever-your-name-is, I can shoot."

Harry Paine turned and walked off toward the corrals. Turning into the ranchhouse, Walt took down his gunbelts and strapped them about his lean waist, tying the holsters down with leather thongs.

He tried several draws and spun the gleaming cylinders with his thumbs, and smiled to himself in satisfaction. He had slowed in the last couple of years and his eyes had grown dim for really good shooting, but his hands

were plenty steady and his nerve was still there.

HARRY PAINE would probably sneer at his guns if he noticed them, Walt thought. They were old-fashioned, long-barreled, single-action Colts, .45s. Paine would say they were no good and useless against the modern weapons carried by himself and Duke Slade.

Perhaps he would be right. Walt didn't know.

Walt picked up his heavy stock saddle and clumped out behind the stables. He found Paine and his men trailing lariats around the corral in a vain attempt to rope some horses. It took but a few moments for Walt to do the job, dropping a noose over neck after neck with a long sweep of his arm and a flip of his wrist. He was short on saddles so he gave them some McClellans he had bought from the government years ago. Then he caught and saddled up his own mouse-colored bronc.

"Where do you think you're going?" Paine asked as he climbed awkwardly into his saddle. He looked down at the old sheriff and chuckled. "Regular two-gun man, eh? Well, Pop, you better stay home this trip. I don't want the responsibility for your safety on my hands. I've got enough to think about without running an old folk's home. You stay here like a good fellow until we get back."

"Yuh better take some canteens along with yuh," Walt advised as Paine began sawing on the reins.

"What for?" The sheriff laughed. "We'll be back in a couple of hours, maybe sooner. So long."

With a wave of his hand he wheeled and dashed away with his deputies fogging behind. Old Walt suddenly grinned. They looked more like a party of dudes, he thought, than a sheriff's posse.

Unhurriedly he filled a canteen at the pump and slung it over the saddlehorn. Then he swung aboard his

sleepy-eyed mustang and headed into the hills at a slow jog.

For an hour he rode up a winding canyon, changing his horse's gait as the going permitted. Mile after mile dropped steadily away under his mustang's nimble hoofs. It was hotter than a blast furnace there in the canyon and the glare from the rocky walls was fierce. But he came out into a broad valley a short while later and it grew cooler and he mopped his streaming face with a faded bandanna.

He crossed the valley floor at a canter and entered the second line of hills, leaning down occasionally to peer at the ground for tracks of the posse and the fleeing outlaws. They were not difficult to follow. Slade and his confederates were making little effort to conceal their trail. They seemed to be trusting entirely to speed and good luck.

Rounding a pinnacle of rock Walt reined to a sudden halt. Hunkered down in the shade were the six possemen. They were covered with dust and sweat and they were rubbing their aching muscles and fanning their red faces with their hats. At one side were the horses, standing with lowered heads and heaving, steaming flanks.

"I thought I told you not to come," Paine growled as he glanced up and frowned at the old lawman. "It's bad enough as it is without you bein' along to slow us down."

He suddenly spied the canteen hanging from Walt's saddle-horn. Leaping to his feet, he reached out and grabbed it. Tilting it back he drank eagerly. His men crowded about and it passed quickly from hand to hand and was soon empty.

With a wry smile Walt Taylor rode on.

Out of sight of the possemen he lifted his mustang to a canter. The outlaws couldn't be far ahead, he knew, and he wanted to catch up with them before it grew dark. The sun was already settling out of sight to

the west and the hills were becoming shrouded in long purple and gray shadows.

THEN he saw them, tiny specks just disappearing over a ridge a mile distant. Straightening in the saddle, Walt raked in his spurs and loosened the pressure on the reins. And the next glimpse he had of them some minutes later the distance had been cut in half. They were riding across a flat tableland on their jaded mounts. They were peering back over their shoulders and he knew they had spotted him.

A bullet snarled high over Walt's head. The sound of the shot came a second later, a sharp crack softened by the distance and echoing faintly in the hills beyond. Again a slug whined through the air, this time close by his ear. Walt slid to a halt. He hated to have to do it but it was the only way to stop them. If they opened up with their tommy gun, he'd never be able to get any closer than he was now.

Dismounting, he unsheathed his .30-30. Dropping to one knee he adjusted the sights to 700 yards and lifted the heavy carbine to his shoulder. He took quick aim and fired. A spurt of dust rose up to the right of the fleeing outlaws. Walt brushed his hand before his eyes. Then he aimed again, more carefully this time, and fired.

With a grunt of satisfaction he saw Slade's black go down. The other two mobsters rode on, Slade mounted behind one of them. Working the lever of his rifle, Walt sent a stream of bullets flying toward them.

But his shots were going wild and as his hammer clicked on an empty chamber, he sprang to his feet and glared after the retreating horsemen.

Climbing into the saddle Walt loped after them, thumbing fresh shells into his rifle as he rode. Flinging the carbine to his shoulder he fired. An eerie scream came faintly to his ears and he

saw another horse plunge to its knees, spilling its rider into the dust over its head.

Almost instantly a swarm of bullets droned over Walt's head from the tommy gun. Spurring back out of range he dismounted in a sandy arroyo. Peering over the rim he saw the outlaws just disappearing into a mound of boulders. They were going to make a stand, Walt realized, and suddenly spun on his heels to see Harry Paine and his deputies sweeping across the mesa.

Old Walt waved his hat and they swerved as the tommy gun broke out into a chatter again. A minute later the riders were tumbling into the arroyo. Walt was leaning against his bronc, calmly puffing on a cigarette.

"What the hell's going on out there?" the sheriff shouted. "What're you doing here?"

"Resting," Walt replied. "That's Slade and his men holed up in them rocks. Yuh better go an' smoke 'em out 'fore it gets too dark."

"Don't be funny," Paine growled and sat down wearily in the sand. "A man couldn't go ten feet without running into lead."

"That's right," Walt went on quietly, "but there's more'n one way to skin a weasel. Half of yuh could keep them busy on this side while the other half an' me could come up from behind an' take 'em by surprise."

Paine looked hard at the old man.

"We're stayin' right here until they give up," he said.

Walt tossed away his cigarette. Sheriff Paine was out on a limb, he knew, with elections coming up soon. He had to capture these outlaws or lose prestige. But much as he needed success he seemed a little hesitant about going out and fighting for it. Paine must have seen the disgusted look on the old lawman's face.

"We'll get them when the time comes," he suddenly snapped. "Things 've changed since you was an officer. It takes brains nowadays."

WALT turned away without replying. Paine was on the defensive and was beginning to bluster. Taking his lariat from the saddle, Walt sauntered slowly down the wash, around a bend and to the mesa's rim. He hadn't much time. It would be dark in another hour.

Sliding down the steep slope of the mesa, Walt picked himself up at the bottom, turned and stooping, half-ran along its shadowy base toward the mound of boulders. He reached them twenty minutes later. There was one big one jutting out over the rim forty feet above his head. He measured the distance with his eye, then uncoiled a section of rope and shook out a noose.

Slowly, so as not to make any noise that could be heard by the gangsters above, he whirled the rope about his head, suddenly shot out his arm and heaved it into the air with all his strength. With a hiss the noose snaked up and settled about the rock. Walt took up the slack and tested it with his weight.

Then foot by foot he began to climb. Halfway up he paused to listen and catch his breath. There was no sound from above and a second later he was climbing the rope again in grim determination. His arms and shoulders throbbed with fire. His hands felt numb. His lungs seemed ready to burst.

How he made the last ten feet he never knew. Black specks were floating before his eyes when he pulled himself over the rim and stretched out along the ground. For several minutes he lay there gaining back his strength. Then he rose to his hands and knees and glanced about.

He was on the outer fringe of boulders at one side and slightly to the rear of the spot where the outlaws had taken refuge. He could hear a low mumble of voices rising from the center of the pile. A cool breeze had sprung up and the shadows had grown deeper though there still was plenty of light to see and shoot by.

Getting to his feet, Walt slipped out his guns and felt them carefully. A savage thrill ran through him as he realized he was about to go into action once again. Inch by inch he crept forward, bent double. Then stepping around a boulder he suddenly froze.

Lying prone behind a mound of rocks and peering out across the mesa were the three gangsters. Their backs were to Walt. They were in a small cleared space. They hadn't spotted him yet though he was a bare twenty feet away. Duke Slade had his tommy gun, the other two their automatics. Walt gritted his teeth and drew a deep breath.

"Up with your hands!" he snapped. "Reach, or I'll shoot!"

With startled oaths the three outlaws whirled. Slade came up into a crouch, tommy gun swinging in a half circle and beginning to chatter. An automatic boomed. Then Walt Taylor's guns bucked and flamed in his hands.

With a scream one of the outlaws lunged erect, straight into the stream of bullets pouring from the muzzle of the tommy gun. Shot through the lungs, it had been a nervous reflex that had sent him bounding up. But it saved Walt's life. Leaping aside, the old sheriff fired.

Peering through the black powder-smoke swirling up around his waist, he triggered his guns. A stream of blood trickled down over his jaw from a bullet gash on his cheek. His shots were rolling out like one. The third gangster suddenly coughed and lay still.

WITH a shrill yell Duke Slade lurched to his feet. He had spent one fatal second staring in horror at his companion who had flopped to the ground literally cut to pieces by those bullets meant for Walt Taylor.

Walt felt as cold as ice. His thumbs fanned the hammers of his Colts with a smooth flawless precision, and then

stopped. The tommy gun had clattered to the ground. Duke Slade was staring down at his wrists dazedly.

Through each of them a bullet had been neatly driven.

Rocking forward on the balls of his feet, Walt Taylor stopped before the mobster leader. Duke Slade looked from the oldster's grim, mask-like face to the pair of old-fashioned weapons in his hands and his mouth twisted crookedly as he spoke from one corner.

"Don't shoot. I give up."

With deft hands Walt searched the beaten gangster for more guns, then marched him out across the mesa toward the sheriff's party which was racing up out of the wash to meet them.

Sheriff Paine was the first to tumble out of his saddle and confront Duke Slade. He was leading Walt's horse



and he handed over the reins, with a look of wonder on his beefy face. Walt holstered his guns and watched the six possemen tying up the gangster.

"Seems to me I made a mistake," Paine said with a sheepish grin. "You're the one should be sheriff of this county, Mr. Taylor, not me."

Old Walt swung into the saddle.

"Forget it," he replied. "Slade's your prisoner. Make the most of him."

With a wave of his hand and a short nod the ex-sheriff turned away into the thickening night. He stretched his aching muscles and heaved a deep sigh as he rode along. It had been a hard day for an old crow-bait like him who was going on eighty-four. But it had been fun. Glancing up at the dancing stars Walt Taylor chuckled softly to himself. Yes, it had been fun all right—he wouldn't have missed it for a million.

The GLOBE TROTTER



HI THERE, Globe Trotters! This month, in answer to many requests, we're taking you up to America's last frontier! That's right—you've guessed it—Alaska! That's the land that's receiving the courageous pioneers of the twentieth century.

It came about this way. When the dust storms and the drought made homeless migrants out of thousands of American families, your Uncle Sam decided to step in with a helping hand. He thought the best thing would be to establish self-sufficient communities in various parts of the United States—and Alaska.

The most famous of these settlements is, of course, Alaska's Matanuska colony. Alaska as a whole is rich in soil, timber, minerals and fisheries. But the winters are cold—and long. So the trick was to find and develop such a spot as Matanuska, which has a yearly growing season of one hundred thirty days, fertile and well-watered land, and forests teeming with wild game. Matanuska is such a place.

Matanuska is a wooded valley, fertile and inviting, ten or twelve miles long, lying in a natural bowl whose ramparts are the snow-covered Chugach Range. Palmer, "capital" of the colony, is about thirty-five miles from Anchorage, the Cook Inlet port on Alaska's south central coastline.

In the Spring of 1935, the Army transport *St. Mihiel* landed some two hundred and eight families at Anchorage—men, women and children from drought-seared farmlands in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan.

Generous Soil

True, not everyone could endure the rigors of resettlement, and in this first year some fifty-two families returned home. However, their places were soon filled. The soil is generous. It yields all kinds of cereals—wheat, oats, rye—as well as potatoes, hardy vegetables and small fruits. There is some difficulty in raising corn, but the experts of the Department of Agriculture are at work on that problem.

As for wild game—well, they say that this section of Alaska is a hunter's paradise. In fact, they even give you a bounty of \$15 per head on each wolf killed, as well as two and a half cents if you turn in the head of a succulent trout—after duly catching, broiling and eating the gentleman.

Would any of you Globe Trotters like to settle in Alaska? Maybe you'd be interested in landing a mining or fishing job. If so, write either to the Bureau of Territories and Island Possessions, Department of the Interior, at Washington, D. C.; to the office of Governor Gruening at Juneau, Alaska, or to the Chamber of Commerce at Juneau. We're sure they'll be glad to give you complete and helpful information.

Back to School

An interesting item appeared in the papers the other day. All of you Globe Trotters know about the many private schools and military academies in this country. Well, it happens to be a fact that a large number of boys from Central and South America attend these institutions as students or cadets, and some of them travel a very great distance to get there.

Take the case of Jack and Robert Darty, twelve and ten respectively, who recently resumed their studies at the Avondale Country School in Laurel, Maryland, after coming all the way from Sao Paulo, Brazil, on a 6,800-mile jaunt by airplane.

Now this is quite a little trip. The youngsters took the train from Sao Paulo—capital of Brazil's great coffee empire—to Rio de Janeiro, then went aboard a Pan-American Airways plane. After one stop in Trinidad, the big skyliner set them down in Miami—all told, a hop of some 5,777 miles.

At Miami, an Eastern Airlines ship took them the remaining 1,032 miles to Washington. Wonder what ol' Abe Lincoln would have thought if he'd ever even dreamt of such a hike to school—back in the early days of our republic, when he tramped over miles of Illinois country roads for his education?

Those Incredible Khevsurs

Light on those amazing Caucasians, the Khevsurs, is shed by Howard R. Marsh, author of this month's grand novel *THE GOLDEN HAUBERK*, in the interesting letter to this department which follows.

Dear Globe Trotter:

When I found myself in the middle of *THE GOLDEN HAUBERK*, I suddenly wondered why I was writing so excitedly about those outlandish people, the Khevsurs.

They lived—and live today—deep in the Caucasus country. My rambles had taken me over

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most of Europe several times, and across Northern Africa, as well as over the major portion of the western hemisphere, but the nearest I had ever been to Khevsuretia was Budapest, in 1935.

Incidentally, it is of Morocco and Algeria that I most like to write—lands of green-white moonlight and ink-black intrigue. But here I was, deeply interested in an almost forgotten people living amid the crags and peaks of an inaccessible country lying in the Caucasus, far down between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, close to Turkey, and yet centuries removed from it.

There was some consolation in the fact that as far as is known, only two explorers had ever gone into that land and returned alive. Both were Englishmen and both admitted—tacitly, if not actually—that they had never penetrated very far into the wild, unfriendly region with its strange people.

Why, then, was I writing of the Khevsurs? The answer was that one anecdote I had heard completely captivated me. It proved to me that the Khevsurs were a real people, a brave, indomitable people, living today as they did more than a thousand years ago. This was the story, vouchsafed by many witnesses and now a matter of record:

During the World War, word penetrated the mountain fastnesses of the strong-hearted Khevsurs that battles were being fought not too far away. If there was fighting the Khevsurs wished to be in on it. So down a great number came from their mountains, down to Tiflis, and each warrior had a suit of armor and an odd weapon or two, many dating back to the days of the great Crusades.

"We want to fight," the Khevsurs said in effect when they faced the commanding officer in Tiflis, in what was then czarist Russia.

They were welcomed, of course, and immediately put in the trenches. But they would not remain in those trenches. Haughtily they formed in line; haughtily they marched out.

"We came to fight like men—in the open. If we cannot fight man against man, toe to toe and sword to sword in the open, but have to hide behind mud banks, we will not fight."

Nor did they. With their collection of strange armor and stranger weapons, they turned and marched proudly back to their mountain fastnesses. Their participation in the World War was finished.

This anecdote convinced me of the realness of these people, and the more I studied their history and their legends, the more I was convinced that they were well worth a story. Not an impossible or too-fanciful story, but one which would show the indomitable courage and steadfastness of this little known people, equalled only by the courage of the American hero in my fiction account.

If there is a single favor I could ask of the readers of **THE GOLDEN HAUBERK**, it is to believe, with me, that the Khevsurs are today happy in their forbidding mountains, living their lives of simple courage, protecting their honor and their traditions just as they do in **THE GOLDEN HAUBERK**.

Sincerely yours,
Jackson, Michigan. Howard R. Marsh.

A favor, indeed, which all of us are glad to grant. Yep, there's still plenty of romance and color and adventure in this old world of ours.

Adventurers, Ahoy!

The following letter was written just three days before German shells started falling in Poland. Here's hoping that events since then have not compelled our friend, Spencer Stovall, to forego his plans.

Dear Globe Trotter:

I am writing this letter to you in the hope that you will help me to get several correspondents who would be interested in writing to me.

I am getting ready to start on a round-the-world cruise in a sailboat, with only my wife and ten-year-old daughter as companions. In February of this year I returned from a two-year cruise in the South Seas, which I made in a 26-foot yacht.

This time I plan to take my family with me, go

through the South Seas, hitting all the far-flung ports of the Pacific, and then on around the world.

It gets pretty lonesome out there on the ocean for days at a time, and I love to write letters and to receive them, and it occurred to me that some of your readers would enjoy receiving a letter from me each month and a snapshot of the boat, the islands or the natives of the places we visit.

I also plan to get my letters canceled at out-of-the-way places, with special cachet stamps, which should be of interest to stamp and cover collectors.

I will be very happy to hear from anyone who may care to write to me. Letters will reach me addressed: Spencer Stovall, P. O. Box 171, Honolulu.

Sincerely yours,

Spencer Stovall.

T.H. (Territory of Hawaii).

A capital idea, Mr. Stovall, and if your cruise pans out—as we surely trust it will, war or no war—we have an idea you'll be swamped with mail from the Globe Trotters who read this magazine. *Bon voyage*, and good luck!

Fair Enough

It isn't often that a fan takes his time to give us a sure-fire appraisal of our fiction parade, but now a friend from Newport, Oregon, comes along with a most analytical eye.

Incidentally, his basis for approval or disapproval is 5, 4, 3, 2, 1—100%, 80%, and so forth. We present—J. Winston Carmichael.

Dear Globe Trotter:

Since I've been reading **THRILLING ADVENTURES** for over three years, I think it's high time I joined the Globe Trotters and stopped missing out on the fun.

I wonder if some of the Globe Trotters aren't interested in anthropology—that is, the study of and histories of some of our ancient peoples; say, for instance, the Mayans of Yucatan, or maybe the Egyptians. Or, to come closer to home, the American Indian.

Being an amateur archaeologist, I'm rather interested in such things and would like to hear from any of the readers similarly interested.

I have the October, 1939, issue before me and have rated the stories as follows:

THE TIGER TABLET, by Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson—5 "adventures." It was one of the few stories it's been my pleasure to read by an author who actually has a knowledge of that which he writes about.

BARS FOR A BUCKAROO, by Allan R. Bosworth—4 "adventures." I got a real thrill out of this one, even though it didn't have a bizarre setting.

ONE WITHOUT GLORY, by William O'Sullivan—3 "adventures." A good story for Mounty admirers.

YANKEE GHOST, by Jackson Cole—3 "adventures." A fair yarn, but I'll still stay out of China.

MALAY KNIVES, by William Barrett—3 "adventures." Just an average blood-and-thunder drama.

PREMPEH'S JU-JU, by G. H. Gilroy-Moore—3½ "adventures." Not bad, Mr. Moore. Rather satirical, wasn't it? Or was it?

ACE JORDAN, by Bob MacKay—1 grapefruit. Not only is this type of stuff far-fetched, but in my opinion also out of place in this type of magazine. But then, you can't please everybody.

The October issue was the best issue I've seen yet, and although you can't always expect such an issue, I'm looking forward to the November number with great interest.

Waiting for the November T. A. and my membership card, I am

Yours in Adventure,

Box 505,
Newport, Oregon.

J. Winston Carmichael.

(Continued on page 108)

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(Continued from page 107)

Thanks for your comments, Globe Trotter Carmichael. And by the way, in the October number we printed, as you know, a biographical sketch of Major Wheeler-Nicholson, author of **THE TIGER TABLET** you liked so much. As you say, the major certainly does know what he is talking about, because he saw plenty of wartime service in the Far East.

Past History

Just to show how fast moves the tragedy of events, the Second World War broke out just two weeks after Captain J. Winchcombe-Taylor mailed us the following letter to accompany his great "Club Fist" Mayne yarn—**GUERRILLA REVENGE**, in this issue. All of which we will comment on more fully at the end of the captain's letter.

Dear Globe Trotter:

By sending "Club Fist" Mayne to his old stamping ground, Mongolia, in **GUERRILLA REVENGE**, I merely anticipated events that are actually happening in Northeastern Asia today.

For, while the regular Chinese armies seem to be on the defensive against the invading Japanese, the guerillas have widened their sphere, not only behind the Nipponese lines in the conquered provinces, but up north in the barren deserts and mountains of Mongolia, where the Japs have a huge force of 350,000 men known as the Kwantung Army.

This army has two objects: to prevent desperately needed supplies from coming through Mongolia to the Chinese, and to fight Russia, should the latter officially declare war against Japan.

So far, Russia has not moved—officially. But we read every day that the Russian-organized Mongolians around Lake Bor are creating "incidents" that keep the Japs' Kwantung Army busy far in the north, so that it can do nothing to help its fellows in China proper to make a last decisive drive against organized Chinese resistance.

Through the clouds of propaganda sent out by both sides, however, it is possible to see that these so-called "incidents" are really war on a large scale. Recently Japan claimed to have shot down 715 Mongolian planes, while the Russian-trained Mongols claimed to have bagged 215 Japanese planes.

Both these totals are obviously exaggerated—probably the Japs' more than the Mongols—but even then the figures are startling. Not until the closing years of the Great War, when some ten millions of combatants were engaged, did air casualties ever reach such figures—and the fighting seasons on the Western Front were much longer than in Mongolia, where the temperature ranges from 40 degrees below zero in the winter to 140 above during the very brief summer.

The Japanese boast about the quality of their artillery and tank-equipped troops in this area, and neutral military observers agree that they are composed of highly-trained Regulars. But even these can be—and are—demoralized by the incessant pinpricks of Chinese and Mongolian guerillas. Nothing worries troops more than to know that, while fighting an enemy in front, their own rear is being threatened. Throughout military history, the mere threat of a rear attack has driven back armies that otherwise were deemed invincible.

So guerilla bands, such as Club Fist's, are doing far more than merely killing a few score enemies here and there. They are demoralizing the greatest power in Asia, and in time may force it to withdraw from its conquests and to return to the Island Empire whence it came.

Too, white men who, like the fictionized Club Fist, are fighting for China, are actually serving the entire white race. For if Japan should dominate China, another twenty or thirty years will inevitably see the outbreak of a war for racial supremacy.

Think! 100,000,000 Japanese, plus 500,000,000 Japanese-led Chinese, besides countless millions of other Asiatic peoples—Malays, Indo-Chinese and East Indians—pitted against Americans and Europeans. Why, it would bring a world catastrophe that would make the present European war threat look like a game of penny ante!

Sincerely,
J. Winchcombe-Taylor.

Tucson, Arizona.

Well, Captain and fellow Globe Trotter, some parts of the letter seem out of date. This Second World War was just two weeks old when it was suddenly announced that the Soviet Union and the Empire of Japan had abruptly agreed to cease hostilities on the Outer Mongolian-Manchukuoan frontier. And, every day, the international situation changes.

Anyway we Americans should be happy we can sit back in our chairs and run through a copy of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** without somebody dropping a thermite bomb on our front doorstep!

The Glamorous West

From Edward S. Fox, who wrote this month's bangup Western thriller for you fans—**OLD CROW-BAIT**—comes a most colorful anecdote indeed.

Dear Globe Trotter:

It was in 1928 that Mexico staged one of its many minor revolutions, and it was less than half an hour after news of the war came out in the Phoenix papers that a friend and I were on our way to the front, to see what we could see in the way of excitement.

The "front," we found, was a pair of swinging doors behind which an army of about two hundred rebels was noisily fighting over their glasses of *tequila*. Much thumping of chests and cries of "Viva!", a few sticks of dynamite thrown from a rickety airplane—that was all the revolution we saw.

So we started home through the mountains a week later, taking it easy, doing a little deer hunting as we went. But one day we were lying around camp when three strangers raced in. I didn't suspect anything until all of a sudden they unlimbered their artillery and told us not to move. We didn't! They were three of the toughest-looking men I'd ever laid eyes on, and between them they had every known kind of gun, including a tommy gun.

They took our horses, turned theirs loose so we couldn't follow, and raced off without another word. Ten minutes later, as we were trying to round up their brones, a single horseman rode by. A lean, white-haired oldster on a shaggy pony. He nodded and with a polite "Howdy!" disap-

(Continued on page 110)

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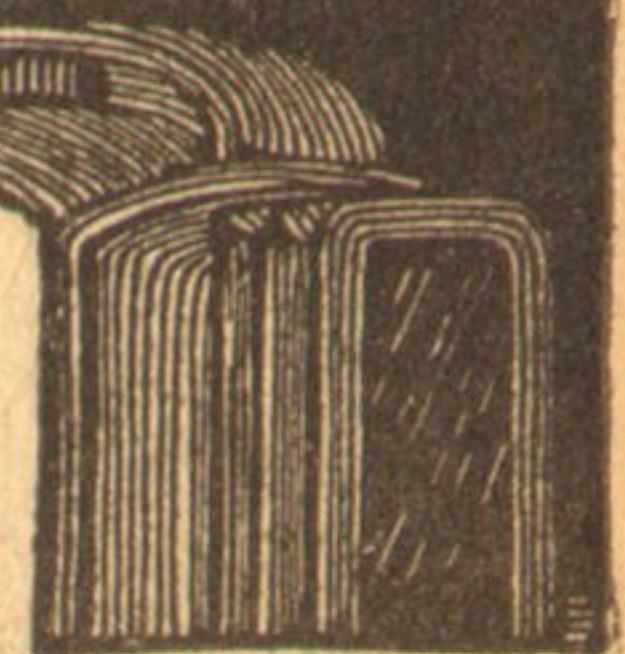
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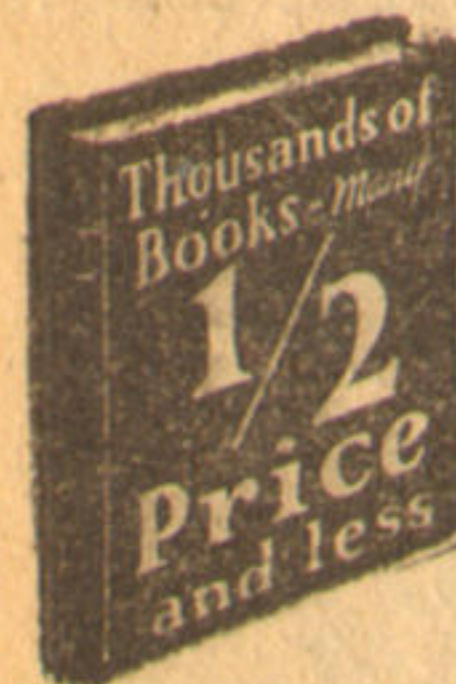
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(Continued from page 109)

peared up the mouth of a nearby canyon, taking the trail of the three strangers. He didn't ask if we'd seen them. His sharp eyes scanning the ground had shown him their tracks.

Then a whole posse whirled by all in a lather, and we knew there was excitement ahead for sure. We managed to catch the horses and pretty soon we were tearing after the posse, which in turn was hot on the trail of the oldster—who, for his part, was calmly tracking the three toughs and their heavy artillery.

That was my first glimpse of Walt Taylor, the old ex-sheriff who tames the three thugs in my story OLD CROW-BAIT. Walt Taylor isn't his real name, of course. But he is one of the old-time gunfighters, one of the few that are still left to us.

I spent a week at his ranch down along the Border. I've been back a dozen times since, and I've learned a lot about him and the days he's somehow (by his wits and his guns, mostly) managed to live through. Some day I'm going to write up a few of the many yarns he's told me. When he reads them—when he reads *this* one!—he'll probably growl to his pony, Ugliness:

"Knowed I should've plugged that writin' feller on sight. Durned varmint!"

I only hope he doesn't take after me with those long single-action Colts of his!

Yours truly,

Edward S. Fox.

Vinita, Virginia.

To which, Mr. Fox, we must add a fervent "amen"!

Attention, Readers!

Once again, friends—have you joined up with our GLOBE TROTTERS' CLUB? If not, fill out the coupon printed on page 111 and mail it in to us, pronto! Because, once a member of this organization, you'll be eligible to correspond with the swellest gang of folks you've ever come across!

Yes, sir, each month we print the names of our new members, so that you Globe Trotters may exchange letters and snapshots with other loyal adventurers the globe 'round. (See page 113.)

Remember—there are no dues, no fees of any kind in the GLOBE TROTTERS' CLUB, and everybody is welcome to join up! There are no residence restrictions, either. Americans, Canadians, British, French, Italians—you're all welcome, friends!

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The Land of Adventure

Clear the decks and prepare for action! The January issue of THRILLING ADVENTURES will sail from port with enough drama and excitement on board to keep every passenger glued to his deck chair!

Leading the parade will be Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson's novel of Darkest Africa—MAGIC OF THE M'LIMO, a thriller of the first water! We don't want to give away any secrets—but we guarantee MAGIC OF THE M'LIMO will do things to your blood pressure!

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And—another White Phantom yarn by that master of animal-adventure stories—Harold F. Cruickshank. This one is titled WOLF WORSHIP, and it's one of Cruick's very best!

—and More, Too!

But hold on a minute! Also on the roster is a great roundup of short stories and special features, including a real treat for you fans—a full-length self-portrait of that doughty writer and adventurer, William O'Sullivan.

We asked Bill to tell us something about his life, so he replied by mailing back a 15-page first-person account of himself, plus a photograph which wasn't so hot and is being duly returned, with a demand for another one.

Bill's true-life account of himself was so funny, we thought you'd like to read it as is, just as he wrote it. So that's how it's going to run in our next issue!

Not to be outdone, Charles S. Strong, surveyor, linguist and wanderer in far places, has been doing considerable research for his next true historical adventure episode. THE SIEGE OF QUEBEC, is the title. And in it you'll read about that brave Revolutionary War hero, General Richard Montgomery, whose aide-de-camp was no less a personage than Benedict Arnold.

Montgomery set out in 1775 with his Continentals to conquer Quebec. The outcome of that courageous little expedition makes exciting reading, and we think
(Concluded on page 112)

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(Concluded from page 111)

Charles S. Strong's account of it will prove to be a most interesting sidelight on the exploits of our early American heroes.

So saying, we call for the copy boy to rush this down to the printers. But we'll be back again next issue, with another column full of letters and anecdotes. Until then—

—THE GLOBE TROTTER.

RASCAL AT ARMS

(Continued from page 91)

Maid Marian spoke.

"Not only because thou didst save me, at thine own great peril, but because thou'rt true gentleman and good, shall I ever hold thy name high in my heart, Robin Fitz-Hood."

She put out a white hand. Robin bent and kissed it.

"Good-by, my old master, and my fair lady," quoth he. "When my pursuers come, Sir William, lead them to the cellar. May we meet again, with more hap and less blood."

He turned and strode to the door. Opening it, he looked out into the gray of early morning. The rain had ceased. At that moment a fat hand touched his elbow. The innkeeper had followed him.

"Hark ye, young sir," he said, "there's reckoning to pay."

"Reckoning?" Robin said. "Nay, have I not done thee great good, man of the inn—even saved thy life?"

"It may be. Yet for a night's rest in my house—"

Robin laughed. "Rest, quotha? I rested not for so much as a snore's length."

"You play with words, Master, but you must pay the reckoning," insisted the host. "I know there is money in your pouch. A shilling was thrown to you by yonder robber captain whom you slew."

Out came a fat palm. Robin laughed

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again, tweaked his beard, and drew forth the coin in question. He held it up, then dropped it upon the hewn-log threshold.

"Dost hear it ring, mine host?" he inquired politely.

"Aye, and thanks," said the inn-keeper, stooping fatly to seize the silver. But Robin's down-darting hand was before him.

"May the ring of that silver nourish thee as the night in this inn rested me," Robin admonished him, and once again pouched the shilling.

Then he was gone, out of the door and into the wet green forest, while Sir William and his daughter Marian stared silently after.

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(Continued from previous issues)

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