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# ACTION NOVELS

*ALL-ADVENTURE*

**DRUMS  
OF THE  
DESERT**

by  
**THOMAS J. COOKE**

**RED TYPHOON**

by **ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN**

**THE IRON MAN  
OF  
DEVIL'S ISLAND**

QUICK DEATH IN THE JUNGLE—  
SLOW DEATH IN THE HELL-HOLE  
CAPT. deVRIS GAMBLED ON ESCAPE

by  
**GEORGE BRUCE**

**RIDERS  
OF THE  
BURNING SANDS**

by  
**JOHN STARR**



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# ACTION *ALL-ADVENTURE* NOVELS

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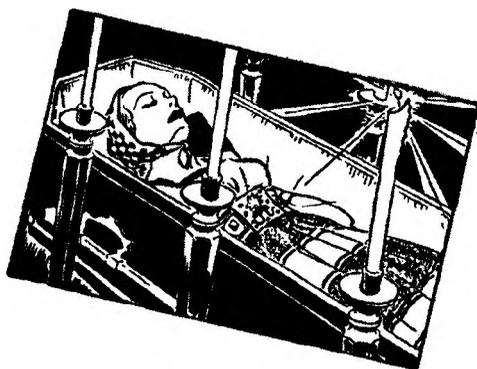


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# DRUMS OF THE DESERT

*A Novel of the Sudan*

By **THOMAS J. COOKE**

**Suez trusts few men and no women. But Horwood, the sacred flag of the Mahdi a sure death warrant under his shirt, rode on a girl's errand to El Melik's black and bloody tents.**

**T**HE flat, white roofs of Suez lay huddled beneath the blazing Egyptian sun, and those whose affairs called them forth kept carefully to the deep shadows cast by the thick walls.

Concealed by half-closed curtains a man and a girl peered down from a high window on to the scorched courtyard—waiting.

The girl murmured, "How long?"

Rene Bazain impatiently shrugged his narrow shoulders, voicing his thoughts again for the hundredth time in rapid-fire French.

"If we only would hear!" he said wildly. "If I only knew that the Emir would pay us our price for the Yellow Flag, once we

have taken it from this Yankee fool? Horwood only waits here for the west-bound P. & O. steamer. He may go any day. The thought maddens me, Marcelle. A fortune within our grasp, if only this damned Arab messenger rides fast!"

"I would not worry, Rene," the girl answered listlessly. "The Mahdi's Flag is more to these desert Arabs than money. They regard it as sacred."

Her mind leaped back to the previous day. Dick Horwood had been carefully pointed out to her by Bazain on the cool veranda of the *Pension Lyonnais*. Woman-like she remembered more than anything else the tired expression on the young American's face; features dried up and weathered by six months' exposure to the sun and wind of the desert. His long frame had been sprawled on one of the cane lounges under the slow-moving *punchahs*. Her eyes had flickered to Horwood's waist, about which she knew the Sacred Flag was securely wound in its oiled-silk container. Bazain's spies had made no mistake, she felt sure.

Bazain wanted that flag too much to make any mistake about its present possessor and his whereabouts.

If the desert chief was willing to pay the huge sum demanded, then this American must be tricked out of his priceless curio—by her! Bazain had hinted as much. The girl felt nauseated by the thought, but she well knew she was powerless to do anything save bend to his will.

"Yahood!" A sudden sharp shout from the man broke in on Marcelle Royale's bitter thoughts. A slim, muscular hand grasped her by the wrist. Bazain dragged the girl further into the wide bay-window, pointing excitedly. "Look! Look! A Meharin racing camel! See the scarlet saddle! It is Yahood returned from the Black Tents. Watch! Watch!"

Marcelle's dark eyes reluctantly followed the man's trembling finger. She saw the Arab halt his swaying camel on the far side of the courtyard, his flaming burnouse a splash of orange against the shadow-filled background of a Moorish archway.

The rider paused for a moment. He glanced about him, then across to where the two stood. Satisfying himself that he was observed the Arab bent forward, patting the dingy white neck of his mount

four times; deliberate gestures, a pause between each motion. Then with a jerk on the guide line he wheeled the Meharin, and disappeared under the red and black tiling of the arch.

Bazain threw his head back and laughed exultantly.

"The signal! You saw it, Marcelle! The Emir will pay us our price. Tonight we will be rich, you and I! Ho-ho! Ho-ho!"

"Oh, Rene, I cannot! I cannot!" the girl wailed. The thoughts surging through his mind were plainly written on the man's face.

"But you will!" Bazain responded, tones icy.

He turned again for the decanter and bottle. Bazain flattered himself that he understood women. Everything would be all right presently.

"Let this hasten your decision," his oily voice spoke again. "Here is the bargain. You have no money, therefore you cannot return to France. Do as I command, and when the Arabs pay for the Flag you shall have twenty thousand good francs. If not— This is Egypt, you will kindly recollect. Now! Either you will trick this Yankee out of his precious curio—" Bazain paused for a long moment, "—or I will sell you into a Pasha's harem!"

A groan of horror broke from the girl. She slid to the floor, hands beating uselessly against the imprisoning walls. The man's smoldering eyes went over her without compassion. He had to have money to get out of this accursed Egypt; much money. This was the only way. He gulped feverishly at the fiery cognac, wiped his lips with a nervous hand, and turned to her again.

"Well, little one?"

She shuddered at the mocking caress in his tones, and bent her head away from him.

"You will do this, eh?" Bazain's leaned forward eagerly.

"Yes," came faintly from the crouching girl.

## II

"MEESTER! Meester! You buy very nice cigarettes? Beautiful! They have the parfum of musk. So lovely! Yes?"

The grinning Egyptian street peddler bent over Dick Horwood, impudently thrust a wickerwork tray of bottles under his nose and plucked at his white duck jacket.

"Damn! Another of 'em!" the American ejaculated. He carefully set down the glass of beer on the marble-topped café table. His six feet of bone and desert-hardened sinew came upright with a jerk. Horwood caught the *fellaheen* by his flowing robe, and hurled him on to the crowded sidewalk with a clatter of boxes and bottles.

IN a moment a glaring crowd was milling about the Egyptian, shouting queries, and echoing the trader's high-pitched accusations. There was much shuffling, flapping of *djebbahs*, gesticulating, and exposure of palms. Behold a Child of the Prophet had been smitten by an Infidel! The sea of glowering, chocolate faces gibbered at the white man. Horwood turned his back contemptuously.

"Better watch those birds, brother, if you don't want a knife stuck in your ribs," a friendly voice called from across the room.

Horwood's eyes twinkled. "Guess you're right. But I won't be here long enough for them to pull the assassination act, I hope." He picked up his glass and sat down at the other's table, extending a bronzed hand. "My name's Horwood. Home address, Seattle, U. S.—an' I'm on my way!"

"Glad to know you, Mr. Horwood. 'I'm Ben Spence, third officer on the *Bjbouti*.'" The stocky man in the soiled drill uniform waved a casual hand to a black bulk looming beyond the choking traffic of the dusty streets. "We're outward bound for Australia; coaling now."

"Just in from the desert," Horwood told the sailor in one of those sudden confidences that spring up between men in foreign ports. "Fresh from six months' camel riding. Figured on taking it easy here and cooling off before the west-bound P. & O. boat comes through."

"You sure picked some place to cool off in!" the ship's officer laughed. He swept an arm to the shuffling Arabs in their slippers and *djebbahs*, veiled women, naked boys, cluttered bazaars, the blazing

sun and all-engulfing heat. "Look at that old chap over there in that brassware shop. Been watching him for an hour. He's never moved but to draw on that hubble-bubble pipe. Great life, if you like it, eh?"

Both men gazed idly at the bearded figure squatting cross-legged in his open front store. The man's delicate fingers held the mouthpiece of a water pipe to his lips. Occasionally a thin stream of faint smoke drifted from his mouth, but not a muscle moved; even his eyes seemed glazed.

ALL at once they sat bolt upright, lethargy shaken from them. Both were staring across the sunny street at the Muslim merchant, who had suddenly come to life. He jumped erect, his billowing garments floating about him like a saffron cloud. He jerked the long pipe by the flexible stem and threw it inside the store. In an agony of haste the trader gathered his merchandise together, hurling it after the pipe; a cascade of clattering yellow brassware. Another second and he was feverishly jamming up the wooden shutters in front of his store.

"The old jigger is alive after all! What do you know about that?" Horwood laughed at the sailor.

Spence ignored the query. "Listen to that!"

A distant booming drummed in the American's ears. A confused medley of sounds; loud calls, howls, the pounding of sticks on shuttered windows.

The sailor jumped clear of the table. "Riot coming up!" he announced calmly, looking about him for a weapon. "Better grab a chair."

The crowd that had railed at Horwood was melting away fast.

The Greek café owner knew the sounds, too. He was running back and forth in a panic, picking up various pieces of his property, only to throw them down again in a frenzy of uncertainty. Finally he stood stock still, staring out of his black-browed eyes at the two cool northerners. All three well knew that street turmoils were easily brewed in the East, and that at such times they were dangerous to Europeans.

The shouts were coming closer. "Allah! Allah! Kill! Kill!! Kill! *Allah il Al-*

lah!" The same phrases repeated over and over.

"Some religious scrap going on," Spence hazarded, "or they wouldn't be bawling so much about Allah. Well, we've got to stick here; no sense in running our noses into that mess."

Horwood grunted assent, peering over the sailor's shoulder. The white street which a moment ago was a bustling hive of commerce was now deserted. Every merchant had shuttered his shop. An occasional face gleamed momentarily behind the iron-work grille of an overhanging balcony; nothing more. The slow-moving camels and donkeys had disappeared as if by magic.

**S**UDDENLY a running figure burst into view from a side street. It was clad in white. After it poured a gesticulating mob, howling like hyenas, shaking fists and sticks, the Arabs' loose garments fluttering in the hot air.

Horton's desert-visions eyes narrowed. "Great Heaven! It's a woman!"

"A white woman!" Spence shot out. He had forgotten his caution and was starting to run forward.

Still grasping his iron chair, Horwood's long legs drove him ahead of the sailor. The American sensed that here was some unusual type of devilment afoot.

Horwood ran as he had never run before. His feet did not seem to touch the dust; muscles hardened by the desert trails flung him over the ground. He could see nothing but two appealing eyes staring at him out of a white, drawn face; dimly behind it a confused jumble of bobbing red fezzes on black heads.

The woman threw herself into his arms, wordless with terror.

"Here! Here! Back in here!" Spence's urgent voice jabbed Horwood's brain. One hand on the girl's wrist, the other still grasping the twisted iron of the chair back, he leaped blindly toward the voice. His sweeping eyes picked up a whitish figure in the gloom; the sailor, he knew. The American found himself in the dark entrance of an alley, shut off from the sun by the overhanging stone balconies.

"Stand there!" he jerked out, thrusting the girl against the wall. He wheeled, jumping back to the roaring street. A sea

of milling Arabs met him. There were shouts of, "Infidel! Infidel! Kill the *Feringeh* woman! Kill her! Kill her!"

Faces, black and brown, split by rows of gleaming teeth. Slim hands gesticulating, threatening. A forest of arms, sticks, an odd knife with the sun gleaming on the curved blade.

*Thug! Thug!* The sharp legs of the chair cut across a strained face. Another swing. Two Arabs in the dust; flailing legs and arms.

Horwood whirled his weapon about his head again; let go a wild roar of defiance. Those in front of the mob hastily leaped out of range. The natives behind shrilled encouragement, pushing forward. Back and forth they swayed, yelling taunts.

"Fine work, Uncle Samuel! Here, gimme a belt at—"

A braying, bugle-like note cut off Spence's words. It floated down the high-walled street, clear and distinct above the yelping of the Egyptians. Before the American could recover from his amazement the whole mob suddenly wheeled about. In a swirling huddle of *djebbahs* they faded from view down the myriad crooked lanes that connected with the main thoroughfare.

Heads at once began to appear from window and door. The merchants calmly proceeded to take down their shutters and reopen their stores. A bare-legged *fellaheen* astride a diminutive donkey brushed past the American, his slippers dragging in the dust.

**T**HERE is no understanding of the East. Horwood shook his head, turning back to the girl. She came to him, a white vision from the dark alley, hands outstretched, eyes shining. He gazed in frank admiration at the rounded face, great dark eyes, and lips scarlet against the pallor of her skin. Clad in some kind of gauzy dress, suited to the tropics, every line of her young figure was revealed. The girl caught his glance and bent her head, nervously clasping and unclasping her hands.

All at once her overwrought nerves gave way. She crumpled against him, and before he well knew it Horwood was again holding her in his arms, saying over and over foolishly, "Don't! Don't!"

"Got to be going, Horwood," Spence's

voice came from behind. "Look me up aboard the *Djbouti* before you head out, will you?" The sailor was grinning.

"Glad to, Spence," Horwood replied.

"Righto! Well, s'long."

**H**ORWOOD was dimly conscious of retreating feet, but his eyes and mind could hold nothing save the figure before him.

"Gosh, she's a peach!" he told himself.

The girl had gently pulled her hands away, and was patting back into place the straying curls that clustered about her pink ears. She settled her blouse and looked up at him.

"Nevair, nevair can I thank you enough, Monsieur—er?"

"Horwood; Dick Horwood," he said.

"M'sieu Horwood, I can nevair— Oh! It was terrible, terrible! Almost I died. You will not let them take me? No! No! You will not, M'sieu?"

She was on the verge of tears again. Horwood grasped her small hand in his great paws to reassure her—and forgot to relinquish it.

"You can gamble on that," he answered stoutly. "Tell me what it was all about, and what I can do to help you. What's your name?"

The girl spoke quickly.

"Marcelle Royale, M'sieu. I am French, as you will have perceive. You are Eenglish, M'sieu? Americaine? Bon. M'sieu, you are so good to me and so brave and yet I can tell you little." She glanced up at him and sighed. "I am in great trouble!"

The girl paused to let this take effect, sighed again, and went on, "There is no one to assist me. It is of sadness. I am all alone and so frightened. *Parbleu!* What an idea! M'sieu Horwood, you are young and brave. Perhaps you will help me?"

Marcelle gazed up appealingly at the American out of starry eyes. At that moment he would gladly have committed murder to please her. But native caution hastened to his rescue.

"If it is at all possible, Miss Royale," he replied.

"Oh, you are so kind. For a man it is easy, so easy, M'sieu. Those beasts!" She shuddered, and Horwood's hands tightened protectingly. "They sought to take from

me a very precious paper. This being delivered safely will bring me much happiness and a return to my beloved France. But I am only a girl and I cannot go." She stopped to gaze at him wistfully.

"What is the message and where is the place?" Horwood demanded against his better judgment.

"Ah, M'sieu, I cannot reveal the message. But if you will do this for me, then when you return to Suez I will tell you all. All. Everything."

Again the brown eyes stabbed him, and a faint odor of jasmine sent his head whirling.

Horwood frowned. "All right; I'll go," he jerked out suddenly. "Then when I come back—"

He left the sentence unfinished, annoyed with himself at the quick color that flooded her neck and face.

"Who is the message for, and where is the place?" He managed to get a certain brusqueness into his tones this time.

She replied placatingly.

"M'sieu, it is but three days' camel ride into the desert. To the tents of the Emir El Melik at the oasis of Kamarah. Take a certain message, hand it to the Emir, and then forever Marcelle Royale will be your great debtor."

His face drew down into a frown. "The desert again!" he muttered.

The girl noted the look and her eyes became anxious. She turned away from him hurriedly, removed a wallet from her dress, and opened it, disclosing a few lines of Arabic scrawled on a single sheet of paper. She handed it to him smilingly.

Horwood studied it, but could make nothing of the lettering, although he had some knowledge of the Arabic script. What he did not know was that the message was purposely written in the little-used Tuareg language.

He folded the sheet, replaced it in the wallet, and carefully buttoned it up in the pocket of his tunic.

"I'll leave in the morning," he said simply. "Now if you will permit me, I will see you home."

Marcelle's smile was radiant. She patted his arm with a pretty gesture of delight. With an effort Horwood thrust his hands into his pockets and fell into step beside her.

## III

"**K**AM-HA! *Kam-ha!*" Horwood called, jerking on the camel's guide line. "*Allez!* Beat it! Get up there! *Kam-ha! Kam-ha!*" He added fluent oaths in English, Arabic and the canal zone French dialect to urge the animal on.

The swaying camel grunted, swinging its long neck from side to side, the seemingly slow stride eating up the burning miles. But the American was impatient. Now the P. & O. boat that was to bear him to England and the United States would be entering the Red Sea. It would be touch and go to catch her, and if he missed the ship it mean waiting another two weeks in Suez.

"I'm a crazy fool," he told himself. "By James, if anyone had a skinful of this desert stuff it should be me, and here I am headed out into the middle of nothing again. Damned ass!"

He pulled his sun helmet down farther over his face to shut out the blinding glare of the yellow sand, anxiously sweeping the eye-aching horizon from under puckered lids. Nothing but heat mirages rising from the endless desert, the steely blue of the merciless sky, and the great disc of blistering sun.

"*Kam-ha! Kam-ha,* you brute!" he croaked from his parched throat at the steadily trotting camel, his jabbing heel keeping time to the command. "Lord, what a country!"

He settled back in the high-peaked saddle, letting his body sway with the rolling motion of the great desert animal, half closing his eyes to shut out the terrific glare.

**T**HE camel was increasing its pace, venting a series of short, barking grunts. Horwood came out of a half-doze, instantly alert. The Meharin had smelled water; that he knew by the animal's bearing.

Up the next bronze dune the animal swayed eagerly. And there below them, a patch of shattering green in the shimmering sweep of desert, was the little oasis of El Cid.

Horwood clucked to the camel but the animal needed no urging. Two minutes later the tall American was bathing his

burning face and neck in the strangely cool water of the spring while the camel dug his ugly muzzle into the overflow tank, sucking in the liquid in huge, noisy draughts.

"Put up your hands, mister!"

Horwood jumped as if a ghost had spoken. That drawl, coming from just behind him, would have been all right in Kansas City or Omaha but in the middle of the Arabian desert. . . . ! His amazement must have still been written on his face as he turned, for the thin, haggard, bearded figure leaning limply against the date-palm trunk laughed in his throat. Only the muzzle of the heavy French-made automatic in the man's hand never wavered for an instant.

"Startled you, eh?"

Horwood nodded. But his narrowed eyes were busy. The man's unshaven face under the soiled kepi, his blue tunic and white duck breeches told at a glance that here was a deserter from the French Foreign Legion. An American who had tired of poor food and iron discipline. And by the same token Horwood knew, if he hadn't already read it in the man's cold gray eyes, that this fugitive was a mighty dangerous customer.

"What do you want?" Horwood asked.

"Food," said the man. "And I want it quick."

"I'll give you what I've got. You don't have to hold the gun on me."

"Cut the gab," the Legionnaire said succinctly. He made a gesture with the ugly black-snouted gun that made even Horwood step lively.

But Horwood's brain was clicking while his calloused fingers worked at the knots of the camel-pack. Horwood wasn't the man to stand for anyone's gun-bluff. Not even the brand dished out by a desperate deserter with the Legion hell-hounds on his track.

As Horwood brought his hand out filled with figs, his neck muscles tensed. His arms, level with his belt, cocked ever so little at the elbows. One step brought him close to the Legionnaire whose famished eyes were fastened on the food. Horwood struck. His left, palm forward, knocked the crocodile-snouted gun aside. His right making a fist around the figs, connected with the point of the Legionnaire's bearded

jaw. The bleary-eyed soldier folded.

Once the man was down the fighting flame died in Horwood and he felt sorry for the deserter. His fist had told him that the American was completely worn out by fatigue and hunger. There was no strength left in the man.

"I would have given you food in the first place, if you'd asked for it," he told the Legionnaire a little later when the man was able to sit up and eat. Horwood watched him, resting the big automatic against his knee.

The man looked up sullenly for a moment. Then something like a grin dawned in his eyes. The tin of tomatoes, the bread and figs, had already made him feel better.

"I sure picked the wrong guy," he told Horwood.

Horwood's thin lips stretched in a smile. "How long have you been on the dodge?" he asked. "And what the hell ever made you take a chance like this? Don't you know what they do to deserters in the Legion?"

The American's story was an old story. Any man who knew that part of the globe had heard it a thousand times. It was mutiny. Man's mutiny against the iron-rod discipline of bullying Legion noncoms. And finally desperate escape, and the deserter, with the odds fifty-to-one of being overtaken by the pickup squad, or caught and held at the first outpost.

"I was figuring to make the British side," the Legionnaire explained. "How about turning me loose?"

"I thought I'd take you with me to Kamarah and turn you over to El Melik, the Emir," Horwood said, just to see how the man would take it.

The deserter grunted.

"If I was you, I'd steer clear of that layout myself."

Horwood grinned a little. "Well, we'll see in the morning. Tonight I'm going to tie you to make sure you don't crack me over the head."

The purple shadows of evening were already reshaping the desert. Horwood took off his jacket and shirt and lay down on the warm sand with the heavy French automatic in the waistband of his faded duck trousers. He had bound the deserter lightly. Several times he awoke to see if

the man were still there. Each time he made out the still shadow at the foot of the palms. And then, suddenly, the first light of the false dawn cleared away the darkness. Horwood awoke, looked over, and saw that the deserter was gone. The man's kepi was there and his uniform tunic, and even the shadowy hollow made by his body in the sand, but that was all.

Horwood jumped up and looked around. Suddenly a thought flashed through his mind and he turned to the place where he had left his own canvas jacket and shirt. They were gone. Everything was gone, even the camel. Horwood stood, naked to the waist in the cool morning light under the palms of the oasis and cursed as few white men have ever cursed before. He had intended to give the deserter food and water and release him. Instead the ingrate had left him to rot on the desert sands.

But the ex-Legionnaire was not quite as black as Horwood, in his first fury, had painted him. Alongside the well he had left a good-sized waterbag, a handful of provisions, and a note.

"Thanks for the lift," it read. "Kamarah is one day's march due east. You can make it. But look out for the Emir El Melik. He's got a rep for being one tough baby." It was signed, Legionnaire 17264. A.W.O.L.

The gall of the guy! thought Horwood. But what could he do? He walked over and put on the deserter's blue Legion tunic and his kepi. I hope they don't shoot me on sight, he thought. Slinging the waterbag over his shoulder he started off across the desert, still muttering under his breath.

**A**LL that day Horwood plodded across the sand dunes. The stuff got into his shoes and sawed great blisters on his feet. But he had to go on. Stopping meant death. The oasis of Kamarah was still not in sight when night caught up with him.

Horwood started out doggedly next morning. His waterbag was scarcely damp any more. He had eaten up his little store of food. He had a terrible fear that he had missed the oasis. If he had it meant amen.

At scorching high noon, when his hope had burnt to a cinder, the wind suddenly brought him the smell of living things.

Stumbling, muttering, he climbed the nearest ridge and a roar of delight burst from his sun-cracked lips.

Below him was the oasis of Kamarah, green against the yellow desert.

"The gods be praised!" Horwood mumbled, feasting his eyes on the dense foilage of the date palms and the carpet of lush green grass and low bushes that surrounded the shining water pool.

Under the trees were scattered the flat black tents of the Emir El Melik. Camels lay about in the shade, jaws steadily moving; goats and sheep browsed on the verdure.

Harwood had arrived at the goal designated by the girl.

A chorus of loud, inquiring grunts from the Emir's camels, the sharp yapping of dogs, and a wave of frightened sheep flying from they knew not what, brought dark figures running from the tents. A horn was blown, and when Horwood knelt at the water pool he was surrounded by a gibbering crowd of Arabs in their bright silken kaftans.

"Fill up my waterbag, Child of the Prophet and Allah will reward you," he said to a staring boy, tossing him half a dozen piastres. He turned to the crowd of Baggaras, speaking slowly in the best Arabic he could command, "Behold, I come bearing words of great weight for the Emir El Melik, Shiek of Kamarah. Let a messenger be sent telling him the White Lord waits."

From much experience with the men of the desert Horwood knew that exterior appearance went a long way. Therefore he was casual and important. He lit a cigarette, although his mouth was parched, then turned to watch the boy with the bag of water. Behind him rose the sibilant whispering of the Arabs, then the rustling of a kaftan, as one of the men ran to deliver the message.

He waited patiently until his waterbag had been filled, then drank sparingly and ate dates that the boy had brought after haggling with an old woman near the tents. Finally a husky voice announced, "Melik, Emir of Kamarah and Ruler of the Kingdom of Baggara, will speak with the White Stranger."

The American noticed that he had not used the customary term "White Lord,"

and a fleeting suspicion of something amiss crossed his mind, but he brushed it aside.

Horwood followed the man through the ranks of the frankly curious tribesmen to the entrance of the largest black tent, set up under the rough stems of the date palms. The great square sheet forming the front wall of the tent, usually propped up on slender poles, was down, rendering the interior of the dwelling dark. Again a feeling that all was not just as it should be swept over him.

THE man called something in an unknown tongue; from inside came a muttered answer. The Arab held aside the tent flap, motioning the American to enter. After the glare of the sun, it was cool and dark. Horwood could see nothing. Then out of the murk came a slow, vibrant voice, "May Allah dower the White Stranger with many strong men children!"

The American groaned to himself, "Cripes! Here goes for a whole dictionary of Arab compliments. Aloud he said, "May the spears of the Great Emir's enemies be a lash to their backs!"

"May the All Merciful feed thee with rich foods!"

"May you live a thousand years, sitting under the fig trees, drinking sweet water!"

Back and forth for fully a quarter of an hour the meaningless compliments passed. Now Horwood could see distinctly. Before him on a mound of striped cushions sat the bearded Emir, the stem of a hookah to his lips, his crafty eyes appraising the white man. Except for more scattered cushions and a broad-bladed Sudan sword hanging in its scarlet leather scabbard from the tent pole, the shadowy interior of the tent was bare.

"I come bearing a message," Horwood put in suddenly, his patience exhausted. The Emir's eyes gleamed.

"It is written that he who brings good tidings is of more worth than a loving brother," he intoned. "Let the White Stranger exhibit the writings." El Melik, too, was anxious to come to the point now that the other had broken the windy cover of words.

Horwood unbuttoned his hot tunic pocket, took out the wallet, and handed it to the Emir. He watched El Melik's face, endeavoring to read his emotions. He learned

nothing from that impassive dusky mask.

The Emir went over the message again slowly, smiling inwardly at the astonishing stupidity of these people from across the seas who vainly imagined they ruled the Land of the Muslims. It read.

*Here is the thief of the Sacred Places of the Baggara. Fastened about his waist is the yellow flag of the Mahdi, the Holy One. Kill this white fool! Take the yellow flag, that you may rule all men beyond the Great River. According to our bond, sworn on the Koran, send a swift messenger with the Great Reward to—*

*One Who Waits.*

El Melik folded the paper carefully, replaced it in the wallet, and tucked it away under his cushions. Then he clapped his hands. Several Nubian slaves shuffled in on flopping slippers. The negroes made up a pile of the scattered cushions, placing a small Moorish table in front of them. It was set with cups, dishes and a tea urn.

"The White Stranger is doubtless faint with much riding. Let him refresh himself," the Emir said in his low, soothing voice, motioning to the cushions.

Horwood knew it was a deadly insult to refuse proffered hospitality. Groaning inwardly at this fresh delay, he seated himself, taking a cup of perfumed Persian tea, some sticky dates and highly sweetened cakes. Neither the tea nor the food appealed to him, but he ate and drank, anxious to get it over.

THE Emir still puffed at his hookah at long intervals, sitting motionless. From beyond the black walls Horwood caught the sound of subdued women's laughter, the rustle of garments, and a faint odor of heliotrope. The Emir's harem, he speculated. He felt that other eyes were watching him through slits in the draperies on the walls.

Faintly from outside came the acrid odors of goats and camels, a distant buzz of talk, rustling of palm fronds, the splashing of water. The sounds were soothing, the shadowy tent restful to eyes strained by the glare of the desert. He caught himself nodding, and jerked upright.

"By Jupiter, this won't do!" Horwood

muttered. "Got three days' ride ahead of me, and I'm not going to miss that boat." But beside the high black sides of the stately P. & O. liner another object suddenly leaped into his vision, a rounded face, framed with soft, wavy hair, parted lips, and deep, trustful eyes. "I've got to get out of here, pronto!" he decided.

The American put down his cup and leaned toward the Emir. "Oh, Upholder of the Laws, my mission is completed. Now I would have a token from you, and return hastily to travel to my own country across the water. Therefore, in the Name of Allah, bid thy servants sell me a camel, and I will depart in the cool of the evening."

El Melik's face was crossed by a faint smile. "Oh, Stranger within the tents of Kamarah, it is written that he who brings good tidings is greatly to be loved, but for him who bringeth ill words is the cord of the strangler."

There was a subtle menace in El Melik's phrase, but Horwood held himself in check.

"The courtesy of the Great Emir is like a cherry tree blooming in the desert," he announced as casually as he was able. "But I am a man of many affairs, and I would be about them." He rose to his feet, bowed to El Melik in token of farewell, and turned for the tent flap.

A high-pitched call! The sudden rush of feet, cackling laughs from the harem, and Horwood visioned a score of dark forms slipping along the walls of the tent. Each hand held one of the long, curved Baggara knives.

"Let the White Stranger be seated again," the Emir's emotionless voice went on. "Behold, he is a brother of the desert riders, for about his waist is the Sacred Flag of the Holy One of the Sudan."

THE American heard him in amazement. Unconsciously his hand strayed to his waist. Another low cackle of laughter came from the women.

"Many seasons have we sought it," the even voice of the Emir droned on. "It must not leave these sands, else the souls of those who die in battle win not to the Gates of Paradise. Thus it is written in the Holy Books. Let the White Stranger hand it to the Servant of the Prophet, and he may go in peace."

Sudden passion boiled up in Horwood. "I'll see you in hell first!" he rasped. Then recollecting, he repeated the words in their nearest Arabic translation.

He well understood what the Sacred Flag meant to the Baggaras. Without it this superstitious people would not dare to attempt another rebellion. That was why the Sudan government was so willing to see it go out of the country. It was a priceless curio. He had risked his life for it and no one would take it, except from his dead body. He had determined that long ago.

The Emir spat out some phrase in an unknown desert dialect. The Baggaras rustled forward. Horwood found himself staring into a circle of dark faces, a forest of bronzed arms, each tipped with a long blade, above the gaily clad shoulders. The American gritted his teeth, cursing himself for his folly. Now he knew it all! Fooled by a pretty woman! The age-old, Eastern trick! He, a student and traveler of the East for longer than he cared to remember, to be thus set aside and cast into the discard by a— He wanted to use the word, but his brain refused to prompt him.

Horwood looked about him wildly; then, realizing his absolute helplessness, shrugged his shoulders and flopped down on the cushions again.

Another cackle of laughter from the harem. One of the Arabs jabbed at a bulge in the tent wall. There was a high-pitched scream, and silence. The Arab examined the point of his knife, held it up for a comrade to see. It was stained. El Melik took no notice. It was only a woman.

"It is written that he who enters the black tents as an honored guest is protected from all men for the space of two moons." The Emir's voice registered on Dick's mind through the whirlwind of thoughts surging across it. "For two moons the White Stranger will be nourished with sweet foods, according to our customs. Then"—he halted impressively—"the time of courtesy being past, he may choose the sharp knife or the thin cord about his neck. The Sacred Flag of the Mahdi will leave the Sudan no more!"

"You're damn right it'll leave the Sudan!" Horwood said to himself. "Two months, eh? They'll keep me penned up here for two months, and then put me out

of commission permanently—if they can."

There was a slim, desperate chance, and his courage leaped to meet it. "Well, if I can't put it over a bunch of lousy Arabs in that time I deserve to kick out."

He poured himself another cup of the sickly Persian tea and sipped it, looking across its rim at the impassive Emir. El Melik understood his thoughts. He smiled, gave a sharp command in the strange desert tongue, and the Arabs faded from the tent.

"You are free to come and go amongst the tents of Kaharah until the time comes," the Emir intoned. "My people and all that I possess are yours, but—" he placed an impressive finger on his jeweled Tuareg wrist-knife—"footsteps will follow yours in the dark and when the sun is high. May the Prophet bring you wisdom." El Melik reached for his hubble-bubble.

#### IV

"*SACRÉ NOM!* A week passes and then this! An insult, *parbleu*. The Arab dog!" Rene Bazain exploded, shaking a fluttering paper in his nervous fingers, his thin, sallow features convulsed with passion.

"What is it, Rene? Read it, please. I cannot understand the Arab script," Marcelle begged anxiously.

"Read it! Yes! This is your doing, little fool. When will you see the light shining on the Tour d'Eiffel? Never! Never! Never!"

He ended in a childish cry of rage. Bazain strode to the window and tore back the heavy curtains, flooding the room with a sudden glare of light. "Yes, I will read it to you. To you who will be a street girl of Cairo! You—you—you—"

He could not find words fitting to the occasion. The girl ran back from him, wide-eyed, horrified.

Bazain began to spit out the words, alternating every second phrase with a crackling oath:

*To One Who Waits, this message. Behold the White Lord comes bearing the Sacred Flag but refusing to be parted from his treasure. In the black tents he is an honored guest for the space of two moons, according to our customs. Then comes the cord and the*

*Yellow Flag passes once more to the Baggara. But he who captures a slave in battle, does he pay also? It is not thus written in the Holy Books. You have failed in your bond, therefore it is broken. May Allah preserve you, and may you eat many ripe figs under the shade of the green palm trees.*

*One Who Takes All Things.*

"There, girl, there! See what you have accomplished. I, Rene Bazain, am nothing but a pariah dog in the streets. My money, my life, my Paris? Gone! Gone! Gone!"

He stopped all at once. The great room seemed to quiver with his shortened breathing. A glorious, flaming thought had surged into his brain. Marcelle, cowering in the bay window, saw his face suddenly illuminated. He wheeled on the girl again.

"Two months! Ah-ha! Two months! In that period I, Rene Bazain, will arrange that matter to a nicety. Yes! I go now to the black tents. There I will slit the gizzard of this heavy-witted Yankee, and myself take his silly flag. El Melik, that old jackal, will pay; will pay double the price. *Au revoir*, Mademoiselle of the Boulevards! Watch well the *Journal de Paris*. In its columns you will read of me, Bazain, the millionaire from the Far East! *Adieu!*"

Marcelle stared at him in mute amazement. Had he suddenly gone insane? Bazain poured himself another long drink, caught up his helmet, bowed ironically, and banged the door on his heels.

A CLOUD of fear engulfed the girl as she listened to the retreating footfalls. She was alone and penniless in Suez! What that meant to an unprotected girl Marcelle well understood. Her brain reeled at the thought. Black-hearted though he was, yet Bazain had at least provided her with food; paid for this gaunt room. And now?

Dazed by the avalanche of emotions speeding across her mind, she stood at the window gazing down vacantly at the white-walled courtyard; waiting. From a caravanserai across the court a grunting camel was led out by an Arab in a flowing *djebbah*. She saw Bazain mount the kneeling beast. The camel rose at an order from the Arab. Bazain kissed one hand mockingly to the white figure in the high win-

dow. His heel struck the camel's neck, and in a moment the man was lost to sight.

"He is gone!" Marcelle whispered to herself. "*Parbleu*, but he is a brave one!" the unuttered words came to her lips. She was thinking of Horwood again. The girl again saw him swinging his iron chair, defending her against the mob. He had not known that the whole scene was carefully staged by Bazain; part of the scheme to get him delivered into the clutches of the Emir.

Spurred at the time by the goad of desperate necessity, she had blindly done what she was ordered. Now her whole being revolted against it. She paced up and down the great room with short, agitated steps. Suddenly a new and astonishing thought took form in her harassed mind.

"Why not? Why not?" she asked herself. "Rene is gone; now I am free!"

For a long moment the girl stood staring sightlessly at the high walls, hands clasped against her breast. All at once she threw herself down at an old-fashioned chest of drawers. From it she flung a heap of clothing. Finally she grasped a string bag crowded with feminine odds and ends, and from this she withdrew a carefully hidden case. Nervous fingers sprung the clasp. Marcelle gazed through tear-dimmed eyes at a tiny roll of French francs.

These two will take me back to France, she thought. There I will be safe.

But again Horwood's face stabbed her. She saw him lying on the desert staring sightlessly at the hard blue bowl of the sky, in which the buzzards circled slowly. The girl closed her eyes to shut out the picture, tapering fingers locking and unlocking in an agony of indecision.

Suddenly she made up her mind. She tore off her flimsy dress. In a few moments she was clad in the outdoor garb of the desert; riding boots and breeches, white tunic and topee helmet.

Her little booted feet rang on the polished floor. Gone was indecision now. Pink spots of excitement glowed in her cheeks, a half smile was on her lips.

## V

NIGHT had come to the black tents of Kamarah. The thin music of the *kemengehs* sobbed and wailed from the

high canvas walls of the women's harem. Little puffs of cool night air blew refreshingly over the camp under the date palms, where groups of burnoused Arabs bent over their camel-dung fires, baking the flat corn cakes of the desert.

Dim figures, carrying the tufted Baggara lances, stepped softly to and fro, ears and eyes missing nothing. From the sand ridges behind the camp an occasional howl from a prowling jackal fractured the night air. Even the dogs refused to answer the challenge of their half-brothers.

It was cool, the only period of the blistering dry season when life was bearable in the desert, and the Arabs were enjoying it to the full. But always the men squatting about the little fires turned inquiringly in the direction of the Emir's tent. There was movement, sharp voices, argument. The Arabs looked at each other, soundless lips carrying the message, "These *Feringehs* are fools. They cannot rest. Even in the cool of the evening must they talk and talk, waving the hands. *Bis-mallah!*"

They spoke of the newcomer.

Resting on his luxurious cushions, puffing slowly at his water-pipe and eying the speaker from under half-closed lids, the Emir El Melik listened without emotion to Rene Bazain's vivid outpourings. With emphatic Gallic gesturings the Frenchman clinched his argument. His dark eyes snapped with excitement. The thin lips drew back from his fine teeth like a snarling dog's.

Horwood, watching him with an expression of profound disgust, learned nothing. The Frenchman spoke in the Taureg dialect, but an occasional answer dropped in Arabic by the wily Emir conveyed enough for the American to understand that this thin, slim, gesticulating figure had in some mysterious fashion to do with his imprisonment.

"Thus it will be, O Protector of the Poor," Bazain went on in the hissing lingua-franca of the Sudan. "The bond between us, sworn on the Koran, still binds. To me comes the Great Reward as agreed; to you is the Sacred Flag. Let two moons pass, and maybe this thief of the Holy Places escapes and there will be wailing in the black tents. I, Rene Bazain, will arrange this matter. Before the sun rises the

Yellow Flag will hang in the tent of El Melik."

THE Emir sent a lazy smoke ring curling up into the still air. His cold eyes went slowly from one white man to the other. Then his glance roved out to the dim figures outlined against the star-spangled sky. Wherever his eyes turned were the Baggara sentries. The camp was well guarded.

"By the beard of the Prophet, but it is well said," he told himself. "This Bazain is bound by no Muslim laws. He kills this Horwood and speedily the flag is mine. Then a long blade between the ribs of this great talker and the thing is finished. By Alh-Masr, but it is well said."

"The *Feringeh's* mouth is like a honey-pot in the bitter plains!" the Emir droned aloud. "His lips drip sweetness."

Bazain started, a triumphant smile crossing his face. El Melik puffed his scented tobacco in silence for a few minutes. Then he turned to Horwood.

"O honored guest in the humble tents of the Baggara! Here is one also seeking the Yellow Flag!"

Horwood heard him in dull amazement, and stared at the Frenchman. He was beginning to get the drift of the matter at last.

The American nodded grimly, motioning the Arab to proceed. Bazain's eyes dropped away from Horwood's. He reached for a cup of the sickly Persian tea to steady his trembling nerves. Things were coming to a head at last. There must be no bungling now.

"Three seek the Sacred Flag, but only one may hold it," the Emir's soothing voice droned on. "Behold, it is written in the Holy Books 'He who graspeth the whole melon, perchance openeth his hand to find only a dry rind.' The Effendi Bazain claims that the Yellow Flag is rightly his. Therefore this is my word. Let you two from across the water settle this thing, and with him who lives I will deal justly. Behold, it is said that to the conquerer is the prize; to him who dies as a fighting man the Gates of Paradise. Let it be thus and—"

"You slimy hound, I see through you now!" Horwood was on his feet, standing over the Frenchman, white-faced with sud-

den passion. "You did not have the guts to do the dirty work yourself, so you made this unfortunate girl do it. Yes, I'll fight you all right. Get up!"

He twisted one sinewy hand in the Frenchman's white tunic and threw him on his feet. Bazain tugged nervously at his collar. A thin smile came to his lips.

"Aha! Monsieur is annoyed, ah? It is to be regretted. Let me be frank. Yes, indeed it is so. This poor little soiled flower, my mistress—"

*Thud! Thud!* Two crashing blows landed on the Frenchman's face, cutting off his words. Blood leaped up on the sallow skin. He catapulted back, heels in the air, to hit the soft sand with a gasping flop.

Hardly a split second later hairy arms twisted about Horwood's throat. Hands gripped his wrists, elbows and legs. The American ignored them, making no attempt to free himself. He watched Bazain stumble to his feet, wipe the blood from his torn face, then suddenly reach behind him.

El Melik's broad-bladed Sudan sword whistled through the air. Horwood marveled at the rapidity with which the Emir threw aside his cloak of apparent languor. Bazain's arms dropped.

"Not now, O Effendi; not now!" the Emir purred. He motioned the Arabs to loosen Horwood. Then, leaning on his sword, he called one of the Baggaras forward and spoke to him in an unfamiliar desert dialect.

"Abd-el-Hussuf, may you sit in the shade of the vine when your hair is gray. Listen well, O faithful one. These two *Feringehs* fight. Let each be given one of our good Baggara knives. You will take them to the lip of the khor." The Emir pointed to the bare sand ridge beyond the palms. The Arab salaamed, palms to his forehead.

"Let none approach until the killing is well done, and, Abd-el-Hussuf, he who lives will die! This is well understood, my child?"

He paused, looking into his servant's eyes, then went on again in the same even, slow tones: "Bring to me the Yellow Flag which is wound about the tall one's waist. Let there be no mistake, Baggara, or your soul, too, may seek the path to the world beyond. *Allah ilaha ill Allah.*"

The Emir lowered himself gently to his cushions, and extended a slim hand for the stem of his narghli.

## VI

**H**ORWOOD threw off his Legionnaire tunic, looking about him. They were on the edge of a deep ravine, along the brink of which ran the well-trodden camel path to the East—and Suez.

Jagged rocks reared up from the edge of the khor, silhouetted against the clear, starry sky. Where he stood there was a level, sandy space perhaps fifty square yards in extent. Below it were the first straggling trees of the oasis, their foliage gently stirring in the night wind. Beyond, on all sides, the billowy folds of the desert.

Bazain had stripped, too, and was facing him at about twenty yards' distance. The light from the stars was good in that thin air, and Horwood could clearly see the twin red splotches on the other's face, the nervous twitching of his neck muscles.

Abd-el-Hussuf was marking a circle in the sand with a slippered foot, midway between the two men. Inside that fatal hoop they would stand breast to breast and settle their differences after the desert mode. Horwood had seen Arab duels before.

The Arab completed his marking and handed the Frenchman one of the long Baggara knives. Then the desert rider came toward Horwood. His eyes were alight. This was going to be interesting to one whose trade was the spilling of blood.

"Oh, *Feringeh!* May the eyes of the All Seeing look on you with favor!"

Horwood ignored the pious wish. He grasped the handle of the proffered knife, examined the fitting of the blade, bent the flexible steel. He intended to see there was no trickery here.

"This is the word," the Arab went on. "You two stand. Then will come my whistle from the trees. You will walk to the circle, and may the soul of the vanquished knock not in vain at the jeweled gates. Allah be with you!"

Abd-el-Hussuf turned quickly to hide the smile that crossed his dark face. Neither knew that his long gun rested against one of the distant palms. The white fools were unaware that no matter who won, both lost.

Horwood had of his own will left the sanctuary of the black tents; he had set aside the benevolent courtesy of the Emir. This was one of the most humorous episodes in the Baggara's stormy career. He had difficulty in checking his laughter.

**H**ORWOOD was not afraid. He had heard death's wings fluttering about him a score of times in North Africa. In his trade of curio hunter the American took these hazards as a matter of course, and looking over at his nervous opponent he felt secure in the thought that at least his own blood was cool.

It seemed an age until the Arab's flowing *djebbah* at last mingled with the stately palms. The two men turned to each other—waiting.

The whistle shrilled out, clear and distinct. A sudden yapping of the camp dogs answered it. Horwood tightened his grip on the knife and stepped forward. Bazain was moving, too.

All at once the Frenchman stopped, and held up his hand dramatically. Horwood gazed at him in amazement. Was the man crazy?

Bazain caught the long knife by the blade, and flung it over his shoulder in a gleaming cascade of light.

"Now, my so-sure Yankee friend, you are about to learn a lesson before you depart for whatever species of hell you desire!" the Frenchman's leering voice rasped out. "Listen, *mon ami*. For this—" Bazain stopped, touching his bruised face with a long finger—"for this you will die. To me you have given the gross insult, therefore—"

The words ended in a meaningless snarl. He laughed, whipping his hand behind him. The starlight glimmered on the nicked muzzle of an automatic.

Horwood gasped at the man's treachery. He threw fear from him and ducked forward.

The American's feet thudded in the soft sand. "Now it must come! Now! Now! Now!" his brain prompted. "Why doesn't he—"

"*A-ah! Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" A yell of agony broke from Bazain. The revolver slipped from his fingers, and dropped glinting to the sand.

For a long moment the Frenchman

teetered drunkenly back and forth, then collapsed in a coughing huddle of white.

The Arab burst from the trees, waving his long gun. There were sounds of hoofs *chuk-chuking* in the sand. Someone calling:

"*Monsieur! Monsieur!* Oh, Dick! Dick! Dick!"

Horwood's brain throbbed. A sweating Arab pony was standing beside him, head drooping, red nostrils dilated. Clinging to his arm was Marcelle Royale, a revolver in her hand! She was wide-eyed with horror, red lips a vivid splotch of color against the deathly pallor of her face.

Horwood looked again dazedly at the foundered pony, then to the girl's dust-begrimed riding dress. All at once a wave of tenderness surged through him. Heedless of everything save her presence, his hands went out to her.

She struggled away with a scream. Horwood whirled, following her glance. The Arab was kneeling in the sand. He had thrown back the folds of his *djebbah*. His eyes squinted along the sights of his rifle.

**T**HE American jerked the revolver out of the girl's hand, sending her flat to the ground with a sudden push. This was not time for courtesy! Crooking his left arm, he threw the revolver across it.

*Cr-ac! Boo-o-m!*

The reports of the revolver and the gun cracked out almost together. A scream of agony from the pony. The Arab jumped to his feet. Through the haze of black powder smoke from the muzzle-loader Horwood saw him fall on his face. Then the billowing folds of the *djebbah* settled slowly down on the Baggara's body.

"Oh, *le pauvre Sidi!* Oh, my leetle pony, for whom I give all my little cache of francs."

Horwood caught her arm, turning the girl's face away. Another sharp report, and the pony's feet ceased their thrashing.

Marcelle clung to him, crying, "I am bad, bad, bad! I am treachery to you! And poor Rene? *Mon Dieu*, what have I done? You hate me for all this. Oh, let me die, too."

He kissed the words away. "Stop that, Marcelle! Now listen. There is a chance yet. We must try to find a hiding place for the day-time, and travel at night. Come, dear, be brave. You will need all your

courage for the long journey to Suez."

Marcelle's heart sang with joy. He believed in her. He had forgotten the past. From his eyes she knew that he loved her. Nothing else mattered!

Talking rapidly to keep the girl's mind away from the present, Horwood shielded her eyes with his body from the things on the desert sand. They ran toward the khor.

From the oasis under the date palms faint sounds drifted up to Horwood above the shuffling of their feet in the sand. Dogs yelping. Shouts.

Three shots when there should have been only one! The Emir had sensed that something was amiss and was ordering his camelmen to the pursuit.

Ahead lay the endless miles of the waterless desert. No food, no shelter, and behind them the fast-racing camels of the Baggara. Dick well knew that escape was hopeless; out of all reason.

## VII

**S**WEAT encrusted and gasping, with a final effort Horwood thrust the girl up out of the rocky khor onto the level desert. Every breath was an agony.

Marcelle looked at him blankly. The shelter they had expected to find in the deep valley was absent; here were nothing but rounded billows of deep sand, swept into the gully by the bitter hot winds.

"Anyhow we gained a few minutes," Horwood told himself. He knew the Arabs' camels could not get either up or down those sheer, sandy banks. They would have to ride to the end of the valley before crossing. That meant perhaps half an hour's travel.

He looked about him hurriedly. There was nothing in sight but the endless dunes, the round dome of the sky sprinkled with the winking stars. Broad camel pads, pressed deeply in the sand, beckoned the way to Suez; a faint line winding over the ridges.

In his mind Horwood saw them following that trail under the starlight; two stumbling figures, with behind them the swaying camels of the Baggara. He laughed bitterly to himself.

"Dick! Dick!" Marcelle clutched his shoulder, pointing across the khor.

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Horwood flung his arms about her, pulling the girl to the ground. She lay with her head against him, her hands on his face. Woman's intuition told her the end was coming. She was content to die thus—in his arms.

"The Baggara!" The words came to dry lips. He paid no attention to the girl.

**A** TRIFLING, trembling wind stirred, beating coolly on his hot face. The stars were waning, a pink dawn creeping slowly above the black rocks. Daylight was coming; the quick daylight of the desert.

Horwood's eyes were fixed on the far side of the chasm-like khor. Black against the first rosy beams of light the uncouth shape of a camel lurched into view. Another. Another.

On each Meharin an Arab bent forward, the tufted spears and long guns clear against the brightening sky. The American lay motionless. He could feel the beating of the girl's heart, and vaguely sensed that she was still stroking his face.

Horwood was counting the black riders. "Fifteen—twenty—forty." He gave it up.

The camels were swaying forward, seemingly deathly slow, but the man knew better. He could see the armed heels steadily kicking the grunting brutes on the necks; well understood that they were being pushed to their best pace.

There was a blank period, void of movement. Then the camels were gone.

"Now, Marcelle, now!" He gently put away her hands, pulling the girl to her feet. "Now we'll chase along and find some place to hide until tonight. Come, dear."

She took his hand, smiling to herself at the note of courage in his voice.

Another ridge. They floundered to the crest, knee deep in the sand. The rose-colored sky was changing to dull blue. Daylight had come and they were in the open. The thought stabbed Horwood's brain like a sword point.

They ran down the side of the ridge, toiled to another crest.

"No, Dick, I can't. I can't!" She looked up at him out of moist eyes. "Dick, I can run no more. This is the end, *mon cher*; kiss me, Dick! Tell me once that you love only me, and then—"

A sudden tightening of Marcelle's arms; a sobbing cry!

**H**ORWOOD whirled. Half a mile away the Baggara camels were racing down on them. The riders were urging the animals on with wild hoots, jabbing the flying Meharins with their spear points. Their flaming *djebbahs* bellied out behind the Arabs on the wind, clouds of flying sand hid the rear-most riders.

"Oh, Dick, oh! May Heaven help us now!"

He wheeled about again at the pressure on his arm, strained eyes following her pointing finger. They were cut off. From the opposite direction another band of camelmen suddenly topped one of the blinding desert rolls. They, too, were waving their guns and yelling.

"The Emir is living up to his reputation of the 'Cunning One,' right enough," the bitter thought fleshed to the American. "Marcelle dear—"

He wanted to say good-bye, but the words stuck in his throat. He pulled her to him in a fierce last embrace.

Then the Arabs were upon them in one wild swirling mass of camels and striped *djebbahs* and fierce, wild-eyed brown faces, brown hands, brown arms. Quickly they bore the man and the girl to the ground. Quickly they trussed them with ropes of braided goat-hide. They slung them on camels and drove them swiftly back to camp.

It was the Emir El Melik himself who greeted them in front of the black tents.

"In the name of Allh-Masr you are welcome," he said, his black eyes blazing with sardonic humor as the two captives were pushed before him. "The woman is like a precious pearl from the warm waters of the gulf. Take her away and stake her down so she will not escape. El Melik has use for her. The man we shall save for sport. Bind him here."

Rough, rein-calloused hands slammed Horwood against the Emir's tent-post. Cruel eyes grinned up into his, while fingers suggestively touched the gold-and-silver inlaid handles of the Baggara knives. Horwood stiffened his shoulders. He had seen victims of Arab knife-work. His stomach turned over inside him. The thought of Marcelle in the hands of this desert demon made him fight his bonds. But El Melik only laughed and struck him with hard knuckles on the side of the jaw.

"The American seems impatient. Perhaps we will start now."

Jerking out his knife, he slit Horwood's Legionnaire tunic up the front. The knecdle-pointed knife ripped through the cloth and into the soft, sensitive skin of Horwood's belly and chest.

"*Ai, ai, ai,*" cried the tribesmen. Their women came pushing through from the rear.

Then, without warning, in the clear desert silence, a rifle cracked. Another rifle replied from the black tents. Horwood twisted his head and sighted a line of camelmen in skirmish formation sweeping down on the camp.

"*Hai! Hai! Hai! El Sirdar! El Sirdar!*"

It rose and fell, gathered in volume and power, seeming to fill the desert air with its wild rhythm.

"*El Sirdar! El Sirdar!*"

There was the sound of battle drums. And of a bugle sounding the charge.

Horwood's mind groped. Then all at once it burst on him in a stunning avalanche of light. The Sirdar! The British General in command of the Sudanese garrison!

The camelmen raced down on the camp. Their khaki uniforms speckled with flashing buttons; grinning black faces, fractured by startingly white teeth; bobbing heads topped with red fezzes, their long tassels floating out on the wind. The Sirdar's Black Riders of the Desert!

Rifles cracked! The Sudanese leaned forward, striking with the feet, swinging their swords, yelling, "*Hai! Hai! Hai! El Sirdar! El Sirdar!*" They rode in a choking swirl of dust, sharp particles of sand striking their faces. They were flashing gray shapes swinging by, their ungainly legs racing—racing—racing!

The tribesmen scattered to their tents and came out shooting. Some ducked behind the walls surrounding the spring. Others mounted their swift horses and camels and dashed into the fray. Cruel men they were, but they were brave.

One of the Sudanese dropped off his mount in front of Horwood. With his long sabre he slashed the thongs that held the American. He pressed an automatic into his hand. Then with a white-toothed grin, he leapt back into the fray. Horwood quickly slipped between the tents, intent on finding Marcelle.

She had already been staked hand and foot to the ground where the sun and the flies could torture her. Picking up a knife dropped by some fleeing tribesman Horwood slipped to one knee and put the bright blade to the thongs.

Suddenly a sound at his shoulder froze him. Even above the shooting and the clash of steel the rustle carried a deadly menace. Horwood had to twist like an eel to dodge El Melik's thrust. The Emir had a long knife lashed to a rifle-barrel so that it served as a crude but deadly bayonet. With a grunt Horwood tilted the heavy automatic and let the Arab chieftian have it. El Melik went down like a palm whose roots have shriveled.

A moment later Marcelle was free in Horwood's arms.

**"SQUADRON halt. Dismount!"**

Horwood, still dazed by the sudden transition from death to life, wheeled about. A score of the Black Riders were forcing their camels to the kneeling position. In front of the blacks a white man was holding his helmet in one hand, wiping his face with a handkerchief. The mounting sun glittered on his shoulder badges.

"Hello, there! Mr. Horwood, eh?" The officer slid off his mount and advanced, helmet in hand. "I'm Captain Fotheringham of the Camel Corps, you know. Deuced hot, eh?"

"Yes, it's hot," the American managed to mumble, shaking hands with the Englishman. It struck him dully that both remarks were foolish in the extreme. The tumbling world had suddenly righted itself. Horwood caught himself wondering if there were any vacant berths on the P. & O. boat.

"Had the hell of—pardon me—deuce of a quick trip. I say! Barton's mob is certainly pasting those chaps, eh?"

"How in thunder did you manage this?" Horwood broke in, his hand sweeping to the Sudanese, now calmly lying in the shade of their mounts, heedless of the bloodshed beyond the rise.

"Oh, quite easy, quite easy, I assure you," the captain replied, flipping his silver cigarette case open. "An American chap came into the post several days ago. He told us that there was another American who'd likely be much in need of help. So we came after you. But it just happened that we were looking for El Melik as well. We owed the blighter some overdue accounts."

Light had dawned on Horwood. It was the deserter who had sent the Englishmen, of course. 'Tis an ill wind—he reflected.

"Now I'll leave you and Miss Royale for a moment," Fotheringham said. "Abdul will make tea, and then we'll have tiffin. Don't mind me going, do you?"

"Thanks, Captain; not at all," Horwood replied. He smiled as he put his arms around Marcelle.

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# THE IRON MAN OF DEVIL'S ISLAND

By GEORGE BRUCE

**T**HERE were two things about Steve Webb which earned for him the highest regard of his flying mates. The first was that he could fly. The sec-

ond: that he never spoke of his exploits. No man has ever had a greater claim to the title of "the world's greatest pilot" than Steve Webb. No man has ever more



**Devil's Island. Nightmare of stinking cells and rotting men. For ten long years its steaming madness gnawed at brain of *l'incorrigible* Jacques de Vris. Then came a day when silver wings lanced the tropic sky, and within that wasted husk a spark flashed, kindling wild memories of a daring, cage-free past.**

surely deserved such a great distinction—

And yet, looking at Steve, being in his company, living with him, one wondered if tales told of him by other flyers were not exaggerated—were not myths. Then one remembered that his flying life was written into the history of the world, and that a ship rising with Steve at the controls was certain to be chronicled by the daily press on page one—usually with a banner headline.

No matter what Steve Webb did he hardly considered it worthy of even casual conversation. To him everything was

merely matter of course. He considered himself among the most fortunate persons in the world—in that he could fly, and that people wanted him to fly.

From the days of boyhood, flying had been Steve Webb's one dream, his one goal, his one ambition. He hardly knew how he came to be a pilot. It had taken him years.

In 1913, when in his 'teens, he had gone to Europe for a tour of exhibitions; to show Europe what America knew about flying. He was still in Europe in 1914 at the outbreak of the World War.

He was the third man to offer himself to France for the Legion des Etrangers—and so he came to the Famous Lafayette Escadrille.

SO he came to know Lufberry and Chapman, Prince and Hall, Garros and Guynemeyer, Nungesser, Petrie, Roosevelt, Fonck, Bishop, and a host of others who were writing the glory of the Air Service upon the blood-red skies of war.

He watched them live, fight and die. He fought on. He fought himself into physical exhaustion. He suffered eleven wounds. The last, through the right lung, occurred four days before the Armistice.

It put Steve Webb on his back for three years following the war. He heard nothing of the celebrations heralding the end of the war. He was not present when the "boys" were welcomed home. He heard none of the plaudits nor the speeches. He received no bonuses, no rewards. During that time he was making a grim fight for life—far more grim than any he had ever forced against an enemy.

Still, Steve Webb needed no Congressional gratitude. He needed no more decorations—there was not room on his tunic for all he had received. He needed no newspaper recounting of his victories—as always, his deeds were a part of the written history of the conflict. His deeds were recorded in the files of the war departments of four nations. His fame was secure in the hearts and minds of the men who had served with him and who had fought with him.

In 1922 he left the hospital to return to the only life he knew—flying. Barnstorming with a flying circus—the name of Steve Webb again topping the newspapers as his band of ex-war pilots toured the country, flying in a way the United States had never witnessed. Bringing to the people the news that flying had arrived—was a fixture and had a future. Spreading air consciousness, struggling to put the United States back in the forefront of world flying—where it had been before the War.

Staid magazines of geographical societies had printed panegyrics dedicated to Steve Webb. He stood at the pinnacle of his profession. He was The Ace.

With it all his mode of life changed

not a particle. He still lived with the boys on any flying field he might put his ship on. He still covered his body with coveralls, ate at the field "Greasy Spoon"—there is always a Greasy Spoon on every flying field of major importance—slept in the dormitories with the pilots and students, or on a cot in a hangar. Listened much, spoke seldom, smiled often.

No student ever came to Steve Webb with a problem which went unsolved. For Webb remembered the years during which he had hungered to fly. He always had time to talk with student pilots who came to him for advice. As a body they worshiped him. Probably they would have followed him around in dumb adoration—but Steve was not the type.

Five feet ten inches. A hundred and fifty pounds of seasoned muscle. Bulging chest. Face tanned by the sun and winds of flying hours spread over twenty years. Penetrating blue eyes, fighting chin, firm, determined mouth, strong hands. Such was Steve Webb. About him there was the spell of everlasting youth.

There have been great flyers. Other men have startled the world with great exploits. They have become heroes before the world. There was a difference. Steve Webb was a hero in the eyes of the men and boys with whom he shared his life—the men and boys who labored on flying fields, the pilots who hurled trimotors over fixed courses; the pilots who staggered around in the war-surplus jobs, and the men who labored with wrenches over recalcitrant motors.

To them, Steve Webb was a bigger hero than to the public which knew so little about him. Truly there is a vast difference. It takes a big man to be a hero in his home town. Flying was Steve Webb's home town.

IT was quite natural that Southern Air Lines should ask Steve Webb to pilot the first trimotor over the tentative line of flight mapped out by the technical advisers to the newly organized company which intended running a transport line from New York to Buenos Aires, an air-line distance of fifty-three hundred miles. A mean distance of close to eight thousand.

They announced the itinerary of each ship which would fly the route.

New York. Philadelphia. Washington. Savannah. Tampa. Havana. Such were the first stops. Then: Barranquilla, Caracas, Georgetown, Paramaribo, Cayenne; thence across the trackless jungles of Brazil, leaving behind the clean ocean, passing over stretches of the earth upon which white men had never trod. Stretches inhabited by savages about which the world knew nothing—south to Rio de Janeiro and on, to Porto Alegre, Montivideo, Buenos Aires.

There were men who wagered that Steve Webb would never get through. They argued that flying across the ocean was a pleasant pastime compared to battling the endless jungles. They mentioned the fact that there was a chance in flying the ocean. Ships might pick one up in distress. Nothing to rescue one who went down in the jungles. No one to see excepting cruel eyes crouching on the earth—animal eyes and near-human eyes and the more kindly were those of the animals.

THEY spoke of the men who had attempted South American flights. Of nine attempts, one had been partially successful. Eight had disappeared completely. No knowledge as to the fate of the pilots or passengers. Gone—swallowed up. No doubt about Steve's ability as a pilot—but there were things which human beings could not conquer, among them the route the Southern Airlines went on making calm assurances would be flown.

Southern Airlines was accepting passengers and mail for the first flight. Stamp collectors the world over deluged the Southern offices with self-addressed mail—to secure a first cancellation. Steve Webb went about his preparations—smiling quietly, going over his motors and ship. Spending patient hours posing for newspaper photographers. Answering foolish questions propounded by reporters.

The *South American* left New York on the first day of May. A trimotored Boeing, painted a beautiful black and orange, flashed into the air with the grace and speed of a scarlet tanager in flight. The mail compartments were crammed to full capacity.

Only three men and one girl made up the passenger list of the huge air liner. Two of the men were South Amer-

icans. One was the president of Southern Airlines. The girl was his daughter.

They landed at the scheduled stops in the United States. They reported by radio from Havana and from Barranquilla. Caracas reported by cable that the *South American* had landed there and had flown on—toward the coast of the Guianas.

Then there was a silence.

No word from the air liner. One day—two—three—a week—two weeks.

At the end of the second week the New York newspapers printed the obituaries of Henry M. Wood, capitalist and financier; of his daughter, Gloria, debutante and aviation enthusiast; of the two South American gentlemen who had been passengers, and devoted two pages with photographs touching upon the adventurous career of Steve Webb.

They spoke quietly of a rumored romance between Gloria Wood and Steve Webb which accounted for her presence upon the lost ship. They printed maps of the regions in which they believed the *South American* to be lost, and described the horrors of the jungle and the ferocity of savage tribes.

With the passing of another week, the loss of the *South American* was forgotten under the press of more urgent news. There was no doubt that Steve Webb had flown his last flight.

No doubt excepting upon the flying fields of the United States. There grease-smearing mechanics, red-cheeked students, and grizzled veterans laughed at the idea of a mere jungle writing *finis* to the career of Steve Webb.

## II

THERE were times when Jean Jacques Victor de Vris was forced to sink the nails of his fingers into the flesh of his cheeks to assure himself that he lived. After a time the imprints of the sharp nails became white scars—minute incisions in the pallid flesh, crisscrossing crazily, appearing as little bird tracks on faded parchment.

Sometimes, in the night, his brain played tricks, whispering to him that he was nothing more than an impostor, parading under the proud name of Jean Jacques Victor de Vris, under the *Republique, ci-devant*

Count, born of the proud blood of the Bourbons, with a family history behind him which was a large part of the written and legendary history of France.

He had to count very carefully upon his fingers to assure himself that he was really only thirty-nine years of age rather than the hoary old man his brain insisted upon picturing him—a hoary old man of fleshless bones, and death whiskers matted about his throat. An old man who had forgotten to die after having been entombed alive, and who found himself vomited out of his moulding shroud of earth to return among the living—to a life in which he had no place, an existence which he could not understand.

Certainly, if he did live, and had existence, without having known the fetid breath of death, his existence had been split into two distinct parts. He was certain of this. The Jean de Vris who was thirty-nine was as completely divorced from the Jean de Vris who had been twenty-three as though born in widely separated worlds, each knowing the other only by some strange jest on the part of Fate which permitted vision through a dense, swirling vapor which hung over the gulf separating them.

The first life, the life up to twenty-three, had been actual, vibrant, colorful, dynamic. At times he wondered if memories of this first life which pounded upon his brain were not hallucinations meant to mock him and to add to the tortures of the second existence.

But there could be no mistake, for the brain of the second existence remembered, in a dim way, having taken part in the scenes which floated in the mists of the second existence.

The brain of the second existence remembered laughter, carefree days, green trees, beauty, cool linen, the touch of soft hands—centuries ago, perhaps, but real—and it was at those times that the sharp nails of Jean Jacques Victor de Vris cut little incisions in his cheeks.

He remembered how the second existence began.

ONE moment he had been twenty-three, confident, laughing, the toast at a thousand high-born tables. A youth who loved, joyously, wholeheartedly, with all his

soul. A woman awaited him—a reward for having passed through the baptism of flame, to emerge calm-eyed, unafraid, and with victory perched upon his lance.

HE never permitted himself to think of the woman. Her face was already lost in the haze of memory. She was nothing more than a shadowy outline.

But he knew that she had been very beautiful. That her kisses had been a potent vine which caused the blood in his veins to froth and boil, and that in thinking of her he had forgotten all else in the world. He knew that he had loved her with every fiber of his being and that days in which she did not appear were sunless and dreary.

Days and months and years he had been sustained by the thought that she awaited his coming. Days of agony and spurting blood, when his strong young muscles had sagged; when his body jerked spasmodically under succeeding waves of pain; when the world was mad and the trees and grass the color of freshly shed blood.

Roar of motors was a constant thunder throughout night and day alike, and stench of cordite scared the membranes of his nostrils. Days and nights of hell—the thought of her upholding his courage and his strength. The thought of her—awaiting him when the baptism of flame had been passed, and when he could emerge, knowing in his soul that he was worthy to kneel at her feet and to touch the hem of her skirt with reverent fingers.

Such was the woman Jean Jacques had loved—or rather such was his love.

Sometimes his lip curled as he thought of her. Thought of the youth he had been. Of his shining eyes, of his recklessness, of his laughter in the face of death.

It had been war. He saw her for the first time shortly after he had received his wings. She had been in white, singing for the troops in a little rest camp behind the lines at Senlis.

Until he beheld her, Jean Jacques had never looked upon a woman as a woman. When his eyes rested upon her face the veil seemed torn from before a great mystery and he knew that she was the ideal of which value, shadow-like voices within his soul had whispered. He sought her out when she had finished singing. He knew

that he must speak to her, hear her voice—and she had smiled at him.

Days followed. He remembered the first time her fingers had touched his arm. How his flesh had tingled—strange pulsing waves of ecstasy along his spine—head whirling. And he remembered the softness of her lips—the first time she had kissed him. Rose petals—rose petals as red as the blood which stained the fields of France.

Days—how many? An eternity—three? Enough—enough to understand why he had been born—and why he lived. Why he fought and why he suffered.

Why his young body had been hurled into the red surge of the tidal wave of war.

Then she had returned to Paris—to wait. To wait until it was finished—*fini la guerre*—a far-off vision of happiness framed with all the horrors of death and despair. She said she would wait. She had smiled at him—much as if he had been a little boy—she had smiled and said she would wait until he returned.

Three years. Three years in which her face and the memory of her fingers and her eyes and voice had been a beacon shining through a hopeless hell. Three years in which he never saw her. He remembered that she was waiting for him and that he must prove his right to seek her out. Honors heaped upon him meant nothing, words of praise were merely annoying, the grinding demands of duty but a means to the end.

And then, suddenly, there was no war.

**I**T was finished. There was merely a dazed silence in the place of the thundering guns. The stench of rotting flesh was no longer in the breezes of autumn.

The skies were no longer filled with the horde of enemy airmen. In the trenches the troops sang wild, ribald songs; and the gray of Germany and the blue of France fraternized and shook hands and exchanged sausages for soap.

Strange—it was all over. He lived—nothing but the scars of his wounds to prove that he had ever fought. The scars of his wounds and the little red and white and blue and green ribbons on the left breast of his tunic. The illuminated resolution of thanks the Chamber of Deputies had voted him.

The toasts and acclamations of comrades

who had rushed through the flame-lit skies of war wing to wing with him. Certified copies of army orders and of citations which always began, "*Captain Jean Jacques Victor de Vris, Troisieme Groupement des Avions du Chasse*" and always mentioned glorious victories over enemy pilots.

For these things, these bits of ribbon and these flimsy sheets of paper, he had descended into the maws of hell, had covered the firm white flesh of his body with scars, had starved his soul, and scourged his brain—had endured—had forfeited his dreams—for this and the memory of the woman who waited.

There was a day when he was at last released from his squadron. A day when he took a train for Paris. There was the succeeding day when he adorned his body with a new uniform, when he hung the little ribbons on the breast pocket of his tunic so that she might see for herself that he came with laurels of the conqueror.

There was the taxicab which took him to the address he had carried in his mind throughout the three years. There was the hotel where she lived in her apartment. There was the door—a shining thing of wood.

His heart hammered. No conflict with the enemy had ever caused his pulse to leap as did the sight of that door and the knowledge that she awaited his coming. There was a smile upon his lips. The first he could remember through three years. There was a wild song in his soul.

He lifted his hand to knock upon the door, then permitted it to drop to his side. The smile turned into a happy laugh—he turned the knob and entered.

She was there—reclining upon a chaise-longue. The soft curves of her body were hardly concealed by the diaphanous materials of her negligee. Her glorious golden hair was tumbled down about her shoulders. Her round arms—were locked about the head of a man—a man in uniform who reclined beside her there on the chaise-longue.

She looked up as Jean Jacques entered. Her eyes betrayed no confusion. She stared at him for a full instant, and then laughed loudly.

"My little boy," she had cried merrily. "My little chicken of Senlis—come here and kiss me—"

And he had stood staring at her, hor-

ror in his eyes—terrible, slimy fingers gripping at his heart.

The man had raised his head and looked at Jean Jacques.

"Did you want something?" he had asked insolently. "It is good manners to knock upon a door before *bursting* into a room. Probably you have entered the wrong apartment?"

Still Jean Jacques had stood there staring at them. Finally words had ripped from his throat.

"Your husband?" he croaked. "You did not tell me—I did not know—I thought—"

The man answered—the man in uniform who also had little bits of ribbon on his tunic. He laughed as he answered. Something about the laugh had sent shudders through the soul of Jean Jacques.

"Husband?" the man had mocked. "Are you trying to be funny? Husband?"

He ran his fingers through the golden rivulets over her shoulders. "It is to laugh, eh?" he demanded of the woman. "The innocence of the youth is refreshing."

Jean Jacques was staring at her face—at her eyes—at her mouth—and she was smiling.

That was where the second existence began.

**S**OMEHOW his fingers gripped the butt of the pistol at his side. He felt his arm lifting—the pistol aiming for the laughing mouth of the man. He remembered a single shriek—and then the sharp, angry crack of the pistol—and a sudden splattering of blood which hid the man's face.

The man's body went soft—transformed to putty—slid off the chaise-longue. The wet gout of blood stained the white negligee of the woman—her horror-filled eyes stared. And then he tossed the pistol on the floor, and swinging on his heel marched stiffly out of the room.

In the street he stumbled along—at times laughing loudly at the thought of the smear of blood which had leaped out of the man's mouth.

Someone grasped him by the arm—a gendarme—there were three of them together. They took him away—to a cell. Concrete with bars—no sunlight. He was trying to explain something—mumbling

words. Days with the cold of the cell seeping into his bones—

And then a court with a black-robed judge.

### III

**T**HERE came a patch of sunlight. It was like many nights all strung together without beginning and without ending. Nights with only the sullen wet cold of the cell floor eating up through the soles of his feet, rising higher and higher until it encompassed his heart and flooded into his head. Nights with the torturing bars of an iron cot bruising his flesh. An iron cot with a single thin blanket to serve as mattress, covering and pillow.

Hollow footsteps beat along the concrete corridor. Footsteps magnified a thousand-fold, reverberating from the high ceiling, beating into the cells as a surf against a retaining wall. Footsteps of warders pacing back and forth.

They led him somewhere. Ah! He remembered. It was back into the great room in which the black-robed judge sat. A white face framed by the black mantle. Eyes looking down at him. Hard eyes.

A voice speaking. Someone speaking of a magnificent war record. Begging for the life of Jean Jacques Victor de Vris. Begging! Somehow Jean Jacques—he of the second life—remembered dimly that man of whom the advocate spoke—but it seemed only a distant memory, hardly concerning him. His dull eyes roved about the courtroom—always returning to the face of the man in the black mantle.

And then a silence. The advocate had finished. Sentence was to be pronounced. The black-robed judge cleared his throat. He was speaking. The words were like the beating of a great sledge upon a solid anvil.

"I have listened to the appeal," he said. "However, this is a court of law. No matter what our personal sympathies might be, we have a duty which transcends those sympathies. A crime has been committed. A deliberate murder. One man has deprived another of life—and for no good reason. We realize and appreciate the services of this defendant to his country. We appreciate his high birth and the history of his family. Still those things

do not alleviate the seriousness of his offense against society. If anything, they add to the gravity. One could expect such an action from an 'apache'—but from this defendant!

"We take into consideration the youth of the defendant. We take into consideration the moving appeal of his advocate. We set aside the penalty of death imposed by the lower court. We re-sentence him to be imprisoned for life in the Penal Colony of Guiana, at forced labor."

A shuddering sigh had gone about the courtroom. The advocate who had made the appeal seemed crushed under a terrific burden. The black-robed judge arose from his seat with ponderous dignity and retired. After a minute the courtroom began to empty.

The advocate spoke a few words of sympathy to Jean Jacques, but Jean Jacques understood nothing of that. He was praying in his heart that this business would soon be finished and that the uniformed guards standing on either side of him would take him out of the building—out into the sunlight of the day, out in the breezes of early spring—into the faint perfume of budding flowers.

THEY took him. There was a journey by train. A ride in a jolting *charabanc*. The looming outlines of some grim building. A massive gate, iron-studded, seeming to reach far up into the heavens. The thudding of a heavy bolt. Footsteps over a flagged courtyard. Then a cell—much like the cell he had quitted that morning, only more squalid, colder, smaller, filled with a queer stench. He remembered—it was the stench of rotting flesh—the stench which hung over a battlefield for days following an attack.

Saint Martin de Re! The concentration prison for those men France had decreed unfit to live within her borders. Men the nation vomited out in disgust. Men consigned to the Guianas. Exile—five—seven—ten years—the dry death.

Sometimes at night one could hear murmurs—murmurs wrenched from sleeping brains. During the day merely an oppressing silence, for within the confines of Saint Martin de Re no convict was permitted to speak. Silence, terrible, heavy, sinister, hung over the place. Pregnant

with violence, with hate, with horror. Silence—a dam before the passions of men, thrown up by the heavy pistols of guards patrolling the corridors.

Solitary. Unmeasured period of time during which the eyes beheld nothing living. Nothing moving. Merely the black bars, with the shadows moving slowly along the sides of the cell as the sickly light of day penetrated the courtyard of the prison and reflected into the cells.

Perpetual twilight. Sometimes the sobbing shriek of one suddenly gone mad under the strain. Sometimes the rattling of cell doors as the mad creatures fought the iron bars. Then the thud of striking fists—sobbing moans—choking breath—silence again.

Food, thrown within the iron bars as one throws swill to swine. Food unfit for swine. At times crawling with uncooked maggots. At times covered with a tough crust of mold. Bread marked by the teeth of rats which had feasted upon it before the prisoners. Soup, reeking a hot putrefaction: in which foul-looking lumps of green meat lurked. At meal times when the carts of the keepers toured the cargo the prison was filled with the vile stench—while talon-like hands reached out greedily from between bars to snatch at the tin basins into which the stuff was ladled.

Such were the early days of the second life of Jean Jacques Victor de Vris—the youth who had known the glories of flight. Who had known the whip of the slipstream upon his face and the crisp cleanliness of the heavens. Whole pulses had leaped wildly in the exultant ecstasy of combat in the heavens. Who had been free as few humans are free—unfettered from the earth—who had known the god-like power of soaring wings, probing deep into the misty reaches of the circle of heaven.

Six months at Saint Martin de Re.

HE was unfortunate in a sense. The convict ship had sailed a few days before the imposing of his sentence. It sailed for the far shores of Guiana but twice a year. So he waited—in solitary—with six hundred other condemned men throughout the six months.

Never a sight of the sun. Never the sound of a voice—except the harsh commands of the warders. Never the touch

of the wind upon his cheeks. Never a single word throughout the stifling days those six months.

They were not six months to Jean Jacques. The period was merely a misty half-existence, without break, punctuated only by the putrid smell of food at the feeding times.

There came a day when warders threw clothing into the cells with orders to don them. Bodies unbathed throughout six months were stripped and a new stench filled the prison. The new clothing was donned. A heavy woolen blouse of no size or shape—merely a bag with sleeves. Trousers of the same drab, gray material. A round, tight-fitting cap of black—no peak—merely a cup-like thing fitting over the cranium. Heavy, black shoes with wooden soles. And a sack in which the convict might cram his precious possessions.

Jean Jacques gave no attention to the sack. He had no possessions.

Then there was a thunder of the wooden soles upon the flagged flooring of the prison corridors. Men were moving—shuffling—stomping along. A bedlam after the utter silence of six months. The iron bolt caging Jean Jacques was drawn for the first time since his incarceration. A warder beckoned to him. He moved mechanically—out into the corridor to take his place amid the thronging stream of convicts being driven toward the outside courtyard.

That courtyard. The most beautiful place in the world. Actual sunshine. Actual air. Gentle breeze upon the face. A first sight of a forgotten sky. Six hundred men drawn up in lines. Conversation for the first time. Sound of voices—croaking voices—men who had almost forgotten how to speak. Surly orders of warders to keep the silence. Contemptuous indifference on the part of the convicts.

The gate opening. The world returning—coming up from some depths—or rather, the gray-clad, shuffling men coming up from a strange hell to see the world again. Throngs of people outside the gates. Starving people. The curious, the sensation seeker. Here and there a wife or a mother or a relative of one of the six hundred in that sinister line of convicts who marched four abreast between the naked bayonets

of a double file of troops lining the route of march.

A quay. Many flat-bottomed boats. Men piling into them—going out to a ship standing at anchor five hundred yards from the shore. Anxious eyes among the six hundred studied that ship. They knew her reputation—the convict ship—the means of transportation to Guiana.

Still, after Saint Martin de Re she was a beautiful object. The oil-covered water was beautiful. The sight of faces was beautiful. Everything was beautiful. Nothing in the world could be so terrible as that silence within Saint Martin de Re.

Boatload after boatload of convicts climbed up the ladders and onto the deck of the ship. After a minute they were driven below—down into the bowels of the ship, into iron cages, four of them, each holding two hundred men. Down into airless, breathless, fetid cells. The sky and the world gone again—ripped away from them.

A hoarse roar from the siren of the ship. Grinding sound of engines turning over. Motion—swaying, bobbing motion. The beginning of the journey—to Guiana.

**E**IGHTEEN days that passage took. Eighteen days of storm, of enraged sea. Eighteen days with more than six hundred men crushed into a space hardly big enough for fifty under normal conditions.

Eighteen days of deadly heat—of terrific sickness with the vomit of the sick spewed over the hot iron plates of the cells. With the stench of the open lavatories hanging like a thick scarf over the interior of the ship. Of being battered against the steel plates, of being trampled under foot. Of insanity, of streaming bodies stripped of all clothing. Of fights to the death for a single minute at one of the small portholes.

Death came among the six hundred. At night the crew removed the bodies of the dead, checked their names from the rosters and tossed them overside—into the sea. The life of a convict has no value.

Scurvy broke out among them—dysentery, but there was no medicine, and the doctor was used to such conditions. After all Guiana would soon be reached, and the living put ashore. Those who died were

the fortunate. The unfortunate were those who would know Guiana.

Then the heat of the tropics. Men gasping upon the plates of the cells. Faces contorted; lungs seared; bodies wet with sweat; eyes bloodshot. Men cursing, striking out about them with flying fists, maddened by the heat, by the confinement, by the stench. Men laughing inanely, crouching against the bars and sides of the ship—men with the wild light of insanity lurking in too-bright eyes. More death—more murders.

Then the engines stopped. The constant pounding of eighteen days suddenly still—the stillness of Saint Martin de Re. Men crowding to the portholes, fighting for the eight-inch openings—to see Guiana. Hours under the broiling sun, confined to the cells—going mad.

Then motion again, the pilot aboard—going up the river. Saint Laurent—the beginning of the end—nerve center of the Guiana prisons.

People lining the shores and dock to witness the arrival of the convict ship. Officials, convicts, exiles, negroes. Here and there a woman. The first they had seen in six months. They had almost forgotten that women existed—except in dazed minds which persisted in drawing fantastic pictures of females during sleep or during the hours when the eyes were open.

Scarecrows on the banks watched the ship with avid eyes. Numbers on their shirts. All bones and yellow, parchment-like skin. Grinning teeth—heads like mummies. Skeletons—corpses with burning eyes—looking at the ship, a longing so terrific in those burning eyes as to make one catch breath sharply. Exiles! Seeing in that drab ship of terrible history a breath of the France once known, but completely lost except for the gnawing agony to return. Seeing in that ship images of childhood, of parents, of wives, of sons and daughters. Surrounding the filthy tub with roseate dreams—dreamed throughout the ages of confinement in the face of death.

THE six hundred stumbled down the gang plank. The odor of their bodies caused the natives to turn away. They were herded into a column of fours.

Warders again barked grating orders. The line moved. The wooden shoes made

a terrific clatter upon the boarding of the dock. Forward! To what?

Down the dusty road, around a bend hiding the docks and the convict ship. Shuffling—thanking God for release from the hold and cages of the hell ship. Thankful even for the oppressive, dry heat of jungle which touched flesh with hot fingers and seemed to dry up all moisture within them.

And suddenly, gates. A groan. Gates! Always gates—shutting them away from something. Heavy, high gates, with guards armed with pistols standing before them. Gates opening—and the column of fours passing within. A sign over the gates. Short, battered, faded, suggestive—Camp de la Transportation.

So this was the end of the journey—this was the end of everything. This was the Guiana.

This was the beginning of Devil's Island. During days and nights they had been thinking of tales of Devil's Island—of Dreyfuss—of the punishment cells, of the solitary, of madmen shuffling about the island, with nothing to do and nothing to wait for but death.

They had been thinking that more than fifty per cent of them would be dead before the end of the first year—and at the end of four years ninety per cent would have been crossed off the rolls by a red ink line drawn through a name. Dead—exiled—buried in the soil of Guiana—already putrid with the stinking carcasses of convicts who had preceded them.

They were assigned to "dormitories." Rough barracks with rude ceilings and a stone floor, separated from one another by a wall through which a narrow, arched doorway was cut. Rude framework lined either side of the dormitory walls, frames laced with ropes attached to oblongs of canvas. Less than a foot of space between each bit of canvas. And the canvas stretched in this manner was all that belonged to them personally.

A foot of space between men. A foot of space on a shelf. A blanket—a thin shoddy thing, with no warmth.

For each convict this and nothing more was life. These were his entire possessions—this foot of space on a shelf, this strip of canvas, this one blanket.

There was no welcome from older convicts. They hardly looked up as the new

men were herded into the room. They merely grunted.

In the afternoon the new arrivals were "Bertilloned." Every marking, every measurement, every peculiarity recorded upon the prison records.

Jean Jacques submitted while they catalogued the wounds upon his body—the wounds he had taken for France. They wrote them down as "scars—incisions—bullet wounds" and passed him on.

They were handled like so many sheep going through a dipping pen. When they were finished they were given new clothing. A straw hat, a pair of white trousers, a shirt, sandals—and they were a part of the system—a part of Devil's Island.

THEY heard vague rumors of other prisons. Of stockades in the jungles where convicts were "hired" to private interests, forced to work in the midst of death-exuding swamps until they died or lost strength, or contracted an incurable disease. Then they were returned. The private interests had no use for ailing convicts.

They heard tales of Devil's Island where the "politicals" were imprisoned. Of Royale, with its regiment of blacks from Martinique to guard the prisoners where the hospital was located—and of Joseph.

Joseph, the Island of Tortures with its deadly punishment cells. With its tales of madness and horrible disease and its silence! The very name of Joseph hung over them as an unseen but ever-present horror.

And then they were driven to work in the river—toiling naked, up to the waist in the sullen water, with slimy things slithering against the flesh—straining at water-soaked logs, hauling them onto the bank under the eyes of the overseers. The river—and plainly seen, the shore line of Dutch Guiana and the white houses of Albina. Looking across the river to freedom—toiling in the swamps with that word *freedom* gnawing at the base of the brain.

It was the week following the arrival at St. Laurent that Jean Jacques began his career as an "incorrigible." Deep in his brain—the brain of his second life—was the knowledge that he must escape.

He knew nothing of the procedure of escape. He only knew that he must go—

he must escape from the horrors of this place; from the skeleton-like creatures who carried big numbers on their shirts; whose eyes glowed with a constant fever, who were starving, who had blue nails and mouths in spite of the darkness of their bronzed flesh. He knew that he must escape this place or go mad—or become one of them.

And so, one day, when the knowledge was screaming within his brain, he dived into the river, hardly hearing the shouts of the guards, and struck out for the Dutch side—struck out for the white walls of Albina—for freedom.

He had covered five hundred yards when the boat overtook him and hauled him aboard. He fought like a wild thing until a guard smashed him over the head with a pistol butt. After that he was a limp, shapeless mass, dripping water, in the bottom of the boat.

They were easy with him the first time. They kept him in a cell for three months until the punishment court met. Then they gave him only three months solitary on Joseph. He said nothing. He went to Joseph, the little island with the strong rip tide running between it and Royale and Devil's Island.

He discovered the punishment cells.

#### IV

A BOAT with sunken-cheeked convicts strained at the oars, fighting against the current between the islands. At times the unwieldy boat threatened to run wild. Then came panting breath—faces contorted with the agony of the effort. Uninterested guards smoked cigarettes, paying no heed to the struggling oarsmen.

Crowded together—all of the solitaires. Silent for the most part. Wondering what terrors Joseph held. Some laughed loudly. False almost hysterical merriment, suggesting nerves near to the cracking point. The laughter grating like steel against a bone.

Staring fellows. Wide-eyed, solemn, awed, looking at men under punishment. Looking at men going to the dungeons of Joseph, looking at men going to the "still death."

In the bow of the boat, Jean Jacques. He sat silent, his eyes never blinking, star-

ing out into the white, searing sheet of sunlight, fixed on the grim outlines of the disciplinary prison.

He remembered tales of men who had been incarcerated there. Of men going raving insane, gnawing at the steel bars with broken teeth. Gnawing at a wrist until teeth tore a way through the flesh and found an artery. Of men, mad for the sound of voices, mad with the everlasting stillness. Mad to the point of self-mutilation for the questionable comfort of the prison hospital.

Men infected themselves with rotten diseases, for the reward of being removed for a day—two days—to know the sight of man again. Men blinded themselves. Men died—beating heads against the concrete of the cells—hanging from a trousers' leg—dead in the night—staring eyes picturing a mental agony too great for comprehension.

The beach grated under the prow of the boat. Hoarse commands came from the armed guards. The solitaries moved forward.

Gates clanged. Narrow corridors—so narrow that one could spread the arms and touch each wall with the palms of his hands. Barred doors with other doors of sheet iron behind them.

And above all the silence. The silence of death. Only the rasp of shoe leather against concrete as a guard paced along overhead—looking down at the crouching animals contained within the cells. Animals in human form, looking up out of bloodshot eyes—baring rotting teeth and gums.

Animals maggot-ridden and with wrinkled, sickly, yellow flesh.

They thrust Jean Jacques into a cell. The sheet iron door clanged loudly. Then the deeper sound of the heavy barred cage door being bolted shut.

**H**E looked about him. He was in a small cell. Nine feet long, seven feet wide. White concrete walls rose twelve feet above his head. For a roof the blazing dome of heaven as seen through a grating made of iron bars.

Concrete floor beneath. Against the wall a wooden framework meant to be a cot, held up in place by two chains. No mattress. Nothing but a thin, shoddy blanket

for covering—or furnishing. A wooden bucket—all the sanitary arrangements the cell boasted.

He looked up again at the iron bars framed against the blue of the sky. The heat was stifling. The sun beamed down into the narrow airless space with a biting intensity. The heat was unbelievable. Nine feet by seven feet of blue sky, the only knowledge that a world existed outside of the cell, and that blue sky made an added torture.

He must not sit nor lie down upon that concrete floor. Terrible things happened to the bodies of men who rested on the floor. It was against the rules to lower the cot during the day. There was nothing to do but pace back and forth, back and forth, between the walls. Three steps this way turn—three steps back—another wall—three steps—until the clack of his wooden soled sandals beat upon his brain.

And the silence! It was thick, horrible—reaching out for him—dragging him down toward a retching pit of madness and destruction. He was battling with himself. Telling his brain that it must be calm. It must not think, it must be calm. It must not think. And all the while the mocking demons of destruction breaking through the barriers he had built up within his mind.

Skin on the back splitting and burning as flesh beneath a magnifying glass reflecting a burning sun. Body slippery with sweat. Eyes stinging and blinded by sweat. Sweat rising with a disgusting stench within his own nostrils. The odor of his own body. Hands slippery. Knees aching. Head spinning—and the heat continued to spout into that limited space.

And the silence.

**L**ATER, when the sun had gone over the top of his cell—when it was time to take down the cots—eternities strung one after the other, he knew that he would go mad. He knew that no man could endure such and survive. He threw his aching body upon the wood planks and stared up at the velvet darkness through the bars at the top of his cell.

Sleep would not come. If he might but forget the ache of muscles inflamed by contact with the concrete!—if there was a single thing of which to think—excepting

the rising walls of concrete—and the silence! He shuddered and buried his head in his arms. Three months! He groaned aloud.

He understood why men gnawed at veins until the body was empty of blood. He understood why men gave up hoarded savings—concealed within their own bodies, for the seed of the castor plant. That was a way out.

Gnaw or slice a raw spot under the skin, insert the little, innocent looking seeds. Then after two or three days—a rooting mass of corruption about the place. The doctor came. He would order the sufferer to the hospital on Royale. Usually it meant an amputation to save the life itself—but one talked with other men, saw things, saw movement, heard voices.

Jean Jacques tried not to think of those things, nor of the limitless stretch of time represented by those three months.

Ninety days! Two thousand one hundred and sixty hours! A hundred and thirty thousand minutes! His nails bit into the flesh of his cheeks. He wanted to scream. To rise up and throw himself head first against the concrete walls—and he had been there but half a day. Tales came to him. Tales of men who had undergone seclusion for as much as five years.

His body was trembling. His face was hot. He forced himself to remain upon the cot. He would endure. He would fight. He would beat back the mad devils striving for possession of his brain. He would show them that he could endure.

The thought comforted him. He slept.

He had lost all track of time when they came to release him. Time meant nothing to one in seclusion. It was merely a meaningless passage of light and darkness. Blinding, searing heat—and then shuddering damp cold, with the body shaking in the grip of an ague, and the teeth chattering, the shoddy blanket folded about one's shoulders. It was a time when matted hair fell down about the neck and the beard of one's face grew like writhing snakes.

The key grated in the lock of his door. Footsteps came to him. Muffled conversation. Men speaking. Guards—they were saying:

"Helas! We almost forgot this type in here. His time was up two days ago. But

who can keep track of such things? It makes little difference." He listened. He hardly understood they spoke of him.

The second voice, gruffer: "Well, let's have the carrion out of there and send him back to the mainland—if he can go back."

The door swung open. Uniforms. An arm beckoning to him to come out. He swayed against the wall, pushing himself erect. He felt very weak—very old. He wondered if he would be able to make the doorway. He was seeing men—moving things—hearing voices. He forced his shoulders back and checked the nervous trembling of his lips.

He was hearing the sound of his own voice. He had thought himself unable to speak.

"I'll come—walking—" he croaked. "You haven't killed me yet."

One of the guards glared at him and took a step forward.

"Oh," he smiled nastily. "A young game cock, eh? You will be an incorrigible, then? You have not learned. Good, we will see you often. We will have another go at you when you return. Get moving. Faster."

And so, seclusion came to its first end for Jean Jacques.

**H**E was shipped back to St. Laurent. There, after a week he was farmed out to a company working in the swamps.

He was transported to one of the outposts down the river—in the heart of the jungle. Surrounded by stinking waters, breathing in the death dealing air of the swamps. Toiling as a slave never toiled.

He bribed the cook to give him more than his share of food. He must have strength. He must not permit his body to fail him. Escape needed strength.

The jungles behind the camp beckoned to him. He knew that natives were in those jungles. Natives who could be bought—and Jean Jacques had money—a little, carefully hoarded. He carried it within his body day and night. He waited. Ten days. He felt strong.

One night he did not answer the roll call.

He plunged into the jungles.

He remembered little of that attempt. It was a nightmare. Trees, black—with crawling things fastened to their trunks. Hor-

rors of the night. Then his head became dizzy and his stomach sick.

Some natives found him along a dim jungle trail. They searched him thoroughly and grunted in disgust. Usually these convicts had something of value—but this one was merely a bag of bones within tattered garments of shoddy.

They carried him back to St. Laurent. The prison might give them a reward. A can of sardines—something.

So, after another three months of awaiting trial, Jean Jacques came back to Joseph and reclusion. Back to the punishment cells. The guard who had liberated him laughed harshly at the sight of him.

"Six months this time, eh, my bantam?" he asked. "Perhaps you will like this stay more than before. One becomes used to these things, is it not?" And the sheet iron door closed and after it the heavy bars—and again there were only the four walls of concrete, the blue sky through the iron grating—the heat.

This time he did not suffer as at first. He made his mind a blank and waited—waited for another chance to escape.

Six times Jean Jacques left Joseph and four times he returned—each time for attempted escape. Foolish, desperate, unreasoning attempts. Attempts having no chance of success. Mad plunges into the river, into the jungles.

The punishment court came to look at him as insane. They almost regretted sentencing him to Joseph. It was like beating a young child—but there was no other place for him and it was a shame he would not die. He was troublesome. A real incorrigible.

His last sentence was for four years. He took the decision without raising his eyes. He was trying to work out in his mind how long four years were—four years on Joseph. First, three months—then six months. Then a year. Then two. Now, four years.

Of his ten years on Guiana, he had spent eight in solitary.

Men had gone mad, died, destroyed themselves in those cells on Joseph. But Jean Jacques lived. Lived for a purpose. Escape! Some day—the next time—he would win free—somehow. It made no difference.

He was becoming a celebrity among the living convicts. They stared at him. They whispered of him. In the barracks—at the grinding tasks of the day.

Jean Jacques—a real incorrigible.

## V

JEAN JACQUES paced his cell. His body was a shell. He knew that all of his insides had rotted. He knew that his brain had dried up to the size of a pea and rattled about under the bone cranium.

He had always paced in this manner. There had never been a time when he had not known the nine feet by seven feet of concrete cage. There had never been a time when the grill over his head had been absent and when the noon sun had not blistered his flesh.

There had never been a time when he had not cowered in a corner of that cage as the cold rain fell from the skies, flooding the cell, and picking at his body like the voracious beak of a devouring vulture. When his teeth had not chattered throughout the night and when his body did not tremble with the chill.

Four years. He did not know that they were four years. It merely was a vague mist bound by the concrete and bars. But the four years of his sentence were drawing to a close. Days now—but Jean Jacques did not know. Time meant nothing.

And then, one day, as he paced the concrete floor of his cell a sound came to his ears. A far-off, whining roar. He stopped his pacing—a caged animal in some zoo sniffing at a faint remembrance of a distant jungle thronging his nostrils.

He glanced at the sky. It was brazen—and a pale green seeped into the blue. He knew that sign. Storm—terrible, ripping, screaming jungle storm. After a while his flesh would be whipped by the fierce rain.

But he listened more intently. Many storms had passed overhead during those four years. None had sounded like this.

The far-off drone rose in power, came nearer—frenzied beating against the skies. Once a hurricane had swept Joseph. It had sounded something like this sound—not quite.

A storm . . . He was no longer interested in storms. It made no difference if

his flesh quailed and his bones ached and his teeth chattered.

But the whining drone grew in power and intensity. It came nearer—nearer. It flooded the entire earth. He lifted his face wearily as if ready to look upon a new torture added to his reclusion. There was no interest in his eyes—merely a resigned, dogged expression. The expression in the eyes of a pugilist who has been battered into semi-consciousness, and who comes back driven by a fighting heart—to face more stunning blows.

There was a stir within the disciplinary prison. Other men were hearing that same sound. In all of the time he had spent on Joseph he had never heard a sound within that prison, excepting for the occasional footsteps of a guard prowling overhead—looking down into the cells of the caged animals. He heard a scream. A man's scream.

Then the whining roar from overhead hushed all other sound. It seemed gathering directly above the prison.

With staring eyes he looked up—and a shape passed over head. A shape!

Jean Jacques rubbed his arm over his eyes and looked again. No there could be no mistake. It was a shape. A flying thing. A great bird of bright fuselage and shining propeller discs. Flying overhead—angels flying over hell.

**T**HERE was a sob in his throat. He screamed madly and beat against the wall of the cell until his fists bled and his knuckles were raw. That had been an airplane. He had almost forgotten that airplanes had existed. He had forgotten that once he had been a master of the skies, sweeping forward through space, the whip of the slipstream about his head—the clean blue of the skies flowing about him.

Lucifer in hell, looking up at a lost paradise.

And then Jean Jacques went a little mad. He threw himself upon the concrete floor of his cell and wept. Great racking sobs, and in his heart arose a hunger greater than he had ever known. A hunger for those far-flung spaces—for that blue dome of heaven—for all that had once been his—before his plunge into the dry death about him.

His soul had been dead—until he saw

those shining wings above him. Then it awoke—weeping softly, whispering to him, yes, Jean Jacques went a little mad.

He did not hear the crash of the thunder, nor see the vivid flashes of venomous lightning above him. He did not feel the swish of cold rain upon his naked flesh. His matted beard and shoulder long hair floated as the water in the cell grew higher with the downpour. He felt nothing. He was listening to the whisper of his soul—calling him to forgotten heights, from the depths of his despair. Mocking him, torturing him with visions long since dead. He did not see the black skies nor hear the shriek of the wind. The most violent storm was within himself.

Later, when his eyes no longer held tears. When the eyeballs were scratchy and maddening, when it was night, he crawled wearily onto his bed of planks and lay trembling and choking with dry sobs. Still later, he knew that nothing existed in the world but the blue sky and soaring wings. He would escape—he would follow the path of the ship which had passed overhead. He would follow—or die.

Two days later they released him from reclusion after four years. He did not hear the guard's: "Ah, my bantam, still living, eh? Oh well, you'll be back—Joseph will get you in time."

He was looking straight ahead. His eyes saw nothing but the shining wings he had seen above the grating of his cell, and his ears were filled with the roar of three radial motors.

They took him to the hospital on Royale. Even the guards looked upon him with something akin to pity in their eyes.

## VI

**T**HERE was a growing tension in Steve Webb's brain. He sat in the nose of the Big Boeing, his hands and feet automatically guiding it along the course he had decided to follow.

From New York to Paramaribo it had been easy sailing. Cruising along at six to ten thousand feet, the sharply marked shore line below with the white line of spume showing as the rollers of the Atlantic hurled themselves against the sand of the shores. Inland, the trackless jungles, but from New York to Paramaribo the

jungles meant nothing—merely a sinister shadow far to the west. It had been a time of flying over clean sea, of clean sand, making the ports of call with the precision of a limited express train.

From Paramaribo it would be different. To follow the coast line among the Guianas and thence along Brazil meant a thousand miles of flying—all off a direct course, all dangerous. From Paramaribo it was a question of striking out across the jungles, boldly, confident that the *South American* would meet every test and conquer, or of flying that extra thousand miles of coast line, taking the chance of being blown to sea, of gasoline failure—of a thousand things which might mean disaster.

Sitting in the cockpit of the big ship, after it had been refueled, Steve Webb made his decision. It would be the track across the jungle. He must blaze the way. The Southern Air Lines could not be expected to add an extra thousand miles to the cost of flying, merely because it gave pilots a prickly sensation up and down the spine to head out over the jungles.

After him other ships would fly. He was the trail-blazer. Men would follow in his path. Knowing that he had gone that way before them would ease such a nervous tension as he now experienced.

He glanced back into the cabin. Henry M. Wood, Southern's President was talking with an official of Southern Air Lines' new field at Paramaribo. He was smiling as he talked. It eased Steve's tension a little.

Then he studied the faces of his two South American passengers. They were gazing out of the windows of the cabin. They were not smiling. There seemed to be a kind of pasty whiteness under the olive of their cheeks. They seemed tense—awaiting something.

**I**T had been like that from New York. Steve Webb knew something of the Latin temperament. It was not stable. It panicked easily. He knew that if a minor incident marred the smooth perfection of the *South American's* flight, these two men would panic. It was written on their faces, in their eyes.

He drew a long breath and turned his eyes toward the face of his fourth passenger. Sometimes he hardly dared to

look at the face of Gloria Wood. It did things to him. It usually caused something akin to a gasp in his chest. A queer icy-warm sensation that made his fingers itch and his heart pump more rapidly.

Time after time he had forced himself to remember that after all he was merely a glorified pilot—and she was the daughter of Southern's president and an heiress in her own right. That she was a gloriously beautiful, soft spoken thoroughbred, and he was just a roughneck, a bird who liked to be alone, delving into the grease and mystery of motors and ships.

Steve Webb knew little about women. His life had been spent in masculine company. He was perfectly at home amid the rough horse play of a flying field—but in a drawing room he felt terribly uncomfortable and his fingers seemed numb.

It was like that when he had visited Gloria's—Miss Wood's, home the week before the take-off. He still trembled and raged at himself as he remembered a teacup sliding off the plate on his lap and smashing on the floor with the faint tinkle of exquisite China. A clumsy lummock—that was Steve Webb's unpraising analysis of himself.

Nevertheless he had to fight with himself to raise the barrier against the warm eyes and the quick smile of Gloria Wood—and the barrier hurt.

She was smiling up at him as he glanced at her from his cockpit. She was not looking out of the window. She seemed interested in nothing but the man who sat at the controls of the big Boeing. There was confidence, pride, assurance in her eyes. She seemed to sense that something worried him. The smile grew brighter. She nodded at him and waved her hand.

He remembered how she had looked on the occasions she had left her seat in the cabin and had taken the co-pilot's place beside him. Sitting there, her eyes fixed on the horizon, he had studied her profile. The firm, determined little chin, the alert blue eyes. The wisps of hair caressing her cheek. The roundness of her shoulders, and the tapering lines of her arms, wrists and fingers. A thoroughbred through and through.

He wondered what it would be like to have her there always—in the co-pilot's seat—helping him fly the course. Then he

abruptly pushed the thought out of his mind.

She had been close to him in that seat in the little cockpit behind the nose motor. So close that her presence seemed to burn his flesh. So close that his hand wanted to reach out and touch her. So close that when she turned to look at his face—the flush of ecstasy upon her own cheeks—a hunger wave swept over him, a hunger to smother her within his arms.

He felt better after a look at her face, after seeing the assurance in her eyes. Something of the tension seemed to subside.

He turned his head and studied the instruments on the board before him. He tested the motors with a long blast of the gun. They were hitting perfectly. The fuel was aboard—the mail—the passengers. The throng on the field was waiting the take-off. There was no reason for further delay. Southern's president was finished with his conversation. Steve glanced at him questioningly and received a nod.

Steve Webb smiled. "Well," he said, trying to force a cheery note into his voice, "we're off."

He threw the throttle against the post. The motors roared a loud defiance. Great clouds of dust eddied up off the field, churned by the powerful slipstream. The big ship ran easily over the field. The tail lifted—higher—higher—the wheels were off.

There was a faint cheer from the spectators. Then the field at Paramaribo was dropping behind. Nothing but the ocean before them—the endless blue stretches of the Atlantic with the white surf line showing the end of the sea and the beginning of land.

**U**P and up, climbing in easy spirals until the altimeter registered five thousand feet and the earth was merely a flat map far below. Then Steve Webb threw the ailerons over and pushed against the rudder. The great ship banked easily toward the south, nosed inland—and the jungle was below.

He knew that the first part of the passage to Rio would not be difficult. He had decided not to stop at Cayenne on the down trip. It was a short hop—by air—from Paramaribo to Cayenne. Better to cover

the great stretch between the Guianas and Rio in one hop—landing and taking off was an added hazard with such a big ship. To Cayenne it was almost a matter of cruising along the coast, after Cayenne it was the jungle.

Something in the air seemed to excite Steve's nerves. The smell of the slipstream. The cruel heat of the heights. The coppery disc of the sun. All seemed a prelude to some hidden danger. Treacherous ground, these tropics. Cruel ground—savage ground.

He lifted the Boeing another two thousand feet.

Then the coast of French Guiana. Sweeping southward, cruising at better than a hundred miles an hour. Earth fleeing behind the rudder of the Boeing. Then Cayenne—the capital. People down there would expect a stop—satisfy them on the way home—going to Rio now. He repressed a desire to open the throttle a little. No go—had to nurse the motors.

A rustling beside him. A smile. Gloria Wood had stepped into the co-pilot's seat. She was looking over the side, studying the ground below. Somehow he felt relieved. Dots on the ocean—dots and outlines of a little white city, and the sullen brown of a sluggishly flowing river.

"St. Laurent's," he told her. "That's the center of the French Penal Colony. Devil's Island, you know. The little island out there gave its name to the entire system. That's Devil's Island—that little dot away out there. They keep only political prisoners there. That other one is Joseph. That's where they have that terrible punishment prison, and across from it, over that tiny channel, is Royale, another part of the prison."

She was staring down. After a minute she turned to him. "Poor fellows," she said in a low voice. "I've read about what they have to endure. Driven out there to die. Living death for all of them. Alone—never a visitor from the outside world. Just think of what they must be thinking, seeing us flying overhead. How they must be wishing that they were up here with us—flying to liberty! How they have struggled to win through the jungle—a foot—and how easy our passage must look to them, going to liberty—going over Guiana to the rest of the world! I should go mad if I

were one of them looking up at us." She was suddenly silent.

"It's probably more terrible than anyone has ever told," admitted Webb. "People who write about those things can never understand how the prisoner feels and how deep his misery. After all, the writer is never a prisoner. He is only a person aloof, trying to express what he thinks must be in the hearts of those wretched men. I've often thought that if I ever came to be imprisoned I should kill myself. I could not live cooped up in a cell—taken away from—all this." He waved his arm about the horizon.

They were passing over Joseph. The island was directly below them. They made out the grim outline of the disciplinary prison.

His eyes swept the horizon. He didn't like the looks of the sun. He did not like the quality of the air. There was something about it. It seemed dead—rotten—like the earth beneath. He did not like the stillness. He stared at a spot on the southeast horizon.

There was a little black patch there. The size of a dollar. A black gathering of low-flying nimbus.

HE held the course for another minute. The conviction of danger was growing within him. That strange sense developed by pilots, which warns them of unseen dangers, was working strongly within him. Then, the wind was whistling about them. It seemed to come from nowhere. The big ship bucked sharply in a sudden strong blast. The black cloud to the southeast was growing larger with the passing of each second. It was heading straight for them.

He swung inland abruptly. "We're going to have a storm," he told Gloria Wood quietly. "They get these sudden blows in the tropics. Come up out of nowhere, rage for a few minutes and then disappear in the same manner. Dangerous while they last. I'm going to try climbing above this one—"

He put the Boeing into an easy climb, coaxing every ounce of power from the three motors.

But the storm was coming up to meet them. It seemed to stain the entire south horizon. It closed in behind them. Back

over St. Laurent the sky was black and the clouds were on the ground.

For an instant he thought of turning back, of trying to run for Cayenne. A single glance over the rudder told him that retreat was blocked.

The wind was screaming now. The giant liner was being tumbled about like a cork on a turbulent sea. He was fighting the controls. His eyes were studying the ground and the horizon ahead. That horizon was lowering and glowering. They seemed to have flown into a black pocket—into the vortex of the sudden storm.

The sun was being blocked out. It stood behind the black clouds, giving off a strange brassy light.

Further inland. Get away from the sea! Get earth beneath the wheels of the ship! Get lower!

Nimbus floating under the Boeing. Wisps now, in a minute thick clouds. Going blind all about. Get down—get down! Force that heavy bucking thing toward earth.

Little rivulets of sweat broke out from under Steve Webb's hair. Running down his cheeks. Frantic thoughts. Gloria sitting there beside him. The jungle—nothing must happen to her! He forgot the others.

He heard a shrill scream from one of the South American passengers. He turned his head for a single moment. He saw a pasty green face with staring eyes and open mouth. A face shrieking things at him. A mad face—mad with fright.

Webb reached for the pistol in the holster attached to the instrument board. He whirled with it in his hand while the Boeing bucked madly.

"Get down in that seat!" he shouted. "Get down, or by God I'll drill you through the head."

The man collapsed into his seat. He was sobbing hysterically. He covered his face with his hands. His companion was looking out of the cabin windows—looking out with vacant eyes—staring into the storm clouds pressing around them.

Laboring motors. He turned to Gloria.

"Those bozos may get a crazy idea," he said. "They may rush me—try to take the controls away from me. I've seen it done before. Birds like that go insane at a time like this. Can you shoot?"

She nodded her head. Her eyes were calm.

"O. K.," he told her jerkily. "Here's my gun. I'm trusting you. I can't watch those guys and run this ship. You watch them. Have no mercy. If they try coming up here—shoot—shoot when you know they're coming and can't be stopped. It's got to be done for their own good—and ours. Will you do it?"

Her hand closed over the butt of the gun. She nodded her head. He marveled that her voice was calm when she answered.

"I'll shoot when I think I have to," she promised.

He turned back to the controls.

**D**IM outlines of the jungle below. Motors roaring madly, straining to pull the ship through the blow. Slipstream crackling like lightning thrusts. Water in the air—he could smell it. Wings rocketing up and down.

Steve held the controls with both hands, his weight thrust against the rudder bar. Going down—down—trying to race the nimbus to the ground. The wind swept madly through the tops of the crowded trees below. Lashing them, bending them—uprooting them. Hurricane! Tropical hurricane, exerting its blind, terrific force through heavens and earth alike.

He peered toward the unbroken outline of trees. Eyes watching for a single open space—a single clearing. Going blind—the nimbus flying under the ship.

Down to within five hundred feet. Wrestling with the controls. The muscles in his arms were aching—his legs were iron. The great wing swayed and rocked, the heavy ship bucking like a pursuit Spad in a gale.

His nerves leaped madly. A stabbing report rang out close to his ear. The stabbing report of vicious thunder. A scarlet light flashed before his eyes. Then came the faint smell of burning powder.

His head whipped around. He saw Gloria Wood, her eyes gleaming, a pistol in her rigid hand. He had almost forgotten the pistol. There was a little wisp of white smoke curling up from the muzzle.

He followed the pointing pistol with his eyes. He saw a writhing something on the floor of the cabin. There was a smear of blood running from the right shoulder. He

recognized it as one of the South American passengers—one who had shrieked at him like a madman.

Gloria's voice was in his ear. It was tense, brittle. "I watched him," she was saying. "He left his chair and tried to steal up behind you. I shot him just as he reached out to grab you around the neck. I hit him in the shoulder, I think."

He had a fleeting glimpse of Henry M. Wood, the father of this girl. He sat quietly in his seat. His hands were grasping the arms of his chair. He was watching his daughter. Steve Webb drew a deep breath. There was no fear in the eyes of Southern's president—nothing, excepting a wondering, proud, satisfied something as he studied his daughter's face. It was as if a great test had been faced and met by someone he loved above everything in life. He did not even glance at the blood-smeared man upon the floor.

After a minute the man became quiet. Slobbering froth drooled from the corners of his mouth. His companion sat crouched in his seat, his face livid with fear, his eyes staring at the inert man upon the floor.

**T**HEY roared down over the trees. Down drafts pushed them remorselessly toward the earth until the heart was paralyzed with waiting for the Boeing to crash into the trees. Motors screamed and fought to lift the ship against the wind pressure. They rose sluggishly after an eternity—then suddenly rushed skyward, borne aloft by another counter draft. Staggered along—slipping, careening, threshing, bobbing.

Ahead, a sudden pitch-black break in the trees. A little break the size of a postage stamp.

Steve Web's eyes devoured space—they seemed telescopes probing that space. His heart was leaping madly. Was there a way—could they get down before the storm ripped them to fragments—was it a clearing or a mirage?

His arm pushed against the stick, forcing the Boeing's nose lower and lower. Great drops of rain hurtled down from the sky driven like machine-gun bullets by the raging wind. That would be the end. Let it be a clearing!—anything big enough to put a pair of wheels into. Half a mile distant. . . .

Steve's heart pounded against his ribs. A shriek in his brain. He was reaching the end of his physical strength. The force of the storm bore against the controls. His arms were like weights of lead. His feet were numb—he could no longer feel the rudder.

A hoarse cry came in his throat. It was a clearing—a tiny spot in the heart of the jungle. Less than five acres—and the force of the wind against the nose of the ship.

The throttle was against the post. He was trying to force the Boeing earthward, in the direction of that tiny opening. There might be jagged stumps on the ground—he could not see the ground itself. It was a chance they must take—better jagged stumps than crashing into the tree tops at full speed in the grip of the hurricane.

Foot by foot the Boeing fought a way earthward.

The three motors droned and struggled against the wind. The clearing was under them.

Steve Webb's hand was on the throttle. He knew that if the wind suddenly changed direction—he had a picture of the *South American* crashing into the narrow space at full speed, driven by a thousand horse power. The wheels hung over the trees. It was like landing an autogiro. Hanging there over that tiny clearing, flying in under full gun—like a nightmare—a terrible nightmare—but no imagining of excited brain could be as bad as this—waiting for the break in the wind and shuddering, crashing death. Fighting for each foot of descent.

He held the wing down against the rush of the ground current, watching the walls of trees coming toward the nose of the Boeing.

The wheels touched—trembled, rocked—the wind trying to lift one wing. He cut the throttle. The ship came to an abrupt stop—and rolled back, pushed by the pressure of the wind until the tail skid dug in and held like an anchor.

He leaped from his seat like a madman and dropped to the ground. He must hold that wing, somehow. He shrieked at Gloria to dig the tie ropes out from the baggage compartment. He hung onto the end of that great wing, at times lifted off his feet, as if the hurricane toyed with him and mocked at his puny strength.

A man fought a way toward him—a man with a coil of rope. It was Henry Wood. His face was still calm. He drove a stake into the soft ground with unpracticed strokes of a wooden mallet. A sudden deluge of rain, cold as ice and stinging as whip lashes, descended upon them. They had the right wing tied fast.

They leaped at the left.

Steve Webb worked like a madman. He knew that he must save this ship. The mere fact that they were safe meant nothing. They had made a landing in a tiny clearing in an uncharted jungle. They must have this ship to find a way out of a situation which might be worse than death in the air in the grip of the hurricane.

The ship was the sole hope of rescue. It must be saved. And so he worked like a savage—his shirt ripped away by the force of the wind—laboring in the stinging rain, his flesh steaming, the muscles of his chest and torso standing out like corded ropes.

WHEN he had finished the staking process, he looked up. His heart gave a great leap.

In the teeth of the wind, her face turned to the rain, fearlessly, Gloria Wood was trying to fit the canvas cover over the nose motor. He saw that she had succeeded in covering the right wing motor. A warm something leaped into his heart. He rushed to help her.

They worked side by side in the frenzy of rain. At times the wind blew her against him and he felt that same old icy-hot something in his veins and the tingle in his fingers. He saw the water coursing down her cheeks—the flattened soaked hair against her face—the determination in her eyes.

It was during those minutes that he knew she belonged to him. That she was Steve Webb's co-pilot. The only co-pilot he had ever known. The only co-pilot he had ever desired.

After a while the wind subsided. There was only the downpour of rain. Torrents falling from the blank heavens. They crawled into the cabin of the liner to escape the water. One South American passenger was still on the floor—blood upon his shirt. The other still crouched in his seat—mad terror thick in his eyes.

He saw the girl rip away the shirt from the man she had shot and examine the

wound. Then she took a first aid kit from the cockpit and bandaged the hurt with gentle fingers. When she had finished she took a seat beside Steve Webb.

"It isn't bad," she said in her calm voice. "It went through the flesh of his shoulder. I think he fainted from fright."

He nodded at her.

He was thinking of the time when the rain would be over—when the *South American* must fly out of this five acre clearing—when they would be face to face with the impossibility of such a take-off.

## VII

TO the average convict coming from reclusion on Joseph to the hospital on Royale, the transition was like a passage between hell and heaven. The hospital had actual beds! Sheets, sometimes blankets enough to keep warm. Even to the men who had practiced self-mutilation, who had risked horrible death, the reward was worth the suffering.

Food—even milk—enough food to satisfy the numb gnawing of ever present hunger. Companionship, the sound of voices, the sight of human beings. A cigarette—there was no tobacco on Joseph—there was nothing on Joseph but the gratings overhead and the concrete cells and silence—and death.

But the hospital on Royale meant nothing to Jean Jacques. He was impatient. A feverish activity filled his soul. The sound of motors and the glint of a wing in the sunlight filled his mind.

It meant nothing to him that he was looked upon with awe by his fellow convicts—that they pointed him out and whispered about him. The boy who had survived almost four years of reclusion. It meant nothing that the hospital orderlies slipped him delicacies on the side and that the hospital barber came to his bed and clipped his hair and shaved his face. It meant nothing that he knew the touch of water on his body for the first time in two years. His eyes were fixed on that far horizon to the south—the horizon over which the strange ship had flown—that amazing, stupendous, gigantic ship.

He was eager to follow the trail of that monster of the skies. His breath came fast as he thought of it. Strength seemed

to seep into his withered muscles. His body was more erect, his eyes glowing.

At night he reclined upon the bed, sleep impossible, his brain filled with fast-moving pictures. Jean Jacques grasping the controls of such a ship. Jean Jacques knowing again the wind of the heavens. Tears rolled down his cheeks and wet the rough pillow under his neck as he dreamed such visions. He must hurry—he must get away.

But he was wise enough to control his emotions. This time he would plan carefully. This time there would be no mistake. This time he would escape or die.

First he must have food. Always before he had fled the prison, thinking nothing of his needs when he found himself in the jungles. This time he would think. He would take a bag strapped to his back. In it would be food—much food.

Then he needed a pistol. No black would ever put hands upon him again. He would not get in fear of jungle animals. Ah, a pistol! None but the guards had pistols. That would be difficult. He thought in his mind how he might obtain a pistol.

The food was easy. Each meal he removed a part of the food upon his plate—things which would not spoil. And then it was easy to ask the convict orderlies for extra food. Four cans of sardines—they believed him starving after his two years of reclusion. They were trying to be kind. They brought him extra food for an entire week, risking grave punishment.

Once he went into the kitchens. There had been knives there, placed carelessly upon a butcher's block. He lounged against the block. After a minute he had one of the keen-bladed things up his sleeve. That night he sewed it inside the leg of his trousers.

Ten days in the hospital. Ten interminable days with his brain screaming at him to make the break for freedom, and his common sense forcing himself to be calm—until he could prepare. After ten days his burlap bag was crammed with food. He was ready.

He had been studying the movements of the armed guard which patrolled the outside of the hospital during the night. Never before had he contemplated violence to a guard. That meant certain death.

But he must have a pistol. He would

take it from the guard. The keen blade of the knife at the guard's throat—a low whispered threat in the darkness—and he would have a pistol and extra ammunition in the guard's belt. He knew the guards—men rotted out by years in Guiana—cowards—bulldozing the cowering convicts as only cowards could do. There would be no resistance to the knife.

Yes, he would get a pistol. It was easy when one planned things.

He felt strong. The food of the hospital. The sense of comfort in his belly. Stronger than he had ever felt—added strength coming from the vision of Jean Jacques in the clouds.

But convicts have sharp eyes.

The orderlies, the guards—none of them suspected that Jean Jacques intended a new break for freedom. What man, liberated after four years of reclusion, would invite a longer punishment of the same nature by foolish plans for escape? Again, Jean Jacques seemed subdued—beaten. He was accepting favors—never before had he accepted favors from anyone.

**T**HERE was one who was not fooled. His name was Manuel. Black Manuel they called him. A big, hulking, evil-eyed brute of a man, his body covered with tattooing, his bullet head covered with old scars, his face pock-marked with the ravages of smallpox.

Black Manuel was a murderer. For profit. Until the *Surete* had laid him by the heels his favorite diversion was the haunting of seaports, the skulking through dark alleys, the pouncing upon drunken seamen who were ashore after a long cruise—the pay of many months in the pockets of their trousers.

There was no mercy in Manuel. He merely drove a long knife between the shoulders of his victims and dragged their still twitching bodies into the alleys. Practiced hands searched pockets, stripped them of all value, and then Black Manuel fled the spot, the proceeds of his murders clutched in his own pockets.

Black Manuel killed because he loved to kill—and because he loved to spend money in the waterfront dives he knew so well.

But once he had made an error. The knife, driven into the victim's back, had slithered against a bone and had been de-

flected from a vital spot. Manuel had been hurried in his work. There was a woman who waited for him in a *bistrot*—a woman for whom he desired money. He did not notice the knife had not been driven in a straight line. He merely dragged the victim within his alley, stripped him, and left him.

The victim had been found because of his groans. He had been taken to a hospital. He recovered. He remembered having seen Black Manuel following him from the estaminet in which he had spent the evening.

So Black Manuel had been arrested and charged with the crime. He protested his innocence. There was no direct evidence. There seldom are witnesses to such a business as murder in dark alleyways. But the judge looked at Black Manuel and knew him to be guilty. He sentenced him to life imprisonment and banishment at hard labor in the Guianas—Devil's Island.

Black Manuel had laughed aloud. Devil's Island! Poof! Child's play. He would escape in three months. But he had not escaped in three months—nor in three years.

He had made one attempt. It brought him six months on Joseph. It was during the time Jean Jacques was in reclusion for two years. Reclusion had made Black Manuel very cautious—at heart he was a coward. He could not be alone. He could not stand the solitude. He could not stand memories of a knife being plunged into flesh out of dark alleys. It did things to him—made him insane. He bribed his way after being liberated from reclusion. Bribed his way into an orderly's berth on Royale.

There he formed a clique. It was composed of the most brutal of the convicts on Royale. They made a practice of bullying prisoners—extorting money, wringing from them the pitifully few francs left to them. There were dark tales of Black Manuel and his clique. Tales of men put to torture—of beating to death—but Black Manuel had the friendship of the guards. He laughed at the scowls of fellow convicts.

He had not thought again of escape until Jean Jacques had been brought into the hospital from Joseph.

In a way Black Manuel was a psychologist. He knew men. He studied Jean Jacques. After a while he was convinced

that Jean Jacques was plotting a new escape. After a while he became convinced that this time Jean Jacques would succeed. He watched him like a cat.

Once, while Jean Jacques was in the kitchen, Black Manuel rummaged through the burlap sack so carefully concealed beneath Jean Jacques bed. He whistled to himself. Food! That meant escape—and planned escape. So?

That night Black Manuel consulted with his followers.

"It is certain!" he told them in a whisper as they crouched in the shadow of the hospital wall. "This Jean Jacques will make a new attempt to escape—and this time he will succeed. I feel it. After all, he has more experience in escape than any man on the islands. He plans carefully. I have watched his eyes when he thought things out. Yes—this time he will succeed. I mean to succeed with him. We all can share his success." He paused importantly.

There was an eager whisper from the circle about him. "How?" It seemed that each of the circle asked the question at the same instant.

"It is simple, *mes enfants*," he said with a wave of his hand. "We cannot go to this Jean and say that we desire to escape with him. That would be useless. He is a lone hand. He would laugh at us. But we can follow him!"

He gestured impressively. "We can follow him in his escape and once we are free of this accursed hell hole, we can take him prisoner and forced him to share his knowledge with us—lead us by the route he intends taking himself. You see he knows—he is certain of his success. Something has happened to him. Someone has given him plans or instructions over there on Joseph. A guard perhaps. Perhaps someone waits in the jungle to guide him to safety. Who knows? But I know of what men think, and I can see success in the eyes of this Jean Jacques. Shall we throw away this chance?"

There was a series of grunts about him.

"We follow him," growled the chorus. "We follow him. We let him think that he is alone, and then, over the river we join him—in his escape. If he will not tell—"

"A finger twisted off, or perhaps a burning stick to the flesh of the stomach, eh?"

That is what you were thinking, my friends?" laughed Black Manuel. "Oh, there are many ways to gain his guidance. It is agreed then? We follow him?"

Again the grunts. After a minute the circle dissolved into evil shadows against the walls of the hospital. Within, Jean Jacques dreamed of his escape from the Islands of the Devil—not seeing the flaming eyes of Black Manuel watching him through the gloom of night in the hospital ward.

The next night Jean Jacques made his break.

IT was Sunday. The hospital seemed quieter on Sunday than any other day. The guards seemed more lax than ever. They lolled about. At times they dozed. Again it was hot—the terrible, scorching heat seemed to wilt everything.

Throughout the day Jean Jacques knew that he was going with the coming of darkness. He had watched the little boat which had brought an official to the hospital. It was pulled up on the bank out of the reach of the swift current. The oars were in the oarlocks—blades inside the boat. The convict boatman was probably in the kitchen wolfing food. Coming to Royale was a treat which might be experienced once in a lifetime.

Twilight—the boat was still there. Dusk—still there. Nine o'clock. Stillness all over the prison. Breathing of sleeping men.

Jean Jacques drew his sack of provisions from under his bed. He slipped the knife from under the stitches of his trouser leg and under the sleeve of his shirt. He counted over his treasures. A small bottle of iodine. A small bottle of stuff that took the sting out of insect bites. A precious can of coffee—a real prize.

He slipped them all into his burlap haversack and ran his arm through the ropes he had fitted to it for carrying on the back.

Like a shadow he crept along the ward, between the beds toward the door at the end of the long room. Outside the slow footsteps of the armed guard approached the door.

He waited in the shadow of the doorway. He saw the bulk of the guard looming out of the darkness. A step

past the door, and then Jean Jacques' left arm crooked about the guard's neck—elbow over wind pipe. At the same instant the right hand brought the knife between the guard's shoulder. It pricked the flesh. The guard trembled as if with a sudden ague.

Jean Jacques spoke in a whisper. "Stand still!" he commanded. "Make one move or outcry, and—" The knife pricked a trifle deeper.

There was no sound. Jean Jacques' left hand worked at the buckle of the guard's belt.

After a minute it came free bearing the holster and the pistol, heavy with the weight of extra ammunition. Still silence.

From under his shirt he brought several carefully cut bits of thin rope. A noose gathered about the wrists of the guard. It tightened, imprisoning his hands. Then the ropes were about his knees and his ankles. He toppled to the ground. A rag was stuffed into his mouth and bound in place by a string about his neck.

Jean Jacques looked down at him an instant as if to assure himself that he had omitted nothing—made no mistakes. Then he buckled the belt and its holster about his own waist and strode softly toward the river—and the little boat with oars.

Within the hospital ward Black Manuel stirred to activity. He cursed within his soul as he watched Jean Jacques' preparations. He had not expected such an early attempt. It took him five precious minutes to awaken his clique and to assemble the food they had stolen for the escape.

Then, in single file, they followed on the trail of the fugitive. They had not anticipated the presence of the boat. They thought that Jean Jacques would attempt to swim the river. They were prepared for that. Along the shore they had cached innocent-looking logs—logs which would support them as they followed Jean Jacques' trail. They knew nothing of the trussed-up guard.

They heard the sound of oars from the river.

They plunged into the water in a panic of dread, dragging the logs after them.

Jean Jacques had stolen a boat. He was escaping them.

They paddled furiously, ears straining for the sound of oarlocks. There was no

further sound. They came to the far bank. For an hour they searched the bank until they found the boat Jean Jacques had used in his crossing. They cursed among themselves. It was dark. They must wait until morning to take up his trail. In the meantime the escape would be discovered. They took cover on the edge of the jungle and waited, crouching out of sight of Royale.

With the dawn they were on Jean Jacques' trail.

Marks of the wooden sandal soles on the sand, then on the rotting crust of jungle earth. It was easy to follow such a path, but Jean Jacques had a start.

A long start. They followed, eyes to the ground, crowding upon the heels of the man in front, like phantom slaves following a ghost trail.

## VIII

STEVE WEBB labored like a maniac to win a way out of the trap into which the storm had forced the *South American*. When the storm had taken its last vicious fling at the helpless ship, he crawled from the cabin for a survey of the situation. Within one minute after his feet touched the ground he knew the situation was hopeless.

There was no chance for the *South American* to rise above the trees to continue her journey to Rio. She was imprisoned.

Above her on every side rose the tall trees of the jungle. That the clearing was there was little short of a miracle. Once rubber bleeders had worked that section. The clearing had been a camp site. The headquarters camp site from which men radiated into the jungles, searching for the rubber trees, fighting against the savages of the country, returning gaunt, half-crazed, to trade such labor for pitiful wages.

The clearing measured less than a hundred yards long by eighty yards wide. Looking at it, he wondered how the *South American* had ever made a landing in the place without wrecking herself. The force of the head wind had been the saving factor—the saving factor which had rescued them from death in the air, only to bring them face to face with death in the heart of the jungle.

Calculating his position, he discovered that they were within two hundred miles of Cayenne, French Guiana. Two hours' flying distance. He suppressed a groan. Two hours' flying distance—but an eternity through such a jungle. An impossibility, any thought of return by foot through that stretch of poisonous tropics, inhabited only by savage tribes of which they knew nothing.

He knew that madness lay in idleness. He did not communicate the hopelessness of the situation to the others of the party. He even tried to smile, to show a cheerful front. He deceived the two South American passengers into a semblance of sanity. But he did not deceive Gloria Wood nor her father.

"It's pretty hopeless, isn't it, Steve?" Wood had asked.

Steve had watched his face for a full minute without replying. The South Americans were sleeping in the cabin. Gloria stood at her father's shoulder. He looked deep into her eyes and drew a long breath, like a man about to plunge into ice-cold water.

"We have one chance," he said in a low tone, and without an attempt to hide the seriousness of the situation. "If we can fell enough of those trees to make a runway, we might be able to take off. That's the chance."

They glanced at the towering trees about them. The trees stood in thick ranks, row on row, hardly a foot of space between trunks. High in the air the foliage was laced and interlaced into a tangled mass of coiling branches.

A chalk whiteness settled upon Henry Wood's face. He was looking at his daughter. In his mind he had a picture of her dying of starvation—in the hands of the jungle tribes—dying of some strange fever.

HE cleared his throat to break away the hard lump which threatened to strangle him.

"And for the attempt we have what?" he asked quietly.

A half smile played about Steve's mouth. "We have one hand ax and one saw," informed Steve. "I had them included as a part of the tools of the ship. I figure we need four hundred yards. That means cutting a runway three hundred yards long

and about fifty yards wide. I can take her off in that distance. It means tight going—but I can do it."

He was studying the trees—hundreds of them thronged that space he needed to free the *South American*. "I'm not worried so much about the labor of cutting the trees. Working methodically, we can fell the trees—in time. Food worries me—and above all, water. We have enough iron rations to do four people for a month. If you've never lived on iron rations you don't know what it means. Still, you can maintain life on them—but water—that's different. We have one tank of water—about ten gallons. It was included for emergencies—a forced landing at sea. With care it will last us two weeks. Perhaps in that time we can find a spring or some other source."

Gloria Wood placed her hand on his arm. "You'll do it, Steve," she said softly. "I feel it in my heart—you'll pull us through. I don't know how, but I know you won't be beaten. We'll back you up—take your orders—work like slaves. You're boss. Tell us what to do."

He smiled at her. "We'll get out," he assured her. "You'll be the incentive. We'll work for you."

He felt the answering pressure of her fingers upon his arm. A great strength seemed to well up within him. He turned toward the ship and disappeared into the cabin. After a minute he returned carrying the hand ax and the saw.

Without a word he went to work upon the nearest tree. The soggy chips flew in a shower as the keen edge of the axe bit deeply into the trunk. After ten minutes there was a crackling. The tree swayed. The trunk splintered. It toppled over—away from the ship. He turned to them, wiping the dripping perspiration from his face with the sleeve of his shirt.

"There!" he grinned. "That's the start. From now on we are fighting the jungle. Slowly and surely, that's the slogan.

"One at a time. Pecking away—until we have the four hundred yards clear. After that—home." He grinned at them confidently.

"It almost sounds easy the way you say it," smiled Wood. "Hand me that saw."

And so they had begun the struggle with the jungle. Stubbornly they hacked and

sawed at the trees. Inch by inch they crawled forward. Through day after day, week after week until they had lost all count of time. Until trees were horrible nightmares. Until hands were blistered and raw from contact with ax and saw. And Gloria labored with the men.

The South Americans worked like demons for the first two or three days. They threw themselves against the trees as if seeking to push them over by sheer nervous force. And then, after three days of effort, which seemed to advance them nothing at all, they suddenly threw down the tools and walked away to sulk in the South American's cabin.

Steve looked after them.

"The Latin temperament," he said with his queer smile. "Some of them can't stand the gaff. For a minute they're world beaters, but if the job stretches out a little—it licks them. They'll sulk like spoiled kids. They'll come around in time—when they discover that we have food and water for workers—only." There was an ominous note in his voice.

AT noon of that third day he faced the mutiny of the South American passengers and vanquished them. The food and water was locked in the cargo space of the *South American*. He had delegated the job of doling it to himself. Quite openly he issued rations to Gloria and Mr. Wood and himself, and without looking at the sulking passengers snapped the lock on the door leading to the cargo space, and proceeded to gnaw upon the unpalatable rations.

There was a scream of rage from the passenger Gloria had shot. "Thieves, murderers, traitors!" he screamed, throwing himself at Webb. "You would starve us—you would murder us—to get the food for yourself."

Quite unfeelingly Steve Webb met the impassioned rush of the fellow. He planted himself firmly in the center of the cabin. He waited until the South American lunged at him, and then his right arm whipped through a short arc from the shoulder. There was a sharp thud of knuckles upon flesh, and the olive-skinned madman seemed to crumple suddenly and went crashing to the floor. Webb glanced questioningly at the second South Ameri-

can, but the fellow shifted his eyes and slid down in his chair.

"I'll tell you this so you can tell it to your partner when he wakes up," said Webb in his calm voice. "From now on only people who work will be the people who will eat. If you don't work you'll have to rustle your own grub out of the jungle. We can't force you to work—and you can't force us to feed you. It's fifty-fifty. You can make your own decisions."

He went on eating his dinner as if he had not met and battered a way through a dangerous crisis.

The next morning the two South Americans reported for work. They seemed sheepish, ashamed of themselves. Webb met them as if nothing had happened. After that they worked in shifts.

Half an hour with the ax or saw, then half an hour lugging logs. Then half an hour of rest. Only Steve Webb worked triple shifts.

So it went for three weeks. At the end of that time they had cleared a space fifty feet long by fifty yards wide. They had dragged fallen trees away from the runway. They had dug snake-like roots from the rotten soil—and they were near to the end of their collective stamina.

Steve Webb was gaunt. His cheeks were sunken and his eyes gleaming. His hands were bleeding talons. He was committing slow suicide by the immensity of his labors. But he was still filled with the grim determination to conquer these silent trees which held them prisoner.

He was in the mental state which had made him such a dangerous foeman when he had flown with twin Vickers, scowling from over his motor cowling.

In those days men had said that Steve Webb didn't understand what defeat meant. He was proving it anew in the heart of the Guiana jungles.

## IX

DAY after day Jean Jacques stumbled along through the almost impassable jungle. He was fighting a stubborn way toward a goal which existed only in his imagination. He was following the picture of those droning motors and that shining great wing which had flown over Joseph.

His brain was dizzy. He panted like

a hot and weary dog. Sweat from his head blinded his eyes. Insects swarmed about him, making each foot of his progress a torture.

Thorn trees ripped at his flesh and tore the scanty shreds of clothing from his body. Reeling, choking, he went on and on, driven by that vision within his brain.

He had no idea as to the path of his journey. He only knew that the great ship which had passed over that reclusion cell had headed this way—and Jean Jacques was following in the track of the ship.

At times his provision bag was a burden too great to bear. The fiber ropes had already cut grooves into the flesh of his shoulders upon which the insects settled and fed—but he knew that he must have food for his emaciated body—he must carry that stale bread and that molding food—until the end.

He suffered for the lack of water. Sometimes he chewed the leaves from passing trees, not knowing whether they were poison, hardly caring. Sometimes he came to a brackish pool of water surrounded by slimy mud marked with the spoor of a dozen different animals. When he came to such a pool he threw himself on his face, as the animals did, and drank greedily.

Sometimes he crawled into a tree to sleep when the short jungle twilight gave way to complete jungle darkness. Sometimes he was too weary to climb a tree—he merely threw his body upon the earth and waited for the dawn.

Day after day—strength leaving him. He could feel that he was not as strong as when he started. He could not march so long. He was forced to rest more often. His breath came in shorter bursts and seemed to hurt his lungs. But he closed his eyes and dreamed of the giant ship—and his heart forced his weary muscles to drag his body onward.

Fourteen weary days in the heart of that jungle. Fourteen weary days, one like the other. Dawn, and onward—afraid to stop for the fear that he might not be able to rise and continue the march. Dark—and his aching, feverish body hugging the damp earth beneath the close-packed trees. Then a new dawn—pains in his arms and legs. Pains in his brain. Pains in his chest. Staggering erect—and on and on—after the vision.

He knew when he threw himself on the earth at the end of that fourteenth day that he had reached the end. The burlap sack was empty. Twelve hours before he had gnawed at the last hard, precious crust of prison bread. The last mouthful of food left to him.

He might rise with the dawn, force himself onward for a few hours—but at the end of that time he would fall to the ground—the vision lost to him. He had to fight with himself to keep from fighting a way ahead during the black hours of the night. His head was dizzy. His eyes were seeing great red dots. His hands trembled. His legs were shaking.

Dawn! He searched the burlap sack for any crumbs that might have remained. He knew in advance that it was completely empty. He permitted it to remain on the ground when he helped himself up by hugging the trunk of a tree with his arms.

He lurched forward. He was a grotesque, horrible sight. Skinny legs and body. Matted hair and bristle. Covered with blood and earth. Great rips in the flesh where cruel thorns had attempted to stay his quest. Naked, excepting for the rag of his shirt wrapped about his loins. Going ahead. Nothing left physically—going ahead on sheer nerve—following after the vision of Jean Jacques among the clouds.

Then—when his eyes were going blind, he heard the sound.

**H**E stopped to listen. It was a regular thudding sound. It came to him from the depths of the jungle. It sounded over his right shoulder. The heart which had almost forgotten to beat leaped in sudden hope. Perhaps it was a band of rubber bleeders. Perhaps he could get food. Perhaps he could go on. He turned and lurched away in the direction of the thudding sound. He knew that sound—the biting of an ax blade into the trunk of a tree. He had spent too many days in the festering jungle—farmed out to private interests—to mistake that.

He came to the edge of a clearing. His eyes seemed blurred. Nothing seemed in proportion. There was a great orange mass in front of him—a great bird-like thing. . . .

Suddenly his vision cleared. His hands

became fists—his body went rigid—a scream froze in his throat. He took a stumbling step forward, caught himself and broke into a shuffling, dragging trot.

He saw a man turn toward him. A man who had surprise and alarm written on his face. He heard a shriek—from another man—a brown-skinned man. Then he uttered a shriek from his own throat. It was a hoarse, rasping note—but it was a shout of triumph.

He felt the world dissolving. His knees would not support his weight. He was sinking to the ground—trying to crawl toward that orange and silver bird by digging his nails in the earth and pulling himself forward.

He had won—he had won.

The words screamed in his brain. He had found the giant bird of the skies. The miracle had taken place. He felt his face plough into the rough earth—and then blackness.

HE opened his eyes. His brain seemed clearer than it had been since that night when his second life began. There was a taste of brandy in his mouth. His body felt deliciously warm. His head was pillowed on a man's knee.

He stared up at the man's face. Something was stirring in his brain—something out of his first existence. Some wonderful memory. A face was being born—a face that looked at him over the side of a Spad. He was trying to speak.

Croaking sounds. The man who held him was bending down to catch the weak words.

"I know you," Jean Jacques was saying. "I know you—my friend—you are Steve Webb of the Lafayette."

There was a look of amazement on Steve Webb's face. He stared down at the man in his arms. Visions were stirring within Steve Webb's brain—visions which also had to do with Spads and flaming skies. There was something about this terribly emaciated creature. Something very familiar, and it had to do with Spads and wartime.

"I think I know you, too," he was telling Jean Jacques. "I am trying to remember your face—"

"It will be difficult. I have no face." Jean Jacques was trying to smile. He was silent for an instant. Then his shoul-

ders seemed to throw themselves back a trifle proudly. His voice was firmer.

"I am Jean Jacques Victor Conte de Vris," he said. "Once I was an adjutant in the French Air Service. Once I was attached to the Lafayette Escadrille. Once we flew side by side—you and I—"

His head fell upon his arm—his eyes closed.

Above him Steve Webb was murmuring: "My God! My God!" Visions were flooding his memory. Jean Jacques—the Debonair—the Reckless—the Perfect Pursuit Pilot. Jean Jacques with the light of High Resolve in his eyes—unafraid—laughing in the face of death—flying out each morning to tempt and to mock at that death.

And this was Jean Jacques.

The white scars of his honorable wounds showing white against the sun-baked brown of his filthy flesh. This gaunt, stringy-muscled, naked thing the jungle had vomited into his lap—Jean Jacques.

And then he remembered. It was like taking a musty volume down from a shelf. Rumors that Jean Jacques had killed someone—over a woman—had been sent to Devil's Island. Years ago that had been—centuries.

He picked the frail person of Jean Jacques up in his arms and bore him gently into the cabin of the Boeing. He placed him on seat cushions and poured another measure of brandy down his throat. He looked up to see Gloria's eyes asking a great question.

"I know him," Steve was saying, a choke in his voice. "Once he was my ideal—he was a hero—one of the greatest pursuit pilots of the war—"

She asked nothing more.

## X

IT had not been easy to follow the crazy trail left by Jean Jacques through the jungle. A dozen times the six convicts who followed after Black Manuel cursed him for a fool and told him that they were crazy men following in the track of a man still crazier. There seemed to be no purpose and no aim to Jean Jacques' wanderings.

As the days passed and they found no evidence that someone awaited Jean Jacques to guide him to freedom, they grew more

and more discouraged and sullen. They had not been able to steal any great quantity of food. It would not last indefinitely—and they were afraid. Afraid of the jungle darkness, afraid of the shadows beneath the trees. They had no more strength than the average Guiana convict. Quarreling among themselves, they actually made slower progress than did Jean Jacques.

Again, they were not inspired by the vision which drove Jean Jacques on when his body trembled and his strength ebbed. On the tenth day after leaving Royale one of the six slumped to earth. For two days he had been dragging along on leaden feet, his strength failing, his terror growing. He had forced himself to totter forward, the great fear of being left to die amid the horrors of the jungle night deep rooted in his heart. He screamed hoarsely as he felt his knees buckling.

"Wait," he begged. "Wait, for the love of God. Let me rest a little. I can go on—tomorrow, perhaps—I will be strong again—wait—"

Black Manuel turned his head, a snarl about his mouth.

"Stay there and rot for the dog you are," he growled. "One less mouth to feed. One less mongrel to listen to."

He spat on the earth to illustrate his disgust, and turning his back, resumed the plodding journey forward, his eyes fixed on the marks on the mold left by the wooden soles of Jean Jacques' sandals. One by one his clique followed after him, not looking at the anguished face of the one left behind to die, evading the clutching of his fingers.

Days when they were only a mile behind the laboring Jean Jacques if they had only known it. Days when they were as much as five miles behind him. Then, as suddenly as Jean Jacques had heard the sound, Black Manuel heard the thudding of an ax against a tree. He lifted his hand for silence. They listened. Faces expressed an exultant sense of victory.

"Axes," murmured Black Manuel. "I guess we have found our Jean Jacques—may the parrots take his eyes! A merry chase he led us! And there are others with him—guides perhaps, for Jean Jacques had no ax when he escaped."

And then they pressed close to the clearing.

THEY had a sight of the great orange ship. They saw Steve Webb hacking at the trunk of a tree with the hand ax. They saw Jean Jacques, white-faced, sick-looking, leaning against the trunk of a tree watching him.

They saw something else—something far more intriguing.

They saw a white woman—the first they had seen—where they might put hands on her. Eyes were glittering—it seemed as if Jean Jacques had been well provided for. An airplane to carry him out over the forest—men to do his bidding—a woman. She was working for him, too, while he looked on—sawing at a tree. It was to laugh.

Black Manuel could not mask his air of triumph.

"There," he whispered to his clique. "There, you howling dogs! Look—feast your eyes—and tell me now whether Black Manuel led you on a wild goose chase. Bah, you pigs—you don't deserve this good fortune."

He laughed. "Now," he said, making a low bow toward them, "we shall call and pay our respects to our fellow convict, Jean Jacques—and he will be surprised—"

He stepped out of the jungle into the clearing, followed by the five who were still with him.

Jean Jacques saw him on the instant he stepped into the clearing. He saw him as some foul ghost breaking in upon a beautiful vision. The instant he saw him he knew the truth. Black Manuel had tracked him in his escape.

He was coming forward confidently, backed by his five followers. Jean Jacques' brain seemed razor keen. Out of the corner of his mouth he spoke to Steve Webb. It was a trick he had learned on St. Laurent's.

"Trust me," he said clearly and distinctly. "I know these men. They are dangerous—would stop at nothing—and they have tracked me—believing that I would lead them to escape. Pay no attention to anything I may say or do—merely let me give the orders. Understand?"

Steve Webb nodded his head, and went on hacking at the tree trunk with his ax.

"Hello, Manuel!" greeted Jean Jacques.

"Hello, comrade," returned Manuel, his evil grin showing his cracked teeth. "It

seems that you are very prettily fixed here. Very prettily, indeed." His eyes stopped greedily upon Gloria Wood.

"All of these people are my friends," said Jean Jacques meaningly. "They are providing me with a means of escape."

Black Manuel could not refrain from smiling into the faces of his followers.

"You see?" he demanded. "I was right. I'm always right."

"There is a difficulty," mused Jean Jacques. "You see, a small miscalculation was made. While there was space enough to land such a large ship, my friend finds that there is not space enough for it to gather speed for a take-off. So we are felling trees. When we are finished, the motors will roar, the wings will lift—and it is the blue sky and freedom."

He was trying to conceal the fear Black Manuel inspired. He was trying to act as if Black Manuel's presence meant nothing. His brain was teeming with plans to be rid of the clique. He saw Manuel looking at the girl. He saw the five others of the clique devouring her with avid eyes.

"We will escape with you," stated Black Manuel. "We came for that reason."

"Of course," stated Jean Jacques in a matter-of-fact way, "I understand that. You will go—if I go. But there is a difficulty. Unless we can clear away the trees, as my friend Mr. Webb directs, no one shall go—we shall die here in the jungle."

STEVE WEBB was listening. He heard the change in tone as Jean Jacques said, "You will go—if I go." He wondered what he meant by that. The Boenig could not carry so many. On this first flight most of the regular passenger space was taken up with mail. It could never hope to get off the ground—and this Black Manuel was a devil—a beast. He remained calm, continuing the chopping at the trees, pretending the conversation had no interest for him.

"Poof!" exclaimed Black Manuel grandly. "A few trees! What are a few trees? We have cut twice as many trees for the damned swine who bought our bodies from that thief of a governor of the prison. What are a few trees to cut—since we can leave this outpost of hell when they are down?"

"Talk cuts no trees," commented Jean Jacques calmly. "It takes very strong backs."

"Hand me the ax," snarled Manuel. "We will begin at once." He took a step toward Steve Webb. Webb stood erect and glanced at Jean Jacques.

"Give him the ax, my friend," directed Jean Jacques. "We shall see what a strong back he has."

And so, Black Manuel and his clique were added to the working force struggling to free the *South American* from the jungle.

That night in the cabin of the Boeing, Webb and Jean Jacques discussed the problem.

"I am responsible," said Jean Jacques quietly. "If I had not discovered you this Black Manuel and his men would not be here. Eventually you would have cut a path out of the forest. Now that he is here, the work will go quicker—and you can husband your strength."

"But when it is finished?" questioned Webb. "There are six of them. Even if I wished to take that gang aboard the *South American* I couldn't do it. The ship would never rise. It is impossible. It is insane for them to think of escaping aboard the ship."

Jean Jacques nodded.

"I have thought of that," he said gravely. "That situation will take care of itself when the time comes."

He smiled into the anxious eyes of Gloria Wood.

"Have no fear, *Mademoiselle*," he comforted. "With Steve Webb caring for you, you could not be in danger—and when Steve Webb and Jean Jacques Victor de Vris are both devoted in your service—it will be a sad time for any who seek to distress you."

He permitted his thin fingers to touch her arm. The contact seemed to purge his soul of all the bitterness he had known. He climbed down from the cabin.

"I shall sleep with them in the jungle," he told Steve Webb. "It is better that way—better that they should think that I am one of them. Also, I can watch them, and listen to them talk."

He disappeared into the darkness. His gray, gaunt face looked like an animated skull.

There was another conference held that night which Jean Jacques attended. It was called by Black Manuel.

HE had remained motionless under his tree until he saw Jean Jacques join his clique and until he knew that the five were asleep. He crawled to where Jean Jacques lay.

"I want a word with you, comrade," he whispered. "We are two of a kind—you and I. You have the brains—I have the strength. Both of us want escape. *Voilà*. We shall get it—you and I. But listen—I have looked inside that great flying thing. I have seen only four seats and the place for the engineer. There are twelve of us here in the jungles awaiting to escape inside her belly. If there is room for us all—why are there only four seats, eh?"

He paused as if to emphasize the point.

"I am listening," said Jean Jacques quietly.

"So, I think to myself—oh, I am a devil of a clever fellow, my friend—I say to myself—*voilà*, it seems that not all are going to escape, but only five—a pilot and four others.

"You see? I reason these things out. Then I say to myself—what five are going to escape? I remember that you have been a—what you call it—peelot—no?"

"Then I think. At first he decided to go with his friends. Then we came—his old comrades—and he has promised that if he goes, we shall go. I know men. I know you—the incorrigible—will keep your word. You are that kind of man. So I say to myself—how can I help him? You understand?"

"Now I know. Listen. Why bother taking all of these carrion who trailed along with me with us? What are they fit for—the filthy beasts? They are not men, like you and me. So—why bother with them?"

"We will wait. The night before we are ready to fly away in this flying ship, I will—"

He passed his thumb across his throat in a significant gesture and grinned wickedly.

"It will be very simple. They will no longer embarrass us."

He paused again, trying to read Jean Jacques' eyes in the darkness.

"I'm listening," answered Jean Jacques a second time.

"And so, we have seven left—eh? You and I, your friend, the engineer of the sky ship, the old man with the gray hair, the two yellow faces—and the woman." There was a gloating note in his voice as he tallied off the girl on his fingers.

"I have that figured also. We need the engineer—besides, he is your friend. The girl we shall take with us also. *Helas*—think of being in the company of a girl—such a girl as that one! Then the others—the yellow faces and the father—bah! A sight of my knife will be enough. We'll leave them to keep company with the fools who tailed along after me.

"You see—that will leave just four of us—not too great a load for the sky ship—and we shall be all good comrades together." He paused triumphantly. "What do you think?"

Jean Jacques answered in the same quiet voice. "I'm glad you told me about this, Manuel—very glad. You are right—it will solve a problem which has been bothering me."

"Oh, I assure you, I am quite clever in figuring these things out," smiled Manuel. He patted Jean Jacques on the arm in a patronizing manner.

"So long as we understand one another," he said meaningly, "we can work better, eh, my comrade?"

"You are right," admitted Jean Jacques. "As long as we understand one another we can work—much better."

He listened as Manuel crawled away in the darkness to the shelter of his tree. For hours after he lay staring up at the dim stars through the interlaced branches of the trees.

## XI

JEAN JACQUES knew he was going to die. He knew it in that moment when Black Manuel and his followers had stepped out of the jungle.

The thought remained with him throughout the eight days it took to fell the last trees standing between the giant air liner and freedom. He was surer of it each time he saw the light in Gloria Wood's eyes as she looked at Black Manuel. Each time a new tree fell before the onslaught of Black Manuel and his gang death stood a little closer to Jean Jacques.

Strange. He was calm. It was a beautiful thought. To die for something good. To die for his old friend, Steve Webb—and for the girl. To die that others might live.

He saw the girl growing thin and haggard. The pitiful mouthful of food she allowed herself each day. The pasty, evil-tasting jungle fruits, the brackish, stinking water. The terror of Black Manuel's presence. The strain of the imprisonment within the jungle. He understood what passed in her soul.

He smiled softly to himself. He, Jean Jacques, would remedy all that. He had the means. The pistol he had taken from the guard on the night of his escape. It was concealed in the cabin of the air liner.

There came an evening when Steve Webb called him aside. "We can make it now, Old-Timer," Webb had said. "I have even allowed a little over our actual needs to be on the safe side. I can get this ship off the ground in three hundred yards. I have allowed four hundred—because we have had that gang of Manuel's to work for us. We could go in the morning."

A look of alarm leaped into Jean Jacques' eyes. "Say nothing of it," he begged. "Do not let them know that you are ready. When you wish to go we will crank the motors. We will make them believe that we are testing them. Then you will take Mademoiselle Wood, her father and the two South Americans into the cabin with you—and you will take off—"

"But you!" exclaimed Steve. "We're taking you, of course."

"Perhaps," smiled Jean Jacques. "And then again, perhaps not. I have promised them that if I go they shall go. I keep promises—you know that. They will see you getting into the ship. They will think that you are leaving without them. It will not give Black Manuel time to slit the throats of his men as he promised he would do the night before you were ready to take off. They will howl and will rush. I will be standing on the ground—waiting for them. After they are no longer a danger, then we will talk about me—and escape."

"But—" protested Webb.

"There is no other way, my friend," said Jean Jacques in a tone of finality. "I am responsible for this condition. I brought it upon you. If anything should

happen to you at the hands of this scum I should be responsible. No—I insist. Let me handle this in my own way. I shall keep my word. I said that they should go if I went—they should have freedom if I had it. I have said it—it is finished."

"But the years you have planned for this moment," pleaded Steve. "You can't throw them away."

"I have been thinking of that," assured Jean Jacques. "I have discovered how foolish I have been. What have I to escape to? Look at my body. Look at my face. Look at my eyes. What is there for me? I should have been content to remain at the prison. I flattered myself. I lost the world—one night—years ago. I am undermined in health—the prison rot is in my bones. I am useless."

"I would be with you," reminded Steve Webb hotly.

Jean Jacques patted him on the shoulder. "You couldn't be sponsor for an escaped convict," Jean Jacques told him. "Not even if the convict happened to be Jean Jacques Victor de Vris. No, my friend. I know best. It will be as I have said."

"If you think you can get away with the coming of tomorrow, you will crank up your motors, put your people inside—and take off."

AND so, with the coming of the next morning, a grim tension settled over those twelve people trapped in the jungle. For the first time since the storm the covers were taken off the motors. The cabin was cleaned out and prepared for flying. There was little conversation. Faces were strained, nerves were tense, hopes were at fever heat.

Black Manuel and his men watched every movement of Webb's party with black suspicion. He made no move. He merely watched, and his body was like a tiger about to spring, and hideous death lurked in his eyes and the eyes of his clique. He never permitted Jean Jacques to leave his sight.

Once, Jean Jacques entered the cabin of the ship. He went alone. He was out of sight for a single instant. When he stepped onto earth again there was a slight bulge under the white shirt Steve Webb had given him to cover his nakedness.

"I shall test the motors," Steve called to

him, loud enough for all to hear. They watched him take the crank and fit it into the inertia starter. They heard the whine of the device as he threw his weight against the crank. Then, after a minute, he threw in the clutch. The shining steel prop whirled—once, twice, three times. Then came the coughing gasp of the first motor, choked with gasoline; flame belched from the exhaust stacks. Then it was firing—hitting smoothly—running perfectly, as if it had not been weeks and weeks since it had last fired.

Jean Jacques felt the tension along his spine increasing. His eyes were keen and clear. His brain seemed alert—ready for anything. A little of that old recklessness he had once known churned in his veins.

The inertia starter again. This time on the second wing motor. The performance repeated. The whine of the starter. The grunting cough of the motor—and then the spinning disc of light about the propeller.

Jean Jacques nodded to himself as he watched. Steve Webb was a good field general. He knew how to take advantage of every element.

The girl had climbed into the cabin of the ship while Black Manuel and his men were watching Webb's labors in suspicious fascination. Her father was already seated—as were the two South Americans. Jean Jacques saw that Black Manuel and his men had not noticed this—but they were moving in closer, driven by their suspicions.

Webb worked on the nose motor. The starter crank turned in his hands. Streams of perspiration ran down his face. His chest heaved, leg muscles twitched with the terrific labor of cranking the three motors.

Then the nose motor was turning over. It synchronized with the beat of the two wing motors. The jungle behind was whipped into a frenzy by the three slipstreams. He saw Webb replace the starter crank and glance at him. He nodded his head slightly.

Webb stepped into the cabin and took his seat at the controls. He left the cabin door open behind him. He spoke a short sentence to the girl as he passed her seat. She nodded—her lips white.

The throttle moved forward. The roar of the motors increased. The props spun more rapidly. The big ship quivered as if eager to be off.

Black Manuel was watching Jean Jacques' face. He had edged up close.

"They are practicing, are they not?" he asked. His tone was thick with suspicion and excitement.

"At the moment he is practicing," assured Jean Jacques. "It is always necessary to run motors—to be sure they work."

"He flies today?" asked Manuel. "I thought it was agreed that I should be warned. It will be difficult to slit so many throats in the daylight. Why have those people crawled into the belly of the ship?"

"I am out here—on the ground—am I not?" asked Jean Jacques quietly. "If I can take the risk of being left behind—you can."

HE saw that Black Manuel's hand gripped at the bone handle of the knife under his blouse. He looked up into his eyes. There was a steely glitter in the eyes of Jean Jacques. He rose to his feet and leaned carelessly against the tree. He was watching Steve Webb—waiting for the signal.

Ten minutes. The jungle filled with the noise of the warming motors. Ten minutes which Jean Jacques counted slowly—the last minutes of his life. Then he saw Steve Webb's nod. He saw that Webb's face was white as chalk.

The girl made a sudden movement of her arm. The door to the cabin slammed shut with a bang and the spring lock clicked into place.

There was a scream of rage from one of Black Manuel's clique. Then, in an instant, the six of them were racing forward—toward the ship—arms outstretched, as if to hold it back. Over their heads the mighty roar of the motors sounded.

Calmly, Jean Jacques drew the pistol from under his blouse and leveled it. It barked dully. The convict nearest the ship slumped suddenly and slithered to the ground. There was a white ring of smoke about the muzzle of the pistol.

A man turned as if to hurl himself upon Jean Jacques. The pistol barked again and a great smear of blood leaped from the man's throat. He fell, mouthing gurgling murmurs.

Black Manuel had leaped for the ship. At the sound of the pistol he whirled. His face was twisted with insane rage. He was

in time to see a third member of his clique go down, shot through the chest.

He screamed an order to the two remaining. Together they charged Jean Jacques. They were frothing with madness.

QUITE calmly Jean Jacques leaned against his tree. The pistol spat flame twice—and Black Manuel was alone. He was screaming obscenity. His lips were flecked with foam. His eyes were glaring. His face congested. He saw the muzzle of Jean Jacques' pistol swinging toward him.

His arm made a sudden motion. A shining, whistling something flashed through the air. There was a shock as it struck Jean Jacques in the chest.

Suddenly Black Manuel stumbled and fell, an expression of surprise upon his face. He plunged face downward upon the floor of the jungle—writhing.

There was a wisp of white smoke floating above the cockpit of the big Fokker. Jean Jacques raised his eyes to see Steve Webb standing erect, a service automatic in his hands—his mouth grim.

He waved weakly with his hand—the take-off signal.

"Go on, my friend," he whispered. "Go on to blue skies and freedom."

THE cabin door flew open and Steve Webb leaped to the ground. He leaped across two bodies that had been followers of Black Manuel. He lifted Jean Jacques in his arms and bore him to the side of the ship. They placed him upon the floor of the cabin. The door slammed. The motors were still idling.

Black Manuel's knife was hilt-deep in Jean Jacques' chest. With a single motion of his hand Steve Webb drew it from the wound.

"Do something for him," he begged Gloria Wood. "Do something for him."

He went back to the controls. He jammed the throttle ahead to the post. The big Boeing trembled from nose to tail. It moved faster—faster—the trees of the jungle seeming to leap up in front of it. The wheels cleared the ground. The ship lifted—a vicious swish and a scraping of branches against the fuselage—a single faltering instant.

Then the motors seemed to roar a new

defiance—and the *South American* was in the air.

Flying—free—the horrors of that jungle prison behind. Going on, nosing into the clear blue of the heavens, with the clean wind of the heavens seeming to cleanse the souls of her passengers.

Gloria Wood worked with cool haste over the shrunken form of Jean Jacques. Tears dropped onto the wasted brown body. She heard the bubbling sound about the wound—she knew—Jean Jacques would die.

She bound great pads of bandage about the wound. She poured brandy down his throat. After an eternity his eyes opened. At first they were clouded with pain, and then they cleared. He was listening—intently. He looked up at her face.

"We are flying—are we not, *Mademoiselle*?" he asked.

She nodded her head.

A great glory seemed to settle upon him. He lay very quietly for a long moment, as if permitting his body and soul to be saturated with the gentle motion of the ship. Then he sat erect. She endeavored to restrain him but he smiled at her.

"It is all right, *Mademoiselle*," he assured her. "I feel strong again—new—reborn." He dragged himself erect, clutching at the arms of the chairs in the cabin. In that manner he passed along the aisle—toward the cockpit—toward Steve Webb.

Somehow he seated himself in the copilot's seat and looked out over the nose of the great Boeing. His eyes were glowing in ecstasy—but from under the bandage blood streamed down his chest and he breathed with difficulty.

Steve Webb's face was very white. He glanced once at Jean Jacques and that light of glory in his eyes. Then he turned his face away—a hot lump in his throat. The earth was far beneath—they had climbed three thousand feet and the three motors were driving the ship south—toward Rio. A sudden impulse stirred Steve Webb.

"Want to handle her?" he asked, almost gruffly.

Jean Jacques turned his head. "Me?" he asked in stunned surprise. "You would trust me—with her—"

Webb nodded his head. "Certainly," he said. "You are a pilot, are you not?" Slowly Jean Jacques' hands touched the

controls. Almost reverently—caressingly.

There was a smile about his lips—his eyes were soft, luminous. His feet found the rudder pedals.

Thus he died. Winging once more through the blue of clean heavens.

AND so Jean Jacques rode to Rio—in the co-pilot's seat, his dead eyes looking out over the nose of the mighty Boeing—a smile upon his lips, as if in delight at the freedom he had won.

He did not know that an amazed world of flying men went almost mad with joy at a news dispatch sent out from Rio within ten minutes after the *South American* landed at the airport there. The dispatch stated:

The Southern Airliner *South American*, which took off from New York City more than three months ago, came to port at Rio de Janeiro late tonight, with Steve Webb at the controls. Henry M. Wood, president of Southern, his daughter, and two *South American* passengers are well and uninjured. With the exception of a brief state-

ment that a hurricane had driven them down in the jungles of French Guiana, Pilot Webb made no comment upon the trip nor upon the experience undergone by ship and crew.

There was no mention of Jean Jacques. That came later in the form of a solid block of pure white marble placed as a cornerstone in the hangar-office at the New York terminus of Southern Airlines.

Sacred to the memory of Jean Jacques Victor, Comte de Vris, captain of the French Air Service, who died as he wished to die—his hands upon the controls—his eyes upon the far horizon.

It would have pleased Jean Jacques to know that a pilot named Steve Webb and a girl who had once been Gloria Wood, but who was now Mrs. Steve Webb, paused each time they passed that cornerstone, and that they looked at it with reverent eyes—eyes which seemed to see a gaunt, brown, glowing-eyed convict standing with his back to a jungle tree—dying for his friend.



New York . . . London . . . Paris . . . Berlin . . . the mighty metropolises of the modern world trembled at the winged onslaught of hooded Men in Red—a madman's minions sworn to crush civilization. . . THE WAR TO END THE WORLD, a thrilling, complete novel by Tom O'Neill. Also a big, full-length novel by Herman Petersen—"SKY PIRATES OF THE SOUTHERN CROSS"; and novelets and short stories by Curtis Mitchel, Hal Dietz, Derek West, George Bruce, Ted Tinsley, Bob Travers, and James McRae

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*A Novelet of the South Seas*

# RED TYPHOON

By **ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN**

**Balata, South Sea iniquity metropolis, toughest port in the Islands! But that was before Typhoon Bradley put in to tame it with fist and spike and bullet.**

**B**RADLEY sensed trouble as he first stepped ashore at Balata Island in the Torres Strait, tucked close to the uncharted coast of Australia. Sending his dinghy back to his ship, he thoughtfully surveyed the sink of a port. He squared his broad shoulders and shoved his white-

topped peaked cap back on his fair hair. "She's tough," he admitted to his younger brother, who stood beside him, his thumbs hooked in his cartridge belt. "Old Waterson told me in Shanghai she was, and I believe him."

The long row of bungalows, shacks and

saloons that fronted the beach was brightly lighted and noisy. On the beach itself drunken Kanakas quarreled. Laughter, oaths, music, shouts came from the dives.

Once a ripple of shots burst the night, but no one seemed to take any notice. Men died or dropped out of sight on Balata right along, for this was the day of the sandalwood traders, the slavers and the last of the pirates. The cruisers had not yet come, nor the missionaries. The islands were raw, and there are those who insist that the taming of them only began that night on Balata.

"Tough she is," agreed Bradley's younger brother disgustedly. "I don't see why in hell we came here and didn't go on to Sydney."

The other shrugged.

"Waterson told me you could learn more about the Islands here than anywhere else, and I'm always wanting to learn. Besides, when a port's got a name like this, it ought to be looked into."

A ragged, gray-bearded man shuffled up to them, reeking of cheap trade gin.

"You'll be th' fellers that came in at sun-down," he suggested in a half whine. "Want t' give an old-timer a hand?"

The elder Bradley tossed a piece of silver into the beachcomber's palm and then lighted a short black cheroot.

"What's the chief joint here?" he asked idly. "I want a drink, not rot-gut."

The beachcomber snickered.

"You'll be going to Singapore Joe's then, up to th' end there. Skippers allus go there first and pay th' dues."

**B**RADLEY stiffened. "Dues?" "Costs yuh twenty quid t' anchor off Balata Beach," explained the beachcomber. "Then you're all right. Stay here long as you want. If you don't pay you can't buy no liquor nor stores nor water 'ere. And if you stick around you'll likely find yer packet afire one night or get something cold between your shoulder blades."

Bradley was astonished.

"Pay twenty quid every time I come just to anchor in an open roadstead? You're crazy!"

The beachcomber chuckled.

"Well, I'm a-telling yuh. Singapore spotted you as soon as you rounded th' point and told me t' keep an eye open case

you come ashore. That's my job, t' tell th' green chums what's what."

Bradley smoked thoughtfully for a moment and then gave a short laugh.

"Rot!" he said feelingly. His brother rubbed his jaw and frowned.

"We'd better get out," he suggested. "It sounds like a hold-up all right, but this is Balata."

"It's a good graft," chuckled the beachcomber. "Singapore splits half with th' rest of the shacks so they stand in with him. There ain't no use buckin' th' game, mate. Pay up an' shut up an' you'll be all right. Singapore runs th' joint. No sense gettin' chesty. This is th' toughest port in th' Islands an' I know 'em all. Maybe Anea's tougher, but that's only cause there's more of it."

Bradley shrugged.

"Well, we'll see," he said with a touch of irritation. "No one's going to hold me up." His brother leaned close to him.

"Don't forget what it is you want to know. Maybe we can find out and beat it right away."

His brother nodded.

The beachcomber chuckled and went away.

**T**HE two seamen started to walk up the beach, thrusting a path through jostling throngs of natives and occasionally pushing aside a drunken white man. There were several ships in the roadstead and most of the crews were ashore for a spree. Once the brothers almost fell over a dead man lying in a dark shadow beneath a palm. He was still warm and a knife stuck out of his ribs. His clothes were ripped open as if in search for a money belt. Bradley sucked at his cheroot and gave a little laugh.

"I think I could enjoy myself here," he observed. His brother shuddered. He was obviously of softer clay, more sensitive.

"I'll be glad when we're clear. You get into enough trouble as it is without sticking around here and looking for it."

They went on without further words. Coming to the largest and most pretentious of the houses that lined the beach, they pulled aside the rough curtain that covered the main doorway, opening from the veranda, and entered Singapore Joe's.

The place was brightly lighted by many

hurricane lamps suspended from the roof beams. Stained, rough wooden tables and chairs occupied the walls. Heavy layers of blue tobacco smoke whirled and eddied with each movement.

A tiny piano was playing on a low platform and a Kanaka girl was dancing there. Not a nice dance. Other girls were about the tables. Chinese and Malay waiters ran back and forth from the long, rough wood bar. Captains and mates of all nationalities and ages sat about, swearing, laughing, talking loudly, arguing. A fight began at one table as Bradley and his brother entered and was quelled by a stout, greasy looking Eurasian in whites of Shantung silk and with a heavy blue silk cummerbund in which a gun was thrust.

Bradley grunted. A waiter came up to them and guided them to a table, took their orders and went away. The stout, sleek Eurasian came to the table. Without asking, he seated himself so that he faced the elder Bradley.

"You are new chums, yes?" he inquired in a soft, purring voice, rubbing together slender white hands. He was a much larger man and a much more powerful man than he had seemed at a distance. His eyes were slanted a little, like aloes. His mouth was cruel beneath a stringy gray mustache. He had many expensive rings on his fingers.

"New's right," assented Bradley in a calm drawling voice that was deceptive. He seemed half asleep, his clear gray eyes slightly closed, a faint smile on his lips. His brother stared at him and was troubled, knowing him, knowing he had taken a sudden and violent dislike to the newcomer.

"I AM Singapore Joe," purred the Eurasian. "I am pleased to meet you, Captain—"

"Bradley," observed the other. And with a jerk of his head, "this is my brother, if it's any of your damned business."

The Eurasian's eyes flamed suddenly. His face went tense, but in a moment he was himself again.

"I can see you are new . . . to Balata," he observed smiling. "But I think you will learn, Captain Bradley. May I inquire how far you have come in that lugger of yours?"

Bradley shrugged.

"Shanghai, if it'll in any way please you."

Singapore Joe's jaw dropped and he showed open disbelief.

"Shanghai? In a forty-foot lugger? Ah, but you jest, Captain. From Sydney, up the coast, perhaps. Perhaps from Thursday Island. Perhaps even, shall we say, from Macassar."

"I said Shanghai," drawled Bradley. "Are you trying to call me a liar?"

Singapore Joe stared at him for a moment and then slowly shook his head. A forty-foot lugger could make such a passage all right, but who would do it? It meant superb seamanship. Luggers were for coast work, for inter-island work perhaps, not for long traverses. Still, the matter was not worth arguing about. The Eurasian got down to business.

"You saw my messenger?" he said, his voice crisper. Bradley tossed his cheroot to the floor and ground it beneath his white shoe.

"I met a soused beachcomber, if that's what you mean. Can't say I admire your choice of servants."

The other deliberately took his lower lip between his teeth and pressed it. His voice became a whisper.

"We have taught Captains manners on Balata before, Mr. Bradley. But I will overlook your ignorance of our customs. You will pay me twenty pounds in gold or Bank of England notes. Our port authorities—" he laughed a little at the pleasantry—"have set that price as the regulation docking dues."

Bradley drummed on the table with his fingers and seemed amused.

"I can dock in Sydney or New York for less than that, but we'll forget it. If you want twenty pounds out of me maybe you can have it—for information."

"Ah," said the other, "so you wish information. May I ask—"

"Sure," was the crisp reply. "What and where is Rewin Island?"

Singapore Joe tightened, but his smooth, sleek face did not change expression.

"There are always the charts," he suggested mockingly.

Bradley shrugged.

"Why all this stalling? I was told I could find out where Rewin Island was at Balata here or at Sydney. I came here for several reasons, the first because it was

nearer. You know damned well Rewin's not on any chart."

"I HAVE heard of the place," admitted the Eurasian smiling. "It is a legend, a myth, a place supposed to have been discovered by Captain Rewin, Captain Jack Rewin nearly twenty years ago. But where . . ."

"All right." Bradley shrugged again. "If you don't know I'll inquire around and if one one here knows then I'll go to Sydney." Bradley hated duplicity, fencing, diplomacy. He was a man of action, recklessly impatient. Yet he was possessed of an amazing luck and a "hunch" sense that was at times almost miraculously accurate. He knew at this moment, for instance, that he would get nothing out of Singapore Joe. But the Eurasian was insistent, as if the trend of the conversation rather pleased him.

"If you could tell me just why you wanted Rewin Island," he suggested.

"Personal business reasons," snapped Bradley. "And when the hell do we get our drinks?"

Singapore Joe tightened again and his voice assumed a metallic note:

"There is a small matter of twenty pounds, which I believe I mentioned before."

There was a short silence. Then Bradley cleared his throat and spread his hands on the table, palms up, laughing.

"I haven't got twenty pounds," he said frankly. "Find someone who can tell me the way to Rewin Island and I'll be back inside a month and pay you."

The Eurasian sucked in his breath sharply. His face darkened.

"I will give you just two minutes to get out," he rapped, "and ten to get off the beach. We need no more beachcombers at Balata."

Bradley stared at him.

"I'll take that from you, seeing we're in your own place. But if you try to take that fancy gat out of your sash I'll knock you flat. Don't forget that."

Singapore Joe had half risen and laid a hand on the butt of the revolver stuck in his blue silk cummerbund. His eyes glittered malevolently. Much of the noise in the place died away. Men began to crowd around.

A HULKING, massively built man with hairy arms rolled up, his thumbs stuck in his cartridge belt.

"Anything wrong?" he growled from the depths of a tangled beard. Bradley's younger brother groaned and set his feet for an upward spring. He had never yet known his brother to back down from trouble. Singapore Joe was tight drawn like a wire, staring at the still seated Bradley.

"Yes," he snarled deep in his throat. "Yes, there is something wrong, Carson. Throw them out."

The bearded man grinned, spat aside and came deliberately forward. He weighed all of two hundred pounds and there were knots of muscle in his arms, and across his chest.

"Better git," he suggested almost amiably. "I ain't wantin' t' muss yuh."

Singapore Joe relaxed and stepped back from the table.

"I said throw 'em out, Carson," he snapped. The big man sobered and laid a hand on Bradley's shoulder. The younger of the brothers got slowly to his feet and watched Singapore Joe, to see if he would draw his gun. From the jests and remarks passing through the now large group of watchers it could be judged they were mostly impartial. Singapore Joe's port dues could not have been popular.

"Take your hands off me," Bradley grated suddenly, so suddenly the man named Carson almost took a step backward. But then he laughed and moved forward again, grimly confident. Bradley was deceptive to look at seated as he was. Carson dug his hard fingers into the other's shoulder.

Then an amazing thing happened. Bradley's right hand shot upward, gripped Carson's thick wrist. That seemed to be all, except that Bradley's shoulder heaved a little and he half rose from his chair. But Carson uttered a sharp roar of pain and went sideways, turned over in midair and landed on the floor with a crash that shook the building.

"I said," observed Bradley, unruffled, getting fully on his feet and hitching up his belt—"I said to keep your hands off me."

There was an awed and complete silence. Carson had not met his match since Big Bill Gunther had fought him one

riotous night seven years before. Singapore Joe said nothing. He was smiling, wholly at his ease now and seemingly amused, though red anger surged inside him.

Carson rocked to his feet, his face convulsed, his right hand holding his left wrist. He glared at Bradley for a moment and then with an oath went for his gun. There was a shot, but only one. Carson's gun clattered on the floor and he stared unbelieving at his shattered and bloody fingers. Bradley slid his own weapon back into the holster and laughed. Curiously it was not until he made that sound that anyone in the room was aware he had fired. No one certainly had seen him draw the gun.

"Thanks for the entertainment," he said.

His eyes were bright, his head up. He smilingly surveyed them all, but no one moved. They could all sense, as one man, the perfect fighting machine in this stranger, another man who took as much delight in trouble as most of them did in drink.

In a dead silence, except for the stupefied dull swearing of Carson and a few hysterical giggles from the Kanaka girls, Bradley backed to the door. He gave one final laugh as he dropped the curtain back in place. That broke the tension.

"Well, I'll be damned," someone said. Singapore Joe loosened his collar with trembling fingers and called out in a voice thick with passion:

"Collins! Sing! Jan! Follow and—" He did not finish. A hand touched his arm.

"Don't go off half-cocked, Joe," said a mildly amused voice, somewhat musical and vaguely mocking. "Did I hear that tall one ask you for Rewin Island?"

## II

SINGAPORE JOE whipped about, his lips working. A slender, dark-haired, dark-eyed man of medium height stood at his side, dressed in immaculate ducks with a narrow blue silk cummerbund about his waist and an expensive silk tie holding his collar together. A small, dark and silky mustache adorned his upper lip and he seemed possessed of a panther-like grace. He was very handsome.

Singapore Joe stifled a furious oath and lowered the hand he had raised to dash the

other's grip aside. Even he respected Gentleman Harry, the dandy, the gambler, gun-runner, one of the most feared men in all the South.

"He did ask for Rewin, yes. But what has that to do with my port dues? And his speech to me?"

The other laughed.

"Sometimes it is a wonder to me you have lived so long," he observed dryly. "What have you inside that head? What are port dues beside Rewin Island?"

Singapore Joe calmed himself with an effort.

"What do I care for Rewin Island? Have you gone mad?"

"You seemed interested when he asked you about the place. I was watching you."

"I thought for a moment of the old tale. But that is legend."

Gentleman Harry pulled the calmed Eurasian to a table and waved an airy hand at the still interested spectators.

"Show's over," he drawled curtly. "Beat it."

There were some hard men in that room, some notorious and reckless men, but it is significant that not one questioned Gentleman Harry's words or resented his tone. He smilingly watched them all disperse back to their drinks and their tables and then he turned to Singapore.

"Do you think this Bradley wants to find Rewin because of a legend?"

The Eurasian shrugged.

"How should I know? Some of us have heard of the place. A few may know just how to find it."

"A lot of the old-timers do," agreed Gentleman Harry calmly. "They use it for a watering place or to careen at sometimes, or so I've heard. But do you think Bradley wants to careen or water?"

The other muttered under his breath and fingered his mustache.

"Use your head," insisted Gentleman Harry. "Bradley came all the way from Shanghai. A dozen men heard him say that. Now what for? Supposing he knows the legend isn't a legend?"

Singapore Joe stared at his companion and a frown creased his sleek forehead.

"I begin to follow," he purred. "Perhaps I was too hasty."

"You're often too damned hasty," observed his companion pleasantly. "Some-

time someone'll plug you. But let that go and listen to me. Old Werner's been in the Islands forty years and he'll know about Rewin, the whole story. Send for him."

**S**INGAPORE JOE shrugged, and summoning a man, sent him to find Werner, that half drunken beachcomber who had accosted Bradley when he landed and who worked for the Eurasian. He came after a short while, shambling, weaving a bit, chuckling to himself.

"I seen that Bradley feller hittin' it back for 'is lugger," he peered. "I told 'im he'd better pay or get out."

He smiled a little, uncertainly.

"Sit down," said Gentleman Harry smoothly. "Have a drink? Of course. Now tell us what you know about Rewin Island. Wasn't there some old tale about a lot of loot buried there?"

Werner, the old beachcomber, set down his glass without tasting the gin it held. His watery blue eyes stared at Gentleman Harry and then at Singapore Joe. In his time Werner had been a famous captain, until drink and women had gotten him. Gentleman Harry's words had called up old memories.

"It's twenty years or more," he half muttered. "Haven't heard anyone talk of Jack Rewin since. . . . He went north an' dropped out of sight. Good man. Hard as they made 'em. Looted Raja Tualatin's palace in Tenimber. Long ago. Long ago. More'n twenty years."

Singapore Joe made an impatient gesture, but Gentleman Harry cautioned him to be still.

"Jack Rewin looted a Raja's palace, eh?" he suggested. "Then what happened?"

Werner blinked at him and his watery eyes grew cunning.

"What do I get if I tell yuh that? What you both up to, eh?"

Gentleman Harry laughed.

"I'll give you six cases for the yarn," he offered. "But make it quick."

Werner pulled himself together and drank.

**"T**H' tale was all over the South once," the old beachcomber mumbled. "Guess you new fellers wouldn't know it. Some of us boys used t' use Jack

Rewin's island for a hide-out at times. He found it once, beating south into a gale—way off his course. We kept it to ourselves 'cause it was useful. Jack an' me was friends."

"But the story," suggested Singapore Joe with a quick hiss of impatience. Werner blinked at him and cringed a little.

"Aye, the tale, Singapore. I suppose you mean of th' loot, what Jack got from the Raja's palace. Them was bad times, tough times. A crowd of proas chased Jack clear south to these waters. He got to his island all right and buried th' stuff. Jewels an' gold an' such, I heard. Then he went away north."

"What was that for?" Gentleman Harry demanded. He knew only parts of the old legend himself, for it was one of a thousand that filled the South.

"He was havin' trouble with his crew," old Werner explained. "Had a bad mate and then his uncle or something was with him and tryin' t' double-cross him. So he slipped ashore with a couple of boys he c'd trust and hid the junk. Then went north, pretending he was going to sell it all in China, figuring he'd ditch his crew there and come back."

"How'd you know all this?" Singapore Joe demanded.

"I was a friend of Jack's an' he sort of trusted me. Met him in Batavia not long after th' whole thing happened, while he was on his way north, an' he told me."

"He didn't tell you where he hid th' stuff?"

Werner shook his head.

"He was figuring on coming right back for it," he explained.

"And he never did?" inquired Gentleman Harry, a touch of color in his pale cheeks.

"He never did," said old Werner sadly. "If 'e had maybe I'd 've been. . . ." He started to cry in a maudlin manner. Singapore Joe looked at his companion and Gentleman Harry nodded.

"What I suspected. Bradley didn't come from Shanghai for nothing. And Rewin went to China. Get the connection?" He leaned over and shook Werner. "Could you find Rewin Island?" The old beachcomber nodded and brushed away his tears.

"It ain't no great way," he said. "It's only south of. . . ." Gentleman Harry

clapped a violent hand across his mouth. There were men at other tables nearby who might be listening, who might have heard.

"Let's go in your private office," he suggested to Singapore Joe, and together they led Werner away with them. They were closeted together for perhaps an hour. Werner knew where the island was. Bradley, obviously, knew where the loot was. It was a matter of getting together.

### III

**I**N the main cabin of the lugger Bradley poured himself a drink and surveyed his younger brother with a smile.

"You're not cut out for this sort of thing, kid," he said, not unkindly. "Once we get this deal over with I'm packing you back to Shanghai. Old Waterson will give you your job back."

The other nodded moodily.

"I'm no fighter," he admitted. "I wouldn't have come with you if I hadn't put all my savings into this tub and you needed a mate you could trust."

"I'm not forgetting you spent a lot more of your savings getting me out of that jail," added his brother warmly. "You're a good egg, Bob. We'll be at the end of the trail soon. Rewin Island's no great way from here from what old Rewin said."

"It's a pity you didn't get the exact location from him," muttered the other. "Saved us all this bother."

Bradley tossed down his drink and frowned.

"There wasn't time, like I told you," he explained for the dozenth time. "The old boy was shot in the back by a guard just as we were getting into that boat you'd arranged to be waiting for us. He'd already told me about the stuff and where he'd ditched it, but he was keeping the island to himself. You see, we figured on sailing together. When he knew he was done he just was able to tell me that anyone who'd been a friend of his in the old days knew the place, or to ask some of the old timers in Balata. I had to leave on the jump then." He poured another drink and added, "I'll find the damned island all right. It's the location of the loot that counts. And we've got that."

"Are we going to Sydney now?" demanded the other. "You said we might find some old timer there if Balata was a blank."

Bradley shrugged.

"Going to Sydney on what?" he said grimly. "We're busted. Took all you had to get the *Wanderer* and fit her out. I figured on calling here not only for information but to get some stores. Thought we'd be able to borrow on the old tub for them. But this Singapore Joe running the damned port makes it look tough."

He drank again and looked pleased.

"I don't like that bird," he said reflectively. "I've got a hunch he doesn't like me either, so we'll have to get together about it again some time. We'll stick around a while anyway and maybe I can locate some bird with a little jack to put up."

His brother shook his head wearily and sighed. He had spent most of his life in a Shanghai counting house until this reckless elder brother of his had very awkwardly got himself trapped poaching seals in a place where he had no business to be. He had managed to effect the other's release and now here they were with their money sunk in a forty-foot lugger and bound on a wild goose chase because of a yarn some crazy ancient had told the elder Bradley while in jail with him; a crazy ancient who had been in that same jail nearly twenty years. It was all too wild to be possible.

There sounded a dull thump along the lugger's hull and then a voice hailed the deck. Bradley hitched at his gun belt.

"If that's some of Singapore Joe's men telling me to get to sea there'll be trouble," he promised. "Better come on up, Bob."

**T**HE two went on deck together. A dinghy was lying alongside. One of Bradley's Chinese crew argued with its occupants, telling them he had orders to let no one on board. Bradley leaned over the rail.

"What th' hell do you want?" he demanded crisply. A suave, calm voice answered back.

"Is that Bradley? Ah, Bradley. Are you interested in knowing where Rewin Island is?"

Bradley stiffened.

"All right," he said, after a pause. "Come up and don't try any tricks."

Three men came over the lugger's rail then. The first was Gentleman Harry, unruffled, cool, and, as always, immaculate. The second was a Captain Barrett. The third was Werner. Bradley recognized the beachcomber and was introduced to the other two. His curiosity aroused now he led the way back to the main cabin and sat his guests down.

He looked them over coldly.

"Let's have it" he said with his deceptive drawl. "What do you know about Rewin Island?"

Gentleman Harry lighted a slender cheroot and smiled. He was frankness and friendliness itself.

"I'll lay my cards on the table," he said smoothly. "I was in Singapore's place, at the next table to you, and I heard what you said. May I say I admire your marksmanship? And your nerve?"

Bradley leaned against the bulkhead and stuck his thumbs in his belt.

"Singapore send you?"

"No one sends me anywhere," returned Gentleman Harry shortly. Captain Barrett, a tall, burly, sullen looking man uttered a harsh laugh.

"You don't know the Islands, Bradley. The Gentleman usually does the sending. It's a damned honor he's come to see you and not had you come to him."

Bradley smiled. His lids drooped sleepily over his eyes. He had a reputation himself in the China Seas, but that was as unknown to Barrett and the Gentleman as their reputations were to him. The China Seas are far north of the southern islands. Bradley made no comment, however, so Gentleman Harry went on.

"I'll play square with you," he said gently. "I heard what you asked Singapore. You want Rewin Island. No one comes from as far as Shanghai wanting Rewin Island for nothing. I'm taking it you know something about Rewin's little affair some twenty years ago."

Bradley shrugged.

"What of it?"

"Just this. We'll find you the island if you'll split with us."

"Who's we?"

Gentleman Harry waved airily.

"Myself, of course. My partner, Cap-

tain. Barrett here. And, of course, my friend Werner."

"How much?"

"Half."

BRADLEY stuck his thumbs in his cartridge belt and drummed with his fingers on the belt itself, considering them. He noticed that his brother was sitting eagerly forward, his face flushed with relief. The kid was tired of the long voyage, of course. Wanted to get the thing finished. And if what old Rewin had said was true there should be enough to split. But. . . .

"Give me the location and I'll bring your whack back here to you," Bradley suggested, his drawling voice amused. Gentleman Harry shrugged.

"Now is that reasonable?" he said softly.

"We are men of the world, Bradley. This is the Islands, not New York or London. You can't do business that way. Take us along."

"Three of you?"

"We can help work ship. There's a pretty hostile tribe on Rewin and you may need to fight. I'll find the stores if you need any."

This last shot went home. Bradley did need stores, badly. He needed new sails. The lugger needed some caulking. He was low on food.

"Supposing our friend Singapore objects to your getting me stores? I understand he has queer ideas."

"I will settle with Singapore," observed Gentleman Harry. "Pay him his twenty quid which you can return to me later. There will be no trouble about supplies, I can assure you."

Bradley was no fool, for all his recklessness. He had a pretty shrewd idea that neither Gentleman Harry nor Captain Barrett could be trusted. Werner, of course, was out of the count as far as fighting went. It sounded reasonable that this Gentleman Harry was acting independently of Singapore Joe. But even if he wasn't, what of it? Supposing they were planning a double-cross? They wouldn't do a thing until old Rewin's loot was located. And there were only two of them to handle.

Bradley felt quite capable of that. He felt quite capable of anything. He wanted

to please his brother too, to get the affair settled. Yet even so he might have refused had not Gentleman Harry made one remark that, unknown to him, was like waving a red rag to a bull, such was Bradley's supreme confidence in himself. Bradley said first, with his usual bluntness: "I think you're a bunch of crooks, but I'll take one of you along."

Gentleman Harry smiled at that—perfectly calm, but inwardly hating the other.

"That would be one of us to two of you," he said. "Of course, if you are afraid. . . ." He shrugged and rose as if to go. But he had touched the button.

Bradley seemed to have drawn into himself, his clear gray eyes narrowed, his lips tight, his shoulders hunched a little. Captain Barrett licked his lips and started involuntarily to reach for his gun, but remembered himself in time and let his hand fall.

"Afraid?" Bradley was drawling. "Afraid? You've made a bargain. Get my stores aboard and we'll sail, the whole damned five of us. And if you feel like it bring Singapore Joe along."

Gentleman Harry laughed, reaching across the table, he poured himself a drink. There was a subtle meaning in his sleek voice.

"Maybe I will. I like you, Bradley," he lied. "We'll get along. Now let's take a shot and close the deal."

Bradley took a glass, but before he drank he looked the other in the eye.

"I'll tell you one thing," he said slowly. "If you put anything over on me you won't talk about it for long."

Gentleman Harry's eyes flamed for a moment and he almost gave himself away by reaching for the gun in his shoulder holster. But instead he recovered and smiled and lifted his glass.

"It's a deal then," he said. "Luck to us all." Then all drank. Captain Barrett laughed silently behind his beard.

**B**RADLEY was surprised at the shortness of the voyage to Rewin Island. He knew, from what the broken Captain Rewin had told him while they rotted in prison together, before his younger brother had plotted for his release, that the island was somewhere close to the coast of northern Australia. But he had not expected

it to be in the Gulf of Carpentaria, a little south of Pera Head, hugging an uncharted shoreline in the middle of a deep and uncharted bay, not very far from Balata Island itself.

Rewin had kept the place more or less of a secret except from his close friends. In the Islands of that time a free-trading captain often wanted a hide-out, some place he could retire to while a bad affair blew over.

The Balata men knew of the place only by repute because from Balata ships went north to the Coral Sea, to Sumatra, Borneo, New Guinea and the Solomons. No one had business in the Gulf of Carpentaria. It was the wildest of all that wild territory, peopled by naked black savages and with no known wealth, for then the opal mines had not been uncovered and there was too much gold available in New Guinea for men to attempt prospecting in the savageness of Queensland. Captains gave it a wide berth.

On the morning of the sixth day after they had left Balata the *Wanderer* lifted Rewin Island, a large rocky eminence some six miles long by four wide, half hidden by the tall headlands of the great bay in which it sat. It was densely forested and possessed of several small bays and coves with sandy beaches, admirable for shelter and even for careening a ship. Bradley surveyed the island through his glasses as they approached it.

"The south shore's what we want," he said. Werner, sober for the first time in years, since they had kept liquor from him, came up in time to hear the remark, and was surprised.

"We always anchored on the east, th' shore side," he protested. "Best cove's there."

Bradley shrugged and gazed again at the island.

"My directions were to head up from the south, pass a high reef to starboard and then get a line on a rocky outcrop bare of trees, lying about northwest. Rewin said there was a good anchorage in three fathoms about a cable's length from the shore."

Gentleman Harry lit a cheroot and smiled.

"Anything you say, my dear Bradley. Anything you say."

## IV

THEY were all standing aft together near the little lugger's main cabin skylight and wheel. Barrett was lounging against the rail, picking his teeth with a sliver of wood and scowling unpleasantly, at nothing in particular. Gentleman Harry was half-seated on the skylight itself, smoking and flicking imaginary specks of dust from his well-creased ducks. Werner was standing by the helmsman, a Chinaman and one of the five Bradley had manned the *Wanderer* with in Shanghai. Bradley's younger brother was pacing up and down with obvious nervousness and impatience while Bradley himself, standing near Gentleman Harry, was inspecting the coast.

There was no perceptible tension among them at this moment. They seemed to have all reached a tacit agreement that it would be best for all of them to get along in a friendly fashion, at least until Rewin was reached.

Bradley had taken no particular precautions regarding his guests. He judged, and rightly, that they had to behave until he had led them to the loot, anyway. And they judged, and rightly, that he would have to behave until they had shown him the island.

In Bradley's shoes Gentleman Harry, once the island was sighted, would have taken measures to dispose of his partners, but he sensed that Bradley had not this in mind. The tall sailor was one of those fools who believed in honesty and keeping his word. The very idea made Gentleman Harry laugh to himself. Still, even though he believed Bradley would attempt nothing, he kept a sharp watch on him, was always alert for any overt move. All of which Bradley realized and was amused at. It was an interesting situation.

They came up to the island, made their course good and anchored in three fathoms, exactly as the ill-fated Captain Rewin had stated. Bradley hitched at his cartridge belt and stared thoughtfully at the tangled masses of jungle that ran down to the sandy beach.

"You said something about natives being here, bad ones," he inquired.

Gentleman Harry shrugged.

"Werner tells me the place is unin-

habited. I said that as an argument for you to take us along."

BRADLEY'S jaw tightened. The crisis was nearly done, he was aware.

"Then there's no need for us to take rifles along," he said. "Or anything else."

There was a slight pause and they all looked at him. Captain Barrett stiffened.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded belligerently.

"Supposing we leave all our guns behind, lock them up?"

"And give you th' key, I suppose," Captain Barrett sneered. "I'm capable of looking after my own gat."

Bradley shrugged.

"As you please. And now who's going ashore?"

"We are all going," said Gentleman Harry smoothly. "That way we'll save argument."

"Nobody trusts anybody else, eh?" laughed Bradley, with a touch of grimness. He had a shrewd idea that Gentleman Harry had arranged matters with his companions, ready for this moment, and he was a bit uneasy about his own crew. They were Chinese to a man, indifferent to him or anybody else as long as they were fed and paid. Gentleman Harry had talked with various of the yellow men once or twice and he might have won them over.

It was only Bradley's superb confidence in himself that prevented him from worrying too much. There was not a man on board he could not break with his hands as he might break a rotten stick. There was not a man on board, with the possible exception of Gentleman Harry, whom he could not out-shoot. He shrugged as these things occurred to him.

"All right, we'll all go," he said.

He ordered the dinghy lowered. Although it was a tight fit, they all squeezed in and pulled to the beach. Bradley stepped ashore, looked about him keenly. Then, seizing his brother by the arm, led the way up into a little jungle-choked ravine from which a small stream ran out on the sand and made a slow way to the salt water.

"Now listen, Bob," said Bradley quickly and in a low voice. "As soon as we locate the stuff remember what I said. Don't

take your eyes off any of them. Don't let them get behind you. I've got a bad hunch we're going to get licked, but there's no sense making things easy for them. If you have to shoot, shoot to kill."

Straggling along behind Bradley and his brother, Gentleman Harry and Captain Barrett were also talking, with Werner hobbling farther in the rear.

"If you see a chance, take it," Gentleman Harry was saying. "If we can get away with it we save Singapore's cut."

Captain Barrett tugged at his beard. "Then it's just you and me?"

"Just you and me," the other agreed.

"Werner?"

"Leave him with the rest."

"What'll you say to Singapore?"

"To hell with Singapore! If we get away with it we'll never even see him. If we don't get a break we'll go through with the original scheme. The *Sea Thrush* ought to be around by now."

**B**RADLEY had pushed through a tangle of vines and was in the jungle. He followed the course of the little stream for some distance, the ground rising all the time. At last he came to a small waterfall, the stream dropping from the edge of a tiny rocky plateau. To one side of this plateau, where the ground was soft again, there stood a group of palms in the midst of which, nearly hidden by the brush and vines, stood a massive boulder. Bradley went to this and nodded.

"The old man was telling the truth," he observed to his brother. Lighting a cheroot, he waited until Gentleman Harry and the others came up, his back to the rock.

"Any luck?" inquired Gentleman Harry pleasantly. Bradley touched the ground before him with his foot.

"Dig there," he said. Gentleman Harry met his glance and the two men stared fixedly at each other, neither moving.

"I should think you'd like to dig the stuff yourself," said the Gentleman softly. Bradley smiled, and his voice assumed the quiet, deceptive drawl.

"I've got a bad back," he said. "So's Bob here."

The two men kept their glances set on each other. Captain Barrett stood to one

side, fingering his beard and muttering to himself. Werner came wheezing up and flung down the shovel and crowbar he had been carrying. Gentleman Harry spoke to him, without turning his head from Bradley.

"Dig it up, Werner."

The old beachcomber stared around blankly for a moment and then with an oath Captain Barrett picked up the crowbar and drove it savagely into the spot Bradley had indicated.

"I want t' get a look at the damned stuff," he panted.

Werner got hold of a shovel. Barrett unearthed a long-sunken rock slab and broke the earth beneath it. They dug furiously then, amid a tight silence broken only by their heavy breathing and grunting.

Bob Bradley watched them, forgetful of everything, the treasure lust upon him. But Gentleman Harry and the elder Bradley stood motionless, their eyes fixed, their faces set as if they played poker. They did not even look away when Barrett gave a hoarse cry of triumph and young Bradley whimpered with excitement.

"A box," mumbled old Werner. "Tin box wrapped in canvas. Nearly rusted away at that."

"Wrap it in your coat, Barrett," Bradley rasped suddenly. "We'll get back to the ship."

The words recalled Barrett to himself and he looked up sharply, first at Bradley and then at his partner. Gentleman Harry smiled a little.

"We'll go back to the ship," he agreed. And in those words Barrett knew that Gentleman Harry had resigned one scheme entirely. Bradley was too alert to be jumped.

**T**HEY went back through the jungle to the beach in silence, even young Bradley suppressing his excitement and aware of the tension. Barrett went first with the box. Bradley and Gentleman Harry came next, side by side. Bob Bradley brought up the rear with Werner. Very carefully they all got in the boat, watching each other, and very carefully they pulled back to the ship.

The sweat was standing on Bradley's brow when he at last stood on his deck, and Gentleman Harry's lips were twitch-

ing with involuntary nervousness. Barrett took the box down to the main cabin. They followed him, all except Werner, who mumbled something about getting busy. He shambled away for'ard. Bradley did not even notice his departure, he was so busy with the others.

Barrett had set the box on the main cabin table and was staring at it with shining, fascinated eyes. Gentleman Harry and Bradley sat down, the box between them. Young Bradley was plucking at his pale lips and shaking in every limb.

"Shall I open her?" Barrett demanded hoarsely.

"Sure. Let's have a look," said Gentleman Harry easily. Bradley sensed that the other had relaxed, was no longer tensed to make a play, and he relaxed too. Together they set their hands in plain sight on the table and lowered their eyes to watch Barrett's clumsy operations.

He ripped clear some rotted canvas and tarred line, exposing to full view what had once been a black-japanned tin box with a brass lock.

With eager fingers the bearded captain forced it open, lifted a fine silk scarf, now badly stained, and uttered a choking cry as his eyes fell upon the box's contents.

**T**HERE was some gold, coins, bangles, earrings and such. But the chief part of the loot consisted of jewels. Emeralds, a few rubies, some all but ruined pearls and a considerable number of diamonds and pieces of carved jade. There were bracelets set with precious stones; necklaces of clear emeralds; some exquisite brooches of blood amber and at least a handful of other stones of indeterminate nature and value. Gentleman Harry put out one hand and delicately lifted a large ruby that glowed like wine from a golden setting; it must have been worth a small fortune.

"It was too bad Captain Rewin could not get back," he murmured, amused. "He could have done quite a lot with this."

Captain Barrett sat down heavily and clawed at his beard. Young Bradley pawed over the gems.

"Hmm," muttered the captain. "There's a pile of jack there."

Bradley's lips tightened.

"There is. We'll make a list of every-

thing, then lock the box up until we get to port."

"To Balata?" inquired Gentleman Harry smoothly. Bradley laughed.

"Do you take me for a fool? We'll go to some port that's neutral for both of us. Maybe Macassar. Sell the stuff and split the money. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Anything you say, my dear Bradley. Anything you say."

There was something in his tone, something confident, insolent, amused, that made the bigger man suspicious. His clear gray eyes narrowed. He was about to say something when there came a slight bump, then another and the lugger rocked sharply. Right through the soles of his shoes Bradley could feel her grinding. He jumped to his feet.

"What th' hell!" he rapped. "We're aground."

Gentleman Harry did not move, but carefully lighted a cheroot.

"Yes," he agreed pleasantly. "We're aground."

**B**RADLEY went up on deck, urging Captain Barrett before him and leaving his brother to watch the jewels and Gentleman Harry. The lugger, which had been anchored in three fathoms when he had boarded her, was now resting with a slight list on a sand bank about two cable's-length to port.

Bradley roared for his crew and ran for'ard. He saw at a glance what had happened. Someone had slipped the anchor cable and the tide had drifted the ship. She had not been drifting when they boarded her after the shore excursion, therefore, it had been done since.

The Chinese were stolid and stupid. They knew nothing. That was, of course, a lie, but Bradley knew the futility of argument. Gentleman Harry must have made promises. If they had not slipped the cable themselves they must have been acquiescent while someone else did it. But who? Werner? Bradley suddenly thought of the old beachcomber, but he was nowhere to be seen. Probably in hiding. But why slip the cable? Had Gentleman Harry ordered that, to put the lugger ashore? Why? What sense was there in wrecking the lugger?

Bradley leaned over the side, went round

the ship and cursed. He would have to wait until the next high tide and kedge the lugger out. It might take him two or three tides, and would certainly take a lot of work. He stormed below to the main cabin again, after calling out to his brother to ascertain if everything was safe, and Gentleman Harry shook his head.

"No use in swearing about it," he remarked. "We'll get her off all right."

Bradley forced himself to be calm.

"What was the idea of beaching her?"

The other looked blank.

"Why the devil should I beach her? I don't want to stick around Rewin Island now we've got the loot."

Bradley bit his lip and gave it up, although an inner voice warned him there was something in the wind. He had a list of the jewels and stuff made, locked the rusted box in his drawer and then took the whole crowd of them on deck to aid in getting a kedge anchor overside. What with all this and with stopping to eat it was soon dark.

Bradley was half dead with the strain. He had to keep always alert, watch the others. His brother he could not trust to do this. He cursed himself more than once for ever bringing Gentleman Harry along. He felt himself outwitted.

The final meal of the day was eaten in silence and when it was over Bradley and his brother went on deck, soon to be followed by Barrett and Gentleman Harry. Of Werner there was still no sign and when Bradley inquired as to his whereabouts Gentleman Harry merely shrugged and answered brusquely:

"How the devil should I know?"

## V

IT was getting late. The night was dark but starry and there was a warm wind from the west. Bradley smoked a cheroot and paced up and down the after-deck. He was deadly tired, but he dared not sleep.

Gentleman Harry and Captain Barrett were midships, talking together with Werner, who had appeared as soon as darkness fell, but had not yet ventured aft, as if he were afraid to face Bradley.

There was a curious tenseness in the air. It was as if they all waited for something, but what Bradley could not tell. He

put it down to his weary nerves at last and called his brother over.

"I've got to get some rest, Bob," he said flatly. "It's going to be hell tomorrow, getting this packet afloat and watching those birds. I'm going to stretch out on a chair on deck here and I want you to stand by. Give me a call if anything suspicious breaks. And if you doze off it'll likely be the last thing you ever do. Get that?"

His brother nodded understandingly but protested.

"I think you take it all too seriously. Men just don't shoot you in cold blood. Why should Gentleman Harry bother to do that? He's certain of a half share without getting into any trouble."

Bradley laughed, a harsh sound.

"When you've been around as much as I have you'll know better," he assured his brother. "Have you forgotten Balata? The man we found knifed under the palm? That Carson man in Singapore Joe's?" A suspicion came to him. "Have you been talking with Gentleman Harry?"

His brother hesitated.

"Well, what of it," he said, a trifle defensively. "I rather like him. He's well educated, a gentleman."

Bradley took him by the shoulders and shook him.

"You're a damned young fool," he snapped roughly, "but I love you and I don't want you to die yet. Stand right here by this chair and do as I say. Call me if anything busts. Get it?"

"All right," said the other somewhat sullenly. He did not like the way his brother treated him as a child.

Bradley dropped to a long cane chair, tossed his half burned cheroot overside, tipped his uniform cap over his eyes and let all his limbs relax. He was conscious of the voices of Gentleman Harry and others midships for a while; conscious that the Chinamen were making an ungodly lot of noise for them, beating a tin can or something, to keep the devils away, he supposed; and singing eerily. He had half a mind to yell to them to cut it out, but decided not to, as he disliked to make the exertion now he was resting. He sensed his brother looming beside him, staring moodily at the stars, and then he dropped into a heavy doze.

WHAT awakened him Bradley never knew. Afterwards he put it down to that "hunch" sense of his and to his colossal luck. He was only aware that very suddenly his eyes were open and his every muscle alert. He turned slightly, and discovered his brother had gone, and then he caught the sound of his voice midships, protesting, but protesting half-heartedly.

"No, I don't want a drink now. I've got to go back. If he wakes up and finds I've gone . . ."

Bradley cursed beneath his breath. The young fool had let them entice him midships. Gentleman Harry had probably called him, wanting to show him something or say something. He had a suspicion, now he looked back on the six days voyage from Balata, that Gentleman Harry had put himself out to make an impression on Bob. Damn everything! What was in the wind? What was that sound, so faint above the small wind? Bradley got to his feet with a cat-like spring and at that moment things happened.

He heard his brother cry out.

"You dirty crooks! Let me go. I'll . . ."

There was a choking cry after that, followed by a thud.

The lugger rocked as something struck her side. There was a loud scrambling noise, the low mutter of voices. The Chinese had stopped beating their can, stopped singing. Bradley cursed himself for not being wiser. They had been making all that racket for some purpose, to guide someone.

Bradley landed on the main deck in one jump from the top of the low poop companion. Shadows filled the deck. He saw men pouring over the rail and, sparing time for a glance overside, noted two boats against the lugger's hull. He heard Gentleman Harry caution quiet.

"Come out, you rat," he said coldly. "I'm awake."

He fired as he spoke, emptied his gun. He saw men stagger and fall. A belaying pin sang through the darkness and took him on the side of the head. He went to his knees. Men poured over him. Half stunned, he rocked upwards, broke a man's arm, flung another with such force against the mast that his skull was cracked. A knife burned his side, a gun butt glanced off his temple. His fist caught a face and

he felt the bones give beneath the blow.

Lights blazed and whirled before his eyes. With a last desperate instinct to survive, he dragged himself to the rail, hauling four or five men with him, shaking them clear and toppling over and into the cool water alongside.

The shock revived him. The smarting sensation in his lungs brought him round. He struck out weakly, came to the surface and heard the spitting of shots and the flick of lead as they fired blindly at him. Gentleman Harry's voice called out and the firing stopped. Bradley struck out more strongly, veered once or twice, located the loom of the island against the stars and headed for the shore. He hoped there were no sharks.

He swam for what seemed hours, as in a dream, sick and dazed. At last, when it seemed he would have to give up, his feet struck sand and he was able to stagger and reel to the beach. He fell on the dry sand. But he did not stop until he had reached the dark shelter of the jungle, though he had to crawl the last hundred feet. Finally, his arm flung round a rugged palm trunk, he lapsed into unconsciousness.

IT was nearly dawn when Bradley awoke. There was a paleness in the eastern sky, a hint of redness, he thought. The stars were weak and wan. The wind had increased in strength. His limbs were all numbed and stiff and he sat up only with difficulty.

The first thing he was aware of was that the redness in the sky was not the early sun, but a pillar of tall flame licking upwards from the beached lugger. She was almost burned to the water's edge and the rosy glow from her cast a light far across the water. There was no sign of the boats that had come in the night. No sign of any ship. The beach seemed deserted except for a dark huddle down near the water's edge.

Bradley got up, shaky still and weak from loss of blood. He leaned against the palm beneath which he had dropped and tried to collect his thoughts. He had been outwitted. He had lost everything, all but his life. What had become of his brother he had not the least idea. He cursed himself for letting the boy come with him.

He drank from the little stream that ran

down the ravine where they had gone to get old Rewin's loot. It was lighter by this time, light enough to see clearly.

The dark huddle Bradley had noticed down at the water's edge now resolved itself into two men, one raised on an elbow, the other lying prone. Savage and sick, Bradley rocked down toward them. He did not even stop to think if they were armed. He had lost his own gun when he had toppled overside, and he had released his cartridge belt when in the water, since it hampered his swimming.

It was somewhat of a shock for him to discover that the man leaning on one elbow was Werner. The old beachcomber was a ghastly sight. His sodden shirt was stained red down the left side. His face was sunken and white beneath his whiskers, his eyes glaring as with fever. He was too weak to even speak at first, only stared at Bradley as if he would bore through him.

Bradley said nothing.

The other figure, prone on its face, he knelt beside and turned over. They had got Bob after all. There was a knife between his ribs and his face was convulsed. Bradley's head suddenly cleared.

"How did you come here?" he asked quietly, so quietly he was astonished at himself. Werner stared at him, wetted his cracked lips.

"They pitched me over," he whispered hoarsely. "Shot me and pitched me over."

"And you swam ashore?" asked Bradley, beyond any astonishment now. The other nodded. It was incredible that an old man, weakened with excesses, should have done it, but he had, obviously. Werner came of a tough breed.

## VI

"**W**HO killed my brother?" asked Bradley, quite calm. Werner sank back wearily to the sand and flung an arm across his eyes. He had not long to live.

"Barrett stabbed him," the old man muttered. "They threw him over too. . . . He swam a bit . . . then died. . . . Drifted ashore. I found him not long ago."

"But why did they want to shoot you?"

Werner mumbled something. Then his voice cleared.

"Didn't want to share with me. . . .

'Fraid you might have friends and I'd talk. . . . I'm tired."

Bradley bent closer over him.

"I want to know just a little more, to get things straight. In some way Gentleman Harry coaxed my brother from where I was sleeping, got him midships. What for?"

"To get him away from you. . . . 'Fraid he might wake you up when he heard the boats coming."

"Whose boats were they?"

Werner rose on one elbow again, rallying the last of his strength.

"From the *Sea Thrush*. . . . Singapore's bark."

Bradley was still for a moment, bent on one knee, staring into the old beachcomber's eyes.

"Singapore sent Gentleman Harry then to see me?"

"It was Harry's idea first. Then Singapore and him fixed it that the *Sea Thrush* was to come to Rewin here. Get here ahead of you . . . fast sailer. They had a man on lookout on the headland of the bay yonder when we anchored. It was up to us to keep the lugger around until night and then the *Sea Thrush's* boats were to jump us. . . . Harry did figure he might get a chance to ditch you an' your brother and get away in th' lugger with the loot all to himself. He'd have had a few hours' start before th' lookout could get to th' *Sea Thrush* and they could get after him. 'E figured on takin' th' chance anyway. But you never let up an' he was 'feared t' jump you.

"When we got back aboard 'e give me th' sign t' slip th' cable. Th' Chinks 'e'd bribed already. . . ." The old man sighed and sank flat again.

Bradley said nothing and Werner went on.

"You're a good guy. I've been a louse, but yuh know how 'tis when a feller goes under . . . bad."

"**W**HERE will the *Sea Thrush* go?" asked Bradley quietly.

"Balata. They figure you won't dare ever go there even if you're alive and get off Rewin. I got you figured different. . . . You stick around an' there'll be a ship coming in some time. One of th' old timers." He closed his eyes and seemed to sleep,

exhausted. There was nothing that could be done for him.

Bradley stood up and looked at the body of his brother. His lean face changed perceptibly, grew grimmer, ageless, terrifying. He did not curse. He did not even feel grief. He felt only a sick remorse at himself and a deadly, stark anger.

From that hour the gay, reckless young adventurer who had come down from Shanghai was gone. Gone was the cheerful daring, the joy in fighting and battle. There remained an older man, a silent, calm, icy man who was to make Island history.

How long Bradley stood on the beach with his brother at his feet he never knew. It must have been hours. He did not feel the crimson glow of the sun strike his face, did not feel the rising heat that beat on him, the glare of the white sand.

The first thing he knew was when he heard a voice, a rough, roaring voice hailing him, and he looked up with a start. A white-painted whaleboat was coming toward him, evidently from the remains of the smoldering lugger.

A tall, muscular man, red-faced, arrogant and dressed in a white singlet, ducks and a sun helmet, landed from the whaleboat and strode up the beach. Bradley saw a pair of keen blue eyes, an iron-gray mustache, a mane of iron-gray hair. The stranger halted before him, a scant two inches shorter than himself, and stared at the inert figures on the sand, before looking back at Bradley.

"What th' hell's wrong here?" the stranger demanded, or rather bellowed, Werner opened his eyes, tried to rise again.

"Cassidy," he jerked feebly. "I'd know that voice. . . . Jim Cassidy."

The gray-haired man started and bent down.

"Who th' hell are you?"

"Werner. . . . What's left of 'im."

The other straightened and shook his head.

"The Werner I knew died on Balata . . . years ago."

The wounded man gestured his assent, smiling a little.

"That's right, Cassidy. . . . Years ago."

Bradley moistened his dry lips.

"Where did you come from?" he demanded. The other waved a large hand.

"Where th' hell do you think? I was

over at the old beach on the east coast, careening. What are you doing here?"

BRADLEY felt something pluck at his leg. Looking down, he saw Werner was trying to speak to him. He bent.

"That's Cassidy," Werner muttered. "One of the old timers. . . . 'E's all right."

Bradley nodded, understanding. This was one of the men who had known Jack Rewin in the old days. One of the captains who still used the island. Cassidy was explaining in his bellowing way.

"Got up this morning and saw a fire way off across the island. Shoved the whaleboat out and came to look-see. What's the story?"

Bradley told him, briefly as he could. Cassidy said nothing, but brought his four Kanakas ashore from the whaleboat. He gave Bradley a drink of brandy, from a flask, moistened Werner's lips with the same spirit. The Kanakas carried the body of young Bradley up under the palms and buried him. Werner they laid in the boat. Bradley got in, Cassidy in the stern sheets beside him.

Nothing was said, except a few commands on the part of Cassidy. The whaleboat was pulled clear of the bay, a sail run up and they circled Rewin Island, coming at last to the east coast, where in an ideally sheltered cove the schooner *Redwing* lay on the sand for careening.

Cassidy took Bradley on board, washed and dressed his wounds, rolled him in cool sheets and made him turn into his own bunk. In spite of himself the exhausted man slept, and hours later awoke to sip some warm broth and drink more brandy and slept again.

When he finally awoke it was to find the *Redwing* launched and afloat, and to hear Cassidy bellowing orders on deck. Bradley got up, dressed in some whites he found laid out for him, shaved himself, drank more brandy and went up on deck. Cassidy eyed him sharply from head to foot and grunted.

"You look better. How's the head and the side?"

"Going good," said Bradley. "Where's Werner?"

"Died yesterday," said Cassidy quietly. "Told me the story. We'll bury him when we get to sea."

FOR'ARD the Kanakas were hoisting the anchor.

"How long was I out?" Bradley inquired.

"Two days," Cassidy replied. "I'm going to Sydney. Take you along?"

"No," said Bradley. His voice was flat and metallic. Cassidy stared at him.

"Drop me at Balata on your way."

Cassidy snorted.

"You got it in the neck going in with fellows like Gentleman Harry and Barrett. Stay away from Balata or you'll get more. You're green in the South, so take an old timer's advice."

Bradley shrugged. "Nevertheless, I'm going there." he replied.

Cassidy swore.

"Have it your own way. But Gentleman Harry's one of the best shots in the South, so is Singapore Joe. And you can't fight them both, let alone the whole damned island."

Bradley's jaw tightened.

"You've been damned good to me," he stated. "And I'll ask you just another favor, as man to man. Lend me your dinghy and a gun when we're off Balata. You don't have to run in the harbor. Give me twenty-four hours and if I'm not back go on to Sydney."

Cassidy was amused.

"It's not much you want," he suggested. "Hold up my whole voyage and throw away a boat and gun because some crazy fool wants to commit suicide." He eyed Bradley closer for a moment and something he saw in the narrowed gray eyes sent a chill through him. Ever an impulsive man he suddenly made his decision. "You're on," he roared, slapping his thigh.

Bradley smiled, thinly and coldly.

## VII

NO one saw the small dinghy as she rounded the point and headed for the roadstead at Balata. Her sail came down as she drew near the anchored ships and the solitary man in her put out the oars and pulled. He headed at a tangent for the beach, for the darkest part beyond the lights of the shacks and saloons.

The first anyone knew that something was looming was when a half-drunken captain stumbled out of the rear entrance of

Singapore Joe's in the wake of a Kanaka girl, bound for the huts back of those that lined the beach.

A tall, grim figure stepped in the captain's path and halted him. The captain, a big man, tried to push past, but the stranger was like a rock.

"Wha'sh up with yuh?" demanded the captain, sobering a little.

"Where's Gentleman Harry?" said a cold voice. A strong hand gripped the captain's throat and shook him. He was suddenly afraid.

"They're both in th' office, back there," he stuttered. He pointed to the door. The stranger released his captive, took half a step back and swung. There was a sharp crack and the captain fell forward, out on his feet. He would not be able to give any alarm for some time.

In Singapore Joe's office there were four men. Gentleman Harry and Singapore Joe sat at a neat baize-covered table beneath a hanging lamp. Between them on the green-topped table was a rusty black tin box, the lid still closed.

Leaning against one wall was a brutal-faced, clean-shaven man, one of Singapore's captains, the man who ran the *Sea Thrush*, Singapore's big bark. On a chair near the door that led into the main room, whence came the muffled noise of hilarity, sat a stalwart Chinaman, half-nude, his arms folded across his chest, and a gun thrust in his belt. Rough customers, those two.

Gentleman Harry and Singapore were arguing. They had entered Balata roadstead that afternoon, due to a squall crippling their canvas and a bad headwind that had held them back.

"There's only one thing to do," Gentleman Harry was insisting. "There isn't enough loose jack in Balata to pay for that stuff. We've got to take it to Macassar, or even Sydney."

"But who's going to take it?" demanded Singapore Joe. "Who can we trust, I ask?"

Gentleman Harry shrugged.

"We'll both go then. But not on the *Sea Thrush*."

"Why not on the *Sea Thrush*?" purred the other, rubbing his hands. "She is a fast ship."

"None faster," Gentleman Harry agreed. "But do you think I'd stand for just Bar-

rett and me among your whole crew? Talk sense, Joe."

The other shrugged helplessly.

"Are you going to quarrel about this, now? What do you suggest?"

"Give the stuff to Ah Sing to take north on his schooner. He's square, even if we don't like him. You and I both send a man with him. That way . . ."

**G**ENTLEMAN HARRY did not finish. A slight gust of air had entered the room. The back door was wide open. Neither Singapore's captain nor the Chinese guard noticed it at first, but Gentleman Harry was exactly facing the door. Singapore Joe looked at him sharply as he stopped talking.

Gentleman Harry's face had gone as rigid as stone. His jaw remained open, as it was when he was in the act of speaking. His throat worked. His eyes bulged. All of his normal suavity and calmness had deserted him.

Singapore Joe whipped round, startled himself now, and then he too grew rigid. The Chinese guard got suddenly to his feet. Singapore's captain braced himself against the wall, astonished.

In the doorway stood Bradley, dressed only in a shirt, in crumpled duck pants, in rope-soled canvas slippers. His head was bare. His face was tight and drawn. His eyes were narrowed. And about his waist he had twin guns buckled.

"Well," he said calmly. "Quite a pleasant meeting." His voice was as hard and cold as ice. He seemed to be standing negligently, his hands hooked in his belts. Only his eyes roved back and forth from man to man. Gentleman Harry slowly recovered, although his hands were trembling.

"I'll give you credit," he said at last, hoarsely. "You've got nerve, Bradley."

Singapore Joe sucked in his breath and stood up.

"I do not think," he purred, "you will bother us much longer."

Bradley laughed and as he laughed things happened. They thought he was off guard for a moment. Singapore Joe sprang sideways and drew his gun. Gentleman Harry moved quick as a snake, diving into his arm-holster.

The room was suddenly filled with noise, the crashing vomit of guns. Bradley was

firing from both hands, braced square back to the door, his eyes gray slits and his face expressionless.

Gentleman Harry knew even as he drew that he had met his match. Singapore Joe never had time to raise his weapon. He died with a hole through his heart and his own shot tearing into the floor. Gentleman Harry just got his gun clear when a bullet entered his right shoulder and another knocked the weapon from his hand.

The Chinese guard went down with a hole in his forehead. The captain rocked back, hit in the left arm and the thigh. It was over in half a minute. The South had never seen such a shooting before.

The room was filled with smoke and the acrid fumes of powder. Only Gentleman Harry stood on his feet, holding his shoulder, his face livid and convulsed, his lips drawn back from his teeth. His eyes held Bradley's as that individual calmly sheathed one gun and going by sense of touch alone reloaded the other. He sheathed that then and repeated the operation.

"You're clever," snarled Gentleman Harry at last. "Damned clever. But you won't live long to talk about it."

**"W**HERE'S Barrett?" Bradley rasped.

"On the *Sea Thrush*. Drunk when I left him," sneered Gentleman Harry. "If you want the man who knifed your brother Barrett's it."

"I know," Bradley agreed. "And I'm letting you live so you can tell how you were licked by a green hand."

He came forward, walking deliberately. There was dead silence now from the big main room. The men and women out there thought that Singapore and Gentleman Harry were fighting and they did not care to interfere. But they were curious, startled, and they waited. Bradley was close to Gentleman Harry at last, staring down at him.

"Do you remember what I told you when we made our deal in the main cabin of the *Wanderer*? I told you that if you put anything over on me you wouldn't talk about it for long."

Gentleman Harry stared at him, fascinated in spite of himself, and at the same time hating him.

"You better get me now," he snarled.

"You won't get another chance. And I'll see you cold before you can leave the Islands."

Bradley laughed, an ugly sound.

He struck then, before the other man could dodge. Struck twice. Two piston drives of Bradley's iron fists caught him flush on his handsome face, smashing flat the nose, splitting the lips, tearing open the cheek and fracturing the jaw. The other dropped like a log, spouting blood.

Without so much as a look down at his foe, Bradley stepped over him and to the door. He flung it back and entered the main room. Every face was turned toward him. He closed the door behind.

"Has anybody got anything to say?" he asked evenly. "Singapore Joe is dead."

No one answered him. They backed away from him, as he advanced. They opened out and let him through, made a clear road for him to the curtained doorway that led to the veranda and the beach. In the doorway he turned, a thin smile creasing his lips. A man who had ventured to peer into the inner office came stumbling out, choking.

"He's got 'em all," he croaked. "Joe an' Harry and th' rest. Looks like a typhoon struck 'em."

Bradley laughed aloud.

"Thanks for the suggestion," he said. Then he drew one gun and started firing. He aimed at the hurricane lamps and there was a stampede as they fell. Flames ran over the floor. Bradley laughed again and stepped back into the darkness.

**B**RADLEY went down to the beach where he had left his dinghy. He launched her and pulled for the ships at anchor. Behind him Singapore Joe's was ablaze and the wind was fanning the flames down the long row of shacks and saloons. Bradley did not even trouble to look back.

He pulled to three ships before he found the *Sea Thrush*. Then he tied his dinghy to the pilot ladder and climbed up over the bulwarks.

Bradley went up on the poop and down the companion to the main cabin. It was well lighted. Two white men sat there. One was Captain Barrett, very drunk and singing to himself. The other was a grim-faced, lean man in a gray flannel shirt and a pair of pajama pants. He was not armed.

Barrett had his gun on the table before him, together with his cartridge belt.

"Barrett," said Bradley quietly. The bearded captain looked up and suddenly sobered. He fumbled at his beard then and half rose.

"What in hell do you want? Some of what your damned brother got?" He made a grab for the gun on the table. Bradley waited until he had the weapon clear and leveled. Then he killed him before he could pull the trigger.

There was a hard silence as the echoes of the shot died away. Bradley turned his gaze to the second of the men, who was sitting rigid and astonished and badly frightened.

"Who are you?" Bradley asked. The other licked his lips and clawed to his feet, his hands above his head.

"Don't plug me. I'm mate of this packet. I jest obey orders."

Bradley stared at him for a long moment and then holstered his gun.

"All right. Then take some orders now. Singapore Joe's dead and I need a ship. Get the men to work and lift anchor. We're putting to sea."

The other choked.

"You're taking over?"

"I'm taking over. I'm the new skipper."

The mate seemed as if he would protest, but one look into Bradley's cold eyes convinced him. He lowered his hands and shrugged.

"All th' same to me," he said. "Lift th' anchor you said. Very well, sir."

**B**RADLEY followed the mate up on deck and stood against the for'ard taffrail of the poop. The *Sea Thrush* was a sweet bark. No one would dispute his claim to her. He had left the tin box of Captain Rewin's loot in Singapore Joe's office, left it deliberately. He felt he could not touch it now, since it had caused his brother's death. But he had the *Sea Thrush*. He knew too that he had made Island history.

The mate came aft.

"Anchor's aweigh, sir," he said respectfully. "Shall I make sail?"

"Make sail," Bradley agreed. "And send a man to the wheel. I'll give the course later."

The *Sea Thrush* drew clear of the roads

of Balata and rounded the point, heading into the open sea. Soon after dawn she drew close, very close to a schooner named the *Redwing*, lying hove-to and pitching gently. Bradley hailed her and Cassidy, walking up and down and chewing on a black cigar, obviously worried, stared across the blue water with astonishment.

"You got away then . . . damn you!" He was unable to say any more. Bradley waved at him as the bark slid past.

"I've got me a ship too. . . . See you in Apia, sometime . . . and thanks. I'll return the dinghy then."

"Say, listen!" called Cassidy. "What the hell!"

"I've got a new name," shouted Bradley, the thought suddenly coming to him as he remembered what had been said in Singapore Joe's when one curious man had stumbled from the reeking, smoke-filled office that looked as if a great wind had struck it.

"What's that?" bellowed Cassidy, and the tall young man with the old face laughed.

"Typhoon Bradley," he shouted back as the bark ran clear and out of hearing.



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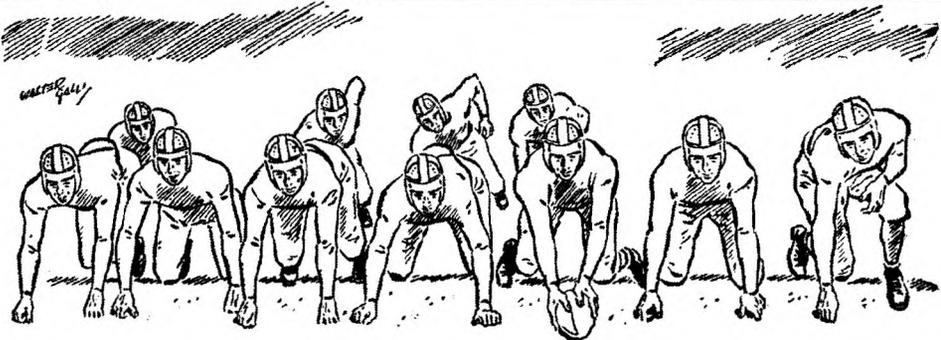
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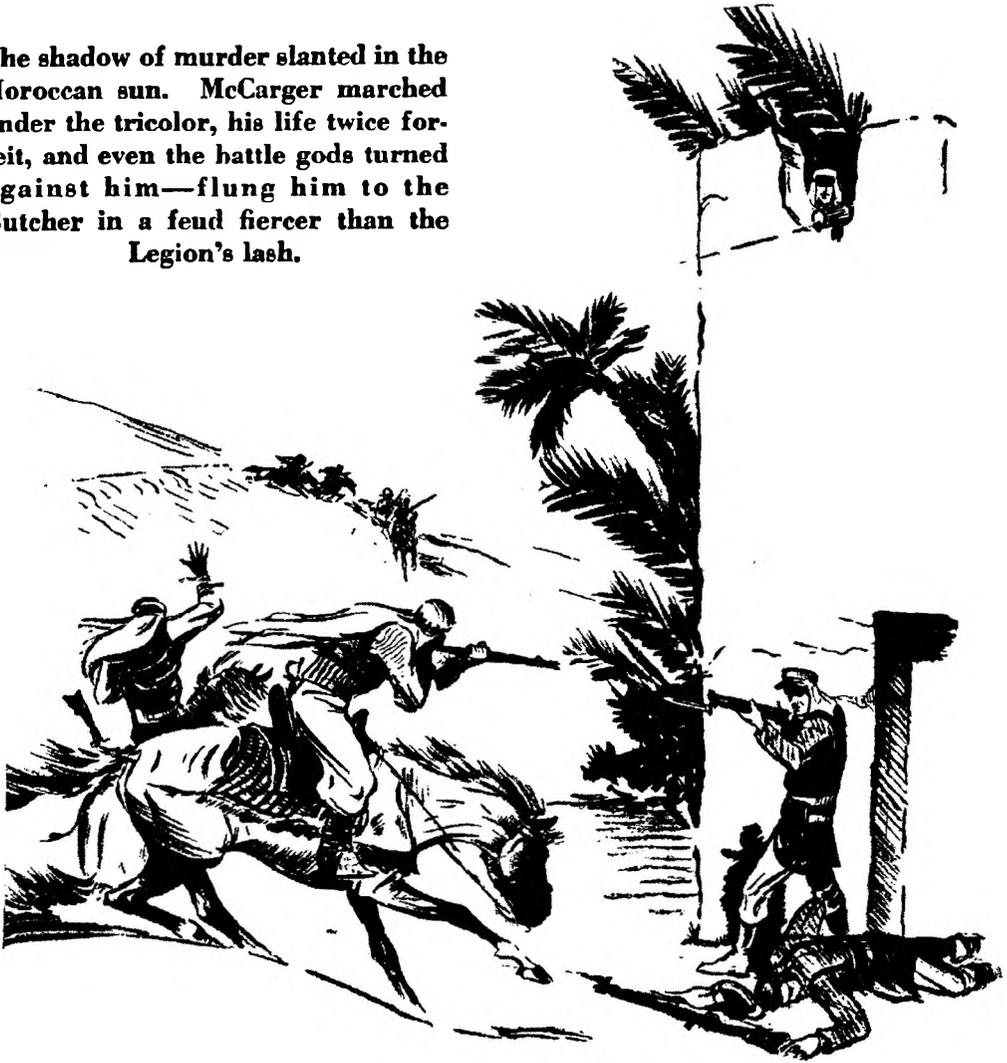
*A complete adventure novelet*

**M**ACCARGER had realized for some time that he was aboard a train instead of a boat. The rumble and jar was about the same as in his bunk over the old *Valdura's* propeller, but the roll was decidedly different.

The first real spark of consciousness

came when the train ground to a stop at Aubagne. A man and woman entered the compartment and settled themselves in the seat opposite. Don MacCarger sat up then. He tried to think of some logical reason for his being there. Why had he left Toulon? He recalled that he had been drink-

The shadow of murder slanted in the Moroccan sun. McCarger marched under the tricolor, his life twice forfeit, and even the battle gods turned against him—flung him to the Butcher in a feud fiercer than the Legion's lash.



ing, which meant that he had probably gotten drunk. But a train? Where was he going?

The couple opposite would know. He took a close look at the man. That did more to sober him than anything else could have.

The Frenchman's two black, close-set eyes bored into him from beneath one solid, bristling eyebrow that grew straight across his forehead. They were hard and cruel like the mouth below, a slot rather than a mouth, screened also by a thick growth of wiry hair.

Don MacCarger had come in contact with some hard cases, but never anything quite

like the bullet-headed, bull-necked man across the narrow aisle. He wondered for a moment what relation the woman could be to him. She was no beauty; but in spite of the unmistakable lines of dissipation, she seemed to be cast from better stuff.

No, he was very sure he would receive no help from them.

It occurred to him that he must have had a ticket to board the train, and that the ticket would name his destination. He made a search of his pockets. He found the ticket—second class to Marseilles. But that was all.

His papers were gone, his wallet, everything.

His angry exclamation ended in a groan. He remembered suddenly that the *Valdura* was sailing on the morning tide. It was morning now.

The agitated conversation went on across from him. The woman seemed to be on the verge of tears; the ugly face of the man was distorted with anger. Giving her hell about something, MacCarger decided.

There is nothing like cold water for a throbbing head. MacCarger left the compartment and worked his way along the narrow passage to the washroom. When he had bathed his head and swallowed a pint or two, he felt better.

At the entrance to the compartment he had occupied, MacCarger stopped. He was wondering if it would be worth while to continue on through the train, when he noticed that the heated conversation within had ceased. Turning, he glanced through the door.

For a moment MacCarger stood dumb with horror. He took a step forward and peered down at the limp form sprawled between the two seats. It was the woman, dead, a knife buried to the hilt in her breast.

A gust of smoke filled the compartment. Hazily he noted that the window had been opened. The man had disappeared.

MACCARGER knelt down to examine the woman more closely. He put out a hand to touch the knife, drew it back again with a shudder. He started to rise.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" a voice exclaimed at his back.

MacCarger turned. One of the train officials stood glaring at him with a look of horror that equaled his own. It flashed through MacCarger's brain that the trainman believed he was responsible.

"No, no!" he fairly screamed, and pointed to the open window.

"A Frenchman!" he cried. "He must have gone that way!"

The accusing frown only deepened. The trainman shoved his way into the compartment and made a move to close the door.

MacCarger swore. The meaning back of that move filled him with sudden dread.

In an instant he realized the danger of his position. He had no proof of his innocence—no explanation, even, of his presence on the train. He had no papers.

He could not defend himself, and had

no money to hire it done. Escape seemed the only way out. He swung on the trainman's jaw.

With a grunt, the man went down, and MacCarger stepped over him, out of the compartment.

Disguise was the next thing. The cut of his clothes and the style of his hat screamed American in every line. The door to the washroom opened as he neared it, and a blond young man stepped out.

MacCarger's decision was made. He had seen the word "Marseille" painted in huge red letters on the side of an embankment. There was no time to lose.

"Get in there!" he ordered, and shoved the stranger back into the washroom.

"*Was ist das!*" the man demanded.

MacCarger closed the door and tore off his coat. Holding it out, he made it clear that he wanted to trade.

"*Nein, nein!*" the German protested, and made a break for the door.

MacCarger had neither time nor words to waste. He slammed him back in the corner, and knocked him cold.

He stripped the unconscious man of his coat and hat. Hastily he put them on and stepped out into the passage. The train was entering a station. A number of people at the other end of the coach gave evidence that the tragedy had been discovered. The group parted. The trainman appeared, waving his arms excitedly.

MacCarger ducked hurriedly through the vestibules into the next coach. He climbed down to the platform, hastening toward the exit. Then he felt in the pockets of his borrowed coat for the ticket that he knew would be demanded at the gate.

There was no ticket. He did, however, discover an envelope addressed to the Bureau of something-or-other at Sidi-Bel-Abbes, Africa. Opening it, he found an official appearing document with seals and signatures. In desperation MacCarger decided to use it for what it was worth.

"*Le billet, Monsieur!*" The gateman put out his hand for a ticket.

MacCarger's trump card had belonged to a German, so it would not do to speak English. He took out the envelope.

The gateman glanced at the contents.

"*Legion Etrangère,*" he grunted.

He called to a man in uniform who stood near by. The soldier in uniform handed

the document back to MacCarger and motioned for him to follow.

## II

MACCARGER paid slight attention to where he was going as he walked along with the soldier. So much had happened in so short a time.

Before he realized it, the gates of Fort St. Jean yawned in front of him. Fort St. Jean is the depot at Marseilles for the Nineteenth Army Corps of France.

He came to his senses with a start. Two coal-black Senegalese with red fezzes and khaki-colored *capotes* stood on either side of the entrance. Just inside was another uniformed negro. On the cheeks of all three were ugly scars that looked as if they might have been made with a red-hot waffle iron.

MacCarger's guide led him to a cold, barren office at one end of an immense barrack. There another officer examined his papers and looked him over. Apparently satisfied, he returned the papers, and muttered an order to the soldier.

The man saluted; then escorted the American down a long corridor. MacCarger found himself in a room with five other men attired in civilian clothes like himself.

When the soldier had gone, the men come forward, each plying questions in a different tongue. Out of the jumble but one sentence was intelligible to MacCarger. It was spoken by the one man of the five from whom he least expected a word of English.

He was short, wiry and dark, with a head of shiny hair that waved like a prima donna's. Had his beard been a year old instead of a week, it no doubt would have curled, also.

"American, aren't you?" he repeated. His black eyes shone with friendliness.

MacCarger could not help answering.

"You guessed it," he returned, "and I wish to hell I was back there."

The little man shoved out his hand and his thin lips parted in a smile.

"So do I. My name's Peyron." MacCarger took the offered hand. "What is this place? What are you fellows doing here?"

"Joined when you were drunk, eh?" Peyron laughed. "Well, from what I've

heard of the outfit, you'll have plenty of time to sober up. This is the beginning of a stretch in the famous French Foreign Legion."

"The army!" MacCarger exclaimed.

"And then some," the little man added. "We ship for Oran this afternoon. You talk like you'd never heard of the Legion."

MacCarger had heard of it in a way. Somewhere he had read a story about it—the story of a company of devils, captained by Satan himself.

"Suppose a man changes his mind?" he inquired. "What would be the chances of—of—deserting?"

"Damn slim." Peyron shook his head. "They have a way in this country of checking up on a fellow."

MacCarger's uneasiness increased. It began to look as if he had jumped from the frying pan into something a great deal hotter.

Finally the arrival of another recruit settled the question for him. The man carried a French newspaper which Peyron immediately appropriated. When he had scanned the headlines, he eyed MacCarger suspiciously.

"Didn't happen to come from Toulon this morning, did you?" he asked.

"No," MacCarger answered promptly. "I came from Paris."

"No, you didn't, because you were here in the barracks before the morning train from Paris arrived. That doesn't matter, though; you don't look to me as if you'd cut the throat of a helpless female and then try the same thing on the train inspector."

MacCarger did his best to appear unconcerned. "What are you talking about?"

"Murder," the little man replied. "The paper says that the brute who committed the crime was either English or American."

MacCarger thought, what had become of the German? Why hadn't he been heard from? As a recruit for the Legion, he should have turned up at the fort. That was something that had not occurred to him. And the idea was far from pleasing.

The chances were, though, that the German had seen the theft of his papers as a good way to back out of his enlistment and had decided to say nothing about it.

"They are watching all roads leading

from the town," Peyron continued to read, "so there is no chance of the poor devil getting away."

"How do they know they're after the right man?"

"The trainman caught him in the act. He had to battle with the fool to keep him from jumping out the window, so he'll know him all right when they catch him."

MacCarger muttered an oath. He was glad he had swung on the trainman's jaw.

"*Garde à vous!—Suivez-moi!*" a soldier barked at the doorway.

The little band of recruits sprang to their feet.

"That means 'Attention! . . . Follow me,'" Peyron translated. "Come on, Yank, we're on our way."

MacCarger nodded. He trailed out of the barrack room with the others, resigned to his fate. He could see no other way.

### III

SIDI-BEL-ABBES, the Foreign Legion Headquarters in the Department of Oran, is a city both enchanting and hideous. The Place Sadi Carnot, where the Legion band gives its nightly concerts, might easily have been copied from a quarter of Paris; the *Village d'Espagnol* or the *Village Nègre* might have been lifted from a corner of Hades.

MacCarger, as he trudged up the hill toward the great stone barracks of the Legion, allowed himself to think that the future might prove an adventure worth while. The prospect, at any rate, was more pleasing than that of a guillotine.

"*Les bleus! Les bleus!* The recruits!" A shout went up as the little company filed through the tiny portal beside the immense, iron-studded barrack gate. Men came running for a glimpse of the new arrivals. The sergeant of the guard lined them up and welcomed them.

"*Sapristi*, what a batch of tripe! Scum! Cripples! There is not the making of a soldier in the whole worthless lot!"

To the uninitiated, the tirade sounded very much as if the forlorn little group was indeed the poorest gathering of humanity in the Legion's history. It would not have surprised any of them had their papers been torn up, and they themselves thrown bodily out into the road.

"Paul Heinrich!" the sergeant read from a slip of paper. He glanced up to see who would answer.

No one answered. He barked the name again, impatiently.

The seven men cast sidelong glances at one another, wondering who among them had forgotten his latest alias.

"PAUL HEINRICH!" the sergeant roared, his face growing red with rage.

The name suddenly flashed through MacCarger's brain and he turned a red that was a match for the sergeant's.

"Here," he answered meekly. It was the name he had seen on the German's papers.

"*Crê nom de nom de Dieu!*" The sergeant burst into a stream of oaths. "Son of a pig, a dog, a goat, what is the matter with you? Do you not know your own name?"

Don MacCarger—Paul Heinrich—had no idea of the terrible things that were being said about him. He only wished that there was a rat hole convenient that he might crawl down into.

"*Wie heissen sie?*" the sergeant demanded.

MacCarger knew less German than he did French.

"What in hell does he want now?" he inquired of Peyron.

"Your name. Tell him your name," Peyron whispered.

"To the devil with him. I answered once. He's only trying to make a monkey out of me now."

"*Garde à vous!*" the sergeant bellowed. "You are at attention, fool. For that talking you will get four hours at *plut*—hear me? And you will repeat your name while you march. If you do not know it, I will teach it to you."

MacCarger was stripped of his coat and forced to exchange his shoes for a pair of rope sandals. He surmised that he was in for some sort of punishment. When an eighty-pound sack of sand was strapped to his shoulders, and he was told to march, there was no longer any doubt about it.

"*En avant—marche!*" The corporal in charge gave the order. "*Un Deux!* One! Two! Paul Heinrich! Paul Heinrich!"

MacCarger took a half-dozen steps, then he stopped. The injustice of the thing suddenly filled him with anger. He had forgotten his name, but there was nothing

criminal about that—not from any standpoint of right or wrong that he had ever heard of. His stubborn Scotch temper revolted to the core. He refused to move another inch.

THE corporal cursed him and shoved him, but his efforts were wasted. Had he been one who understood his fellow men, he would have read a warning in his victim's mounting color. When MacCarger's jaw snapped shut and his dark blue eyes began to smolder, it was time to let him alone.

"You lay your dirty paws on me again," he declared, "and I'll bust you on the nose."

The corporal promptly did the very thing he had been warned not to. And Don MacCarger kept his promise. With a swing that started a yard away, he spread the man's nose over the greater part of his be-whiskered countenance.

The corporal staggered to his feet. He was bleeding like a stuck pig and squealing worse. He did not offer to fight, much to MacCarger's disgust. His yells brought help from the guard. Bayonets at his ribs, MacCarger was marched off across the parade ground and thrown into the *salle de police*.

Jails and prisons in France are the worst of any civilized country on earth. The *bôte débôtée* of the Legion at Sidi-Bel-Abbes is no exception.

A sloping shelf along the side of the rough stone wall answered as a bunk. The slope was just enough so that a man could not relax without slipping down against the footboards, and he could not stretch out in the trough at the bottom without danger of being walked on.

There was a floor, to be sure, but a drunken man is never particular where he makes his litter, and the number of drunks always far outnumbered the sober.

For one whole week MacCarger remained there, cursing France, the Legion and everyone in it, himself included. Try as he would, he could not get a guard to give him more than an uncivil grunt. When at last one called him aside and led him out, he was sure he was dreaming.

This sudden act of kindness, he soon discovered, was for the benefit of the court which had condescended that morning to

consider his case—the case of a raw recruit who had disobeyed his very first orders and punched a corporal to boot.

The trial was strictly in accordance with the laws of the Legion. On the bench sat a colonel, a major, two captains and a sergeant-major. In addition there was a prosecutor who damned MacCarger to the very depths, and an attorney for the defense, a dapper young captain, who really proved to be human.

An interpreter was allowed. The interpreter, however, spoke German instead of English, and MacCarger was all at sea.

It was a point that caused comment in spite of the protests of the prosecutor; so much comment, in fact, that another interpreter was brought in to see which side was right. At last MacCarger was addressed in a language that he understood. The trial proceeded.

There were witnesses for the prosecution, the sergeant, the corporal, and a dozen others, but not one for the defense. No one, not even the dapper young captain, could think of any possible reason or excuse for the prisoner's inexcusable, unmilitary conduct.

The captain did, however, stress the fact that the miserable recruit could not have understood what had been said to him, and that he was too new a soldier to realize what he had done. On these grounds, he placed the prisoner on the mercy of the court.

There was much conversation after that. Finally the interpreter repeated the sentence as the president of the court announced it.

"The court," he said in careful English, "owing to your lack of training and inexperience in military matters, has decided to let you off with three months' confinement to barracks. It will still be necessary, however, for you to serve the four hours *plus* as first ordered, and four hours in addition to that for the indiscretion of having refused it before.

"I might add, unofficially, that you had better take it and be glad you didn't get worse. They could very easily have sent you to the penal battalion."

MacCarger had no idea what that meant, but if it was anything like the hole he had just come from, he certainly did not want to try it. It hurt his pride to go

back and begin the *plut* again, with four hours more thrown in, but the *salle de police* had been a wonderful place to lay awake nights and think things over.

"All right," he muttered to the interpreter. "There's no justice to it, but I guess I'm the goat. I'll take my medicine. Tell them to bring on their damn *plut* so I can get it over with."

**H**IS feet were again bound in the rope sandals. The eighty-pound sack was strapped to his back. They started him marching around the parade ground.

"*Un! Deux!* One! Two! Paul Heinrich!" the corporal barked, and MacCarger took up the chant.

"Paul Heinrich! Paul Heinrich!" he muttered in rhythm with his step.

Slowly but surely, as the sergeant had promised, he learned his name. Born of an aching back and bleeding feet, it became a part of him.

The mutter changed to a groan as he continued to march. The straps cut into his back like narrow strips of iron; the coarse rope sandals cut his feet as if he trod barefoot on a path strewn with glass. He ceased to march. It was all he could do to stagger. But he had said that he would take his medicine, and he had meant it.

One hour—two hours—three hours, he tramped around the parade ground. Every muscle cried out in protest. He stumbled and fell. The corporal dragged him to his feet and drove him on.

Another hour and another. . . . He kept at it until he could not have told whether he walked or crawled. But through it all one foot was PAUL and the other HEINRICH.

"Paul Heinrich! Paul Heinrich!"

His brain throbbed with the words long after his tongue grew thick and his voice failed. And then at last when a bucket of water was thrown in his face and he opened his eyes to gaze up into the leering visage of the sergeant, he answered without even being asked—"Paul Heinrich."

#### IV

**O**N the top floor of one of the huge stone barracks was a long room lined with small iron cots—spotlessly clean.

There Soldier of the Second Class, No. 83247, Paul Heinrich, took up his interrupted career as a Legionnaire.

Peyron, who had learned many things in one short week, showed him how to fold his uniforms and arrange his *paquetage* on the shelf above his head. He taught him a few commands. Peyron informed him that the non-commissioned officers rated salutes.

"They are devils, Heinrich," the little man declared. "Steer clear of them. We had a new sergeant at drill today—a brute. They call him 'Saigneur'—the butcher, and he surc looks it."

"I haven't seen any of them yet who looked like angels of mercy," the man Heinrich replied. "You forget I've had a little experience with the skunks."

"No, I don't. You got a tough break," Peyron admitted, "but you showed poor judgment, bustin' that *cabo* on the nose like you did. Some of these old-timers were betting you'd get a year at labor."

"I heard something to that effect, too," Heinrich nodded. "They were very considerate—tried to kill me off in one day instead of dragging it out."

"Well, use your head next time. You can't beat a game that's been payin' the house for a hundred years like this one has."

Heinrich envied his comrades their stroll into town during the evening, but nothing could be done about it. Confinement to barracks also mean scrubbing and mopping continuously. He had little time to meditate on his misfortune.

He learned the commands. By the simple method of filling his shoes with tallow, he healed the painful blisters on his feet.

The millstones of the Legion ground finer and finer, polished him down to a full-fledged Legionnaire. He was accepted by the men, for any *bleu* who had the nerve to punch a non-com was worth cultivating. For the same reason the non-coms watched every move he made, but he managed to keep out of further trouble.

The confinement was up at last. Heinrich prepared for his first visit into the city. The walking-out dress was blue tunic, red breeches and overcoat buttoned on the left. He was very careful to see that everything was exactly in order.

"Keep your head up and act like you owned the joint," Peyron advised. "That's half of it."

They made it all right and Heinrich felt a little proud of himself. He had nothing to be ashamed of in the matter of build and appearance, and the uniform of the Legion, though coarse and practical, is not bad to look upon.

Sidi-Bel-Abbes at night differed vastly from the strange half-western, half-eastern city Heinrich had viewed that first day. After his three months in the barracks he felt very much like a small boy who has packed a thousand buckets of water to one small elephant and is about to receive his reward.

The Legion's own band was playing in the Place Sidi Carnot. The streets were filled with Spahis, Turcos, Chasseurs d'Afrique, Sapeurs, Tirailleurs, Zouaves and Legionnaires.

Across the Rue Prudon they came to the brilliant cafés, shops and hotels where Frenchmen, Arabs and Spanish Jews rubbed elbows with only-the-Lord-knew-what in their nightly promenade. It was a spectacle, indeed, but there was still the side show.

**"H**OW about a drink?" Peyron suggested. "I feel the urge to celebrate."

"Not a bad idea," Heinrich replied, "but I haven't the price."

"I have and I know a place where they serve pretty good stuff. Come on."

The odd little man led the way down a nearby alley and across the dimly lighted square to a liquor shop called the Café de la Princesse.

"A hell of a name for a dump like this," Heinrich remarked. "She must have been *some* dame."

"She was," Peyron nodded.

It was not an impossible place, the Café de la Princesse. The floor was fairly clean. There were benches, chairs and tables about. The bar was quite modern.

There was Algerian wine to be had at a few centimes the bottle—better brands, too, if one could afford them, and the usual assortment of *tord-boyaud*.

"That's Bel Kassan, the bird who owns the joint," Peyron pointed to a man standing near the bar. "A decent sort,

too. He'll be around before long. If we can get him to stop and talk, he'll set up the drinks."

Heinrich peered through the haze of tobacco smoke and made out a tall, broad-shouldered man of uncertain age standing at one end of the bar. Though he lounged carelessly, and seemed disinterested, it was evident that his keen dark eyes missed nothing at all that went on about him.

The name, Bel Kassan, was Arabic, and his sharp, sensitive features were suggestive of that ancient race of nomads. In his dress and mannerisms, however, the proprietor was Western.

"What about this dame, the princess?" asked Heinrich as they chose a table.

The little Legionnaire sampled his drink, and lit a cigaret.

"The same old story," he laughed. "She ran off with another man—some bird here in Bel Abbes, and they beat it to France."

"So they do that here, too? I thought these fellows treated their women rough."

"I guess that was the trouble. They say Bel Kassan was really in love with her—married her and all that."

"Who was the lucky gentleman? Does Bel Kassan know?"

"The soldier who told me about it seems to think he does."

**T**HE proprietor made his way from one table to the next, greeting his patrons. Senegalese, Turcos or native Berber, he spoke to all—impartial. He came at last to the two Legionnaires.

"*Bon soir, messieurs*," he said.

"*Bon soir*—Good evening," they answered. Heinrich spoke in English.

The proprietor glanced at him sharply.

"You are Engleesh?"

"American," Heinrich replied, surprised at being addressed in his own tongue. "We both are."

"So? That ees better still. Americans are not so many in Bel Abbes."

The proprietor pulled up a chair and sat down. "You are not in thees Legion long, eh?" he asked.

"Three months today," Heinrich nodded.

"So? You have not come to my place before."

"No, this is my first night out."

"Ah, you are the one who punch the corporal. Ees that not so?"

"Yep, I'm the guy—or maybe I ought to say goat."

"Goat? What ees the goat? You are a remarkable fellow. For that you must have a drink—both of you—anything you weesh."

"Make it cognac," Heinrich laughed. "And tell me, where did you learn your English?"

"From my father. He was Portuguese—a *domestique* to a family of English. He learn from them. I learn from them, too, until I go with my mother back to the desert."

"Then your mother was Arab?"

Bel Kassin nodded proudly.

"Yes, Arabian—daughter of Harum Bel Kassin, sheik of the great. . . . But tell me of the Legion. What is your company?"

"The twenty-eighth company of the first regiment," Peyron informed him. "I think it is better known as the company of confusion."

"Ah, the twenty-eighth. Yes, I know; they have not long return from Syria."

"Right; what was left of them. Most of the original company were butchered by the Druse tribesmen."

Bel Kassin grimaced.

"Ah, yes, it is always so with the Legion. But tell me, who are your officers?"

"If we've got a captain, I've never heard of him. Lieutenant Jouven seems to be the big chief and Sergeant-major Tellier does all the work."

"Ah, yes. I know them both. They are not so bad as some. What about the sergeant?"

Peyron muttered an oath. "He is the devil, if there ever was one. I don't know his right name. They call him Le Saigneur."

The proprietor nodded slowly, and his eyes narrowed.

"Le Saigneur—Le Saigneur," he repeated. "Yes, I have heard of heem, too."

Something in the way he spoke the name caught Heinrich's attention.

Bel Kassin pushed back his chair and stood up. "*Bon soir, messieurs*. I hope you like my leetle café—that you weel come again—often."

"What the devil did he mean?" Heinrich asked, when the proprietor had gone. "What could he have against this blood-thirsty sergeant?"

Peyron could not answer. He only knew that he, too, had detected a sudden change in Bel Kassin's manner.

## V

THE twenty-eighth company scrambled out of their bunks as usual the next morning. The shrill blare of bugles was echoing through the corridors. The corporals were shouting: "Get up! *Debout! Debout!*"

Heinrich gulped down his bowl of boiling-hot coffee and got into his clothes, reconciled to another day of the monotonous labor and drill. The powers on high, however, had planned something different, as he soon discovered.

"Full packs. Ready to march!" the corporal bellowed. The men looked at each other in astonishment.

The air was blue with orders by the time Heinrich reached the parade ground. He slipped into his place in line.

A voice that resembled a foghorn bellowed, "*Garde à vous!*"

The command could not have come from anyone but Le Saigneur. When he had snapped to attention, Heinrich dared to look at the man whom he had heard decried so rigorously.

For a moment he could only gasp and stare. His blood ran cold, then hot. He could not believe his own eyes.

And then he knew that he could not be mistaken—the thick neck, the fierce black mustache with the eyebrows to match, the close-set eyes and the hard, cruel mouth. No, he was not mistaken.

Le Saigneur was the man who had occupied the seat across from him in the Toulon-Marseilles express.

"*Garde à vous!*" roared the sergeant again. Heinrich realized that the command was meant for his special benefit. In his horror, his astonishment, he had dared to lift a hand toward his face.

"*Nom de Dieu!* What do you—"

The sergeant stopped with his mouth open. For an instant he stared, much as Heinrich had done a few seconds before. His jaw snapped shut and he took a half-dozen quick steps forward. Had they been alone, he would have seized the object of his rage in his two huge paws.

He came on to within a foot of Heinrich

and glared into his face, his nostrils wide, his eyes closed to slits.

"Son of a dog!" he spat. "You will stand still before I am through with you! By *le bon Dieu*, yes—still as a corpse—understand?"

HEINRICH understood—only too well. He knew that the recognition had been mutual, and that Le Saigneur would not rest until his dreadful secret was his alone. A corpse. . . . Yes, that would be the one sure way. What malicious whim of fate had again brought him under the influence of this inhuman bully?

Le Saigneur strode back to his place in front of the company. He stood there looking over the line of rigid men, fighting to regain his composure.

"*Colonne par trois*—column by threes—*marche!*" came the command at last.

The company swung into the maneuver and the sudden thud of boots on the hard-packed ground broke through the stupor that had come over Heinrich.

Desertion was the one idea of the insane jumble that would not be dispelled. He must manage somehow to escape—to get away from Bel Abbes and the clutches of Le Saigneur. To remain would mean death one way or another, as soon as the sergeant could conveniently arrange it.

Inspection followed the drill, the most severe the *bleus* had experienced. It was conducted by Lieutenant Jouven, the sergeant-major and Le Saigneur. There was not a piece of equipment that was not scrutinized almost to the point of absurdity.

To his surprise and relief, Heinrich pulled through without an offense. His three months in confinement had done that much for him, at least. Through it all, however, the one thought remained uppermost in his mind—he must get away before it was too late.

Before he was a corpse.

More drills, and an inspection by the *medicine major* followed during the afternoon, until even the *anciens*—the veterans—were ready to admit that something unusual was in the air.

"What do you make of it?" Heinrich asked one of them. "Do you think we are going to move?"

"*Mon enfant*"—the old Legionnaire shook his head—"when you have been in

this suburb of hell as long as I have, you will learn to take things as they come and think about them afterward. I have seen more nonsense than this over the arrival of a new colonel."

Heinrich felt better.

ONCE through the gate, he made his way straight to the Café de la Princesse. Bel Kassan was busy in his tiny office, but he came out presently and wished his early patron a pleasant evening. The Legionnaire asked him to sit down.

"You are alone thees evening," the proprietor remarked.

"Yep. Peyron is doing a little cleaning-up around the barracks tonight—got caught up on inspection."

"So? Ah, well, *c'est la Légion*."

Heinrich nodded in disgust.

"Yes, such is the Legion all right. Tell me, Bel Kassan, how can I get out of the damned outfit—out of Bel Abbes, and the whole beastly country?"

"What? So soon?" The proprietor grinned. "What has happened?"

Heinrich said earnestly, "I've got to get away and I want you to help me. I'm no tramp. I can get my hands on some money if I ever get out of here, and I'll pay you whatever you ask."

Bel Kassan slowly and emphatically shook his head.

"A thousand times I have been ask that same thing. I cannot help you. That ees business for the Jews. Be careful, though, they weel take your money, your uniform, and then when you are gone they weel tell the guard and collect the reward."

"I know all that. That's why I came to you."

The proprietor rose to his feet with a shrug. "I am sorry, but there ees nothing I can do. Eef I help you and you are caught, my business ees closed."

"Sit down until I tell you something," Heinrich argued desperately. "I'm no quitter. If I had a ghost of a show, I'd stick it out, but I haven't. What chance has a man in that outfit with Le Saigneur on his neck?"

Bel Kassan sat down. "Why ees Le Saigneur angry weeth you, a common soldier? What have you done to heem?"

"He is a murderer and he knows that I know it."

Bel Kassin sat back with disgust. "Bah, who does not know that? He ees worse than a murderer, but eet makes no difference."

"This was no poor soldier. It was a woman—on the train between Toulon and Marseilles."

**B**EL KASSAN straightened. "What? A woman!"

"Yes, a woman. That's why I'm here, because the fool trainman thought it was me. I was riding in the same compartment."

"Thees woman, what did she look like?"

"I don't know. She was middle aged—medium build—French, I guess. At least they were talking French."

Heinrich told him in detail. He told how he had happened to be on the train, how he had found the dead woman and how he had escaped.

"That's why I've got to get out of this damn' hole!" he added. "If I don't, that devil will kill me as sure as he murdered that woman."

Bel Kassin nodded, his forehead beaded with sweat, his fingers white where they clutched the table.

"I weel help you," he said after a long silence. "But you must go now, so no one weel know you were here. Come back tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow? We may be gone tomorrow. We've had nothing but inspections all day. I've got to go now."

"You cannot go now. I weel have to arrange. Thees inspection, what ees it? You have not had the hair cut. Neither have they give you the rations—the ball cartridge. Am I not right?"

"No, they haven't done any of that."

"Always they cut the hair and give the rations. Come tomorrow night and I weel have eet fix."

## VI

**L**ONG before daylight the blare of bugles crashed through the barracks of the Twenty-eighth Company. The shouts of the room corporals added to the din.

Heinrich pulled on his clothes with a sinking sensation in the region of his

stomach. Was this a continuation of the drills, inspections and tortures they had been through the day before, or did it mean something else—something worse?

The men were in high spirits as they raced down the three flights of stairs to the parade ground. Anything that promised a break in the monotonous routine of barrack life was more than welcome.

When the sections were marched off one by one to the barber shop, their joy resembled the suppressed glee of so many youngsters at the burning of a schoolhouse. All except Heinrich. To him it spelled only disaster—the failure of his plans.

The company was called to the final assembly at last, with full packs, overcoats, ammunition and rifles. The colonel gave them a long-winded lecture to which no one paid the slightest attention. They were marched out through the main gate then, with the band in the lead, playing the Legion's favorite—*Voilà du Boudin*.

The band swung off to one side when they reached the edge of town and allowed the company to pass. A kilometer farther on, the command: "*Pas de route—route step—Marche!*" echoed along the column. They knew they were in for a hike.

The rough banter and ribald jokes did not interest Legionnaire Paul Heinrich. Marching at ease with his rifle upside down, Legion fashion, his mind had been occupied with thoughts of his own.

The old marching song, however, coming from the throats of twoscore men, seemed to lift him out of his mood. It lightened his load.

What was the use? he asked himself. If fate had decided, cursing his luck would not help matters. He was no infant in arms. He could fight.

Le Saigneur would probably get him in the end, but what of it? If the devil would give him half a chance, he'd make it interesting for him until he did.

"*Voilà du boudin!*" he muttered, and before he realized it, he was humming the tune with the rest.

**T**HERE was less joking the second hour; the third there was none. The singing, too, became an effort, and then failed entirely.

"Come on, you cripples, *L'Empereur de Danmark*—sing it out!" the corporal

urged, but he got only a curse for his trouble.

By the fifth halt, twenty kilometers lay behind the sweating, straining soldiers. The pace had begun to tell. Twenty kilometers, however, did not satisfy the lieutenant, riding easily on the back of a prancing black mare.

"*En avant!* Step out or you will march at attention!" he threatened. "I have seen old women who could do better."

The response was an outburst of muttered oaths.

"How are you making it?" Peyron inquired when the complaints had died out.

"Not so bad," Heinrich replied. "It's no worse than the *plut*, anyway."

Le Saigneur dropped along the column then, his practiced eye searching out the weak from the strong, his sharp tongue lashing them on. Heinrich knew without even glancing his way that the sergeant had sized him up and estimated his endurance to the last possible meter.

It grew dark at last. The sudden chill in the air was heaven-sent after the long grind in the burning sun. There was a marked difference in their stride during the hour that followed.

It looked as if they might make it through without a casualty. Human flesh, however, can stand so much and no more. When the eighth halt was called there were three who went down and could not get up.

One of them, a sallow-cheeked young German, had marched in the squad with Heinrich. The two Americans tried to help him. Le Saigneur came back to investigate the delay, and gazed on the exhausted man with disgust.

"*'Cré nom de Dieu!*" he swore. He prodded the soldier with the toe of his boot, jerked him to his feet. "Take his rifle, *Gran-père*," he nodded to the grizzled old man in front. "And you, my strong young ox"—he turned to Heinrich—"take his pack."

The persecution had begun, as Heinrich had known it would, but he did not complain.

"*Oui, mon Sergeant.*" He saluted, and with the help of one or two others, he got the extra pack on his already aching back.

"The son of a goat!" the soldier on his right spoke a word of sympathy. "There's no excuse for overloading a man like that.

Here, rest your extra pack on this."

He handed the muzzle of his gun to Peyron, on the other side. Grasping the stock himself, they brought it up under the pack. Between the two of them they helped Heinrich bear his burden.

Twice during the following hour, the sergeant dropped back to see how his victim fared. Each time the support was withdrawn.

Ten hours, and every man dropped where he halted. There was no smoking; no one spoke. When the command came, it was several minutes before the combined kicks and oaths of the non-coms started them moving again.

But on they marched. And Heinrich, his lungs bursting, his body numb, his feet like solid weights of lead, somehow marched with them.

They reached the gates of a town, and the lieutenant gave the order to march at attention. The city was in darkness and the streets deserted, but that made no difference. The Legion's reputation must be upheld.

"*Garde à vous!*" Le Saigneur and the corporals repeated the command. Because the men knew instinctively that the end was near, they put forth one last effort. It carried them through the barrack gates at Saida where the final, "*Halte! Formez les faisceaux*—stack arms!" broke in on their dazed senses.

Heinrich was near exhaustion. The thought uppermost in his mind was the fact that he had survived. He had kept out of the grasp of Le Saigneur. And the knowledge gave him courage.

## VII

STIFF and sore, the company was marched to the railroad station early the next morning. For two days they rode, to Beni Ounif.

Beni Ounif consisted of the usual collection of one-story, flat-roofed hovels, surrounded by the inevitable stone wall. It was a town, though, and Heinrich and Peyron found a café. Heinrich sat alert, wary of Le Saigneur's traps.

Peyron leaned forward. He spoke in an undertone.

"There's an Arab who acts like he knew you—over there on your right."

Heinrich waited a moment, then turned and glanced at the bearded, white-robed native his companion had indicated. The Arab nodded slightly and gazed questioningly at Peyron.

Heinrich was undecided as to whether he had better answer the man. He was curious. Yet he feared the treachery of Le Saigneur.

"What do you make of it?" Peyron asked. "Did you ever see him before?"

"I might have," Heinrich shrugged. "The devils all look the same to me."

"Me, too, but it seems to me I've seen this one around Bel Abbes."

"Bel Abbes! What would he be doing here then?"

Heinrich glanced at the Arab again, and as he did, the man drew a piece of paper from beneath his burnoose and spread it on the table in front of him.

"He's probably got some greasy old *Ouled Nail* he wants to date us up with," Peyron decided. "Come on, let's move on."

Heinrich agreed. As he got up, he walked behind the Arab's chair. He stopped to light a cigaret. In heavily penciled letters, scrawled on the piece of paper, he read:

BEL KASSAN KEEPS HIS WORD—PATIENCE—  
BE CAREFUL.

He looked back as they stepped out into the street. The Arab was touching a match to the bit of paper.

**B**EL KASSAN! The proprietor really meant to help him. But what chance was there now—on the desert?

He wanted to talk it over with Peyron, but knew it would never do. When the little Legionnaire got drunk he talked.

The next night Heinrich visited the same café in anticipation of further advances on the part of the mysterious Arab, but he waited in vain.

A little after daylight the Legion was on the march.

From Bel Abbes to Saida had been strenuous enough, but they had traveled a fairly good road, and in a climate vastly different from the desert. Now, they were in sand ankle deep, with a sun that burned down like the blast from a furnace.

"March, you *salopards*, march!" the lieu-

tenant barked, and all that day the company, sweat-streaked and dirty, tramped south into the Sahara.

At last someone sighted another oasis. Above the half-dozen palms a flag hung limp—the tri-color of France.

The notes of a bugle call drifted across the intervening mounds of sand. When the dust-covered column reached the gates of the outpost, the garrison was lined up at *présenter l'arme* to receive them. The expressions of joy and relief on their lean, burned faces was pathetic to behold.

The *bleus* of the Twenty-eighth Company learned a few things that night from the veterans of the outpost. They witnessed *la cafard*—the Legion madness—first hand, saw what it could do to a man. They listened to a few stories of the Arabs; heard something of the methods they employed in waging war.

**I**N the morning the first two sections were assembled in full marching order. Le Saigneur was in charge.

It meant but one thing. Heinrich was destined for the neighboring outpost at El Haabj, from which there would be no escape. There the sergeant would rule with an iron hand, his word undisputable. The lieutenant's discourse on *valeur et discipline*, in conjunction with his farewell, was a colossal joke.

Heinrich, his jaw set, rivulets of sweat streaming down his face, sighted the oasis of El Haabj with a gasp of relief. He had pulled through again without giving the sergeant an opening.

Peyron found the spirit to jest. "There's your future home—a choice little corner of hell!"

"Something wrong here," the old soldier in the rank ahead declared. "We should have heard *rassemblement* by this time. Look! There is no flag!"

## VIII

**T**HE Legionnaire was right. The bare flagpole stood out in plain view. Not only was there no flag, but the usual sentries were missing from the parapet. Le Saigneur brought the column to the halt.

The gates swung open and a half-dozen frenzied soldiers of the Legion came running down the slope.

"Water! Water!" one cried.

"Attention!" Le Saigneur shouted angrily. "What is the matter with you? Are you mad? Why do you ask for water? Where is your commandant?"

"The commandant is dead, *mon Sergeant*—poisoned! Half the garrison is dead! The Arabs came in from the desert three nights ago and poisoned the well. We did not know it until the men began to die!"

"How many men are still alive?"

"Eighteen, but most of them are in a bad way. If you have water to spare, some of them might be saved."

"There is not a full *bidon* in the whole two sections. But get back to your barracks. I will see what can be done." Le Saigneur shouted, and the astonished column marched in through the gates of the stricken outpost.

The suffering was too pitiable to be overlooked by even the calloused Le Saigneur. He ordered an earthen jug brought from the cook house, and the contents of the *bidons* emptied into it. There was enough water for one good drink apiece. He assigned a corporal to the task of doling it out to them.

"It has been two days since you first discovered the poison," Le Saigneur addressed the soldier who had met them outside the gate, "nearly three since the Arabs were through here. Has anyone tasted the water since?"

"Hardly, *mon Sergeant*, not after watching half the men die from it."

"That is no reason. Any well will clear itself in time. Is there no animal of any kind in the post?"

"There was an ass which was used to carry the jugs, but it died, also."

"Then we will have to select a two-legged one from among the living, and try it on him. If the poison has not passed off, there is nothing to do but abandon the place." He roared for attention.

"It has been three days since the water was poisoned," he announced, as a preparation for the demand that was to follow. "By this time the well should have cleared itself. Who will volunteer to take the first drink?"

No one replied. His glance met Heinrich's. His small black eyes narrowed still more.

"Come! Somebody speak up," he

snapped, "or I will name the man myself."

Heinrich was thinking fast. He had not made a study of that cruel face for nothing. He knew only too well that if Le Saigneur named anyone it would be himself. Why not beat him to it?

"A fine collection of cowards!" The sergeant gave a snort of disgust. "All right, then, if you would rather have it that way, I will—"

Heinrich stepped forward, his fingers touching his cap.

"You—you volunteer, do you?" Le Saigneur said at last.

"*Oui, mon Sergeant,*" Heinrich answered. "I will try the water."

"Good. Go down and get a fresh jugful. Bring it up here before you drink, though. I want to see you do it."

Heinrich, amused at the sergeant's confusion, went down the slope to the well. He let the jug sink to the very bottom, to be sure of getting the purest. He pulled it up and took a mouthful to sample it. It tasted as if it might be a solution of arsenic, alkali and quicklime. Heinrich spat it out with the feeling that Le Saigneur was going to win the bout after all.

In the barrack room, he set the jug down in the front of Le Saigneur. He dipped into it with his drinking mug.

"Here's to death, *mon Sergeant,*" he toasted. "If I meet the devil, I'll tell him you are not far behind."

The sergeant's face clouded angrily. His huge fists opened and closed.

Heinrich put down the cup and touched a match to a cigaret. Ten minutes later, he was still smoking, and a half-hour after that he was convinced that fate was still playing tricks on him. He had felt much worse after a single drink of Algerian rotgut.

Some of the others drank from the jug, then, a bit sheepishly. Le Saigneur worked off his confused wrath on the men who had held the outpost. He restored El Haabj to its former routine in very short order.

A week was spent in building a cistern within the walls, to guard against any such calamity in the future. Then the sergeant set himself to the task of locating the tribe that had committed the cowardly outrage.

He made no move to send the men they had relieved back to their company. They grumbled and threatened. One of the cor-

porals dared to mention the matter, but nothing came of it.

## IX

A SCOUTING party brought word of a tribe encamped at a small oasis off to the east. Le Saigneur immediately gave orders for the first section to hold itself ready to march. At one o'clock in the morning they started across the desert.

Marching in the cool of the morning without their heavy packs, the Legionnaires made good time. By daylight they had covered twenty kilometers. A few minutes later they came out on a rise in full view of the oasis. The Arabs were up and moving about the camp, but it was quite evident that they had been surprised.

Le Saigneur did not mince matters. "*Bayonnette au canon—fix bayonets!*" he barked.

He marched the section straight up to the tent occupied by the chief of the tribe. The sheik, a one-eyed, toothless old warrior, came out.

"*Parlez-vous Francais—do you speak French?*" Le Saigneur demanded.

The old sheik glared at him a moment with his one good eye, then spoke to a man in the entrance to the tent. The tribesman disappeared, to return with the man who was to interpret.

Heinrich took one look at the fellow, and all but dropped his rifle. It was the Arab who had displayed the scrap of paper in the café at Beni Ounif. Peyron muttered an astonished oath.

"Now, by *le bon Dieu!*" La Saigneur swore. "Who gave the order to poison the well at El Haabj? Who did it? A man for every minute I wait! Tell them that, you educated dog!"

The interpreter spoke. The sheik answered angrily.

"Azza Ben Kader knows nothing of the well at El Haabj," the interpreter said firmly. "You are making a mistake."

"The Arab never lived who could tell the truth," the sergeant returned with contempt. His automatic spat a streak of flame.

Aghast, the Legionnaires watched an Arab pitch forward. They knew now where the sergeant had got his name—the bleeder—the butcher.

Another shot roared out and Le Saigneur staggered back, a raw, red gash across his cheek. An Arab had fired.

"Fire! Fire!" he bellowed. "With the bayonet—charge!" And with his own gun he shot down the aged sheik and the interpreter.

Heinrich saw the Arab from Beni Ounif sink to the ground. As the charge swept over, he stopped to peer down at him.

"Bel Kassan keeps his word—" the tribesman gasped. Then his distorted features relaxed and he was still.

Heinrich shook the lifeless form in desperation. He felt somehow that he had lost a friend. What had the Arab meant? What was his secret?

It had been an easy matter to rout the tribe. They had fled to the dunes without firing a dozen shots.

When the section had formed, Le Saigneur marched them out of the oasis and back the way they had come. It was evident that he was very well pleased with himself.

Heinrich, on the long, hot march to El Haabj, thought of little but the dead Arab and the repetition of the mysterious message.

THE men of the former garrison listened to an account of the assault that night with profound disgust.

"Azza Ben Kader had nothing to do with that poison," one of them declared. "It was the work of some Berber gang."

"I don't doubt that," Peyron spoke, "but what did the fool want to lie for?"

"Lord only knows. He might have had some little scheme up his sleeve. Then again he might have figured it was just none of Le Saigneur's damned business."

"Then he did some expensive figuring," someone remarked.

"Don't be too sure it won't cost us something, too," the old Legionnaire said tersely. "Ben Kader has been a friend of Sheik Harum Bel Kassan for thirty years. If you know anything about the desert, you know Bel Kassan is no man to fool with."

"Harum Bel Kassan!" exclaimed Heinrich.

The men turned and looked at him, amused and surprised.

"Friend of yours, is he?" the old Legionnaire inquired.

Heinrich covered his confusion. "No," he returned, "I was just thinking I had heard that name before—in Bel Abbes."

"You probably did," the soldier laughed. "From what I have heard, Bel Kassan has as many sons wandering around North Africa as a dog has fleas."

Heinrich nodded. If Ben Kader had been a friend of the Sheik Harum Bel Kassan, and the Arab messenger a friend of the café owner, it was certainly within reason to connect the four of them.

But suppose he *was* right, Heinrich asked himself—what could that have to do with a fool Legionnaire who had merely wanted to desert?

## X

HE had plenty of time to ponder over it all during the week that followed. Le Saigneur appeared satisfied to remain within the four walls of the post.

The men were forced to lie about on their cots in the sweltering barrack room. Day in and day out it was too hot to smoke, to talk or even quarrel.

Then suddenly one morning Harum Bel Kassan arrived—to avenge the death of his friend, as the old Legionnaire had said he would.

"*Aux armes! Aux armes!*" the sentries yelled from the parapet.

There was no confusion in the barracks, though the alarm had come at the coolest hour in the twenty-four when every man was deep in sleep. In a few minutes they were at the wall, half-clad and pounding their heads to clear their senses. But every man bore his rifle and belt of ammunition.

"Look at them!" Peyron exclaimed. "They are halfway up the slope."

Heinrich peered through the gray light of morning. And his heart stood still. The slope in the direction of the oasis was a solid mass of shouting, struggling humanity. They were coming on camelback, horseback and afoot—hundreds of them.

"Fire! Fire!" Le Saigneur roared.

With rifles and machine-guns, the Legionnaires poured a stream of lead into the advancing tribesmen. Heinrich, working like a cog in some machine, fired with the rest.

The machine-guns cut into the mass formation with an accuracy that was appalling.

Yet the wave continued to advance. A hundred yards from the wall it seemed to waver, but it was only that the Arabs, too, had begun to fire.

Heinrich saw the man on his right go down with a hole in his forehead. Then a brown, bearded face appeared suddenly in front of him. He thrust his bayonet through the Arab's throat, jerked it clear. The expression on the tribesman's ugly countenance made him shudder, but it was no time then for any thought of mercy.

The Arabs were struggling to gain the wall.

The Legionnaires turned loose with the bombs. They released the pins and held the deadly missiles until they all but went off in their hands.

Still the screaming, hate-spitting horde came on. The ground outside the wall was strewn with their dead, but those who lived only yelled the louder and fought the harder. The wall was lined with them.

"With the bayonet! Rip them open!" an old corporal cried in desperation. "*Cré nom de Dieu*, they will butcher us all!"

The morale of the Legionnaires was marvelous. *Bleus* and veterans, shoulder to shoulder, they stabbed with the long, slender blades, and battered heads with their gun-butts. Their efforts, however, were of no avail. The sheer press of the struggling mob below shoved the foremost tribesmen up and over the wall.

And then, at the moment when it was needed most, the rat-tat-tat of the machine-gun above the gate suddenly ceased.

"The gun! The gun! *En avant, mes salopards!*" the familiar voice sang out.

Heinrich found himself on the heels of Le Saigneur, racing across the parade ground toward the gate. A little band of Legionnaires was still fighting there, with backs to the wall, but the tribesmen were dropping down.

They closed with the Arabs. The sergeant, fired with the mania to kill, was in his glory. He emptied his automatic, then seized a discarded rifle and swung it by the muzzle.

"*Allez la Légion!*" he roared. "Brain the devils! Kill them!"

The strength of the man was tremendous—inhuman. He laughed when he killed. At the top of the stairs, he turned and

shouted for the others to follow. Then his blazing eyes lit on Heinrich. For an instant he stared, his lips parted in an evil grin.

"*Sapristi*, and still you live!" he swore. "Then you shall help take that gun. *En avant!*"

THE half-dozen Arabs working frantically at the machine-gun became suddenly aware of them. Two of them fired and one hurled a knife. Heinrich dodged the hissing blade and sprang forward. Le Saigneur spat an oath as one of the bullets laid bare his ribs, but he was not a foot behind.

Together they tore into the Arabs—one because of the twist in his brain that had made him a killer, the other because there was no alternative.

Twice Heinrich thrust home his bayonet and jerked it out dripping with blood. A bullet burned through the flesh of his arm; a knife grazed his neck.

Suddenly there were only the Arabs. The mighty Le Saigneur was down.

Heinrich swung the steel-shod gun-butt with all his strength and knocked the last man clear of the wall.

He staggered to the coveted machine-gun, swung it around and pressed the trigger. The weapon sputtered—stopped—barked again, then settled down to a steady roar. He had won.

Le Saigneur came forward then, crawling on his hands and knees, and took the gun himself. It made no difference to Heinrich. The brute could have it. Had he felt otherwise, though, he would not have hesitated to shove him aside. Somehow he no longer feared the man. He had fought beside him and seen him beaten. The sergeant had the brain of a devil, but his body was flesh and bone.

The Legionnaires who had followed them, to guard against an attack from the rear, turned back to assist the little band at the gate. Le Saigneur trained the gun along the top of the wall.

The result was terrible. A score of Arabs fell.

Somehow the handful of Legionnaires gained the points of vantage. The tribesmen broke, and made a dash to escape the inferno they had entered. With the machine-guns blazing away from the para-

pets, they died by the score as they fled.

Le Saigneur ordered the men upon the walls. He made them shout their war cries until the Arabs had withdrawn to the shelter of the oasis. It was a demonstration of victory, intended to impress the defeated tribe, but the Legionnaires knew that they would never withstand another attack.

His wounds cared for, Le Saigneur paced back and forth, cursing and watching the oasis through his binoculars. The fact that the Arabs did not move on was evidence that they had not given up. At last he gave orders to abandon the outpost.

Peyron, his head swathed in bandages and his arm in a sling, muttered an angry protest.

"It is the only wise move the pig has made," a scarred old veteran silenced him. "If we can slip out tonight without being seen, there is a chance of us making it back to the next outpost. If we stay here, we will never live through another day."

"But the wounded?"

"Those who are able to stand will march as far as they can. The others—*c'est la Légion.*"

The arms and ammunition that could not be carried were hidden beneath the floor of the barrack room. That afternoon the *bidons* were filled with water from the cistern and rations issued.

Night came at last. The Butcher strode into the barrack room for a last look at the hopelessly wounded. It was not the abandoning them that troubled him. Le Saigneur was thinking of the loaded rifles, given to each one, that would fall into the hands of the tribesmen.

There was nothing to be done about it, however, and he walked out again with a cold, unemotional, "*Bon chance*—good luck."

The curses and groans that followed him bothered him not at all.

## XI

SILENT and grim, not more than one full section of them now, the Legionnaires slipped over the wall at the rear of the fort and crept away into the desert.

The first to give up was a young Italian with a hole through his lung. His dying gasp was an oath that must have tempted

Le Saigneur to shoot him even then. An ugly, vicious little rat from the Bordeaux docks was the next to go.

Heinrich, burning with fever, every step a stab of pain, heard them vaguely and drove himself the harder. Others dropped out as the hours dragged on, so many he lost track of them. Peyron, he knew, was still with them, for he could hear his muttered oaths.

"*Halte! Garde à vous!*" the command broke in on his benumbed sense some time near morning. He found himself standing motionless with the others, wondering what the sergeant could be thinking of.

"*Sacré, the Arabs!*" someone groaned. Then Heinrich heard the muffled thud of hoofs.

"Down! Down!" Le Saigneur shouted desperately. "Form square!"

Staggering and stumbling, the exhausted Legionnaires somehow formed the square. They knelt, awaiting the end.

The fight at El Haabj and the long, terrible march had been for nothing after all. They would die now, one at a time, as the old sheik and his tribesmen had met their death at the oasis. The Legion never surrenders.

Off in the darkness, a rifle spoke, and the dust rose in a tiny cloud in front of them. Another report came from the opposite direction and then another. They were surrounded.

"Sights at one hundred meters!" the sergeant ordered. "Fire!"

"Yeh, fire—fire!" Peyton shrieked insanely. "At what?"

"Shut up, fool!" Heinrich silenced him. "You'll get a slug in the back. Shoot at the moon."

"In the back—yes! If he'd only give it to me in the brain, I'd welcome it!"

"Don't worry, you'll get it before long—just as soon as it's daylight."

But Heinrich was wrong. The shots were few and badly aimed.

When the first streaks of dawn enabled them to see, they beheld a lone Arab on horseback, a piece of white rag tied to the muzzle of his rifle.

Another horseman joined the first, from behind a nearby dune. Together they rode straight toward the astonished Legionnaires.

"Keep the swine covered," the sergeant

warned. "If they make one queer move, shoot them down."

Heinrich watched breathlessly as the two men approached. Something about one of them drew his attention. His build, his carriage was strangely familiar. Then he choked back a cry of astonishment. It was Bel Kassan—not the old sheik, but the proprietor of the *Café de la Princesse*.

A startled oath broke from Le Saigneur a moment after, and the Arab half-breed slowly nodded his head.

"*Oui, Monsieur Le Saigneur*—the bleeder, the butcher, the killer of old men—and women," he said with scorn. "It is I, Bel Kassan."

THE sergeant's mottled face went black with rage. His immense fist gripped his automatic until the knuckles turned white.

"You lie, you mongrel dog!" he spat. "You lie!"

The Arab shook his head. "I repeat, you are a killer of women—my woman. I was too smart for you, Le Saigneur. She left me, yes. But she did not get my money. Was that why you murdered her?"

"You lie! You lie!" the sergeant screamed. "You have been listening to that fool there. I should have killed him the first day I saw him."

He pointed a blunt, crooked finger at the dumfounded Heinrich.

Bel Kassan alone seemed calm and rational.

"It would not have mattered whether you killed this man or not," he said. "Some day I should have learned the truth and the end would have been the same. My business, now, is not with these soldiers. It is with you. If you, my brave butcher, are willing to give yourself up, they will be allowed to go on their way unharmed."

The proposal brought a change in Le Saigneur that no one there had ever seen before. He scoffed, then he tried to bluff. But the conflict that went on within his stupid, plodding brain was as easily read as the page of an open book. Beneath it all he was afraid.

He glanced at the little band of men he had bullied and abused so long. In every face he saw contempt and hatred. They had always hated him. He had driven them just the same—cattle, spineless and

dumb. His opinion of them was not changed even now. The thought gave him courage.

"Speak up!" Bel Kassan snapped. "Will you come, or must I take you?"

"Take me?" Le Saigneur tried hard to scoff. "No dog of an Arab that ever lived could take me, or any other soldier of the Legion. We will fight to the finish."

Bel Kassan turned to the men. "I mean what I said," he spoke to them alone. "If you wish to stand by that swine, it is up to you. If not, I will take him and you can go your way."

"We will fight it out," a grim old veteran answered. "He's a swine, a devil, and worse, but he's a Legionnaire." And no matter what the others thought, not one protested the decision.

The Arab shrugged, and then his glance rested on Heinrich.

"What weel you do?" he asked in English.

Heinrich shook his head. "I'll stick with the rest."

"They are better men, each one of them, than you could ever be," was the Arab's final thrust at Le Saigneur. Wheeling his horse, he started back the way he had come.

But the horse had taken only a step or two when Bel Kassan jerked it suddenly to one side. The roar of Le Saigneur's automatic came a split-second late. In defiance, of all honor, principle, or regard for the flag of truce, he had deliberately fired at the retreating back.

The Arab, however, had once again proven too smart for him. He had been certain of what even the Legionnaires would have doubted. And he had saved himself by that sudden move.

Heinrich, in an instant, swung his rifle from the Arabs to Le Saigneur. With all the utter contempt and disgust one man could feel for another, his fingers groped for the trigger. And then he realized that not only his but every rifle there was turned on the sergeant.

Le Saigneur glanced at the ring of angry faces. The men who a moment before would have stayed with him to the end were ready now to shoot him down.

He sneered, then he laughed, and the next second the automatic roared again.

With his own hands he had blown off the top of his head.

THE impatient snort of one of the horses brought the men to their senses. Bel Kassan came forward to gaze on the fallen sergeant.

"The butcher—a murderer of women," he said. "He died too easily. He should have been made to suffer."

"That makes us one less now," the old veteran declared. "Bring on your mangy tribe, Bel Kassan, and let us get this thing over with."

Bel Kassan shook his head. "Too many men have died already on account of that beast. My grandfather's quarrel is not mine. I wanted only him."

"Then you mean there will be no fight?" the soldier inquired incredulously. "We are to continue on to the fort?"

"If you wish. But I have given my word to one man here that I would help him across the border. If anyone else wants to join the *promenade*, he is welcome."

Peyron shot a suspicious glance at Heinrich.

Heinrich nodded. "Yes, I'm the one. My reason for quitting has recently removed itself, but I am going just the same."

"Then I'll go too," the little man declared. "Bel Kassan, there's two of us."

There were several more before it was settled. Only the old veteran, a corporal, and two others preferred to press on toward the outpost. Even they must have doubted the wisdom of their decision when they saw their comrades headed toward the west, a guide to show them the way and camels to pack their provisions.

It was a long journey and difficult, but some days later the Arab guide held out his arms, north and south, and they knew they had made it. They were in Spanish territory and it was not far to the valley, Rio de Oro, and the coast.

"Shake on it, Heinrich." Peyron put out a worn, bony hand. "I guess it just wasn't our time."

"I guess not," a thin, blond-bearded man agreed. "But don't ever call me that name again. MacCarger is my name—Don MacCarger, and I'm just back from hell."



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By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

**Kali, hideous Death Goddess of the Hindus! From the slums of black Calcutta to the rock-hewn altars of Seravi her idolaters blazed her bloody cult. Until Gaunt of the Indian Secret Service pitted a white man's steel nerve against the pagan frenzy of that savage horde.**



winding stairs beside the cobbler's shop. He wore the uniform of a Calcutta postman. His face was stained to the color of a native's. In the dim evening light, his disguise should pass.

Four stories up—then a woman's sudden shrill cry broke the silence of those impenetrable walls. There followed the stampede of feet upon the roof above, a man's shout, a moan. And Gaunt knew that once again he had been anticipated by the powers that were leagued against him.

Gaunt, of the Indian Political Service, was facing its only serious rival, that secret service of the priestly caste that is ubiquitous throughout India, backed, in this case, by the wealth of an outraged ruler.

He ascended the last flight of steps with three bounds. Now he was on the roof. Under the awning were a rug, a cheap di-

**G**AUNT'S hand was thrust into his tunic as he mounted the steep stone stairs. His fingers were closed about the butt of a revolver fitted with a silencer.

Slowly, watchfully, Gaunt ascended the



van, a little table, the usual furnishings of a Calcutta roof apartment belonging to one of the humbler orders of Indian life.

Nobody was there. But in front of Gaunt hung the *purdah*, the curtain that separated the common room from the quarters of the women. And from behind this there came another cry, but smothered, as if a hand were over the woman's mouth.

Mingled with this there sounded the gasping wheeze of one in the death agony.

Behind that curtain a mere commonplace of Indian life might be in process of enactment. Husband, lover and wife might be playing the eternal drama there. Gaunt's belief that he had reached the end of his quest might prove utterly unfounded. And to break *purdah* was to expose himself to the liability of instant death.

7—All-Adventure Action Novels—Spring



*A  
Novel  
of  
India*

Gaunt broke *purdah*. He flung himself across the intervening space and pushed aside the flimsy curtain. Behind the curtain were two men and a woman.

One of the men was an Indian of low class, with the caste-mark of the groom

smearred in red ochre across his forehead. He was lying back on the divan, wheezing as he tried to draw beneath, and bleeding from a dozen knife-wounds in his body.

The girl, her veil flung back, was struggling in the grasp of the second man, a short, stocky hillman. One of his hands was clamped over her mouth, the other dragging at her neck. She fought and resisted furiously, clawing at his face with her nails. Blood was streaming down the hillman's cheeks.

And even in that instant, while his whole being was tensed for action, Gaunt was conscious of a flash of wonder as he looked at the girl. For it was the first time that he had ever set eyes upon the Nautch girl, Meta-taj, dancer in Kali's temple, whose beauty threatened to set all India ablaze with war.

And, looking at her, Gaunt knew that his information had been true. This was the end of his journey. And what he wanted was what the hillman was trying to pull from the dancer's neck.

Next moment the hillman had flung the girl violently from him. He turned upon Gaunt and leaped like a panther. And white man and yellow man were locked in battle.

**A**FTERWARD Gaunt remembered how the girl rose from the floor, to which she had been thrown; how she pulled the veil across her face beneath the eyes, and stood watching the fight, as if spell-bound, regardless of her own peril. But at the time Gaunt was hardly conscious of her presence.

As he leaped, he had drawn his revolver. But to shoot, except as a last resource, was strictly forbidden him by his code. Instead of pressing the trigger, he raised the weapon to bring the muzzle down upon his adversary's head.

Before he could achieve his purpose, the hillman had gripped Gaunt's arm with fingers of steel, while with his free hand he swept a short, murderous hill-knife, the *kukri*, out of his belt.

The nature of the knife betrayed the Bhutanese or Gurkha, as did the oblique eyes and sallow skin. A hired thug, not a temple devotee, was Gaunt's thought, as he closed. He caught the man's right hand with his left, and thus, held in temporary

equipoise, the two wrestled together, each trying to secure the other's weapon, and to free his own hand.

Gaunt quickly realized that the hillman was more than a match for himself in the strength of the wrists. He let his revolver fall to the ground, and shot his fist into the yellow man's face. It was a blow that might have knocked out one of his own race; the hillman merely grunted and blinked, and closed again. Looked tight together, the two wrestled for possession of the *kukri*.

All the while they fought, the dying man on the divan was gasping out his life. The girl stood like a statue, ignoring him, her whole attention concentrated upon the struggle.

Again and again Gaunt dashed his fist into the hillman's face, without succeeding in breaking his hold. He could retain his own grasp upon the man's wrist only with difficulty. The yellow man lunged furiously with the knife. The point ripped Gaunt's shoulder.

Suddenly Gaunt tripped over a low stool. He fell to the ground. Like a leaping cat, his opponent was upon him before he could regain his feet. The knife swept down, straight toward Gaunt's throat.

With a desperate upward thrust of his arm, Gaunt succeeded in deflecting the weapon's downward sweep. It missed his throat, grazed his shoulder, and pinned the sleeve of his postman's tunic to the floor. So fierce had been the blow that the knife stuck quivering, buried almost to the hilt.

The hillman tugged madly at the blade. As his face came up, Gaunt got home a blow with his right fist just where he intended. Delivered at short range, with all his strength, it caught the hillman on the jawbone, and for a moment dazed him. The man's grasp relaxed, his eyes grew glassy.

Gaunt leaped to his feet, leaving a foot of ripped fabric on the floor. But the hillman was on his feet, too. Striking home with right and left alternately, Gaunt drove the yellow man reeling across the room.

The girl's shrill cry rang out.

"*Ai*, he can fight!" she cried. "I love a fighter."

Her eyes followed the movements of the

two men eagerly as she glided between them and the *pardah*.

The hillman tried to close, but with a last mighty blow Gaunt sent him sprawling through the curtain, flat upon the stone roof that formed the floor of the outer room. The yellow man tried to regain his feet, but Gaunt gave him no respite. He knocked him back upon the stones, leaped upon him and fastened his fingers about his throat.

The hillman's struggles relaxed. His eyes bulged; his sallow face grew purple; his heels drummed a tattoo upon the floor.

"Now who sent you here?" asked Gaunt in Bhutanese, as he partly relaxed his clutch upon the man's windpipe. "Speak or you die!"

But the hillman was apparently beyond speaking. His head fell back and he was breathing stertorously. Gaunt withdrew his fingers from his throat and watched him, uncertain whether the man was actually unconscious or whether it was a trick.

"*Ai*, look behind you!" the girl screamed suddenly in Gaunt's ear.

**I**T was a trick, of course. Gaunt paused; then turned his head. But the moment of hesitation was his undoing. A second man was leaping forward from the head of the stairs, knife in hand.

Gaunt twisted sidewise. By a lucky chance his forearm struck the man's wrist, hitting some nerve and causing the hand to fly open. The knife went to the floor. But before Gaunt could regain his feet the man had pulled a second weapon—a cobbler's stone hammer. It descended upon Gaunt's skull.

Gaunt heard the thud of the impact, though at the moment he was unconscious of any pain. But a whirl of stars began to dance before his eyes and the features of the second hillman faded out in a spangled mist. He tried to grapple with him, but his knees gave way beneath him. And he collapsed prone upon the body of his first assailant.

Momentarily sinking into unconsciousness, he was aroused by a shrill cry from the girl. As the man raised the hammer again, she leaped upon him. As she leaped she whipped a dagger from her dress with incredible swiftness.

With a snarl, the man turned upon her,

striking with the weapon. The hammer missed her, the right arm, weighted with it, fell, and the girl's knife was at her assailant's throat. She struck home.

Man and girl went down in a struggling heap, but it was the girl who was on top. Her knife was flashing so fast that its movements seemed like an arc of light.

Gaunt managed to stagger to his knees. He moved toward the two, with the intention of coming to the girl's rescue. She did not need a rescuer. Gaunt saw with horror that at each blow she was driving the knife home to the hilt in the hillman's body. Her arm rose and fell like the movements of a piston.

The hillman yelped once or twice, moaned. He flung out his arm. Then he lay motionless. Still the girl continued stabbing like a fury, thrusting the knife repeatedly into the insensate body. At last she desisted. Poised like a pantheress, crouched over the dead man, she peered into his face.

Suddenly the first man leaped from beneath the body of his dead companion. In an instant he was out of the entrance and scurrying down the stairs.

The girl paid no heed to him. She rose from beside her victim and turned to Gaunt, a smile of triumph upon her face.

Gaunt was on one foot and one knee now, still fighting off the fog of unconsciousness that was alternately lifting and closing down. Suddenly the girl turned to him with a lithe movement, the bloodstained dagger upraised. Gaunt knew that he was at her mercy, if she chose to strike.

**B**UT she did not strike. Instead, she remained standing in front of him, looking into his face with a strange smile, as if mocking his helplessness. Beautiful? Yes, rumor had not lied about Meta-taj. But it was the sleek beauty of the tigress in her slender figure, and the beauty in her face was that of a spirit of evil.

She stood there, smiling at Gaunt, then extended her left arm in the direction of the divan in the next room, and through the torn *pardah* Gaunt could see the man who had been her companion still writhing there. He could hear the moans that came from his lips.

Horrified at the girl's indifference to his sufferings, Gaunt found his tongue.

"That man is the groom, Ram Dam?" he asked.

"That carrion was Ram Dam," answered Meta-taj, in the liquid accents of the hills. "Let him die. It was not he whom you came here to find, Gaunt Sahib."

"You know me, then?"

Meta-taj broke into ringing laughter.

"Aye, I know you well, Gaunt Sahib," she answered. "Hourly I have awaited your arrival. But it was an old, wise Sahib whom I expected. I did not look for a young Sahib. Had your hair been white, this dagger had been for your heart, Gaunt Sahib."

"Amiable intention, I'm sure," Gaunt muttered.

As he spoke, he was eying the dagger in her hand. Had he been stronger, he would have attempted to disarm her, but he knew that at present he was unable to cope with her devilish agility. To die on that housetop with the dead hillman and the groom would have been a sorry ending to his long search.

No, he must try to hold her until his brain grew clear. And the girl, as if reading his intention in his eyes, laughed softly.

"What is it that you seek, Gaunt Sahib?" she asked in her soft voice. "Is it something that I possess? Why do you not seize me, Sahib, and force me to surrender it? See, I am weak and frail, no match in strength for a strong Sahib."

A pause, during which the two watched each other. If only that cursed fog would lift!

The girl placed two fingers to the neck of her *kurta*, and drew it down an inch or two, revealing the rounded column of her throat. And Gaunt knew that the information which had brought him there had been no lie.

For there, against the girl's ivory throat, suspended on a slender chain of gold, was the golden fillet that had once adorned the brows of Bibi Hanum, the queen of Tamerlane, a piece of exquisite workmanship that could have been duplicated by no modern craftsman anywhere in the world.

And blazing in the center of it was one of the largest and most magnificent rubies in the world. It was the Eye of Kali, the Death Goddess of the Hindus. The red

luster of it seemed to illuminate the darkening roof-top like a little lamp.

## II

IT was because this jewel, the fate of dead empires and the challenge to living ones, had hung around the neck of Meta-taj, the dancing-girl, that Gaunt had come to the housetop. It was to save a thousand miles of frontier from being lit by the blaze of war that he had followed Meta-taj from one end of India to the other. Now he had found her, only to be balked at the last.

For he was helpless, tottering like a decrepit old man as he tried to move toward her. And she watched his efforts with an amused smile upon her lovely face. Just out of reach she watched him, her eyes alight with mockery.

"Nay, come no nearer, Gaunt Sahib," she said as her fingers toyed with the dagger. "It is no longer in my heart to kill you, for you fought bravely with the hillman. But come no nearer."

She held the dagger menacingly. Gaunt stood still, breathing heavily. That cursed fog, clouding his eyes again!

"Why do you want this jewel so badly, Gaunt Sahib?" she asked. "Now if it was for yourself, I might be persuaded to give it to you, for truly my heart is soft toward brave men who fight as you have fought, Sahib. But I think it is not for yourself, but rather for the Department, who will put it in the Museum at Lahore, where its red heart will never again call men to war."

Gaunt groaned in spirit as he watched her. A little more strength, and he would risk those tiger strokes of hers with the dagger. But he could not take so big a chance yet, with so much depending on his life.

"No, Gaunt Sahib, if you want this jewel, you must plead for it with me. You must come after me, and beg me to give it to you. Then perhaps my heart will be melted. There is no other way. No, Gaunt Sahib, stand back, I say!"

Suddenly, with a low laugh, Meta-taj let the fillet with the jewel drop back beneath her *kurta*. With a swift, lithe movement, she darted across the room, and vanished down the stairs.

WITH that, Gaunt succeeded in pulling himself together. The fear of losing the gem, after his long search, acted as a stimulus that made him temporarily oblivious of his weakened limbs. The fog cleared from his brain. He rushed across the room and down the stairs in pursuit of the dancer.

HE emerged into the twilight of a Calcutta evening. Crowds, released from their daily work, were moving through the city streets. Among them here and there a veiled woman glided. Gaunt looked desperately to right and left of him. Surely that was Meta-taj, that slender figure hurrying on its way, not far ahead of him.

He pushed his way through the crowds, ignoring their angry protests. He reached the woman's side, tried to peer through her veil that shrouded her face. A pair of timid eyes were raised to his. No, this girl was not Meta-taj.

Muttering an apology, Gaunt began to retrace his steps. But surely that was the dancer gliding down the steep street toward the river! Again Gaunt set off in pursuit, only to find himself foiled once again. But this time a storm of abuse greeted him.

"Shall I, the respectable wife of Gomashti Harendra, be accosted in this fashion by a postman with a torn tunic? Yes, and ripped into the bargain, and blood on it! *Ai*, how did this fellow find employment with the Government? Look at him, drunk, and insulting respectable women on the streets! *Ai, ai*, take your hands off me! Bring the policeman!"

But Gaunt was already in full flight from the virago. Meta-taj was lost to him now. He realized that he would have to take up the chase again from the beginning. But there remained the dead man on the rooftop. Perhaps some clue could be obtained there.

The groom had been a mere cipher in the game, like one of those pawns on which, nevertheless, the winning of a game of chess depends. Meta-taj had not troubled about him after he had served her purpose.

Gaunt retraced his footsteps and regained the roof apartment once more.

Gaunt half expected to find an ambuscade. He was weaponless. But no one was lurking on the stairs, nor had anyone

entered the place during the brief period of his absence. Gaunt pushed through the *purdah* into the inner room.

A faint moaning told him that the groom was still alive. It was almost dark by this time. But, bending over the figure upon the bed, Gaunt could see that the man's eyes were open, and that there was the light of consciousness in them.

A muttering sound came from the lips. The groom crooked a finger, trying to beckon Gaunt nearer.

"I know you, Gaunt Sahib," came in Hindustani. "She told me—you would come. Curse her! May she die as I am dying—"

He broke off, fixing his anguished eyes upon Gaunt's face. The fear of death looked out of them, and more than that—the sense of the relaxing grip upon life with its joys and struggles. Gaunt could read the terror in those eyes.

"I know you, too, Ram Dan," said Gaunt. "You played for great stakes, and gained what you played for, which was more than you could have dared hope for. And for a while Meta-taj was yours. Be grateful to the god who gave you the gift and postponed the time of repayment."

The features of the dying man grew more composed.

"Aye, the price was not too great," he muttered. "But there was no peace. Always they were upon our track, first the agents of the Prince; then thou. Always we fled—Delhi, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Calcutta. They never lost us.

"She swore that if we could reach Calcutta she could obtain money which would take us in a ship across the water, where even Prince Hari and the priests could never find us. But she was tiring of me. Of a truth, I think she betrayed me to thee, Gaunt Sahib."

"Not to me," answered Gaunt.

"Those others, then. I thought her faithful, but there is no faith in women. Verily I was a fool, when I might have been with my horses, to have fallen under her accursed spell."

He seemed to gather the remnants of his flickering strength into a last frenzied outburst.

"*Ai*, Meta-taj, I shall never see thee again, never again hold thee in my arms!" he cried. "Thou who didst swear to share

the same funeral pyre with me hast left me in the moment of my last agony, not even staying to close my eyes. *Ai*, the treachery of women!"

**G**AUNT listened grimly. He was thinking that other heroines of romance in western lands had played the same game of high intrigue and sordid baseness as the Nautch girl in the Temple of Kali at Seravi.

It was to win her love that Prince Hari Singh, of Shastan, had despoiled the temple of its sacred jewel, to hang it round her lovely throat.

Gaunt knew that it was in revenge, because Prince Hari had taken a highborn princess in place of making her his queen that *Meta-taj* had fled from the palace. With her had gone the groom and the sacred stone, thereby placing an indelible stigma upon the Prince's name and threatening to set the whole peninsula ablaze.

And yet, he was thinking, many a man would have given his whole fortune to have had *Ram Dam's* success. Many would have paid the same price that *Ram Dam* was paying now.

"Listen, *Ram Dam*," said Gaunt. "Canst thou hear me?"

"Aye, I—hear thee." The dying man was drawing himself back through the mists of death with an intense effort of will.

"Tell me where she has gone."

"I do not know, *Sahib*. She—lied to me. Always she lied. I knew nothing—not even whether she was not secretly warning—those who pursued us. It was a game to her—my love. *Ai*, *Meta-taj*."

"You do not know where she would go?"

"Back to the Temple—it may be—to bargain with the jewel for her life. Even Prince Hari—would not dare—to put to death *Meta-taj*, the servant of—the Goddess. How should I know?"

He seemed to sink into unconsciousness. Then once more the intensity of his will-power brought him back to consciousness.

"When you—find her," he whispered, "kill her—for me—your hands about—her throat. *Ai*, lost to me forever—*Meta-taj*! I go—"

His head fell back, and the death-rattle sounded in his throat. Gaunt stood over him watching. The man's breathing had grown imperceptibly weak. But Gaunt

dared not wait till life was extinct. At any moment now the representatives of Prince Hari, warned by the hillman who had fled, might come upon the scene.

Gaunt turned away. In the next room he saw something dark lying upon the stones beside the dead hillman. It was his revolver. He put it inside his torn tunic and made his way down the stairs.

He gained the street unmolested. In another moment he was mingling with the crowds without.

### III

**T**HE Viceroy of India sat with the Chief Political Officer in a room of the Viceregal Palace at Delhi. Both were keyed up to a pitch of expectancy as they waited the arrival of the man on whom so much depended.

For it was the man who might be able to forestall the thunder of the guns along a thousand miles of frontier, and behind it, too. The one man who might snatch from the expectant arms of death thousands of young lives that seemed destined to be sacrificed upon the bloody altar of Empire. One man—Gaunt, the American.

Who he was, what his earlier history had been, nobody knew. He spoke a score of languages and dialects. He could pass for Hindu or Moslem, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, or devotee of any of the innumerable smaller sects. He seemed completely familiar with the practices of all the castes and rituals.

He had sprung into notice three years before, when he had settled a frontier affair that threatened to develop into a full-blooded he-man's war. He had settled it by a daring act of impersonation, representing himself to be the ruler of a frontier kingdom, whom he had actually abducted.

Addressing the assembled warriors in fluent Pushtu, he had commanded them to return to their homes. And he had been obeyed.

He was an obscure officer in the Political Service then. Since he had become one of the heads of that secret organization on which depends the very existence of British rule throughout the vast Indian peninsula.

Gaunt came in. Nobody had announced him, though there were servants on duty

in the corridor. He came in, a sleek, suave Hindu in the Viceroy's own livery, but the grim features, the beak of a nose, the air of mastery that sits incongruously on Hindu footmen, revealed him to the two men who knew him. That was as Gaunt had meant it to be. Without explanation, with a bow to the Viceroy and a salute to his immediate superior, he stood beside the table.

"Gaunt, sit down. I'm glad you're here, gladder than I know how to tell you," said the Viceroy. "So she got away with the jewel at the last moment?"

Gaunt assented with a little gesture indicative of failure. There was no pretentiousness about the man. He had been outwitted, but he had taken up the trail again. In the end he would win. That was a spirit in keeping with the traditions of the Service.

"Have you any idea where she's gone, Gaunt?"

"Possibly back to Shastan. She would be safer there, where she can bargain with the jewel in her possession, than trying to escape elsewhere. Unfortunately, veiled women who pass the border cannot be searched or investigated."

"You are thinking of going to Shastan?" asked the head of the Service.

"Immediately," said Gaunt. "The annual Feast of Kali takes place in three weeks' time. I can make Seravi with three days to spare."

"Three days in which to accomplish the impossible," sighed the Viceroy. "Unless you find and head off that girl, the priests will undoubtedly get the Eye into their hands again. That means a hundred thousand troops mobilized along the borders, a blaze-up bigger than anything since the Afghan War."

"I'm not so sure," answered Gaunt.

AS he talked, even the Viceroy seemed to see the political situation in clearer perspective. He drew fresh courage from the faith of this one man who was going out to match his wits against a degenerate, drunken prince and the ambition and caprices of a spoiled and irresponsible woman.

"First," said Gaunt, "this should be clear. To Meta-taj, the groom Ram Dam was merely an instrument of revenge. She

cared for him so little that she left him dying there without even a good-bye.

"But, because Prince Hari succeeded in accomplishing his vengeance on him, Meta-taj will never forgive. She might have been bought over to acquiesce in the loss of the position of queen that she had expected, but she will never cease to seek revenge upon Prince Hari now.

"Upon this irreconcilable enmity between our two chief actors I build my case."

The Viceroy nodded. He was wondering, incongruously enough, where Gaunt had acquired his understanding of women.

"The next point," Gaunt went on, "concerns Prince Hari's elder brother, Sobrao, whom he supplanted—"

"With the consent of the Indian Government," the Viceroy admitted. "We should have struck then and there, upheld the rightful claimant to the Shastan throne. But Hari Singh had been at Oxford with Lord Wishart's son. He seemed well disposed toward us, and we decided not to interfere in an internal matter of the State. If we had anticipated what vast schemes he was nurturing—"

"Prince Sobrao represents the party that is opposed to the bloody Kali worship. If he can be set free from imprisonment before the annual festival, invested with the sacred jewel—"

"Man, how can such a thing be done?" cried the Viceroy, starting out of his chair. "How can one man do what would require an army?"

"Finally," said Gaunt, without immediately replying, "there is Professor Orloff, the Russian Commissar."

"And there," interposed the head of the Service, "Gaunt has put his finger upon the heart of the trouble. You've read Orloff's dossier, Gaunt?"

Gaunt nodded. "Marginally commented upon as a madman," he answered.

"Nothing else. Orloff, the anthropologist of Petrograd, the man of European reputation, a member of learned societies, well into his sixties, a man with a wife and grown children, appearing in such a role as his in Shastan, stirring up the vile Kali worshippers to attack Great Britain's power in India! It's the dream of a madman."

"Orloff," said Gaunt, "acquired his repu-

tation by his method of rejuvenation. He claimed that he could confer immortality upon mankind by the operation he had perfected."

"Must have been mad for years!" snorted the Chief Political Officer.

"How can you accomplish this program alone, Gaunt?" asked the Viceroy.

There was despair in his tone, and yet, as he looked at Gaunt he felt that same faith which the American seemed to inspire in all who came into contact with him. That was the most singular thing about Gaunt.

"I'll do my best, sir," answered Gaunt quietly. "That is as much as I can promise. But I would ask that you make no move of a military character until the festival of Kali has come and gone."

"I'll promise you that. What else?"

"No more, sir." Gaunt bowed, saluted and disappeared through the doorway.

The Viceroy and the Chief Political Officer looked at one another in amazed silence. Gaunt had dismissed himself from the viceregal presence in defiance of the most elementary rule of etiquette. He had departed as mysteriously as he had come.

#### IV

A WHITE road, made by the British in one of their expeditions, runs through the fertile valley of Shastan, green with young rice and shaded with plantations of peach and fig, walnut and apricot. Northward and southward the Himalayan spurs rise white with their eternal snows. Along this road a multitude was streaming to attend the annual festival of Kali.

Hindus and Sikhs, Jains and Jats, Bengalis and Punjabis, some devotees of the goddess, more sightseers, peddlers, jugglers, showmen, thieves. Hillmen in ballooning white trousers, with *paghris* round their pointed caps, and daggers in their belts, strode with the swagger of a superior race.

Oxen pulled family bullock-carts with embroidered canopies, from behind whose curtains came the chattering of women. *Bairajis*—holy men—walked in abstraction; *pariahs* scuttled along beside the road, where their shadows could not fall upon the Brahman and contaminate him.

Others there were, too, men with swords

concealed beneath their robes, men who were on their way to the capital of Shastan with a purpose of their own. But these men mingled undetected among the crowd.

Shastan, a remote mountain state in the fastness of the Himalayas, was ruled by a dynasty of priests of Kali, the Death Goddess. And their title to their kingdom was the possession of the famous jewel.

Prince Hari Singh, who had given it to the dancing girl in a moment of drunken rapture, was the hereditary chief priest of Kali. Actually he was a westernized degenerate, who had to crawl through the Temple on hands and knees to atone for having crossed the black water.

Each year, on the annual festival of Kali, which was accompanied by human sacrifice, the image of the goddess was paraded through the streets of the rock capital, Seravi. This year it was known that the festival was to be the occasion for a widespread outbreak against British rule. For the red Eye of Kali was the emblem of blood.

All that Prince Hari Singh needed was to regain possession of the Eye before the festival.

All that Gaunt needed to do was to get possession of the Eye itself, liberate Prince Sobrao, the rightful ruler, from prison, and invest him with the jewel; overthrow Hari, drive out Orloff and win over the populace.

A big program for one man!

DRESSED as a Jat farmer, Gaunt had crossed the Himalayas in the stream of pilgrims. He shared the provisions and camps of his supposed compatriots undetected. There were still the three days to spare that he had promised the Viceroy, when Seravi came in sight—twin crests rising in the distance.

By sunset the crowd was pushing through the gate of the capital and making its way toward the great temple on the eastern ridge. Opposite it, on the western one, was the palace, connected with it by a bridge across a deep ravine, down which a torrent tumbled.

A maze of courts surrounded the great temple of white stone that stood silhouetted against the crimson sky of evening. Inside the outermost court the mob was swarming, jostling, trying to gain the in-

ner ones, and so finally, by dint of *bakshish*, to reach the sanctuary of the goddess.

It was dark by the time Gaunt had his way to the temple. At the huge bronze gates he found himself unable to proceed. Temple servants were keeping back the swarming, shouting mob in which he was caught. Troops of priests were hammering gongs and waving banners, very much like the barkers at a Coney Island show, announcing the price at which it would be permitted to step inside and see the statue of Kali.

Throngs were passing out, but only a few of the crowd seemed to possess the necessary price. Eager as they were, they knew that on the third day of the festivities the temple would be thrown open free.

Gaunt had no intention of entering. He did not wish to stamp his hawk visage on the minds of those alert priests just yet.

Through the doors of bronze he could faintly see the outlines of the hideous Goddess of Death within. A huge form it was, black as sin, with four long arms outstretched, two on each side of her, and the blood-red palms upturned.

**WORKING** his way slowly back through the crowd, Gaunt gained the streets after night had fallen. Seravi was deserted, save for the crowd outside the temple. The city gates were closed. Gaunt made his way up the peak on which the palace stood, the mean houses extending right up to the base of the gardens about the imposing structure.

After some searching Gaunt located the place he was looking for. It was a small rice-seller's shop. Apparently it did little trade, for the proprietor, an elderly Hindu, in a round embroidered cap, was nodding drowsily as he sat among his sacks. From the room behind came the smell of cooking, the all-pervading odor of sesame oil.

"Brother, a few handfuls of rice for a poor pilgrim, that you may acquire merit," whined the supposed Jat, entering. "Today I have not eaten, and I have but three annas to pay for entrance to Kali's temple."

The old man sat up, blinking, and began stuttering angrily.

"Begone, beggar!" he shouted. "Is it for me to feed all the accursed Jat beggars in India? Had you sense, you would know that Krishna, the Avatar, ruled all things

in heaven and earth, not Kali, the accursed, who devours her votaries."

But his eyes began to bulge as he saw what lay in Gaunt's right hand. There were two annas, but in place of the third was a little trinket of black enamel. Controlling himself with a visible effort, the Bengali produced a similar object, on a chain, through the opening in his packet.

"Close your shop!" said Gaunt peremptorily. "Then we shall talk where none can overhear us."

**I**N a little rear room they talked, faces close together. Chunder Ras was the sole representative of the Service in Shastan, and he knew none of his superiors by name.

Once, several years before, a Babu from Calcutta had visited him and sworn him to the service of the British Raj. After three years of testing, he had been given the token, with the information that he must obey anyone who should ever show him a similar one.

Also Chunder Ras knew that unmentionable penalties awaited one who played false to the Raj, not to mention the loss of the little income from a non-existent son that came to him each spring by postal runner, when the pass opened, and each fall, before it closed.

A Brahman, by virtue of good deeds in his past incarnation, he was in close touch with priests and palace.

His answer to Gaunt's first question came with stunning emphasis: "Meta-taj is back in Kali's temple, and is once more the delight of Prince Hari's eyes."

"And the Eye?" questioned Gaunt.

"As to that, I can say nothing," answered the Brahman. "Yet I think Meta-taj would never have been able to purchase forgiveness of our lord unless she had brought back the jewel. Furthermore, if Prince Hari were not again in possession of the Eye, how should he dare proclaim the feast of Kali in three days' time?"

"It means war?"

"Aye, there is no secret as to that. War, Sahib—nay, I know you are a Sahib, for none but a Sahib would speak so masterfully to a Brahman, wearer of the sacred thread, even though misfortune has forced me to become a seller of rice.

"War, such as has not been seen since

the days of the Great Mutiny. From one end of India to the other—war against the *Mlech* from overseas. And back of it all, the spider who weaves the web of Russia in the Palace.”

“And Prince Sobrao—do his partisans stand by idly while he lies in chains?”

The Bengali’s voice dropped still lower: “Sahib, the town is full of men from his mother’s tribe in Nepal, who seek to free him. But they are without a leader, and the priests have the people’s ear.

“Sahib, they will go mad on Kali’s day, for already eight men, they say, have offered themselves as victims, hoping to gain heaven by giving up their lives to Kali. And the last man shall be—the Sahib knows?”

“I do not know,” said Gaunt.

“It is what our Lord Prince Hari has proclaimed as the supreme sacrifice. Thus he proves his devotion to Kali, which many have doubted. Thus he pledges his faith. How could a man do more? For the last sacrifice on Kali’s altars is to be his beloved brother, Prince Sobrao. Thus the priests have proclaimed.”

**G**AUNT remained silent for a while, thinking rapidly. If Meta-taj was back in Seravi, she must have purchased forgiveness by returning the Eye of Kali to Prince Hari. That made his own position still more difficult.

He had hoped to intercept the girl before she reached Seravi—if, indeed, she was bound for it. Now he felt himself checkmated.

“Sahib!” Chunder Ras’s hand was upon Gaunt’s arm. “Spies there are everywhere in Seravi, as the Sahib knows. Is the Sahib sure that his presence here is unknown?”

“How can one be sure?”

“Then let me change the Sahib so that, if any be watching, they shall be deceived. The Sahib came in as a Jat farmer; when he goes out it will be as a holy *Sadhu*.”

Gaunt assented, and in a few minutes the disguise was complete. With deft touches, Chunder Ras transformed the American into one of the religious mendicants that are to be found everywhere throughout the peninsula. He clothed him in yellow and orange rags, the color of the *Sadhu*’s garb, and smeared his face with a mixture of ashes and turmeric dye.

Gaunt found himself in an alley behind the Brahman’s house.

While his change of disguise was being effected, he had formulated his plans. He had told the Viceroy that he based his chances of success upon what he believed to be Meta-taj’s irreconcilable enmity toward Hari Singh. And even though she had restored the stone to him, Gaunt believed that he could still prevail upon the girl to aid him in his plans.

He turned his footsteps down the hill, with the intention of entering the Temple of Kali on the other peak. As a *Sadhu*, he would have the right of wandering within the precincts unmolested. In the attached house of the Temple dancers he hoped to find Meta-taj.

He had left the token, indicating his membership in the Service, with Chunder Ras. Underneath his rags he had his revolver and a small supply of ammunition, sewn into a hastily contrived pocket.

**G**AUNT had just reached the end of the alley, from whose shuttered windows on either side not a sound or a light came, when a figure stepped into his path so swiftly that it seemed to materialize instantly. Only a moment or two later did Gaunt realize that it had come out of one of the doorways.

“*Sadhu!* Holy One—” it whined.

Gaunt saw that it was a woman, a crone so old that she had dispensed with all but the flimsiest of veils about her face. In keeping with his part, he stepped aside, quickly gathering his rags about him to prevent contamination.

“Nay, shrink not from me, *Sadhu*. Shrink not, Gaunt Sahib.”

“Ah!”

Gaunt stood rigid, peering into the face through the thin veil. Somewhere he had seen those features, but where, he could not recall. So he was known! There was a faint mockery in the hag’s voice as she continued:

“Fear not, Gaunt Sahib! I am only an old woman, and I am alone. It is Meta-taj hath sent me. It is her spies have followed thee, yard by yard, across the border.”

“Where is she? What does she want of me?”

“Sahib”—the old hag was cringing now

—“she is not in the Temple, but in the harem of the Palace. She asks whether Gaunt Sahib is brave enough to go to her there, reminding him that she held her hand upon the housetop when she could have slain him.”

Again Gaunt had to make up his mind quickly. It might be a trap on the part of Hari Singh, who could better have learned of his movements than the dancer. On the other hand, if Hari Singh wished to dispose of him, he would have no need of a trap. The probabilities were in favor of the old woman's message being true.

She was peering at him keenly through the filmy veil.

“Surely,” she chuckled, with soft malice, “Gaunt Sahib is not afraid to follow an old woman when there is the chance that he will obtain his heart's desire—the Eye of Kali?”

It was the argument, not the taunt, that clinched Gaunt's resolution.

“Lead the way, old woman, and I'll follow you,” he said.

## V

**I**N the dim light of a sinking moon Gaunt followed the crone through the crowded, narrow streets up the hill toward the palace. He kept sufficiently far behind her to avoid the scandal that would have ensued had a *Sadhu* been seen in the company of a woman, even of the crone's age.

Though it was still early in the evening, every house was shuttered. Only an occasional form could be seen slinking through the streets.

Soon they were clear of the town. The high wall that enclosed the palace gardens came into sight, with the stretch of trees and shrubbery between it and the palace itself.

The old woman paused, looked around, and, finger on lip, crept softly under the shelter of the wall until a small iron gate appeared. She peered through it, then turned again and beckoned Gaunt to come up to her.

She cackled and pointed. Looking through the gate, which was partly open, Gaunt saw the guard seated, legs outstretched against the inside of the wall. His head was on his breast, and he was

deep in sleep and snoring stertorously.

“She is brave, this Meta-taj, is she not, that she has dared to drug His Highness's guards, so that she may meet the Sahib Gaunt?” the crone chuckled.

Gaunt said nothing, but he had the uncomfortable feeling that the meeting was taking on the aspects of an assignation. They passed the sleeping sentry and made their way along a narrow path between shrubs with sweet-smelling flowers that filled the night air with perfume.

The palace loomed before them, a massive structure of stone. In the central portion and one wing lights shone from the windows, but the wing that they were approaching was completely dark from without. Heavy bars against the windows showed that it was the harem.

Where the shrubbery ended, the old woman grasped Gaunt by the arm and pulled him down, making a peremptory sign to him to be motionless. A moment later they heard the tramp of the sentry making his round. As soon as the sound of his footsteps died away, the crone wrapped her skirts about her and ran with surprising speed, Gaunt hard on her heels.

A small door set between two barred windows disclosed itself out of the dark façade. It seemed to open automatically. In another moment the two had passed through, the door closing behind them, though whether operated by human or mechanical agency Gaunt could not tell. He stood beside the old woman in complete darkness.

The silence was almost uncanny; Gaunt could hear not a sound save the steady throbbing of his pulses. Feeling the woman's hand pull at his arm, he followed her.

He had an impression of passing through a doorway; again he felt a curtain brush his face and body. Then, with a whispered injunction to him to be still and await her return, the old woman left him.

She did not go far, for Gaunt could hear the soft rustling of garments. The faint odor of sandalwood came to his nostrils. He stood, straining his eyes to pierce the velvet darkness.

Suddenly a match was struck, a lamp lighted. In the moment or two while it was flickering into flame Gaunt saw that he was standing in the middle of a room,

with an embroidered curtain at one end, and a door at the other. Soft divans, carved chairs, costly rugs filled it. A curtain red as Kali's eye hung before what looked like the embrasure of a window.

And then, as the light flared up, Gaunt saw standing before him, a mocking smile upon her face—Meta-taj!

**T**HE girl laughed merrily and came toward him.

"Am I not a good actress, Gaunt Sahib?" she asked. "Verily, the wise Gaunt Sahib was deceived, though, had he had the eyes of love he would have discerned the dancing-girl beneath the painted visage of the crone."

Gaunt, lost in amazement, could only stare at her. Yes, the crone had been the dancing-girl, though there was no longer anything but vibrant youth in that erect carriage and unlined face.

Meta-taj was clothed in a rich dress of silk that swept to the toes of her tiny slippers of gold thread. Her face, unrouged, and only faintly whitened with rice powder, was that of a girl of twenty.

Beautiful, even to western notions, but hers was not the beauty of the legendary fame. Gaunt had seen greater beauty many a time in his own country in any chance assemblage of women. And—perhaps because he had unconsciously assimilated Oriental ideas—he was conscious of a faint disgust at her brazen unveiling.

"Truly you were brave to come here, Gaunt Sahib," she said. "Prince Hari's spies lost you between Darjeeling and the frontier, thanks to that disguise of yours, but he awaits you in Seravi, confident that you have the Eye in your possession."

She stepped nearer to him.

"Let me speak quickly, Gaunt Sahib," she said, "for every moment here is dangerous for us both, and especially for yourself. The Prince knows that your purpose is to place Kali's Eye upon his brother's brows, thereby rendering him sacred and arousing the populace against himself. To me he gave the commission of luring you here. You understand? So we must act quickly.

"He does not know that I have the Eye, that I saved it for you after I fled from that roof-top in Calcutta. I shall take you to the dungeon where Prince Sobrao lies

in chains, and together we shall proclaim him ruler of Shastan. See, if you believe not!"

She swept her hand into her garment and withdrew it. And thus for the second time, glittering now between her slender fingers, Gaunt saw the Eye of Kali.

A shaft of ruby light shone from the glorious stone, shifting with each least movement of the dancer's hand. Yet in the reflected light of it, the face of Meta-taj seemed to assume once more that tigerish look that Gaunt had seen on it upon the housetop.

"Come," said Meta-taj. "You trust me?"

"I—trust you," answered Gaunt, with the least shade of hesitation in his voice.

"Then follow me," whispered the girl.

She led the way through the curtain, along a corridor dimly lighted by tiny butter-lamps in niches. On one side was the exterior wall of the palace, on the other, doors hung with rich draperies. Not a sound came from behind them, but Gaunt knew that he was in the women's quarters, where discovery meant instant death.

They passed into another corridor. Suddenly Meta-taj put her finger upon Gaunt's lips and dragged him behind a curtain that hung in front of a little hall. As she did so, Gaunt heard the steady tramp of feet on the heavy carpet around the bend.

A moment later a fat Nubian eunuch came into sight. He was dressed in flowing robes of white, and a sword hung on his thigh. In his hand he held a small lamp, whose rays, focused in front, cast a steady beam before him.

Solemnly, portentously, the creature waddled on his way, mouth pursed with importance, passed through the hanging curtains behind which the girl and Gaunt were crouching, and disappeared around a bend of the corridor.

Meta-taj turned to Gaunt with a smile.

"Now we are safe," she whispered. "Come."

**O**NE of the palace guards was snoring, fast asleep, before a door set in the wall. Meta-taj stepped over him, and Gaunt, following her, saw a flight of stone steps before him, disappearing in darkness. The girl turned and gave Gaunt her hand. He followed, feeling each step of the way,

until the stairs finally ended in a flagged corridor.

They turned twice or thrice, all the while in pitch darkness. Presently Gaunt heard the sound of rushing water. In the distance a faint light appeared. The girl halted Gaunt with an almost imperceptible movement of her hand.

"I do not know if there are more guards than one below," she said. "Prince Sobrao is in a special cell, closely watched, for fear his partisans may attempt to rescue him before the feast of Kali."

"Is it true," asked Gaunt, "that Hari Singh intends to offer him as a sacrifice to the goddess?"

"It is true. The brute, the swine! Ah, he shall suffer for the indignity he has put upon me, once he is in my power. Daily and nightly he wheedles me to procure the Eye for him."

"But he knew I was on the way to Seravi?" asked Gaunt.

"He knew, but he was afraid you would have managed to conceal the stone. Hush! We must be careful!"

They crept on further, and the light grew clearer. The roar of water was growing louder. Now Gaunt perceived that the light came from a large butter-lamp suspended from the rock roof of the large cavern in which they were standing. The walls dripped water, and there was a stench of fungus growths.

The lamp hung above a sort of recess, with a small, window-like aperture in the wall, strongly barred, and through it Gaunt could see an almost perpendicular wall of rock rising. He knew where he was now. That rush of water was the torrent at the bottom of the ravine, and the dungeon was immediately beneath the palace.

Under the lamp, lying upon a pallet of straw, with fetters round his wrists and two long chains hooked to strong staples in the rock, was a young man, almost as fair as a European. He lay motionless. Beside him squatted one of the most bestial-looking hillmen Gaunt had ever seen, a brute built like a Japanese wrestler, all hams and shoulders.

Again the girl checked Gaunt.

"What will you do?" she whispered. "He is armed. Let me strike him with my dagger."

"I'll settle that fellow," said Gaunt. The

very sight of the repulsive creature aroused his anger.

"I tell you he will beat you. I am quicker than you, Sahib. Let me—"

The jailer had heard their whispers, carried in soft echoes from wall to wall. He turned, rose to his feet, and came forward, peering into the shadows in which they stood. He came ambling toward them.

"Is that thou, Roul?" he asked, evidently supposing that his relief had come.

Gaunt stepped forward, his revolver pointing at the man's breast.

"Put your hands up," he said. "Quick, or you're a dead man!"

HE spoke in Bhutanese; whether or not the hillman understood that tongue, Gaunt's gesture was unmistakable. And Gaunt would have shot. But the voice of Meta-taj rang out:

"Don't shoot him! They will hear! Strike him!"

Simultaneously, with a roar, the hillman charged, and Gaunt's revolver barrel connected with his head above the ear.

It dropped with a thud that would have fractured a white man's skull. But the Bhutanese, hardly checked in his rush, bore Gaunt to the stone floor with his weight and impetus. His arms locked themselves about his body, and the huge teeth, snapping convulsively, tried to fasten themselves in his throat.

Gaunt was fighting an animal. In a moment he discovered that the hillman, deprived of sense by the blow he had given him, was nothing more than an automaton.

The mighty limbs flailed, the jaws snapped together with a force that would have torn Gaunt's throat to shreds. It was all Gaunt could do to keep his face and neck away from those gleaming fangs, while he beat impotently with the revolver muzzle upon the impenetrable skull.

The lock of the great arms was crushing his ribs and lungs. Gaunt tried to draw in a breath and could not. The dungeon, with its walls of stone, began to circle around him.

Then a shadow crossed the light of the butter-lamp. The arm of Meta-taj flashed down. Simultaneously the grasp of the huge hillman relaxed. Dizzily, Gaunt detached himself.

Again Meta-taj had saved him. Her

dagger, driven home with unerring aim, had pierced the monster to the heart from behind.

Grinding out a spray of blood-flecked foam, the hillman quivered in his last agony.

Gaunt got upon his feet. Meta-taj was already at the side of Prince Sobrao, who was sitting up, his eyes fixed in wonder upon his rescuers.

## VI

THE dancer produced a huge file from her dress. She handed it to Gaunt, who set to work upon the captive's shackles. Meanwhile they talked, to the accompaniment of the singing steel.

Prince Sobrao, who had been imprisoned in the dungeon since his brother usurped the throne, had lost all hope. He almost welcomed the bloody end to which he had been devoted, in three days' time.

He was wasted away almost to a skeleton. Yet there was hope in the look he turned on Gaunt and on the girl, while the file sang, and a groove appeared in the link of his chain.

They had searched the dead guard for keys, but found none. If Sobrao escaped, he would have to escape with either hand in a cuff, and trust to finding a locksmith to open it.

During the period of his imprisonment he had learned of the party pledged to deliver him. Once he had almost succeeded in escaping, by bribing his guards, but he had been captured and brought back, and thereafter watched by the savage hillmen.

"If fortune favors me," he said to Gaunt, "I pledge myself to abolish the Kali rites forever. The British Raj shall have no further anxieties about Shastan."

While the file played, they formed hasty plans. Gaunt and Sobrao were to make their way back to the house of Chunder Ras. The old Brahman was in touch with the leaders of the revolutionary party. These, doubtless, would be prepared for some action, being fired with enthusiasm by the appearance of their leader.

Snap! One of the links had gone.

"There is a way out beneath the ravine," said Meta-taj. "Prince Sobrao doubtless knows it."

"Aye, I have known of it from of old," answered Sobrao. "It is a passage running through to Kali's temple. Once across the ravine, I shall have little cause to fear. And what about thee, Meta-taj?" he asked the girl.

"I can protect myself," she answered "Do not be anxious about me."

"And what of the Eye?" questioned Sobrao.

"It shall be yours at the appointed time, Highness," answered the dancer.

Gaunt was disconcerted. It was evident that Meta-taj had no immediate intention of surrendering the jewel. To attempt to take it from her by force was unthinkable; yet Gaunt would have given all he possessed to have had it.

Meanwhile they made further plans. The gist of them was that, without the Eye and the fillet, the festival of Kali would be a failure; at the appointed time, Prince Sobrao must himself appear before the populace wearing that sacred symbol of Empire.

Snap! The second chain broke. Prince Sobrao stood up, a free man.

Wasted and feeble, he had a little difficulty at first in regaining the use of his legs. His rags were rotting from him. But there was new courage in his demeanor, something kingly, that Gaunt noticed with approval.

"We must go," said Gaunt.

"Aye," said the dancer.

She led the way back along the corridor, turned into a recess and stopped. Behind her Gaunt saw a darkened shadow against the rock. It was the secret entrance to the tunnel—no door, but a movable block of stone. Sobrao ran his hand along the edge of it, and Gaunt saw the line of shadow deepen.

But Meta-taj was standing with her back against it. The two men looked at her in wonder.

"SO the task is ended," said the dancer. "Yet remember there is always a price that must be paid."

"It shall be richly paid," answered Sobrao. "You shall take your pick of all the temple jewels, O dancer."

"Good!" She laughed. "And what price will you pay me, Gaunt Sahib?"

"I can pledge myself that the Indian

government will reward you richly," said Gaunt.

Meta-taj laughed, a hard laugh that chilled Gaunt. That tigerish look appeared on her face again, seen in the long shadows cast by the butter-lamp at the end of the corridor.

"Good again," she said. "But what price do you pay, Gaunt Sahib?"

"What is it you require?" asked Gaunt in bewilderment.

"A small price. Your love, Gaunt Sahib. So little! I loved you when I saw you in fight with that hill beast upon the housetop. Is the price too much? Am I not beautiful?"

She flung her arms wide. She stood before him in supreme self-confidence and pride, ignoring Sobrao as if he had ceased to exist.

"Why do you hesitate to accept the price, Gaunt Sahib?" asked the dancer, a little frown gathering between her brows. "I have heard it said that you men from the West are slow to love, but Meta-taj has never yet offered her love in vain."

Gaunt, looking at her, felt much as if a tigress had offered to love him. There was something splendid in the courage of the dancing-girl, her contemptuous disregard of what might be called proprieties, even in Shastan.

But Gaunt sensed the venomous, ruthless nature of her. Thwarted, she would strike, with as little compunction as she had shown that night when she struck down the hillman—or when she slew that other hillman on the Calcutta housetop.

He spoke slowly, because he was fighting an almost irresistible temptation. Not to accept her offer. Gaunt was proof against beauty. A woman-hater, they called him in the Service. No, to fore-swear himself.

To dupe her for the sake of the prize at stake.

He saw the look of impatience on Prince Sobrao's face. Sobrao could not understand what he was hesitating about.

But it is on character that the English rule in India is based, and not to gain all that was at stake would Gaunt lie to her. "Hanum," he said with affected lightness, "love is not to be bargained for. Of that I will not speak—not when it is offered as a price."

"*Ai*, hear him!" A shrill scream broke from the dancer's lips. "He refuses! You, whose life was in my hands on the roof-top! You, whom I led here tonight! Answer me!" She shook with tigerish rage. "Shall men say that a vile *Mlech* spurned the love of Meta-taj, the love of kings?"

Gaunt could not answer. And there was no need to answer, for all his soul was written on his face. It was that look he gave her that changed the Nautch girl in to an elemental fury.

With a scream like that of a wild beast, Meta-taj hurled herself upon him, dagger in hand.

GAUNT knew well the Nautch girl's skill in dagger-play. He knew that he was facing an antagonist whose sex he must forget. Long afterward he told himself that it was those two rehearsals of her prowess that saved him in the fight that followed.

As the girl's hand shot toward his heart with lightning speed, Gaunt struck it up, deflecting the steel so that the blade only ripped his rags. Then he had the dancer's dagger-hand in his, and he gripped it until he heard a bone crack under the pressure of his fingers.

He had her mastered, though she fought and bit like a wild beast. But her screams were like the shrilling of a flute, and Gaunt could not silence her.

Vaguely he was aware of Sobrao fumbling at the stone behind her. He saw it open, and the Prince's form disappear. Sobrao had not waited to save his rescuer; he was too keen to save his own skin. Gaunt noted the fact without bitterness as he wrestled with the mad woman, but he could not shake her off.

She had dropped the dagger and was clawing at his face. Still she shrieked. Now there sounded answering cries at the end of the corridor. He freed himself and she leaped at him again, a demented fury.

Men were running toward them, palace guards, swords in their hands. The girl was gone, and Gaunt was struggling desperately in their grip. Behind them he saw the fat Nubian eunuch who had paraded the corridor of the harem.

There were half a dozen of his assailants, striking at him with scimitars. He

evaded a slashing blow. Snatching his revolver from his rags, he thrust it into the face of the wielder, the foresight ripping it from brow to ear. The man reeled, screeching, on to the point of the sword of the man behind him, wrenching it from his hand as he fell.

Gaunt struck again. The second guard collapsed. The rest backed in the narrow passage, trying to find space to swing their swords. For the moment Gaunt stood free.

For a moment he thought that he might still win to the secret exit. But Meta-taj was gone and the ponderous wall of stone showed no trace of the movable block. There was not a moment to search for it.

They were coming at him again. Gaunt snapped his revolver in the face of the foremost of his assailants. But the cartridge failed to fire, dampened as it was by the rains that had soaked Gaunt continuously on the way north from Darjeeling. He hurled the weapon into the man's face, stooped and snatched up the sword that had fallen from the guard's hand.

It was a fantasy, that fight in the narrow passageway. Neither Gaunt nor the guards, more and more of whom were crowding in, could swing a blade effectively. But Gaunt was being backed against the rock wall as his assailants gradually gained foothold.

He thrust the point of his weapon into one of the savage, scowling faces, saw the scowl obliterated in blood. Then he slipped and went down under the weight of a dozen adversaries.

Gaunt strove to rise. He was knocked flat. He was being hammered into unconsciousness.

He heard a sharp command in Pushtu. He was dragged to his feet, his arms tightly bound, while a ring of swords menaced him. Before him stood a man in fez and frock coat, a young man with a handsome, dissipated face, just now set in a scowl of rage. It was Hari Singh, ruler of Shastan.

Suddenly a man came running toward the group, shouting and gesticulating. The flight of Sobrao had been discovered. But the ensuing confusion was very dim to Gaunt.

He remembered later the threatening blades pointed at his heart and Hari

Singh's command to lower them. He recalled being roped and carried out of the vault into some place not far away, then up flights of stairs that seemed to have no ending. He was flung down roughly on a stone floor. For a while consciousness lapsed.

## VII

THE taste of brandy in his mouth, unmistakably French brandy, roused Gaunt. He opened his eyes and looked about him.

He was in another vault, a tiny chamber irregularly hewn out of the rock. It was completely bare, and illuminated only by the light that came through a small circular aperture above a door set into the stone. But that light was electric light. And behind that door Gaunt heard what sounded like the soft humming of a dynamo.

Two hillmen, evidently his guards, were in the chamber with him. They sprang to attention as footsteps were heard. Hari Singh came in.

He stood looking down at Gaunt, who returned his gaze. Gaunt's dizziness was passing. He had been knocked out rather than stunned.

"So—we have you!" said Hari.

Gaunt made no reply.

"You have done an evil night's work in setting the prisoner free," shouted the Prince in sudden passion. "Who showed you the way? Who brought the file? Answer me!"

He covered Gaunt with a drawn and cocked revolver.

Gaunt said nothing. For a moment he thought that Hari Singh meant to shoot him. But a change passed over the Prince's face. He hesitated a moment, then replaced the revolver in his belt and stepped to the door.

"Orloff!" he called.

There came a shuffling sound on the other side; the door opened, letting in a blaze of electric light. In the doorway stood framed a tall old man with a bald head and a long white beard that tumbled nearly to his waist. The face was deeply wrinkled. Precariously perched on the nose was a pair of spectacles with enormous lenses.

ORLOFF peered at Gaunt. His face, which had appeared that of a benignant old scientist, suddenly twisted. The Russian gibbered, grimaced, shambled forward and stood over Gaunt, looking down at him. He stretched out a huge bony hand.

"That's the right cranial index, Prince. I couldn't have found a better type," he shouted. "Bring him inside!"

His fingers twitched as if worked by wires.

"I can't use these black fellows," he shouted, in a thin, metallic voice that was curiously deprived of resonance by the surrounding walls. "Aryans they call them, poor cousins of the white races. Bah, they're Dravidians, primitives! Brains smooth as monkeys'. Bring him in and let me get to work with him."

Gibbering, chuckling, rubbing his long, bony fingers and cracking the joints, Orloff looked like a repulsive madman.

"Not just yet," answered Prince Hari in English, laying a hand upon the old man's shoulder. "Go back to your work, my dear friend. In a little while we shall attend to Gaunt Sahib."

Orloff, apparently oblivious of the Prince's presence, was running his bony fingers over Gaunt's head, chuckling and gibbering. Hari Singh caught him by the arm and spun him around.

"Be patient, Orloff," he said, with a loose-lipped grin. "There is all the time you need at your disposal."

"Time?" shrilled the Russian. "There is not enough time. I am growing old. My secret—if it should die with me! . . . I want brains, brains, white men's brains for the sake of humanity!"

But after eying the Prince a moment, he turned and began shambling apathetically back toward the laboratory. Prince Hari watched him until he had disappeared, then turned to Gaunt.

"You see, he is quite mad, poor old fellow," he said. "I think you and I are not likely to have any difficulty in coming to an understanding, Gaunt. We have fought each other, but it was a fair fight and I bear you no ill-feeling on that account."

He spoke a word to the two hillmen. They pulled Gaunt to his feet and pushed him through the doorway.

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GAUNT had seen many strange sights during the term of his service along the frontier, but nothing so unexpected as the interior of the room into which he was now propelled.

It was a laboratory, apparently a well equipped one, and ablaze with electric light. The source of this evidently was the large dynamo that was whirring softly in one corner.

Down the center of the room ran a long table, covered with apparatus of various kinds. A tongue of blue flame shot from a Bunsen burner. Against one wall was a couch, with two chairs beside it, and near this a small table, containing the remnants of a meal. Apparently Orloff lived as well as worked there.

Two objects immediately attracted Gaunt's attention. One was what looked like a dumb-waiter shaft beside the large window; the other was a covered dome upon a pedestal, about five feet above the floor. Then Gaunt's eyes wandered to the window and he knew where he was.

The laboratory was apparently near the summit of the ravine that separated the two peaks of Seravi, and facing it. In the starlight Gaunt could see the opposite side, the slender bridge overhead, that spanned it, and beyond, the outlines of the Temple of Kali.

He looked at Orloff, who was bending over the Bunsen burner, fusing the end of a test tube which contained some fluid of a yellowish color. The Russian was mumbling to himself. He seemed temporarily oblivious of the presence of the four men in the room.

Immediately Gaunt realized that his pre-conceptions of the Kommissar had been wrong. He had pictured Orloff in his mind as a typical intriguing envoy of the Soviet. Instead, they had sent a madman to the court of Shastan. Politically there was nothing to fear from Orloff.

Hari Singh, on the other hand, was one of those strange figures that flit from time to time across the stage of India. A degenerate, drunk with absolute power, cruel and bestial beyond the imagination of ordinary men, yet capable of forming grandiose schemes of empire.

Such men were Nana Sahib, who massacred the English women captives during the mutiny, and Siraj-ud Daula, who

penned his prisoners in the Black Hole of Calcutta.

“YES, I think you and I are going to come to an understanding, Gaunt Sahib,” purred Hari Singh. “You are an intelligent man; I like dealing with intelligent men. We’ve matched our wits fairly and you realize that I possess the greater power. In three months’ time there will be not one Englishman left alive in India.”

“Is that so?” queried Gaunt.

“Yes, that is so,” grinned the Prince. “India is tired of you, with your justice and your equality. And there is one thing she resents more than any other. That is your championship of the pariah, the untouchable. Your mercy and your justice—we spit them out as vile things, suited only to a race of slaves.

“We want our ancient gods and our goddess, Kali.”

“But there will always be a place for one like yourself, Gaunt. Honors and rule and riches! You shall have a principality of your own, if you would like one. But first, my friend, the Eye of Kali!”

Gaunt had never done such quick thinking as during the moment following this demand. He was trying to consider the implications of the Prince’s demand.

It bore out what Meta-taj had told him. The dancer had evidently told Hari that Gaunt was on his way to Seravi and had promised to betray him by getting the stone from him.

Hari, then, had no idea that the Eye was in the possession of the dancer.

Gaunt’s mind found one idea and clung to it. He must await developments and tell Hari nothing.

“The Eye—the Eye, Gaunt Sahib!” cried Hari Singh, in tones tremulous with eagerness. “Give it to me, or tell me where you have concealed it, and you and I shall seal our friendship. There is no quarrel between you and me, Gaunt Sahib. And as for the escape of my brother, we will forget that. Once the Eye is in my possession—”

He checked himself. He looked at Gaunt earnestly, beseechingly.

Gaunt laughed, a ringing laugh that had more than once disconcerted foemen who thought they had him at their mercy.

“You will have to search well and carefully, if you hope to find the Eye of Kali, Highness,” he answered.

A SPASM of murderous fury, surest sign of an unbalanced mind, twitched Hari’s face.

“Dog of a *Mlech*,” he yelled, “do you think you can defy me? Do you think I have not the means to force you to tell me where it is? I swear to you that if the Eye is not in my hands within an hour, I will have you crawling at my feet, screaming for mercy.”

The dark face, working with rage, was thrust forward into Gaunt’s. Gaunt watched Hari with a cool smile that seemed to drive him to the point of absolute insanity. The Indian leaped at him and struck him violently across the face with his fist.

He shrieked at the two hillmen. They threw themselves upon the American and almost tore the rags from his body. They pried open his mouth, they examined every inch of the dirty yellow fabric.

Gaunt’s white body, in contrast to his stained face, must have appeared a fearsome thing to the two savages. But neither expressed surprise by so much as a quiver of his features.

While they searched Hari Singh watched them eagerly.

At last they rose.

“It is not on his body nor in his clothes, Lord of India,” announced one of the men.

“Fool,” shrieked Hari, almost beside himself, “what have you done with it? Are you mad enough to suppose the Eye will be of any use to you after you are dead? What is it you want? I have offered you everything a man can desire.”

“Listen to advice, Hari,” said Gaunt. “You have not yet thrown the die that will mean your destruction and your death. Many a man has withdrawn from the brink of his Rubicon in time. Be warned!”

“Fool, Caesar crossed the Rubicon and made himself master of Rome.”

“Prince, you are no Caesar.”

“You lie, you fool, you accursed fool! Do you think I kept my eyes shut during my two years at Oxford? I have seen our English aristocracy; they are rotten to the core. A push and their whole rule in India topples over. Then I shall lead my

men across the passes to slaughter and plunder."

"Aye, such as one sees in the haze of the black smoke, Prince," laughed Gaunt.

Hari Singh shrieked and struck him in the face again. Then, in uncontrollable rage, he drew a knife from his girdle. Gaunt laughed once more. That laugh was part defiance, but part contempt. Naked, still partly bound, Gaunt still felt the white man's superiority to this unrestrained savage confronting him.

"Stab me, black man," he taunted him. "What are you afraid of? See, my hands are tightly bound!"

With a wolfish howl Hari Singh drew back the hand that held the dagger. In another moment it would have pierced Gaunt's throat.

**I**NTervention came from an unexpected quarter, in the shape of Orloff. Aroused by Hari's screams, he had come ambling forward. With remarkable agility he seized the hand that held the knife.

"What are you doing, Highness?" he cried petulantly. "Are you going to spoil my subject?"

For an instant Hari struggled in the grasp of the old Russian, who had restrained him easily, gibbering protests. Then the mood of uncontrollable violence passed.

"Very well, Orloff," he snarled. "Yes, you are right. No easy death for him. And if I had killed him I should never have found the stone."

He shouted a command to the hillmen, who began to fling Gaunt's rags about him again. They completed the refastening of his bonds. Hari watched them, a devilish smile upon his bestial face. When Gaunt had been yanked to his feet, Hari crossed the room toward the domed object that Gaunt had seen when he first entered it.

Orloff, who had bent over the table again, looked up and uttered a protest. He tried to seize the Prince's hand again, but Hari pushed him aside.

He sprang at the domed object and whisked away the covering.

And, prepared though he was for any horror, Gaunt could not stifle the cry that broke from him. Upon the wooden pedestal was a glass dome, one of those crystal covers used over clocks a generation ago.

Under it the name of the maker in Birmingham could still be seen.

Under the dome was a freshly severed human head!

## VIII

**T**HE head had been cut off cleanly at the neck, and the top of the skull had been removed. It was the head of a dark man, apparently a Hindu, and the appearance of the ghastly relic showed that the man had been alive not many hours before. But it was not merely the sight of the head that had drawn the exclamation from Gaunt's lips.

Attached to the skull within, so as to make contact with the brain centers, were two long wires, which ran down the side of the wooden pedestal to a dry cell battery on one end of the table. Beside the battery and wired to it, was a flat wooden plate containing a number of keys.

As Hari Singh snatched off the covering, and lifted the dome, Orloff awoke. With a ringing, mad screech of triumph he sprang to the instrument, and began rapidly depressing one key after another with his bony fingers. And instantly, to Gaunt's horror, the severed head began to respond.

The muscles twitched, the lips moved, the eyelids jerked open, displaying the black orbs within. These fixed themselves upon Orloff with what seemed to be a gleam of dreadful recognition.

A hideous spasm of delight twisted Orloff's features. He danced and gibbered, frantically rapping out his devil's tattoo upon the keys. At each depression of a finger some nerve pulled a muscle of the dead face, so that the thing upon the pedestal seemed to grimace back at the madman.

"Laugh! Laugh!" shrieked Orloff. "Ah, you were a fine fellow yesterday before Kali got you. Six feet, if you were an inch, with the limbs and chest of an athlete! The body to Kali, the head to Orloff, a fine division of labor, as Lenin would have put it.

"It seemed almost a pity to take your life, my poor fellow. But that life will flow on through countless other lives when I have completed my discoveries in rejuvenation."

THE Russian raised his hands from the keys, and the face resumed its aspect of a livid mask. He half-turned, flung out his arms, gesticulated, spoke as if he was in a lecture-hall:

"They talked about glands, Voronoff and the rest. On the wrong track, all of them, gentlemen. There is only one gland holds the secret of life, and that is the pineal body in the brain. Once I have enough pineal bodies, I shall distill an essence that will enable man to defy old age and death."

He turned to Hari Singh.

"Prince, you must give me the brains of white men," he shouted. "These Hindus and Bhutanese have not properly developed brains, as white men have. They represent the infancy of civilization. Smooth brains, without well developed pineal bodies—all Kali's victims have been like that.

"I must have white men's brains if my experiments are to succeed, if I am to prove myself the greatest benefactor of humanity that has ever lived.

"And I, too—I, Vladimir Orloff! Suppose I were to die before I have succeeded in making myself a young man again. Now that I am upon the threshold of success—suppose I were to die!"

Standing there, motionless in sheer horror as he watched this ghastly performance, Gaunt at last understood what it was that had brought Orloff to Shastan. The aged scientist had gone insane, but insanity had proved no bar in Russia to his securing from the Soviet Government the post that would enable him to procure what could not be procured even in Soviet Russia.

He wanted living human beings with whose brains he could perform his ghastly experiments. And there was only one place in the world where he could obtain these, outside of the *ju-ju* haunts in the swamps of darkest Africa. That was in Shastan, the last place in the world where human beings were still being immolated upon heathen altars.

That was why Orloff had come to Seravi, the site of Kali's bloody sacrifices.

Hari Singh turned to Gaunt.

"Now, Gaunt Sahib, you see what awaits you unless you give in," he said. "The Eye, Gaunt! In return freedom,

gold, empire, whatever you will. You can trust me. I will even set you free upon your pledge to restore the Eye to me within three days. The word of a Sahib, it still counts in Hindustan. Come, your answer."

"The word of a Sahib? You shall have it," answered Gaunt.

"Ah!" Prince Hari's features relaxed in a pleased smile. "You are sensible at last. Gold from my treasury, as much as ten mules can carry away, and that only the beginning—"

"That word," said Gaunt, "is 'No!'"

HARI SINGH stood stock still. Behind him Gaunt saw Orloff recommence his ghastly experiments. The muscles of the face twisted under the electric currents that he sent through them. The features now grew flattened, now elongated, as if the face were of plasticine, being molded by the hands of a child.

"So," said Hari slowly, "you wish your face to stand upon that pedestal under that crystal?"

"Your wish is an amiable one," laughed Gaunt, "but it hasn't happened yet."

"No? You think you can escape me? You think you can remain silent? Have you ever seen a man flayed alive, from the ankles upward? Have you seen a man mutilated so that he looks like nothing under the sun, and still remains alive? I tell you, before Kali's festival comes around you'll be begging for death as the greatest boon in the world."

He burst into sneering laughter and once more struck Gaunt across the face. Then he gave a command to the two hillmen in some dialect that Gaunt found difficulty in following. Apparently they understood what was required of them, however, for one of them crossed the room and opened the shaft of the thing that resembled a dumb-waiter.

It was actually that—or, rather, a cross between a dumb-waiter and a small elevator, no doubt worked by a rope passing over pulleys. The second hillman motioned to Gaunt to enter it. Gaunt saw at once the purpose of the crudely rigged mechanism.

It had been used to convey Orloff's hideous trophies up from the shambles where the sacrifices took place.

Gaunt knew that the victim was always taken to the temple after sunset to be slain. He would have a twenty-four hours' respite at the best—at the worst, tortures unspeakable for three days and nights.

He stepped inside the contrivance, which was only large enough to hold himself. As the hillman was about to close the door, Hari Singh stepped forward.

"Your own price, Gaunt," he said. "You'll have time to think it over. I'll give you anything you want—even *Metataj*." He eyed Gaunt shrewdly. "That's all, Gaunt."

**T**HE door was closed and barred. Jerkily, the contrivance began to descend. The light from the laboratory that filtered through the cracks, disappeared and was succeeded by complete darkness.

Slowly and jerkily, foot by foot, the elevator was lowered. Presently a sound began to break the silence. It was the roaring of the torrent at the bottom of the gorge.

Then of a sudden the elevator came to a stop. The roaring of the stream was loud in Gaunt's ears, almost as if the cage was suspended over it. Then a light flashed. Gaunt heard the sound of voices.

Suddenly the bottom of the contrivance opened under his feet. Gaunt clutched at the sides to hold himself, but too late. He felt himself dropping into vacancy.

The roar of the torrent was suddenly cut off.

He struck what seemed to be a shelving ramp of rock, shot downward, bumping against the sides and roof and walls. Then of a sudden his fall was arrested by earth. A light flashed; a door slammed. Gaunt lay where he had fallen.

**"A** I, have mercy! Kill me, but cease to torture me! I swear I know nothing. Mercy! Mercy!"

Gaunt heard the cries. They brought him back to consciousness. He had not known with what an effort he was holding himself together in the mad Russian's laboratory. Half-stunned by the blows he had received in the fight in the palace, he had quickly drifted into a coma.

He started up, to find himself in pitch darkness. For a few moments he did not know where he was. Then the cries broke

out again, muffled by intervening walls yet apparently near at hand—cries in Bengali:

"Mercy! Mercy! Ah-h!" A bubbling sound succeeded them, a choking cry prolonged into a faint ululation, no less horrible than the screams.

Gaunt knew where he was now. He remembered everything. He sat up, aching in every limb. He ascertained that he had broken no bones during that long fall down the passage.

It had seemed pitch dark when he opened his eyes, but now he was aware of a glimmer of light coming from an orifice overhead. It was not moonlight, but reflected daylight, telling him that he must have been unconscious for hours. Looking about him, Gaunt saw the dim outlines of four walls.

He was in a cell, then, as he had supposed—no doubt one of the dungeons beneath the palace.

A small object gradually took shape beside him. Gaunt stretched out his arm and found that it was a pitcher filled with ice-cold water. He drank eagerly. The water cleared his brain.

He forced himself to swallow a few mouthfuls of bread. He tried to collect his strength and wits. At that moment the shrieking began again. Then followed a sound as if someone was striking a punching-bag.

Thump! Thump! Each blow was followed by a faint cry of agony. Gaunt felt nauseated. He could not picture to himself what kind of torture was being inflicted, but it was evidently something diabolically after Hari's heart.

"*Ai*, have pity on me and let me die, I do not know the whereabouts of the Eye. I swear it by Kali's holy image!"

**T**HE cell door opened with a click, admitting a shaft of light which, faint though it was, blinded Gaunt momentarily. Two Bhutanese guards stood in the entrance, huge men, nude to the waist, with daggers in their hands. They motioned Gaunt to leave his cell.

He went out into a passage, with cells set on either side. At the end of the passage was a square space, above it a small window. It had been covered with paper, but this had rotted away. Through the opening Gaunt could see the side of

the gorge and a building on top of the precipice.

This building was not the temple, but the palace. For a moment Gaunt was puzzled. Then he understood where he was. He was not in the dungeons below the palace, as he had supposed, but under Kali's temple.

These thoughts passed through his mind in a flash, to be driven out by the appalling sight that confronted him.

A human body lay on the stone floor. It was that of a Hindu, nude save for the loin cloth, but swollen to such dimensions that it was hardly recognizable as that of a man.

By some devilish torture it had been enlarged until it was almost a globe. The thighs and upper bones of the arms were lost within the swollen trunk.

Beside the helpless man was something that looked like an ordinary bicycle pump. And Gaunt understood. The victim's lungs and stomach had been inflated with air, which, under pressure, had filtered through into the tissues of the body.

One of the Bhutanese raised a length of rubber hose and dealt the half-conscious man a blow. Again Gaunt heard the sound as of one striking a punching-bag. The Hindu moaned feebly.

Then Gaunt recognized him. It was the merchant, Chunder Ras. He was being tortured because he was suspected of having knowledge of the whereabouts of the Eye.

## IX

WITH a shout of fury, Gaunt broke from his guards and rushed upon the torturer. The man's heavy, bestial features wrinkled into a grin of surprise as Gaunt leaped at him. Gaunt's blow sent him staggering back against the stone wall of the dungeon.

Snatching up the length of rubber hose that he had dropped, Gaunt dealt him a blow that dropped him, writhing, at his feet. Then the guards closed with him.

Gaunt's struggles were brief. He was pulled down to the stone floor and quickly noosed. His wrists and ankles were made fast to rings in the dungeon wall. Chunder Ras was dragged away and Gaunt found himself lying in his place.

Prince Hari came along the passage. He was wearing a lounge suit of Oxford gray, with a pearl tie-pin. He stood beside Gaunt, smiling down at him.

"Well, you've seen something, just the beginning of what might be called possibilities, Gaunt," he jeered. "Not a pleasant sight for the cultivated Western eye, is it? You can save yourself a good deal of unpleasantness by being reasonable, Gaunt. We've got appliances that you've never dreamed of, things that would make the Inquisition look like a side-show. How about the ruby, Gaunt?"

Gaunt looked at the smiling face of the Prince, at the impassive countenances of the torturers. Contempt so filled his soul that it left no room for fear.

"Do your worst," he gritted between clenched teeth.

HARI SINGH nodded to the chief torturer, who picked up the pump. Another, with an iron bar, pried Gaunt's teeth apart. The bar was kept in place by two of the hillmen, one kneeling on either side, while a third held the back of Gaunt's head firmly in the hollow of an enormous hand. Gaunt felt the tube passing down his throat, into the bronchial passage.

For a moment Gaunt suffocated, he set all his muscles in a convulsive struggle for air, he writhed and moaned. Then the air passed. And then the agony began.

With lungs distended, so that he could not draw a breath of fresh air, with pulses hammering in his head like pile-drivers, he fought the devils of pain and spiritual surrender. Gasping, swooning, he saw the evil faces of his torturers and Hari's gloating features as he bent over him. Then all went out in blackness, until a spasmodic indrawing of fresh air revived him.

He opened his eyes. The torturer had withdrawn the tubing from his throat and was putting the pump away.

"Well, Gaunt Sahib, how did you like it?" grinned Hari, bending over the half-conscious man. "That is only the beginning, Gaunt. Come now, you see you can have no further use for the Eye. Be sensible and we will forgive and forget."

"You go to hell, you filthy dog!" said Gaunt.

Hari's face was convulsed.

"Listen!" he snarled. "This is your last hope to escape whole in body and limb. Tonight you will be taken into the fire-room; you will come out a shrieking, broken thing ready to lick the dust off the floor for the boon of death. You have six hours to think it over, Gaunt! But you shall see before making up your mind."

He spoke to the guards, who picked Gaunt up and carried him unceremoniously along the passage to another square chamber, with a number of cells ranged around it. From within these came whimpering moans.

Gaunt was flung into one of them. The door closed.

FOR a long while he lay in agony, trying to draw air into his bruised lungs. Gradually the pain passed; with it came acquiescence to his fate.

He knew there was no longer the smallest hope of escape. Nevertheless, that instinct which always guided him refused to let him tell Hari Singh that the dancer was in possession of the stone.

He did not know what Meta-taj's intentions were, but he still held obstinately to the conviction that she meant to foil Hari's plans. He had only to remain silent, therefore, and face the worst.

All around him he could hear the moans of the tortured inmates of the cells, but he could see nothing. He lay in complete darkness.

Hours passed. Somewhere Gaunt could hear shuffling footsteps on the stones, occasionally the distant sound of voices. It was beginning to grow warm—pleasantly warm in the chill cell, whose walls were wet with water soaking through the limestone.

It was growing warmer yet—unpleasantly warm now. Gaunt sweated in his rags.

Suddenly a scream of intolerable anguish rang through the chamber, mingled with hoarse laughter. Scream after scream!

Something clicked in the door of Gaunt's cell. A section of the door fell down, admitting a shaft of moonlight.

Immediately opposite was another opening in the rock wall, giving likewise upon the gorge. Between the wall and Gaunt's cell was a space about twelve feet square, with the red glow of a charcoal fire in a small bronze stove. The torturer was

bending over a man stretched out upon a plank. Close beside him stood Hari.

WHAT Gaunt saw—as he had been meant to see it—is indescribable. Years of experience among the natives of the frontier had taught him that there are depths of cruelty unmeasurable by the Western mind, but he had never pictured such a refinement of torture as was being inflicted upon the shrieking wretch strapped to the wooden board.

Horror-stricken, Gaunt turned his face away. He had come nearer to breaking then than at any time before. Each shriek might have come from his own laboring lungs.

Then he nerved himself to a supreme composure. And he threw off his baser fears as a fighter throws off his assailant. Once again he was Gaunt Sahib, white man, and a member of the Service that was everything in life to him. Calm and collected, he waited what was to come.

The victim's shrieks had ceased. The man had fainted. Gaunt looked out of the trap again and saw the limp and broken body carried away.

The door clicked open and the hideous guards stood there. Gaunt walked out, not a tremor in his limbs, his face neither set nor smiling.

Hari lurched toward him, looking at him in wonder. Hari was very drunk. He reeled, planted himself firmly on his feet.

"You are a very brave man, Gaunt Sahib," he said in grudging admiration. "But this is the end. When you leave the hands of these men, *twenty-four hours hence*, you will not be a living man. You cannot hold out under twenty-four hours of such torments as will be yours. Come, Gaunt, the Eye!"

"You go to hell, you swine!" said Gaunt steadily.

Hari Singh uttered a strident laugh. The hillmen seized Gaunt and threw him upon the board. His extended arms and legs were strapped and drawn through iron rings in the sides. His body was fastened by a strap that ran through two holes in the board's surface.

Immovably bound, Gaunt saw the chief torturer begin to heat his implements anew in the fire. He saw the black metal change to cherry red, grow white. . . .

A shadow passed between the moon and the opening in the wall, cutting off the shaft of light. Gaunt saw the man at the stove look up; he saw the Prince swing around. Then something came spinning through the opening and crashed upon the floor.

Gaunt saw a figure in a snout-like hood follow it.

"Gaunt Sahib, where are you?" it yelled.

**G**AUNT forgot even his apprehensions in the agony caused by the exploding tear-bomb. His eyes closed tightly and he strained madly at his bonds as he tried to breathe.

All about him he heard shrieks of anguish. A figure crashed into him and sent the board spinning from the rock slab on which it lay, hurling him to the floor, still fastened to it. The rush of feet over the stones, the shattering sound of revolver fire in the narrow confines of the chamber.

Someone was cutting Gaunt's bonds. Gaunt, only half conscious and still choking for air in the deadly fumes, heard a voice in his ear:

"It is I, Sobrao. They have all fled. Did you think I had deserted you, Gaunt Sahib?"

The last strap snapped. Gaunt staggered to his feet, eyes still tightly closed. Sobrao led him toward the opening in the rock.

"Reach up and feel the edge of the orifice," he said. "Then pull yourself up and let yourself drop gently on your feet and wait for me. There is a narrow ledge outside."

Gaunt obeyed. The fresh night air began to relieve his wheezing lungs, but he was still unable to open his eyes. In another moment Sobrao was standing beside him on the ledge without.

"Can you see, Gaunt Sahib?" he asked.

"I can't get my eyes open."

"Then I must guide you. Step carefully. There is a steep descent to the torrent. They will be in pursuit of us in a minute or two."

With one arm about Gaunt's shoulders, Sobrao guided him foot by foot forward.

"It is not far," he kept whispering. "It is a hiding-place in the ravine I found when a boy. But we must swim a short distance, Sahib. Try now to open your eyes."

Gaunt tried. For a moment he caught a glimpse of the ravine, bathed in black shadows, though the moon shone overhead. The torrent roared beneath him, a swath of tumbling foam.

Then he closed his eyes again under the intolerable smarting of the gas.

"Here is a rock. Step carefully," said Sobrao. "A little to the right, Gaunt Sahib. We shall beat them now."

Suddenly yells sounded from the heights above and a fusillade crackled overhead. Bullets began to chip the rocks around them. Gaunt got his eyes open once more and managed to keep them open.

"I can see now all right, Sobrao," he gasped.

"This way, then!"

**T**HEY raced together along a narrow track that ran down to the water's edge. The yells upon the ridge were increasing, as was the firing. Looking up, they could see dark forms silhouetted against the top of the ravine. A furious crack of rifle firing broke out.

"Now," gasped Sobrao, as they reached the edge of the torrent. "Let it carry you forward, but try to make the rock that juts out into the stream. But be careful you are not swept beyond it, or you will be dashed to pieces!"

The shock of immersion into the icy water brought Gaunt back to normal. He let the torrent submerge him, opened his eyes beneath it and let it cleanse the poison from the eyeballs.

Overheard the whole garrison of the palace seemed to be under arms. A machine-gun, posted somewhere above, began to spray the surface of the stream with showers of lead.

Gaunt swam strongly, letting the current carry him along. The jutting rock drew closer, seemed to draw back as the torrent swept Gaunt away from it. He fought with frenzy to gain it; finally succeeded in grasping the edge of it and clinging there.

The machine-gun was now whipping the water behind them; it was evident that their exact whereabouts were unknown.

Sobrao was clinging to the rock at Gaunt's side.

"Crawl forward on your face," he hissed in his ear. "It is there, beneath the edge

of the rock, where it stands up from the slope. We shall be safe there."

Gaunt made the base of the slope, stretched out his hand and pulled his companion out of the water. A yard in front of them was a small orifice that might have been the entrance to a bear's den.

The machine-gun spray had shifted and was now searching the torrent far below. It was quite clear that the maneuver of the fugitives had escaped notice. Gaunt crawled into the opening.

In another moment the earth gave place to rock. He rose to his knees, felt upward and found that there was room to stand. Sobrao came to his side.

"We need go no farther, Sahib," he said. "We are safe from them now. We can rest here until our plans are completed."

## X

"IT is heavy news I bring you, Gaunt Sahib. The dancer, Meta-taj, has given up the Eye to Prince Hari. It hangs on its fillet on Kali's forehead in the Temple."

Two days had passed. The culmination of Kali's festival began at dawn on the morrow. Gaunt had spent those two days in the cavern, hearing the wild clamor of the devotees on the hill above, and recovering from the effects of his torture and the tear bomb.

He had passed the greater part of that time in sleep. Nature had effected a recuperation of his strength and vitality. He had eaten and drunk without inquiry as to the source of the supplies, but he knew that more than once Prince Sobrao had left the cave for a prolonged period.

Now Sobrao was back. Gaunt, completely restored, was looking at the peasant clothing he had brought with him, the revolver and ammunition and the *kukri* in its sheath.

"Also, Gaunt Sahib, the Brahman, Chunder Ras, is dead. Being afraid, because he is a subject of the Raj, Prince Hari had his body conveyed secretly to his house and had it given out that he died of smallpox."

"That news is less heavy," answered Gaunt. "But how came it that Meta-taj restored the jewel?"

Sobrao shrugged his shoulders.

"Who can say what impulse is behind a woman's acts, Sahib?" he answered. "But I think that, weighing the offense committed against her by Prince Hari and that of yours, she decided that yours was the heavier. Accursed be the whole race of women who have no lords whom they obey!"

Gaunt was in no mood to dispute with Sobrao on this subject.

"You have seen your followers?" he asked.

"Aye, Sahib, at the secret meeting-place, Kishwara are they all, of my mother's tribe, and valiant fighting men, but pitifully few. There are no more than sixty in Seravi, while Prince Hari commands a guard of twice that number, armed with machine-guns and the three field guns that were left behind by the British ten years ago."

"But there are many in Seravi who would join us, to overthrow the Kali worship," said Gaunt.

"At other times, but not now, when the whole city is at white heat because of the festival. Tomorrow at dawn, Sahib, eight men voluntarily give their lives for Kali. And there will be other victims from the dungeons beneath the palace.

"All Seravi is mad with enthusiasm for the Goddess.

"Of which Prince Hari plans to take advantage. We have learned something of his plans. Tomorrow, when the last victim has been flung into the flames in the great inner court, Prince Hari will take the fillet, with the stone, from Kali's brows. He will bind it about his own and, proclaiming himself the living Son of Kali, he will call upon all his followers to make war upon the British Raj.

"And throughout the peninsula, where Kali is worshipped, men will rise. The gates of India will stand open wide to Hari's armies. All the frontier, Sikh, Pathan and idolater, will follow in his train to war and plunder."

"AND the plans—the plans, Highness?" asked Gaunt, as he tried desperately to think of a solution.

"We have discussed them fully. All are agreed that, unless some miracle occurs, we shall be beaten and doomed to feed the flames before Kali's altars. Nevertheless,

all of us are agreed to stand together.

"Our sixty will be among the worshippers in the Temple, with swords and daggers under their clothes. But it will be for you and me, Gaunt Sahib, to set the moment of action for them.

"Now listen, Sahib. When I was a boy I explored this ravine from end to end. The palace and the temple, as you know, are very old, much older than my father's dynasty. Before he made himself master of Shastan there was a heathen temple on yonder hill, and those idolaters, too, sacrificed living men to their deity.

"There is a passage leading from beneath the altar of Kali down to this very cavern. Along this it was the custom of those idolaters to carry the bodies of their victims to cast them into this torrent. I know the way to the very altar of Kali."

"Do the priests know?"

"That I cannot say, Gaunt Sahib, but therein lies our chance. Now, Sahib, the plan we have decided on is this. You and I shall make our way into the Temple of Kali a little before the dawn. As to the sacrifices, it will be impossible to prevent them, for so we should bring down upon our heads the wrath of the whole people, and so fail of our hopes.

"But when my brother, the accursed son of a Marashta woman, would take the fillet with the stone, to bind it on his brows, then I shall spring forward and slay him. Then I shall proclaim myself ruler of Shastan.

"In the stupefaction that will follow, our sixty heroes may hope to make themselves masters of the city and to sway the populace."

"A great idea," said Gaunt. "Now as to weapons—what have you? Whence came the tear bomb and the mask?"

"Sahib, there are less than a dozen of them, left behind by the English after their expedition to Seravi ten years ago. To use them would be to destroy the fighting power of our own men as well as of the enemy."

"That's so," said Gaunt.

"Therefore we shall rely upon our knives and swords. For you, Gaunt Sahib, the dagger I have brought you, and the revolver. Once we have won the temple, we shall storm the bridge across the ravine and seize the palace. The chance of success is a small one, but it is not hopeless."

"No," answered Gaunt, "it is not hopeless. And the stake is worth the chance."

AS night drew on, the howling of the devotees of Kali grew wilder. During three successive days the orgies in the temple courts had been increasing in abandonment.

The courts were packed with a mob of maddened fanatics, awaiting the annual pilgrimage of the grim goddess through the streets, from temple to palace and back again. And through the crowds there percolated rumors of the great events that were to be begun on the morrow.

Kali, goddess of war and blood, of cholera and smallpox, the hideous representative of the old heathen faiths, who was to rise in her might and wipe out the gentler deities, might have been the symbol of all the debased and evil passions of the human race. This mob was wholly evil, dreaming of the world chaos that would ensue when Hari, hereditary high priest of the ancient cults, should give the sign for bloodshed.

In their cavern Gaunt and Prince Sobrao listened and waited. The night wore on; still the tumult was unabated. But there was a change in the nature of the cries that came to them from the hillside above them. The wild outbursts had spontaneously taken on a sinister note that Gaunt had heard more than once before along the frontier.

It was the human death-cry, which arises, ever the same, from mobs among which the lust for blood has dominated all other instincts. It is as characteristic of the human species as the death-bay of the hunting wolf.

Gaunt heard it, and knew that theirs would be no easy task upon the morrow. The night wore on; the moon dipped low and disappeared. A black pall overhung the gorge. Hours passed, and the two men waited, neither speaking.

At last, when a faint, nebulous grayness began to steal down the ravine, Sobrao turned to Gaunt.

"It is time to start, my friend," he said.

Gaunt rose to his feet, thrusting the revolver into the pocket of his coat. Sobrao, producing a flashlight, led the way back into the interior of the cave. During Gaunt's sojourn of two days there, he had not even had the curiosity to explore it.

The cave widened, then narrowed again, turned sharply to the right. Between two rocks appeared a roughly hewn flight of stairs in the soft limestone. Sobrao and Gaunt squeezed their way through.

The stairs appeared, in the light of the flash, to be partly natural—one of the innumerable tunnels worn by dripping water in the course of ages. It also bore marks of being partly hewn out by the tribes that had inhabited the place before the dynasty of Sobrao's father established the Kali worship there. In places they were almost non-existent.

As the two ascended, however, the evidences of human agency grew clearer. The roof grew higher; they were ascending a regular stairway smoothly carved in the limestone rock. Suddenly Sobrao stopped. The beam of the flash showed a smooth wooden floor above them, black with age.

**S**OBRAO handed Gaunt the flash, indicating that he should examine it. Gaunt saw the two halves of a trap-door overhead, smoothly, fitted together. Between them he could see a thin rim of metal.

It was clear that the two halves had been constructed to open downward and inward. The rim of metal visible from below was the iron bolt that held them together.

Sobrao nodded, as if reading Gaunt's thoughts. Producing a thin file, he took his stand beside the American. Reaching upward with his hand, he inserted the blade between the two wooden slabs. It caught the bolt. The faint sound of metal on metal was heard.

The hubbub of the mob of devotees had become inaudible during the progress of the two men through the tunnel. Now it was heard again through the trap-door overhead, a distant sound that lost none of its thrilling horror because its intensity had been diminished. It came from the innermost court of the temple. Immediately overhead was silence.

Steadily the thin music of the file rang. Seeing Sobrao laboring in his strained position, Gaunt would have taken his turn at the work, but Sobrao thrust him away and continued at his labors.

For perhaps an hour he filed. Then the thin, musical note cracked as the file came through. Simultaneously the two heavy

halves of the trap-door descended, sending Gaunt and Sobrao sprawling headlong in the tunnel.

They picked themselves up, rubbing their bruised scalps and shoulders. The sound of the fanatics in the outer court had suddenly become accentuated. The droning chant of prayer had succeeded the death cries. It swelled upon the wind and died away.

High overhead a single star of light was shining. It was the lamp before the huge idol of Kali, one of whose outstretched hands, immediately beneath it, gleamed red as blood. Underneath her foot was visible part of the body of the prostrate Siva.

But Gaunt and Sobrao were not in the Temple. By the dim light that filtered down from above they could see that they were in a pit, some twenty-five feet deep, almost immediately under the idol, which straddled it overhead. And in the pit, huddled at the farther end, was a group of human figures.

Sobrao turned the flash about him. The sides of the pit were of smoothed rock, unscalable. There appeared to be no exit.

He moved stealthily toward the figures, then turned and beckoned to Gaunt.

"Do you know who these men are, Sahib?" he asked.

"They are those who have offered their lives for the sacrifice at dawn. They have been drugged with *bhang*, lest they repent and try to flee. What say you, Gaunt Sahib? Shall we flee while there is time or shall we take our places among them?"

"We'll take our place here," answered Gaunt.

## XI

**T**HE droning in the inner court became a medley of renewed shouts that grew louder and more fanatical. In the courts beyond it a growing multitude took up the clamor. A spire of fire leaped into the paling sky.

Down in their pit Gaunt and Sobrao, crouching among the stupefied captives, knew what that fire meant. It was the lighting of the immense pyre on which Kali's victims were to be cast.

The light of dawn began to spread within the Temple. Now the two could see the statue of the hideous goddess overhead,

as she came into view. She was black as ebony, with four outstretched arms, and red palms to the four hands. She straddled an enormous wooden base which was fitted with rollers, on which it could be drawn through the streets.

Her huge eyes were red; red paint, an imitation of blood, was smeared upon her face and breasts. Matted hair covered the skull, a tongue a yard long protruded between the hideous fangs between the blood-red lips. A necklace of skulls was around her throat, and a serpent formed her girdle. Under the splay feet was the body of her husband, Siva.

Around her head was the golden fillet of Tamerlane and, blazing upon the forehead, the great ruby.

Looking up at the hideous image, Gaunt shuddered. Then anger shook him. For the debased minds that had imagined the abominable symbol he could feel no pity. He was no longer merely a servant of the State; he had become a crusader, burning with the determination to wipe out the horde of priests and courtiers who profited by this idolatry and used it to maintain their hold upon the people.

Sobrao looked at him and nodded.

"Aye, Gaunt Sahib; today, please God, shall see the end of Kali's rites forever," he said.

**M**EN came running into the Temple—priests, dragging a number of bound captives. These were the prisoners from Hari's dungeons, destined to be immolated with the volunteers upon the pyre. The flames were leaping higher toward the sky.

Crouching down among the stupefied volunteers, Gaunt and Sobrao saw the unhappy captives dragged to the edge of the pit and hurled to the bottom. Some lay there stunned, others writhed and groaned and tried to free themselves from their bonds.

But their cries were drowned in the sudden hammering of gongs as a shaft from the risen sun penetrated the interior of the temple. A score of priests were hammering the great brass cylinders and blowing conches, producing a deafening clangor. Simultaneously, the Temple gates were thrown open and a crowd of wild-eyed, shrieking fanatics rushed inside.

As they approached the statue of the god-

dess, they cast themselves upon the floor. Slowly Kali's four arms descended and hung above them in a gesture of benediction.

Gaunt uttered an exclamation. Sobrao turned to him.

"There is a priest inside the statue who moves the arms and turns the head from side to side. Look now!" he said.

The head was moving. The goddess looked right and left, the arms slowly elevating again. Clumsy as the mechanical performance was, there was something awful in it, even to Gaunt, as he lay there watching.

The worshippers arose. The gongs hammered again and the shriek of the conches filled the Temple. It was now densely packed. In the court beyond, around the roaring pyre, whose heat reached even to the pit, Gaunt could see thousands more.

Priests, clambering among the beams of the roof, were letting down hooks at the ends of ropes. They were hung upon a huge crossbeam, which seesawed upon an upright pole. It was the opening of the *Churruk Pooja*, Kali's hook-swinging festival.

**A**S the gongs beat yet louder and the conches blared, the crowd became convulsed with demoniacal frenzy. Groups began to whirl and gyrate, until each man within the packed temple was spinning in a mad dervish dance.

Then single individuals, rushing to the altar of the goddess, began to hack their breasts and arms with knives—till the whole upper portion of their bodies was stained as red as Kali's palms.

A man rushed screaming to one of the dangling hooks. He bent toward it, while a second seized the sharp point and passed it beneath the muscles of the shoulder-blade. Quickly each hook was seized by one of the maddened votaries. As soon as each had its victim, a crowd of men rushed to the rope dangling down from the other end of the see-saw beam, and pulled.

Hoisted into the air, the fanatics were quickly swept around in a widening circle.

For fifteen minutes or so the insane torture continued, each hook, as it released its victim, being eagerly seized by a fresh devotee. All the while the gongs roared. The frenzy within the Temple spread to

without, where the center of the court was now a roaring furnace.

But through the brazen clangor of the gongs there shrilled the sound of bugles. Suddenly the interior of court and Temple became mute. The fanatics slipped from the hooks, which ceased to whirl; the conches were silent.

Prince Hari appeared on foot at the Temple doors. He was followed by a crowd of courtiers and a number of his guards.

Advancing to the front of the statue, he bent in reverent obeisance.

A body of priests came running forward, with long ropes trailing behind them. Quickly they attached them to the base of the statue and formed a line along them. The creaking rollers began to revolve. Swaying upon its base, the great statue began to move forward through the Temple.

Ladders were let down into the pit. Priests, with knouts in their hands, ran down them and began to urge the prisoners to ascend. Some, the volunteers, awakening from their drugged sleep, cried out in ecstasy and scurried up the rungs. Others, the prisoners from the dungeons, were unable either to move or to resist. They were carried up bodily. At the top their bonds were cut and they were marshaled in line.

Temple boys ran among them, placing wreaths of flowers upon their heads.

**G**AUNT and Sobrao, among the volunteers, were unrecognized as strangers.

As the wreaths were placed upon their heads, Sobrao turned to Gaunt and whispered:

"We have traveled a road that we had not planned to take, but among these madmen there are our sixty, waiting for the command. If Hari does not take the stone and declare himself before the sacrifices begin, we shall anticipate him."

Gaunt nodded.

The ghastly procession began to move forward in the wake of the creaking statue. The huge black image passed through the great bronze doors into the court without.

The moment Gaunt left the Temple he felt the almost unbearable heat from the heaped-up pyre, which was blazing furiously. Its heart was a white-hot furnace.

Priests and Temple servants were throwing on fresh logs each moment. A pungent smoke drifted across the court, half

obscuring the sun, which hung, a blood-red sphere, overhead.

But the multitudes, nude except for their loin-cloths, did not seem to feel the heat. They shrieked and raved and howled, pressing forward almost to the fringe of the blazing logs.

Behind them the thousands massed in the outer courts were shrieking invocations to the goddess. At the gate between the inner court and the next a body of troops was keeping back the devotees from trying to crowd in.

The ground was heaped high with a pile of dead and dying, every bone in their bodies broken by the jam.

But at the sight of Hari and his bodyguard, the clamor ceased. Hundreds of heads, craned upward, watched the slow procession of the great idol.

Suddenly one of the captives, with a wild shriek, broke from the line and leaped into the heart of the blazing pyre. He sank through the surface shell of charred logs into the white-hot heart of it. No vestige of him remained.

**A** MAN was stalking from the Temple—a white man, Orloff, his long beard floating to his waist, his eyes ablaze. He strode up to Prince Hari, cries of denunciation upon his lips as he pointed to the pyre.

Gaunt could not hear what he was saying, but he understood its tenor from his gestures. He wanted the heads of the victims, whereas the fire would destroy them utterly.

At the sight of Orloff, unmistakable signs of fear were shown among the crowd. Perhaps the scientist's dreams had filtered into their minds, distorted a thousand-fold by rumor. But even the priests and Hari's bodyguard drew back as Orloff stood there, his hands outspread in vehement gesticulation.

Prince Hari grinned. Suddenly, he pulled a revolver from the breast of his tunic and shot the old Russian through the head.

Orloff spun about, shrieking horribly, hands clasped to his temples. Hari turned to the leader of his guard and spoke a word or two. Two of the guard seized the writhing figure of the old man and hurled it into the heart of the fire.

It crashed through the outer shell into the depths of fire beneath. It appeared there for a moment, still writhing, a red-hot human coal, rapidly whitening to the color of the heart of the furnace. Then it vanished.

And the whole court was still as death. And that, Gaunt knew, was Hari's moment.

He turned to the statue and stretched out his arms. As he did so the hideous head, with the fanged mouth, bent toward him—bent lower, with a downward motion that it had not displayed inside the Temple.

Lower, while the same profound silence held the mob. Lower, until it hung forward on the neck and the gold fillet with the great, blazing ruby was within reach of Hari's hands.

Prince Hari detached the fillet to place it on his brows. Yet, as his hand touched it, he paused and turned toward the people.

"By the red stone of Kali, known as Kali's Eye, I, her high priest, call all her followers to war!" he shouted. "By the Eye bound upon my forehead, I command you to swarm in your millions southward to wipe out the accursed *Mlech* who has usurped the lands that were once ours.

"Slay and spare not! Plunder and withhold not your hands, for all their goods are yours. Take their women and spear their children. Spare none, from the gray beard to the infant at the breast. I, Hari Singh, Kali's high priest, command it!"

And he solemnly brought the fillet to his own forehead.

But before he could place it on his brows Sobrao leaped forward and snatched it from his hands. He sprang back and, before his intention could be guessed, had bound it about his own brows.

"And I, Sobrao, rightful ruler of Shastan, command you, slay this dog, the accursed spawn of a Marashta woman, who beguiled my father!" he shouted.

## XII

WITH a shriek of rage Prince Hari pulled the revolver from his tunic and fired again. Gaunt leaped forward and struck his arm just in time. The bullet flew past Sobrao's head and pierced the body of one of the guards. He dropped, dead on the instant.

"Seize him!" Gaunt shouted.

Out of the crowd the men of Sobrao's mother's tribe had forced their way to the front. Swords and daggers flashed. The terrified devotees broke into a mad scramble for safety.

"Seize that man!" Gaunt shouted again. "Prince Hari Singh, I place you under arrest in the name of the Indian Government!"

Hari Singh had taken in the situation. With a scream of rage he flung his revolver in Gaunt's face, sending him staggering backward. Next moment the palace guards had closed about him. Swords were already clashing, but more and more guards were pouring out through the Temple, while a band of fanatical priests, armed with *kukris*, were rushing into the fray.

A thin line of dead and wounded men lay between the two bodies of combatants. Slowly the adherents of Prince Sobrao were being forced back. The populace, infuriated by the interruption to the sacrifice, was surging forward again with howls of rage.

The situation of Sobrao's men was growing more and more critical. On one side of them was the raging furnace, whose heat was already beginning to sear their clothes and hair; on the other the guards.

Forced back against the wooden base of the great statue, which was crackling and splintering under the infernal heat, facing three ways, they fought desperately for life. In the midst of them Gaunt and Sobrao stood side by side. The Indian was forcing back the guards with mighty sword sweeps, Gaunt methodically firing and recharging his revolver until his last cartridge was gone. He picked up a sword from the hand of a fallen guard and fought on. But already a quarter of Sobrao's men had fallen. Their plight was growing more and more hopeless.

OVERHEAD the four great arms of Kali, worked by the priest hidden in the interior of the statue, were moving in all directions of the compass, now pointing this way and now that. From time to time they clashed together with successive claps that sounded above the shouting and the fury.

Upon the wooden pedestal beneath the arms Prince Hari stood, directing the fight. He was screaming like a madman and yell-

ing evil taunts at Gaunt and his brother.

"Kill them! Kill them!" he shrieked. "The Eye! The Eye! A *lakh* of rupees for the man who takes the Eye from his dead body!"

Leaning forward, his dark face convulsed, Hari was the embodiment of all the hideous passions in that assemblage.

Perhaps Gaunt was the only person in the courtyard who noticed the cessation of the apparently aimless movements of the arms above.

It was as if the priest within the statue had, after experiment, discovered the proper control of the mechanism. The four arms were beginning to move slowly downward, until two of them were on either side of Hari as he stood urging on his men.

Slowly and jerkily the arms began to come together. And still, though they were now only a foot or two on either side of the doomed man, only Gaunt saw.

He saw in the intervals between the strokes of his sword, which, nicely calculated, had already surrounded him with a ring of dying guards.

Nearly half of Sobrao's men had fallen. A rampart of dead and wounded men protected the pitiful remnant from the assaults of their enemies. The efforts of the guards were further hindered by the rush of the maddened populace, now trying to scale the barricade of corpses and tear the defenders limb from limb.

Suddenly the four arms closed about the body of Hari Singh. Next moment it was being lifted into the air.

**A** SCREAM of terror rose above the din of battle. Horrified, Hari's men saw their leader dangling high above their heads, gripped in the blood-red palms of Kali.

Higher and higher rose the arms, higher and higher rose the dangling, writhing, screeching man within their grasp. And now a scream of horror broke forth, as if from a single throat, as the four arms began to turn toward the raging furnace.

Out—out, while the priests ran shrieking to and fro, and the guards broke and fled. The whole courtyard was a pandemonium. Now Prince Hari dangled out above the heart of the furnace. Tongues of flame leaped up at him out of the red

inferno, licked him hungrily and played about him in waves of lurid light. The wretched man, a living torch, swung there a moment longer. Then Kali's arms released him.

Down into the fire he dropped—a charred lump, black against the red. He vanished instantly in the midst of it.

Then, as if the wings of the death-angel had beaten through the air, an awful silence fell. Even the dying seemed to hush their cries. In terror that precluded speech or movement, the multitude watched the four opening arms of the hideous goddess suspended over the fire.

Sobrao leaped forward, his face alight with triumph.

"Kali has spoken," he cried, "That is her answer to the dog who dared to defy the wearer of the sacred stone. See! Have you not seen that it is upon my forehead?"

He pointed to the great ruby that hung, like a little lamp, between his brows.

"I, Sobrao Singh, the rightful heir of my father, and Lord of Shastan do proclaim," he went on, in clear, ringing tones, "that from now on the rites of Kali cease. Kali has proclaimed her will. Henceforth I, as hereditary priest of Kali, shall rule this land alone. She needs no priests nor images from now on.

"Therefore, propitiate her by making her idol the sacrifice to her, as she is used to having us lay our dearest things upon her altars. To the fire with the idol! To the fire!"

The mob was still silent, looking at Sobrao doubtfully. They knew that it was the custom to sacrifice their dearest possessions to the goddess, but the logic of sacrificing her own idol to her had not struck home.

**I**T was one of the band of priests who took the initiative.

Maddened, perhaps, by the heat, by the wounds he had given himself in his fanatical fury, with bare breast streaming with blood, and shoulders ragged from the hooks that had been thrust through the muscles, he rushed forward, screaming. In a moment the whole mob came streaming after him, hurling themselves against the statue's wooden base.

The enormous idol began to totter sideways toward the fire. Creaking and groan-

ing, it swayed ponderously upon its base.

Suddenly a door was seen to open midway between the rump and shoulders.

The hidden priest, whom everyone had up to this time forgotten, appeared upon a little platform.

But this was no priest. This figure, clothed entirely in a single, long, clinging garment of white, was—Meta-taj, the dancing-girl!

Gaunt recognized her as she stood there, with arms outstretched. She knew him, too. She was speaking, but her voice was inaudible above the yells of the multitude. And it was toward Gaunt that her arms were extended, with a gesture that it was impossible to mistake.

It was not an appeal for rescue. It was—good-bye. There was something noble and infinitely pathetic about the dancing-girl's leave-taking of the life that had bruised and battered her, raised her to the height of a throne and then hurled her down into the depths.

Gaunt understood her belated vengeance upon Prince Hari. He read the appeal for pardon in that last gesture of hers. He flung himself furiously into the midst of the mob, intent on saving her.

He was too late. There came the crash of rending wood. The giant statue, broken off from the base at the point where Kali's splay feet bestrode her husband, Siva, tottered and smashed into the fire, carrying the girl with it.

It broke through the great mass of red-hot embers and lay, visible beneath them. From it a fresh stream of fire shot up in tongues of phosphorescent flame.

A groan went up from the crowd as they saw the destruction of their venerated emblem. Then, as if conscious that Kali's virtues had passed into her incarnation, Prince Sobrao, they flung themselves prostrate at the Prince's feet.

Gaunt spoke: "I'll take a detail of a score of men and make sure of the Palace," he said. "With the machine-guns in our hands, there'll be no question of a counter-stroke."

But that precaution proved to be unnecessary. When he reached the palace,

Gaunt found that those within were feverishly preparing for Sobrao's coming. Too long had they suffered under the lash of Hari's drunken wrath to attempt a counter-rebellion against his logical successor.

**G**AUNT stood before the Viceroy in the vice-regal palace at Delhi. He had not entered in disguise this time, but in the uniform of a Political Officer. Smartly attired, he raised his hand to the salute and stood before the man who had spent many sleepless nights waiting for news from him.

"I have the honor to bring you dispatches from His Highness Prince Sobrao, ruler of Shastan, Your Excellency," he said, laying the sealed package upon the desk. "His Highness pledges complete loyalty to the Indian Government and requests that a Resident be sent to guide him in the conduct of his affairs."

The Viceroy's voice failed him for a moment.

"Gaunt," he said, presently, "a hundred thousand men have been under arms in their cantonments, awaiting the order to march. You can practically name your own reward—within reason. A Crown order, or promotion to a high department post when the next vacancy occurs—"

Gaunt's hawk-face relaxed in a slight smile.

"I'd like a week's leave, Your Excellency," he answered.

"A week's? You can have—"

"Before returning to the Frontier," Gaunt continued. "I've a few affairs of a personal nature to settle. Then I think I might be needed along the Afghan border, with things looking the way they are at present."

"They say," observed the Viceroy, "that one man's meat is another man's poison. You seem to like your poison undiluted. Take a week, Gaunt, and I'll post you to the Punjab."

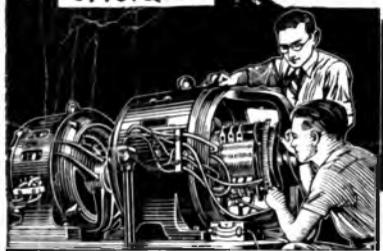
He looked after the tall figure as Gaunt left the room.

"There goes the biggest fool and most incomprehensible problem in the Administration," he said to himself.

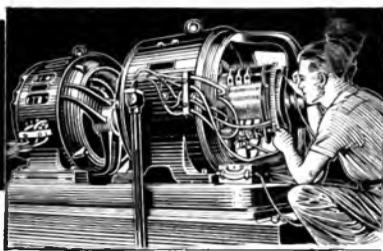


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# 96 Piece SILVER SET

Guaranteed - 20 YEARS

SERVICE for 8 in the JOSEPHINE PATTERN

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**\$16<sup>75</sup>**

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Twenty Year Replacement Certificate

The National Silver Company certifies that this set of silver plated on the same high quality stainless steel.

**SET  
Consists of:**

- 8 Stainless Steel Dinner Knives
- 8 Dinner Forks
- 16 Teaspoons
- 8 Round Bowl Soup Spoons
- 8 Ice Tea Spoons
- 8 Oyster Forks
- 8 Salad Forks
- 8 Butter Spreaders
- 8 Bouillon Spoons
- 8 Demi-Tasse Coffee Spoons
- 5 Serving Spoons
- 1 Cold Meat Fork
- 1 Sugar Shovel
- 1 Butter Spreader
- 1 Gravy Ladle
- 1 Berry Spoon

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Gentlemen: Enclosed find \$1—send me 96 Piece Silver Set for examination and approval and include the Pie Server FREE. If satisfied, I agree to pay \$1.58 a month. Otherwise, I will return within 5 days and you will refund my dollar.

Include Chest — \$2 Extra

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