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Red Star Adventures

VOL. 1
No. 2

AUGUST
1940

CONTENTS

★ Complete Book-Length Novel of Tropic Adventure

CRUISE OF THE SAVAGE Martin McCall 6

Yellow talons reach out for the prize of the South Pacific—Dutch East Indies oil. And so the White Savage risks his neck once more to defend the honor of the Islands, and to endeavor to snatch victory from sure defeat

★ Gripping Action Novelet

CAPTAIN JINX Carl Jacobi 70

Everything he touched turned to poison—but the six little vials loaded with faulty diamonds were transformed into TNT that threatened to blow the sea apart

★ Two Thrill-Packed Short Stories

ZULU HUNCH E. Hoffman Price 88

He who would force the jungle to disgorge the treasure of a hundred years must travel softly—and be ready to perish

GALLOP OR DIE A. deH. Smith 102

Have you ever seen a wrestling match on horseback? Well, then you haven't even guessed the cunning of the Moslem toward his prey

★ Picture Feature

MEN OF DARING Stookie Allen 101

Captain Craig—Underwater Cameraman

The cover is by H. J. Ward, illustrating
Cruise of the Savage



A RED STAR Magazine

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20x5.25-21	3.25	1.35				
6.50-17	3.35	1.40				
20x5.50-18	3.35	1.40				
20x5.50-19	3.35	1.40				
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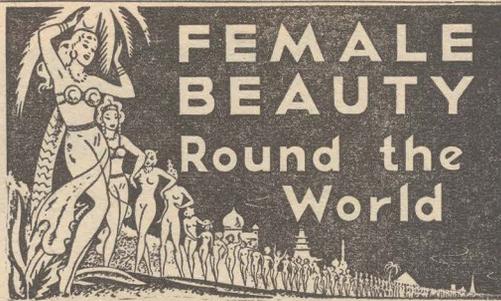
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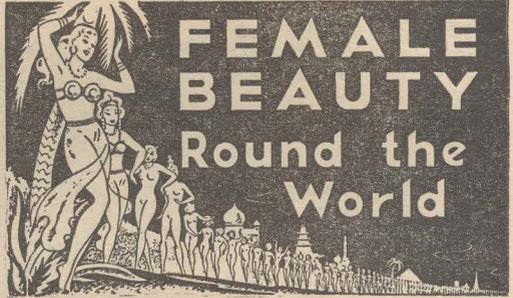
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Matalaa had never heard of the gangsters' "pineapple"—but he threw the real thing as if it were literally loaded with dynamite

Cruise of the Savage

By Martin McCall

Author of "The White Savage," etc.

CHAPTER I

S.O.S.—WHITE SAVAGE

OUT of Surabaya, in the dead of night, moved the trim, Diesel-powered yacht *Selene*. Smoothly and silently she glided over the waters, heading into the tropical sea.

Her departure was abrupt—so abrupt that the two in the lounge-saloon were taken completely by surprise. The willowy, golden-haired

girl leaped to her feet and ran lightly to the porthole. "Harley! We're moving—we're putting out to sea!"

Sprawled on the lounge, the sandy-haired American cocked an eye on his iced drink, looked up at the girl, then back at his drink. He took a long swallow. "So," he inquired mildly, "what?"

He finished his drink, disentangled his long legs, and went to stand beside the girl, regarding the swiftly fading port with calm. "And

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NOVEL**



Over the South Pacific, the war monster spreads its ugly tentacles, reaching out for Sumatra where oil is stored, more costly than diamonds. The secret leaks out, your favorite news-correspondent is kidnaped, Hell threatens to pop. The answer? Call the White Savage! Another gripping adventure of the Robin Hood of the South Seas

me with no toothbrush." He grinned.

At that moment, the owner of the *Selene* stepped into the saloon. The girl wheeled. "Dad—we're sailing! What does it mean—did you—?"

Dirk van Houten, one of the very few thin Dutchmen in the East Indies, smiled at his daughter. "Yes, I know.

You are surprised. But the point is that everybody else will be, too. We go to the cinema, we come aboard for a cool drink, then—*pouff*—we sail.”

Harley Byrne nodded. “I guess it’s as smart a move as any,” he said judicially. “Yes, I guess it is. In fact, I’ll drink to it.”

Byrne moved to the liquor stand. He had keenly cut features dominated by intelligent, thoughtful eyes, hazel flecked with brown. He was tall and as lean as an athlete; his age was problematic. Even when he seemed to be most at his ease, there was a whipcord alertness about him that showed the cool quickness of his nerves, and the swift efficiency of his reactions to any sort of situation.

He waggled an empty bottle. “No more gin,” he said mournfully.

Cornelia laughed, and moved to press the button that summoned a steward. Her father said, “No steward, my dear. No other service, and just enough crew to navigate. I didn’t even provision the ship. We have plenty of canned goods though and”—with a smile at Byrne—“bottled ones.”

“Sardines and gin and the great blue Pacific,” Harley Byrne commented. “Sounds ideal, especially for a battered newspaper correspondent. Ethiopia was never like this.”

“Just so.” Van Houten spoke in English out of deference to his internationally famous guest. “You probably would like to know what is behind all this secrecy.”

“Frankly, I would. I’m being kidnaped, I take it. You have all the cards, Mr. van Houten, but I want to warn you—”

The old Dutchman held up a thin, aristocratic hand. “I’m afraid you don’t quite understand my position. I’m not in any way attempting either to stop

your work here in the East, or to alter your opinion about conditions. You have uncovered a great deal of information about Japanese penetration of our islands. About colonial misadministration. About discontent among the native rajas and sultans.”

“I see. Go on.”

“Do let’s sit down and be comfortable,” Cornelia said. “I’m beginning to feel like a character in a bad London melodrama.”

THEY grouped themselves about on the comfortable leather lounges. Dirk van Houten lit a long cigar and offered one to his guest. Puffing rich blue smoke, he said: “I think I am not exaggerating, Mr. Byrne, in saying that every word you write is accepted as gospel truth by millions of newspaper readers all over the world.”

Byrne nodded. “Thanks. I won’t blush and claim that you overestimate me. It’s perfectly true; my stuff does formulate public opinion. That’s why I have to keep it accurate and uncolored. You know, integrity of the press.”

His tone made mock of the phrase, but Cornelia saw that his lightness was merely a mask for his utter sincerity, an honesty of purpose that was practically his religion.

“I quite understand,” van Houten said gravely. “I will not ask you to do anything that would in the least impair your self-respect.”

Byrne lost some of his stiffness; his long legs sprawled easily out before him. While van Houten talked, Byrne watched the harbor and the lights of Surabaya’s residence section high up on the slopes above the steaming flats.

Sometimes the black bulk of a godown blotted out the lights, and Byrne would catch the smell of spices, copra, rubber, coffee, and dried fish. He smiled a little.

"For heaven's sake," thought Cornelia to herself. "He's almost human, when he lets the dynamos run down." She studied his keen, sharp-jawed profile, outlined in semi-silhouette against the twilight sea. "Yes, indeed. He's really quite a guy."

She caught herself up abruptly and began to pay attention to what her father was saying. It was something about corruption among certain of the lesser Dutch residents and officials.

Byrne nodded. "From all I picked up in Java, there's a lot going on that your people wouldn't care to have put to the public in—shall we say, an unfavorable light?"

Van Houten looked as though he had bitten into an unripe persimmon. "Exactly," he admitted. "And that is why I have brought you on this unexpected cruise. What I have told you these last few days is nothing."

"I had a hunch you were holding back some," Byrne said.

Cornelia's blue eyes twinkled and she turned to hide her smile. For it had been Cornelia who had warned Byrne that her father, like all other Dutch officials, had been evading embarrassing questions.

"So," van Houten went on, "we have put out to sea, with no spies or eavesdroppers. I am too old to go charging about on crusades. But we must put our house in order. What you find, you find, and it is not my fault. Officially, I mean. I cannot afford to make enemies of every planter and official in the Indies."

"I see. You're giving me a chance to root things out for myself."

"Yes. In Sumatra."

Byrne's sandy brows rose; he and Cornelia exchanged a swift glance. Van Houten smiled at them. "I see you've been comparing notes. And now you

find the old man still has a trick or two up his sleeve."

"Right," Byrne said. "The answer is oil. The oil that corrupt officials have been running through secret pipe lines to secret tanks along the coast. That's the story that's being whispered all over the islands, anyhow.

"Japan needs oil; and you Dutchmen are afraid she'll gobble up the Indies to get it. I remember those tank-farms at Pangkalan Susu. Each with a big valve all set to dump the oil into the sea, in case Japan, say, attacks and the oil cannot be gotten out in time."

"You do not miss much," van Houten said, wryly.

"It's my business to know things. Of course, you might say that Sumatra is so close to Singapore that no nation would dare to seize the island—that the British naval base would make sure of that. But with war in Europe, the Dutch government is not too certain that British assistance would be forthcoming. Already there is muttering about Dutch ships running the European blockade with contraband."

CORNELIA flared up. "But that's silly! However much the British may resent our efforts to keep our shipping occupied, they certainly do not want an aggressive power to seize Sumatra!"

"They don't want it, no," Byrne said. "But suppose there was an international stench about Dutch colonial mismanagement. A nation with its fists full already would jump at a chance to wash its hands of Holland—to arrive secretly at an understanding that would not make a change of ownership in Sumatra too difficult."

"That is possible," van Houten admitted. "Too possible. But—that is your job. Prove the existence of illicit stor-



VAN HOUTEN

age tanks along the wild Sumatra coast, and prove that corrupt Dutch officials are unintentionally playing into Japanese hands. I want this thing rooted up and cleaned out before it is too late."

Byrne whistled. "That's *more* than I expected! But it will take a lot of proving."

"You mean," Cornelia asked, "that exposing this oil smuggling—I think you Americans call it dealing in 'hot' oil—will make our British friends in Singapore realize that 'Asia for Asiatics' does not just mean crowding the Dutch out of the Indies, but includes as well, getting the British out of Singapore?"

"Correct. If this 'Asia for Asiatics' business keeps on the way it's been going, the Japs will have to be sure of getting oil from Sumatra. Looks like I'll have to cook up a hunting trip in Sumatra."

Van Houten frowned and relighted his cigar. "You'd be recognized. It's wild country. Every white man is numbered and cataloged."

"I'll take my chances."

"Nobody is questioning your courage. We all know you were under fire in Shanghai, and inland. There's a price on your head now, for the stories your syndicate published. The 'pacification' of China has become the world's most unpopular enterprise because of your stories and pictures.

"That you dared come to the Far East again proves your courage. But you are not here to demonstrate something we all know. You are here to get results—" Van Houten was jabbing with his index finger. "Not to be ambushed in the jungle, or put in a sack and thrown to the sharks. So think of some method a little more sensible."

The sharp-faced American yawned and carefully hitched up the legs of his perfectly pressed flannels. "Trying to scare me, eh? All right, I'll run out and then sneak back on the quiet."

Cornelia had been sitting there with her eyes closed, her blond head averted. Abruptly, she straightened. "I know just what you need! Suppose you were one of the crew of a trading vessel? With a skipper you could trust?"

Van Houten smacked his glass down on the table. "So! The White Savage comes into the picture? Mmmm—my dear, I think you are right. Just the man, brave and honest. And what Byrne would call a fighting fool."

BYRNE lolled back in his chair. "White savage, eh? What is he—an Albino?" Cornelia shook her head indignantly. "Well, how did he get that name?"

Van Houten chuckled. "Cornelia christened him that one day—when they were, well, arguing." The girl bit her lip, and in answer to Byrne's quizzically lifted brow, she said:

"It's true, I did. And I've been

ashamed of myself ever since. Matalaa—that's his native name—his actual name is Warren Steele, Jr.—you see, he's really a white man and—"

Byrne laughed and his hazel eyes glistened. Cornelia had noticed those eyes before. They looked as if they had seen everything and were sick to death of what they had seen; but there was mockery in them to gibe at the disillusion, and once in a while a sort of fugitive brightness that spoke of an incurable optimism, a dogged faith in human beings that nothing could quite down.

"Whoa," he said, "you're getting all balled up. Better make a fresh start."

"Well, Matalaa's parents were shipwrecked— Stop making faces. I know it sounds like a movie, but it's what happened. They were shipwrecked on a reef off a tiny, almost unknown island. The natives took the baby and raised it as one of their own people. Torkusa, the chief, even made him blood-brother to his own son.

"His education was rather scrambled, I'm afraid. He learned to fish and swim and dive and wrestle and use a spear and all the things the other island boys learned. And an old witch doctor, Poi Utu, took a great interest in him and instructed him in all sorts of things no other white man has ever learned. And finally the missionary, Father Pierre, taught him how to speak French and English and tried to give him the sort of civilized education he would have had back in America."

Byrne interrupted.

"Why didn't this Father Pierre send him back to the States?"

"He thought of doing it. But Matalaa had no people. He would have been sent to an orphanage, made to feel lonely and unwelcome. The islanders all loved him and wanted him. Father Pierre, in

his wisdom, knew just how big a difference that would make.

"So he grew up: the strongest, cleverest boy on the island, and probably the happiest— Until he found out about his parents. He doesn't trust white people you see, and for a long time he hated being one of them. I still don't think he quite likes the idea. Every once in a while he reverts completely to the teachings of his foster father, Torkusa, and of Poi Utu, the witch-doctor. I wish you could see him in one of his savage rages, smashing things, and lashing out at anything in reach. He's really magnificent."

"Hmm. Sounds like plenty of guy. How did you meet this bundle of dynamite?"

Cornelia told him, quickly sketching the story of their encounter when she had gone to the island on the *Aguila* with Bull Garvey to buy copra. She told how Garvey had tried to cheat Torkusa, and how Matalaa had carried her ashore to hold as hostage while he and his friends dealt out rough justice to Garvey and his crew before throwing them off the island.

Then had come Matalaa's discovery of his identity—and of the mystery surrounding the death of his parents, culminating in his knowledge that they had been murdered before their ship had run aground. Instantly the old tribal law had reclaimed him and he had set out to discover and punish the murderer.

The fact that the culprit had turned out to be Borden Pitts, who was one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the islands, had not deterred him one whit. He had fought for vengeance with every fibre of his being, with every ounce of savage cunning and white man's courage that he possessed.

The affair had ended dramatically in a man-to-man struggle between Matalaa and Pitts, and Matalaa had triumphed.

The man who had killed his parents was dead, and Bull Garvey, Pitts' chief roustabout and handy man, was in the hands of the British island-police.

CORNELIA did not tell the American that the death of Borden Pitts had lifted a blackmail club that had been dangling over her father's head for nearly twenty years. She did not mention that the *Aguila*, which Matalaa now commanded so proudly, was the gift of the grateful van Houtens. She ended: "Matalaa knows the native mind. He's strong and brave and an excellent seaman. He's definitely your man, Harley."

Her father looked at her sharply; her blue eyes were glowing, and red came into her cheeks. Byrne, too, was watching her face. He laughed shortly. "He's more or less your hero, eh?"

Cornelia's eyes lowered.

"Don't be silly!" would ordinarily have been Cornelia's answer to that. But the envious pique in Byrne's voice was a bait to which no woman could fail to rise. So she said: "Of course I do. He's marvelous. Terribly handsome and tall and strong. He's like a child and a pagan god and a man all rolled up into one." She let her eyes and voice go dreamy. After all, she'd never given Byrne the slightest excuse to show jealousy because of her. He really deserved some punishment. "They call him 'Eye of the Sun'—that's what *Matalaa* means, you know—on account of his hair. It's a sort of red-gold, exactly like the evening sun before it sets over the islands."

"Help!" Byrne begged. "You sound like a travelog. . . . Well, so all we have to do is snap our fingers and lo, up pops the White Savage! Dandy—except that it takes Lord knows how long to get word to Papeete or wherever he is. And

by the time he got here, I'd have a long gray beard."

"We can radio him right away. There's a receiver on the *Aguila*."

Byrne rumpled his hair. "This gets better and better," he said. "I've been your guest for three weeks. Now you send a coded message from the yacht. Of course, our watchful little friends aren't going to think there's anything fishy in that."

Cornelia was patient. "Not code. Just a simple message, no address, no signature. Simply: 'White savage I am in danger come at once.' No one but Matalaa will make any sense out of it. There is a receiving set on his ship, but no transmitter. Besides, he wrote me he was coming to Java, and he might even be on the way now!"

"We can try it," Byrne agreed.

So Dirk van Houten took the terse message to the radio compartment of his yacht. When he came back to the saloon, he said, "We'll cruise a while and keep that on the air. We do not have much power, but some amateur will relay it."

Cornelia nodded.

Byrne chuckled, a bit sourly. "Uhuh. Sounds romantic, the hams will gobble it up. But won't this red-headed ape of yours be griped when he finds out you're not really in danger?"

Cornelia shrugged. "I may *be* in danger before this is over. So might you."

Dirk van Houten slowly rubbed his thin hands together. "That is not a jest, either. And you, Byrne, please be careful when we return to Surabaya. You are my guest, and it would be extremely difficult for me if something happened to you."

"Such as?" Byrne made a slicing motion across his throat, just above the knot of his black and crimson tie. "Little yellow men in a dark corner?"

"I see now why they use the term 'fool American'."

"We get results," Byrne admitted. "And we don't care who likes it. Or who doesn't."

CHAPTER II

SEA TRAP

THE wind that bellied the *Aguila's* sails whipped Matalaa's red-gold hair, and seemed to burnish the bronze of his flesh. He wore only white canvas pants, and like his six-foot Marquesan sailors, he had rubbed himself with palm oil. Matalaa, "Eye of the Sun," was crowding all sail to get to Java. The nearer he came to his goal, the more eager he was to see Cornelia van Houten.

"Hold her as she is, Nito!" he said to the man at the wheel.

The big Marquesan grinned. "Aye, aye, sir! As she is."

"Nito!" Matalaa hooked his thumbs in his belt. The motion accented the corded muscles of back and shoulder, the muscle-ribbed stomach, the powerful arms; though scarcely taller than the Marquesan sailors, Matalaa was heavier. "Do not talk as if I wore a cocked hat and a cutlass. I told you I'd have no such nonsense! You're my brother, Nito—remember that."

"Aye, aye, sir!" Nito answered, respectfully agreeing.

Matalaa threw up his hands, shook his head, and left the bridge. Nito had felt he had to play up to the dignity of a foster brother who commanded a ship, and there was apparently nothing to be done about it.

Matalaa had scarcely reached the main deck when a tall, grizzled Frenchman stepped from the salon. He wore a broad-brimmed straw hat and clerical robes. For the time being, Father Pierre

was in charge of the *Aguila's* one-way radio. After years in the islands, he was on his way for a visit home.

"A message has come, my son." He offered Matalaa a sheet of paper. "It is an odd message. I am afraid there is trouble."

Matalaa read it. His gray eyes were narrow when he looked up. "Is this all?"

The priest nodded. "Just that message, over and over."

"Only *you* heard Cornelia call me 'White Savage.' No one else could know about it."

"I am not too sure of that," the priest protested. "She may have used that expression when she pleaded with the Governor of Tahiti in your behalf. And Bull Garvey may have heard her say it."

"You think this is a trap?" Matalaa's eyes narrowed.

"It is possible, my son."

"Cornelia knew I'd be on the way as soon as the *Aguila* was fitted out, but she did not know when that would be. Maybe she was hoping that some radio-man would relay the message, as you say is the custom of foreigners who make a game of radio. I would finally get it, somehow."

Father Pierre nodded. "She could not hope that such weak signals would reach all the way to the Marquesas or Tahiti."

HE WENT back to the teak-paneled saloon. Matalaa started down to his cabin to think it over. He was not surprised when he saw an ancient Marquesan squatting on the floor. The old man's face was wrinkled, every bone of his body jutted through leathery skin, and his hair was white with the years, but his eyes were sharp as the shark's teeth that made the collar about his throat.

Poi Utu spoke. "There is danger before you reach the yellow-haired girl's

hut. The yellow-haired girl speaks, and her enemies listen."

"How do you know, Poi Utu?"

The old man pointed at the infant's skull which he had set on the deck. There were also curiously colored pebbles, a dried sea-slug, and a small image carved of dark wood. These trappings of wizardry had come out of a beaded bag which he had begged from Cornelia van Houten, some months ago.

"I have been speaking to the gods and to the dead. Go kill the yellow-haired girl's enemies, King's Son. They hate you because you are her friend. There is a man with a big voice."

Poi Utu could have cooked up his prophecy from overhearing the priest's conversation; but Matalaa was inclined to reason: "It is as easy for the dead to talk to a wizard as it is for Cornelia to talk over the wind to Father Pierre." So he asked, "What is the big man's tribe, Poi Utu?"

"When you have killed him and I have baked him, I will taste and see! Now go, King's Son. The gods will not talk to me again until you go!"

Running the skipper out of his own cabin was simple business for Poi Utu, who claimed to be over a hundred years old; and proclaimed that he had eaten the hearts of a hundred brave men of all races. Some of his magic was pure trickery, but a good deal of it lay beyond Father Pierre's power to explain by science or logic.

Forty years ago, priest and devil-doctor had reached a tacit working arrangement, by which each accorded grudging respect to the other and kept strictly to his own province. That way they managed to get along with a modicum of friction. Poi Utu did not howl too loudly against the good father's saints, and the missionary tactfully looked the other way when the witch

doctor reverted to some of the less flamboyant tribal practices.

Now both of them, each in his own way, sensed the danger that lay before Matalaa, and because both loved him greatly, both feared deeply.

And they were more nearly right than even they suspected.

A thousand miles west, a balloon-shaped man with close-cropped black hair and three sagging chins sat in front of a two-way radio. The room was stifling in the afternoon heat of Banjarmasin, on the Borneo coast. The droning fan stirred the muggy air into humid whirlpools. Sweat trickled down Resident Willem van der Groot's puffy cheeks as he twisted a dial with one hand; in the other he had a big tumbler of Bols gin.

"*Gottverdom!* White Savage! Such nonsense." He turned to the blank-faced Japanese who stood beside his chair. "Hakamoto! Fill my glass!"

"Please, it is full already!"

"So it is." Van der Groot emptied it, wiped his thick lips with the back of his hairy paw. "Now, this white savage business! It must be coming from the van Houten yacht. The *Selene*."

Hakamoto said, very precisely, "Our directional instruments make that a foregoing conclusion, sir. Our logic make very clear why van Houten wishes assistance. But our logical brain encounters obstacle."

"As if I didn't know that! Where's that gin?" He sat there, scowling, while Hakamoto pounced for the slim, stone jug of Bols, and filled the glass to the brim. "But wait. Cornelia van Houten spent a year or so in Tahiti. She could be calling some island friend. All I need do is radio my island connections and ask who is this White Savage. An odd name, not so?"

"Yess. That sound logical."



The water poured swiftly into the hold—and soon Matalaa's head would touch the decking above

"*Gottverdom*, it's perfect! Shut up!" Van der Groot lurched for a switch. A converter whined, and a transmitting tube glowed blue-white. The Dutchman began to kick the ether into whirlpools.

Finally Hakamoto cut in, "Please, one message for me. To Japanese fishermen in Ara-Ara Island. In the Banda Sea."

"*Fishermen!*" Van der Groot rumbled with laughter. "Go ahead!"

THE sun still had a far distance to go before dusk came to Borneo, but the Banda Sea, a thousand miles east, was red, and the *Aguila* was sailing into a great ruddy disk. Matalaa, back on the bridge, scanned the palm-clustered islands which dotted the waters. Here and there, volcanic peaks smouldered.

Then a geyser of water rose high and white, a scant cable-length forward of the *Aguila*. From a wooded headland on the port quarter came the boom of a five-inch gun.

Matalaa shouted, "Hold her as she is!" He had the French flag run up to the masthead, and then he turned his glasses on the headland.

There was a spurt of flame against the dark foliage. A second shell roared across the *Aguila's* bow, and on the headland, a British flag fluttered.

That war in Europe! There were no British possessions, according to the charts, nearer than Papua or Australia, but there was no telling what obscure island might have been put to use as part of a war blockade.

Remembering how the British Agent in Pakalafa had helped him in the Borden Pitts affair, Matalaa was willing enough to heave to, instead of trusting to the swiftly falling darkness and the chance of winning the cover of some island before shellfire could harm the swift *Aguila*.

Poi Utu, however, came on deck with another thought. "Stand and fight, King's Son, for it is now too late to run as even a brave man should sometimes run!"

A searchlight lanced the brief twilight, and picked out the *Aguila*. The hidden gun could blow her out of the water. Matalaa said, "One British agent did well by us; this one will hardly do worse."

Poi Utu went below, muttering in Polynesian.

A high-powered launch was coming up on the port side. The searchlight blinked out. When Matalaa's eyes adjusted themselves to the abrupt change from glare to gloom, he saw the white-clad men at her rail.

"*Aguila*, ahoy!" a man hailed, and the big engine throttled down.

Matalaa answered, and dropped a ladder. He said to Father Pierre, "That person's English does not sound like yours or Cornelia's or the British resident's at Pakalafa. And the men are too small."

He gave Nito an order in Marquesan dialect. Nito sent the crew scurrying about for belaying pins, broad-axes, capstan bars. Malay pirates might, he reasoned, run the Union Jack to the masthead to trick trading schooners.

"Go below, Father," he whispered. "I don't like this."

The launch was alongside now. A white-clad man came swiftly up the ladder. Others followed him like monkeys. The lantern light from the saloon door splashed over Matalaa, who was bare to the waist and unarmed, except for a sheath knife. The light played over the white-clad man's face when he reached the deck.

He was short and yellow and slant-eyed. He smiled at the sudden understanding in Matalaa's eyes, and the sud-

den wrath. "So sorry, Captain Steele. I am Captain Kirikata, Imperial Japanese navy. Informal use of British colors prevented wasteful fighting. We search for contraband of war, and inspect your papers, please."

Four armed men had grouped themselves behind Kirikata.

"This way." Matalaa gestured with one hand.

Kirikata stepped toward the skipper's cabin, and Matalaa's big fist jumped up and out. The blow slammed Kirikata against the rail, and he slumped to the deck. A Japanese seaman yelled and fired. The blast scored Matalaa's ribs. Nito shot out of nowhere to crack down with a belaying pin, and one of the Emperor's little men dropped with a permanently fractured skull.

Nito roared his delight and waded in. Matalaa's Marquesan sailors darted from behind the coils of hawser that had concealed them. An adze gleamed, rose up, whisked down. Matalaa snatched the capstan bar he had planted against the door jamb. It was an impossibly heavy weapon. No ordinary man could have used it with any kind of efficiency. He played it like a quarterstaff. The upward sweep caught a man under the chin; his neck was snapped before he cleared the rail. But reinforcements were swarming up the ladder in a disciplined, stolid advance, with drawn pistols.

CHAPTER III

CAPTURE BY NIGHT

MATALAA sidestepped as the boarding party sprayed the deck with bullets. Two of his sailors were down, riddled with slugs. Others fled, terrified by the chattering death. But Matalaa's fury made him reckless. He lunged from the flank, and the capstan bar swept the

yellow men into a clump, momentarily cramped the use of their weapons.

His battle shout checked his men's retreat; and Nito echoed the cry. Below, Poi Utu was beating a war drum and chanting madly. Matalaa swept the boarders back over the side, to topple over the heads of those who were scrambling up the ladder to join the fray.

His heavy bar came up sharply athwart the railing. A pillar snapped, and Matalaa, pulled off-balance, found himself hurtling down into the water after his victims. Sharks made phosphorescent ripples on the surface; already they smelled blood.

Matalaa kicked his way clear of the stunned and battered men he had taken with him. He heard them yell as the sharks got to them. Matalaa slashed out with his knife, kicking the water into heavy foam as he pulled away from the tangle of sailors. The killers greedily closed in where the food was most plentiful.

Matalaa had two choices: one was to swim back to the *Aguila*, the other to board the launch, start the engine, and run her away from the ship whose deck was now an inferno of wild gunfire. His surprise resistance and the darkness had given his Marquesans their chance. Some must have snatched pistols from the first of the Japanese to fall, for if all that roar and crackle had been directed at only one side, the fight would now be over.

The rest of the boarding party swarmed up the ladder. Some, escaping the sharks, had regained a foothold. A few were on the deck of the launch, waiting to join the fracas.

The *Aguila* had twice the crew she needed, for Matalaa had not had the heart to refuse more than half the younger islanders who had insisted on joining him for the trip to Java. So

Matalaa decided to board the launch. A few powerful strokes brought him up by her stern, and his huge arms raised him swiftly out of the water. He cleared the rail, just as a white-clad man jerked a tarpaulin from a pedestal on the fore-deck. The sailor yelled words Matalaa could not understand. A red star from a signal-pistol flared high over head.

The engine roared, the propeller churned, and the launch whisked back, racing in reverse. The boarders on the ladder had not been deserted, for they bobbed in the gloom as they spread about on the *Aguila's* deck, methodically carrying on. Matalaa, thrown off balance by the drive of the powerful engine, lurched to his knees. He was alone and already a cable length away from his ship.

Lacking a leader, his men were not fighting it out at the rail. The boarders had been allowed to fan out when they should have been fought to a finish while still closely bunched. Too late, Matalaa realized his error; and what made it worse was the machine gun he now saw uncovered; he realized all too clearly why the powerboat had pulled away.

The searchlight reached out from the headland again, revealing the battling groups that surged about the *Aguila's* deck. The machine-gun chattered, only a short burst and purposely high, to terrify the Marquesan sailors, and to give their own men a chance to duck for cover.

Matalaa lunged from the rail, his knife ready. He struck, tore his blade loose, and kicked clear of the prostrate gunner. Before the men on the launch were entirely aware of his presence, he had bounded to the cockpit to knife the man who was operating the engine. Matalaa nailed his man, but in the struggle the throttle was jerked wide open. The

boat leaped under the sudden blast of power, and Matalaa was flung sharply back against the bulkhead.

Three wiry little men landed on him. One struck him with a spanner, and Matalaa sagged to his knees. There was a chattering in Japanese, then the blaze of a flashlight in Matalaa's fogged eyes. A man said in English, "Surrender, Captain Steele. Your men are helpless without a leader. We have gas bombs, a machine-gun. They will be shot down like animals."

Matalaa glared helplessly and got to his feet. "All right," he muttered. "Pull alongside, and I'll talk to them."

THE shore light's glare showed only Japanese on the *Aguila's* deck. Nito and his fellows had been driven below. With a pistol at his back, Matalaa boarded his own ship a captive. The man behind him warned, "If you make any trouble, we will kill every man aboard."

Sick with fury, Matalaa shouted: "Come up. We are beaten. I have surrendered."

One by one, the wounded sailors tottered up the companionways. Nito came up, carrying a dead native in his arms. Tears trickled down his battered face.

Half a dozen Marquesans sprawled on deck. The blood of all of them was on Matalaa's head. He had blundered. And now if he could not plan some way out— Matalaa's spine stiffened, his eyes stared bleakly ahead of him.

Captain Kirikata, his hammered face the size of a melon, stood very straight. Matalaa's fist had left only one eye open, but that one glittered with malice. Under his arm he had the *Aguila's* log book.

"We will take you in under guard. So sorry, Captain Steele."

Father Pierre was led forward from

the radio room, and he glanced at Matalaa as if to comfort him, but Matalaa was too stricken with his own failure as a leader to meet the old priest's eye. The prisoners were herded into the launch, Matalaa the last to leave the ship. A swift glance around him gave Matalaa the one ray of hope he needed. He looked again to make sure, but it was true. The Japanese had not found Poi Utu!

As the launch started for the shore, Captain Kirikata said, "Very appropriate, calling you 'White Savage'."

Matalaa gave no sign that he had heard.

At Father Pierre's protest at the piratical misuse of the British flag, Kirikata laughed. "British far away now. They will do no more than they have been doing. Use of flag merely expediency in the cause of our Imperial Government."

"My ship is carrying only ballast," Matalaa said stonily. "I do not have war supplies. You cannot want my sailing ship or my Marquesan crew. So—"

"Very shrewd! You wonder how I knew you are the White Savage?" He waited for Matalaa to betray curiosity, but when the red-headed captive only stood there, face blank, Kirikata went on, "You tell *me* something first. Why are you on the way to Java?"

"To pick up cargo. I would hardly take copra to the Indies, would I?"

"True, but you do not tell the truth. You go to see Cornelia van Houten. She send for you."

Captain Kirikata could not have guessed this fact, and there was nothing in the log book to reveal it. Matalaa glared his defiance, then shrugged his brawny shoulders. "All right. It's true."

"When you admit so much, you admit much more," the Japanese told him



CORNELIA

sternly. "We are soon ashore"—bowing stiffly from the hips—"then we talk some more."

CHAPTER IV

THE HIDDEN ISLAND

WHEN Matalaa and his crew were marched up the steep path that led from the cove where the power launch landed them, he saw how easy it would be for his captors to conceal the ship. The boat had put out again to bring in the *Aguila*. As Matalaa struggled along the volcanic boulders that cropped out of the pumice slopes, *bajuco* thorns raked his legs, and bamboo slashed his face. But in spots, the dense vegetation thinned a little, and he could look down into an ancient crater. A cleft in its side made a narrow passage through to the cove.

From the sea, this cleft was not visible; yet it was wide enough to admit ships considerably larger than the *Aguila*. As to the depth of the water that flooded the extinct crater, Matalaa could not even guess. At the moment, his inspection was directed toward es-

cape. A man might scramble down the steep slope and to the hidden basin. But to get a sailing ship out of there without a tug would be impossible.

Before he was half way up the difficult path, he could see the dull blur of the *Aguila*, and hear the power boat that towed her to hiding.

There was no other sound except the rattle of dislodged rock, and the panting of captor and captive. Matalaa, wondering about Poi Utu's absence, asked Father Pierre in Polynesian what had happened to the devil-doctor.

"I do not know," the priest said. "The drumming stopped, and when they searched the ship, there was no sign of him. Maybe he was knocked overboard."

Nito, laboring up the trail behind Matalaa, had a guess. "I think he is hiding. He did not join the fight. Maybe he swam ashore to lurk and later help us."

One of the guards said in English, "No talk in that language!"

The destination of the party was a group of sheet-iron buildings which, being scattered over the interior slope of the extinct volcanic cone, were invisible from the shore. Vegetation concealed them from aerial observation. There were electric lights, blue and shaded, about the barbed-wire inclosure. Just below the lip of the landward side of the crater was the five-inch gun that had shelled the *Aguila*, and not far from it was the powerful searchlight.

Captain Kirikata stood beside the guard at the gate and watched the prisoners file in. He said, "Do not make any attempt to escape. The upper wire is electrified, and anyway, you would be shot on sight. Okama, take Captain Steele into the office, and put the others into the stockade."

The office was of creosote-treated

wood and corrugated iron. There were two desks, several chairs, and through an open door, Matalaa saw a radio transmitter; an operator was on duty.

"Sit down, please," Kirikata said. "Let us view the situation clearly. You have disappeared. There are few inhabitants on the adjoining islands, and they are savage Malays, head-hunters and pirates. No one will receive any word from them as to your whereabouts. And they would finish you if you did escape."

"Why are we here?"

"So sorry, I will ask all questions. We know you are bound for Java to help Cornelia van Houten. You will tell me what your orders are, and just what you were to do for her."

"I know no more about it than you. In fact, your knowledge is greater. You intercepted the message, and you knew enough to stop the *Aguila*, even though the name of my ship was not spoken. Before you seized the log book, you called me by my white name. You know all this; you are stupid to have to ask me questions."

"Believe me, so silly to be stubborn." Kirikata pressed a button on his desk. His undamaged eye gleamed wrathfully. "I am not small child. I cannot believe you came all the way from Ua Paepae without knowing why!"

"Miss van Houten said she was in danger. I had no time to ask why."

"Romantic, but not convincing." Kirikata showed his teeth, and shrugged.

THE door opened. Four stocky Japanese in shorts and singlets entered the room. They were square, bull-necked, at least twice as heavy as their fellows. Their heads were shaved, their bodies gleamed with oil, and their arms and legs and shoulders were fantastically knotted with muscle.

Though Matalaa did not know it, these were wrestlers, trained from childhood in the art of inflicting torturing grips and holds. The sinister crescent advanced with a swift waddle that was scarcely human.

Behind them was a squad of four men armed with rifles. Each had a fixed bayonet, and each gun was held at ready. Kirikata stepped back from the desk.

"You are big and strong, Captain, but so are these men. Please to talk now, before they have torn you to pieces. Each of them has been exiled for crippling too many professional wrestlers at home."

Their bruisers' faces would have made that plain without any words. Half crouched, they halted, scowling and flexing their powerful hands; they were ready to close in at the captain's signal.

Matalaa, however, had no intention of waiting for a word of command. The cool, white man's part of him told him that he should have been frightened; but the savage exploded in a fit of rage. He darted in without any warning crouch, with no foot shuffling and no grimacing; he was in action before the quickest of the quartet could react.

He caught the wrestler on the extreme left, snatching him by the wrist and ankle. Matalaa's reach and long legs were something that these men had never experienced. Proud of their murderous skill, it had not occurred to any of them that one man would deliberately attack them.

With a warrior's bellow, Matalaa braced his feet and swung his opponent off the ground.

The Japanese kicked and squirmed, but could not get a hold. Before he knew what was going on, he was rocketing through the doorway. He landed on the

bayonets of the dumbfounded guards, who could not recoil in time. The gleaming blades sank home, and the thrashing weight jerked the rifles from their hands.

Matalaa bounded back. He still had the advantage of shocked and incredulous opponents, paralyzed by the events of the last five seconds. He struck out, backhanded, knocking Kirikata end over end. His lunge backward carried him momentarily out of reach of the three lunging wrestlers. The guards were busy wrenching their bayonets free. Blood drenched them from head to foot. Kirikata yelled in Japanese, and the one who had jerked his weapon loose by unlocking the bayonet and was about to fire at Matalaa over the heads of the wrestlers, lowered his barrel.

Matalaa's second shift evaded the trio. Their legs were too short to keep up with his tigerish leaps. He was now behind Kirikata's desk, and as the three hesitated between leaping over it or dividing to attack him from both sides at once, he caught the desk by its edges and lifted it.

At the same time, he bucked it with one knee. It shot forward, bowling two of the wrestlers over. One was knocked breathless, and the other popped his head against the door jamb.

The survivor, however, swooped in. He caught Matalaa off balance and secured a lock on his leg.

Here was a chance to show his skill, and once at grips, the wrestler won an important advantage. Matalaa, lifted bodily off his feet, crashed to the floor with a stunning impact. The Japanese who had been hammered breathless staged a quick recovery and made a flying tackle. The double attack by the two experts kept Matalaa from regaining his feet.

Kirikata drew his pistol and cracked

the butt down on Matalaa's head. The white savage went limp; he was conscious, but unable to move.

"Captain Steele, if this way has failed to twist the truth out of you, there are other ways." He smiled unpleasantly.

Pain nauseated Matalaa. His stomach seemed about to turn inside out, and a sudden rush of sweat raised by his fierce exertion drenched him from head to foot. He knew he could never convince Kirikata that he knew nothing. His only hope was to guess what the captain wanted to know, and then to concoct a story that would satisfy him. But if he spoke too soon, the Japanese would suspect the trick.

Now that the numbness left his head, he could feel blood trickling from the cut which Kirikata's pistol had dug into his scalp. The two wrestlers were working over him expertly, gouging his flesh, probing and twisting his neck and his limbs. Even without Kirikata's clubbing, Matalaa knew he could not have squirmed out from under the pile.

A sickening pain racked him from ankle to shoulder. There was a twist on his elbow, and his instinctive resistance trebled the agony. Kirikata forced a grin that showed all his teeth. Then the room blackened, and foreign speech blurred in Matalaa's ears.

A DRENCHING of sea water revived him. He lay limp, thoroughly exhausted by his fierce struggles and by



BYRNE

the excruciating wrenches and nerve searching twists the two wrestlers had subsequently inflicted. He felt he had endured enough. If he broke down and spoke now, Kirikata would not be surprised. But by this time, Matalaa's whirling brain was beyond cooking up any story plausible enough to satisfy a child.

"What have you to say now?" Kirikata asked.

Matalaa spat blood into his face.

There was a staccato exchange of Japanese. Kirikata gestured. The wrestlers, panting and sweating from their exertions, picked up their victim and carried him out of doors. The night air was stingingly cold on Matalaa's lacerated skin. Kirikata came behind.

In the area whose blue lights and overshadowing vegetation made aerial observation impossible, Matalaa saw the cage in which Nito and Father Pierre and his men were confined. Beyond was his own prison, in a far corner, constructed of iron pipe threaded to angle fixtures. One of the guards brought some strands of *bajuco*, a wiry fibre that has the toughness and flexibility of rawhide, and with it lashed Matalaa's ankles and wrists. When they flung him into his cage, Kirikata said, "The Malays have a way of flogging a captive until he goes mad. Perhaps you have heard. Think of this until tomorrow, and I am sure you will then be willing to tell me what Cornelia van Houten wanted you to do in Java."

CHAPTER V

FOOL'S ERRAND

IN BANJARMASSIN, Willem van der Groot and the Japanese who passed as his servant were again conferring in the radio room of a bungalow far from the Dutchman's official residence. With phones clamped to his head, a pencil in one hand, and a tumbler of gin in the other, van der Groot was taking down a message in code. He handed it to the Japanese and said, "Get busy, Hakamoto!"

Van der Groot drained his glass of oily gin, and refilled it. His piggy little eyes gleamed from his fat face, and when he planted his feet on the table, the swivel chair creaked under his weight.

In an alcove was a larger table, all littered with the remains of a meal. There was a big bowl, smeared with yellow sauce and bits of rice; the whole room had the tang of ginger, and pepper, and the reek of garlic and dried shrimp and smoked fish and roasted coconut. There were forty small dishes arranged about the platter from which van der Groot had eaten his *rijstafel*, and a few of them still contained bits of the relishes and sauces and sliced meats which the big Dutchman had mixed with his mountain of rice and pungent gravy.

He glanced at the table, saw a fried banana, and started to waddle over to get it. Midway, van der Groot thought of another outlet for his energy. He went back to the radio, and cut in the "mixer" which garbled speech out of all possible reception, except by a receiver which was tuned to rearrange the scrambled syllables.

A few moments later, he got an answer to his call. A man said in mechanical English, "Kirikata speaking.

The *Aguila* is in the secret pool, and the crew locked up. I am unable to find out just how the White Savage plans to help the van Houten girl. If you give me a hint, maybe I can make him talk."

Van der Groot laughed until his three chins turned a deep red. "You make work for yourself, Captain. He does *not* know what is ahead of him. If you caught him so soon after I spoke to you, he must have left the Marquesas weeks before she sent that message."

Kirikata said, "It was a mistake putting me to so much trouble to capture someone so useless."

"Don't be a fool! The van Houtens are playing a foxy game, and they must be in a nasty situation to be calling for help from such a distance. Stopping him is very useful."

"What shall I do with this fellow?"

"Do I have to explain how one keeps travelers from giving the location of their last stop?"

"Very logical hint," Kirikata said, and cut the switch.

Van der Groot turned to Hakamoto: "What do you make of the report?"

Hakamoto grinned and said, "Simple routine. The last shipment of petroleum reached Pulau Hantu filling the tanks. A tanker emptied them, and so the station needs a new supply at once."

Van der Groot swished the inch or so of gin which remained in his tumbler. He decided that that was not enough to wet a man's tongue, so he poured some from the stone jug. "What about the van Houtens?"

Hakamoto thumbed a sheaf of reports, then read, "Harley Byrne guest on van Houten yacht *Selene* stop believe Byrne gets information on illicit petroleum stop plans exposure stop advise at once."

"*Gottverdom!* Now I see! This girl who has just come home from Tahiti is

bringing a Polynesian desperado to snoop around Sumatra in a so-called trading schooner, eh? While that all-too-damned Harley Byrne is prying for information to make a worldwide stench."

Hakamoto placed his finger tips together. He was a studious-looking young fellow with a permanent smile. "Captain Steele of *Aguila*, he is antique history, by now. Kirikata has arrangements. Next, we make similar arrangements for troublesome Byrne."

"That," van der Groot grumbled, "is going to be embarrassing. After all, the Surabaya police are protecting him. Plenty of people would like to shut his mouth. Another thing, we cannot be sure that he has not done so much damage already—by stories already cabled in—that settling him now would be wasted effort."

"Beg to differ. If Byrne's damages are excessive, why does van Houten girl beg help from White Savage? Manifestly she is in trouble. . . . Best move now, use Byrne for our own purposes. Counter-propaganda. Dead, he is safe but useless. Alive, safe and useful."

Van der Groot looked puzzled. He hitched his chair forward. Then his round face brightened, and he nearly telescoped the little Japanese with a thumping slap on the shoulder. "Just the thing! Make him write misleading, trouble-making stories. Keep so many officials in hot water that they'll not have time to meddle in our oil business."

Hakamoto nodded. "Very brilliant suggestion. Also, capture of Byrne would cast evil reflection on van Houten, prime trouble-maker."

Van der Groot choked for words and had to swallow a drop of Bols. "Colossal! It'll look as if the van Houtens had something to hide and had got rid

of Byrne themselves when he found it out."

The big Dutchman sighed gustily, and let his shoulders sag. He mopped his fat face, then stretched. He looked like a man who has finally solved a trying and troublesome task.

"I could eat. I am hungry," he rumbled. "This business has taken my appetite for a couple of weeks."

Hakamoto discreetly hid a smile. "Please step to alcove and close door of radio room. Another *rijstafel*, yes?"

THE *Selene* was well out in the Java Sea, nearly halfway to Borneo. Dirk van Houten stopped pacing the deck and muttered, "If that wild man from the Marquesas only had a transmitting set on his schooner! We don't know where he is, or whether he's gotten our call or not."

Byrne, still chafed by Cornelia's frankly admitted interest in Matalaa, laughed and said, "He must be on his way. Nothing could keep him from Java. He'd certainly not stop to visit friends."

"Friends!" Cornelia exclaimed. "Byrne, you're wonderful. I should have thought of that. Radio the British agent at Pakalafa. If Matalaa started from Papeete, he'd probably stop to see Cyril Rankin."

"He might not have arrived there," her father slowly said, "and if he's left, there would be no point—"

"Radio, anyway!" Byrne cut in. "If he stopped to chin with this island governor, he'd say something about his plans."

Cyril Rankin *was* the government of Pakalafa; he was public health officer, police commissioner, highway commissioner, customs officer, tax collector, and superintendent of schools, just to mention a few of his duties. When not

cycling about the island making tours of inspection, he played golf, or drank whiskey and rewrote memoirs entitled *Thirty Years in Burma*.

At the moment, Rankin was signing reports.

Nothing had happened for months; nothing, in fact, since Matalaa's encounter with Borden Pitts. But even calm must be recorded and the reports had to be forwarded. Rankin's red face puckered in a frown. His native clerk had gotten the date wrong.

"Blast it," Rankin grumbled, as he made the correction with a pen and then signed the blank form. "Fancy what would happen if he had to fill in something other than *Situation unchanged since last report*."

He spoke aloud, having long since given up all efforts to fight the habit of solitary white officials. A door slammed. Rankin started; he cursed when he saw the blot on the page. His orderly, a tall Polynesian wearing a uniform cap, a tunic, a breech clout, and no shoes, came dashing in.

"Sir, radio message! Calling Pakalafa!"

"My word! German sea raider, what?"

He stalked into the adjoining room. Then he recollected Willem van der Groot's tentative inquiries about young Steele, and began to wonder if this might be more of the same.

Cornelia van Houten was speaking over 6000 miles of ocean. "Mr. Rankin, I know you're terribly busy, and I hate to bother you, but I've been expecting Matalaa in Surabaya. Has he stopped in Pakalafa?"

"Not a sign of the young scoundrel, madam! A trader came ashore three weeks ago, from the Marquesas. Said the *Aguila* had put out of Ua Paepae for Surabaya."

"Oh, I'm so glad! Thank you, Mr. Rankin. Good—"

"I say, I say! You're not intruding a bit. And there's more. Your wild friend is in Banjarmassin. Quite incredible, such a fast trip."

"Banjarmassin? He couldn't possibly be!"

"My dear, nothing is impossible to that incredible young person. Van der Groot, the Resident, radioed the other night—aw—I say, wait a moment, I'll consult my diary—"

"Please don't bother, Mr. Rankin. What on earth is he doing in Banjarmassin?"

"Really couldn't say, but van der Groot asked me for a confidential report. Apparently Matalaa gave me as a reference. Possibly a bit of trading, you know."

"Thank you! Goodbye, Mr. Rankin!"

CORNELIA turned to her father and Byrne, who stood in the doorway of the radio room. "He's in Banjarmassin, would you believe it?"

"We could believe anything, after hearing all you said and most of what that Englishman said," her father drily observed. "Well. It won't take him long to get to Surabaya."

Cornelia's eyes sparkled, and she caught her father's lapels. "Let's head for Banjarmassin right now! It's nearer than Surabaya, and we might meet him before he puts out."

"Nonsense!" Dirk van Houten frowned. "The man can't be in Banjarmassin—not in any sailing boat."

"Oh, you're just going by Cyril Rankin's estimate of what an island trader estimated from a rumor he picked up in the Marquesas! Don't be so mathematical. I want to go to Banjarmassin, I've never been in Borneo



MATALAA

anyway, and it—why, we could make it by morning!"

Byrne smiled. "Why don't we try it? I've never been in Borneo, either. We have enough canned goods and—" He looked down the passage, into the saloon. "Plenty of *schnapps* in the locker. How about the crew?"

"Enough for navigation."

So the *Selene* headed north that night. Van Houten turned in, and Cornelia and her guest sat on the boat deck, looking at the Southern Cross. The wind was warm, and brought the far-off scent of cloves from Celebes. Moonlight made a golden halo about Cornelia's hair, and Byrne began to feel that some happy instinct, a dozen years previous, had prompted him to specialize on international affairs. It had all led to this hour, and it was absurd to be disturbed about Cornelia's friendship for a wild man from the Marquesas.

"This seems to be the climax of all my traveling," he said. "Something I've worked to, blindly and not knowing why."

There was a far away look in Cornelia's eyes, and that encouraged Byrne.

So he kissed her, and took her in his arms. "Darling, I could make Batavia or Surabaya my headquarters," he said. "Unless you'd rather live—"

"I thought," she said, absent-mindedly, "you were going to work from Benkulen on the Sumatra coast."

"I'll be damned!" Byrne hitched away, and regarded her at arm's length. "I was asking you—oh, skip it!"

"I'm sorry, Harley. I was wondering how *Mynheer* van der Groot came out in his deal with Matalaa."

CHAPTER VI

DEATH IN THE BLACK POOL

MATALAA'S wrenched limbs and battered head, the agony that flamed through his whole body and the *bajuco* fiber that cut into his wrists and ankles—all these torments drove sleep from Matalaa's side that night. After throwing Kirikata's pet wrestler against a fixed bayonet, he saw no chance for his own survival; but he wondered if he could save Father Pierre and the crew.

If he could offer some material advantage, Kirikata might be induced to hold him as a hostage for the good behavior of the liberated priest and natives.

Guards entered the compound. They had rifles with fixed bayonets, and a white clad man wearing a sabre led them. His head was bandaged. That must be Kirikata. Matalaa called the name, but there was no answer. The tramp of marching feet continued, and the file halted at one of the cages. By twisting about, Matalaa caught a blurred glimpse of what happened under the blue lights.

"Come out!" Kirikata said, "and tell these savages to behave or we'll shoot their chief."

Father Pierre countered, "What do you plan to do?"

"We have decided that your captain does not really know what we wish to learn, so we think we can release you. We are taking you down to your ship, but we hold him as security for your good behavior until we get authority to release him."

"May I speak to Captain Steele?"

"That is forbidden."

"Forbidden to me as a priest?"

"So sorry, but orders do not make allowance for ecclesiastic ranks. Explain to crew what is the penalty for rioting."

Father Pierre explained in Polynesian. Kirikata said at the conclusion, "I do not understand that speech. Misbehavior forfeits your captain's life, immediately."

"That is what I told them."

"Very well. Prisoners, *attention!* Forward—*march!*"

Matalaa could not recognize faces, but he could count the tall men who marched across the compound. Six of his comrades were missing, not counting Poi Utu. Six had died for following him from home. If he could win vengeance for them, he could meet his inevitable doom without regret.

The captives were passing the sentry at the compound gate. Matalaa heard the slap of leather and metal as the man made a snappy "present arms" when Kirikata approached. The gate clanged, locking behind the party. Hands bound, feet free, they were marching.

"Why tie their hands when my head guarantees good behavior?" Matalaa asked himself. And suddenly he knew. His heart sickened.

False hope made Father Pierre and the Marquesans go peaceably to the unrealized peril ahead of them. Carrying corpses from the compound was hard



NITO

work for a small garrison. So let the prisoners walk. And they did walk, for as long as their skipper lived, they believed he would protect them.

A faint scratching, a metallic vibration behind him made Matalaa wriggle about on the concrete slab. Someone was squatting behind his cage, in a patch of shadow.

A familiar voice whispered, "King's Son, I come to turn you loose. I hid and they could not find me on the ship, for the gods make me invisible. First I cut a hole in your cage, then you join your men, then—then I go eat Captain Kirikata!"

The muted rasp of a saw indicated that Poi Utu might carry out most of his program. "How did you get in, with those electric wires, death-wires all along the top of the fence?"

"I walked in when the gate was unlocked. Have I not told you the spirits make me invisible. I can pass before a man and he will not see me. So could you if you could think right." Poi Utu's tone indicated that this was mere child's play, and that Matalaa was wasting time asking useless questions.

Matalaa had often seen the old man's vanishing trick. There was always some startling little sound; one's glance shifted for an instant, and when one looked back again, Poi Utu was no longer visible. Matalaa had often said, "If I could only stop from looking away, I would know if he really is blotted out by the darkness of the gods."

Poi Utu dared not work too swiftly with the saw which he had brought from the *Aguila* since each muted note must blend with the night sounds to which the sentries were accustomed.

"Try to come closer, I will release your hands and feet," Poi Utu said. "Then they won't be numb when it is time to run."

Wriggling within reach of the wizard was slow and painful effort; and Matalaa still had a foot or more to cover when the sentry at the gate saluted, and the lock clanged. Men marched toward Matalaa's cage, and halted at the door.

Captain Kirikata spoke through the bars, "Until you are well out of hitting distance, you remain tied. We are taking you to your ship."

The guard opened the cage and two men went in with a bamboo pole and some rattan withes. With these last, they lashed Matalaa to the three inch rod and then shouldered their burden, dividing the weight between them.

Kirikata said, "So sorry, Captain. My mistake—other person wanted. Pleasant voyage." Then he said a few words in Japanese, and the non-commissioned officer saluted.

Matalaa's guards carried him through the stockade gate. It opened narrowly, and latched at once. Poi Utu, as far as Matalaa could observe, had not slipped through. The gods, it seemed, had their limits.

FAR below, the bare masts of the *Aguila* were black against the moonlight which the water reflected. While the pool in the crater rose and fell with the tide, no breeze disturbed its surface.

The *Aguila* had been towed to the steeply sloping bank. The powerboat, usually moored in a cave outside the cone, was now inside the bowl; but Matalaa could hardly believe that his captivity was to end, and that his ship would be towed out to sea.

Loose chunks of lava clattered down the rocky slope. The porters grunted under their burden; picking their way down the uneven path became increasingly difficult. One stumbled to his knees, and Matalaa wondered wearily if they would drop him. The engine of the power boat roared, and the still water was whipped to white foam by the propeller. One of the guards shouted, and there was an answer.

Then the porters crossed the rickety gang plank, and stepped to the *Aguila's* deck. Father Pierre lay there, bound like the crew. He lifted his head.

"Soon we shall all be free," the priest said. "Courage, my son!"

Matalaa understood. His captors did not put him on deck with his friends; instead, they carried him below, into the dark hold of the ship. One of the guards went ahead with a flashlight. Either none of them understood Matalaa's angry questions, or else they did not choose to answer. They chattered to each other, and from the main deck, came the steady sound of Father Pierre's prayers.

The crew began chanting. Nito's voice came loud and clear above the others. They were singing the old Marquesan farewell to a dead king. Matalaa yelled to them, "Don't sing that! Say what Father Pierre says!"

But the echoes distorted his voice, and his foster brother and the crew could not understand him. For a moment, Matalaa was angry because his fellows chanted a pagan song. In spite of Father Pierre's years of effort, at the end they went back to their tribal ways.

The man with the flashlight returned from the bilge, and then all the guards hurried up the companionway to the main deck.

Water was splashing. It rushed and rippled against the ribs of the schooner. They had opened the sea cocks of the *Aguila*. The engine of the power boat began to roar, and the ship moved out into the pool. Matalaa felt her losing way, and heard the voice of the engine die out as the power boat continued on through the narrow passage and into the cove.

Here the *Aguila* was to sink. Never would she become a derelict that might drift and some day betray the crime. This deep crater would guard its secrets; the *Aguila's* ballast would carry her to the bottom of the once-fiery pit. It was a shrewd plan and Matalaa could see no way to stop it.

The rushing of water through the sea cocks was no longer audible, for the hold had filled enough to muffle the splash of the inflowing stream. The sea, Matalaa's lifelong friend, had through human treachery become an enemy.

The *Aguila* began to settle by the stern. She had snagged one of the outcropping lava plugs that rise from the floor of a crater. Then she wallowed, leveled off; and from the sluggish motion, Matalaa knew that the water would soon reach him.

Instinct made him struggle against the *bajuco* bonds. The strands that looped about him and the pole with which the porters had carried him were

loose enough, and did not matter; but the strands at his ankles and wrists were so tight that even with the slight stretch caused by blood and sweat, he could not tear himself loose.

The *Aguila* grated against another lava plug. Above, Nito and his Marquesans had ceased their song to a departed king. Father Pierre was chanting. One by one, the doomed seamen joined in. Matalaa was glad that they had stopped their pagan song. He was glad that the white-haired priest would have the satisfaction of knowing, as he sank into the black pool, that his forty years in the islands had not been wasted. He hoped Father Pierre did not guess that the song sprang from their love of him mostly, rather than for his God, and from that gentle kindness that every Marquesan possesses.

The deck sloped again, and this time, Matalaa's head was lower than his feet. If the pitch became steeper, he would slide to meet the ever-rising water. It was lapping closer now.

POI UTU had evaded this doom. Somewhere, the old man lurked, making magic. Matalaa wondered if Poi Utu would find his way home, finally; whether the old man would take with him Captain Kirikata's skull, and whether he would eat the captain's heart and tell Torkusa how Matalaa and Nito and the others had gone under, chanting, first a pagan dirge and then a Christian hymn, not wishing to offend either God.

Father Pierre was intoning something in a language Matalaa could not understand. It must be Latin, though the deck and the rising water made a sounding board that distorted the words. Matalaa wanted to join when Nito and his fellows responded. But he held his tongue. They might think

he was crying in fear, and a king's son must not be afraid.

The water rose in the thick blackness. A ripple splashed his head. By floating, bound hand and foot, he might delay the end, but finally, the deck above would check him. Yet Matalaa struggled to put himself in line with the advancing edge of the water.

He succeeded, and now his left leg and left side were submerged. The salt water stung his wounds. For the first time he shrank from water; the friend that had spared him when his murdered father and mother could no longer protect him was now an enemy. The blackness of his ship stifled him.

There was a roaring in his ears as he struggled, moving by instinct; for no one was watching, and so he could forget Poi Utu's many instructions on how a King's Son must die. There was a kind of comfort in the instinctive battle against death. To die passively is very difficult for youth.

The will to live is strong. . . .

He wondered what Cornelia would think when he failed her. Some day, when he had been gone a long time, she would understand, if she escaped the peril that now threatened her. In the choking gloom, in the darkness that stifled him as the water soon would, he saw her moon-gilded hair, and heard her voice. He had not lived vainly, after all; he had won vengeance for his parents, and he had won a new start in life for Cornelia.

The steeply sloping deck rolled him into the water. It was easy for him to float; King Torkusa and Poi Utu had taught him every trick of swimming. For a moment he was face down, then he rolled, and his nose came clear.

The *Aguila* slipped off the lava plug that for some moments had held her.

Father Pierre's voice was clear and

loud now. He was reciting a prayer for Matalaa.

But Matalaa floated, and the smarting sting of salt made him fight. The prayer for the dead made him battle. That Cornelia had called him from across the sea made him twist and writhe until sometimes he sank deep into the rising sea within the hull.

The *bajuco* began to yield.

That strong fiber did not grow in Polynesia; he did not know its properties. He did not know that the Malays soaked it in water to make it stretch before they used it to bind bridges and houses together. He knew only that he had gained an inch; that the *bajuco* no longer cut as it had.

Slowly, certainly, the rising water carried him toward the decking above. Sometimes, when the *Aguila* lurched a little, he was thrown against the beams. But there were air pockets to sustain him. And finally, he tore his hands free.

He yelled, trying to encourage his chanting comrades. Then, knowing that he could not make himself heard, he gulped a lungful of air and nosed down in a dive.

His feet were lashed, for he could not waste any effort to release them, but he did not have to get them free, for he could swim as a porpoise. Down—down—down into a blackness that finally exploded in shooting red fires.

The intruding current guided him. Lungs at the bursting point, brain blazing, he finally fought his way down to the bottom. He seized the sea cock and wrenched it. The flow stopped. He struck out and swooped up, bashing his head against a timber. He caught a dull glow of moonlight, and then, hand over hand, he dragged himself to the main deck. "Keep on chanting," he said, choking. "Keep it up, till I get

loose. We won't sink any further."

"Thank God!" the old priest cried. "I knew He would help us, but I could not see how."

CHAPTER VII

TROUBLE IN SUMATRA

THE sun had not risen above the yardarm, but William van der Groot had a tumbler of gin in his hand. He had no use for light breakfasts, so he was sitting down to a *rijstafel*. The big table on the veranda was half filled with small plates of toasted peanuts, pickles, smoked shrimp, curried chicken, coconut soup, pickled eggs; and a file of Malay servants still marched past the big Dutchman's table. Van der Groot added a fried banana to the margin of the mighty heap that rose from his bowl. He waved the next two servants on, and stopped the one who had a platter of raw pineapple and sliced oranges with caramel sauce.

Then he scattered a handful of toasted coconut over the whole heap, and grumbled, "Get out, all of you!" For breakfast, twenty *sanbals* sufficed; for lunch, at least thirty; while for dinner, no less than forty side dishes and relishes were necessary with the mountain of rice.

Van der Groot saw Hakamoto tip-toeing in. He grunted, waved a hand, and shoveled home a great spoonful of rice and sauce. The little Japanese bowed, sucked in his breath. "Good morning, *Mynheer* van der Groot. A beautiful morning."

The Dutchman said, "Arrhumph." And reached for his gin.

"Please forgive the interruption. But if you gaze out into harbor, you will see power-driven yacht, *Selene* in the harbor."

"What?" Van der Groot choked, and



VAN DER
GROOT

grains of rice showered all over the table. "*Gottverdom!* Why? Where from? Ten thousand devils! Who told—listen, are you sure it is the van Houten yacht?"

"Very sure, oh yes indeed, sir." Hakamoto beamed. "Already, I have assure Mr. van Houten and Miss van Houten and Mr. Harley Byrne that you are happy to receive them to Banjarmasin."

"Quit this foolishness, Hakamoto! What *are* they doing here?"

"Not politeness asking callers. So sorry."

Van der Groot gulped a fried banana and the leg of a curried chicken. "What's Kirikata report this morning?"

"So sorry. Kirikata not reporting."

"Why not?"

"Kirikata have not report yet why he does not report. Endeavoring to ascertain reasons. Will repeat demands hourly."

"Damnation! Why do you suppose he isn't reporting?" He raised a beefy hand. "Don't repeat that last one, or I'll knock your head off!"

"Possibly Kirikata have nothing to say, hence, saying nothing. Possibly weary from disposing of Captain Steele and crew."

Van der Groot finished his gin, and sent his car to the water front. Feet perched on the veranda railing, he sat there, eyeing the *Selene*, lovely and gleaming among the Malay *prahus* and Chinese junks and sooty tramp steamers which made the harbor a stench with a thousand variations. Fish—copra—petroleum—rubber—and blended in every known proportion with diverse filth. Dyak boats swooped across the roads, outriggers kicking up spray, and striped sails bellying in the wind.

The Malay waiters came trooping in with wicker trays to take away the two dozen odd plates the *rijstafel* involved. Van der Groot fished a black cheroot from his pocket. This was hardly going well when Mr. Hakamoto reentered the screened veranda. He announced, "Mr. van Houten. Mr. Byrne. Miss van Houten."

VAN DER GROOT rearranged his scowl into a convincing smile. "Ah, so pleasant this!" He clapped his hands, and three Malay "boys" trotted in; they lined up, trim in their white jackets and red skull caps and many-colored *sarongs*. "A drink, yes? Breakfast?"

"Thank you, we have eaten," Cornelia said. But her father nodded and carried on, "Stupid turning down a drink. Some of that brandy, van der Groot, eh?"

Byrne said, "I'd be a chump, asking for rye."

Van der Groot rubbed his hands together. "Usually yes. But in this house, my dear sir, you would be a chump if you did not ask for it! Boy! Brandy! Rye! *Jalan lekas!*" Two boys trotted

away. Van der Groot bowed to Cornelia: "Give me the pleasure."

"Chocolate, and I don't care if I gain another pound!" she said, laughing. "Since you insist."

Van der Groot's sharp eyes appraised Cornelia from her trim white shoes to her large-brimmed red hat. "A pound would neither help nor harm! Boy! Chocolate!"

Van Houten chatted about copra and the weather. Byrne sat there, silent and sharp-eyed, almost the forgotten man. Byrne never did talk much; mostly he listened. You hear everything eventually if you listen long enough.

Cornelia finally cut in, "Oh, devil take tin and copra and the weather! Mr. van der Groot, where is the *Aguila*, and when did she leave? We heard she was in Banjarmassin. We—Father, I mean—knows the skipper."

"Oh, you mean, Captain Steele? The red-headed Polynesian giant-killer?"

Cornelia's eyes flashed for a second; she sensed a touch of mockery in van der Groot's voice, but she went on, sweetly, "Yes, a giant-killer but not Polynesian."

Van der Groot flicked his cheroot from the right side of his mouth to the left, a shift managed with tongue and lip alone. "He was inquiring about the *Selene*. Two days ago."

"Really?" Cornelia sat up straight. "He should have been in Surabaya by now!"

"So?" Van der Groot closed his eyes, folded his hands across his paunch for a moment. Then he opened his eyes wide and shouted, "Hakamoto! Where did Captain Steele go? The *Aguila*, you remember?"

The little Japanese said, "Not remembering too clearly, but I think Sibolga."

"Why, what would he do there?"

Good heavens, it's nearly seven hundred miles from Surabaya to Sibolga!"

"So sorry, Miss. Captain Steele very hastily heads for Sibolga on Sumatra coast. On south coast."

"I know it's on the south!" Cornelia snapped. "But why in the world did he go there?"

"Not asking Captain Steele. So sorry. Best way is overtaking Captain Steele."

"Get out!" van der Groot roared, and Hakamoto ran. The big Dutchman said, "The man's a fool or a liar! I'll look it up, myself."

He waddled from the veranda, and down the hall that led to his office. Hakamoto was lurking in a cross passage. Van der Groot whispered, "Good work, they're dizzy already. Keep hiding out, and listening."

SOME minutes later, van der Groot's weight again made the joists creak. He had a handful of papers, and he looked crestfallen. "That fool was right, after all. Wherever he got the waterfront gossip, it checks with facts. I called my clerks, and verified these papers—" He offered carbon copies "Clearance from here, to Sibolga."

"But it's *crazy!*" Cornelia persisted. Her father caught her eye, gave her a blistering glance. "Well, it *is* crazy! When I saw him in Papeete, he said he would sail direct to Surabaya the first time he came to the Dutch Indies."

Van der Groot laughed. "Oh, this is colossal! You believe a sailor, Miss van Houten! You must not be so trusting. Van Houten, do teach your beautiful daughter some basic facts! After all, the man isn't sailing for fun, he had a cargo. *Gott*, is he to be blamed for trying to make expenses, perhaps a profit?"

"No, of course not."

Van der Groot urged the van

Houtens to stay, but Cornelia insisted that they had to hurry back to Surabaya. Once aboard the *Selene*, she changed her tune: "We are going to Sibolga, do you hear?"

Byrne caught her arm. "Are you so crazy about that wild man that you can't wait till he dumps some cargo?"

"Don't be a fool!" She turned on him, face tense.

Byrne backed down. "I'm sorry. After all, it isn't my business."

Van Houten was rubbing his chin. "Maybe there is something funny about this. We radioed for Steele—Matalaa as she calls him—and he hurries to Sibolga instead of to Surabaya."

"But he was already en route for Sibolga," Byrne said. "Can't expect him to turn around."

"With that message, yes!" Cornelia insisted. "Maybe I am silly, but I know he would if no other skipper on earth would!"

"Oh, nuts!" Byrne turned on his heel. "Let's go to Sibolga! Lower a boat and I'll row to Surabaya!"

Cornelia caught his hand. "Now, Harley," she said, smiling, "don't *you* be a fool, too. The way I feel about it is that someone has put him on guard. He was really intending to head for Surabaya all the time, don't you see? Why would he ever go to Sibolga? But we've got to be sure."

"Um . . . say—you got something here."

The *Selene* could make six hundred miles in twenty-four hours. She bored into the Java Sea, and left a long white wake behind her. The following dawn, Krakatoa smoked sullenly behind her, and the currents of the Sunda Straits tugged and twisted for awhile; then, high and rugged, Sumatra coast rose from the water.

Gray cliffs crowned with bright

green, with blue green, with gray green; ruddy cliffs, black cliffs, white cliffs; towering iron purple crags, some smoking and some extinct; patches of sugar cane, here and there, and the waxen green of coffee, the dark green of tobacco. Rarely, a thread of smoke from a village, and just as rarely, a *prahu* darted over the blue water.

THE more Byrne saw of desolate Sumatra, the more he frowned and shook his head. "We've been sent somewhere," he muttered, as he and Cornelia stood at the rail. "I've read about Sumatra, but this is my first look. Now that I've seen how lonesome it is, it's a pushover. Hot oil—nothing to it! Lonly as the Formosa coast."

"Somebody could have decoyed Matalaa," she said.

It was afternoon when the *Selene's* fast run ended in sleepy Sibolga. Van Houten said, "Before we move in on my old friend, the resident, let me go ashore alone and size things up. So we won't be imposing on hospitality. He has the biggest family in the Indies—for a white man, that is."

Byrne chuckled. "You mean, you want to see if this new house is too big for his family, or if his old house is too small for—"

"Exactly! Once I see, I can plead engagements and the like. We certainly are not crowded on the *Selene*."

They watched van Houten go ashore, without waiting for the port officials to go through with the formalities. Cornelia broke into their routine by demanding news of the *Aguila*. Lacking that, she insisted on explanations.

She was very lovely and the officials went to pains to enumerate the reasons why Matalaa might have been missed en route. This was too much for Byrne. He seized his briefcase, and called over

his shoulder, "I'm going ashore to file some dispatches." Cornelia did not even hear him. He added, "Aw, nuts!"

Byrne hailed a rickshaw and rode scowling. At the cable office, he did not have a second look at the dispatch he handed the clerk; usually Byrne was careful to the last comma. "Where can a fellow get a drink that is not gin?"

A Malay popped up from beside the door jamb. He said in what he called English, "Sir, my car, new and powerful, knows all places where have got drink. Let me demonstrate?"

The fellow was oilier than any Malay he had ever seen, and his grin was amusing; so Byrne went. He was hot and thirsty and disgruntled. He was sore at Cornelia and sore at himself.

The incessant chatter as the chauffeur took him along the water front was distracting, and so was the speed. He missed 1500-pound water buffalos by a scant half inch; he ducked carts and Model T Fords and pedestrians, obviously by magic, for most of the time he was looking back to explain the sights to his passenger.

Byrne shouted, "Look at that speedometer, you fool! You're doing a hundred kilometers an hour! I want a drink."

"Can do one hundred and thirteen!"

He jammed his bare foot to the floor board. The roar drowned Byrne's wrathful shout. The lunatic was actually doing one hundred and fifteen—a shade over eighty-five miles an hour. There was a nine-hundred-foot drop to the sea, and the road was far from straight.

Though the chauffeur now kept his eyes to the front, that did not relieve Byrne for long.

And then, unnoticed by the passenger, a ninety-pound Malay with a mean face and a knotted ebony club rose up out

of the trunk. He brought his club down swiftly and accurately on Byrne's head. Byrne slumped down on his face. The driver saw the move in the mirror and slowed up.

"In the name of Allah, O thou fool," said the man with the club, "was it necessary to make this devil wagon go around the curves at the speed of lightning, so that I am flung first one way, then the other?"

"Shut up, and tie that infidel dog!" the driver commanded.

CHAPTER VIII

FIRE-MAGIC

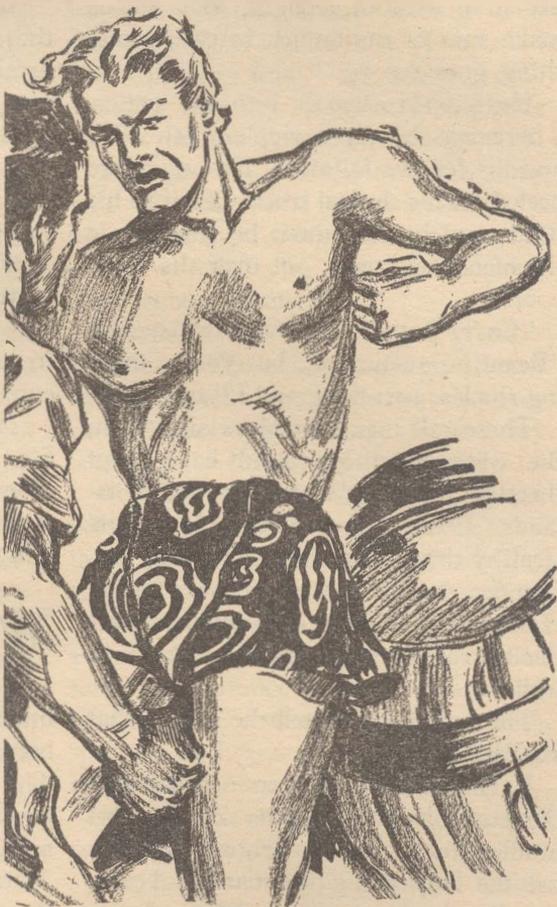
MATALAA, as van der Groot and Hakamoto knew, was a long way from Sibolga; but there was one thing which they did not suspect, and that was that shortly after Kirikata had reported that captain and crew of the *Aguila* were to be discussed in the past tense, Matalaa had broken loose.

When Matalaa lurched to the deck, he tore the stretcher *bajuco* strands from his ankles, then found a knife in the saloon and released his comrades. As he worked, he said to Father Pierre and the others, "Keep praying loudly in case they listen. If we do not sink within the next few minutes, they will know something is wrong."

Nito demanded, "How can we get our ship out? If we take the putt-putt boat to tow her, they'll hear."

Father Pierre pointed. "The moon has moved enough to throw a long shadow. Soon they won't be able to see whether or not our masts are still above water."

"Still doesn't help enough," Matalaa



Matalaa, swinging wildly, went smashing back against the barrel

decided. "If we rig up a pump to get the water out, they'll hear us. If we used the capstan to pull against an anchor in the passage, we'd make too much noise. No, there is only one way."

He picked up a belaying pin. "I'll be back as soon as possible."

"Wait," Father Pierre urged. "We can all swim out of here, and take the launch. It is large enough to carry us to Surabaya. When the fuel is gone, we can rig a sail."

"No. The *Aguila* is my ship, and I am saving her. I have not dreamed all my life of owning a ship to abandon

my first without a fight. But let us make sure of the launch in case something goes wrong."

He slipped silently into the water. There was hardly a ripple when Nito and his fellows followed. Father Pierre peeled off his clerical frock, tied it to his head; and in a moment he was beside the men who struck out over the black pool.

"Easy, Father," Matalaa whispered. "Beautiful swimming, but you're making ripples. Just float, and I'll tow you."

These tall men moved as silently in the water as they would have crept through the jungle of their native islands. Presently, a current began its stealthy drag. The tide was going out. Matalaa broke out in a sweat; the *Aguila* might drift and jam athwart the narrow passage that cut the lava wall.

The sound would tell the enemy that she had not sunk.

Finally, the file of swimmers reached the cove, and the mutter of the surf muffled their coming ashore. Matalaa led the way along the narrow beach, crawling in the shadows of the volcanic rocks that cropped up. Ahead of him was the concealed cavern where the lunch was made fast.

"They don't keep it in the crater," he reasoned, "because the passage must be high and dry at low tide. And the outside path to the lip is easier."

That tide! If the *Aguila* jammed, he would have to abandon her. That thought sickened him. For as long as he could remember, he had dreamed of having a ship of his own. In a few months, he had come to love the *Aguila* next only to Father Pierre and his Marquesan comrades.

"Shhh—" He reached back, touching Nito's hand. The whole creeping file frozen in place. "Wait."

Measured footfalls were clear now; the marching men wore shoes, and carried rifles. In the gloom of the cavern, only a few yards ahead of Matalaa, a man challenged in Japanese. The non-com in charge answered, and the march was resumed until sentry and the relief were face to face.

Matalaa could not understand the muttered exchange, but he knew that it was the custom of a soldier leaving post to tell the relief of any suspicious circumstances.

The old sentry took his place in the file, and the new one took his post. About face: and up the outer slope they went, making bamboo rustle, and stumbling over rocks.

MATALAA held his breath for moments, and listened to the man's gait on post. A short beat to walk—that much was certain from counting steps between each arrival at the nearest end. The man was alert, and there was no time to wait for him to settle down to monotony and dullness. Inch by inch, Matalaa crept along until he reached the edge of a patch of shadow.

There he crouched, waiting.

The sentry was close now. He turned. Matalaa wormed swiftly over the patch of moonlit sand. The footfalls were coming back. A rifle sling smacked as the soldier changed from one shoulder to the other.

Then came another sound, and there were no more footfalls. A belaying pin had descended, just as the soldier shaped his mouth for a challenge. He went limp, but he did not drop, for strong hands caught him and also the loaded rifle. Matalaa picked man and gun bodily from the narrow path at the mouth of the cavern, and carried his unconscious enemy to one side.

He knelt, shook his head after a mo-

ment. "I'm afraid Father Pierre will not be pleased. I hit this one too hard."

But try as he would, he could not feel very penitent. Poi Utu would have applauded that bit of stalking, and had the old witch-doctor done the job, there would soon have been roasting meat. When Matalaa rejoined his comrades, he said, "Here is a rifle and cartridges. This long knife on the gun—Nito, you take it. The rest of you, go into that cave and push the boat out. She is moored with a rope."

Nito admired the bayonet for a moment. "Brother, let us swim and push the putt-putt boat right up to the *Aguila*. Then being in place, we start the engine. The little yellow men can't do much damage with shoulder guns. And Father Pierre said that the cannon cannot point at things that are close, so they won't use that on us."

"*Aué!*" The way Matalaa pronounced that word of a dozen meanings made it signify, "Marvellous!" Then he groaned. "No, I have to get Poi Utu. The last I saw of him, he was inside the compound."

"If he sneaked in," Nito said, "he surely sneaked out on the heels of the new guard. That would be easy when he makes himself invisible."

"I have to find him so he'll be here when we leave."

"If it please God that we do leave," Father Pierre cut in. "Must you go up there? Could you not look along the shore, where he would most likely be?"

"No, Father. I must do it this way. Make sure first that his magic has not failed, leaving him a prisoner inside the death wires."

The priest resumed his clerical frock, and was now putting on his hat. "Spoken like a captain. May God guard you from violence."

Nito made a swishing cut with the

bayonet. "How about having God guard the little yellow men? They need some prayers now," he boasted with childlike ferocity. Nito felt fine. Battle was in the air. The gods were good.

Matalaa said, "Nito, you take this rifle, give the knife to someone. Guns are too noisy, I could not use one. All I need is a belaying pin. Watch close, don't shoot by mistake."

"Wait!" The priest bounded after Matalaa. "There is something I must tell you about electric wires. I never thought you would have to use my teachings to break into a prison."

Matalaa listened, then went to the launch and found a length of chain. "I understand, Father. Instant death if I slip, but safety if I do it right."

He went swiftly up the winding path, but silently. Rarely, a pebble rolled down the pumice footing, and ticked against lava outcropping. Then, half-way up, he heard a sly little sound behind him.

He shrank into the shadows, and waited.

He caught the dull gleam of metal. A man with a gun was creeping up behind him. The breeze shifted, and Matalaa got a whiff of palm oil. He relaxed, and when the man was within arm's reach, he whispered, "You fool, I told you to stay."

Nito answered, "You can't—I can't let you go alone. Father Pierre understands putt-putt boats. If there is trouble, he can escape alone."

SO MATALAA had to make Nito understand that to fling an iron chain over a live wire, making a short circuit that would blow every fuse in the garrison, took only one man. Nito did not try to grasp the science of it. He stubbornly said, "That is not true. One man to run, so they chase him,

while one man climbs over the dead wire and is not noticed."

"All right." Matalaa had no time to argue. "Now, quiet—"

He could have shouted. There was a blast that made the gloom a momentary red blaze. The concussion knocked Matalaa breathless. It was as though a giant had squeezed him in a mighty fist. He was flung against a bamboo stalk. Overhead, there was a whistling and a screaming; foliage crashed and crackled, and choking fumes billowed down hill. Men yelled frantically, but there were not many voices.

"Powder magazine!" Matalaa gasped. "Now's our chance!"

They charged the remaining fifty yards, into the smoke. Another blast let go, and red and green stars zipped up through the blanket of nitrous haze.

A gate clanged open, and by the murky light of a few blue bulbs, soot-blackened soldiers reeled toward the exit. Some had guns; some were empty-handed. They looked like dead men who still could walk.

Rocks pattered about them, and chunks of metalwork fell, crashing; a piece of the twisted building pinned one down, cutting off his terrified screeching.

Matalaa leaped forward, swinging his belaying pin. A dazed soldier came toward him. Matalaa ducked, struck out with the belaying pin, and seized the man's rifle. An officer crawled from under some wreckage. Nito cut loose with his gun, just as the officer's revolver crackled.

Then a dancing madman bounded in through a big hole in the fence. The five-inch gun, blown from its mounting, had demolished the barrier. Poi Utu was swinging an officer's saber, slashing and chanting a Marquesan war song.

Matalaa was too dazed to check the savage mopping-up. Some dimly remembered teachings told him that he should not let his comrades belabor stunned men who moved unwittingly. Then he went wild himself, hearing the old man's war chant, and he brained a man he could have disarmed.

It was over before the fumes thinned out in the breeze. He said to Poi Utu, "What happened? How—"

The devil doctor grinned and answered, "I was making magic, and I called on the gods and the spirits."

"Listen, you old—"

Then Matalaa checked himself. Poi Utu had lived two lifetimes, and he must have learned a few things about powder. If he wanted to touch off a magazine and then blame it on the spirits, he was entitled to. Matalaa lamely concluded, "*Aué!* Great magic!"

The storage batteries that fed the lights were still in order, so he was able to crawl into the demolished barracks and office. He found no trace of Captain Kirikata. The radio man was dead, and the transmitter was a hopeless tangle of wire and shattered tubes.

A short circuit had started a fire, and the air was dense with the smoke of blazing insulation, burning papers from the filing cabinets, and smoldering mattresses and clothing.

Matalaa snatched the few sheets of paper he could reach, and whipped the fire from their edges. "These men are Cornelia's enemies," he said to Poi Utu, "maybe I can learn why. Let's get out before something else blows up!"

But Poi Utu was not there.

Outside, Nito was yelling and Marquesans, running from the beach, answered him. "Come look at the cannon!" Nito shouted. "A little cannon and some shells!"

A drum of gasoline let go. Flames

reached up, red and smoky. Father Pierre, panting from his exertions, ran into the wrecked compound.

"Come, let us get out, it is dangerous!"

Matalaa outshouted the laughing Marquesans. They picked up the 37-millimeter gun that Nito had found and carried it down the slope. Others lugged cases of one pound shells for the compact weapon. All they had to do now was to tow the *Aguila* from the hidden pool, and pump her dry.

CHAPTER IX

THE RESIDENT IS FRIENDLY

BEFORE they had started the *Aguila's* pumps, Matalaa said, "Can we not have the engine of this power boat fitted into our ship, to use in case the wind fails?"

Poi Utu chuckled. "*Aué!* That is fine. I was making magic for a wind, that is why I did not come down the hill to work on the ship. But after this, I shall not bother praying for wind. I can ask the gods for other things."

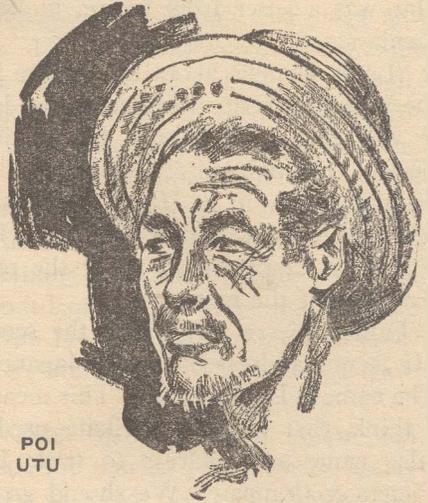
Matalaa wanted to get the facts of the old man's second disappearance, and the strange tricks he had done, but there was no cross-examining him. Once, during the hard work of getting the *Aguila* out of the crater, Matalaa had smelled the odor of roasting meat, somewhere in the jungle. Father Pierre had noticed the smell, and his face was very stern when he asked Matalaa, "Where is Poi Utu? What is he doing?"

"Uh—um—he is making what he calls magic."

"I think he is eating."

"Possibly a lizard," Matalaa said, with some embarrassment.

He did not like to lie to the old priest, but he began to have his suspicions



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about Captain Kirikata's total disappearance; though the Japanese captain might of course have been buried in the blazing wreckage.

THE following day, when a brisk breeze drove the *Aguila* across the Banda Sea, Matalaa's suspicions were strengthened. Poi Utu squatted on deck, beating a drum and chanting the traditional song in honor of a brave enemy who had been eaten. Matalaa eyed him sternly until Poi Utu glanced up from his drumming and smiled as guilelessly as a babe.

Matalaa went into the saloon, where Father Pierre was sitting by the radio. The priest said, "There are no more messages for the White Savage. I fear that those pirates delayed us too long."

"What was their true purpose?"

"I cannot tell from the few papers you saved from the fire," Father Pierre answered. "But here is my guess: they were preparing for possible war. They were very close to Australia. They could trap or trick ships sending soldiers or food to Singapore, or to the Dutch East Indies."

Matalaa examined the charred papers.

One was a letter from a firm in Banjarmasin.

"Look—it tells about the engine for the putt-putt boat, how many guilders it will cost to put in a big engine. See—" He pointed. "The same kind of engine now in it. If we go to Banjarmasin, we can find out from Jan Pieters & Company all about the men that bought the motor."

Father Pierre scrutinized the scrap. "It is not addressed to any Japanese. The name is Dutch, in fact. This means, I think, that Captain Kirikata used a false name and address to trick Jan Pieters & Company. We should go to Banjarmasin at once and ask the resident."

"Mmmm . . . how about Cornelia?"

The priest considered for a few moments, and sighed. "I do not know what to say. If her danger had been immediate and deadly, it would be far too late, now. Furthermore, she did not *know* where we were and so could not be counting on immediate response. Finally, if she is able to have a call repeated for hours at a time, she could not be in extreme peril."

Matalaa nodded. "She may have said those words just to make me hurry, wherever I might be. A secret message, meaningless to—"

"To everyone but Captain Kirikata!"

"That is odd, and that is what makes me think that we can best help her by learning all we can, before we see her in Surabaya."

Nito, despite all efforts the priest had made to teach him European standards of conduct, had been squatting happily at the door, listening. Shamelessly, he rose and cut in, "We don't even know she is in Surabaya. She may be at sea in the *Selene*, which has a talker-over-the-air."

"Of course! In danger, and she goes

to sea, in her fast boat. So, if we go to Banjarmasin to investigate, while we have this engine fitted into the *Aguila*, we can find her all the more quickly."

He strode to the deck, drew a deep breath. Poi Utu' had ceased chanting. The old man smiled and showed all his teeth. "Captain Kirikata was a very brave man."

"You old devil, you should drop with shame! Father Pierre is a good man, and he is grieved, thinking of what you probably did."

Then Nito came out and went over to the 37-millimeter gun and stripped the tarpaulin from it. It was mounted on a carriage, and was exactly like a full sized cannon, except that its telescopic sights were for direct fire. Its shells, designed to demolish machine-gun nests on land, would as readily sink small boats. Nito seized a scuttle butt and heaved it over the side.

"Shoot-target practice, brother! You promised me yesterday."

His big face was beatific.

"All right."

Matalaa crouched beside the little gun, slammed the breech shut when Nito thrust in a solid shot; the shells with TNT bursting charges were far too valuable to waste on targets. With his eye jammed against the sponge-rubber cup on the telescope eyepiece, Matalaa racked the elevating and traversing screws until he had centered the cross hairs on the tub.

It was far out now, bobbing in the wake of the *Aguila*. Matalaa fired. There was an ear-splitting smack, and the barrel jumped back against the recoil cylinder. "Got it!" Nito yelled, dancing up and down. "Knocked a big chunk out! Let me try it."

Nito scored a hit, and that settled target practice for the time. It was too easy to be good sport.

THEY made Banjarmassin one morning shortly before dawn. Matalaa and Father Pierre went ashore, leaving Nito on watch.

Jan Pieters & Company's building, like most of Banjarmassin's waterfront, was dingy. Humidity and the sea and the blistering sun made paint bubble, and metal rust, and wood rot. A small tug was on the ways, ready to be launched.

In the muggy shadows of the barn-like building, a grease-smudged Swede watched a lathe turning down a crankshaft. He was stripped to the waist, and gleaming with sweat. He eyed Matalaa, and resumed chewing *snuus* and spitting.

Two men were at work caulking the hull of a boat beached for overhaul, while a third was chipping scale from the corroded metal. The noise tore at Matalaa's ears, but there was no escaping it, for the grimy office at the far end was of sheet metal that shook from the steady hammering and crashing.

A moon-faced Dutchman in dingy pongee pants and a greasy undershirt had his feet on an old desk. He scrutinized Matalaa for a moment or so before asking, "What do you want?"

"Try speaking French. I don't understand Dutch."

Father Pierre, however, could with not too much effort make himself understood in Jan Pieters' language. It did not take *Mynheer* Pieters very long to decide, "Offhand, yes. I can mount that auxiliary engine and put in a drive shaft and propeller." He reached for his hat and called to the Swede at the lathe. "Olaf! Knock off and come with me to measure up a job."

Matalaa nudged the priest. "You go with them, I don't understand the technicalities anyway."

He went to the cable office and sent

a message to Cornelia's Surabaya address. He signed *Warren Steele*, and made the words noncommittal enough.

Jan Pieters had claimed he could install the engine in two days, unless the job developed difficulties. This gave Matalaa more than enough time to see the town, whose sixty-four thousand inhabitants had their houses sprawled on both banks of the river that emptied into the Java Sea. It had more fascination for him than for a seasoned traveler.

Matalaa had no more than half crossed the market place, where Malay women in gaudy sarongs squatted beside baskets of yams and bananas and mangoes, than he saw Poi Utu. The old man watched three Malays chattering and wrangling about the merits of the fighting cocks they had in wicker cages. Poi Utu did not understand a word of Malay, but somehow, he found everything fascinating. He looked up at Matalaa's approach.

"Matalaa, I have news. The man Garvey is here in Banjarmassin."

"Can't be! He's in jail."

"No, it is true. I have been talking to the gods. I know your old enemy is here. Maybe we can kill him while we are waiting for the putt-putt machine." The last was spoken on a note of blood-thirsty wistfulness.

Matalaa seized the wizard's skinny arm. "Look here, once and for all! There will not be any killings. Garvey made trouble for us—that is so, but the man of greater evil, Borden Pitts, is dead."

Poi Utu looked skeptical.

Matalaa had no real reason for taking such a generous attitude toward the trader who had tried to kidnap King Torkusa and steal a shipload of copra; but Father Pierre had convinced the red-headed giant that nursing grudges



BULL GARVEY

was profitless; and certainly they did not have time for Poi Utu to start a private crusade.

A MOTOR car honked, and bullock carts pulled aside. Women with baskets of fish on their heads scampered right and left, and children ran squealing. A Japanese chauffeur drove the open car, which was canary yellow. In the back seat was a mountain of a man in white tropicals that exaggerated his bulk. A Malay servant, standing on the luggage rack, held a parasol over the big man's head.

His three chins quivered as the chauffeur booted the brakes. He leaned over, slowly; the parasol followed. "Ah . . . good afternoon, Captain Steele," he said in English. "I am Willem van der Groot, the resident. Welcome to Banjarmassin! I envy all you visitors who can leave again. Yes, and I have a message for you."

"Thank you, sir. But how did you recognize me?"

"Cornelia van Houten told me all about you. She was here with her father, and their guest, a wealthy Amer-

ican. An international banker, I gathered."

"Oh." Matalaa's smile became mechanical.

"Climb in, Captain! Your man can ride with Hakamoto, up in front. Just think, in one week, a second visitor. Here, Captain, a drink!"

He dug an earthenware bottle of Bols from a side pocket, and two miniature mugs; too small for beer, and in the same proportion, entirely too large for spirits. Matalaa tasted the oily stuff and grimaced. Van der Groot laughed and slapped his thigh. "You have to learn to like it. But a great drink, smooth, eh?"

Hakamoto tooled the car through the native quarter, with all its reek of offal and spices and fish and coconut oil; then through a settlement of prim, white-painted Dutch cottages.

"You must have *rijstafel* with me! Damnation, Captain! This is a pleasure. And so you got Jan Pieters to install an engine? No better man in the Indies. Too bad—" He burred on, taking Matalaa's answers for granted. "Too bad Miss van Houten was in such a hurry. Charming girl. So pretty."

"That message, *Mynheer*, if you please."

"Oh, of course. *Gott!* I am absent-minded! She is going to Sibolga. In a great hurry. I am asking myself, is it an elopement, a sudden romance, a sensible girl's natural wish to avoid a *gottverdort* stupid formal wedding?"

Matalaa went poker-faced. He knew that van der Groot's hints could be true; why wouldn't an international banker want to marry Cornelia, and why should she not be fascinated by a man of her own world? But her mysterious call for help did not suggest romance. The only thing to do was to keep his own counsel.

At van der Groot's house, the absent-minded official remembered that one of his servants had told him of a priest who was aboard the *Aguila*. "Here you leave the good father sweltering in his cabin! Let me send for him at once, he must join us at *rijstafel*."

"Please let me send my man," Matalaa insisted. "Your servants will be quite busy. Let me take your pen a moment. Yes, and a bit of paper."

He wrote only a few words; he was done when Poi Utu came to get the *chit*, which read: *Join us at dinner—but see that the Aguila is watched.*

CHAPTER X

OLD ENEMY, REFOUND

THE following afternoon, Matalaa received an answer to his cable, which had been forwarded from Surabaya by radio to the *Selene*. Cornelia was in Sibolga. *Come when engine is installed. Will wait. Hurry.*

Matalaa let Nito and the crew go ashore, while he and Father Pierre watched Jan Pieters, his tow-headed Swede, and a crew of Malays mount the powerful engine. Matalaa, however, paid little attention to the work, for he was too busy wondering about Cornelia's radiogram.

Why was she in Sibolga? Was she actually there? In any case, Harley Byrne's presence worried him. Neither he nor Father Pierre had become familiar enough with the world events, back in isolated Ua Paepae, to recognize Byrne as a commentator on international affairs.

Around noon of the next day, the *Aguila* slid down the ways and into the water. For an hour or more, Matalaa found it quite thrilling to maneuver about without a stitch of canvas; though for all the engine's power, the speed was



RANKIN

decidedly disappointing. Jan Pieters shook his head when he noted vibration of the propeller shaft, but swore that he could fix that before sundown.

So Matalaa went ashore for another look at Banjarmassin, and Poi Utu stalked grandly after him; a man gained "face" by having a retainer at his heels.

They went along the river, whose banks were crowded with houseboats where Chinese families had founded a floating town; there were junks with high poops, swift Malay *prahus*, and an occasional lateen-rigged *dhow* from the Red Sea: it was all fascinating to Matalaa Steele, who had grown up dreaming of sailboats and power boats and steamboats as well as war canoes paddled by forty Marquesan warriors.

Equatorial nightfall caught him well away from town, and some distance upstream. As he turned to retrace his steps, he heard the sounds of the nearby village: the squawking of a chicken whose flight ended in the family pot, the yapping of scavenger dogs, the grumbling bellow of a domesticated buffalo.

But as those homely sounds and smells faded a little, Matalaa heard something which made him stop, cock an ear, and beckon to Poi Utu.

Halfway between town and the sea was a ravine which during the rains was flooded and fed the river; now it was a steep and boulder-scattered gash whose straight walls were half hidden by vines. Natives chattered, yelled wrathfully; a deep voiced white man cursed, and wood splintered.

"Gang up on me, huh? I'll knock your bloody heads off!"

Matalaa had heard that voice before; and Poi Utu said, "Only one man bellows that way. Bull Garvey."

Matalaa dashed into the dusky ravine, and by the light of a small fire he saw a group of Malays armed with wavy bladed *krisses*. A broad-chested man, his back against the cliff, stood there, club in hand. He parried and slugged, beating aside blades, cracking the heads of the Malays who were trying to cut him to pieces.

Matalaa snatched a chunk of driftwood left by high water, and yelled, "Hold them!"

The man was Bull Garvey, trickster and South Sea ruffian, but for all that, a fighter. Matalaa had tracked him down, cornered him, trapped him into admissions that damned the arch-criminal of Polynesia.

All that was well and good. But seeing a dozen Malays hack the man to pieces was something else. Matalaa stretched his long legs and shouted a fearsome challenge.

Some of the Malays whirled, blades ready. Others hurled jagged rocks. Matalaa plied his chunk of driftwood heroically. The size of the weapon made it impressive and awed the fierce little swordsmen, though its bulk slowed Matalaa.

When the bludgeon landed, a man crumpled, but Matalaa's guard was left open, and *krisses* darted in. He did not try to parry; instead, he closed his guard, and took a long leap backward. The wavy blades bit and raked, but did no real damage, though blood began to trickle down his ribs.

He had won an instant, and the club rose for another sweep. Behind him, a pistol crackled. Poi Utu charged, firing as he ran. Bull Garvey made the most of the distraction, and bounded out of his corner. The Malays ran, mainly because of the unexpected gunfire from the flank.

"Get out of here," Matalaa gasped. "Before they find out that Poi Utu didn't hit anyone."

They stumbled back over the rocks, and to the river. After a hundred yards of sprinting, Matalaa slacked his pace. Garvey finally asked, "Uh—look here, kid, what was the idea of helping *me*?"

"A mistake, at first. I was too surprised, and I couldn't believe it was your foghorn voice. Though Poi Utu had told me you were in town. And you saved my life once, you know."

"Huh! What are you doing here?"

"I'm skipper of the *Aguila*."

"The hell you are!"

HIS amazement and embarrassment were genuine. As the lights of Banjarmassin's native quarter winked out of the gloom, Garvey went on, "I know you hate my guts, but— Well, I want to work my way to the next port."

"You are a fugitive from justice," Matalaa reminded him. "And would you be happy, being a seaman on your old ship?"

By the glow of the peanut oil lamps in a Chinese gambling house doorway, Matalaa saw the desperation in the broad shouldered bully's rugged face.

Fearless as ever, but haggard and hungry and unshaven.

"You can go to Hell with the *Aguila!*" he growled. "After all, you did enough for me half an hour ago."

Poi Utu ceased fumbling with the Japanese revolver which he must have inherited from Captain Kirikata and said, "King's Son, help this man."

Garvey, who understood Marquesan, scratched his head. "I am everlastingly damned, this is the man that wanted to roast and eat me."

"You'd rather risk a cannibal than any more of Banjarmassin?"

"Buddy, being on the beach is tough. That lousy van der Groot treats me like I was dirt. By the way, I ain't a jail-breaker. I can prove it. That guy Rankin played square; I copped a plea, and got off with six months paroled in his custody."

"If Poi Utu says so, I'll gamble," Matalaa answered.

Not far ahead, the *Aguila* was made fast. Father Pierre was at the forepeak and when he recognized Matalaa, he said, "There is no more engine vibration in the shaft, though tomorrow, we might have a test run."

There was no time for an answer, for a squad of khaki-clad native police trotted up. After them came a motorcycle. A fat man filled the sidecar to overflowing. Garvey muttered, "Here it is! I'm being framed."

"Get aboard!" Matalaa called to Nito, in Marquesan. "Get ready to cast off! Here's a new member for our crew."

He turned to face the native police. They addressed him in Dutch, and tried to get to the gangplank. Matalaa shook his head. "Get out!"

Nito and the crew were spreading canvas. The big man lurched out of the sidecar; it was van der Groot, and

he was not affable. For all his bulk, he moved quickly, with a deceptive waddle.

"Here, here! You may not know it, but that man is under arrest."

"What for?"

"That is my business."

"Well . . ." Matalaa grinned engagingly. "I hate to harbor a fugitive from justice. But he said he was on the beach, and it seems to me you'd be glad to get rid of him. What has he done?"

"Rioting, discharging firearms. *Gottverdom!* He and a couple of other ruffians attacked a crowd of unarmed Malays."

Instinct told Matalaa that Garvey was being framed. Though quarrelsome and loud, Bull was no one's fool; it was unlikely that he would go out of his way to attack a half dozen high-tempered Malays, notorious for their murderous wrath. Also, the story had traveled too rapidly by far; and finally, left to their own devices, Malays would not appeal to the law. They would wait for a better chance and knife their man.

"Get out of the way, Captain," van der Groot snapped.

He lumbered forward.

Matalaa delivered a punch without winding up, but for once, his hard fist was not quite heavy enough. The big Dutchman staggered, but did not drop. He roared, and the native police piled in, truncheons ready. Matalaa sidestepped; he straightarmed the first cop, snatched his club, and thrust his man bodily athwart his fellows. He turned to settle van der Groot, but the ponderous Dutchman had picked a way of his own.

He was pulling a nickel-plated revolver from his shoulder holster. Matalaa lunged in with the club. Van der Groot fired. He was a shade hasty, and though the flecks of burning powder stung Matalaa's cheeks, the truncheon

clipped van der Groot alongside the head. This time he crumpled up.

The police, in the meanwhile, had swooped around. Before Matalaa could swing to face them, they pulled him to his knees, and clubbed him as he sank.

Matalaa made a dive, and the sudden lurch took his assailants with him to the ground. In their swift descent, they could not use their clubs. That was what Matalaa needed, and the brief respite cleared his head. He rolled over, and lashed out with his boots. In the meanwhile, Nito had gone over the side, and Poi Utu followed him.

The old man had a Marquesan sword of hardwood, edged with shark teeth. That scattered the police. Matalaa, regaining his feet, shouted, "Get that engine going! Before van der Groot—"

The roar blotted out his words. The *Aguila* moved slowly from the pier. Then the wind made her sails swell; she made way, and the town faded astern. Ashore, van der Groot recovered enough to curse and fire his big revolver.

BUT they had not reached the open sea when a power boat began to overhaul the *Aguila*. A searchlight lanced the darkness, and a siren screamed. A sailing ship with an auxiliary had not a chance. Garvey said, "Let me take the wheel! Hell, kid, I'll get you out of this!"

Matalaa remembered how skillfully Bull had kept the *Aguila* from crashing on the dangerous reef that guarded King Torkusa's village. "Go ahead," he said. "If you're wrong, it's jail in Banjarmassin for every man of us!"

The speedboat had to weave in and out among the native craft that blocked the inner harbor, whereas the *Aguila* was already in the clear.

When the searchlight beam picked the *Aguila*, Garvey roared, "Heads down! They'll shoot!"

He was right. A machine gun sputtered, and a burst thudded into the *Aguila's* deck house. Matalaa jerked the cover off the 37-millimeter gun. Father Pierre thought things were going too far, and said, "Resisting an official in the performance of his duty—"

"Something is crooked! Someone has lied to van der Groot, or else he is bent on finishing Garvey!"

Matalaa squatted beside the gun, and Nito threw in a shell. But just then, Garvey yelled, "Never mind shooting! Let 'em gain a bit."

"Are you crazy?"

"Trust me, kid! Do like I say. Hold your hat!"

The *Aguila* turned swiftly, her rail almost awash. Another turn, and then she straightened out of her *S* turn. Garvey shouted, "Now give her the gas!"

The speedboat had gained, and the searchlight swept the deck. Matalaa, still skeptical, was ready to throw a one-pounder shell into the speedboat's cockpit. But before he could fire the shot that would outlaw him all over the Dutch Indies, the pursuer lost way. He could tell from the sound that someone was reversing, then racing the engine. Garvey boomed, "Being on the beach has something! Couple of fishermen showed me that bank, a new one. Van der Groot is aground and he'll stay aground till morning!"

Nito took the wheel, and Bull joined Matalaa. "I didn't have time to tell you why I was getting pushed around in Banjarmassin. It is account of a radio station I run into, hidden in the jungle. Whoever runs it is trying to have me blotted out. And van der Groot, the pig-headed fool, wouldn't listen to me when I tried to tell him."

Matalaa nodded. "There is something odd about van der Groot, but I am not sure that he is a fool. That is why I gave you a lift."

CHAPTER XI

PROBLEM IN JOURNALISM

MATALAA was not afraid of arrest in Sibolga, on the strength of any request van der Groot might send by wire to the resident of that district in Sumatra. As nearly as he could figure it out, someone had made a fool of van der Groot, and when the big Dutchman realized that the operator of a secret radio station had been using him as a cat's paw, he would drop the entire affair and protect his important dignity.

So Matalaa sailed into the crescent-shaped harbor of Sibolga, which years ago had been a trading post second only to Benkulen. Garvey, just in case there was a demand for his arrest, had transhipped to a Malay *prahu*, early that morning; and its skipper, Hamid, was to follow, either returning Garvey to the *Aguila* when she anchored, or else taking him to some port where van der Groot would not look for him.

Nito and Matalaa and Father Pierre rowed out to the *Selene*; she had been anchored well offshore, ever since the disappearance of Harley Byrne.

Cornelia met them at the rail, and her father was at her heels. Matalaa could almost feel the level gray gaze of van Houten; that, and the story van der Groot had told about Harley Byrne made Matalaa very dignified and reserved. He said, "It's nice seeing you again."

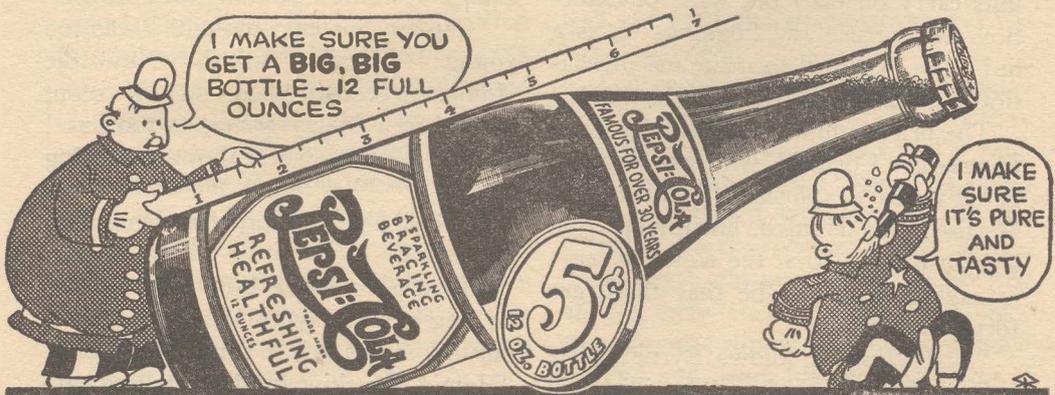
Cornelia looked worried, and for all the smile that greeted her old friends, trouble darkened her eyes. She had scarcely taken her guests to the saloon when she said, "I know you're bursting with curiosity about my messages."

She explained what had happened, and why. She admitted that she had not been in any personal peril. "So we came to Sibolga to overtake you."

"The man was lying!" Matalaa flared up. "We arrived in Banjarmassin four days after you left. The morning you landed, we had just blown our way out of a nest of Japanese who had taken over an unadministered island. Where's your banker friend?"

"Banker? Oh. Harley Byrne is a newspaper man. And most of this hurry is on his account. He was kidnaped within a few hours after we reached Sibolga. All we know is that he went to the cable office. Some natives claim they saw him step into a hired car. From then on, nothing."

"For ransom?"



Dirk van Houten said, "No. That is the worst of it. I need hardly tell you I'd cheerfully pay any sum to get his liberty. His disappearance puts me into an embarrassing—a ruinous position. And we cannot appeal to the authorities because that would only start a pretty scandal."

"They may have murdered him?" Matalaa suggested.

Cornelia sighed. "No, thank God for that!"

Her father dug into a desk and got a handful of news clippings, all dated since Byrne's kidnaping. "Look. Syndicated column, and signed news items, cabled all over the world. Some in Dutch, some in the English papers of Singapore. The *Manila Tribune*, which never used his column, is running it now!"

Matalaa let Father Pierre see the file. The priest, after a little more than a glance, looked up. "Why, this is incredible! Conditions are worse in the Dutch Indies than they ever were in the Belgian Congo. An international disgrace—I never heard—I never suspected such things went on in Java—in Sumatra—"

Dirk van Houten leaped to his feet. "There are no such things in the Indies! We do not oppress the natives, we do not let the native rajas and sultans carry on their old ways of extortion and torture and floggings! It is a lie! A lie designed to make us international outcasts—do you understand?"

The priest smiled, and raised a hand to reassure Cornelia, who was shocked at her father's explosion. "I believe you, *Mynheer* van Houten, but my reaction was just about what the world at large is saying. Could it be that these are forgeries?"

"No! Whoever knows Byrne's style knows this is genuine. The illicit oil

exporters are using him to create such a sensational scandal that there will be no time for the real rottenness. Byrne, somewhere in Sumatra, is being compelled to write this nonsense. Even if he escapes and retracts later, much damage will have been done, with Europe a hotbed of suspicion and resentment. I refer to the neutrals who are caught between two millstones."

"I think," the priest said after a moment, "that you had best tell the whole story to the governor-general."

Van Houten protested, "How can I? Look at my position! If Byrne is finally murdered, that will make it seem that I and other Dutch officials finished him in self-defense. Ammunition for Japan, is what it is."

MATALAA'S story of his escape from the secret garrison in the Banda Sea only strengthened van Houten's conviction. Matalaa said, "Your suspicions about illicit oil export seem all too well founded. Now, if we can find Byrne quickly enough, give him a chance to tell what actually happened to him, his own true story will scotch all these false reports."

Van Houten ceased pacing the deck. "That is right! But what can you do? You look too young—good God, man! This is much worse than the illicit oil export I wanted you to track down."

"Captain Kirikata thought I was too young!" Matalaa smiled. "Now the *Aguila* is conspicuous, so I'll scout around in a Malay *prahu*, as soon as I can find a clue to where they are keeping Byrne."

"What clue?" Cornelia demanded, hopelessly.

Matalaa told her how Garvey was lurking in a Malay *prahu* until he found out that it was safe to rejoin the *Aguila*. "Hamid, the skipper who is taking care

of Garvey," he concluded, "is a very sharp witted Malay. He can get me native gossip that no one connected with the police or official circles would ever get. Just as it was back home, we natives had secrets from the French gendarmes."

"I hope so, Matalaa. But Bull Garvey—aren't you taking a chance, trusting him?"

"I wouldn't worry. He is rough and he is tricky, but he knows he can gain much more helping than blocking us."

Van Houten said, "The way he ran van der Groot aground shows he is handy. So do things your own way, young man! Here are the clippings, and if you can find any clues in them, you are no less than damnably remarkable!"

CHAPTER XII

GHOST ISLAND

WHEN he was in Tahiti, Matalaa had picked up quite a bit of dialect from a Malay boatswain; and now this knowledge gave him a clue to Harley Byrne's prison. Moreover, Hamid, the skipper of the *prahu* which Dirk van Houten had chartered for Matalaa's quest, supplied enough native gossip to confirm the deduction.

Harley Byrne's trouble-making articles had one curious feature. Byrne seemed to have ghosts on the brain. Appropriately enough, he wrote that Bouraboudour's mighty ruins in Java were peopled by ghosts of an island civilization. Nothing remarkable in that, of course. Then he went wild; he seemed unable to think of any way of telling of the oppression of the natives except by saying that on such and such an island, they stood not a ghost of a show. Neither would the raja of any island have a ghost of a chance when the natives revolted. . . .

So Matalaa, with his red hair dyed black, was sailing to Pulau Hantu. In Malay, the name means *Ghost Island*. In Malay slang, moreover, *hantu* means "police spy, secret informer." Hamid, the monkey-faced, wiry little skipper, said to Matalaa, "By Allah! Pulau Hantu is a good place to hide a man. It is wild and rocky, and inhabited only by Malay fishermen."

The *prahu*, beloved alike by pirate and fisherman, skimmed over the blue water; it could sail without getting a second glance in waters where the *Aquila* would be conspicuous. Hamid, at first uneasy when Matalaa insisted on trying his hand at navigation, soon learned that the young giant from Ua Paepae was more than equal to the task.

So now Hamid sat on deck, taking tobacco and areca nut and slaked lime from his brass case, to make up another chew of the mixture that kept Malays spitting sixteen hours a day. Matalaa was not sure that they did not chew in their sleep.

Like Nito and Poi Utu, he wore a skullcap and red jacket and striped *sarong*. In his sash, he had a *kris*, and a pistol.

The rest of the armament was hidden in the forecastle, along with the trade goods brought as gifts for the Malay fishermen; the captured 37-millimeter gun, and the three Japanese rifles that had survived the destruction of Kiri-kata's garrison.

Approaching Pulau Hantu, Matalaa focused the binoculars Father Pierre had given him. The island was a peak rising from the Indian Ocean; its slopes were overgrown with forest, and the shoreline was indented with coves, small bays, and precipitous inlets. Just ahead, there was a village, and since the sun was dipping, Matalaa decided to land and begin his investigation.

AS THE *prahu* approached, the fishermen who sat near their beached boats flung aside the nets they were mending and ran out to meet the strangers; though first, those who were unarmed hurried to their bamboo huts to get *krisses* and straight-bladed *sundangs*. Gaily clad women, taking nothing for granted, scattered into the jungle to await developments.

Hamid's beady eyes instantly picked the headman from the crowd. He was wrinkled, and his teeth were filed to points; but his silver-hilted *kris* rather than his age identified him.

Hamid said, "Peace be with you! We come as friends. We bring presents." He pointed at Matalaa, who was nearly a foot taller than any Malay. "Our chief is a man of honor, and he leaves his far-off home because of the vengeance he took in a feud."

Everyone brightened; vengeance they could understand. And when the tobacco and calico were dealt out, the women and children came from hiding to get their share.

The women served fish, and rice, and blistering sauces. Then the villagers listened to Hamid tell grandiose stories of Matalaa's valiant and quite impossible deeds in a land so far away that people talked a different dialect of Malay, and grew much taller.

"We have other foreigners," old Abbas, the headman said. "On the other side of the island. We let them stay because they give us presents."

"What kind of presents?" Matalaa asked. His heartbeat quickened, for here was indication of the truth of his theory.

Abbas answered, "Knives, calico, tobacco, sugar. And we give them fish, and some of the rice we grow in the swampy quarter. Sometimes, we get empty bottles from them. Like this one."

He picked up an earthenware flask with a narrow neck. Matalaa had seen similar containers in Captain Kirikata's quarters. Rice wine, Father Pierre had said, was the Japanese national drink, which the yellow men imported to whatever land they visited.

"Do they weave batik or make brass trays?" Matalaa asked, feigning innocence. "It seems they do not fish or grow rice."

"No. They sit in their houses, waiting for *prahus* to bring them black liquid which they store in big vats. Big iron vats, higher than two houses, some of them as big as this whole village." He turned and called to one of his wives.

When she came running with an earthenware bowl, he went on, "See, here is some of the stuff. Some say it is good for medicine, but I do not know. I use it for a lamp."

A twist of rag was fastened to a piece of wood floating in the black liquid. Before the headman took a brand from the fire to light the crude lamp, Matalaa knew that he had found something worth investigating. Unquestionably the "other foreigners" were Japs and unquestionably the Japanese had a petroleum storage depot on this far-flung, unadministered island. What better place could they find to hold Harley Byrne captive?

"*Tûanku*," Matalaa said, with grave courtesy, using the ceremonious address reserved for Malay kings, "I have never seen vats a tenth as large as you say those foreigners have. By Allah, how I would like to help your people carry rice and fish to these odd people, so that I might but behold them."

"It is good," Abbas said. "Without me, you could not go in. They have a wall of sharp wires, and men with guns stand guard." He sighed. "They keep

their men inside the fence; else we could kill them and take their guns."

THAT night Matalaa and Nito and Poi Utu discussed the details of their plan. The old wizard squatted in one corner, and fired darts at the corner post of the shack that the headman had allotted his guest. "Put that blowpipe away and listen," Matalaa said sternly.

"I am listening." Poi Utu raised the six foot length of hollow cane to his lips. His cheeks swelled, there was a puff, and a dart smacked home within a hair of the others he had fired. "This Malay blow gun does not make noise, I think I would like it better than a pistol."

The slender missiles had been dipped in a poison that either paralyzed the victim or killed him outright. To Matalaa, such a weapon was both barbarous and treacherous—this was his white blood speaking. The savage in him, however, understood the uselessness of trying to discipline a witch-doctor.

"We will walk into their camp," Nito said as he summed up the plan. "We are dressed as Malays, and who will suspect us?"

So the following morning, Matalaa and Nito joined the file of Malays set-

ting out across the island with baskets of rice, fish, bananas, and mangoes. Poi Utu refused flatly to carry anything. He was too busy practicing with his blowpipe. He straggled contentedly behind the procession of bearers that filled the steep trails leading through dense ferns, the bamboo clusters, patches of sharp edged elephant grass.

"Odd that they don't sail this stuff around in boats," Matalaa said to Hamid. "Scrambling over boulders is hard work."

"Allah! Do you think I did not ask about that? The yellow men do not like to have boats land along their part of the shore."

Presently, the trail cleared a ridge of lava. The wind that swept from the other side of the island was heavy with the odor of petroleum. Far below was a cove whose shore was thick with bamboo shacks. From the sea, this was nothing but a Malay village. Only from the heart of the island would one see that all this was camouflage to conceal a great pier loaded with drums of oil.

Behind this pier was the tank farm: the conical covers of a dozen or more circular tanks peeped through the foliage. Here and there, Matalaa could pick out the corrugated iron roof of a building.

Then came the downgrade climb,

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along the lip of a ravine, and descent into jungle. The path ended at a clearing beyond the underbrush, with the widely spaced tall trees shaping a canopy, whose edge was a barbed wire stockade.

A sentry shouted, and a noncom came running. The khaki-clad new arrival wore glasses and could speak fluent Malay. He greeted the headman and ordered the guard to open the gate; but first, each porter had to draw his *keris* and lay it on the ground. Only when they were unarmed were the porters admitted within the enclosure. Everywhere were signs of disciplined activity.

On the veranda of one of the corrugated iron barracks that flanked the high barbed wire fence, Matalaa saw a man in a white shirt and white slacks; a man whose height was apparent, even when hunched in a camp chair, bent over a table. The man's hair was sandy, and brushed straight back. His face, rugged and tanned, was thin and angular.

As the porters tramped into the area, he straightened up, looked at the gate which the sentry was closing. His eyes met Matalaa's, and Matalaa knew that this was Harley Byrne. Matalaa would have recognized him from Cornelia's description alone; the snapshot she had showed him left no doubt.

But the White Savage gave no sign. He came almost abreast of Byrne, turned his face to the right for just an instant.

"I'll be back later, Byrne," he whispered in English.

Byrne's expression changed for an instant. He became tense; then immediately he relaxed. Two Japanese civilians came from a doorway at the further end of the veranda. Byrne turned toward them, and said, "Mr. Hakamoto,

if you have any suggestions, I'll start writing."

Hakamoto! The name stung Matalaa like a whip. Then van der Groot himself waddled out. He was scowling, and his face was flushed. He was saying, "*Gottverdom!* Listen, Hakamoto, there is a limit to the nonsense you can have Byrne write!"

The presence of the Banjarmassin resident and his Oriental servant was a good deal more than Matalaa had expected. It also definitely added to their danger. When Matalaa and Nito had left their burdens and straightened to their full height, their size would instantly set them apart, and attract the Dutchman's eye. Van der Groot was gross, but he was far from stupid. His sharp glance was almost certain to stab through Matalaa's semi-disguise—and in this armed enemy camp, the White Savage recognized was the same thing as the White Savage dead. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

BATTLE AND FLIGHT

AS THEY heaped the foodstuffs in the warehouse, Matalaa said quietly to Nito, "I saw Byrne, and van der Groot. We must hide, or he'll spot us. Where's Poi Utu?"

"Out in the jungle, I guess." Nito shrugged. Let the white pig spot them, his gesture said. There would be one white pig less in the world.

The Malays were leaving the storehouse, to cross to the other side of the area to get their trade goods. Matalaa had slipped behind a pile of rations, and Nito, at Matalaa's firm command, was heading for cover. In another moment, the doors would be closed. Suddenly there burst out a *clump-clump* of heavy feet, and an excited chatter in Japanese.

Matalaa knew that something had gone wrong, even before van der Groot roared, "In there! The two big ones! You fools might have known they're not Malays!"

Guards with rifles ran toward the doorway. The Dutchman towered over them, and shouted, "Stop, you! Or we'll shoot!"

The leveled rifles gave Nito no choice but to stop in his tracks. Van der Groot yelled, "That's one of them. Look for the other!"

The Japanese in command pointed and jabbered. The squad went forward at the double. Matalaa knew that he would be discovered as soon as the squad returned from locking up Nito.

All eyes were centered curiously on the tall Marquesan. This gave Matalaa a moment's advantage. Pantherlike, he darted from his cover, carrying a basket of pineapples. He grabbed one and hurled it with tremendous speed and shattering force. At the same time he uncorked a yell that made the tin roof shudder.

The pineapple caught the Japanese officer full in the face. Blood and juice spurted; the yellow man lifted off his feet and slammed back hard against the corrugated walls. Matalaa wheeled when the startled guards turned on him. He hurled a second pineapple, catching van der Groot squarely in the stomach. The Dutchman doubled up as though a mule had kicked him.

The disorganized guards whirled, firing a wild volley that missed the man who had attacked them from the flank. Now Nito had his chance; and he made the most of it. He snatched up a heavy case of canned goods and smacked it down on the heads of the nearest two of the squad that had swung from him and toward Matalaa.

Their second volley would have cut the white savage in half, if it had connected; but the yellow men had lost a split second slamming in fresh cartridges. Matalaa lunged to cover behind a stack of rations; he darted down the narrow space between the high-heaped rows, and as the squad scattered to cut off his escape, he pushed a stack over with one powerful heave of his right arm.

THE guards jumped back as the tower of cases buckled and crashed into the aisle. Cases rolled, bowling the little yellow men down like tenpins. And Nito, darting in empty-handed, snatched a rifle from one luckless soldier who was too upset to stop him.

He began shooting, and Matalaa popped up from behind his barricade to hurl a tub of smoked fish; then a case of rice wine smashed over the top like a shell from a broadside.

Matalaa and Nito were now both armed, sweeping the survivors before them, shooting and bayoneting like demons. When they reached the open space, they saw that the empty-handed Malays were dashing wildly toward the gate. The sentry lay face down, and like beggar urchins scrambling for a solitary copper, every Malay was intent on snatching his rifle.

A file of guards from the waterfront came trotting out from between two other storehouses. The noncom pointed and yelled. Matalaa ducked behind one of the barrels of water set about for use in case of fire. "Run!" he said to Nito. "I'll cover your escape, then you cover me."

Men shooting on the run rarely hit anything except by accident. Nito bounded after his Malay comrades. Then Matalaa cut loose.

The newcomers, hearing only the disturbance and not having the details, had not expected one troublemaker to be lurking in ambush.

A guard dropped. A second spun in his tracks and crashed with his rifle to the paving, then a third. Matalaa's rifle was empty, and the surviving guards were diving for cover. They opened fire on the barrel that sheltered Matalaa. Bullets smacked through the thick staves. The water checked and deflected them, but when the guards recovered their wits, they would catch Matalaa from both sides quickly enough.

Nito had ducked into the jungle, just beyond the gate, to cover Matalaa's dash, but the sudden shift had blocked the plan. Until Nito circled around to get into position, he could not pick off any of the men that had Matalaa bottled up. And it was now a matter of seconds.

Matalaa glanced swiftly around him.

The gate was closing, sliding along its overhead rail. Gravity pulled it shut, once the catch that held it open was released. Two feet more, and Matalaa would be trapped.

Then the sentry's prostrate body checked the advance of the panel that rolled on its trolley suspension. A stray bullet could jar it into motion, but for a moment, it held.

Matalaa had no time for a sniping duel, and he could not wait for Nito to get into position to cover the dash across the area. The guards, he knew, were jumpy and erratic from the unexpected outburst; so he put his shoulder to the heavy water barrel, intending to roll it over. The sudden move would trick them into dividing their fire between him and the barrel, and being second-rate marksmen, there was a chance they would miss both.

But Matalaa checked himself. A man

yelled in English, from across the area, "Don't! Gate's closing!"

Byrne, pressing against the bars of his window, pointed. The gate had resumed its motion; it had brushed past the guard, and now it had latched. Out in the jungle, a military rifle crackled.

Nito had gotten into position, but because of broken ground and dense foliage, he had lost the seconds needed to cover Matalaa's escape. His bullets *zinged* from the gate pillars, ricocheted from the court; they searched the shadows of the veranda, and drove the guards back. But Matalaa's escape was cut off.

Byrne yelled, "Stay there until I get a light. Then come up!"

Matalaa had no other choice, with the gate closed and his rifle empty. Van der Groot and the officer, having recovered enough to crawl out from under the heaps of rations, came staggering out of the warehouse. They cursed the guards who had scampered for cover when Nito opened fire.

Byrne was back at the window with a lighted kerosene lamp. "Now come up!" he shouted, and heaved the lamp into the area. It broke, and the fuel spread, flaming. In a petroleum depot, fire was deadlier than a hundred men.

Nito fired again. Van der Groot flung his hands up and toppled. A siren blared. The guards, knowing that Matalaa was out of ammunition, ignored him and scattered in every direction, running for fire extinguishers and sand buckets.

MATALAA bounded across the area.

Here was the confusion he needed! In his swift dash upstairs, he met no one. Byrne, at the door of his prison, shouted through the bars, "Keep going! You can't get me out of here!"

Matalaa saw that the metal was too

much for his strength and time. Byrne was yelling, "That hall window—jump for it!"

"Back later. Cornelia sent me!"

"Say hello to her for me, if we don't both make it—here they come! Fire's out!"

He had heard the yelling and the footfalls in the area. Matalaa dashed down the hall. With his rifle butt, he smashed the window, swept the sash clean, and flung the weapon out into the jungle.

A man at the head of the stairs yelled, "Halt! We fire."

Matalaa was on the sill. Below and beyond him was the top strand of the barbed wire. He turned, raising his hands. The battered officer in civilian clothes had a drawn pistol. His only possible reason for not firing was that he wanted to take his prisoner alive.

Somewhere in the jungle, Nito's voice called in English, which most Japanese officers understand, "Matalaa, grab his pistol! Let him get near you and grab his pistol."

Matalaa had been thinking of doing just that, and now Nito, for the gods alone knew what reason, had put the Japanese on guard. "I do not joke. I shoot if necessary. Step down from sill, at once."

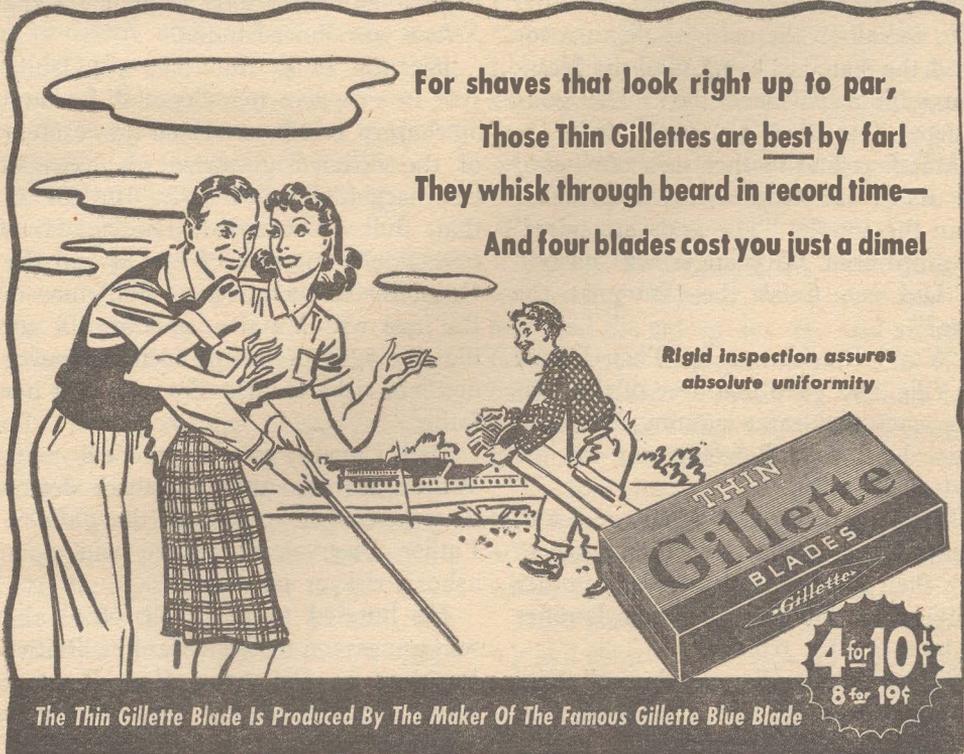
Matalaa froze, a curse choking him.

The officer came toward him with a cat-like vigilance. Catching him off guard now would be impossible. Then he started like a horse stung by a gad-fly. He clawed his throat, and pitched face forward. Matalaa yelled, "Help!" and pointed.

The men following the officer had heard no sound, had seen no move. The trapped fugitive had been at least two

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yards away, and the amazement in his voice convinced them that he understood no more than they did. They hurried forward to help their superior. Unarmed men after all were not impressive.

Matalaa whirled, and bounded to the sill. With one surging leap, he sailed over the barbed wire and hurtled down through dense foliage that broke his fifteen-foot fall. Then the men in the hall began to fire from the window, and bullets riddled the jungle.

Matalaa landed with a barefooted thud, straightened from his crouch, and Nito and Poi Utu were at his side.

Bullets dug in around them.

As the trio loped along a game trail that led uphill, Matalaa panted, "Telling me to snatch his pistol! You fool, that was just what I was trying to do, and he heard you."

Poi Utu smirked with pleasure at his cleverness and screeched: "I told Nito to call so the man would turn toward the sound. Then I used my blow-gun with a poisoned dart. The gods whispered it. And it came about."

Matalaa had neither seen nor heard the small missile that had whisked in from the jungle. "The gods are wise," he murmured. "My anger was hasty."

"Did *you* finish the sentry at the gate?"

"Yes," Poi Utu said. "Then I stole his rifle, and gave it to one of the Malays when they came running. They are cowards, I say! I would not eat the best of them!"

Matalaa answered, "What are we to them? They would have been fools to risk their heads for strangers. Another thing, they had to warn their families to look out for trouble."

"Here is the rifle you threw," Nito said. "I have the one I grabbed. Did I finish the Dutchman?"

"Yes. And that saved Byrne's life."

Nito and Poi Utu were puzzled. "Aué! That is odd."

"Byrne knew van der Groot as an official in Banjarmassin," Matalaa explained. "So Byrne could never leave here alive. But with van der Groot dead, perhaps they may release Byrne, for they don't realize that he knows the position of this island, not that he told it cleverly in his column."

CHAPTER XIV

BULL GARVEY TURNS PIRATE

IN Sibolga, the *Selene* rode at anchor, well out in the crescent-shaped bay. Cornelia and her father were anxiously waiting to learn the result of Matalaa's rescue-cruise to Pulau Hantu; so were the Marquesans who had been left behind on the *Aguila*. Father Pierre was a guest aboard the yacht; and Bull Garvey had signed on as a seaman, for the *Selene* was short-handed.

For the time, Bull had a hideout, just in case van der Groot did trump up charges and demand that the resident of the district authorize his extradition back to Banjarmassin. But for all that, Bull was worried. The van Houtens would not protect him if van der Groot insisted on action. Bull's ace in the hole was Matalaa, and he did not like the idea of his protector running needless risks to help Cornelia and her father.

Bull Garvey was a practical man. Within an hour after Matalaa's departure, he had borrowed all the *guilders* Father Pierre could spare and gone ashore, risk or no risk.

He hurried to the cable office and sent a message to Cyril Rankin, British Resident in Pakalafa: *Van Houtens using Matalaa to pull chestnuts from superhot fire stop van der Groot Banjarmassin resident in radio contact with*

secret Japanese garrison on island Banda Sea stop your interest to investigate.

He reasoned that Rankin would be interested in the secret garrison on an island so near Australia, and that he would ask the Governor-general of the Dutch East Indies to look into the matter; this would entangle van der Groot, and cause that gentleman so much embarrassment that he would have no time to persecute Bull Garvey.

Finally, the resulting investigation would force the van Houtens into the open. Bull Garvey reasoned that van der Groot must have some connection with the tangle that worried the van Houtens; and once Cornelia's father had nothing to gain by secret and unofficial action, Matalaa would be at liberty.

Any way it turned out, Bull had something to gain; and since he knew better than to try to dissuade his present protector and former enemy from suicidal efforts on behalf of Cornelia, he picked this undercover approach. A cry of "Spy!" and even flimsy evidence was certain to arouse Cyril Rankin.

And Bull Garvey was working more effectively than he realized.

He had to pay the tolls, in case Rankin would not accept a collect message from a person of his caliber; but if Rankin should accept the charges, Bull could then repay Father Pierre. Copra-theft, pearl-poaching, blackbirding—they were all in the day's work; but a man had to repay a personal loan.

While waiting for an acknowledgment, Garvey went to the waterfront to see the *Aguila* and her crew.

He loved the schooner he had once commanded, and while his own trickery had cost him his master's ticket, he was free of any malice toward Matalaa; indeed, his begrudged respect for Warren Steele's castaway son had become ad-

miration and gratitude, and now Bull was sincerely concerned lest Cornelia, dazzling a "white savage" with her blond beauty, had sent the boy into more danger than she realized.

"Realized? As if she'd give a damn," Garvey muttered. "Sweet gal in lots of ways, but busy looking out for herself. I wouldn't bring back that Harley Byrne, not even if I could do it standing on my head!"

He had put himself into Matalaa's place, and he considered Byrne a rival for Cornelia's affection; saving the fellow was downright silly. Bull Garvey had never been an idealist; moreover, he was twice Matalaa's age, which might also have had something to do with his practical mind.

THOUGH the sun was high in Sibolga, it was night in Pakalafa, and Cyril Rankin was in his study when Garvey's message arrived. In view of his long list of duties, he had a cable connection with New Zealand, and radio with the world at large. So, for all his isolation, it was not long before his orderly came in with Garvey's bill of complaints.

Rankin thrust aside the memoirs he was writing—*Thirty Years in Burma*—and read the cablegram. He said aloud, for isolation had gotten him into the habit of thinking audibly, "Island in Banda Sea, eh? Blast it, the man could be more than half right!"

Rankin drained his whiskey soda. He settled down to studying the reports of unusual occurrences and rumors which he entered in his journal.

After some minutes, he sat up, frowning and chewing his black cheroot. "My word! Tramp steamer *India Maid*, Colombo to Port Moresby, reported fire and explosions, possible volcanic activity, about one thirty east longitude,

eight south latitude. Now Garvey reports that Cornelia van Houten is using the White Savage to pull some blasted chestnuts out of the blasted fire. . . . Hmmm . . . two nights before the possible volcanic activity, Willem van der Groot inquired about the White Savage—oh, I say, this is thick! Downright baffling . . .”

He began sending radiograms direct. He called British North Borneo, Singapore, and the *Selene*. He kept the ether whirling for an hour or more, and cables out of New Zealand were fairly simmering.

This long-distance investigation by Mr. Rankin would have embarrassed Willem van der Groot and his so-called servant, Hakamoto, had they been in Banjarmassin to answer questions; but they had left town only a few hours after Matalaa had evaded arrest and hurried to Sibolga to meet Cornelia.

That night, after having been towed from the sandbar that checked their pursuit of Matalaa and Bull Garvey, Hakamoto had presented his deductions.

“Continued silence of Captain Kirikata indicates thorough destruction. Also, I learned that Jan Pieters & Company installed in schooner *Aguila*, one engine previously purchased by—” He winked. “By Malay fisherman in Samarinda. Manifestly, Captain Steele purloin engine and launch from Captain Kirikata.”

Van der Groot gulped a tumbler of Bols. “*Gottverdom!* The scoundrel had a gun aboard, a 37-millimeter unless I am mistaken. A wonder he did not blow us out of the water, that night.”

Hakamoto said, “Needless wastage of ammunition. Much cheaper to cause pursuer to go hastily aground.”

This made van der Groot curse deep in his throat for some moments.

“That Steele is too clever. He will be disposed of as soon as he reached Sibolga. Permanently.”

Rising to this emergency, Hakamoto and van der Groot had flown from Banjarmassin to Pulau Hantu to organize an attack on the *Aguila*, presumably in Sibolga, where Steele must surely be trying to help Cornelia find her missing guest, Harley Byrne.

BULL GARVEY, though he did not realize it, had turned the Indies inside out without adding anything to Willem van der Groot’s worries; *mynheer* was already sufficiently upset. But Garvey’s message to Rankin did have one effect: Before the day was much older, a Dutch coast-guard cutter came steaming down from Singkel toward Sibolga. The skipper had received an order from the Governor-general of the East Indies to ask Cornelia’s father an imposing list of questions. Mr. Rankin had turned up a real spy scare!

Van der Groot was not at his office in Banjarmassin. The van Houtens had recently seen van der Groot at his headquarters—

This was something Garvey had not expected. So, sitting under the awning at the forepeak of the *Aguila*, he was alarmed when he saw the coast-guard boat, all white paint and brass, and with the Dutch ensign flying. He cursed van der Groot, and he cursed the van Houtens; he felt that it was their fault that he was in Sibolga, with nothing faster than a sailing ship with an auxiliary engine to take him out of Dutch waters. They had come to arrest him, he thought, and there had to be some way out.

Garvey stood there, blaspheming until he was out of breath. Then he started thinking, and he worked out another twist.

"Look!" he shouted, pointing at the approaching vessel. "Government boat! They are going to Pulau Hantu to arrest Matalaa. I heard this ashore and I could not believe it, I thought the talker-over-the-air was lying. But there is the boat."

"*Aué!*" the Marquesans groaned. "We can't get to Pulau Hantu ahead of that smoke-boat!"

Garvey had them worried, and with Matalaa supposedly in danger, they would risk anything, and without a moment's thought. He said, "We can, if you men are brave!"

The challenge stirred them. "Tell us!" they demanded.

"We'll go over and get the *Selene*, which is faster. If the yellow-haired girl's father will not give us the ship, we'll take her by force. But remember, do not get rough until I tell you. Is that understood?"

"We understand! Lead us!"

In a wink, they had a boat lowered, and were rowing hell-bent for the *Selene*. There still was time, for the government boat was bucking tide, coming into the bay. And the tide helped the oarsmen. By the time Garvey was close enough to hail the yacht, he had the rest of his story planned out.

Van Houten came to the rail. Garvey shouted, "I just found out where Byrne is locked up! Matalaa's on the wrong trail!"

The ladder was lowered without any more question. The Marquesans swarmed up after Garvey. Dirk van Houten said, "Speak up, man! Where?"

There was only one destination that appealed to Garvey, and that was Pulau Hantu. It began to look as if Matalaa might also be wanted by the government; Matalaa had helped him, Bull Garvey, escape from Banjarmassin. But to mention "Ghost Island" would cer-

tainly not jibe with the trick he had used to board the yacht with all the *Aquila's* crew.

So, instead of answering Dirk van Houten's question, Garvey said to the sailors, in Marquesan, "This old man is a coward, he will not help us save Matalaa. Knock him down and lock him up!"

Cornelia, drawn by the voices, ran from the saloon. She understood Marquesan, which her father did not. And she heard more than needed to tell her that Garvey was up to his old tricks. She cried, "Watch out!"

Van Houten was saying, "That cutter is hailing us. We should wait, they can help us—*eh, what's that?*"

He turned to get the words that the wind had half plucked from Cornelia's lips. Garvey uncorked one from the deck, and knocked him cold. No one was going to nail him and drag him back to Banjarmassin. If taken back for trial, he was sure that he would be murdered before he got a hearing. A man with a secret radio station could not afford fussiness.

Matalaa's men overpowered the scanty crew of the *Selene*. In a few minutes, the anchor was weighed, and the yacht was putting out to sea.

Cornelia, frantically waving her scarf, stopped screaming. Garvey laid a big hand over her mouth and hustled her toward her cabin. She bit him; he slapped her. "Now shut up! I need a fast boat to find Matalaa in a hurry! You little fool, do you see that cutter snooping around?"

"You—you pirate!"

"Aw, nuts!" He twisted the key. "Sorry, but business is business."

Two bruised Marquesans with their shirts torn off their broad backs came trotting up to Garvey. "The old man is locked up!"

"Good. Stand over the engineer with a wrench!"

Then Garvey found time to thumb his nose at the cutter, now far astern.

CHAPTER XV

THE SEA WILL BE ON FIRE

WHILE the Malays of Pulau Hantu had very sensibly let Matalaa and his friends sink or swim by their own efforts, his escape from the stockade made them see things in an entirely different light. That impressive feat, along with the rifles and bandoliers that several of their number had seized in their flight from the opening riot in the warehouse, indicated that with Matalaa's leadership they could play a return engagement and get much more priceless booty; principally, the rest of the guns and cartridges of the guards.

There was no sense in bartering produce, in sweating with nets, in struggling through the jungle with fish and rice and fruit to trade for things that could just as well be seized wholesale.

Japanese guards were beating the brush. Every once in a while, a shot shook the gloom; then a ragged volley, with bullets whining from rocky shelves, or clipping off branches. Gecko lizards made raucous and bawdy protests. Parrots screeched wrathfully.

"They're crazy," Nito said to Matalaa, "if they chase us further into the center of this island."

"They have to try it, or else there'll be some wholesale *harikari*. Van der Groot recognized me, and he knew Garvey and I must have talked much together all the way from Banjarmassin to Sibolga. Also, van der Groot and Hakamoto undoubtedly told the officers in charge of this depot that I had friends among the Dutch officials. So, they do not want us to get off the island."

A motor backfired, then roared; as it settled down to an even drumming, Matalaa went on, "A putt-putt boat. A powerful one, too."

For a moment, the sound rose in pitch, and then the note flattened out as the boat swooped further and further away. A second, and a third boat got into action. Abbas, the headman, made a guess. "They are trying to catch someone leaving the island in a *prahu*. They go round and round."

This was presently verified when the stealthy retreat of Matalaa and his newly won allies led to the ridge that commanded the island and the surrounding sea. Searchlights played over the water, and swept the sandy beaches and the stretches of cliff.

The pursuit on foot had been shaken off. Chasing Malays through their own jungles and by night required more than mere valor and endurance, which the little yellow men had; experience was imperative, and the intuition of the savage, and these they lacked.

Abbas said, "Do not worry, brother. No matter how many putt-putt boats they have, a *prahu* can get through. And win in a race, unless the putt-putt is fast as the birds of the sea."

"Some are," Matalaa said, "but so are *prahus*. That does not worry me. I mean, getting away. I have a feud with the yellow men. More than that, they have a prisoner who is my kinsman."

These statements were not entirely accurate, but Matalaa's sketchy Malay demanded short cuts. Moreover, the simple ideas he expressed were things that any Malay could grasp in an instant. Vengeance and aiding a kinsman were the very basis of savage ethics.

There was hardly a rustle, other than the stirring of foliage by the wind; but every man of the group huddled to-

gether near the crest started, and *krisses* gleamed in darkness when a man suddenly blossomed out of the shadows. He said, "Put your swords away! Tell them who I am, King's Son."

IT WAS Poi Utu, and he had loot. There was a flashlight; a rifle and a cartridge belt; and a lump of something wrapped up in a shirt. The old man still had his *sumpitan* and a pouch of darts. He wore spiral puttees wrapped around his skinny calves. Over one shoulder, he had a pair of shoes, the caps freshly cut off to make room for his toes. Poi Utu said to Abbas, "This gun, a present for the *penghulu*."

"What's in the package?" Nito asked.

Poi Utu smiled craftily. "This is the head of the man who yells at the other men. Now, I am going somewhat apart to talk to the dead and find out what the man-who-yells was going to say before I puffed a dart into his neck."

He displayed the severed head. Abbas, who was ten percent Moslem and ninety percent pagan head-hunter, approved more and more of his new friends. Hamid explained, "He is a magician, he will make the dead man speak and tell all the orders he planned to give."

Abbas said, "By Allah, he *is* a magician," and patted the breech of the rifle. "Guns have strong magic, which is why the Dutch forbid them to the tribesmen."

One of the runners Abbas had sent to the village at the outbreak of trouble returned soon after Poi Utu went to make magic. He said, "My lord, the yellow men go about in a putt-putt boat, around and around."

"We saw that! What news?"

"They go from village to village along the shore, counting the *prahus*. They forbid that anyone leaves."

Nito and Matalaa took turns watching while the raiders slept. Mosquitos hovered in buzzing swarms, and gnats closed in in clouds. The smudge fires of Malay villages were never fully appreciated until the presence of an enemy prohibited their use. A betraying glow might make the petroleum depot guards renew the pursuit.

At dawn, when Matalaa and Abbas crept back toward the depot, they saw that the guards had been at work all night; by flares and lantern light, they had cleared away the jungle. The width of the once narrow girde was now surprising; originally cut as a fire guard, it was now wide enough to make an attack outright suicide.

Matalaa could feel the Malay *penghulu's* dismay. Valor, he said, was one thing; folly was something else. But if a man had a feud, and a kinsman to rescue, doubtless Allah would guide him. This, rendered without any shamefacedness about backing down, told Matalaa what he had begun to suspect was the chief difference between a white man and a "native."

At first outraged to learn that King *Torkusa* was not his father, that the stalwart Marquesans were kinsmen only by adoption, Matalaa was becoming more and more resigned to being the son of Warren Steele.

No white man worth his salt would have backed down at the sight of the Japanese preparedness for attack. Abbas, however, and almost any Marquesan, for that matter, was not bothered by matters of principle. If Matalaa, a very pleasant and brave young man, was fool enough to continue his fight against barbed wire and a well defended stockade, doubtless

Allah or some other god would guard and guide him; and if not, it was sad but still no enduring cause for grief to Abbas and his villagers.

They were right, too. Matalaa admitted that. He could accept their logic, and forget all about Cornelia's problem, particularly ignoring Harley Byrne, whose peril seemed to drive Cornelia to distraction. But being a white man seemed to forbid such easy logic.

Father Pierre had never lectured to him about the "white man's burden." There just seemed to be such a thing, and Matalaa intended to carry it; without resentment, and already, with a touch of pride, instead of his first dismay and wrath at not being a "native."

"The old man tells me you are a king's son," Abbas said. "I also am the son of a king, and so Allah will guide you as he guides kings. When you fought, down there, and when you let your wizard give me this rifle, I knew you were the son of a great man."

Matalaa knew that it was not cowardice that made Abbas back down. It was merely common sense, the obligation of a village *penghulu* to his people. "Allah will doubtless show a way," Matalaa said. "In that tin-roofed building is a kinsman they will now soon kill for my sake."

THE patrol launches were still circling the island. In addition, "fishing" *prahus* circled about in the bay; the men were dressed like Malay fishermen, but Abbas assured Matalaa that they were yellow men, who for all their hours on the water, always had to buy fish.

"That is their custom the world over." Matalaa remembered Father Pierre's lessons. "They love to play at being fishermen, but they never bring

in any fish. They go to all foreign lands and buy boats and sail up and down the coasts making pictures and sounding the depth of the water."

Abbas was very polite in his reception of this incredible tale. "God does what He will do!"

When they returned to the crest where Poi Utu had consulted the dead, the old man came to meet them. "King's Son, you will win today. The sun will be black, the sea will be afire, there will be war on the water, and war on the land!"

The old man's blazing eye and solemn voice made Abbas whisper to Matalaa, "What does he say? Allah has spoken to him."

"I think he has a touch of fever. These things are impossible. How will I make war on land and on water, with only my brother and one old man? Who will make the sun black and put fire on the sea?"

"Allah does, and man marvels."

Abbas let it go at that, but Matalaa sat there wondering.

There was no use asking Poi Utu to explain himself, for the old wizard acted on the peculiar intuitions of his kind; those who heard his advice, his inspired utterances, had to chew on those tantalizing speeches until they could shape some plan that seemed to fit. In a way, Poi Utu's purpose in life was like that of any philosopher or sage or prophet: to prod the wits of ordinary men into new fields, and to greater keenness.

Abbas and his villagers went toward the shore. Matalaa and his two companions remained; three against a stockade.

The sun rose, beat down through the palms. Buffalos wallowed in mud pools in the swampy interior, and apes chattered in the trees. Poi Utu squatted in

the shade, and stared at the wizard's gimcracks he kept in the beaded bag Cornelia had given him, months ago. He smiled a little, for when a medicine man has spoken, it is the chief's duty to frown and puzzle it out. . . .

"Land and sea . . . war on land and sea . . ."

The words hammered Matalaa. They began to have the rhythm of a drum. They shook him like the riveting machine in Banjarmassin. Land and sea. Land and sea. How could three men make war on land and sea?

Finally he rose. He wanted to dance and shout and laugh, but that would not do. He spoke gravely to Nito: "Get up! Listen to me."

King Torkusa used that manner at times. Nito rose and respectfully regarded his foster brother. "Something has come to you?"

"Yes. It will be done this way. With the little cannon, which you know how to fire, you will blow down the barbed wire and the iron gate posts. Some of the shells, the ones with yellow paint on their noses, they explode when they land. This will shock the yellow men. They will rush out to kill you. Maybe some of the villagers will use their rifles to pick off the yellow guards, for then there will be more guns to give away. That is war on land."

"*Aué!* You knew this thing all the time, too, but it did not come to you until Poi Utu made magic."

"That is right," Matalaa said, the chief instinctively backing the priest. "Now listen more. I, myself, will make war on the sea. While they are running out to stop the cannon fire, I will sail into their harbor in a *prahu* and turn Byrne loose. You will run away before there is too much danger, get a *prahu*, and sail away with the gun."

"*Aué!*" Nito exclaimed, and Poi Utu

echoed, "*Aué!* The gods have borrowed his tongue."

CHAPTER XVI

BATTLE ON LAND

THE 37-millimeter gun was easily dragged to the edge of a cliff which commanded the petroleum depot. The fickle Malay villagers, encouraged by Matalaa's persistence and attracted by the prospect of loot, came up with the few rifles they had snatched the preceding day.

The sun was sinking before the preparations were complete. Then Matalaa saw that his simple plan had become complicated. With the glasses which he had taken from the *prahu*, it was easy to recognize the boat that came from the direction of Sumatra.

The *Selene* was heading straight for Pulau Hantu.

Why, Matalaa could not even guess.

Nito said, "Maybe yellow-haired maiden had to come to the island to save the American's life. The yellow men may think that she knows too much about this business and do not want her to be questioned by the Dutch officials."

Matalaa's reasoning was just as somber: "By making Cornelia trade places with Byrne, he can be turned loose and he will have to keep on writing things that make trouble. If he tries to tell the truth, they will kill her."

"Why not keep him?"

"No. If he stays hidden too long, people will suspect he is a prisoner and no one will believe what he says. He must be turned loose and so of course they have to have her as a hostage."

The *Selene* was heading almost directly toward the concealed depot. From her deck, it would seem that she was making for a Malay village, where

fishermen went about their duties. Matalaa went on, "Maybe both guesses are wrong, and some trick has made her come here. Once she gets into that bay, those tricky devils will take her prisoner."

There was no way of stopping the *Selene*. The one-pounder's range was not much over two thousand yards, and such a small shot would not draw attention until too late. So Matalaa thrust an explosive shell into the breech, centered the cross hairs on the corrugated iron headquarters building, and cut loose.

Nito spotted the shot with the binoculars. There was a flash of red, a puff of black smoke. Before the sound of the explosion could carry back to the gun, the breech block closed on a second shell. It hit true, right on a tubular steel pillar that secured the gate of the compound. The guard, walking his post, ran for cover.

Nito yelled, "They're turning out! The area is full of them! Throw a shell against the paving! The pieces of iron will chew them up!"

But Matalaa had his own ideas on strategy. He traversed the gun, and aimed it at a pillar of the side fence which had almost blocked his escape the night previous.

One—two—three explosive charges tore the iron piping loose from the concrete pedestal, and blasted the barbed wire from its supports.

"Solid shot!" he shouted, traversing the gun.

He had a new target. The guards were dashing out over the clearing, and some were firing at the crest which sheltered the miniature cannon. They did not yet have the range, but bullets were peppering the face of the cliff.

The Malay villagers, whooping and dancing about, pointed their captured

rifles at the men who were still crossing the area. The cannon impressed them, and they were all ready for war. There were no casualties, but the noise was terrific.

Matalaa fired again.

"Couldn't see that one!" Nito said.

"The oil tank! Look close. Throw in another shell first!"

He slammed the breech shut while Nito scanned the only tank whose side was visible from that position. "Now I see the hole!"

MATALAA sent another one-pound shell whistling down into the depot. This time, there was a spurt of fire, and the black smoke was followed by a gust of flame. Nito yelled, "That was good!" But Matalaa choked his triumph; he leaped from the gun and shouted, "I told you I wanted a solid shot, you gave me explosive!"

"I didn't notice," Nito apologized. "Anyway, you've set the oil tank afire, that's better yet."

"Better? Byrne's locked up, and the whole place will start blazing. Here, keep this gun in action! I've got to get him out before it's too late!"

"You're crazy—you can't go down there now—they'll kill you—"

"Keep that gun firing!"

And Matalaa ran along the ridge, recklessly exposing himself to the marksmen who were now getting the range. He had no time for paths or game trails.

He leaped over the edge, landing on a rocky shelf. Bullets pattered and smacked on the boulders above him. He caught a creeping vine and swung down fifty feet, cutting his hands and legs in his haste.

Another shelf. He paused to catch his breath.

The air was heavy with petroleum

fumes, and the wind blew thick black smoke inland. Flames reached high and murky red from the buildings which he could not at the time see. The men in the jungle below him were yelling and shooting. A siren screamed, endlessly; whoever had turned in the alarm had forgotten to cut it off. Perhaps a shell fragment had knocked him down.

Matalaa poised. He sailed out into space. For a sickening instant, he thought that his shortcut would finish him. Then he smashed into the thick branches of the treetop, and heard the clatter of his pistol on the rocks below. A limb broke, he dropped until the whipping of branches ceased, and the sudden shock knocked him breathless.

It was a short jump to the ground. He clawed up his pistol from the rocks, and dashed down the ravine, still keeping to the dangerous shortcut that would save a mile of beating through jungle and down game trails.

Matalaa slipped on smooth stones as he plunged down the swift stream which reached the bay not far from the depot. He was close now to the guards who were crashing through cane and bamboo and dense vines, trying to fight their way to a trail that would flank the ridge held by Nito and the Malay riflemen.

A one-pounder shell burst fifty feet ahead, and then another. Nito must have observed the attempt to outflank him. There were yells, the crashing of brush, the scream of steel fragments; and over the reek of blazing petroleum Matalaa smelled the acrid explosive.

His only weapons were his pistol and the Malay *kris* he had thrust into his sash; so he made the most of the confusion caused by Nito's two shots. He bounded from the ravine and to the path, his wavy blade hissing in a silver circle.

The guards, scrambling to regain their feet, were too surprised to act. Matalaa's yell of encouragement to a squad of imaginary men was bad enough, and his *kris* was worse.

He danced from rock to rock, slashing and thrusting as he leaped. Some fired wild shots, some made belated bayonet thrusts, but no one stopped him. In a few seconds he was through, half deafened by rifle fire.

He turned, risked one shot with his pistol, and doubled over a man who had retreated to take him from the rear. Then Nito poured another one pounder into the tangle, and that covered Matalaa's advance.

He nerved himself for a zigzagging dash across the clearing, but when he reached its edge, there was no human opposition.

Blazing oil flooded the seaward half of the depot; fire lapped the steel sides of the big storage tanks, and their vents gushed flame. The intense heat was cooking the gasoline vapors out of the crude oil, and each tank had become a colossal torch.

Once the rivets softened from heat, there would be a tidal wave of fire, whose backlash would reach to the shattered fence, and to the very edge of the jungle, a wall of flame.

BLACK smoke veiled the sun, and made it dull and sullen. Suddenly, Matalaa remembered Poi Utu's curious words: there must now be fire running toward the sea. The choking fumes, the scorching blasts of wind ceased to frighten him, and the drunkenness of daring lightened his head. Waving his bloodstained *kris*, Matalaa ran toward the building that skirted the side fence.

He snatched a fire axe that a terrified guard had dropped when it became ap-

parent that this blaze was beyond control. Already, the nearest tank was bulging; hot rivet-heads were losing their grip, and superheated petroleum gushed from between slowly separating plates.

The fiery flood, though flowing toward the bay, was also backing up, for the sheet iron building, collapsing over heaps of burning rations and burning furniture, had dammed its free flow.

Matalaa dashed up the stairs, and into the hall that had trapped dense clouds of smoke. The air seemed solid soot. The roar of the blaze outside now drowned the crackling of rifles and the heavy *whack* of the one pounder shells. He could only guess whether Nito was still firing. It made no difference any more; for this was the last place the enemy could endure.

He stumbled up the steps.

Paint was bubbling and blistering from the hot blasts, and the air scorched his lips and face. The barred door was not a dozen yards from the head of the stairs, but Matalaa reeled, staggered, fell to the scorching floor. He heard a pounding, a grim thumping against the bars. That made him struggle to his feet.

Byrne, trapped, was fighting; he was not yelling or screaming. Suddenly, Matalaa was glad that he had come to save this man. Perhaps Cornelia was right.

"Easy, there!" he croaked, and smashed home with the axe.

He was too dizzy to know if there was any answer. The hot air bit his throat. But he was no longer afraid of the raging fire. He knew now that a man dies easily, and long before the flame can touch him.

Another blow. His legs doubled, and the axe bit the floor. He heard a man yell, "Hold it! Maybe I can reach it!"

Byrne, face masked with a steaming towel, tried to reach through the broken panel. His voice prodded Matalaa, who recovered and struck once more. The lock yielded, and Matalaa lurched through when the door swung. Byrne croaked, "Here, tie something over your face! My God, man!"

He snatched a shirt from the foot of the bed and dipped it in a basin of black and steaming water. As Matalaa made himself a mask to filter out some of the soot and choking heat, Byrne ran to the window overlooking the area.

"Can't go that way—she's ankle deep in fire!"

"Window!" Matalaa gasped.

He lurched into the hall, and gained the sill; he wavered, then leaped clear of the sagging fence. Byrne, lacking the white savage's agility, fell short, tripped on a strand in passing, and crashed to the ground. He was beyond the obstacle, but unconscious.

Matalaa gulped in a breath of air which was stifling except in comparison to the blasts he had been inhaling. He stooped to shoulder the dazed and muttering American when he saw the guards who crashed into the clearing.

CHAPTER XVII

BATTLE ON THE SEA

NITO and his Malays must have trapped and beaten the guards; or perhaps some had guessed the reason for Matalaa's desperate dash through the advancing line, and had come back to block the rescue of the captive.

Whatever brought them, Matalaa never learned; still kneeling, he leveled his pistol and fired, one-two-three.

Two men crumpled. The others ducked for shelter.

Matalaa shouldered Byrne and bounded for the jungle that skirted the

stockade. Bullets whisked past, for his pistol fire had only momentarily shaken them, but the hot gusts of air, the surges of smoke, the steam that rose from the ground made shooting difficult, and they were mediocre marksmen at the best.

He won high ground, and the shelter of jungle at the same time. The pursuers burst out into the clearing to flank him, but Matalaa had dropped down into the now shallow bed of the stream that rushed to the bay. And Byrne, though groggy, had recovered enough to stagger after him.

"Boat!" Matalaa gasped. "There! *Prahu!*"

"Can you sail the damn things?"

They ran.

Most of the beach was ablaze with oil, and flaming fuel was running out into the bay. The dummy camouflage-shacks were crackling, and the surf could no longer whip the fire out; it reached further and further.

The *prahus* of the imitation fishermen were racing out toward the *Selene*, but there were others on the beach. At the first burst of shooting, many of the "fishermen" had hurried ashore to join the fight.

Matalaa pushed a light boat into the surf while Byrne got busy with the last few cartridges his rescuer had given him. The *prahu* was barely launched when the pursuers appeared and dashed down across the beach. Some fired, some made for boats to continue the pursuit.

Smoke, black and oily, blotted out the sky, and almost hid the *Selene*, well out at sea. Gusts of fresh air cut into the hell that hung over that part of the island, and Matalaa managed to hoist the three-cornered sail. The *prahu* skimmed over the waves, but the pursuing boats were just as fast, and now others were launched; for the remain-

ing guards, sensing the futility of trying to deal with Malay bushwhackers, had decided on flight.

Flight, but the rifle fire of the leading *prahu* told them as certainly as a written order that their prisoner had escaped. They plied paddles, four or five men in each *prahu*, and they could handle their tricky craft at least as well as Matalaa and a half-stifled American. They could ride the outriggers when they came about, whereas Byrne fell overboard at his first game attempt, and acted as an anchor to the light boat.

Bullets riddled the sail. Bullets thudded into the hull. Matalaa was cut up from flying splinters, and Byrne was wounded.

The crew of the *Selene*, unable to understand the pursuit, might have helped but did not. The smoke, the towering flames, the veiled sun, all these were too much to let any spectator wonder at the swift flight of Malay *prahus*.

Byrne paddled valiantly. He kept it up until he fell face forward, exhausted. "For God's sake—look—"

MATALAA turned. There was no more pursuit. The enemy had seen, and they were no longer interested in intercepting the fugitives. A tide of flame was rolling out to sea, smoothing out the breakers, topping the waves with a flood of fire that spread in every direction. The big tank had burst, and as Matalaa watched, a second tank parted along a seam, releasing uncounted thousands of gallons of blazing petroleum.

The swift-running flood overwhelmed the last of the pursuing *prahus*. It overtook the second. It reached for the third; the men paddling collapsed, and the three-cornered sail burst into flame.

The others pulled clear, at about the time Matalaa came close enough to hail the *Selene*.

His ears roared from the rumble of flames, and he could not hear his own voice or the answer. A ladder was lowered. Matalaa boosted his wounded companion up ahead of him. Garvey was at the rail to give a hand.

"Where's Cornelia?"

"Huh?" Then Garvey recognized the blackened men. "My God, man!" He dug a key out of his pocket and shouted to one of Matalaa's Marquesans, "Let them out, tell them he's back. They're both back!"

Cornelia came running out, her father after her. She stared for a moment at the two black creatures who wove dizzily as they stood there. Then she cried out, "If I'd known you were out there, I'd have died!"

She was too busy kissing Matalaa to notice that Harley Byrne was aboard the *Selene*. Matalaa began to grin, and he pretended that he was amused by the soot marks he had put all over Cornelia's face.

Finally, when he took Father Pierre's hand, Cornelia turned to Byrne: "I'm awfully glad you're back, Harley, and I hate to think of what you've been through. Well, *now* how do you like my White Savage. Aren't you convinced?"

He made a wry grimace, then caught Matalaa's arm before he said, "Never saw anything like it. You didn't do the lad justice! Now, maybe I can get cleaned up."

LATER, the *Selene* circled the island, to stop at the village where Nito and Poi Utu should be with the 37-millimeter gun. Garvey explained his high-handed seizure of the *Selene*, and said to the van Houtens as well as to Matalaa, "Sure, I put a fast one over! I figured it was my only chance to dodge Dutch justice. Dirty trick, but—" He shrugged. "Put me in irons, or shut up.

If you don't throw me in the brig, I'll get a Malay *prahu* at this village and head for the New Guinea gold fields."

Cornelia said, "Don't be silly, Bull! Father and I could forgive you anything, after bringing us right to the spot where Matalaa needed a lift. You just blundered into it, hoping to get him to protect you from an arrest that no one intended making, but even so—"

Her father cut in, "I agree with my daughter."

Garvey grinned. "Thanks, folks. But I'm going to New Guinea anyway, and it's been nice meeting you again."

So he went over the side, to talk Hamid out of a *prahu* and an adventurous crew.

And when the *Selene* made for Sumatra, Matalaa knew that his cruise through hell had done more than settle Willem van der Groot and his Asiatic allies; had accomplished more than the destruction of an illicit petroleum depot.

"You have been too busy to realize what you have done," Dirk van Houten said. "Much less to understand the nature of this conspiracy that was going to use *Mynheer* Byrne to drive a wedge between Britain and the Netherlands, the two nations who have to stick together in the Far East. Led on by the chance of profit from illicit petroleum export, van der Groot and without doubt many other gullible fellows became so entangled that they had to go from bad to worse, or face exposure.

"Van der Groot, I have every reason to believe, was basically a good man, though a bit too sharp. It is good that he died, for that closes the case, and other officials who are involved can take his lesson, and go straight. But if he had lived, and there had been an investigation, many official heads would have fallen."

"That is right," Byrne said. "From

all I could learn, this petroleum depot was the only one of its kind. The fire finished all the records, and most of the men who ran it. Steele, you've done a mighty big thing, starting with the day you got that SOS addressed to the White Savage."

He held out his hand.

"Thanks," Matalaa said, and went on deck. He was embarrassed by the verbal decorations, and he hoped Cornelia would follow him.

She did, some moments later, and he

said, "The big thing—whether I did it, or luck did it, I don't know—is something that nobody seems to think about. You had us both side by side, and both black with soot, and—"

"Of course. I saw you, and didn't notice him!"

"Saw?" Matalaa chuckled and drew her closer. "If that is what you call looking—I am looking at you some more."

But anyone else would have sworn he was kissing the blond girl.

THE END

GOLD OF NEW GUINEA

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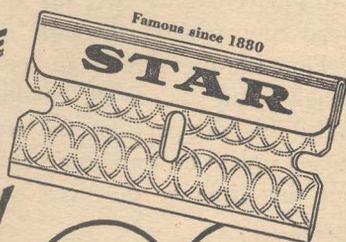
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I

THE Saigon offices of the Yellow Funnel Line—the coastwise shipping people—lie at the blind end of Angkor-Wat Road. Occupying a two-story building as decrepit as the vessels they operate, the company is one avoided by every respectable seaman and patronized only by those concerns who want cheap rates for cheaper cargo.

To Herrick, pausing before the entrance, the place was gloomy and then some, in the approaching dusk. Awaiting him inside might be anything: the loss of his ship, even the loss, perhaps, of his master's ticket.

Herrick set his jaw, pulled his blue cap squarely down over his square forehead and pushed through the doors. Seldon Larang wanted to see him personally, did he? Well, Seldon seldom called his skippers on the well-known carpet unless he wanted an explanation, but this time he deserved one on the house.

A moment later Herrick stood in the agent's office. Larang, a handsome Eurasian with sleek hair, thin bluish lips, and gimlet eyes, looked up.

"Herrick," he nodded shortly. "I've been waiting for you. What's this about the *Java Queen*?"

Herrick swallowed hard. For an instant his seething indignation wavered under the penetrating gaze. Then he caught the tone in Larang's voice, and his fists clenched.

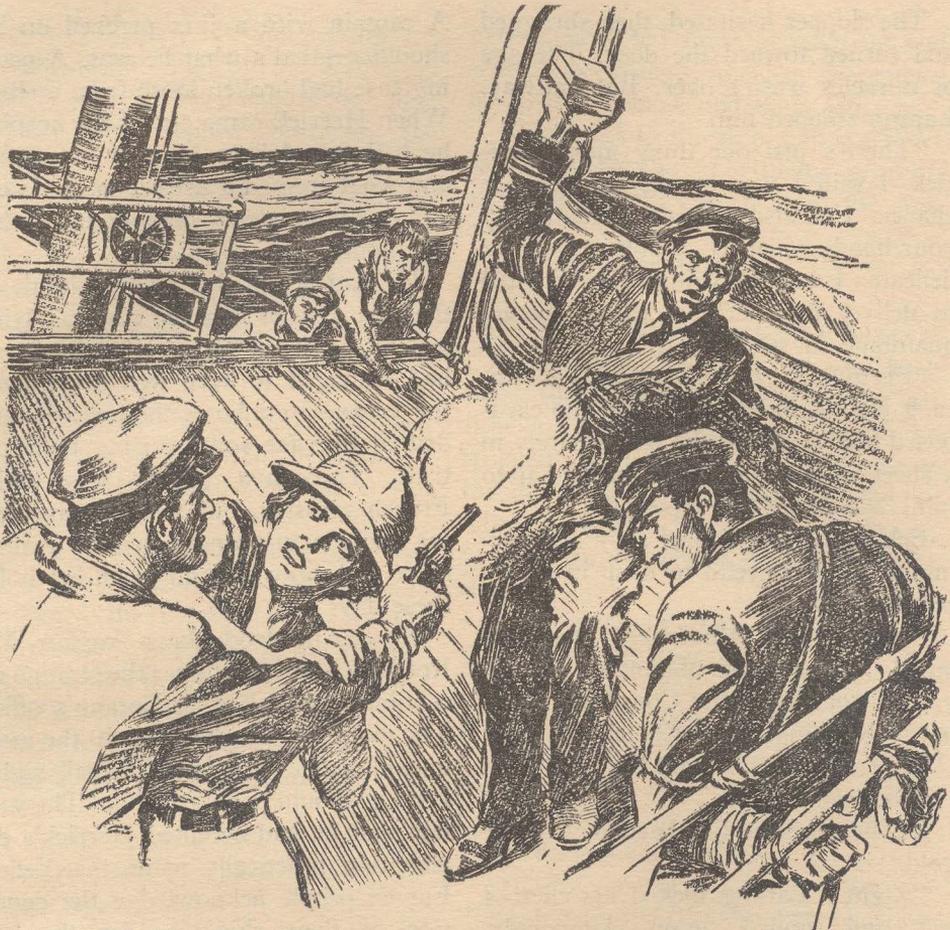
"The *Java Queen*," he said tersely, "piled on the rocks off Hochow Reef. She stove a hole in her forepeak, cracked a boiler and lost her drift anchor, trying to ride out the worst typhoon that hit this coast in twenty years."

Larang nodded coolly. He took a cheroot from the breast pocket of his immaculate white linen coat, lit it slowly and smoked a long moment in silence.

"You were drunk, I suppose."

THAT did it. Months of pent-up anger boiled to Herrick's lips. He paced two steps forward, placed both palms flat on the desk and let loose with the speech he had mentally rehearsed for the occasion.

No, by the saints, he hadn't been drunk. There hadn't been liquor aboard the *Java Queen* since he'd taken over



There he was, tied to the rail, while all hell threatened to pop loose on deck

her command, and Larang knew it. The trouble was with the ship. She was old. She was so old there wasn't an insurance agent from here to S'pore would have anything to do with her. Her engines were worn out. Her number one hold . . .

Herrick's voice trailed off as he realized that Larang was no longer listening. The agent puffed his cheroot and gazed at the electric fan that hummed on the wall. Then he opened a drawer, took out six small bottles and laid them in a neat row on the desk top. From another drawer he took an oblong cardboard box.

"All right, Herrick," he said, "I'll

give you another chance. You'll transfer over to the *Min Woy* tonight. She's under charter to the Hessian people to Kuching with mixed cargo. Stow your gear aboard and be ready to leave on notice."

Jaw dropping, Herrick's tall frame slowly went rigid. Had he heard correctly? Larang—"Iron" Larang who was known up and down the coast as the hardest, coldest man in the business—giving another chance? Larang who hired his men, as he did his ships, only for what he could get out of them . . . It didn't make sense.

The skipper hesitated, then shrugged and turned toward the door. The age of miracles wasn't over. But halfway, Larang stopped him.

"There's just one thing more, Herrick. I said I was giving you another chance. I'm also putting a matter in your hands which is . . . ah . . . rather delicate. I believe you can be trusted to deliver this perfume to a lady acquaintance of mine?"

"Perfume?" Herrick stared as Larang placed the six bottles in the cardboard box, wrapped the box securely in a sheet of newspaper and handed it to him. "*Perfume?*" he repeated.

Seldon Larang smiled slyly and permitted his left eyelid to drop in a perceptible wink.

"*Essence de héliotrope,*" he said quietly. "The finest obtainable in Saigon. It goes to a Miss Constance Hawley in Kuching. You will tell her this: 'The perfume lies beyond the gold.' Can you remember that?"

"The perfume lies beyond . . . the gold. . . ."

"Right." Larang flicked his cheroot ash and smiled again, knowingly. "She'll know what it means. It's just a little secret between us."

II

IT MIGHT be said of Tom Herrick that he knew his way around. Just past thirty, with a face that still looked at life with boyish enthusiasm, a lean jaw and square though not wide shoulders, he had worked his way up from the very bottom. Two short years ago he'd first officered the R and L's *Carlotta*, a five thousand tonner which had everything in the way of accommodations except a swimming pool.

Then Lady Luck had turned her face. Everything he'd touched had gone sour.

A captain with a jinx perched on his shoulder—that's what he was. A packing case had broken loose from a sling. When Herrick came out of the hospital he had five dollars Mex in his pocket and what seemed a useless master's examination in steam coming up within the month.

He had accepted a skipper berth on the *Java Queen* as a last resort. Plying up the coast as far as Haiphong, he had managed to keep well away from the Japanese gunboats that occasionally drifted that far south during their patrols. The *Java Queen* was under French registry, but with the increasing trouble in-country, it was getting more and more difficult to fill her holds these days.

Now as he strode down Angkor-Wat Road his brain went over the strange reception he had had in Larang's office. The more he thought about it, the more unexplainable it seemed. By all rights Larang should have fired him. The very fact that he had accepted Herrick's explanation practically made the Yellow Funnel people acknowledge the condition of their ship. As for the perfume . . .

"*Essence de héliotrope,*" muttered Herrick sarcastically. "And Larang with a wife and three kids."

Saigon flowed past him. The night life of the "Paris of the East" was opening up, and from the dingy shops sounded a Babel of voices, the queer padding of rice-straw slippered feet, and occasionally from an upper window the wail of a reed flute.

Rickshas wove in and out; coolies shuffled past, apparently in no hurry to reach their destination. The night was hot and muggy; the air lay across his face like moist gauze.

But at length the street lights dwindled, and Herrick entered the

waterfront district. He was heading for the consulate to sign on the *Min Woy* when a man strode abruptly out of a doorway and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Just a minute there, Mr. Herrick. Don't you remember me?"

Herrick surveyed the bulking figure in the gloom, saw the round, not unhandsome face, the second-mate stripes on the threadbare jacket. He thrust out his hand.

"Jim Follow," he grinned. "The last time I saw you you were heading for Papeete to settle down. What're you doing here?"

Follow scuffed his feet and chuckled. "It's a small world," he replied. "I've gone *down* the ladder instead of up. Right now I've got a berth, but I'm not bragging about it. The *Min Woy*. She's that YFL hooker that . . ."

It was his second shock of the evening, even if it was a pleasant one, and Herrick felt a warm glow of pleasure surge through him. Follow was all wool and a yard wide. It was good to know he would be aboard.

But Follow shook his head slowly when Herrick announced he had been transferred and was now captain of the *Min Woy*.

"There's something in the wind," the second mate said. "I don't know what it is, but I don't like the lay of things at all. The whole *Min Woy* fo'c'sle was let out last night, and the new crew is the finest gang of cutthroats you ever saw. Carnaby, the First, is no better. We've been lying in the roads here for three weeks now, and all the cargo that's come aboard is a couple of dozen crates of oriental silk shipped out of French China in bond. I tell you, Mr. Herrick, we'd better keep our eyes open."

Herrick lit his pipe and nodded. He

exchanged a few more pleasantries and was about to pass on when he remembered the package under his arm.

"Take this to the ship, will you?" he said. "I'll be aboard with my gear directly soon as I return from the consulate."

The two men parted.

AN HOUR later, his official business completed, Herrick strode back along the wharves, heading for the last time for the *Java Queen*. Halfway he stopped at a backalley shop, peering at the mixed array of merchandise in the window; then he went in to purchase a pair of canvas shoes which he badly needed.

Then when he came out on to the street again, it happened!

They came upon Herrick from behind, two of them. A heavy blow bludgeoned against his skull back of the ear; a pair of powerful hands clasped his throat and the steely fingertips dug down against his windpipe.

Herrick managed to turn and rip those hands away. Dizziness assailing him, he backed to the building wall and pounded his fists in and out in the darkness. But there was no let-up.

The two figures rushed him again; one grounding a cruel knee into his midsection; the other staggered him with a terrible punch to the heart.

Then something hard and heavy crashed down on Herrick's temple. A blinding pain shot through his eyes, and blackness folded over him like a curtain. He slumped slowly to the cobblestones and lay on his face, quite still. . . .

III

WHEN Herrick came to, he was lying in a bunk; and yellow sunlight slanted through a round opening

in the far wall. The opening was a port; the faint vibration was unmistakably the throb and beat of engines. He was at sea!

Shanghaied! It was the first thought that struck him as he slid out of the bunk and staggered across to the desk. On that desk, as if waiting for him, was a decanter filled with brandy and a glass. He held his throbbing head a moment, then filled the glass with a generous peg and gulped it down.

Slowly he began to tidy up his scattered thoughts.

He hadn't been shanghaied, he told himself, for the cabin was a skipper's cabin. There was no doubt about that. He glanced at the comfortable furnishings: the shelves of books, the fan-backed chair, the varnished maps and charts. Then he saw the framed print of a ship screwed above the door and the wording upon it:

Min Woy. Yellow Funnel Line.

So that was it! But how had he got here? And what had happened in the hours since he had been bludgeoned in the waterfront street?

Herrick crossed to a wash basin, splashed water on his wrists and forehead. There was an ugly blood-rimmed welt on his temple, and even the water failed to remove the caked blood on his cheek.

"Well, I'm home at any rate," he muttered aloud. "Now to find out what all this means."

The door was unlocked. He went out, followed the passage to the companionway and reached the deck. The sun was high in the sky; there was no sign of land on the horizon; the *Min Woy* was ploughing cheerfully through a rolling sea as if nothing had happened.

A few deep breaths did wonders to Herrick's head. He went up the port ladder to the bridge and saw Follow

standing at the rail, smoking a cigarette.

The second mate nodded casually.

"Mr. Follow, how many hours out of Saigon?" Herrick demanded.

Follow grinned and said, "Twelve, sir."

"Who cleared with the harbor master and who gave orders to put to sea?"

For a moment it seemed as if Follow desired to avoid the question.

"Mr. Carnaby, the first, signed for you. Orders came through from Larang's office. You were . . . ah, a bit under the weather, sir, when you came aboard."

A whistle broke unsounded on Herrick's lips. "You mean you thought I was drunk?"

Follow's smile died, and his eyes shifted uneasily.

"Where's Mr. Carnaby now?"

"In the chart house."

HERRICK turned and paced across the bridge. A moment later he had his first look at the new first. Parallel rulers in hand, the man looked up from the chart he had been studying and answered the skipper's gaze evenly. He was a smooth-faced man of forty odd with regular features, a stocky frame and sandy hair. He had a quiet look of self-confidence about him which Herrick caught instantly and liked. But there was also a perceptible curl to his upper lip that offset any comfort Herrick might have taken from the look of him.

"Mr. Carnaby, I'm Herrick, the master. Perhaps you'll be good enough to explain what happened last night."

The first officer nodded and cleared his throat. "Well," he began, "I was coming from the White Parrot when I heard a mixup, and I ran up in time to see you in the thick of it. White men

they were, I should judge, though I couldn't see clearly.

"They knocked you out before I could help. I waded in and got this in exchange." Carnaby jerked up his sleeve and revealed a jagged knife wound extending up the fleshy part of his arm. "They got away, by Godfrey, and I brought you aboard. That's all, I guess."

"How did you know who I was?" Herrick demanded. And instantly added, "Oh, my papers, of course. And Larang sent orders we should leave at once?"

Herrick watched Carnaby with uneasy eyes. "Yes, sir." Carnaby's face remained expressionless.

Herrick scowled. It sounded all right. The pieces fitted into the puzzle, but a voice within him rebelled at accepting this explanation.

Why had everything dovetailed so neatly that he was put out of action precisely at the moment when the *Min Woy* was to leave Saigon? Why of all people had his own first mate happened to find him when he needed help so badly?

"All right, Mr. Carnaby," Herrick said. "Lay a course for Kuching. I'll look around and arrange watches."

He went over the *Min Woy* carefully from stem to stern, examining details with a judicious and experienced eye. The ship was a typical YFL hooker, old enough to be discarded, yet in better condition than the *Java Queen*. She carried no wireless, and from her mast-head flew the tricolor of France. Her boats were sun-blistered and needed paint; yet they were quite seaworthy.

But the crew was bad. Riffraff undoubtedly, flotsam of the Saigon waterfront. They were a mingled lot of various nationalities, but thank heaven, all white.

Herrick headed below and met the engineer on the gratings.

"Stoddard, sir," the engineer introduced himself. "Five years out of Vancouver. Any orders?"

Herrick studied him critically and decided the man was everything he looked: a brute with a broken nose, arms heavily tattooed, and a clipped ear lobe that spoke plainly of an old gun wound.

"No orders," replied Herrick. "We're making about eight knots now, which is fair enough."

He noted casually that Stoddard's jacket was ripped in several places, also that there was a bluish bruise on the man's cheekbone.

But he made no comment.

IN HIS cabin five minutes later Herrick dropped into a chair before the desk, packed his pipe slowly and sat there gnawing its battered stem. On the desk, unnoticed before, lay the box of canvas shoes he had bought in Saigon just before the attack, the box that Carnaby must have picked up when he carried Herrick aboard.

As the skipper glanced at it, his brows drew thoughtfully together.

The box had been opened. He could see that by the way the string was tied. It was wrapped around but once now, but the precise old Dutch shopkeeper had taken pains to tie it double. Still clinging to the package was a small piece of blue cloth.

Herrick picked up the cloth, looked at it, and thought of Stoddard's jacket. It might be, he told himself; yet on the other hand, seamen's garments were much the same everywhere. Definitely, it didn't prove anything. Herrick went out on deck and called to Follow.

"I gave you a package last night to bring aboard," he said when the second

stood before him. "What did you do with it?"

"Put it in my locker," Follow said. "I thought that . . ."

"I'll take it now," if you don't mind."

The mate ran below and reappeared in a moment with the perfume box. As he had expected, Herrick saw that it was much the same size and appearance as she shoe box, except for the newspaper wrapping.

He returned to his cabin, locked the door carefully, opened the second package and took out the perfume bottles, one by one.

Essence de héliotrope. The name was printed in ornate lettering on each of the labels. The bottles were fancy in design, with small hard-rubber caps, and the liquid was a dull amber color.

Had the men who had attacked him been after this box instead of the one with the shoes?

He removed the caps, bent over the bottles. Perfume, right enough! And then his eyes caught something that glittered at the bottom of one of the bottles. An instant later he was pouring the contents of the six bottles into a copper bowl he found on the desk. A low exclamation came to his lips.

In each of the bottles was a large-sized crystal that sparkled and gave off blue fire from its many prisms. Diamonds!

Herrick wiped them off on his sleeve and rolled the stones back and forth on his palm.

"Fifteen karats . . . fifty thousand dollars . . .!" He sat down in a chair, gnawed his upper lip.

Herrick knew diamonds. He'd worked at Capetown, and he'd been in-country at the mine near Port Moresby. Now abruptly he drew the desk lamp close to him, and gave the stones a long and careful scrutiny.

When he looked up a moment later his frown had deepened to a deep-furrowed scowl of bewilderment. The diamonds were large and flashy. To the inexperienced they looked like a fortune or a near fortune, but they were full of flaws, and their cutting was old style. From his original fifty thousand Herrick dropped his estimate to five hundred.

"Maybe less than that," he muttered aloud. "But . . ."

Mechanically he refilled the six bottles with the perfume, dropped the diamonds back in and returned the bottles to the box. He placed the box in the desk drawer, which he locked.

Several details were clear. For some unknown reason Seldon Larang had wanted that perfume to reach its destination and had chosen what to him seemed the surest way: passing it off as a casual gift. The words he had told Herrick to repeat to the woman in Kuching were undoubtedly a cipher. What else could be the meaning of "The perfume lies beyond the gold?" As for the diamonds, they were harder to explain.

It was incomprehensible.

"But it looks," Herrick told himself, "as if Larang had added them as a blind. He was afraid someone would wonder what he was up to, and he threw in the stones to convince whoever might examine the package that they were really a gift which he was simply smuggling through the customs. But what does it all mean? Something is very peculiar about this business. But very."

No answer came, and Herrick unlocked the door and strode down the passage to the mess cabin. A Chinese steward looked in on him there, grinned, and a moment later was serving him food.

IV

NIGHT brought an overcast sky and a wind with misty rain that swept the weather side of the ship. With her canvas storm cloth about her bridge and all hatches battened, the *Min Woy* headed south by east for the Borneo coast.

Herrick found Mr. Follow on the bridge in oilskins. The mate nodded cordially. They discussed the weather, the prospects for a quick voyage. And then Herrick threw down his guard and told the second all that had happened.

"It's a devil of a mess," he concluded, "but I wouldn't mind so much if it made any kind of sense at all."

Follow's eyes were wide as he listened. Then, before he had chance to reply, the shot came!

In the silence that followed Herrick stood there, stock-still. Then the two men swung as one and raced down the ladder.

The deck was deserted, the companionway scuttle open. Along the passage they ran to Herrick's cabin. Two feet over the threshold the skipper jerked to a halt and caught his breath.

The electric lights were burning, though Herrick knew he had switched them off before quitting the place a few moments before. The two lockers had been opened and their contents: books, papers, files were scattered about the floor. On the far side the bulkhead safe was open. A table was overturned.

And in the chair back of the desk sat the Chinese steward. One hand lay on the desk top. His head, resting on the table lamp, was curiously upturned as if he were about to ask a question. Squarely between the eyes was a bullet hole from which blood was running freely.

"Dead!" Herrick swore under his

breath and swung sharply on Follow. "Search the ship. Tell Mr. Carnaby and Mr. Stoddard to report here immediately. Move!"

When the second had gone, the skipper paced to the desk, lifted the body gently aside, unlocked the desk drawer and glanced inside. The perfume box was there, undisturbed.

He needed no one to tell him what the steward had been doing here. Undoubtedly he had watched through an open port when Herrick had examined the diamonds. The Chinese had come here, intending to steal them, and he had been surprised by someone else in the act of searching. The question was: Who was that someone?

As for the stones themselves, probably they hadn't been discovered because of the openness of their hiding place.

Carnaby came in a moment later, sleepy-eyed, followed by Stoddard, the engineer, and Follow. Follow shook his head.

"Everything shipshape," he said. "Most of the fo'c'sle's asleep. The lookout swears he hasn't left the head."

For a moment Herrick stood in silence as he watched the two men's reactions. Stoddard's teeth came together with a little click as he gazed at the dead body. He pulled a cigarette from his pocket nervously, placed it between his lips without lighting it. Carnaby evinced no emotion.

"Who did it, by Godfrey?" he demanded.

"That's what I want to find out," Herrick said. "Mr. Carnaby, do you know of anyone aboard who would want to kill this man . . . for any reason at all?"

But questioning the first officer and the engineer did no good. Carnaby said he had been asleep, getting ready for

his watch at eight bells, and Stoddard swore up and down he hadn't even heard the shot.

Finally Herrick gave up. He detailed Follow to the unpleasant task of taking care of the steward's body and returned to the desk. He passed through the scuttle into the fo'c'sle and looked around. As Follow had said, most of the crew was asleep, and there was no sign of excitement. He went below and questioned the stokehold men on duty, but they could tell him nothing.

STANDING at the taffrail a half hour later, Herrick gazed moodily over the black sea. Presently he heard steps and turned to see Mr. Carnaby sidling up to him.

"Cap'n," the first said, "I played dumb down there because I didn't know who I could trust. Let's go up into the chart house where we can talk."

In the chart house an instant later the first officer dropped onto the settee and smiled. "All right, Cap'n," he said. "Let's talk straight. I know a little of what's going on aboard, and if we join forces, by Godfrey maybe we can get some place.

"First of all, Larang gave you a box, containing among other things six diamonds. Those diamonds are consigned to a certain woman in Kuching. They aren't listed on the manifest, and there's no record of 'em except your word. Right?"

"You've got a good imagination," Herrick said after his first start of surprise.

"Observation's the word," Carnaby replied with a chuckle. He leaned forward. "Has it occurred to you what those men wanted who jumped you in Saigon? Those stones, of course. But I'll give you credit, by Godfrey, you were too smart for 'em. You got 'em

aboard in advance. Now has it also occurred to you that one of those men who knocked you out might be aboard too?"

"You mean . . . ?"

"I mean Stoddard. He knew about those stones, and he thought they were in the box you carried."

Herrick's brain was whirling now. Not in response to this information, but in a desperate effort to discover a motive behind the first's proffered revelations. Was it possible he had been mistaken about those diamonds? But no . . .

"If you can prove that statement, I'll put him in irons," Herrick said, moving as if in anger toward the door.

"Hold on! Hold on! I can handle Mr. Stoddard if he starts anything. The point's this. I happen to know those stones are worth a price. A price, that is, if they're sold to the right party.

"Now you hand 'em over to me," Carnaby went on hurriedly, "and I'll pay you five thousand as soon as we reach Kuching and make the sale. It's a more generous offer than it sounds. I take all the risk, and you simply collect.

"You give me the perfume bottles so that I can substitute fake stones in their place, and I'll see they're passed off to this woman without her suspecting. The only thing I need is the spoken statement Larang told you to repeat to her."

While the chronometer in the gimbals ticked off the passing seconds Herrick pretended to think the matter over. Then he stood up and shook his head.

"The answer's no," he said. "For the present at least. If I change my mind, I'll tell you."

Carnaby's wolfish eyes stared hard into Herrick's, measuring him, testing his courage and will. Then he left.

V

THREE bells were striking when Herrick entered the pilot house and nodded to the quartermaster there, a sullen Belgian named Arlot. The *Min Woy* still rose and fell in a choppy sea, and the rain which had fallen off during the last hour was beginning again in earnest.

"How's the glass?" Herrick asked.

The barometer was down a couple of points, but something else attracted the skipper's attention at the moment. A glance at the compass under the electric binnacle light showed the ship off her course. Not much, but still off a direct course to Kuching. She was standing to the east, heading toward the Java Sea in a manner that would bring her eastward of South Nantuna Island.

Herrick made no mention of his discovery. He left the pilot house and sauntered aft onto the boat deck abaft the bridge. Rain lashed his face, and off to the west lightning began to play across the heavens.

"The perfume lies beyond the gold," he repeated the phrase Seldon Larang had instructed him to tell the woman in Kuching. Some meaning was hidden in those words, yet he realized he might try a hundred years and never arrive at the true answer.

As for Constance Hawley, the name meant nothing to him. Undoubtedly it was a pseudonym, one more unexplainable detail in the baffling enigma.

He was tamping tobacco into his pipe when muffled voices drew him up short.

Two figures stood in the gloom by the starboard bow boat. As he listened, the skipper slowly stiffened.

"I'm gettin' tired of this stallin'," Stoddard's voice said. "What're we waitin' for? Stick a knife in him and take the stuff. That's my way."

Carnaby, the other man, voiced a whispered oath. "You fool!" he snarled. "You've come near spoiling the whole game twice with your damned impatience. By Godfrey, we're not going to have the French government down on our heads, if I can help it. Besides you forget that if we put Herrick out of the way, we lose the cipher, and without that, the perfume's worthless. I've had my eye on Larang and those bottles too long to let you bungle the whole thing now. I should never have let you get on to this in the first place. We've got plenty of time, and we'll do it my way."

The voices became inaudible then. Herrick took no chances on moving closer. Lips tight, he tiptoed back to the ladder and made his way to his cabin.

So Stoddard and Carnaby were in cahoots, were they? And plotting against him. That was interesting, in view of the fact that the first officer had been so willing to fasten guilt on the engineer for the Saigon attack.

The body of the Chinese steward had been removed now, and the cabin was in its original order save for a dark bloodstain on the carpet beside the desk. Herrick took out the perfume box again and stared down at the bottles.

For a second time he opened them, sniffed their contents. He took out the diamonds, examined the stones with the greatest care.

He held them in his fingers, turning them over and over.

But the result was as before. The liquid was undoubtedly *essence de héliotrope*; without a chemical analysis, that was all he could tell. The jewels were of below-average quality and value.

Herrick undressed and went to bed. But even with the comforting bulge of a Webley automatic under his pillow, a long time passed before he fell asleep.

MORNING, and the storm still hung in the offing. Herrick, having filled out the rough log, loitered on the for'ard well deck, gazing out at the froth-tipped jade of the China Sea. He went up to the bridge presently, where he found Mr. Follow leaning against the chart house, a dour expression on his face.

"I feel terrible," Follow said. "Those canned peaches we had for morning mess must have been bad."

"I had some," Herrick replied. "They seemed all right to me." He moved forward, squinted into the second's face, uttered an exclamation.

The pupils of the mate's eyes were contracted to pinpoints; his face was flushed, and his breathing was rapid.

"You're sick, man. Go below and take a dose of quinine. I'll be down and see you soon as I take the sun."

But even while the skipper was looking through his sextant, Mr. Carnaby came up the ladder, moving rapidly.

"Listen," he said, drawing Herrick away from the pilot house and the quartermaster there, "there's all hell to pay. We got plague aboard!"

"Pla—!" What new trick was this? Slowly Herrick knocked the ashes from his pipe. "Follow?"

Carnaby nodded. "I heard him groanin', and I went in to see what was the matter. It's bubonic! Seen it before in Sandakan. He's going fast!"

A thin piece of ice slipped up Herrick's spine. Bubonic, the most feared malady of Asiatic seas . . . ! And here on his ship, which meant exposure to everyone.

With a dry feeling in his throat, Herrick went down to the second's cabin, which was the last room in the block aft. The moment he opened the door a dull horror assailed him.

Follow was dead! There was no

doubt about that. He lay in his bunk, eyes wide and glassy, an expression of excruciating pain on his face, hands drawn to his throat.

Suppressing his emotions, Herrick strode forward and stared down at the body. Bubonic strikes quickly, yes, but hardly within a period of thirty minutes. Furthermore, Follow's skin showed no signs of any tumorous pustules. And then abruptly Herrick remembered what Follow had said about the canned peaches.

Poison! There could be no other answer. Either Carnaby or Stoddard had seen in the second a dangerous ally for Herrick and had chosen this method of removing him.

But Herrick had eaten of those peaches too! With his brain conjuring up a hundred fears, he swung on his heel, ran rapidly to the deck. There he leaned far over the rail and proceeded to ram his finger down his throat.

FIVE minutes later, weak and trembling, he made his decision. Whatever the odds, it was time for action. Keep on going the way he was, and he'd be a dead man sooner or later. He took the Webley from his pocket, saw that it had a full clip. Then he headed for the bridge.

Mr. Carnaby was standing by the for'ard rail, a pair of binoculars to his eyes when the skipper strode up to him. Before Herrick could speak, he turned and nodded in a general direction off the starboard quarter.

"Junk coming up fast, sir. Some one in the stern sheets waving a flag."

Herrick took the glasses. After a moment's focusing he saw it. The Malay craft was under full spread of her lateen sails. A single person was visible in the stern, waving a small white cloth.

With a leap Herrick was across and

whistling down the telegraph. "Quarter speed!" He moved into the pilot house, took the wheel himself and watched the junk swiftly materialize.

The craft came in under the *Min Woy's* lee and wallowed alongside. Five lascars seized the lines and made them fast. A figure in white duck trousers climbed the sea ladder.

Then, and not until then, did Herrick utter his exclamation of astonishment. The figure was a girl. A girl in a powder blue waist with a freshly chalked solar topee set jauntily on her head. She came over the rail agilely, setting blue-topped sneakers firmly on the deck.

Herrick bowed. "Captain Herrick," he said. "What can I do for you?"

Uncertainly she glanced about her. "I'm Constance Hawley," she said. "If you don't mind, Captain, I'd like to talk to you alone. You can tell my men in the junk I won't need them any more."

At the name, a little thrill shot through Herrick, and a rush of questions swept to his lips. He said nothing, however; led the way quickly below. In his cabin he locked the door, drew up a couple of chairs and studied the girl closely.

"All right, Miss, suppose you tell the truth. Your name's not Hawley."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," Herrick went on, taking

a long chance, "that Constance Hawley is in Kuching at the present time. Also, she's a blonde. Unless you've resorted to dye, and I don't think you have, you're pretty much a brunette."

The girl's lips twitched.

"Very well, Captain," she said, smiling grimly. "We're both a pair of liars. I'm not Constance Hawley. But she isn't a blonde; her hair is quite red."

For a long moment the girl remained silent, as if weighing a mental decision. Then she leaned forward.

"Captain Herrick, I'm going to take a long chance. You look like a man I can trust. But first will you answer a fair question? Just what is your connection with Seldon Larang?"

It was a clean shot, but Herrick took it with a shrug. "I'm in Larang's employ," he said, "but only as master of this vessel. You can talk."

The statement seemed to satisfy her. She searched a moment for words.

VI

"MY NAME is not important," the girl began, "though you'd probably recognize it if I told you I was the daughter of Martin Gane, the chemical research engineer. I'm Portia Gane. Up until a year ago my father was in the employ of the Federated Mining Com-

USE **SPEEDWAY** **DE LUXE** **BLADES**
FOR FAST, SMOOTH, ECONOMICAL SHAVES



pany, stationed at their Malayan offices in Kuala Lumpur. His health had been none too good for a long time, and I came out from the States to bring him home. That was in September. The following November he was murdered!

"Murdered!" the girl repeated. "And the discovery upon which he had spent the great part of his life was stolen. That discovery was a new and concentrated explosive, a chemical known as S24W and designed primarily for mining purposes.

"My father had great hopes for this explosive," Portia Gane went on. "I remember he said it operated under an entirely different principle and was many times more powerful than glycerine trinitrate or dynamite. Experimenting, he once adapted a minute quantity to a specially constructed cartridge. When fired from a rifle it traveled a measured mile, and its trajectory was almost inconsequential."

A gleam had entered Herrick's eyes now. He regarded the girl with interest.

"Go on."

"You must realize," she continued, "the dangers which would accompany such an explosive if it fell into the wrong hands. Father, of course, had planned to give the formula over to the United States government for military defense purposes. Before he could do so, some one entered his bungalow and shot him while he slept. They stole several samples of the liquid, and they stole part of the formula."

Herrick nodded. It was the old, old story; international greed asserting itself without compunction as to the consequences.

"What I'm banking on is that one vital detail of that formula was missing," the girl said. "Without it S24W is useless. Now the person who stole these articles was hired by Seldon

Larang. Of that I'm positive. Larang realized the tremendous value of the explosive for warfare use and looked around for a buyer. You can readily see that with the European conflicts and the war in Asia, he had plenty of potential customers.

"Larang made arrangements for the sale with the representative of one of these governments, a woman known as Constance Hawley. He detailed you as skipper of this ship to deliver that explosive, disguised as heliotrope perfume and . . ."

"How did you come on all this information?" Herrick interrupted.

Portia Gane shrugged. "When my father was killed, I swore I would recover what was his and bring his murderers to justice. I followed every clue, and each led me direct to Larang. From one of Larang's employees who had no love for him I learned that the foreign agent on the receiving end would be in Kuching and would be a woman.

"So I caught a fast steamer for Kuching. After all, I reasoned, I should stand a better chance with a member of my own sex. I found this Constance Hawley, showed her a pistol and told her to talk."

"You *what?*"

"The gun wasn't loaded," Portia went on with a little laugh, "but Miss Hawley talked. The rest was simply a matter of mechanics. I had to meet the *Min Woy* before she reached port, and I knew that she would be a little east of her course. I hired a junk, trusted to luck—and here I am."

Herrick looked across at the girl with open admiration. The story sounded incredible. And yet it explained a lot.

"Luck was certainly with you," he said. "There wasn't a lot of odds in your favor. But there's a few details you haven't mentioned. Larang and this

Hawley woman aren't alone in this deal, are they?"

"No." A shadow crossed Portia's face. "There's the *Langsi*. You've heard of it, of course. A scheming international syndicate with headquarters somewhere in the Orient, it makes a business of obtaining secrets of military importance and selling them to the government that offers the highest price. The *Langsi* operated in 1916 and was probably responsible for more than one *coup d' état*. I've heard . . ."

A SUDDEN shuddering shock swept through the ship. Running steps vibrated down the outer passage, and an instant later a fist pounded on the door.

Herrick strode forward, slid the bolt and drew the door open. A deckhand stood before him, his clothing soaked to the skin.

"Typhoon!" the man said shortly. "Mr. Carnaby says—"

The rest of his words were lost in a battering roar of wind and sea topside. Herrick nodded and swung on the girl. "Take a gun out of the right locker and stay here. Don't let anyone enter this cabin under any circumstances. I'll be back as soon as I see how bad it is."

On deck he was met by a driving wind and mountainous waves that rolled over the well decks. The *Min Woy* wallowed drunkenly under an inky black sky. It was a squall and a bad one, but it wasn't a typhoon. Head down, Herrick fought his way to the port ladder and the bridge.

Arlot, the Belgian, gripped the wheel.

"Thicker'n varnish," he growled. "Keep her as she goes, eh?"

"As she goes." Herrick left the pilot house, wondering whether Mr. Carnaby could possibly have violated the rule of the sea and gone below.

The answer was swift in coming. At the break of the bridge instinct warned Herrick to look back over his shoulder. Poor as the visibility was, he had a cinema-like glimpse of Carnaby standing at the starboard ladder, feet braced wide, a revolver leveled before him.

The gun spat fire. Something hot and heavy slammed into Herrick's shoulder, spun him like a top. With a short cry the skipper reeled and crashed heavily to the planking. Carnaby waited a moment, fired again, then turned and disappeared.

The second slug only grazed his thigh, but his shoulder was a thing of pumping agony; blood trickled down his arm; spots and queer-colored lights formed before his eyes. He fought furiously to keep from going under.

VII

BUT in spite of his efforts he must have passed out for a long time. When he became aware of his surroundings again, his head was in Stoddard's arms, and the engineer was forcing the contents of a whiskey glass down his throat.

"You're all right," Stoddard was saying, and Herrick was vaguely aware that the wind had died down. The storm had passed on.

The liquor sent new life surging through him. He swallowed until he was gasping, then raised himself on one elbow.

"Carnaby . . .?"

"Below with that woman. That's what I want to talk to you about. Do you feel able to . . ."

"I'm okay." Herrick struggled erect. His arm felt like a block of wood now, but the pain was gone.

"Listen, Cap'n," Stoddard said, "Carnaby's down there after those per-

fume bottles. He don't give a damn for the diamonds as you well know, but he wants the explosive. There's a deckhand on guard at the door. We go down together, rush him and . . ."

"Just a minute. How do I know this isn't another trick?"

Stoddard shook his head and handed Herrick his automatic butt first. "No trick," he said. "Carnaby's going to try and doublecross me, and I aim to see that he doesn't. We join forces, and afterward we strike up a bargain. What say?"

Herrick nodded slowly. He knew well enough that the engineer could not be trusted. But for the moment at least the man was an ally, and that meant everything. Out of the corner of his eye the skipper saw that the pilot house was deserted. The steam steering gear had evidently been set, holding the ship to its course.

"Let's go," Stoddard said.

They went down the ladder to the main deck. Half way to the companion Stoddard picked up a stanchion, then led the way below cautiously.

The captain's cabin on the *Min Woy* lay at the farthest end for'ard, opening on a T-shaped passage. Pressing close against the bulkhead, the engineer peered ahead into the shadows. Suddenly he sprang forward.

Herrick, closing in behind, caught but a glimpse of the ensuing action, so swift was Stoddard's movements. A burly seaman stood guard before the closed door of the cabin. With a single lunge the engineer was upon him, pinioning his arms back. The stanchion rose and fell, and the sailor crumpled in a soundless heap.

Herrick tried the door. It was locked. He fitted a key noiselessly into the lock and shoved the barrier open.

There was no sign of Carnaby. In the center of the room by the desk Portia Gane sat, back toward him, gazing it seemed out one of the ports. The girl did not turn, though she must have heard the sounds of his entrance. Herrick paced forward two steps. He saw no one else in the cabin, or back of the door. Then an inner warning flashed across his brain, and he whirled.

TOO late. Pressed back in the shadows beside one of the lockers, Mr. Carnaby regarded him with a complacent smile, waved his revolver and said quietly,

"Drop the gun, Herrick. Drop it, by Godfrey, or I'll blast you!"

The automatic slipped to the carpet with a thud as Herrick slowly raised his hands. But Stoddard, still on the threshold, snarled an oath and lunged



toward Carnaby. Carnaby stiffened.

The first officer's smile didn't leave his lips as he deliberately squeezed the trigger. Stoddard pulled up with a violent shudder, staggered and slumped to the floor.

"That takes care of him," Carnaby said. "All right, Herrick, we'll make this short and sweet. Where is that perfume?"

Herrick's eyes moved from the prone body of the engineer to the girl. Portia's lips were set with a dull horror now. Her wrists and ankles were bound to the chair, but although unable to turn, she had visualized the drama behind her.

"Well . . .?" Carnaby fingered his gun impatiently.

Herrick let his shoulders fall in defeat. Slowly he paced to the desk, opened the drawer and took out the perfume box.

"You realize what you're doing, I suppose?" he said. "When we reach Kuching . . ."

A sneering laugh came from the first officer as he took the box. "Do you think I'm as blind as all that? This hooker has been off her course since we left Saigon. Right now, a few miles to starboard is Kolea Island. No resident there, no officials to ask questions, but still in steamer lanes. We board the inter-island boat, and we head for the Malay coast."

The man emphasized the word "we," and with a little chill Herrick understood. Carnaby was taking the girl with him.

"Sure." Carnaby seemed to read his thoughts. "The lady goes along. As for you, I think you'll be with this tinpot a long time. I spread the word around that there's plague aboard, and the crew's jumping ship with me. In ten minutes, Captain Herrick, you'll be

master of a derelict." He laughed icily.

Even as he spoke a rush of feet sounded topside. Herrick heard oaths and guttural yells and a moment later the rattle of cables as men began working at the falls and davits.

"They're lowering the boats now," Carnaby said smoothly. "You might as well go along topside and see the show."

With his left hand the first officer drew a knife and swiftly cut the lashings from Portia Gane. He kicked Stoddard's body aside and motioned the skipper and girl to pass through the door.

On deck Herrick strained his eyes to starboard and made out a smudge low down on the horizon. The island was there! Carnaby had taken care of every detail.

Already one boat was lowered. The crew, fo'c'sle and stokehold gang, was clustered on the boat deck, a struggling yelling mass. Fear was written in their faces—fear of the silent scourge of Eastern seas—plague! The *Min Woy* was wallowing without steerageway.

"Up we go!" Carnaby prodded his gun, forced Herrick and Portia to mount ahead of him to the bridge. There he seized a length of line, thrust it in the girl's hands.

"Tie him to the rail," he commanded. "Captain Herrick likes to see things, and he's going to see plenty." Drunk with power, his voice went on:

"There's still a fair head of steam on. We're going to leave you, Skipper, right here and start the engines before we go. That way there'll be no danger of the *Min Woy* drifting back to the island. Any last word?"

COLD sweat stood out on Herrick's brow. Feverishly he looked about him, seeking a way of escape. He saw only the bore of Carnaby's revolver.

And then as the girl stepped back, leaving him lashed to the rail, it happened! A flying shadow catapulted over the ladder to crash headlong into Carnaby. Staggering in and out like a madman, the shadow jerked the perfume box from Carnaby's hands. When they separated, a horrible figure stood at the break of the bridge, one hand holding the box triumphantly aloft.

It was Stoddard! His face was crimson with blood, and his lips were split in an insane grin.

"It's the perf . . . the explosive!" Carnaby yelled. "Put it down you fool!"

But Stoddard didn't put it down. Reeling drunkenly, he waved the perfume box high over his head.

"Do me in, will you!" he cried. "Well, you'll never live to crow about it. I'm going to blow you and this ship to kingdom come."

The engineer's arm poised for the throw. Face white, Carnaby backstepped. And then as Carnaby whipped up his revolver and fired, Portia seized his gun wrist, twisted and sent the weapon clattering to the deck. Herrick saw the bullet plough its way into Stoddard's brain. The engineer shuddered and with the perfume-explosive still locked in his fingers crumpled in a silent heap.

"Herrick!" Portia cried, her fingers flying at the ropes that held him. "Get Carnaby before . . ."

The skipper needed no one to tell him the odds had miraculously changed. Even as Carnaby reached for the revolver, Herrick shook off the loosened bonds and waded into him, striking hard clean blows with his good right.

The struggle was short-lived. Carnaby's jaw met one of those iron fists in full career. He gave a hoarse cry, tottered and fell. Instantly Herrick

scooped up the fallen revolver and raced for the boat deck. The crew, crowded about the davits, swung to meet him.

Pistols spoke, and a hail of lead spattered about him. But Herrick was fighting mad now, and a grim smile was on his lips as he replied with shot for shot. . . .

THREE hours later the British freighter, *Brunei*, bound for Sandakan, sighted the *Min Woy* drifting without steerageway, flying the distress signal, her flag upside down.

The *Brunei* lowered a boat and proceeded to board the vessel. But the officer who led his men up the sea ladder and thence to the bridge was unprepared for the confusion that greeted him.

A bareheaded man and a girl stood smiling by the chart house. About them was evidence of a fearful struggle; bodies of men lay on all sides. One boat still hung halfway in the falls. The deck was bullet-splintered, and the chart house door swung at a crazy angle.

"Glad you came," Herrick said weakly. "We had a bit of trouble aboard, as you can see. The rest of the crew's below, locked in the forepeak. Plague, you know."

"Plague!" The limey stiffened.

"Not real plague," Herrick said with a dry chuckle. "This one was the explosive kind, not the contagious."

A long time later when his wounds were clean and bandaged, the skipper of the *Min Woy* sat in his cabin and looked across at Portia Gane. The ship was under way again, with a skeleton crew loaned by the *Brunei*.

"We've enough evidence to send the murderers of your father to justice," Herrick was saying, "and I believe the law will take care of everything in time.

But we can consider ourselves mighty lucky. If Stoddard had thrown that perfume none of us would be here now to . . ."

"No." Portia shook her head. "Those perfume bottles were filled with my father's explosive all right, but as I told you one necessary detail of the formula was missing."

"But . . . I don't understand."

"The liquid needed one chemical to make it detonate on impact," the girl explained. "Father never added that until he was ready to use it. For the same reason he never wrote it in the formula."

"Then . . .?"

"It was the gold labels on the per-

fume bottles that held the secret. On the back side of each of them, protected by a thin covering of paper, was written the stolen formula."

Herrick lit his pipe and puffed. "I see," he said slowly. "So that's what Seldon Larang meant when he said, 'The perfume lies beyond the gold.'" He looked up. "Just who are you, Miss Gane?"

"I told you. My father was the man who invented that explosive. Also—and you probably guessed this—I've been operating for the United States government on special assignment duty. United States Secret Service, in other words."

She leaned back and smiled.



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Fire howled out of the jungle toward the river; the raft tipped perilously



Zulu Hunch

By E. Hoffman Price

There it lay—a fortune in tusks, locked away in the jungle. All the son of Ivory Slade had to do was go in and bring it out, with the smartest crooks and the most treacherous natives in Africa on his heels

THE breeze that came from the Indian Ocean brought the smell of cloves all the way from Zanzibar, some twenty miles off the African coast, into the tin roofed warehouse. It blended with the odor of trade tobacco, and bolts of calico, and the rancid palm oil that made the sweating Swahili

porters gleam in the late afternoon light. Perry Slade sniffed the mixture of spice and stench, and wondered how long Africa would be fooled by his return.

“For big game hunting,” Bogie Allen was saying, as he gestured toward the blacks who arranged the chop boxes, “you did well to see me. Oh, yes indeed,

Mr. Slade. Oldest outfitter in town."

Slade grunted, lifted his helmet, and mopped his bronzed forehead. He was broad and muscular, but Africa would soon boil him out. Several days of Allen's sales talk and fawning and patter began to wear. He did not like the red-faced Cockney, and the Swahili bearers did not look any better than they should have; but Slade was short of money, and the outfitter had given him the best price by a wide margin.

So, fearing that Allen might skimp on the supplies, Slade watched him, gray eyes unobtrusively probing every chop box, and bale of trade goods. He'd have to "dash" a lot of native kings, far inland, and the presents for these black fellows had to be right.

Thus far, all was regular. But Slade was uneasy. He was not going after big game, and the less Bogie Allen knew of the truth, the better. It was not what a safari went out after that counted, it was what it brought back.

An *askari* in khaki shorts and tunic came running up. One black hand rose in a smart salute. In the other, the messenger had a stick into whose cleft an official envelope was thrust. "Big game permit, sar. From the commissioner, sar."

Slade pocketed the documents. Blast that costly pretense, paying for a license to kill an elephant, when he was not interested in game. Slade was going after the tusks of beasts dead for many years. The ivory belonged to his father; lawfully bought, but never taken out, for the old man's health had failed, and Africa took all but his life.

If Perry Slade's identity were known, the grapevine telegraph would spread the news faster than any safari could march. Ivory thieves would lurk along the return route to rob him. At present market prices, the cached tusks were

worth nearly sixty thousand dollars, after payment of export duty. And even with the high cost of a safari, there would be enough to keep Slade's parents in comfort.

"I was only knee-high when we lived in Mombasa," Slade had told his father, a month previous, "but those kid memories will come back. It's a good gamble, Dad. Now that we can just about raise the cost of a safari, I'll grab that cache of tusks, or else."

It was up to him to make good. Or things would be worse than ever.

SUDDENLY, Allen's ingratiating chatter ceased. A tall native, very lean and very black, with thin lips and gray hair had come into the warehouse.

He wore a bowler hat, a leopard-skin breech clout, and a wire collar from which a Ford hubcap hung, very much like a precious jewel. In one hand he carried an *assegai* with a long, razor-edged head of hand-forged iron.

"Of all the blarsted impudence!" Allen cried. "Get out!"

The Zulu ignored the Cockney. He thrust the short-handled spear into the ground, and knelt at Slade's feet. He jabbered in Zulu and broken English, "It is true! It is true! The son of Bwana Tembo."

A witch doctor had told him to go north and serve the son of his old patron; the son of the "Elephant Lord." So, barefooted and armed with an *assegai*, he had marched.

SLADE should have told him it was a mistake and given him a stick of tobacco. He knew this, even as he gulped and swallowed a little, touched by the Zulu's long memory. "Chakana! Get your head off the ground and stand up."

Chakana obeyed. He shot a con-

temptuous look at the brown Swahilis, coast Negroes who were a mixture of African and Arab, as was their language. "*Bwana toto*," he said to the "little master" who was almost as tall as himself, "I will go on safari with you."

There was nothing more to be said. Chakana had offered his services, and Slade was glad to have him; though he did not like being exposed as the son of a man who knew Africa. Allen was ostentatiously booting and cursing the Swahilis, but he watched Slade and the Zulu from the corner of his eye. Finally he said, "Gor blime! I might 'ave knowed you wasn't a blarsted greenhorn, Mr. Slade. And I appreciate the patronage of one as knows Africa like you must."

Slade shrugged, and Chakana looked over the Cockney's head, as though the fellow did not exist.

"And you'll be wanting a pack for this chap, eh, Mr. Slade?"

"A blanket, a canteen, and rations for Chakana, yes."

"But you can't make him head porter. Mkuba won't stand for it—" He pointed toward the Swahili headman. "'E won't stand for it, gor blime."

"I'll decide what Mkuba'll stand for," Slade quietly answered. "Chakana won't interfere with any of the boys you've outfitted."

But he knew that yellow-faced Mkuba did resent the presence of a warlike Zulu who, despite his respectful attitude, was obviously an old friend; a fighting man who would much sooner die than carry a sixty pound bale for hire.

Slade spat, and added, grimly, "I do not think that Mkuba will hurt Chakana."

"Gor blime, sir, of course not! 'E's lor abiding, sir."

That night, Slade said to Chakana, "What else did the witch doctor tell you about me?"

"No more was needed, *bwana tembo*," the Zulu evaded. "Except that you were here."

There was no cross-examining him. But Slade wished that the spirits had used a little more sense about arranging the reunion.

Fifteen miles a day was what the government allowed an employer to march his safari. It was all prescribed; the daily two pounds of mealie-meal for each porter, and at least five shillings a month, and no unreasonable floggings with the hippopotamus hide *sjambok* Mkuba carried as a badge of authority. And as the safari filed westward over the rutted trail, Slade saw constabulary patrols, khaki-clad natives, and occasional tanned Britishers whose brusque cordiality disguised official inquisitiveness; leading questions about the game he sought; helpful hints offered to bring forth an unguarded remark. . . .

Dust rose in clouds. The spindle-legged Swahilis made light of their packs. They sang as they marched, a monotonous and wailing chant which made Slade think of the old days, when turbaned adventurers brought slaves and ivory to Zanzibar.

"*Bwana*," Chakana said, one evening as the eighty-odd porters were building cooking fires, "the men wonder why you have done no shooting."

He had ignored all game, except for food. He had no time for the delays incidental to bagging a rhino or an elephant. Slade, now exposed as the son of "Ivory" Slade, would have half the crooks in British East Africa interested in his return route. The constabulary would do their best, but that widely scattered handful of white officers and native *askaris* could not play nurse-maid

to a safari. Africa was for grown men.

Ivory Slade's caches of tusks were famous. The only way to avoid trouble was to slip out of British East by a route that looters would not anticipate: in this case, the nasty trip through Portuguese East.

Native kings met Slade. He "dashed" them with red calico, tobacco, hatchets, knives and flashlights. They gave him yams and chickens and mealies. And they all chattered, furtively, about the *bwana* who was such a poor shot that he had killed no game. That could hoodoo the safari.

"Master, there is too much talk," Chakana said, squatting with the shaft of his heavy *assegai* across his knees. "Trouble. The witch doctor said my friend's son would have trouble, so I came."

Slade laughed. "Dad had a lot of foxy enemies, but this time, they'll be waiting along the wrong trail. We're meeting an Arab *dhow*, on the Zambesi, and on this side of the border. That'll fool 'em."

"Unless the drums talk too much."

A MONTH passed; a month of tramping over the brown veldt, and past canebrakes where lions roared; up wooded slopes of towering mountains, and down lava fields which cut the bare feet of the Swahilis, and tore Slade's boots to ribbons. It was in the jungle near the Belgian Congo's border, steaming and humid, that the safari halted.

Finding the cache was easy. There were seventy big tusks, some of them weighing nearly eighty pounds a piece, and few under fifty. Time had mellowed them. None had spoiled. Many had once served as fence posts for an African king's *boma*; ivory taken long before any white man entered the heart of Africa.

Chakana's eyes glistened, and he counted on his fingers. Slade said, "Sixty thousand dollars worth, in Antwerp. And my father paid four thousand in export tax and then couldn't haul it out."

The Swahili bearers muttered, and Mkuba came forward to protest, "*Bwana*, these are too heavy. The law says, sixty pounds for each boy."

Slade had taken as many bearers as he could without exciting suspicion. His answer was, "A shilling extra for each boy, and shorter marches. Another shilling if they make twenty miles a day!"

They could do it. Arab safari leaders had made their men carry twice that limit, and more. Slade, concerned with justice and a stake for his father, whose forty years in Africa had left him peniless, could not let regulations rob him of his chance.

"Troublè, *bwana*," Chakana muttered, fingering the haft of his *assegai*. "That Mkuba. Something should happen to him."

"The men are singing," Slade countered, as the safari set out.

"Mkuba is not," the old Zulu grumbled.

Slade pushed the safari. Chakana, forgetting his Zulu pride, shouldered the biggest tusk in the lot; one hundred pounds of ivory, and he set a merciless pace. His long legs reached out, and he twirled his *assegai* like an officer's swagger stick. Looking back over his shoulder, he mocked the sweating porters.

"Sons of slaves! Dog children! Can you shake the dust out of your bones and keep up with an old man?"

Mkuba, being headman, was rightfully affronted. Once he unlimbered his *sjambok* to lash the Zulu to ribbons. Chakana, not even bothering to set

down the tusk, whipped about, grinning. He crouched, *assegai* ready for a thrust. Slade snatched the shaft. "Cut it out! And you, Mkuba, put down that whip! I'll flog him if he needs it."

The Zulu ignored the muttering Swahilis who had gathered about. Slade had intervened before Mkuba lost face; but the damage had been done.

Despite the night marches, the zig-zagging designed to nullify the gossip which native villages relayed by the same mysterious method that had brought Chakana all the way from Zululand, Slade was worried. He had to drive hard, but if he overdid it, the whole safari would desert.

Normally, bearers who abandoned their employer got prison terms. Slade, however, was at their mercy. The Swahilis could win immunity by telling of the forced marches; that he was giving them double wages made no difference. His moral rights were not worth a shilling in the face of official red tape. So he watched the bearers by night, taking turns with Chakana.

ONE evening, Mkuba came to Slade's tent. Half a dozen scowling Swahilis were at his heels. "*Bwana*, we are law-abiding boys. But this Zulu fellow insults us. We do not wish to kill him. So we must leave if you do not make him go his way."

He did not blame Mkuba. But he sensed that the Swahili's demand came from more than outraged propriety. The respectful voice was accompanied by a veiled but unmistakable insolence of bearing, which was seconded by the sullenness of the bearers behind him. This was intended as a test of strength; all the more so since Mkuba did not openly threaten to report Slade to the authorities.

As a matter of fact, a man has a

right to carry all the ivory he wants to, anywhere at all—except past the customs officials. Until Slade attempted to cross the border, or put to sea, he had committed no offense against book law. Mkuba for some reason did not see fit to threaten, but his attitude was a challenge.

To expel Chakana not only went against the grain, since the grim old fellow had faithfully served Slade's father, but it would also lower Slade's prestige. To refuse, on the other hand, would lead to desertion.

"Once I saved your life from his *assegai*. You fool, you were going to strike a fighting man and he would have killed you. Is it wise for you to ask this thing, when you know that he will hunt you by night, as soon as he leaves camp?"

Mkuba fidgeted, then regained hold of himself. "*Bwana*," he stubbornly maintained, "we do not fear this man, and we will not have him."

Slade felt sweat slowly trickling down his cheeks and he hoped that the Swahilis did not notice it. He had lost in that exchange. Then it came to him. "Let one of your men get Chakana, and I will give you weapons. If you slay him; if three of you at once can slay him, it is well."

Mkuba's expression changed. He was no coward, but no three Swahilis cared to face a Zulu warrior whose black body showed how many wounds he had survived. They might kill him, but he would finish them all before he dropped; British regiments had learned that!

But Mkuba could not back down before his men, or he was finished. His fellows would spit at him, even though their fear was as deep as his own. "Get Chakana!" he commanded. "Now!"

Slade folded his arms and waited. It was bad, any way it went. If, very im-

probably, Chakana died in a duel, Slade would curse the ivory that caused it. If the Zulu won, there would be hell to pay. Yet a white man, cornered, cannot back down before natives.

The Zambesi was not far ahead; then the march downstream, along its bank, to meet Hamid and his *dhow*. Just that simple, and now this clash had come to disrupt the secret safari.

The men returned, grinning. "We cannot find the Zulu. He has run away, fearing us."

"*Bwana*," said Mkuba, very respectfully, "we be peaceful men and not slayers. He deserted, but we will not."

On the face of it, this rang true; but somehow, it was a bit too good. There should have been a certain amount of unconcealed triumph. For while Slade had not personally lost face by knuckling down to Mkuba's insolent demands, the bearers had scored when Chakana fled.

While the old Zulu may have deserted to spare his adopted master an embarrassing situation, there were other possibilities: such as a hidden danger that Chakana sensed yet did not mention for lack of proof. "He's smelled trouble," Slade told himself, once he was alone in his tent. "So he's gone out to scout around."

To Slade's surprise, Mkuba and his bearers outdid themselves the following day. They marched twenty-three miles over rock and through brush to an abandoned village, whose bedraggled huts dotted a pleasant clearing. Beyond, and westward, was jungle and finally, a bend in the Zambesi. While a safari usually leaves a conspicuous trail, the rocky ground and wiry thorn brush retained signs apparent only to men deliberately hunting traces of the march.

Already Slade could tell from the humidity and heat that he was well off

the plateau, and heading toward the low country which fringes the coast. It could not be far to Portuguese East, and the Arab's *dhow*.

THE next morning, Slade quickly learned that his optimism had been wasted. Eleven porters had deserted. Mkuba came to render his report.

"*Bwana*," he wailed, so that the whole chattering camp could hear, "the men are afraid. One of them dreamed that your Zulu servant went out to lurk and slay us as we slept, near the river. When the boat waits to be loaded with ivory."

Slade cursed. "You fool! Why would he kill you?"

Mkuba fidgeted and squirmed. "Allah forgive me for saying this thing," he stuttered, "but it was thus in the old days. The Arab traders slew their porters when the march was over, so that they could not tell where the ivory had been found."

This had been done in the days when Tipoo-Tib ruled the land, seizing slaves and tusks, slaying and burning and looting Africa with his cunning and remorseless Arabs. Slade said, "You idiot! Didn't you see that there wasn't any ivory left? There's nothing for them to tell about."

"They were gone, *bwana*, before I could explain that!"

To abandon eleven tusks, even small ones, meant a loss of over four thousand dollars; and the old man needed every cent of this last resource. Africa owed "Ivory" Slade a living for his remaining years. She had taken his health, and left him nothing but memories. For his son to delay and recruit more bearers would be disastrous, for success depended on a march fast enough to outrace raiding Arabs and natives that would be after them.

Even with a full crew, the load was too big. There was but one decision to make, and he made it. "Take the smallest tusks and make slings, so that there will be three carried by two men. These heavy packs will be changed about, each hour. And all get extra pay."

There was no more singing as the safari snaked through the jungle. Bearers often had to chop a path. Slade abandoned as much mealie-meal and tinned rations as he dared, lightening all the loads. He threw away his own blankets, and made the men discard theirs, so that they could carry more food and ivory. He relieved his gun-bearers, and himself took a rifle in hand, and another slung from his shoulders.

A village where he had expected to get rations was deserted; freshly abandoned, he saw at a glance. The smells confirmed his observation. Rumor must have gone ahead. The fear of a prowling Zulu could have alarmed the villagers; so also could word of a safari making forced marches. Haste, to them, could mean nothing but an evil conscience or evil purpose.

Slade knew that there would be wholesale desertions that night. He said to Mkuba, "Build a stockade so they cannot sneak away!"

"*Bwana*," the Swahili headman wailed, "the men are afraid. They say now that this ivory is being smuggled."

"If you want to report this safari to the constabulary," Slade said, "go and take your men with you. See if you get a reward, or prison for deserting. We are going right to the border and the inspectors."

"*Bwana*, I know that this is lawful," Mkuba protested, "but these fools are too stupid to understand. You are my father and my grandfather, and what you do is good."

But men vanished, that evening, even while they built the stockade. The vapors and the shimmering gloom of brief twilight swallowed them. When Slade checked up those who were inside, twenty were missing.

Once, that night, he heard sounds that indicated how some clumsy fellow was trying to outwit the barrier. Slade went perhaps a dozen paces from the smudge fire he had built to keep away the mosquitoes while he watched. "Halt!" he shouted, leveling his rifle. "Halt!"

He could just distinguish the dark blur of motion. Then he lowered his weapon, and shook his head. He could not quite shoot down a frightened savage; it took an Arab for that. The fellow yelled, crashed through, as Slade bounded forward to snatch him by the ankle.

Together, they burst out of the barrier. Slade recovered first, jerked the deserter to his feet, and stiffened him with a wallop.

"Get back in—get back in, and stay there!"

He booted the bearer headlong through the hole his departure had made. But while this went on, others had slipped out. Slade was certain that one deliberately clumsy deserter had offered himself as a distraction so that a dozen comrades could make good their escape.

Morning verified this guess. Only five men and Mkuba remained. The Swahili headman said, "*Bwana*, I could not help it! They are my brothers, so I could not kill those I heard slipping out."

Slade spat. Lack of sleep reddened his eyes. A sandy stubble made cheek and chin bristle, and mosquitoes had left his face bulbous with lumps. Futile patrolling of the stockade had forced

him to dispense with his netting. But it heartened him to see that Mkuba still looked to him for orders.

The headman went on, "*Bwana*, the deserters do not have much start on us. We can go as fast as they. To a village, somewhat north, to get more bearers before those fools spread the news."

This was logical enough; there had been no drum talk. But Slade said, "It is close to the river. We will haul the tusks, five at a time. Then we will make a raft."

Mkuba bowed and said, "That is well, *bwana*. If whirlpools do not upset us for the crocodiles to eat, and if the hippopotamus does not rise beneath us and break our raft apart, it can be done. My grandfather was an Arab, and he did as you say."

IT TOOK two sweating days to get the ivory to the river, and as many to cut timber and withes to make a raft. Trimming the load was a task; and seven men, including Slade, had their hands full, poling the awkward craft down the river.

Progress was slow. The sun blazed down, and glare from the water reached into the shade of Slade's helmet. Uncounted mosquitoes swarmed from the sluggish pools where the river's curve threw the current from the bank. His hands were raw and bleeding from the ceaseless plying of the awkward pole.

Overhanging lianas whipped and cut his arms. Thorny vines slashed his shirt and let the sun bite into his skin. These things could have been avoided by staying in midstream, but the current and the water's depth would have made it impossible to control the raft with poles. An eddy or whirlpool could set it spinning until it broke.

Finally the river widened a little, and leaving the jungle and running through

a level stretch of veldt, where tall grass baked brown in the sun. Zebras saw the raft, and galloped away from the river, making their peculiar *yap-yapping* cry, like a dog.

Slade and his men had been on half rations. What the spray had not ruined, they had eaten. "Pole into that cove," he said. "We can hide the raft, while I go ashore for meat."

Mkuba and his five weary men grinned and licked their lips. All they had had for days had been mealie-meal.

He did not take a gun bearer; the hard-driven Swahilis had to make camp. Slade's .405 Winchester was too heavy for the game he sought, but it had the sledgehammer impact needed to settle a trouble-hunting rhino, or the savage black buffalo.

Alone and on foot, he could take no chances.

The sun was dipping, and the fierce heat subsided a little. Something like an hour after he left the river, Slade saw some springbok, suspiciously picking their way along. He aimed at the little hollow where the neck joined the spine.

The blast of the .405 shook the dry grass. The springbok scattered, except for one that crumpled, knocked from its slender legs. Slade ran forward, knife drawn, and slashed the dying animal's throat. The Swahilis, true to their few scraps of the Mahammedan faith, would not touch an animal unless it had been bled before the last spark of animation was extinct.

He quartered the carcass, removed the choicest cuts, and wrapped them up in the hide. That the head and neck were useless weight had to be ignored. His men had served him well, and he wanted them to see the slashed throat so that they would have no scruples about eating.

Loaded down with his kill, Slade's return was slow and labored. He had to dodge ant hills, and clamber out of dry wallows where buffalo rolled after the rains. Sharp blades of grass slashed his face.

Chakana's mysterious departure had troubled Slade, now that he was alone and for a while relaxed from his task of driving men. This, with the old Zulu's appearance in Dar es Salaam, presented a riddle that worried him. During the interminable days of outfitting a safari on the coast, some native, noting the son's resemblance to the father, could have pieced things together. Otherwise, gossip would not have reached Chakana in Zululand.

With characteristic African reticence, the old Zulu had refused to explain. White men have too often laughed at the animal-like intuition of the natives, so that they would not discuss their sources of knowledge.

When Slade reached the rocky ruin of the river's course, there were no tents pitched at the camp site. The raft was gone, nor were there any broken ropes to show that it had been swept away. There were no heaps of firewood; Mkuba and his men had not made any effort to prepare for his return. Beyond any doubt, they had cast off, going downstream with his cargo of ivory. A trail among the water lilies showed its course.

WRATH made him for a moment forget that he was alone, with nothing but his rifle and pistol, knife, and first-aid kit. The few moments of twilight were almost gone, and the deep rumble of a lion blotted out the squawk of herons. Africa was raising her voice as purple gloom raced across river and veldt.

Slade made a fire and broiled some

meat. "The biggest chump south of the equator!" he growled in answer to a hyena's laughter. "Taken in by Mkuba's phoney loyalty!"

The Swahilis expected him to perish of exposure. While each one was finger-printed, and on record as having been assigned to Slade's safari, there were plenty of whites who could "discover" a raft of unlicensed ivory; they could pay the two shilling a pound tax, and lawfully export it, thirty thousand dollars worth for the taking.

"There's a white man behind this," Slade reasoned, forcing both wrath and alarm into the background. "A clever chap, who knows the answers."

He ended by planning to follow the river on foot. Mkuba, confident of having settled the troublesome *bwana*, would soon relax, and pole downstream in African fashion—stopping whenever he was tired, which would be often.

Slade still had a chance, if hardship did not take his strength.

A sound startled him; a new sound, not that of Africa's night-prowling beasts and restless birds. He reached for his rifle, and slowly drew back from the dim glow of the smudge that discouraged the swarming mosquitoes. They would wear him down sooner than anything else.

A twig crackled. Then the hammer click as Slade got the .405 into line. "Steady!" he warned, and repeated the challenge in Swahili. "Halt!"

"Do not shoot, *bwana*," a familiar voice answered.

The man emerged from the deeper gloom. A chromium disc gleamed on his chest. It was Chakana, still wearing his bowler hat. Slade threw wood on the fire, and gestured toward the spring-bok meat. "Have you eaten?"

The old fellow chopped off a cut, and ate it raw. His eyes gleamed in the fire-

light, and when he wiped his lips, he grinned ferociously and said, "*Bwana*, I did not slay any of them, for I did not have time, wondering what they had done to you. So I came, and I smelled your fire."

"How'd you know?" Slade leaned forward, eagerly. "Who? Where?"

"Mkuba and his Swahili dogs, riding a raft of ivory, and singing about *bwana tembo*, lost upstream. I was afraid you were wounded. Maybe dead."

"Where've you been, all this while?"

"Staying away to prevent uprising, *bwana*," the old Zulu explained. "And creeping about, listening to village chatter. All men know how the bearers deserted, but no one knows why. So I learned which way they went. Leaving one by one, they met and marched together, that way."

It began to make sense, to confirm his suspicions. "Bogie Allen paid them, did he? They're meeting him?"

"That is right, *bwana*. Paid to say nothing of ivory, so that he can offer the tax and own it. But until they learn of this raft, the red-faced hound will go to where your men broke from the *boma* that was to cage them by night. Back there I watched, but could not help."

The old Zulu fanned the mosquitoes away while Slade caught a little sleep; restless and troubled, for hundreds of bites made him feverish, and so did the plans that danced in his head. When he finally sat up, he said, "We will march downstream where the raft must be waiting, while Mkuba sends a man back to meet Bogie Allen."

At dawn they set out. The first day's march brought them to the spot where Mkuba had moored at the bank to camp.

"See, *bwana*!" Chakana circled as he read the signs. "One man left camp,

swinging wide of the river bend, to make a shortcut upstream. We will reach the raft first."

His reasoning was sound, but it did not work out that way.

THE following day, Slade did find the raft. Seventy bearers were carrying the last of the ivory ashore, and toward a camp some distance from the bank. The bribed Swahilis had lost no time in getting word of Mkuba's success in outwitting Slade, who had upset the entire plan by refusing to recruit new bearers. Africa keeps no secrets from her children; news travels on the wind.

Fires winked in the twilight, marking the extent of the camp. Swahilis chanted and laughed. Creeping closer, Slade recognized Bogie Allen, and another white man. The flickering glare picked out gun barrels and knives. Chakana muttered, "If we killed them all, who would carry the ivory back to the raft?"

That was the Zulu's attitude toward life and odds. He dimly recognized the impossibility, then denied it.

"There are too many," Slade admitted, frowning.

"Suppose—" Chakana hefted his murderous *assegai*, "I sneak in and spear Allen and the other thief. Then Mkuba and his cowards will beg for their lives, being without a master."

This was eminently practical. Slade, however, did not want two lives on his hands. He knew that if he went with Chakana to capture the two tricksters, the old Zulu would in spite of orders kill one or both.

For death and combat were in the warrior's blood, in the glint of his eyes, and in the lines of his lithe and scar-marked form. Chakana had been patient until now.

Then Slade outlined a plan. Cha-

kana's grin expanded. "*Bwana*, it is your father who speaks! Who else would think of that!"

"You circle to the right. I'll take the left. I'll fire twice, one-two, quick. That's your signal."

He handed Chakana a packet of matches, and watched him plunge through the tall grass, swinging in an arc that would carry him a mile or more to the rear of the camp, and then toward its further flank. Slade was certain that the breeze was brisk enough; and it would continue riverward.

Slade stood waiting, his powerful body relaxed and easy, glancing now and again at the watch on his wrist to make sure of giving Chakana enough time. His eyes followed the warrior.

Allen's deep-voiced companion could no longer be distinguished from the Swahili chatter. Then the rustle of grass drowned all but the mutter of drums. The bearers were in high spirits.

From a knoll, the far off blinking of camp fires told him that the distance was great enough. He raised his rifle and fired twice. Moments passed. If the shots had been heard by Allen's men, they gave no sign. Slade crouched, anxiously watching. Far off, he caught a small splash of flame. Chakana had touched off the dry veldt.

Then Slade struck a match.

He felt the tightness that had held him ever since the discovery of Mkuba's flight suddenly relax, as the prospect of action released him, then pitched him to a new, but different, tension.

He raced a hundred yards and halted. A second tongue of flame rose. As he ran in a great curve, he saw Chakana's third spot of fire; the first two were blending into a red line in the gloom.

The breeze whipped the blaze toward the river. Grass stalks, thick as a man's finger, popped like rifle shots. In the

ruddy glare, Slade saw the old Zulu's black body and gleaming *assegai* blade. He had a twist of grass, all ablaze, which he applied as he ran.

Breathless and panting, they met at the midpoint of the flaming arc.

"Run for the river, *bwana!* This way!"

They paralleled the distant stream, skirting the flames as closely as they could. Slade stretched his weary legs, and shifted his course. The curve of the river gave him the odds he needed; otherwise, he could not have reached the water ahead of the advancing blaze.

From the downstream side, he could see giraffes and lions and antelope stampeding for safety. Their rush had warned Allen, well ahead of the grass fire's crackle and glare. "Look, *bwana!*" the old Zulu chuckled, gesturing toward the camp, which was at the center of the rapidly advancing crescent. "They're hauling it back! Just as you planned!"

The flames leaped higher in the dry grass, and even from where they stood Chakana and Slade were fanned by its cruel heat in surging, shimmering waves that beat their bodies dry.

Swahili bearers, their flight checked by the whips of Allen and his white companion, had picked up tusks. Sweating and stumbling and shouting, they tottered with their burdens. Whenever one dropped his load of ivory, Allen's *sjambok* cracked down.

"Pick it up!" Allen howled. "Gor blime, I'll kill you! Tom, watch that beggar! Don't let him—"

Stampeding animals bowled the bearers over. Tom, the Cockney's accomplice, booted and flogged the laggards. Slade, watching the desperate efforts to save the ivory from the blaze, grudgingly admired the tricky Allen's resolution and quick wits. The raft was the only

place of safety, and already, the river was crowded with panic-stricken animals.

This was something that could only exist in a nightmare: the smothering heat, the flames dancing upward into a brazen sky, the mixed howls and cries of frightened jungle beasts, and above it all the jackal voice of the Cockney and the sharp high slap of his whip, lashing the air.

The Swahilis plunged shoulder deep into the sluggish water and toward the raft. "Stow that stuff right!" Tom yelled, cracking his whip. "If it tips, I'll skin you alive!"

THE furnace blast came closer. Slade wondered if the struggling men could get the load trimmed before they had to dive into the water for safety. He said to Chakana, "Now's our chance! Get aboard before we're roasted out, up here! They'll not notice us."

He led the way down the narrow, rocky path, and joined the milling Swahilis. Soot and dirt blackened his face and helmet. He was scarcely distinguishable from the bearers. Chakana helped them in wrestling the heavy tusks into place, so that the raft would not capsize when poled from the bank.

Allen and Tom leaped aboard, shouting to Mkuba. "Cast off!"

Mkuba leaped to obey.

Then Slade burst through the Swahilis, whom Tom was flogging to make them dive into the water, where they would be safe enough.

He came plunging through their close-packed panic with the fire hurrying at his heels. With elbow and knee and fist he bludgeoned them aside, using his rifle butt as a flailing club whenever they massed in around him. Then he was through, and made the raft in one great leap.

"You get off yourself!" Slade shouted, rifle leveled from the hip. "Get, you skunk! And you too, Allen!"

He stood there facing them, white with anger, trembling with the knowledge of what these men had almost done to him and to old Ivory Slade. They were stunned at first, then they rallied, each in his own way as a man must do at such a moment. Slade was ready for them.

The Cockney, his red face now black from smoke, recoiled, mouth sagging, eyes wide. He gulped, "Gor blime—Mr. Slade—love a duck—"

Tom jerked a pistol. Slade made a butt strike with his rifle, catching the fellow under the chin, and knocking him into the water. As he turned to nail the amazed Cockney, Chakana closed in with his *assegai*. Screeching, Allen retreated. He splashed into the lily pads, kicking and threshing.

Slade turned on the bearers, a dozen of whom had not been flogged from the raft. "Grab a pole!" he shouted. "Careful, there! Easy, boy!"

They now recognized the master they had deserted, and they were afraid. They bent to their task, and Chakana prodded them with his *assegai*. "Dog children," he growled, "careful or I spear you!"

Chakana was in his element now. He swaggered and bullied, the derby he had somehow not lost in the melee, rakishly perched on his head. The men cringed and whimpered.

For moments, the fierce breath of the fire licked over the rocky brink of the river. Even well toward midstream, the heat singed Slade. Then the intolerable blast subsided, and in the dying glare, he saw half choked men popping up from among hyacinths and lily pads; men and beasts forgot their enmity in common peril.

Allen, splashing and dragging his half-conscious accomplice to his feet, cried out, "Gor blime, Mr. Slade, I come to help you! You can't leave us—I'll 'ave the lor on you!—I'll—now, listen—"

"Try walking home," Slade retorted. "You've got a good yarn, but it doesn't quite tick. If Mkuba hadn't been keeping you in touch with my *safari*, you'd not just happen to meet me when I needed a lift."

Chakana made as if to hurl his *as-segai*. Allen ducked into the muddy water. His last play had failed. The old Zulu laughed, then shouted, "Steady on that pole, child of a coward!"

The raft swung clear of a whirlpool; it straightened, and once under control, headed slowly downstream.

"We'll meet the boat by sunrise," Slade said, as they rounded the next bend. "It's a cinch. Listen, Chakana, you knew I was in a jam, but how?"

The old Zulu smiled knowingly, and shook his head. "Your father knew you would find his last hoard of ivory when he needed it, in his old age—but how did he know that you would do this, and that you would make thieves carry it back through fire?"

Slade knew better than to press the point. He knew that but for the loyalty "Ivory" Slade had won, years before, Bogie Allen would not have failed in his trickery. "Let it go at that, Chakana. I'll call it a Zulu hunch and give you a gold plated hub-cap. And with enough hunches like that, a fellow can get by anywhere."

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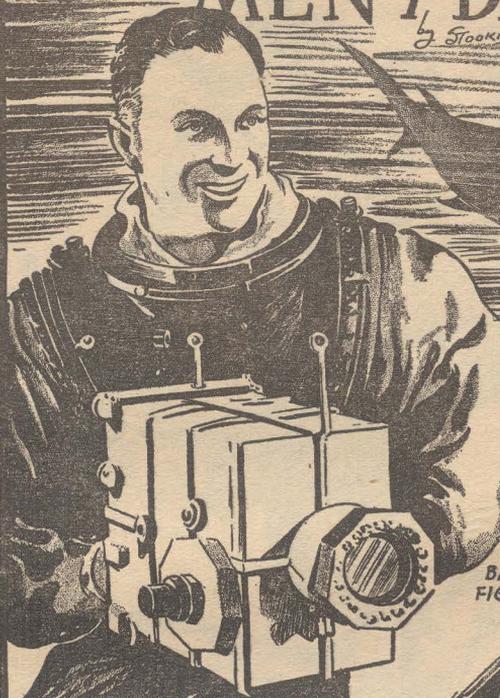
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MEN OF DARING

by STOOKIE ALLEN



DIVER

DANGER IS HIS BUSINESS. CAPTAIN JOHN D. CRAIG HAS RISKED HIS LIFE ON THE OCEAN FLOOR MORE THAN ANY MAN. YEARS AGO HE STRUCK IT RICH IN OIL, AND THIS PERMITTED HIM TO ROAM THE WORLD IN SEARCH OF ADVENTURE. HE SHOT TIGERS IN INDIA, BEAR IN ALASKA AND BARELY ESCAPED WITH HIS LIFE FIGHTING THE RIFFS IN MOROCCO.

CRAIG WHILE WORKING IN HOLLYWOOD, CRAIG INVENTED A SPECIAL DIVING SET THAT MADE IT POSSIBLE TO TAKE PICTURES FAR UNDER WATER. STUNTING ON THE OCEAN FLOOR FOR THE CAMERA BECAME ROUTINE WORK FOR CRAIG. HE FOUGHT ENORMOUS FISH AND TOOK MANY ANOTHER TREMENDOUS RISK.

ONCE, WHILE FILMING JAPANESE SARGASSO DIVERS CRAIG BECAME ENTANGLED IN THE SARGASSO GRASS. HE WAS ALMOST EXHAUSTED BEFORE A JAP DIVER COULD GET TO HIM. THEN WHILE CUTTING HIM FREE THE JAP SEVERED HIS LIFE LINE. CRAIG WAS ALMOST DEAD WHEN BROUGHT UP.

USING HELIUM SUITS, THE BEST YET DEvised, CRAIG WILL SEARCH THE WRECKAGE OF THE LUSITANIA. WORKING IN 312 FEET OF WATER, CRAIG WILL NOT ONLY PHOTOGRAPH THE SALVAGING BUT WILL ALSO BROADCAST THE OPERATIONS OVER AN INTERNATIONAL HOOKUP FROM THE BOTTOM.

THERE IS MUCH GOLD IN THE WRECKED LUSITANIA.

IT'S NOT ADVENTURING, IT'S SUICIDE!

STOOKIE ALLEN



By

A. De H. Smith

The horses neighed and pranced as their riders came to death-grips

Gallop or Die

A regiment cannot take the fortress of the Arab rebels? Very well then; send in one Yankee with a good right-hook, a knowledge of horseflesh and a hatred for Sahara heat

TWO pairs of eyes met and clashed. Mutual dislike flashed from one man to the other and again silence fell on the sweltering tent. "But this means my death!" Captain Garroway exploded, staring in shocked disbelief at the British desert-expedition leader. "The whole regiment couldn't capture this Arab fort," he said. "How can you expect one man to do the job?"

"It *can* be accomplished by a soldier of intelligence and courage," Colonel Reeves said coldly, stabbing his pencil into the map spread before him. "I could select another man for the assignment, if you prefer. Naturally your refusal will have to be put in my report."

Garroway shot his superior a withering glance and half turned away.

Through the open tent-flap he could see the shimmering desert sands, churned into waves by five hundred cavalry hoofs. Thorn bushes and scraggly palms broke the yellow rolls beyond the horse lines but all these things were obliterated by the merciless sun.

"If I could get away from this cursed desert I'd be able to take hold of myself and forget that sunstroke," Garroway reflected, still ignoring the Colonel's cutting drawl. "Get away from this blasted heat. My brain's dried out." He half shut his eyes and saw the snowy-cool slopes of Colorado—fresh green, sparkling clear water . . .

Garroway jerked himself out of his day-dream, suddenly fixing his mind upon what Colonel Reeves was saying.

"Thanks for your renewed attention," the commander acidly remarked. "As I was saying, you will proceed to Fort Neejah and capture its commander. In return I will accept your resignation and recommend you for the Military Cross. You will be at liberty to return, with honor, to that cool climate of which we have heard overmuch. But if you fail . . . Orderly," he barked over his shoulder, "my compliments to Mehmet Ali Pasha and ask him to come in."

"Colonel, you're not sending that Arab with me," Garroway said angrily. "I know he's a prisoner of war and has given his parole not to escape—but he's a slimy assassin like the rest of his tribe and I don't trust him."

"You will do as I order," Colonel Reeves said with icy finality. "Ah, Pasha, take a seat," he added, his voice velvety, when feet shuffled in the sand and the Arab came in.

Garroway's angry eyes went to a point just above the colonel's head. Mehmet Ali's bullet-head was crowned by a thick astrakhan fez, pulled down

almost to the quick little eyes set in his puffy face. A high, tight collar pressed into his puffy jowls. His paunch bulged over a tightly pulled-in belt.

Mehmet Ali puffed a Russian cigarette while the colonel recited, for Garroway's benefit, what he had planned. The pasha had very kindly consented to take a British officer to the fort. There Mehmet Ali would use his superior rank and influence to compel the commandant and his two thousand men to surrender to Captain Garroway.

Colonel Reeves intended losing no more men in useless frontal attacks and felt it reasonable to risk one life rather than several hundred. It was as well that Pasha recognized that the rebellion was a failure; he was anxious to return to his home in Jeddah.

The Arab's pouted, darting eyes filled Garroway's mind with fresh suspicions but another glance at Colonel Reeves' set face made him decide that he might as well keep his mouth shut.

"Very well, sir," the American said. "I'll get my kit together and will be ready to start in an hour's time."

The Arab half bowed and waved one pudgy hand in assent. Colonel Reeves continued his interminable stabbing at the map as Garroway saluted and left the tent.

THREE blistering days had passed since Captain Garroway, the Arab leader and his servant had left the camp. Now the cavalryman sat under the date plams of a little oasis, soaking his swollen feet in the water and congratulating himself that, for the moment, he was free of Mehmet Ali's persistent conversation.

The Pasha, strict follower of Mahomet that he was, had retired to the other side of the palm clump to turn his face toward Mecca and recite his

evening prayers. But he had completed his devotions very rapidly and now he was crouched in the thorn bushes between the palms, peering over at Garroway and cursing the slow-falling dusk.

The man beside him put one of the thick, Arabian cigarettes to his lips but before he could strike a light. Mehmet Ali, purpled with passion, struck down the hand.

"Son of a cow-camel!" the Pasha burred. "Have I not told you that this one is suspicious? Idiot! Must you give him warning? Let there be no sound until the dark comes. I take him to Neejah as a prisoner, for my especial purposes. There will be no knives . . . yet. Quiet."

Garroway tossed aside his helmet and got to his feet to stretch his arms in the fresher air of evening. To the watching Arab he appeared far taller than his lean six feet and there was that about him which resembled a panther; lithe, steel-muscled, ready to spring.

As well the Pasha recalled the American's icily blue eyes, curving nostrils and compressed lips. He smiled and patted his rounded paunch. Many other tall, fair-haired *Ingleezi* had died out here in the desert.

Gratefully filling his lungs, Garroway sauntered over to where the camels were bedded down, swinging their heads from side to side and groaning as they chewed their barley rations.

The cavalryman examined the beasts' backs for saddle sores, prodding one animal to its feet to inspect it better.

The examination was deliberate, for which the crawling servant of the Pasha gave thanks to Allah. He slipped under the back of the canvas shelter, snatched up Garroway's two revolvers and sword and was back in the shelter

of the trees long before the American returned to the camp.

The shadows drew down over the oasis. Garroway relaxed, but for some reason he could not rest. Finally, with a muttered oath, he rose and slid into the palms' dense shadows, listening intently.

He could hear nothing to justify his uneasiness, but instinct drove him on.

All at once something gripped his extended wrist. Garroway promptly ducked and a club aimed at his head, glanced off his shoulder. He jumped up and let drive with his free fist. That too was gripped and held.

Now the camels' grunting and the palms' fluttering was lost. There were no sounds but low, hissing intakes of breath and the scuffling of shoes in the sand.

Garroway groaned softly when a heel ground his instep. He twisted sharply as sweating fingers met around his neck from behind, pulling him backward. He crashed to the ground and rolled over, smashing his fist on one of those scuffling feet. There was a grunt in reply and again the hands groped for him.

Garroway swiftly got to his feet, peering into the dark. Something moved just beyond him; a lightish blur. He leaped ahead and shot in a blow backed by every sinew in his long, desert-hardened body.

A grunt came out of the gloom but Garroway did not hear it. An agonizing pain was shooting up his arm and he knew from the hot, wet sensation of his hand that he had cut himself, deeply, on some sharp object.

With the hurt hand to his lips, and bent double, Garroway backed away a few paces, trying to disregard the pain.

Long seconds passed but nothing

happened. He pushed softly forward, his left hand extended to guide him, the right drawn back. He touched a palm's rough bole and he knew that the attackers had faded away.

The double cracks of two revolver shots suddenly rang out. The sounds came from the direction of the camp site, right behind, and without hesitation Garroway turned and blundered off through the trees.

"Well, I'll be damned!" the American breathed when he reached the camp to find Mehmet Ali's bulk outlined by the fire and standing astride a fallen man; wheezing but triumphant.

"Look, my friend," the Pasha crowed in his clipped yet perfect English. "The traitor, hah! My servant, see? The pig-dog! The fire is low. I take the flashlight to show you. Take it. You will observe he steal your revolvers, your sword? Hah. He would sell us to the rebels. Yes, he is dead. I shall remove him."

With the words the Pasha calmly grasped the dead man by one foot and tugged him out of sight.

"Hope you're not hurt?" Garroway asked, when the Pasha returned, still puffing. He played the flashlight over Mehmet Ali and his eyes suddenly narrowed. Mehmet Ali retained the olive-drab uniform he had worn as a General during the Turkish occupation of Arabia and on his shoulders were the crossed swords, denoting his rank.

The metal insignia on the left shoulder was twisted and covered with a red splotch. In a flash Garroway knew it was this badge which had cut his knuckles.

Garroway promptly lowered the flashlight down. Sweet little jackpot he was in. If he took Mehmet Ali back, Reeves would blast him out of his shoes. He couldn't prove anything. No,

he'd go on; nothing else was possible.

Mehmet Ali continued to exude pride and good humor at this deliverance from captivity. He skilfully renewed the fire of camel dung, and while Garroway examined his revolvers the Pasha set the camp in order, quite as though he were a humble camp-follower instead of a former leader of the Sultan's cavalry.

After he had settled himself for the night the Pasha again commenced his interminable chatter. Garroway got in a question here and there and learned exactly what Mehmet Ali intended telling him. He did discover, however, that the person they sought was apparently a superman.

"Of a surety this Kazee Bey is astonishing," Mehmet Ali declared, laughing softly as he lighted his twentieth cigarette. "His soldiers regard him as a god. But when he is taken, the rebellion is concluded and we return to our homes. You must visit me in Jeddah."

"Thanks, but I've got an appointment to meet some Eskimos," Garroway said, grinning.

The night dragged on endlessly but Garroway forced himself to remain awake, resolutely controlling the urge to stretch out. He made himself as uncomfortable as possible and when the first fingers of light were tipping the palms' crests he was still awake, surrounded by a litter of cigarette stubs.

DESPITE his bulk Mehmet Ali proved that he possessed smooth-flowing muscles beneath his bulging uniform. Now that there was no servant to saddle his camel he did so himself and was mounted and over the nearest sand-roll long before Garroway had his groaning beast on its feet.

In this fashion they rode all morn-

ing and despite Garroway's efforts he was unable to shorten the distance between them. Always Mehmet Ali was one sand-roll ahead of the American and always when the Pasha found himself out of the other's sight he raised his fez in the air; three stiff jerks.

"*Ikh! Ikh!*" Garroway slashed his *zehl* on the neck with the bamboo riding rod and forced the beast up another long sand-roll, but to his surprise found Mehmet Ali awaiting him on the crest and pointing below him.

There, in a brush-speckled *wadi*, Neejah's baked-mud walls and flat roofs shone against the desert's glare. Above one tower a green and black Mecca flag floated defiantly in the air.

Mehmet Ali smiled at Garroway and started his camel. They had nearly reached the fort when a bugle blared from above the cumbersome gates and a lone horseman rode out into the desert.

The commander of Neejah looked about twenty-five. He rode a white stallion with easy grace and as the rider drew closer Garroway saw that his uniform was spotless and well fitted. Something of a dandy, this Kazee Bey.

In a moment Garroway forgot the other's polished riding boots and shin-sword belt. The cavalryman noted with surprise that the Bey's hair, just showing beneath the jaunty, red fez, was fair; that the eyes above the hawk nose were bright blue.

Strange coloring for an Arab. Kazee's mother must have been a Georgian or a Greek.

Mehmet Ali introduced Garroway in Turkish, frequently using the word "American," at which both men smiled. The cavalryman was becoming impatient when Kazee shot out a curt phrase, shrugged his shoulders, and wheeled his stallion about.

Bugles rang out in salute and bayonets flashed in the dark recesses under the gates when they passed through. Then the great iron hinges screamed and the gates were promptly refastened.

The pleasant odors of wet stones, moist earth and growing things filled Garroway's nostrils while they jogged along beneath the windowless walls. He took little notice of the staring desert men; his senses could feel nothing but that wonderful cool, earthy smell.

The camels halted abruptly at a crumbling Moorish entry cut in the thick walls. There came curt orders and hurrying figures and Garroway found himself following Kazee Bey into a shadowy court, fringed with nodding palms.

Kazee pulled out lounge chairs, smiled again at Garroway and waved to a long table set with glasses.

"This Arab last-hope certainly takes good care of himself," Garroway thought, drinking in the moist coolness through every pore. "No wonder he doesn't want to leave Neejah. Regular garden of Eden."

Garroway waited until the others sampled their drinks. Then assured that the stuff was not drugged he settled back on the lounge, listening to the low clatter of women's voices coming from behind a grilled doorway.

THE Pasha was talking in low tones to Kazee and if he had understood Turkish Garroway would have leaped to his feet.

"These cursed *Ingleezi* are as children," Mehmet Ali droned, tilting his glass again. "There was no way to get through the British lines so, behold, I went to their colonel . . . that eater of pigs' flesh! . . . telling him that were I given an escort I would take camel to Neejah and demand your surrender.

Again I laugh. By Allah, but it was simple."

Kazee Bey shot in an abrupt question. The Pasha laughed, informing his subordinate that it had been his intention to bring Garroway in as a prisoner, tied to his camel for the edification of the garrison. But there had been a slight misunderstanding. It had also been necessary to kill one Yakoob, a servant, so as to dull the British officer's suspicions.

But Allah had smiled upon his efforts. Now this Garroway would tell the soldiers that the rebellion was over, that the gallant Arabs had vanquished the thrice-accursed British. How? Had Kazee Bey forgotten the excellent Turkish system of torture; the beating of the soles of the feet with bamboo rods; the hanging up by the thumbs; the pouring of water down the throat until the stomach burst? Hah. By the Beard of the Prophet this *Ingleezi* would talk! He would tell the soldiers anything he was ordered.

"I have planned well," the Pasha went on in time to the nodding of Kazee's fair head. "The Holy War is a thing of the past. Our arms are scattered. But the British will spend no more money in Arabia. They will retire. And do we return to Jeedah for court-martial, perhaps the firing squad, if the Emir should happen to be in evil humor? Ah, no. Here in the heart of the desert will grow up another empire. You behold in me the Sultan of Neejah! And you, my friend, shall have all that is desired."

"But what of this *feringeh*?" Kazee queried, lifting his brows in Garroway's direction.

Mehmet Ali answered with a shoulder shrug and a sign made with his thick fingers from behind the shelter of the table.

Kazee's hard eyes narrowed. He motioned to one of the men standing in the shadows behind him, issuing a rasped order.

The voices droned on and on. Softly slipped attendants filled the long glasses again and again. Honey cakes and plates of ripe dates were brought in. Still the voices buzzed and buzzed.

Garroway's soul was steeped in the coolness and silence of the court after the desert's blinding heat and the camels' ceaseless grunting. He set his glass down, running a grateful tongue about his lips.

The droning voices sounded almost like a lullaby now. But it was queer that those palms should be bending and twisting like that. They weren't doing it a moment ago.

Garroway's hands clutched at the side of the lounge-chair in an effort to rise, but suddenly all tangible things seemed to fade away in a soft, fleecy mist.

Kazee Bey clapped his hands and men came running in answer to the summons. Five minutes later Captain Philip Garroway was a prisoner behind thick walls of baked clay.

BY THE passing of shadows across a barred window, set high in the wall above him, Garroway knew that another day was at its full.

This was the third in the prison—or was it? The veins in his head were still throbbing from the effects of the drug and he felt as if leaden weights were pressing down on his eyes. The American lay back on the sand again, arms and legs spread.

That hyena-faced Arab with the green turban would soon be coming again, bringing the usual plate of dates, flat bread and the stoneware jug of water.

Water! He rolled a thick tongue

about his sticky lips at the thought. Why didn't they give him water more than once a day? Probably that fat hog, Mehmet Ali, was trying to break him down for some reason or another.

The cavalryman's thoughts were broken by a low creaking. The grilled door was softly moving inward.

A cunning, ebony face was thrust about the lintel. The Arab's turban showed up dully in the half-light as the man leaned forward, peering at the prisoner.

"The *feringeh* sleeps," the Arab muttered to himself, keen eyes on Garroway's flattened figure. "It is well. Behold, I craftily take his silver container for the cigarettes, his watch. No doubt there is money also. All these *Ingleezi* are of a great richness. Brown eyes will shine upon me in the bazaar this night. Fatima will hold out her arms in welcome. Aha!"

The man crept forward on soundless slippers until he reached within touching distance of the captive. The dates, bread and the jug of water were softly placed on the sand. The Arab leaned over the officer; delicate, bronzed fingers lightly tapping Garroway's tunic pockets.

Whump.

"Allah il All . . .!"

Garroway's heavy riding boot crashed down on the Arab's thinly shod foot and before the man had time to move the officer's hands were on his legs. Another thud sounded when the Arab hit the floor and the two rolled across the prison, locked in each other's arms.

The American's mind was still hazed but clear enough to understand the threat in those bared teeth and the glint of the knife above him. Three times the men squirmed the length of the stifling prison, but still Garroway found

himself unable to reach the glint tipping that wiry arm.

All at once the cavalryman experienced a cold shock and was dimly aware that his shoulder was wet.

Wet? Blazes, yes! That jug the Arab had brought in. Must have knocked it over. If he could get hold of it, Perhaps. . .

Putting all his aching muscles into one single drive, Garroway succeeded in thrusting the Arab backward. His fingers darted out and fastened on the jug's long neck.

Crash. The blow was followed by a groan and Garroway found himself getting to his feet, every muscle twinging, his breath coming in windy gasps. One glance at the now motionless guard and he had wheeled about and was staggering through the doorway.

A train of blurred thoughts winged across the cavalryman's brain. He'd have to clear the fort somehow, get back to the expedition and tell Reeves what was going on here. He'd get hell for his trouble too. But he'd have to face the music. The column would have to attack.

A SUDDEN blaze of light half blinded him but he presently made out the shapes of overhanging balconies. After the prison's silence the noises of the outer world boomed in his ears like drum-fire. The bleating of sheep and the camel's grunting came as a veritable tornado of sound.

The gate. He'd have to get to the gate somehow. There were riding camels near the entry and he'd fight his way through. But what would old Reeves say about this? Escaping from the man whose surrender he had been sent to demand.

Garroway crept to the alley's opening and crouched back against the wall,

peering out. He found himself looking directly at the gate and at a mob of untidy Arab soldiers who lounged in the shade, smoking cigarettes, half asleep.

A boy, mounted on a donkey, ambled out of another alley opposite. He stared across at Garroway, eyes wide, mouth drooping. Then a shrill yell split the hot air.

"*Gell bourda?*" An Arab sentry's challenge came right behind the boy's cry.

Knowing that concealment was useless, the American catapulted out of the alley and raced toward the jumble of figures at the gates.

A shot rang out, echoing back from the thick walls. An excited voice called some order, followed by a wave of flowing cloaks and dirty uniforms. The cavalryman glimpsed flickering lights tipping the rifles, staring eyes and thrusting shoulders.

Garroway's mind held but one thought; "Get to the gate! Get to the gate!" His fists drove into the wall of brown faces and he was dimly conscious of stinging jars as his hands met flesh and bone.

A rat-faced little man leaped up into Garroway's vision. A bayonet flashed past his neck and tobacco-stained teeth snapped almost in his face. But the Arab had overreached himself. He was sent staggering sideways with a blow under the ear and Garroway's fingers closed over the rifle barrel.

With a yell of defiance the American crashed the rifle butt into the nearest face. Swinging the weapon wildly he managed to hold the attackers at bay for a breathing space. Bayonets rattled on the swinging Mauser in time to a chorus of howls.

The Arab sergeant roared another order and in reply to it one of the

soldiers dived at Garroway's legs, throwing him off his balance. Sinewy arms were flung about him from behind and the American went down, to roll over and over under the straining legs.

As Garroway blindly struggled, clucking phrases in Arabic came to him. Then a new voice sounded, clear and commanding, and the throttling hands were withdrawn.

THE soldiers fell back and when the cloud of dust had subsided Garroway found himself looking into the sardonically smiling features of Mehmet Ali.

"Ah, so," the Pasha intoned, his huge stomach quivering with amusement. "You would escape, eh? But the idea is not original. Come, you are just in time. I have changed my mind as to how you will serve me and have a pleasing entertainment arranged for you."

The Pasha barked an order, spurring his horse out of the mob of soldiers. Garroway was jerked to his feet and marched off. He stamped on through the heat until the party arrived at a large square, glittering under the high sun.

Long lines of the desert Arabs, in their vivid burnouses, were squatted in the shade cast by the wall balconies. The soldiers were drawn up in ragged lines at one end of the square, the men "standing easy" and puffing at cigarettes. All were apparently waiting for something of importance to happen.

The man in charge of the party barked "*Douour!*" and the escort came to a halt. Garroway saw Mehmet Ali waddle off to a lounge-chair that had been set up for him at the top of a long flight of marble steps, leading to

a mosque. Words passed amongst his captors and the American was pushed forward.

Garroway found himself standing elbow to elbow with the Arab he had left lying in the prison. There was another man there as well. Kazee Bey. The young commandant flashed his cool, even smile at the American, shrugging his shoulders as well as his strapped arms would allow. Garroway's face registered his astonishment.

Mehmet Ali made a long, pompous speech in Arabic, pitching his thick voice so that it was audible all over the square. After a pause he ironically bowed to Garroway and translated the address for him.

According to the Pasha, all three were traitors to Islam and the new Sultan of Neejah. Two of the prisoners were sentenced to death but they themselves would decide who was to squat in the mud-walled prison for the remainder of his days; wishing he was dead.

The Pasha settled back on his lounge and clapped his hands. Age-long minutes passed, following which horsemen came running out of an alley, leading two beautiful desert stallions. The glossily coated horses leaped and curvetted, with the American watching them intently and wondering what it was all about.

At an order from Mehmet Ali one of the soldiers slashed the straps binding Kazee's arms. The still smiling Bey rubbed his stiffened limbs, promptly stripped to his silk undershirt, and having tendered Mehmet Ali a mocking salute, turned for the horses. He gathered up one stallion's reins, vaulted to the bare back and cantered to the far side of the court.

Mehmet Ali called the Arab guard's name. A groan escaped the man's lips

as he too stripped off and mounted the second, squealing stallion. Low sighs of expectation came from the natives when the Arab trotted his mount to the opposite side of the court.

"*Giour!*" A shout from Mehmet Ali in time to the flourishing of a curved, cavalry saber.

At the order the two desert horses were sent tearing across the square to a delighted chorus of yelps from the onlookers. The riders shot past each other, bent well forward over their mounts' necks. Garroway saw arms dart out and understanding flooded his mind. This was to be an Arab wrestling match, and he would fight the victor!

The American forgot his peril. He came of a ranching family and he could think of nothing but the horsemanship of the two combatants, the stallions' graceful stepping and their deft twisting and darting as the men sought for grips when they flashed by, time and again.

MINUTE after minute passed with no sounds but the thrumming of the barbs' hoofs on the baked courtyard. "A—ah!" A hiss of expectation ran along the line of watching desert men. The riders had clinched at last. Each man held his horse in check with one hand while with the other he tore and wrenched at his opponent's body.

Dense clouds of dust arose from the flickering hoofs. Long moments dragged. Then Kazee Bey rode out of the swirling dust column, the Arab's body across his thighs.

The commandant guided the sweating horse to the steps in front of Mehmet Ali, caught the vanquished man by the neck and thigh and threw him through the air. The Arab's head hit the marble steps with a sickening crack

and his body rolled down to the dust, jerked and lay still.

A faint cheer winged out from the soldiers. It was instantly checked when Mehmet Ali wheeled about in his chair and scowled at the troops.

Men darting about the courtyard caught the loose animal and before he quite realized it Garroway was stripped, mounted and wheeling his barb toward where Kazee Bey awaited him at the far side of the square.

"*Giour!*" At Mehmet Ali's hoarse shout the horse under Garroway took a wild leap forward. He sensed a brown arm flash out but struck it aside, as a blur, fractured by Kazee's gleaming teeth, darted past.

They wheeled again. Garroway's ears were filled with the soldiers' excited yells. He determined to end it quickly; to get to grips. Apparently Kazee Bey was of the same determination. The horses were reined in as the two men met and their arms locked.

Garroway forced the barb over with one knee and found himself staring into Kazee's steely-blue eyes. He saw the veins swelling in the man's neck when he reached out, closing his grip.

Kazee's teeth flashed again when the American's fingers tightened on his wrist. Knee pressure and rein hands held the stallions almost motionless as their riders clung to those slippery, sweating backs; straining, giving nothing.

All at once Garroway's jaw dropped and his eyes widened in amazement. For a long moment he felt as though he was a spectator at some fantastic Oriental play. His eyes narrowed and widened again. No, he wasn't mad, he told himself. It was still there.

The Bey's silk undershirt had bellied out when the man leaned forward and Garroway was staring at a line of blue

lettering tattooed across Kazee's brown chest.

"Holy Mackinaw! The *Nevada!*" broke from Garroway's dry lips. "Say, what the devil is. . . ?"

"Not so damn loud," the fort's commander warned him. "Jam that cayuse over here and keep wrestling. Got to talk fast. Was sergeant in the Marine Corps, got into a tangle ashore in Smyrna and the ship put to sea without me. Case of join some other outfit or starve, so I was eight years in the Turkish army and horned into this mob when the Arabs licked the Turks. They needed trained soldiers; kept shoving me up. Been so long in Arabia I guess they forgot I was a *feringeh*. Mehmet Ali's going to start a desert empire of his own here. Jealous, so he figured on bumping me off. Name's Frank Casey. Kazee was the nearest these boys could get to Casey. Don't laugh, man; don't laugh. We're talking too much. Break away and come back at me in a minute."

Garroway ducked as Casey made another lunge at him. He kicked his stallion out of the scuffle and came erect, wiping the sweat out of his eyes. Then once more he drove his barb toward the other man.

"Listen," Casey called when they were locked together again. "I had these troops feeding out of my hand. Treated 'em right. But they're hot on officer stuff and this Mehmet Ali's a Pasha. Top soldier in Arabia. Well, we'll find out in a minute if we're going to die or not and if we are it's going to be nasty."

"But why didn't you tell. . . ?"

Casey cut the words off short with an open-handed slam across Garroway's mouth. More twisting, straining and thudding hoofs. Then the erstwhile Arab gripped the other's neck, to order:

"Time's up. When I say 'Go' you ride like blazes and take care of Mehmet Ali—or else! I'm going to try the old soldier stuff on the troops. If it doesn't work we'll be in a warmer place than Arabia in about five minutes. Good luck, and now—

"Go!"

CASEY'S lips framed the word but Garroway did not hear it. His barb was stretched at full gallop, racing back to where Mehmet Ali's bulk was outlined against the white, marble steps.

Garroway was conscious of a roar from the Arabs as the two horses thundered back across the court—together. He saw the Pasha lumber to his feet and reach for the sword lying against his chair.

The stallion's feet were clattering on the steps. Mehmet Ali's pouched eyes were staring up at Garroway out of a face gone green.

The American pitched himself from the barb's back, but Mehmet Ali realized the intention, tensed his body and swung the curved sword.

It is not easy to change the course of a lunge when your body is in midair, but somehow Garroway wrenched sideward, and by inches missed being spitted on the outthrust blade.

Garroway's boots slid on the polished steps. He fell, recovering just as the sword whistled over his head. With the desperation born of death he lunged half upright, fingers clutching.

Something hard met his fingers. There followed a wrench backed by every muscle in his body and the sword was his. For a long moment he stood swaying on the steps, still dizzy from his fall.

A close-range revolver shot cleared the American's mind. He swept the sweat out of his eyes to see a thick-set blur just below him. The blur again raised one arm, tipped with something bright.

With a yell that echoed across the courtyard, drowning all other sounds, Garroway threw the sword back and slashed. His arm was jarred to the shoulder but that blur was now rolling down the steps, leaving a crimson trail behind it.

Garroway's eyes followed the body until it hit the ground and lay there, motionless. The man unconsciously took a firmer grip on the sword, peering across the square to where Casey stood before his men, calling something, waving both arms in the air.

The free horses were luxuriously rolling in the dust. The desert Arabs were gathering in excited groups, apparently planning an attack.

To Garroway it seemed that a full hour passed as his feet dragged him through the dust to where the former Bey still harangued the soldiers. What was the matter? Wouldn't they. . . ?

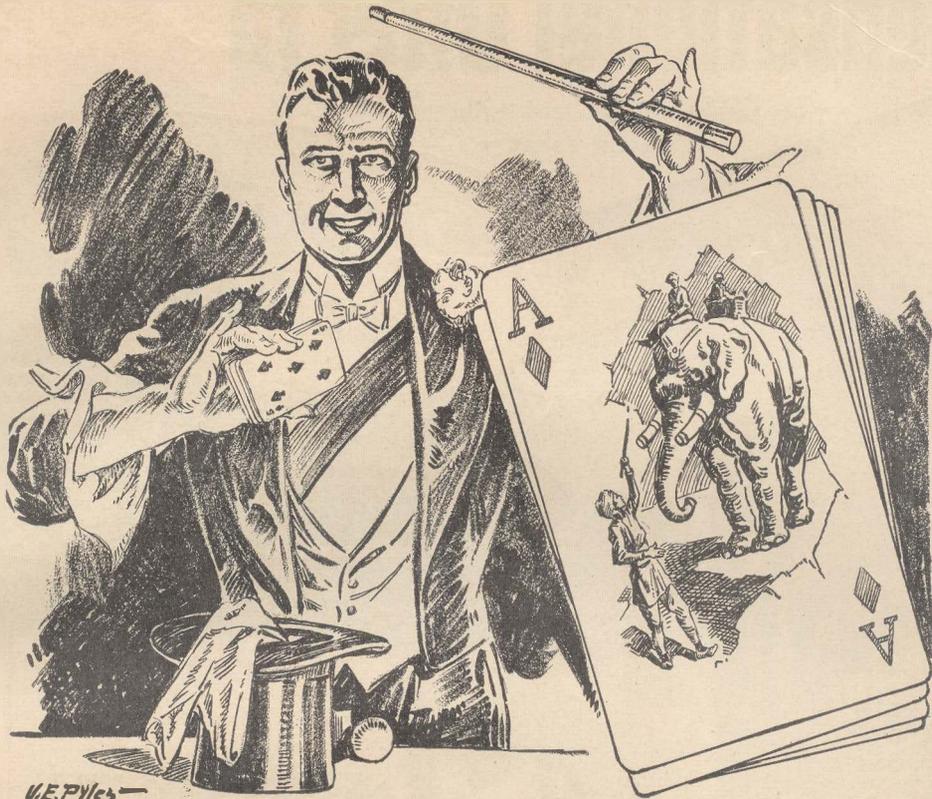
As if in reply to his thoughts the lounging troops suddenly stiffened and a long line of rifles jerked into the air. A ragged, yelping chorus of cries winged out as the last rebel garrison in Arabia surrendered.

Garroway moved forward groggily.

"You're my prisoner, Casey," Garroway wheezed, slamming a sticky hand on the ex-Marine's shoulder.

"Okay," the other retorted. "Aim to shoot me?"

"Can't be done," Garroway said. "We've got a date with a Colorado snow-man."



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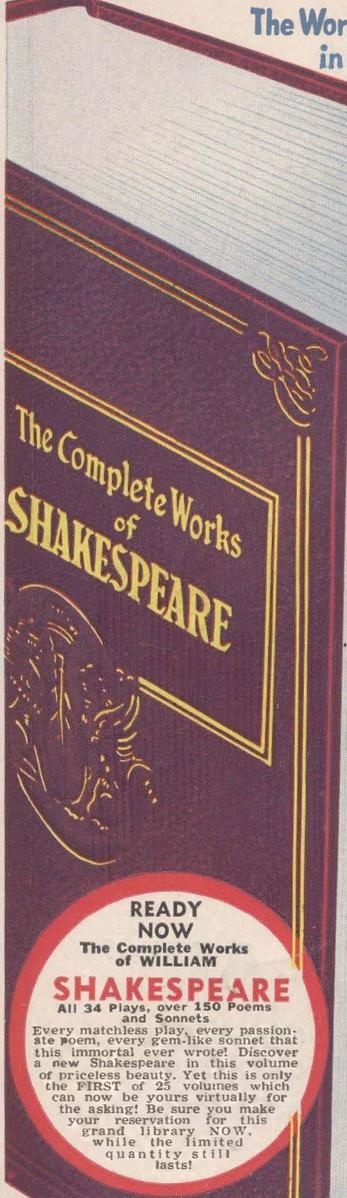
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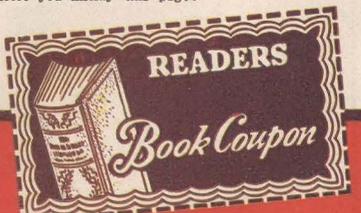
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