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MAGAZINE



GUNS FOR SUMATRA

by *E. Hoffmann Price*

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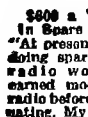
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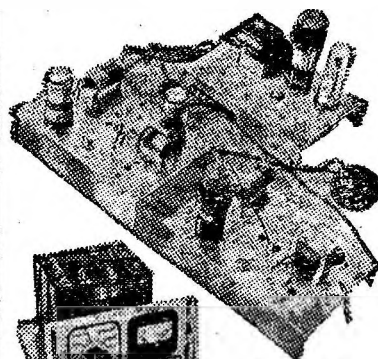
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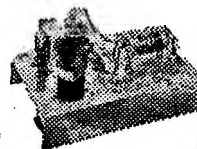
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SPEED ADVENTURE STORIES



JANUARY, 1946

Vol. 3, No. 6

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SPEED ADVENTURE STORIES is published quarterly by Arrow Publications, Inc., 29 Worthington Street, Springfield 3, Mass. Editorial offices at 126 East Forty-sixth Street, New York 17, N. Y. Entered as second-class matter, November 7, 1944, at the Post Office at Springfield, Mass., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Yearly, \$.75; single copy, 15c. Canadian and foreign postage extra. Manuscripts should be accompanied by self-addressed envelope and are submitted at the author's risk. Copyright, 1946, by Arrow Publications, Inc. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations.

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Message to America

By COL. EVANS F. CARLSON, USMC

THE boys are beginning to come home again. They are no longer boys; they are men matured by struggle and death, by hardships and dangers shared in common. They have seen their comrades fall; they have suffered wounds and illness. All these things have left their mark.

In the foxholes and the jungles, on the sea and in the air, men have met and judged one another. There is no better place to judge truly one's fellow man and to know what makes him tick than the close confines of ship, plane and tank, or the blinding field of battle. There the non-essentials fall away; only fundamentals remain.

It has been said that there are no atheists in the foxholes. I tell you that there are no distinctions of race, religion or color in the foxholes. For these are the non-essentials; not the fundamentals. When men have faced death together, when they have shared a common struggle and a common

cause, the color of a man's skin, the particular church he goes to, the country from which his parents came, no longer matter. It is the man himself who counts; and nothing else.

This is one of the most heartening things that has come out of this war. Men from New York and Texas, Ohio and Wyoming have met and learned to trust and respect one another. Christian and Jew, white and Negro, native-born and foreign-born—they are all Americans, animated by the same ideals, loving the same land—yes, willing to die for her!

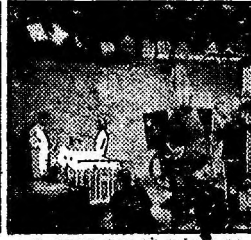
When these men come home, they expect to find a land where the same things hold true. They are not going to stand by idly and see their buddy discriminated against or sneered at because of his skin, his creed or his nativity. They are going to take seriously the immortal words of the Declaration of Independence: "All men are created free and equal!"

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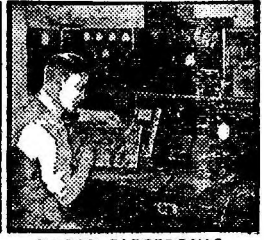
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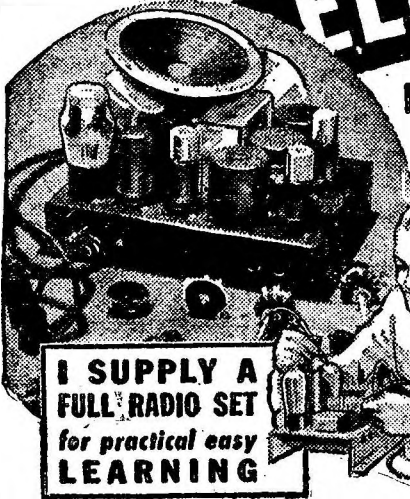
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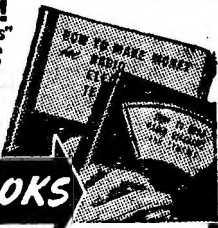
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The bayonet steel bit so swiftly through the sentry that he could not cry out to the other Japanese.

LATE THAT AFTERNOON, the entire company of Sumatra Volunteers was put on guard duty, though there was not an armed Dutchman within a thousand miles. Sergeant Takahashi, a winkled little Jap who took

his work at least as seriously as did the captain, explained to the "volunteer" recruits how important their duty was:

"While on guard about village of Bukit Merah," he said in labored Malay, "you are the Emperor's Law, in person. You

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE



GUNS FOR SUMATRA

Great was the hatred of the Malay youth Salim for the cruel monkey men of Nippon—and devious were the ways devised by himself and the girl of mystery to harass and to fight them!

have marched thirty-two hours without rest, but you go on guard. Because you know how to sleep, now you learn to keep awake."

What kept Salim awake, as he walked his post along the outskirts of that scatter of thatched houses, was Malay wrath: for the monkey men, after luring him and Aswad from home with promises of weapons, had issued wooden guns.

Hours later, at the end of his second tour, Salim lay down on the bundle of grass he had spread in the plaza. Despite the Japanese program of making either soldiers or corpses of Sumatra farm boys, he was still awake—because Captain Iguchi was at last asleep.

He waited until his comrades were asleep. Then he crept along the edge of the plaza. The dull glow of a smudge whose fume somewhat discouraged mosquitos marked Captain Iguchi's tiny tent. A corporal squatted on the ground, some distance away, beside his own smudge. He had his rifle on his knees. He was nodding. The noncoms were snoring. Though hardened veterans, they were as deadbeat as the recruits.

Salim wormed his way along. Somewhere in the village, a dog snarled. A water buffalo, one of the few draft animals not yet slaughtered for hide and meat, grumbled sullenly. Night birds cried, and from the nearby jungle came the warning of a monkey alarmed by the scent of a predatory prowler. Bats, whisking through the gloom, made twittering sounds, tiny and shrill.

Salim was near enough now to hear Iguchi's breathing. The captain slept soundly.

THE PLAZA dipped and swelled, though gently. Part of it, prepared to be a threshing floor, was table-flat, and higher than the rest. On this dry, hard spot Iguchi had pitched his tent.

The rise of the floor and the natural unevenness of the plaza cast long patches of shadow through which Salim snaked until he was looking into the tent. Smudge-light reached in, picking out the gold, silver, and lacquer of scabbard, the creamy whiteness of the long ivory grip,

and the adornment of the small oval guard. The one non-com on duty concentrated on what lay beyond the camp. That anything within could require his attention was beyond imagining.

Salim had only to take the sword from its couch of silken scabb, and draw it. Grandfather, who had often given the Dutch some uneasy moments, said that a man slashed somewhat below the chin makes little sound, and that one hewn at the nape of the neck makes none at all.

A hissing, whispering, low yet insistent, came from behind him. Salim went cold, and flattened. Panic urged him to jump up and run, but he stayed motionless, and broke into a sweat. The noise was repeated. Something tickled his ankle. It was as the touch of a grass blade, to arouse a sleeper gradually, so that his soul would have time to return to his body.

The tickling broke Salim's almost-regained honor. It left him limp and burned out and helpless, now that the tension had been snapped. A hand closed about his ankle and tugged, gently.

Salim obeyed, and without trying to understand; nothing was clear except that someone who wished him well had come between him and his attempt. Presently, as he retreated, he knew that a woman had meddled. Though the hand was by no means soft, the touch was certainly feminine. Then he got the scent of the oil with which she dressed her hair, and a whiff of perfume hoarded since before the invasion.

He knew that she must have felt his violent trembling before she let go of him. He was now angry and ashamed, and could barely keep from speaking out, or getting up to face her. But he had to retreat soundlessly, and he did.

Finally, Salim and the girl were huddled in the shadow of a house whose walls were of woven rattan, and whose thatched roof rose to a peak in front, like the prow of a boat. He asked, "Sitti, what is this? Who are you?"

"I am Amai, and you are the father of all fools. I have been waiting because what I saw today told me that someone would try to kill the captain. And what

would they do to us? Child of a buffalo! Hasn't enough happened to us already, without your hot head bringing soldiers to finish the rest of us?"

"He is a dog and the son of many dogs! And you are a fool woman!" Salim retorted, sullenly, though without conviction, for he began to understand what his rashness could have done to these villagers. "By Allah! He hit me with a stick. He even hit me with his hand!"

Despite the gloom, he could just see that Amai was young, and that her large eyes gleamed, and that her smile was white; she had not chewed betel to blacken her teeth. And Amai now saw him as she had seen him, that afternoon, picking him for one of the possible trouble-makers: a boy, hollow-eyed, and hollow-cheeked, his once smooth Malay skin rough and sallow, his golden brown coloring turned to a greenish gray by hunger and fatigue and the Japanese way of training recruits.

MORE than that, she saw him as he had once been, back in his own village, with Aswad, his comrade. And of the two, she knew that Salim, not Aswad, would plan disastrous killing because his honor had been hurt.

Now that she had stopped Salim, her indignation cooled.

"Is it not written, leave your enemy to Time, so that Time and Fortune may avenge you?"

"That is a strange saying, that was not what my grandfather taught me. Who is your father, what is your family?"

"Tok Jangut, the Old-Man-With-the-Beard, Tok Jangut, who has killed more Japs than you have hairs on your head. They have offered a hundred thousand *guilders* for his life, but he lives, and he kills, and the power is with Allah!"

"Satan loves a liar! You, his daughter, he'd be ashamed of you, keeping me from killing one monkey man. But Allah cursed him, giving him a daughter instead of son."

"I am Tok Jangut's daughter," she said earnestly. "So I know best the trouble he makes for us all. My mother



Captain Iguchi

and I are hunted, because they don't know where to find him. The people of our village are dead, except the few who are slaves. Our neighbors are as bad off, for miles around. Whoever they catch, they kill for not telling where to find Tok Jangut."

This left Salim feeling a little less glorious. Finally he said, "But that pig hit me *with his hand!*"

"This is not the time for making right what is wrong. Do you really know why the monkey men wanted you to volunteer?"

"Because they are afraid the Dutch are coming back. It is said here and there that they came back and destroyed Sabang. That they came back to take Tarakan, in Borneo, and they took it. So when the Japs promised me a gun, it seemed good."

"They didn't need your help to drive the Dutch out," Amai retorted, "why would they need you to keep them out? Each village whose boys volunteered has to mind the new laws, or it will not be well with the volunteers. For your sake, your people work harder, and eat less. And to save their heads, you have to behave."

He saw for the first time the full extent of the swindle, and he muttered, "Yea, I was a fool, and my people were fools! Those who have gone, and those who have stayed, each is like a thing given to a money lender as security. When they let us have real guns, they'll be sure we won't use them on anyone but

the Dutch, if it is true that they are coming back."

"They'll be back," Amai said, "but only Allah knows the day."

Knowing now that he and Aswad were hostages for their people, he could not even desert; and helplessness added to his exhaustion. His approach to Captain Iguchi's tent had been the final overdraft on his strength. Though he still could hear Amai's voice in his ear, and feel her breath on his cheek, these sensations were becoming thinned, as though she had withdrawn further and further, leaving him afloat and alone in space which had neither direction nor dimension.

Yet one thing she said was not lost: "The Jap captain marches as far as you do. That is the way of his people, and there were many of them, and that is why the Dutch are gone. So learn to march as far and fast, and to eat as little. Allah will open the way."

WHEN the bugle awakened Salim, he had his head pillowed against Amai. Her jacket was drenched from the mists that swirled out of the jungle. Torches flared in camp. His comrades were stumbling splotches silhouetted against the light. There were shouts and answers as the corporal relieved the guard. Amai boosted Salim to his feet.

For the first time, he got good sight of her face. Torches brought out the gleam of her hair, and the sheen of pale brown skin, and the curve of a slightly upturned nose. She had a lovely mouth, and a chin combining delicacy with strength.

"I'll be back," he told her, before she had him fairly on his feet. "If Allah saves me, I'll be back."

Though he had no time to wait for her answer, he read enough from her smile to make him repeat, to himself, "I'm coming back."

Then he saw Aswad, who was scurrying about, looking for him.

Aswad's change of expression told that he had seen Amai leaving Salim; there was incredulity, a sly look of understanding, and somewhat of begrudged ad-

miration for any volunteer who had not been too dead-beat to have an eye for a shapely stranger.

"I was afraid you'd run into the jungle."

"And you'd all get a forced march, hunting me?"

"Worse yet, that pig-father would beat you to death when he found you."

During the brief rests in the hours that followed, Salim found a chance to tell Aswad what Amai had said about making the most of their chance to learn soldiering. "Yea, one day we will cut down all that walk, and all that run, all that crawl, and those that lie," they promised each other.

But they did not tell the others, who were from strange villages, and perhaps not to be trusted.

That day, Salim saw the pain-twisted face and glassy eyes of the sergeant. The man moved like a mechanical toy. Captain Iguchi suffered, and so did the Japanese corporals, though they were younger. It was the guidon that kept them going: the symbol of the Son of Heaven, carried ahead by a man who moved on because it would have been sacrilege to fall and lie there.

Aswad bore up under recruit training. So did most of the others. Salim, however, slipped a little more each day. When the company maneuvered in combat exercises, he moved in his sleep, not hearing commands. He smashed headlong into trees, he fell into ditches, and into buffalo wallows. When, finally, the halt was given, in some village plaza, he would continue marching until the piers of a house checked him.

Sergeant Takahashi grinned, prodded Salim to his feet with a carefully controlled jab of a steel bayonet, and said, "Very good, but learn to obey commands in sleep."

A few died on the march. For these, Captain Iguchi had a funeral oration: "Life is war. Losing life while training for war is honorable as losing it in battle. Duty weighs more than a mountain. Death is light like a feather." Then *banzai* for the hero, and that night, the captain knelt in his tent, writing an



Salim saw Jap soldiers darting into the forest. They were throwing a cordon about Bukit Merah.

honorable eulogy to send to the dead recruit's kinsmen.

Salim marched to save his life, for if he fell, they would leave him to die where he dropped; there was no transportation for men on a forced march.

Finally, as the column labored over the last crest, and the sea stretched out, and

the red roofs of Telok Betong looked up from the city's green gardens, Salim saw the blue water over which his ancestors had come to Sumatra, centuries ago. He collapsed. His fingers did not claw the red earth, or twitch when Captain Iguchi booted him, and Sergeant Takahashi prodded him with the bayonet.

"Sergeant!"

"Yes, Honorable Captain?"

"This man is too feeble for a soldier, but he can work in the shipyards. Haul him to town, letting him die here is wasteful."

"Honorable Captain, it can be done."

He made a sled of bambo and rattan withes, and they dragged the volunteer for the remaining hour's march to the sea.

CHAPTER II

Tok Jangut's Daughter

AMONG the shipyard workers were a few who, like Salim, had been volunteers. Even if they had not still worn the ragged remnants of uniforms, something about their faces would have told him that they were different from those who had never had military training.

Salim, eating his first meal, looked about, but did not see Aswad. Before anyone could ask his name, the whistle blew, and the slaves lined up for roll call.

Though Mr. Okubi, civilian foreman, mangled one name after the other, the answers were prompt until he called, "Shaheed!" Getting no reply, he blinked behind his glasses, and squinted along the line. Then, noting Salim, he pounced forward, and boxed his ears.

"You, fool! You do not know your name? Answer, *here!* No wonder you are not fit to be a soldier!"

Since Okubi wanted to call him Shaheed, "the witness," very well. Perhaps Captain Iguchi's paper work had been scrambled, so that, wherever the Volunteers were, a recruit named Shaheed was being booted for not answering to the name of Salim.

Shaheed—"he who bears witness"—testifies for the True Faith, the One-ness of Allah; there is the testimony of words, and also, that of steel. But Salim, who could not use either, went to the ways where several hundred peasants like himself sawed timber for the keels and the ribs of dumpy boats.

Standing on the ground while his fellow balanced himself up there on the big

log, Salim worked his end of the saw. Elsewhere, men squared and mortised beams. Japs in threadbare, grimy white suits darted about, cackling orders, waving sheets of paper, plying canes and whips. In the far corner of the yard, they were stepping a mast. Others paid out new hemp for rigging.

After what Salim had endured, the work was easy, the skimpy ration was generous, and the grumbling of his fellows seemed silly. Salim's only complaint was that they kept him, day after day, as a sawyer, and did not give him a chance at adze or axe or chisel.

Since all Sumatra had become a cage, being confined in a compound of barbed wire was no worse than being at large. Thoughts of Amai were what turned Salim to planning escape.

Used to starvation on the march, he easily hoarded a few grains of each meal's rice. Captain Iguchi had taught better than he realized.

The barbed wire, spaced so close that not the leanest man could worm through, was a problem whose answer Salim did not get until he had hidden several handfuls of rice. When it came to him, he thanked the enemy for a lesson unwittingly given.

An axe or a hatchet would be good, except that the sound of chopping a taut wire would be dangerous. A chisel, small and handy, would be good, but too brittle for prying. He knew this from having seen workmen flogged half to death for snapping the fragile steel. He finally decided on a pinch bar, a small one which could be hidden under his shirt. Tools, however, were checked as though they had been gold, so he devised a Japanese trick.

SOME days passed before Salim found a suitable piece of wood to smuggle to the cage. By night he scraped with a bit of broken glass until he was no longer sure which had been cut the most, his fingers or the wood. In the end, he had a facsimile of a pinch bar, especially after he smeared it with dirt.

Almost under Mr. Okubi's eye, he unhooked the dummy bar from the string



"Tell my father," Amai said to Salim, "that it is well with my mother and me, and that whatever he hears about us will be lies."

necklace from which it was kept suspended under his shirt, and in its place concealed the one of metal.

The whistle blew. The slaves filed to the storekeeper's house, each putting his implement in the proper place. Salim left a wooden substitute. Now he had to

escape before the trick was discovered.

That evening, he chattered and laughed and jested to conceal his anxiety. While there were comrades he could have trusted, it took more than a good heart to endure the way of starvation, the Japanese way he had learned; so he de-

cided that he would go alone.

The city was dark, and fear made it silent. Sentries along the waterfront passed calls from post to post. Once, a rifle whacked. Perhaps a hungry Malay had tried to loot a rice warehouse. Perhaps a jittery sentinel had fired at nothing at all.

Salim crept from his pallet of grass and wiggled among his sleeping comrades until he got to the fence. Lying flat, he waited for the sentry. When the man passed, Salim set to work, prying the wire from the post.

By getting two strands loose, he won enough slack for him to spread them by putting the pinch bar endwise between them. The tension kept the bar in place. He held his breath when he heard the sentry's return; and as the footfalls again died out, Salim wriggled through.

He dislodged the bar. The *spang* of wire snapping into place sounded to him as loud as a rifle blast. Though the barbs tore his leg, he was through, and he lay there, groping behind him for the steel bludgeon.

There was no alarm. He got his packet of rice, and snaked away through grass six feet tall.

Before Salim was half way to Amai's village, he came to a *kampong* which, being well off the highway, had not been looted by the Japs. Yet the people were afraid to welcome him. "In the name of Allah, eat and go, it will not be well for us if they find you here," they told the fugitive, as they gave him chicken and rice and yams.

Like Amai, these people felt that rebels and seekers of vengeance harmed their own people far more than they hurt the Japs; and Salim began to see their viewpoint and hers. However, he stayed long enough with the worried villagers to trade the steel pinch bar for a sarong, a jacket, and a skullcap, worn yet serviceable. Also, he got a small, curved knife of the sort used for cutting rice stalks, three at a time, as tradition prescribed. The village smith was happy to get a billet of steel, lack of which had for many months kept him from working.

Two days later, Salim came to a crest

from whose height he could look across a green valley, and see Bukit Merah; and now that he was about to see Amai, he became shaky and worried. Going down the long slope, he shaped and reshaped the words he would speak to the guerilla's daughter.

THREE reconnaissance cars came swooping up over the opposite crest. They were packed with soldiers. Bayonets twinkled. Villagers, working in the higher terraces of rice, were outlined against the sky. Their gestures told Salim of terror's recognition.

Once he found cover in a clump of palms, he risked a peep. The cars had pulled up. Soldiers were darting into the forest which girdled the village clearing. They were throwing a cordon about Bukit Merah. This was more than a rice-requisitioning party.

For some yards, he skirted the highway. His next look brought further alarm. They were setting up a pair of mortars to shell the village. Along the ridge, soldiers herded the people down from the rice fields.

Salim could do nothing but stay under cover while Amai and her people were torn by bombs. Those who tried to get away would be bayoneted by the cordon of soldiers. One man with a rice knife was useless, yet he pushed on.

The cordon would be facing inward, watching for villagers trying to escape. The soldiers would be some yards apart. Salim snatched at the chance that he could catch one by surprise, and use that small, curved knife. He'd grab a rifle and helmet, he'd bayonet the man nearest him. He could do this in the forest's dimness, if he moved nimbly. He'd run *amok*, finishing a number of Japs. With a hole cut in the cordon, some of Amai's people could get out. She would surely escape.

He slackened his gait, and got control of his breathing. For a while, he did not have to make any effort at stealth, since the Japs made a disturbance which kept the monkeys chattering, and parrots scolding.

Salim found a game trail along which he moved swiftly. Presently, he heard

the voices of the village, and the speech of soldiers. Then, rounding a sharp twist of the trail, he came upon two women who crouched beside it. They were tense, craning their necks as if trying to understand the voices in the village.

Beside each was a bundle wrapped in a scarf. They had left Bukit Merah before the town had been surrounded. One was thin and gray; the hand which opened and closed from her impatience was wrinkled. The other woman was young and plump and shapely.

He noted all this in the moment before they sensed his presence, and whipped about to face him. The younger woman was Amai. "I have come back, and not too late. Allah has been good!"

"So you bring wrath on your people by running away from the army?"

The old woman's face was keen and forceful and shrewd. Her eyes, undimmed by age, twinkled when he answered Amai: "Sitti, that concerns me and my people! How is it with your people?" He regarded Amai's companion, "And with the lady, your mother?"

"I am Nejeeb, and as you say, her mother."

"Why are the money men coming to the village? When I saw them—"

"If you saw them, why did you come nearer?"

"To find you, and to hear more of what you said when I did not cut Captain Iguchi's throat."

"And now I'm afraid they're looking for me. For us."

Amai's mother sighed. "So we wait here. If it is something else they want, then we go back."

FROM the swelling sound of voices, Salim judged that those who had been herded from the rice terraces were now entering the *kampong*, and he said as much to Nejeeb, who answered, "Then I'm going back a bit so I can hear better. You two wait here."

But Salim and Amai went with her. What they heard as they crouched within a few yards of the cordon of soldiers told Salim all he had to know.

A Malay was proclaiming, in behalf of



Salim came to a crest, saw
Bukit Merah across a valley.

the Japanese officer in command, "O ye people! Hear and learn. The two we want are not before us, but we know they are in this *kampong*. Let them come from where they hide. If they have left, let one of you go to bring them back. If this is not done within the hour, we shall the *kampong* until none of it is left, and nothing left of you. And the peace upon you!"

At this, the three lurkers retreated. When they came back to luggage, Amai and her mother regarded each other. Salim looked at the ground. He had come at the wrong time. Allah hated him.

Amai picked up her bundle, set it on her head, then changed her mind. "We have to go back," she told Salim. "You take these things, you'll need them."

Neejeeb said, "We go back. We have to go back. And God does what He will do!"

"Tell my father," Amai said to Salim, "that it is well with me and my mother, and that whatever he hears about us, it will be lies. Say to him that we are in hiding. That we begged you to tell him he must not believe what he hears. There are things in that bundle which he'll recognize."

The old lady said, "We were strangers, and the people of Bukit Merah sheltered us."

Amai smiled a little, now that her mind was made up. "You see now what my father's work has done? And what it might have done to those friendly people?"

"I see now, and I see that you must be Tok Jangut's daughter, and that he shouldn't be ashamed of you for not being his son. Allah has made this too plain."

He stood there, until Nejeeb prompted, "Go while you can; take the things and the message to Tok Jangut, which he is called because he is old and has a beard. He is high in the mountains. The Japs know this, but they cannot go up to get him. And having no more cartridges, he can't come down to hunt them. Go southwest, it will be easy to find him. Easy for one man, coming alone.

"You promise me this?" Amai prompted, when he did not answer.

"There is no help for this thing," he said, choking a little. "So I do as you say, and may Allah blacken me if I do not do it!"

They turned toward the *kampong*, and captivity. Some traitor would be waiting to identify Amai and her mother. Perhaps he had been forced to treason to save his own family.

Salim heard them hail the soldiers. Later, near dusk, as he crouched in a bamboo clump beside the road, he saw Amai in the leading car, and Captain Iguchi, who was taking the prisoners to Telok Betong.

CHAPTER III

The Oath

SALIM went southwest, out of the foothills, and into the Barisan Mountains, the spine of Sumatra. Volcanic peaks rose ahead of him: violet, and some, cream white, with dark plugs of lava jutting up from the steeply sloping talus.

Some had snowcaps gleaming blue-white; others wore veils of smoke. Sometimes, the wind was choking with sulphur, and again, foul with the odor of rotting eggs. While the forest dwellers on those high slopes were of a race akin to his own, they could understand only a few words of his talk. They gave him food, and directed him, since most had heard of Tok Jangut.

Planes with the rising sun on each wing circled high over the peaks, and the deep, ragged ravines. Small parachutes blossomed, and settled slowly.

There were no explosions, nor were there Japs dropping into the mountains as they descended to the steaming flats of Palembang. All this puzzled Salim, and especially since the Japs were covering the region toward which he was going.

But harder than getting his breath at that high altitude was coming to a decision about what to tell Tok Jangut: whether the lie which Amai demanded, or the truth. "Her father," he told himself, "can't help her, so she might as well keep him from worrying."

That made sense. After all, things weren't so bad, for she'd said that since the guerillas had no munitions left, they had to hide: so that her being a hostage wasn't putting her in danger.

Then, one evening, armed men came from cover to accost Salim. They said, "Do not worry, O Man, we'll take you to Tok Jangut! Do not think that you could help facing Tok Jangut." A pause, a spitting of betel juice, a thin, bitter smile that showed blackened teeth. "Not every man has enjoyed seeing him."

"I'm a friend, not a spy!"

More spitting. "The enemy knows where we are, and can't come to get us. The Old-Man-With-the-Beard will find out what you are."

Salim began to understand why he had not for days met anyone coming out of the mountains. Judging from faces and speech, when he presently was led into a *kampong*, men of all sorts had found refuge in the volcanic wilderness: there were Menang Kebau Malays, surly Buginese, Battaks from Lake Toba. Some of the older ones among the last named had their teeth filed like those of a saw. Salim's grandfather had often said that the Battaks were great chess players, and that they ate human flesh. The latter statement seemed especially true.

Some wore Indonesian militia uniforms. A few had the tattered remnant of Japanese uniform. Looking at the faces of these men who cleaned and polished their weapons, Salim knew that they must once have felt just as he himself had, that night when he watched Captain Iguchi take Amai into captivity.

They led him into a house at the further extremity of that *kampong*; and he was before Tok Jangut.

THE deeply lined face of the man who sat on the floor might have been carved from teak darkened by time, and smoke, and oil-rubbing. The beard was heavier than the average Malay's, though it was hardly generous; yet there was enough of it to be trimmed and shaped in the Arab fashion. Tok Jangut's nose flared fiercely and proudly at the nostrils, but otherwise, it was thin, and almost beaked. About the mouth, except for its bitter hardness, and in the eyes, he was what Amai might well have been, had she been the son of this man.

With both hands, Salim offered the red-wrapped bundle. Two men intervened, snatched it, and took it out of the house. Tok Jangut's mouth twitched at the corners. He almost smiled, and seemed satisfied, at seeing that Salim was puzzled, not alarmed.

Tok Jangut said, "My men don't bother with politeness, they make sure no one brings me hand grenades with the pins pulled."

"Your family," Salim said, formally, "ask me to give you a message. The things in the bundle, you will recognize them, and believe me."

"The message will speak for itself."

"They ordered me to say it is well with us, believe nothing to the contrary. And I have said this to you, not changing what your family asked me to say."

Tok Jangut closed his eyes. Salim felt as though he were alone in the shack. Then the eyes came open, and the man spoke: "You have said what they told you to say. The words prove themselves. Now, after I give you a present, you will go back, and give my family a message, saying that all is well with me, Allah be praised."

"That I will not do," Salim retorted. "My face is black. Twice I have been within reach of my enemy, and each time, I was unable to strike."

"You were afraid?"

"Afraid, *aywah*, shaking and sweat-

ing! But what made me stop was that one man's head would have cost the lives of many people."

Tok Jangut said to his guard, "Here is a man who is afraid. What do you think of that?"

"We think," they answered, "he tells the truth. We also have been afraid."

Tok Jangut asked Salim, "You want to join me because your enemy is my enemy?"

"*Aywah*."

"Can you live with little food and much marching?"

"The Volunteer Corps did not quite kill me."

Then Tok Jangut asked about his days with the Volunteers, and the work in the shipyard; and Tok Jangut said, when he had heard how and why Captain Iguchi could not be allowed to die of old age, "What you want may happen sooner than you expect. Stay and be one of us."

Then the chief reached into the shadows behind the mat on which he sat, and brought out a cylinder, from which he took a piece of paper. "Read, Salim!"

"The peace upon you, but who said that I can read?"

"Then listen: *TOK JANGUT, commander of rebels. Honorable surrender is invited, for you and your brave followers. Resistance is useless. Submit to Japanese Government, lay down your arms. All soldiers of your country made honorable surrender three years ago, why should you make useless resistance? Come back to waiting families, and receive free pardon. Signed, Masanori Kobayashi, Military Governor.*"

After a pause, the guerilla leader went on, "They drop these from planes. Now let me read one they just brought in: *Tok Jangut, commander of rebels. Since you do not accept generous peace terms, we have found and seized your family, holding same as hostages subject to immediate execution when your next outrage is committed against peace and order. Signed, Masanori Kobayashi.*"

He regarded Salim, eye to eye. "That makes a liar of you."



"Your family told me what to say, and I said it."

"This may have been written—they may have been taken after you spoke to them," Tok Jangut suggested.

"God is the Knower. But it is plain

that Kobayashi is smart for a pig-lover."

"How is that, Salim?"

"He does not tell you that unless you surrender, he will kill your family, because he knows that if you left your men, they would still make raids. But as long



Tok Jangut's orderly plan had been scrambled, and the battle was now a hundred separate brawls with gun and steel.

as you stay with them, you can keep them from raiding."

"That," said Tok Jangut, "is what the pig father expects. Marouf, Salim looks hungry, feed him before you arm him."

AND as he ate, Salim could not guess what Tok Jangut was thinking. Later, while resting from his long march,

he watched knotty-legged porters come down from the heights. Each bent under a small but heavy pack.

The rebels quit chewing and spitting, and began to shout, "Allah be praised, they come from the sea, and they bring cartridges!" They were excited indeed.

Case after case was added to the heap.

The talk Salim heard was too marvelous for belief. The porters claimed that their cargo had come from a boat which sailed under water, so that the Japanese patrols would not know that Tok Jangut was getting all that he needed for another raid.

As the heap grew higher and higher in the *kampong*, Salim thought of Amai, and the oath she had made him swear. Better risk the wrath of Allah, and tell Tok Jangut, so that a handful of men could slip into Telok Betong, and release Amai and her mother by craft, rather than by open raiding. Now that Salim had finally found an answer, Allah would open the way; but before his plan could take shape, he heard a familiar voice. Aswad, wearing what remained of a Volunteer's uniform, had come to camp.

"How is it with those at home?" Salim asked his comrade.

The beetle-browed farmer countered, "No worse off than your running away would make it for them."

Salim hastened to explain how a confusion of records had kept his escape from bringing reprisal on his people. Then, "How did you get away?"

"I was on guard. The sergeant caught me asleep, only I wasn't sleeping as soundly as he thought. So I bayoneted him. Whatever they have done to our people, was it my fault, or was it by the will of Allah?"

CHAPTER IV

The Hand of Allah

THE arrival of munitions made the hidden camp flare up like trading day in a market town, except that instead of gaily-clad Malay women, lean and ragged men sorted out the wares: no haggling, no mirth; only harsh-voiced exultation. Strong drink was forbidden, yet these men were intoxicated. Salim learned the meaning of the Prophet's words: "Paradise is in the shadow of spears."

Salim, feeling futile and childish among these men, was glad that his old

friend was at hand. Beetle-browed, flat-nosed Aswad had once had the quizzical expression of an ape who regarded the world as not such a bad place, but now both voice and gesture were purposeful.

Aswad was sure of himself, and Salim was not.

Fortunately, there was no time for thought. Tok Jangut, wearing olive-green uniform instead of *sarong* and jacket, buckled on his pistol as he came into the compound. For all his dignity of leadership, he seemed ready to pounce.

"O Men!" His voice got immediate silence. "There will be no rest, and no eating. Whoever has just come in from patrol, let him stay here. Where we go, the only friend is Allah, and there is no strength and no help except in Him."

Group leaders came to Tok Jangut to ask, "Will *they* be there?"

"We'll know when we are there," the chief retorted. "Are *they* asking each other, will Tok Jangut be there?"

Salim turned to Aswad: "Where do we go?"

"To Telok Betong, *inshallah*."

"Where they have Amai," he muttered. "And Allah does what He will do!"

Salim saw no hope except in breaking his oath, so he said to Tok Jangut, "Man-With-the-Beard! I told you what I was required to say, but it was not true. It is not well with your family."

He told Tok Jangut how he had seen Amai and her mother taken away by Captain Iguchi. When he had finished, he looked from the ground, and at the chief. He could not see any change in that deeply-lined face.

"Behold God's wonders!" Tok Jangut exclaimed. "The Jap, the father of pigs, for once he spoke the truth. Yea, I have lived to see a Jap speak the truth. Even for Allah, this thing would be hard to make, except that the Jap spoke truly of any evil doing!"

Then, though he had not moved, it seemed that Tok Jangut was far away from Salim; and the men all about the *kampong* were arming themselves, and preparing food to eat as they marched.

"Man-With-the-Beard!" Salim's voice,

hoarse and cracking, commanded attention. "If you go to Telok Betong, they will believe that you have come to get your family, and then the Jap will do what he promised. There are other places for raiding, where your hand will not be known."

Tok Jangut answered, ironically, "When I am gone, you shall lead them. See these men. How many of them have families? How many times have these already died? Does Allah owe me more than He did them?"

"But ask them! I'll tell them, they'll judge!"

"They have judged," Tok Jangut told him. "Listen again—"

Salim broke in, "I have trained with the Volunteers. So has Aswad, so have others. We know the ways of Japanese soldiers, we can walk like them, carry a gun like them, we can do all those things as they taught us. A handful of us can go first, and get into the town, one walking ahead like a sergeant. The guards will see nothing wrong with us. We'll find your family, *inshallah!* Then—"

"Then," said Tok Jangut, "I'll finish what is to be done?"

"*Ay, wallah!* Is it not clear?"

IT SOUNDED so good, so logical, that Salim was happy. The chief could accept the plan and not dishonor the hardships of those who followed him.

But Tok Jangut said, "Salim, what you say is good, except for one thing. Men are coming by sea, and they are saying, Tok Jangut comes by land. See this watch!" He held out his wrist. "What is time to me, except that they and we have to strike at once, or not at all!"

Salim had no answer. It was as though he had been clubbed numb, yet without loss of consciousness. Then Tok Jangut said, "Since there is no help for this, listen to what I tell you, then get Aswad, and the others who are trained like Japs. There is use for them, even if not what you wanted."

Salim listened—

It was good, but not as he had hoped.

The guerillas set out, each detachment taking its own way, since on a mountain

trail, a large party would straggle hopelessly; whereas, with only a handful on each path, the entire mountain side became a military road. The guerillas had only their will, their endurance, their small-arms, and a bit of parched rice. Before the day was over, Salim remembered Captain Iguchi's training course as something mild and gentle.

Once more, Salim moved in a fatigue-trance. Sometimes he thought that Captain Iguchi and Sergeant Takahashi prodded him. This feeling became stronger when, in lucid moments, he recollected that Aswad had bayoneted the sergeant. Since one who was a ghost drove him, the other must also be a spirit. At times, Salim was angry because someone had cheated him of Captain Iguchi's head.

But fuller understanding came to Salim as, without kicks or slaps, he kept moving, and crunched a few grains of rice, and took a swig of water. Where the guidon bearer had gained strength from his reverence for the Son of Heaven's flag, these rebels of Sumatra carried on because of their memories.

All night, and then the sun rose, and still the men marched. They came down from the heights, and going lower, went into the heat and the steaming air of the narrow coastal flats. Threes and fours and fives, they converged in the dense growth that encroached on a once cleared area where a *kampong* had been.

There they rested for the final spurt, and waited for darkness. Tok Jangut squatted under a tree, looked at his watch, and closed his eyes. The others lay as though dead. Salim was too nearly worn out to be uneasy or worried, though at times, he would sit bolt upright, tense and shaking from something which had intruded into his sleep.

Amai had joined the phantoms which whirled through Salim's fatigue-intoxication. Allah was good to him, for he could not fix his attention on anything except the Japanese idea that a man can keep going forward for a long time after there is nothing but will to move him. Sometimes, Salim almost laughed in his trance, for it was good to think how men

(Continued on page 78)

LINE OF DUTY



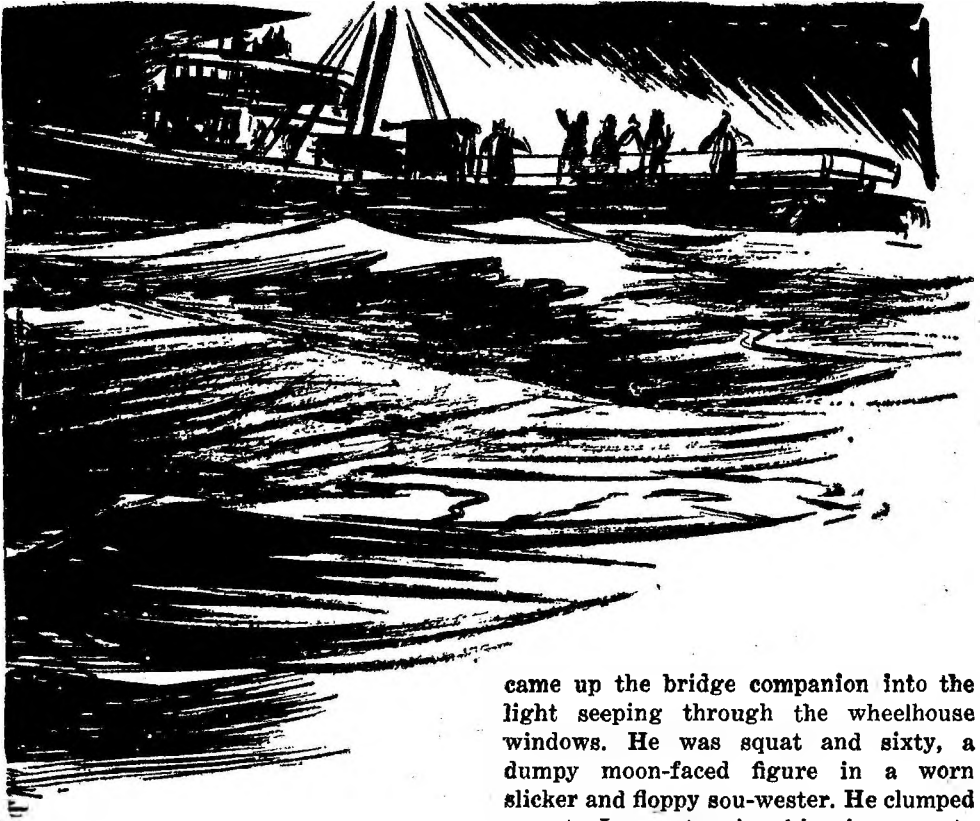
Larry hooked a leg over the tiller and yelled through his megaphone: "Heave us a line!"

★ ★ ★

The chief officer of the steamer Popo faced a doubly grim problem: he had to get his ailing skipper ashore on a long-shot to save the skipper's life—and his girl wouldn't wait long. Now, in this savage storm at sea, the chief's hope was being beaten down.

★ ★ ★

By FELIX FLAMMONDE



LARRY FARWELL, chief officer of the *Popo*, shivered in his oilskins and cursed the sea. A hurricane off Vera Cruz had forced the steamer from her course, and she was now running several hours behind schedule. Larry had three good reasons for wanting to dock in New Orleans on time, but at this moment it looked as if all the elements were conspiring against him; mountainous seas tossed the *Popo* like a cork, the rain was coming down in blinding sheets, and the wind sweeping over the dodger into his bronzed face showed no signs of abating. The freighter was five days north of a Central American port with essential war materials below decks and her captain was delirious with fever.

Mr. Collins, second mate and navigator,

came up the bridge companion into the light seeping through the wheelhouse windows. He was squat and sixty, a dumpy moon-faced figure in a worn slicker and floppy sou-wester. He clumped over to Larry, turning his pipe over to keep the bowl dry, and squinted over the dodger.

"If this weather holds," he said, "we'll never get across the bar tonight."

Larry turned. "Like hell we won't!" he snapped. The *Popo* gave a twisting lurch that almost laid her on her beam ends. Larry and Collins both grabbed the rail to keep from falling. The bar was only four hours north now, and Larry knew that in seas like these it would be next to impossible to take a pilot aboard. Until the treacherous mouth of the Mississippi calmed, no launch would risk putting out from Pilot Town to take them across. The *Popo* righted herself and wallowed on. Larry relaxed a bit and fumbled in his oilskins for a cigarette. "I'll get a pilot," he told Collins, "even if I have to swim with him in my teeth!"

THE second mate lurched suddenly against him. The two men were a tangle of arms and legs as the freighter plunged into a mountain of black water and hung motionless with her screw spinning helplessly and her rusty plates rattling. When she settled back with a smack that almost popped her rivets, Collins picked himself up and spread his booted legs against the pitching of the bridge deck.

"You want to sink us?" he protested. "No, lad, he repeated, "we'll not cross tonight. Heave to and ride out the storm, that's the only thing."

Larry returned curtly, "You'll be drinking beer on Royal Street tomorrow, I promise you. The *Popo* will cross the bar tonight, never fear. All hell won't stop me!"

Collins remonstrated with stubborn persistence, "You've no right to risk the ship and every man in her just because you want to go dancing with—"

"Leave Linda out of this!" Larry warned angrily. Collins had touched him on a sore spot. Linda Harris was one of the reasons Larry wanted to tie up in New Orleans on schedule. She worked in the steamship-company office on the dock.

When in port, Larry spent most of his time trying to convince her that he'd make a good husband. The trouble was, a big Swede leaderman in the shipyards, Johnny Nelson, had the same opinion of himself, and more time to tell Linda about it. Worse, Nelson had recently caught a couple saboteurs in the yards, and the newspapers and newsreels had made a hero of him. Nelson was playing the angle for all it was worth, Larry thought, and the big Swede's modest attitude that his feat was all in the line of duty, with no heroism to it, was a line that went over big with Linda but only enraged and infuriated Larry. Now he snapped at Collins, "My personal affairs—"

"I was standing by," Collins interrupted, his voice rising to shout out the wind, "when you and Linda said goodbye at sailing time. If you aren't back in time for the company's banquet and

dance tomorrow night, she said, she'll ask Johnny Nelson to escort her. You've got no right to let your jealousy make you willing to endanger your ship. You can't expect—"

Larry blazed, "I expect you to mind your own business and obey orders, Mr. Collins! I'm in command here, and I expect you to help me work this ship to port—on time!"

AT MIDNIGHT Collins took over the bridge. Larry went below. The rain still fell in torrents that rattled on deck like shot, and the wind howled through the rigging and tore at hatch tarpaulins. For half an hour Larry prowled the deck, salt water swirling about his feet. His flashlight probed dark corners, looking for unsecured lashings on gear, deck cargo and lifeboats. If the sea became rougher, loose objects would be dangerous.

Satisfied that all was shipshape and snugged down, Larry went to his quarters, stepping aft along the deck with the sure-footed roll ten years in sail and steam had taught him. At the captain's cabin he paused and knocked. The steward, a white-coated little Jamaican with a black monkey-like face, stuck his head out.

"How's the Old Man?" Larry asked. This was the third day of the captain's bout with tropical fever. He had taken to his berth shortly after clearing Central America, his sudden illness leaving Larry in command of the *Popo*.

The negro jerked his thumb at ice and towels on a chair beside the bunk in which lay a heavy-jowled man with tangled gray hair. The captain was sweating under a pile of blankets.

"Getting worse, sir. I'm keeping cold compresses on 'is 'ead, sir, like you ordered, but they ain't doing much good. Needs a doctor bad, sir, that's wot 'e does!"

Larry nodded. "We're doing all we can. Call me if he takes a turn."

In his own cabin, Larry changed into dry clothes. He was still smarting from his set-to with Collins on the bridge.



*"Say, fellow hero,"
Larry said to him,
"Why not come along
and make it a three-
some?"*

Larry glanced into the binnacle and spoke a word to the helmsman, then stepped over to Collins.

"Wind's dying a bit," he said. He stared into the blackness outside, trying to pierce the murk.

At the same time, he had to admit to himself that part of his determination to make New Orleans on time was inspired by his desire to be with Linda; the thought of Johnny Nelson strutting around playing hero in her eyes made Larry squirm. He pulled on his oilskins, snapped off the light over the washbowl, and returned to the bridge.

Collins was in the wheelhouse, a vague bulk against the streaming windows.

"Not enough," Collins returned gruffly. "It'll be so rough off the bar that—"

The bell in the lookout's station at the fo'c'slehead began to clamor. The three strokes came clearly back to the men on the bridge, followed by the faint hail of the lookout:

"Light dead-ahead, sir!"

Larry strode to the wheelhouse door and stepped onto the starboard wing of the bridge. Winking through the dark-

ness, a pinpoint of red pricked through the blanket of rain. Larry returned to the wheelhouse.

"Well?" Collins asked.

"Right on the nose," Larry said with satisfaction. "We'll be off the bar in less than an hour."

He stepped to the speaking tube and whistled the radio room.

"Radio to Pilot Town," he ordered when the operator answered. "Tell them to send out a pilot when they pick up our lights. That's all."

Collins started to protest again, but Larry cut him short. "Call all hands, Mister," he said. "Taking a pilot aboard in this storm isn't going to be a picnic."

THE SECOND MATE faced Larry determinedly. In the faint light from the binnacle his face was set in hard lines.

"You're in command," he said slowly, "but I still say you have no right to let selfish personal reasons—"

Larry snapped, "Pipe down! Haven't you got sense enough—"

He broke off as the steward stumbled into the wheelhouse. The little negro's jacket hung in sodden folds from his skinny shoulders, and his teeth chattered as much from fear as from cold.

"Mr. Farwell, sir! The skipper is getting worse! 'Is pulse is dropping something fearful, sir. 'E cahn't larst long without a doctor, that's wot 'e cahn't!"

The door opened to admit the radio operator. Sparks came in, a raincoat flung over his shoulders. He was a middle-aged man with a pale face and thinning hair; like Collins, he was one of the patriotic oldsters the war had brought out of well-earned retirement.

"Just got an answer, sir," he told Larry. "Pilot Town thinks you're crazy—their own words, not mine. They say you'll have to heave to and ride her out."

Larry shook his head. "We've got to get the Old Man to a doctor. Once we're across the bar and in smooth water, the Coast Guard can send a seaplane in time to save him. But no plane could land out here now." He looked at Collins. "Now

do you understand? Selfish personal reasons, eh?"

Larry got medicines from the chest and gave them to the steward, then pushed him toward the door. "Do what you can for the Old Man." Then he turned back to Collins. "Right now I'm a ship's master with a job to do. If you still think I'm going across the bar for personal reasons, you'd better chance your mind. I've got a cargo and a sick man to deliver, and I'm going to do it. Rouse all hands, rig flares and clusters on the lee side, and stand by to put a boat over. I'm going to bring that pilot aboard, myself!"

Collins grinned. "I'm with you," he said, and went below.

Larry instructed Sparks, "Call Pilot Town again. Tell them the Old Man is sinking fast, and they've got to help us. I'll guarantee double pilotage fees and assume full responsibility."

Sparks clattered back to his shack. Larry stepped out onto the bridge. Flashlights were bobbing about the deck as the crew tumbled out. He could hear Collins putting the men to rigging lights and readying a lifeboat. The rain still fell as before, but the wind was going down a little.

LARRY picked the speaking trumpet off the stanchion and hailed Collins. "We'll need oil! Break out a dozen drums and lash them to the lee rail!"

Brilliant flashes of light stabbed the darkness for a moment as cargo clusters were plugged into bulkhead sockets and tested. For-ard, a torch gleamed as a seaman got signal lights from a locker. Aft, half a dozen men were tearing the cover from a lifeboat and knocking out the chocks.

Larry heard the speaking tube whistle in the wheelhouse. He stepped to it. "Yes?"

Sparks reported, "Pilot Town says O.K., sir. They'll send out a launch. But unless it looks safe the pilot won't try to come aboard under any conditions."

"That's what they think!" Larry snapped. He stoppered the tube and went back to the bridge.

The lights at the river mouth were brighter now. He could hear the clanging of the buoys marking the entrance to the channel. When he saw the flare of white lights that mean the pilot launch was approaching, he trumpeted down to Collins:

"Come topside, mister, and take over!"

Collins came up to the bridge and placed a hand on Larry's arm. "You'd better let me take that boat away. 'It's my place to do it, now that you're in command."

But Collins, Larry thought, was too old to take a boat away in weather like that. So he said, "Thanks. I appreciate the offer, but I'd rather take full responsibility in case anything goes wrong. Stand by!"

He stepped to the telegraph and rang the engines down to half speed, then cautioned the helmsman to hold his course.

On deck, Larry ordered the cluster lights turned on, inspected the boat falls, and saw all hands into lifebelts. He threw one of the cork harnesses around himself, blew his whistle for Collins to stop the engines, and watched while some of the men broached oil from the drums along the rail.

"All right, men," he said then, and waited while six seamen clambered into the boat. He took his place on the stern thwart and grasped the tiller. "Lower away!"

He steered for the pilot launch, now only a hundred yards downwind. The craft was ablaze with lights, and wallowed so heavily her mast seemed to dip water. Men clustered aft along her weather rail, among them a tall fellow in a civilian hat and a raincoat. He would be the pilot, Larry knew.

THE lifeboat fought toward the launch, seeming to gain only an inch at each tortured thrust of the oars. Larry handled the tiller to take advantage of every gust of wind and lurch of wave in the right direction. When the boat came alongside the launch and passed around her stern to the lee side, he hooked his leg over the tiller and yelled

through his megaphone: "Heave us a line!"

A line snaked out from the launch. Larry caught it just as the end was slithering into the sea.

The next few minutes were a nightmare to him. Although rain pelted him and the wind chilled his bones, his fight to inch the boat alongside the launch brought sweat out all over him. His ears roared, cotton filled his mouth, and pain tightened like a band across his chest. Then he heard the thud of grappling-irons on the gunwale, and almost lurched out of the boat as the strain on the line went slack in his hands. He spat out oily water and shouted, "All right, pilot—stand by to come aboard!"

A half dozen men on the launch were holding the lifeboat with pikes, while Larry's own crew fended with their oars to keep the two craft from crashing together. The pilot was now directly above Larry, so close he could almost touch him with upstretched hands. But the tall man in the raincoat made no move to leave the rail.

"Not on your life, mister!" the pilot shouted. "Only fool's luck got you out here, but it'll take more than that to get you back. You and your men better come aboard before you drown!"

Larry had to admit the justice of the pilot's refusal. The man was within his rights; there was no rule or regulation demanding that he risk his life in a situation as dangerous as this. Then Larry thought of his precious cargo, and of the sick captain depending on him for life, and all else faded from his mind. After all, seamanship, not luck, had brought the lifeboat out here. The same seamanship could take it back.

"All right!" Larry shouted in sudden decision, and lifted his arms. "Give me hand up, pilot!"

A wave lifted the lifeboat almost to the launch's deck level. The pilot, reacting as a man will to a sudden and forceful order, reached over to grasp Larry's hands. But when Larry caught hold, he made no effort to spring aboard the launch. Instead, he set his weight

down as the lifeboat fell away, and felt his arms almost torn from their sockets as the pilot gave a startled yell and came diving over the rail into the lifeboat.

"Heave away!" Larry shouted, and kicked up the pikes grappling the boat against the launch. The next instant the space between the two craft was widening rapidly as the lifeboat, under the flailing oars of Larry's crew, pulled for the freighter.

THE PILOT had lost his hat, half his raincoat, and all his breath. But by the time the lifeboat was halfway back to the ship he found his voice.

"You—you—!" he choked. He made a wild swing at Larry, but missed. "I'll have your ticket for this! I'll put you on the beach for life! I'll—" He lunged at Larry again, tripped on a thwart, and went overboard before anyone could make a move to save him.

Larry shouted to the nearest oarsman, "Man the tiller!" and followed the pilot. He hit the oil water, the lifebelt holding him up. He looked around for the pilot, saw him thrashing wildly a few feet away, and stroked toward him. The man was gasping, swallowing water and beating the sea in a frenzy of terror. Larry grabbed him by the hair, lifted his head out of water and clipped the man on the jaw as hard as his awkward position permitted.

The pilot relaxed as if he'd been shot. Larry towed him to the boat, and the pair were quickly hauled aboard. Five minutes later they were safely in the *Popo's* chartroom, where a slug of rum from the medicine chest brought the pilot around.

The pilot was still enraged, but Larry and Collins put in a successful quarter hour convincing him that, now he was safe, the thing to do was to take the freighter across the bar in time to deliver the captain to the Coast Guard plane the second mate had already radioed for.

"All right," the pilot agreed at length, and with reluctance. "But when we dock, I'll make a full report of this," he threatened as he changed into dry clothing

from the slopchest. "You'll get all you deserve, you young pirate!" he promised Larry.

LARRY and Collins stood beside the pilot next morning when the *Popo* docked. A crowd of people was on the wharf, and Larry wondered what had brought them out so early, and in such numbers. But when he saw Linda waving from the fringe of the crowd, and Johnny Nelson grinning beside her, he ignored everything else.

Larry met them at the top of the gangplank. Behind them trailed some tired-looking men with press cards in their hats, and two of them carried cameras. Linda was smiling at Larry in a way he'd never seen her smile before, and in her blue eyes was a glow that made his heart quicken.

"Oh, Larry, you were wonderful!" Linda cried. She gave him a hug, then turned to the pilot, who had come down from the bridge and now stood ready to go ashore. "And this must be the pilot you rescued when he fell out of your lifeboat. The steamship company is going to give him a reward for his bravery in helping you get the captain to a doctor. Everybody's thrilled to death over you two!"

The pilot gulped and found his voice. "Ah-uh." He looked at Larry, and this time there was no hostility in his eyes. "A reward, you say, young lady?" he asked, turning back to Linda. "Well, ah—" He beamed and rubbed his hands. "Well, well! That's very handsome of the owners, I must say!" He started for the gangplank, then paused to say to Larry, "Ah, Mr. Farwell. This . . . uh . . . rather changes things." He winked. "Suppose we just forget about that little matter I was going to report, eh?"

Larry nodded, mystified. Things were happening too fast for him. "Sure, of course." He turned to Linda. "Now, what's this all about?"

Johnny Nelson interrupted, "Wake up, sailor. You've made the headlines. Thrilling battle with the sea, daring rescue, race with death, all like that, see?"

"Yeah," one of the reporters broke in. "You're a hero, skipper. Give us the story while some of the boys get pix, huh?"

The cameramen popped flashbulbs, Linda bubbled excitedly, and Johnny Nelson was grinning when Collins clapped Larry on the shoulder.

"Pilot Town radioed the whole business last night, Larry," the second mate explained. "The Old Man is resting easy in Quarantine right now, our cargo's coming out of the hole on schedule, and—" Collins paused and grinned. "And you're a hero, my boy!"

EVERYTHING was mixed up, Larry thought dazedly. The pilot-launch men had garbled everything, however impossible that seemed. Collins, too, from the way he looked, had added his share to the story. And, in such a storm, with little light and everybody keyed up, it was no wonder the kidnapping of the pilot might have looked like an accident. But this hero stuff . . .

"Listen, everybody," Larry said then. "Say what you like about the rest of the crew, but leave me out of it. No hero stuff to it. I didn't do anything but my

job. The while thing was just in the line of duty—"

He stopped abruptly, as if the words had rung a bell in his mind. *Line of duty!* Why, that was the line Johnny Nelson had been using since he'd captured those saboteurs! And now he, Larry himself, was using the identical words. If the papers could make heroes as easily as they were making him one right, now, maybe Johnny Nelson—

Larry looked at the big Swede, who was grinning at him with a friendly light in his eyes. Suddenly, Nelson didn't look like the kind of fellow who'd play phony hero; he looked like the kind of man who'd make a good friend if you'd let him. Larry grinned back at him in mutual understanding. Then he turned to Collins and said:

"You tell the newsmen whatever they want to know. I'm going ashore. Linda and I have a date for the banquet tonight."

Larry took Linda's hand, and they started down the gangplank. Then Larry stopped and turned back to smile at Johnny Nelson.

"Say, fellow hero," Larry said to him, "why not come along and make it a threesome?"

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

OF SPEED ADVENTURE, published quarterly at Springfield, Mass., for October 1, 1945

State of New York
County of New York / ss

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Frank Armer, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Publisher of the Speed Adventure and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537 Postal Laws and Regulations printed on the reverse of this form to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Arrow Publications, Inc., 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Editor, Kenneth Hutchinson, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y. Managing Editor, Wilton Matthews, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y. Business Manager, Frank Armer, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) **Arrow Publications, Inc., 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y. Frank Armer, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y. Michael Estrow, 114 East 47th Street, New York 17, N. Y. G. Donenfeld, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y. J. E. Wasserman, 801 Harries Bldg., Dayton, Ohio. Anna Estrow, 114 East 47th Street, New York, 17, N. Y.; Janet DePinna Armer, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Alice U. Wasserman, 801 Harries Bldg., Dayton, Ohio; Linda B. Wasserman, 801 Harries Bldg., Dayton, Ohio.

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FRANK ARMER, Publisher.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 11th day of September, 1945. Alfred B. Yaffe, Notary Public, Kings Co. Chs. No. 5. Reg. No. 4004; N. Y. Chs. No. 8. Reg. No. 4-Y-3. Commission expires March 30, 1946.

GUN-BRAND BANKER

It was a case of banker versus rancher, of heart versus greed, and yet, at the showdown, it was a clever slip of a girl who maneuvered things the way she wanted them



ANTAGONISM mounted between Bill Anson and Otis Clumb until it was like a tangible wall rising. Their hostility was but minutes building to the point of an open break which was loaded with dynamite for many others besides these two oddly contrasting figures.

For his part, Anson, nearing his thirties, had suspected for weeks that this split-up must come. As the only banker of Copper Gap, Anson had watched the

greed for power growing in Otis Clumb. Anson had hoped to counter Clumb's dominant ambition by argument, not until today realizing the sheer ruthlessness of the richest rancher in the great valley of the Thunder Mountains.

On the other hand, Clumb, the biggest depositor in Anson's small bank, had also failed to read deeply enough into the character of the apparently easygoing Bill Anson. Therefore Clumb had expected Anson to fall in with his scheming,

By RANDOLPH BARR



"One yeep out'n yuh, an' I'll whip yuh down," the hooded man growled.

gladly and willingly. Not only was big, ruddy Otis Clumb sure that Anson would admire his smartness, but as the probable son-in-law of the cattleman, Anson could figure himself a partner in this slick enterprise.

Standing six-feet-three, his rugged body shaking with the deep heartiness of his voice, Otis Clumb voiced his proposition:

Them notes that was signed jointly by old Harvey Gillis and the other five ranchers is due an' payable in ten days from this day," said Clumb. "The notes add up

to some sixty thousan', Bill, an' I've been keepin' this as a sort o' surprise for you an' Millie. I'm takin' them notes offa your hands for seventy thousan', that ex-try ten bein' in and nature of a weddin' gift."

"Sounds right interestin', Otis," replied Anson quietly, his long legs resting upon his desk and his lean body stretched lazily in a tippee-up chair. "The only catch is that I ain't sellin'. Not for seventy or a hundred thousand, or any other figure, Otis."

Clumb rested huge, hairy hands upon the desk edge, staring at Anson. Anson gave him back a gray-eyed grin that was too flat-lipped to be pleasant.

"Don't let us joke about this bus'ness o' them notes, Bill," said Clumb with the note of authority that usually ended all argument with either friend or enemy. "Since that fool Hylan *did* his that under-

ground creek the money was borrowed off you for, they've got nigh forty thousand acres of what'll be the best grass land in the Thunders, joinin' right up with my Ladder."

Anson nodded agreement, pushing back his shock of red hair.

"Sure 'nough, Otis. An' what's been starved-out drouth meadows for two seasons is sproutin' grass that'll fatten the herds o' the six ranches in a matter o' months. Which makes them spreads under the Copper Ridge worth five times the dinero they was 'fore the tunnel brung in the water."

Otis Clumb's eyes were too big and too blue and hid too much inner damnation. He grinned now.

"So you're hangin' onto the stuff your ownself, Bill!" And Otis Clumb checked. "I'm gettin' a smart son-in-law an' pard, an' it comes to the same thing. I was meanin' that buy-out as a gift, but maybe Millie will side with you on holdin' the land."

BILL ANSON inspected his long, facile fingers a moment before replying. Nature hadn't fashioned a girl more desirable than Millie Clumb and she never was out of Anson's mind.

He wondered suddenly if it was as Millie's father said, that she would favor him grabbing and holding this suddenly valuable land at the head of Thunder Valley. The gay and vivacious Millie, as witty as she was pretty, showed no strain that marked crude, ruthless Otis Clumb as her sire.

Bill Anson thought, too, of six ranch owners. He added up in his mind some eleven children, five wives whose faces had become tired and hopeless in these past two years, and the five husbands who had ridden in together a few days before to tell him their venture in drilling the mountain had brought them jubilant optimism.

The sixth rancher, Harvey Gillis? Well, his wife and little girl had died during the drouth. Gillis was washed-up, even though his top spread of the six soon would be producing beef profits.

Otis Clumb fidgeted at Anson's long silence. His heavy face reddened and his blue eyes clouded.

"Can't say it ain't your right to grab off what you put out the money for," said Clumb slowly. "Strapped the bank puttin' up that sixty thousand on a gamble, didn'tcha?"

Anson nodded and smiled as pert Millie Clumb glanced into the bank door, tossed her black curls, and went on quickly as she saw her father was talking with Anson.

"I ain't grabbin' off any of that land, Otis," stated Anson flatly. "Hylan and the rest of the Copper Ridge benchers worked like the devil an' took a chance tunnelin' into the ridge. I'm givin' 'em another six months or so to fatten their stock and start payin' off. All I lent 'em was money, Otis. *They* furnished the guts."

Blood flooded in Clumb's big face until it seemed he would burst. His voice lowered now, but it had the cutting edge of a chisel.

"I offer to buy them notes for seventy-five thousand, Bill," he asserted. "An' you're sellin'. I ain't lettin' no man what's figurin' on marryin' with Millie to make a plumb fool o' himself."

"Sorry, Otis, but that's the way it is," replied Anson. "I'm in the bankin' business to make money. But I ain't havin' none when it comes to pushin' good citizens offa their land to my own profit."

Otis Clumb stepped back a pace. Anson saw that Jerry Carter, his cashier, clerk and only employe, had lifted his head to listen.

"Now I ain't askin' you, Bill," rasped Clumb. "I'm tellin' you. Your books are showin' I've got a hundred and fifty thousand in your bank. Outside o' that, all you got as capital is maybe two or three thousand, after you put out sixty thousand on them notes."

Bill Anson's feet dropped solidly to the floor.

"Meanin' what, Otis?" he said sharply.

"Meanin' that unless you've come to your senses by closin' time tomorrow night, I aim to draw out every last pen-

ny o' my money what's keepin' your doors open," said Otis Clumb. "Every damn' dollar o' mine's comin' out, an' maybe you can run a bank on these poor-mouth ranchers' notes that're due an' payable ten days from now."

Anson had a cold lump in his stomach. He hadn't expected Otis Clumb to go this far. But Anson's eyes only became a little harder. Clumb's threat, if carried out, meant bankruptcy. He had but little more than a thousand in cash. The Copper Ridge ranch notes were not negotiable or good for a loan, every other bank in the tri-county section already being overloaded with ranch paper.

BILL ANSON was thinking fast, especially of his own past, six years before when he had arrived in Copper Gulch with a shoe-string stake to open this bank. He thought of his wooden-handled guns in his trunk over at the Gulch Hotel where he lived.

In a way it had been in Bill Anson's soul that his aid in pulling the Copper Ridge ranchers out of the hole, on a gamble with his own money, would in a measure atone for the manner in which some of that bank-founding money had been acquired. Gun-running over the border wasn't exactly legal, or peaceful, or such as to leave a man with good memories.

Otis Clumb shuffled his big feet, cussing under his breath. It was evident he had expected no argument from Bill Anson on this intended land grab, after the ranchers had struck it rich in water.

Bill Anson's next speech was considered:

"Withdrawin' your hundred an' fifty thousan' won't change it, Otis. Exceptin' for a stake I'd saved, I was nothin' but a ridin' hand when I hit Copper Gulch. I'm still a fair-to-middlin' roper an' bronc buster."

Anson paused, watching Clumb's thick lips working over furious oaths he was trying to hold back.

"And if it comes to that, I'll be makin' the Copper Ridgers a free gift of their notes," added Anson slowly. "In that case, you would be set agin' Millie an' me



Though the girl glanced around, she did not speak.

hitchin' up, I guess. So I won't be ridin' along out to the Ladder tonight, like as usual."

Otis Clumb flexed his heavy muscles. His clenched fists were tight at his side as if he found it hard to resist smashing the slow grin from Anson's flat lips.

But Clumb had not arrived as top range owner in Thunder Valley by giving away to a hasty temper. His words now were cold and measured.

"You've got hoss sense, Bill. Think it over until tomorrow night. I'm givin' you that long. If I was you I wouldn't disappoint Millie."

It was true that Millie would be slow to understand why Bill Anson should miss riding out to the Ladder, this being Wednesday and always his night.

But Anson had the sudden grim idea that Clumb was counting upon Millie to sway his judgment.

"Give Millie my excuses, Otis," said Anson quietly. "It may be some of the boys will come in, an' I wouldn't want to miss a chance at findin' out about a ridin' job."

"Why, you cantankerous, weak-minded—!"

Otis Clumb expelled the words with his gusty breath. Then as quickly he let his anger run away with him. He had an ace in the hole and it was too much for his arrogant, boastful spirit to resist showing the card.

"Yup, I'll bust your bank!" he raged. "An' Harvey Gillis is honin' to get shed o' his spread since losin' his missus an' kid! I think I rec'lect somethin' that'll make the Gillis ranch a good bargain, it bein' on the bench above all the other spreads where the new creek tunnel brings up the water! Maybe you won't even get a ridin' job! I'll tell Millie you ain't comin' out!"

It was dark outside, with a slashing mountain rain churning the street dust into mud. The two lamps in the banks showed Clumb's broad back as he strode out and slapped his boots into the mud.

Bill Anson watched Clumb go without moving from his desk.

THERE WAS MORE than black anger inside Anson now. Even Clumb's ruthless plan to buy up the Copper Ridge ranch notes was far less evil than his final implied threat.

It was early dark on account of the lather of mountain rain. Bill Anson stared out into the street with bleak eyes. He saw Otis Clumb's buckboard pass, the ponies plunging in the mud.

Clumb was driving the ten miles out to the Ladder Ranch. Bill Anson guessed Millie was huddled beside her father's huge bulk against the drive of rain.

"Otis won't be drivin' thirty miles to see Harvey Gillis tonight," said Anson, scarcely knowing he spoke aloud. "Gillis won't let go that top spread for less than

forty thousand, but it'll give Otis what he wants, even if it takes longer."

"You say somethin', Mr. Anson?" asked Jerry Carter.

"Nope, just thinkin'," replied Anson. "There ain't no business an' nobody stirrin' in this ruck, but we'll be keepin' open till eight o'clock as usual."

Jerry Carter looked disappointed, but went back to the books. In a little while he would stack such currency as was outside and lock the old-fashioned vault.

Bill Anson's mind was seething turmoil. When Otis Clumb said he would buy out Harvey Gillis he might as well have stated that he intended ruining thousands of acres of grassland, thirsting out five herds of cattle, and driving the families of five ranchers out of Thunder Valley.

The key to despoiling the land lay there on Harvey Gillis's ranch. Ten thousand of the sixty thousand spent in tapping the underground water of Copper Ridge had been required for a ditch and a flume to bring the steady flow of clear, pure water from the tunnel.

Anson considered this. Without the added ditch and flume, the newly tapped water for the six bench ranches would have cut its channel through one of the varied mineral deposits that gave Copper Ridge its name.

One such deposit was a jumbled bed of iron ore strongly impregnated with copperas sulphite. This sulphite, so strongly volatile as to form the basis for dyes and ink, lay deep in the deposit of the mountain bench.

Added to this poisonous chemical and almost in line with it was a surface outcropping of rock salt. Because of this the ranchers had taken a desperate gamble on striking sweet water under the ridge, where Curt Hylan had declared it would be.

The bitterness growing inside Bill Anson was apart from his own probable loss of his bank and a return to the saddle at forty a month. He was thinking of what Otis Clumb had in mind.

"He'll divert that water through the copperas an' maybe the salt," muttered

Anson. "No livin' thing can drink o' it then, an' the grass won't even grow where copperas water floods out."

Anson pulled some books from his desk. Yes. His total personal cash came



She had a sack in her hand as she slipped from the buckboard.

to little more than a thousand. The deposit books showed Otis Clumb to have one hundred thousand-odd, plus interest.

Another fifty thousand-odd was in the name of Millicent Clumb, heired from her grandfather on her mother's side.

But Anson judged it would be simple for Otis to persuade Millie to withdraw her money with his.

It had seemed apparent to Bill Anson since his courting of the sprightly girl that her father dominated her thinking. Anson smiled wryly now as he recalled how he had hoped he might change all that. At least, he had been sure that Millie loved him for himself.

Yet right now he was thinking too much. Before he had put more than sixty thousand into the Copper Ridge ranchers'

last hope, he had been well on the way to becoming a prosperous banker, especially being backed by kingpin Otis Clumb.

All at once Bill Anson's lean face became a mask as he looked out into the slather of rain. Jerry Carter was waiting for him to go to supper at the Gulch Hotel.

Anson slapped his feet to the floor.

"I'll be havin' chuck, Jerry," he said. "Be back in half an hour or so, an' then you can hightail out an' see your girl. I'll close up."

BILL ANSON looked up and down a deserted street. The only living things outside were a dozen horses hitched at the rack halfway between the small bank building and the Gulch Hotel. This put the horses across the street and some distance up from the Drifter Saloon, a matter of some old-timer's precaution.

Too often there had been lead-slinging in the saloon, and horses hitched in front had sometimes stopped stray bullets. Tied over here they were relatively safe from man-made violence.

Anson's broad mouth was grimly set. He glanced back into the bank. One thing, in this he had suddenly made up his mind to do, he did not want young Jerry Carter hurt.

As he moved toward the hotel, some fifty yards away, Anson realized he was favored by the driving rain. Even the shape of a horse was vague in the darkness a few yards away.

Anson turned off the walk into the vacant lot between the bank and the hotel. Two minutes later he had ascended the backstairs of the hotel and was in his room, having encountered no one.

"Never thought I'd ever have use for that hood again," said Anson as he lifted the lid of an old trunk in his room.

The feel of the wooden-handled guns on his thighs brought a memory he had been trying for six years to banish from his mind. He went back down the stairs and the street was still empty as he came to the front of the bank. No one had entered and Jerry Carter was smoking a

cigar and taking it easy in the boss's chair.

"Git up yore paws, an' don't make ary move!"

Anson's croaking voice could have belonged to anybody. His tongue was over a hazelnut held in his mouth. He was speaking through a hooded mask that came down to the slicker over his shoulders.

Jerry Carter turned white, started to rise, but sank back, his hands lifted as he saw the black barrel of the .45 pointing at his stomach across the desk.

Anson might have tapped Jerry and put him out cold. But he had planned differently. He had moved beside Jerry and jerked a gunnysack over the younker's head and shoulders.

"One yeep out'n yuh, an' I'll whip yuh down," growled Anson in Jerry's ear.

Jerry was shaking. Half a minute later he couldn't have made himself heard. Tied hand and foot, with the sack still over his head, Jerry Carter was left lying in the small closet at the back of the bank.

Anson moved with speed, having to chance some lone visitor. But the driving rain outside favored him, and when he had gathered all the available currency he had not heard a step outside.

Just as he was about to slip from the door, Anson paused.

"If Otis Clumb gets the idea, he'll be grabbin' them ranch notes," reasoned Anson. "He could make it stick, too, with his influence, claimin' he'd have the right to foreclose that land on account o' the cash he's lost."

Anson remedied this by putting the Copper Ridge notes inside his coat. As he came into the street, he chuckled in spite of the grave risk he was taking. He would have bet that not one bank anywhere had been so completely cleaned of all its cash.

"Hope nary hombre comes ramblin' out of the saloon," thought Anson. "It's sure I ain't shootin', an' if I have to grab a hoss an' hightail it, the whole thing will be spoiled."

HIS LUCK HELD. He got rid of the hooded mask and the slicker back of the hotel. For the moment he disposed of the rather bulky money from the bank under the dry roots of a cottonwood tree.

Bill Anson couldn't believe it had been so easy as he returned to the rainy darkness of the street. His silver watch showed that it was but fifteen minutes since he had first left the bank, telling Jerry he was on his way to supper.

There was one more angle to be considered. Jerry Carter might be discovered by some chance visitor in a few minutes, or he could be unfound until Anson himself returned from supper at the hotel. The latter idea was unsound.

Bill Anson, the banker, now unprotected by a slicker, moved down the plank walk. He saw no person as he reached the horse rack. It was a matter of seconds for him to jerk loose the tie reins of half a dozen cayuses and slap them into motion.

Freed, the beasts took out, a few one way and a few the other, depending on the direction of their home stables. The stir of the horses running in the mud would bring their owners from the saloon across the street and some distance away.

Bill Anson was stepping onto the hotel porch. He guessed there never had been a bank holdup pulled off as slickly as this one. Sure, there would be the devil to pay when Otis Clumb found out the bank had been looted of all his cash by a lone hold-up, but in two minutes more there would be no possibility of suspecting other than the story to be told by Jerry Carter.

Rain-drenched now, Anson hurried, taking off his hat and shaking the water from it as he came onto the hotel porch. He had been watching for the first horse owners to come from the saloon up the street. Three or four men had just come out and were looking this way and that, puzzled, having heard horses, but being unable to see the tie rack clearly.

Anson decided it was time for him to get into the dining room. He turned toward the lighted doorway of the hotel.

Millie Clumb, her oval face framed by

her black curls, was staring at him. The way she stood, her slender body rigid, her small hands clenched, Bill Anson knew that she had been there when he untied the horses. Perhaps she had seen even more.

Anson took a step toward her, was about to speak, but Millie turned swiftly and moved lightly back through the hotel office and up the front stairway. Saunders, the deaf clerk and proprietor, was half asleep behind the desk.

Anson swore under his breath. He wanted to call out, to hurry after Millie. He decided against it. First, he could not know how much she might have seen, and looking out into the darkness himself, he judged Millie had not identified him until he had come into the light of the hotel porch.

Anson was cold inside. He had believed Millie on her way to the Ladder Ranch with her father. Her quick avoidance of him now was filled with dire meaning. She might even have been watching and seen him up in the light of the bank?

Or her turning away of itself could mean that she was angered by the word he had given Otis Clumb, that he wouldn't be riding out to the Ladder to see her tonight?

"Mighta knowed it couldn't work out," muttered Anson. "But there's nothin' to do but play out my string. This could be my last meal outside Sheriff Calhoun's jail."

MOLLY CAIRNS, the waitress, smiled and joked as she set out the hot dishes. Bill Anson had to pretend an appetite. At any moment Millie might come through that dining-room door, having made up her mind about what she had seen.

If he could only be sure how much Millie had seen!

Anson choked down some food, drank some hot coffee. He guessed there wasn't a bigger fool ever born than he had turned out to be.

It had been his plain and honest intention to rob his own bank for but one purpose. Otis Clumb meant to buy the Har-

vey Gillis ranch to ruin thousands of acres of grass land, so that he could drive out the owners, repossess that land and then put good water back into its feeding meadows.

Anson knew that Harvey Gillis wanted to sell, but that he wouldn't accept a dollar less than forty thousand. All of Clumb's cash, including Millie's money, which Clumb might use, had been in Anson's bank.

It hadn't come to Bill Anson until this minute that he would use any of the Clumb cash. Blocking Clumb's ruthless plan would be enough, he had imagined.

Now it came to Anson that Clumb might in some way talk Gillis out of his ranch. Well, that would wait until tomorrow—

Boots made a clattering along the plank walk outside. Shouts were raised in the street. Two or three hombres cut loose with gun-smoke, probably to stir up the town.

"What's happenin'?" exclaimed Molly Cairns, the waitress, running to the window. "Everybody's out in the street."

Anson judged he would have to show the proper amount of curiosity. He pushed back his plate and went to the window. He saw a knot of men up in the light of the bank. Then two townsmen came down the walk toward the hotel.

Anson looked toward the hotel stairway. He thought maybe he ought to have this out with Millie now. She might be only put out at his failure to keep his usual Wednesday-night date with her, and on that account she probably had remained at the hotel.

Or she might be waiting for the proper moment to announce she had seen much more? Anson considered that Millie couldn't know about the bank being robbed as yet, but when it was proclaimed, would she be compelled to denounce him?

A hard voice called out from the hotel porch:

"Hey! There's been a holdup! Jerry Carter was stuck up an' the bank's been cleaned out!"

Anson could do no other than start toward the hotel office now. He turned.

And he saw Millie come from the stairs, run lightly across the office to the porch.

"Yup!" yelled another voice. "Jerry Carter says there was but one galoot, an' Jerry was trapped an' tied up afore he could raise ary alarm! Hey! Jerry said Bill Anson's eatin' his supper!"

ANSON had caught up his hat. He was at the inner door of the office. Millie's slender figure was outlined on the hotel porch. Half a dozen men were crowding up.

Then Anson was held where he was. Millie's clear voice rang out:

"I didn't know the bank was being robbed, but I saw the holdup man!" proclaimed the girl. "It was too dark to see if he was wearing a mask, but he turned some horses loose from the rack and then he rode away fast, taking the south end of the street, with some of the loose horses running with him! If I'd only known he was a bank holdup, I could have raised a scare, but I thought he was some rider just playing a joke!"

Bill Anson was a full thirty seconds compelling his feet to move. Then he was moving out onto the porch. There was no time to speak with Millie. As the banker he could but ask a curt question or two, and get back to his bank.

"The bandit rode south, you say, Millie?"

The girl's dark eyes flashed upon him. Her curved mouth twisted almost as if she were laughing at him.

"Yeah, darling," she said softly. "He rode south. And you'd best be getting back to the bank. Pardee, one of our riders, has already lit out to catch up with dad an' bring him back."

Sheriff Calhoun came along, rubbing his gray mustache.

"All you fellas that's got hosses are in the posse," announced the sheriff. "I hear the holdup headed south. 'Lo, Anson. You ridin' along?"

"I'd like it, sheriff," stated Anson. "I'll roust out my hoss an' be trailin' the posse as soon as I check at the bank."

Anson still had the well-defined feeling that Millie was laughing at him quiet-

ly. He touched her shoulder, but she stepped quickly to one side. Anson wondered, suddenly, why Millie's dress should be soaked with the rain.

"I'll be back an' talk this over, Millie," said Anson, speaking into her ear.

Men were already swinging to their saddles. Millie gave Anson another quick look that appeared to hold hard amusement.

"Yes, darling," the girl replied. "We'll talk it over."

Then Millie turned back into the hotel. Anson went on up to the bank. About this time the dashing rain stopped abruptly and the full moon appeared in a ragged break of the clouds.

THERE was little to detain Bill Anson at the bank. He listened to Jerry Carter repeat his story of the holdup. He checked and announced to curious townsmen that about all of the bank's cash and been cleaned out.

There was some grumbling. The bank had a few small depositors, twenty or so, and it was their money that had made up about half of the sixty thousand loaned to the Copper Ridge ranchers.

"Nobody'll lose a dollar," assured Anson. "Otis Clumb is the biggest loser, but he's protected."

Anson did not say how Clumb was protected. He closed the vault and closed the door of the bank. A few citizens were muttering among themselves, and Anson knew their few hundreds were as important to them as Otis Clumb's hundred thousand to him.

Anson didn't like the way the townsmen appeared to draw away from him as he started back toward the hotel. But that was to be expected. He had in mind now to see Millie and find out why she had told her surprising lie about seeing the holdup ride southward.

A horse and rider came up the street from the livery stable beyond the hotel. The horse was loping, scattering mud. Anson halted and stared unbelievably.

Millie was the rider. Her slim figure was erect in the saddle. Anson had but a passing glimpse of her face turned to-

ward him as she passed. The girl was heading northward, toward the Ladder, possibly to meet up with her father, who by this time might have been overtaken by his rider and be turned back toward town.

"She didn't want to talk," grated Anson between set teeth.

His flat-lipped grin hardened. He judged that all that had been between them was now tallied out. Millie had lied to give him a chance, but apparently she had no intention of tying in with him.

For the moment Bill Anson was quite alone. It struck him then with all force what he must do. In the eyes of the girl he was thief-branded. He might as well play out his hand. Perhaps he could make sure that Otis Clumb didn't get his hands on the Harvey Gillis ranch.

Making sure he was unobserved, Anson slipped through the vacant lot between the bank and the hotel. He reached the cottonwood where the dry roots had formed a hiding place for the bank cash.

Anson groped for the money sack. In half a minute he was raking the ground with his fingers, almost frantically.

The money was no longer there. Otis Clumb's hundred thousand and Millie's fifty thousand had been removed.

Bill Anson felt paralyzed in his mind, trying to think this out. Who might have watched and followed him?

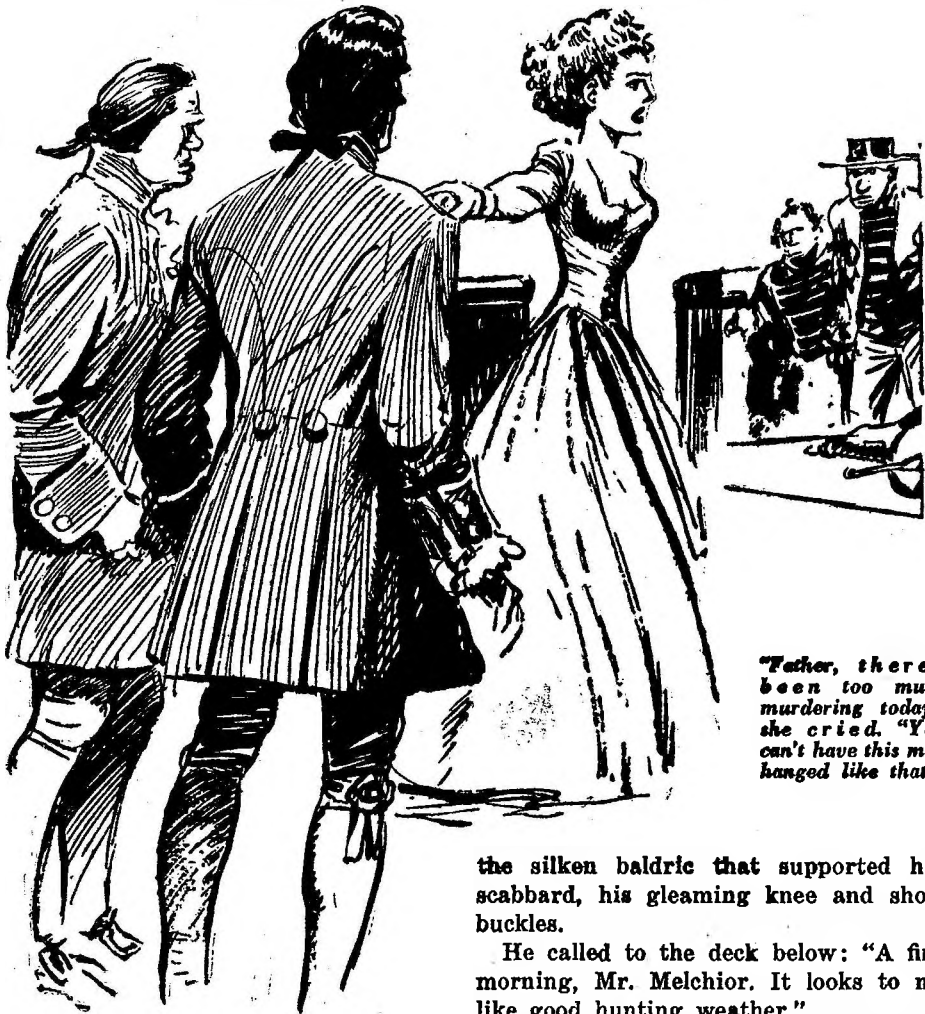
In the rainy darkness anyone could have been nearby when he had left the bank. Anson lighted a match, but the churned mud around the tree showed no clear track.

Anson heard voices being raised in hot argument out in the street. The sheriff's posse had gone tearing out of town southward. Then Anson heard the heavy voice of Otis Clumb, rising above all others, cursing loudly.

Anson struck across the vacant lot toward the wall of the hotel where he had hidden the hood mask and slicker and his pair of guns. He had placed these in a dark recess at the corner of the building.

He drew a freer breath when he found
(Continued on page 84)

By CLIVE TRENT



"Father, there's been too much murdering today," she cried. "You can't have this man hanged like that!"

ON A FINE midsummer morning in the year 1779, Captain Patrick O'Shea surveyed the ocean from the quarter-deck of his ship, the *Brian Boru*. The water was a rippling blue; there was just as much wind as O'Shea liked; the decks shone gleaming white after their daily holystoning, about which the captain was a martinet. He stood complacently at the top of the companion, a handsome young man, with a year or two to go to thirty, looking very much of a dandy in his coat of claret taffeta, with the frilled shirt, the short wig under his clamped down cocked hat,

the silken baldric that supported his scabbard, his gleaming knee and shoe-buckles.

He called to the deck below: "A fine morning, Mr. Melchior. It looks to me like good hunting weather."

Melchior, the chief mate, a coal-black Jamaica negro, looked up and grinned. "It does, it surely does, sir," he called back. "We'll be on our way to Baltimore or Boston soon, with our hold crammed with goods. The English will be screaming bloody murder that the old Sea-Killer has scraped his barnacles and caulked his seams, and got under way again."

"Old Sea-Killer, Mr. Melchior?" inquired O'Shea loftily. "Am I to assume that you are speaking of me as 'old'?"

"Not for the world, sir. 'Tis but a term of affection used about you, on account of your depredations on the English commerce."



★ ★ ★

The English called Privateer Pat O'Shea a pirate, and set a sea-trap for him, but they didn't reckon with the fighting blood of an Irishman or the ingenuity of a man long accustomed to living by his wits

★ ★ ★

LETTERS OF MARQUE

"Bedad," exploded Patrick, "if that's a term of affection on the lips of my own men, what is it on the lips of the English? Never mind, Mr. Melchior. Come up here and take the helm, but first I want to consult with you." And, when the black mate came grinning up, he added: "What do you think of the report we had that a big English convoy is on her way to Charleston, guarded by three frigates?"

"As for the frigates, we can dance around a score of them, if this wind keeps up," answered the other. "But the English have sworn to get you, sir, after

the havoc you've wrought against them. You recall that placard we saw nailed to that tree on Mangrove Isle, offering twenty thousand pounds for you, dead or alive. I'm misminded they'll set a trap for you, if they can."

"To the devil with their traps," cried O'Shea. "We've got just room for another fair-sized cargo below-decks, and our water's like to spoil. I'll scour the ocean for a fat merchantman, and then we'll put into Baltimore, unless those cursed devils have taken it, and we'll share the profits."

His eyes kindled, he clapped Melchior

on the shoulder, and then there came a sudden cry from the masthead: "Ship to larboard!"

INSTANTLY all was bustle on the part of the eighty-odd men who comprised the company of the *Brian Boru*. Yankees from the New England ports, men from the Philadelphia yards, from the South, renegade English sailors, a sprinkling of blacks, cutthroats who had sailed with pirates, all worked with the same feverish intensity. For the lone ship sighted was a merchantman, and looked like easy prey.

Tops and mainsail were tied for possible action, though this was hardly expected; blocks creaked and sails rattled as the privateer went about, to get the weather-gauge of the fat stranger, aboard whom, as she came into sight, Patrick could see signs of disturbance and alarm, through his telescope. His aim was to bring the *Brian Boru* onto her windward quarter, and his lighter quality enabled him to execute this maneuver perfectly.

Although no resistance was anticipated, the gunners cleared the leaved aprons from their touch-holes and stood by the carronades with lighted matches in their linstocks. The grapnels were got ready. And Patrick paced his deck in growing impatience at the prospect of this added prize.

It was not for nothing that he was called the Sea-Killer, for his depredations among English shipping had been enormous, and he was known as the most successful of all the privateers. They called him a pirate, as they had called John Paul Jones, but he sailed under letters of marque, issued by the Continental Congress. It was true Sir Harry Eldridge, the Governor of the Windward Islands, had threatened to order him hanged at the yard-arm of the first English frigate that captured him, but Sir Harry's isles were a long way away, and it was hardly likely that the commander of a British ship of the line would adopt such a method, in defiance of the rules of naval warfare.

Besides, Sir Harry, who was a four-bottle man, had sworn it when in his cups, according to the report, and would probably hesitate to carry out his threat for fear of reprisals.

The merchantman was almost within hailing distance now. There were clear signs of panic aboard her. Seamen were swarming up the rigging, trying to crowd on sail, but they were too late. O'Shea ordered his reefed foretopsail to be raised and lowered, the signal to send a boat. But none came from the side of the merchantman, and so he ordered his boats over the side, with a boarding party of twenty, armed with pikes.

"You'll take no more, sir?" asked Melchior. "It may be a trap—"

"The devil with it. You'll come with me, and let Tom Sharp command the cutter. Take pikes, no more than that. If it's a trap bedad, we'll spring it short and quick."

AT the sight of the two boats approaching, all life seemed to disappear from decks and rigging. Patrick stood up in the bows and cupped his hands.

"Ahoy, there!" he shouted. "Do you surrender?"

There came no answer, and Patrick maneuvered the boats toward the bow, where the name *Queenstown* was painted in big black letters. "Surrender, or I board you!" he called again.

An elderly captain piped back: "We're in no state to fight, and we've got a gentleman of note aboard, and a young leddy."

"Line up your men along the deck, arms in air. My name's O'Shea. You know me. I fight fair, but I show no mercy to treachery."

Some twenty seamen promptly ranged themselves along the deck, the two boats were made fast, and Patrick and his followers, pikes in hands, swarmed up the stern of the *Queenstown*. Waiting to receive him was an elderly man wearing the stripes of a captain of merchant marine. He looked almost decrepit. Nor could his men be what would be called a scratch

crew. They looked like broken down seafarers.

O'Shea looked at them in perplexity, then began to laugh. "What sort of crew is this, to sail the seas in time of war?" he asked. "Where's the rest of you?"

"These are all, sir," said the captain.

"Divil take me, I saw more on the rigging!"

"No, sir, these are all of us. We had the yellow jack aboard, which took all the youngest and strongest. We didn't dare put into port, for fear of shipping another dose of it. We buried the last man ten days ago, and please God we're free now of the plague, but we've been lying to these ten days past, waiting to make sure there would be no more of it.

"You see, sir," he added confidentially, "The gentleman we've got aboard is mortally afraid of yellow jack, and gave us our orders. Now the young leddy didn't care; she'd have tended the sick men with her own hands if she'd been permitted."

"And who may be these passengers of yours?" demanded O'Shea.

"Sir Harry Eldridge, sir, and his daughter, Mistress Bess."

"Demme, I'll see them on the instant," said O'Shea. "Take me to them!"

THE two were seated, as if expecting him, in the captain's saloon, a cheerful square apartment, with the sunlight streaming in through the poop window, at which a canary bird, in a cage, was chirping. Patrick had never yet set eyes on Sir Harry, but he recognized him from a portrait he had seen. He was an old man, some sixty-odd, in a scarlet uniform and stained ruffles. A bottle and a tumbler stood before him, and he was evidently far gone in his potations already, for his wig was awry, and his eyes bloodshot.

Mistress Bess was seated diagonally to him. She was a girl in her early twenties, one of the fairest Patrick had ever seen, in his instant opinion, prettily dressed in a low-cut gown, with flowing skirts, and two dark eyes were fixed on him in unmistakable anger.

Patrick advanced and saluted. "Your



Thrusting with all his force, he pierced the other through the throat.

servant, sir," he said. "Your servant, madam. My name is Patrick O'Shea, commanding the ship *Brian Boru* for the Continental Congress, and operating under letters of marque."

"Marque be damned!" roared Sir Harry. "You are nothing but a pirate, and I mean to have you hanged, as soon as opportunity affords."

"Get to your bottle, Sir Harry," answered Patrick with some contempt. "Hanging's a game that two can play at, and, did I not know the desperate plight of England today, I should be less lenient with you."

"How dare you address my father in that way, you boor?" asked Bess, eyes flashing.

O'Shea swept his hat from his wig and bowed, then clapped it under his arm. "I shall be pleased to explain the source of my courage at a more propitious moment," he answered. "Now Sir Harry, hard words bind no bargains. I want an inventory of the merchandise that you carry, and I notify you that you are my prisoner. Nevertheless, pirate though I be, it has always been my custom to set my prisoners ashore at some port of call. It's the merchandise I want, not you, nor else your daughter."

Sir Harry looked at him shrewdly, then

filled his glass and emptied it. "I am not in charge of the merchandise aboard this vessel," he answered, in a much more conciliatory tone, "but I understand that she carried valuable silks and spices. That is no business of mine. It was for the Admiralty to protect her. You shall speak to the master."

He called to some attendant somewhere within hearing: "Tell Captain Wallis to come here immediately!" And, rising, staggered into his cabin.

Left alone with Mistress Bess, Patrick coolly stared her down. Angrily she dropped her eyes, while a deep blush stained her cheeks.

"What is the source of my courage?" mused the young man, as if in meditation. "Hatred of England, hate that can never be satisfied, on account of what she did to my grandfather. He was one of the landed gentry who rashly took up arms for Monmouth against James the Second, for which he was indentured as a slave for life in the West Indies.

"There my father was born; there he married an Irish lady whose father had likewise been sold into slavery. And there, too, I was born, with every drop of my blood acid with hate of England.

"I ran away to sea; when the Colonies declared their liberty from the tyrant, I was proud to serve them. I have risen to the command of my own ship. And I think, mistress, that I have repaid some of the wrongs that my own people have endured at the hands of the tyrant."

"You are insolent!" she flashed out; but again fell silent under the cool, amused scrutiny that Patrick gave her.

"You have spirit, mistress," he replied. "What a pity that you are not on the right side in this quarrel! But then, of course, you have not yet had the opportunity of living in a free land. That opportunity will come swiftly."

"What do you mean?" she asked, startled.

"That it is my intention to convey you and your father to Baltimore, for I do not care to delay my return in order to seek out some other haven for you."

"I would rather lie in my grave than set eyes on Baltimore," Bess declaimed.

But steps sounded in the doorway, and Patrick turned, to see the old master, bowing before him. He handed him a paper. "This is the inventory of our cargo," he said. "But would it please you to go down into the hold and inspect it for yourself?"

"That I'll do," answered Patrick, "and you can hand this inventory to Mr. Sharp, who will remain in charge of my prize crew, for I shall be returning to the *Brian Boru*."

MR. SHARP, on deck, had taken charge, and was awaiting orders. The crew of the captured vessel were lounging or squatting in the forecabin. Sharp said: "We'll have no trouble with them, sir, and they've invited us to share their dinner with them."

"Go then, half of you at a time. I'm going to leave you in charge of the prize crew, and shall be returning to the *Brian Boru* as soon as I've looked at the cargo. You'll get the inventory from Captain Wallis. Trim your sails and follow my course, keeping me in sight. There'll be moon enough to last us into Baltimore."

Sharp, a keen, dark-haired man from Savannah, frowned. "You've heard there's three English frigates with a convoy near the coast?" he asked. "The *Brian Boru* can run from any ship of the line, but not this barge. She's got no speed, and she's got no arms."

"The course I'm steering should keep us out of danger," answered Patrick. "If we sight a frigate—why, you'll scuttle this ship and transfer to the *Brian Boru*."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Where's Mr. Melchior?"

But at this moment the mate came along the deck from the forecabin. From the look of satisfaction on his face it was probable that he had already been sampling the hospitality of the galley.

"We're pulling back to our ship and leaving Mr. Sharp in charge of the prize crew. I want you to come down into the hold and inspect the cargo with me.

Spices and silks won't take much of our time to look at, but I've got an idea Sir Harry may have lied to me. He changed so quickly from bluster to gentility.

There may be some trick to it; she may be in ballast. If he and the master lied to me, I'll make them pay."

The hatches removed, Patrick and Melchior descended the wooden stairs into the hold of the *Queenstown*. It was dimly lighted by several large lanterns that were suspended from the roof, and was of ample size. Also it was plain that the ship was not in ballast, for the hold was packed with bales and crates and boxes,

"Well, you pirate, what is this news about my father?" she snapped.



leaving only a narrow gangway down the center.

A few of these had split open when some of the cargo shifted, presumably in a gale. Raising a bale of material, Melchior held it up to the lantern-light.

"That's silk, sir," he said. "The best Chinese. The *Queenstown* must have crossed the Pacific and made the run of the Horn. Aye, she'd have picked up Sir Harry on one of the Windwards. No lying here, sir."

Under another lantern there were boxes and boxes that presumably contained the spices. There were other goods galore, but O'Shea seemed satisfied.

"I don't think they were lying," he said. "Well, Mr. Melchior, let's go back."

A man's voice laughed hoarsely behind some cases at the back; as Patrick whirled, he discovered that the hold was full of armed men, pointing their pikes and muskets at him and Melchior.

"Tricked, by gosh!" shouted the mate.

"Throw down your pike. Don't try to draw that pistol, O'Shea. We're forty to two. Aye, the trap was set for you, and you walked into it."

"The devil I did! Then I'll walk out!" roared Patrick. He tugged at his pistol. But the flat of a pike dropped on his head, half stunning him. The pistol dropped from his hand, undischarged, a million lights flashed before his eyes. He heard Melchior bellow, and strode toward him, but he was down, helpless. Trampled and kicked, he subsided into half-consciousness.

But through it he could hear the stamp of feet on the deck above, and knew that his prize crew was being surprised, and that they had no chance of holding the ship. Groaning, he slipped back into darkness.

"CAPTAIN! CAPTAIN!"

He hadn't been quite out, for he could recognize the mate's voice and feel his arm about him. "Can you stand on your feet, sir?"

Patrick tried, found he could get only to his knees. Melchior was feeling his body. "You've got no wound, sir?"

"Only a knock on the pate. How about you? By gad, your arm is wet with blood."

"One of them chouses stuck his pike into my shoulder, but I don't think the bone's broke. We can get out of here."

"Aye, too late now," said Patrick bitterly. He was dimly conscious that the roar of the fight had died away long ago. He said: "They'll be coming back for us. Is my pistol at your feet? I can't see well?"

"It's not here, sir. But if we could hide behind some of those boxes, we could deceive them till night by putting out the lanterns, and then make a dash for it."

However, Melchior's plans were sent glimmering at that moment, when a party of seamen, led by an officer with a sword in his hand, came stamping along the gangway. He stopped, sword in one hand and pistol in the other.

"Do you yield?" he shouted.

Patrick made no answer, but, seeing that the two men were unarmed, the officer turned and called to his men. In a moment the two were seized and hustled along the gangway, up the stairs and into the blinding light of the afternooon.

The deck was a fearful sight, for bodies of dead men lay everywhere, illustrating the ferocity with which the engagement had been fought. Staring up at him with sightless eyes, Patrick saw Mr. Sharp. Huddled against the stern were some ten of his men, all of them wounded, and all who had survived. There were ropes about their legs and handcuffs on their wrists. A small detachment of Royal Marines stood guard over them. The trap had been a shrewd one.

Well within gunshot was the *Brian Boru*, her sails idle in the dead calm that had sprung up.

On the quarter-deck was a table, behind it Sir Harry and two officers of the British navy, seated on small chairs. On the table were some papers. O'Shea and Melchior were led up and halted, an armed guard standing on either side of them.

The senior officer, a captain, nudged

Sir Harry, who was asleep. He opened his bloodshot eyes, and it was evident that he had imbibed considerably since Patrick's former interview with him.

"Sir Harry, the trial is opening," said the captain.

Sir Harry sat up in his chair. "Ah, yes, the pirate. Hang him, man. What are you waiting for?"

Formalities, sir. He is already under sentence of death *in absentia*, in accordance with your edict governing the Windward Islands and surrounding waters. Nevertheless, he must be permitted to plead."

He turned to Patrick. "Your name's O'Shea, your occupation, pirate?" he asked sarcastically.

"Captain Patrick O'Shea, sir, operating under letters of marque furnished by the Continental Congress," answered the other.

"Ah, yes, we've heard about all that. There are specific charges against you of having violated the usages of war on numerous occasions—to wit, the merciless sinking of the *Blackstone*, with all hands, after plundering her, last January, so as to leave no trace of your crime. You have already been condemned for that."

"If I sunk her with all hands, how the divil do ye know I did it?" queried O'Shea. "As a matter of fact, I niver saw or got a smell of her."

Sir Harry mumbled: "Are you going through the entire list of the rogue's crimes, Captain Jeffreys? Hang him, and get it over with."

Patrick was looking at something lying on the table, almost within arm's grasp. It was a sword—his own sword—which, by custom, had to be displayed. Point toward him meant death; hilt toward him meant liberty. It was lying broadside on.

"Sure, now," he said, "bad as the English are, I've always given them their due as good sea-lawyers. Ye've proved nothing against me contrary to the usages and customs of the seas."

Jeffreys said coldly: "The verdict was pronounced against you months ago. You

can have a copy of your trial, if you wish. But you won't have much time to read it. You were condemned to death by hanging. This man"—he indicated Melchior—"and the rest of your crew have had their sentence commuted to penal servitude for life, by His Gracious Majesty, George the Third."

"So you've cooked up my murder because ye couldn't face me in fair fight!" commented O'Shea.

AND at this moment intervention came in the shape of Bess Eldridge, her hair in disorder, her dress awry. She came running up the companion to the quarter-deck and up to the table.

"Father, there's been too much murdering today," she cried. You can't have this man hanged because you say so. And drinking, too! For shame! That a man's life should depend upon your whim, when you admitted some days ago, when you were sober, that the case against him had been 'cooked up,' as you called it, to get him out of the way!"

"How dare you interrupt—prosheedings of—hic—court-martial, girl?" thundered Sir Harry. "Get you below, or I'll—have you—removed by force—"

"I say this is a murder and shall not be," cried Bess. "Captain Jeffreys, you know as much!"

Jeffreys, with a troubled look, replied: "I hold no responsibility, mistress. Your father has promulgated the edict, and he is naval commander in these waters, by virtue of the office he holds. I must do as he says."

"You hear that, father? The captain doesn't want to carry out your sentence. I call upon you to rescind it, and to permit Captain O'Shea to stand trial in a naval court appointed by the Admiralty."

"Sdeath!" bellowed Sir Harry, lurching to his feet, and nearly upsetting the table. "Will you prate to me about my duty? Seize them both, man, and hang them to the yard-arm instantly!"

It was that lurch of Sir Harry's that gave Patrick the opportunity he had been dreaming of. As the table toppled toward him, he reached out and grasped

the sword. Instantly it was in his hand; he backed away and faced his guards and those upon the quarter-deck so resolutely that they gave before him.

Only one man rushed in with a pike, and a swing of the sword slashed through his shoulder and sent him bleeding to the dack. Captain Jeffreys was fumbling for his pistol. With a grin, Patrick reversed his sword and sliced through his baldrick. The wound inflicted was put skin-deep, but the severed baldrick tumbled to the floor, carrying the holster with it.

Sir Harry had leaped back, his face now ashen. Patrick whispered to Melchior. Then, still swinging the sword, to clear a passage, he suddenly seized Bess about the waist, and plunged into the sea with her.

As they rose to the surface, another splash beside them indicated that Melchior had jumped, too.

So unexpected had been the maneuver that Bess hadn't had time to scream, but now she struggled furiously in O'Shea's grasp and let out a piercing scream.

Patrick seized her and shook her. "Pipe down or I'll drown you," he shouted. "I'm taking you to the *Brian Boru*, where you'll be safer under the protection of the Colonial flag than under that old rascalion father of yours."

"But—I can't—swim," spluttered Bess.

"Arrah, then, just lie quiet and it'll be easier than in a boat."

YELLS and tumult sounded from above. Patrick could see the guards lined up on the quarter-deck, aiming their rifles. But he surmised that they would not dare to fire while he was holding the girl. Melchior, a vigorous swimmer, was already some distance ahead of him. A volley splashed the water about the black, but none of the bullets seemed to hit its mark. And before the guards could load and ram and fire again, Melchior would be almost out of range.

O'Shea himself was almost out of range. Bess, overcome with fear, lay silent and still in the fold of his left arm. He raised his right fist, shook it at

the ship, and shouted his defiance.

Then he struck on, as best he could. Looking back, he saw that a boat was being lowered from the *Queenstown*. And he had still several hundred yards to cover. He was less than halfway to his destination when the boat splashed into the water. The cars plunged rhythmically; it seemed as if only a few strokes would bring the boat alongside.

But they had been seen from the *Brian Boru*. A puff of smoke shot from her bow, and Bess screamed again as a round-shot skimmed the waves within a short distance, and sent up a shower of spray close under the bow of the oncoming craft. But that was enough for their pursuers. The boat turned, the oarsmen began pulling back to the merchantman.

Patrick grasped the rope that was thrown to him, made Bess grip it too, and somehow hauled both her and himself up to his deck, where Melchior already stood, grinning and shaking himself like a great Newfoundland dog.

Bess, dripping and shivering, cried: "How dared you kidnap me that way! Now I know you're a pirate. No gentleman would have done that. I demand you take me back!"

"Arrah, now," answered Patrick, "we'll talk things over when ye're dry. Conduct this young leddy to my cabin and have the purser make her over into the smartest sailor who ever put on dungarees."

He turned to Melchior: "Hoist the flags, asking if she surrenders," he instructed him. "Then run alongside, with your starboard battery covering her, and hail Captain Jeffrey to send off his men and ours and take them aboard."

THE reversal of fortune had been utterly fantastic. What O'Shea couldn't understand was why Jeffreys had sprung his trap when lying unarmed within range of the guns of the *Brian Boru*.

Of course the men aboard O'Shea's ship had both seen and heard the fighting on the deck of the *Queenstown*, and they had abstained from opening fire because there was no way of telling which

side had gained the upper hand. And, in the dead calm that prevailed, it was impossible to move to within hailing distance.

Now a light breeze had sprung up, and, while Patrick changed his clothes, Melchior took charge, informed the seamen what had happened, and quickly carried out his captain's orders. As a result, Patrick was enabled to interview Mistress Bess with the information that she was to see her father again shortly.

Only by the promise of this piece of news did he persuade her to open the door of his cabin. He confronted as pretty a sailor as he could have hoped ever to see, with her sailor's blouse and loose, bell-bottomed trousers. But Bess's eyes were ablaze with fury as she confronted him.

"Well," she snapped, "and what is this news about my father? Oh, I'm sorry I interfered and enabled you to escape your due deserts, you pirate. What is this news?" she continued, all in a breath.

"Why, mistress, you should be as grateful to me as I am to you," answered O'Shea. "It seems the fates took pleasure in making us each perform a sarvice for the other."

"Will you tell me or not?"

"Why, your father is coming aboard the *Brian Boru*," answered Patrick, "together with Captain Jeffreys and his men, prisoners, and well they deserve it, after the trick they played on me, of which ye had full cognizance, while ye sat so demure and innocent in the captain's cabin. And what remains of my own crew," he added sadly. "Well, it will be Captain Jeffrey's turn to discover whether the laws of the Congress are more merciful than your father's edicts."

"I hate you more than I thought it possible to hate any man on earth," answered Bess. "And I'll have no man see me until my clothes are dry and brought to me."

Bess slammed the door in Patrick's face, and he went on deck to receive the surrender of Captain Jeffreys, and to have Sir Harry—now very far gone in liquor—assisted to a cabin, to welcome

his own men, and to have the prisoners put below.

"I'm putting a small crew aboard the *Queenstown* and taking her in tow," he told the mate. "It's in my mind now to make for St. Joseph harbor, where we'll transship the goods. A two days' run and we'll make her, with this breeze."

As an officer, Captain Jeffreys was, of course, permitted a certain amount of freedom, and in the day that followed he and Patrick held several conversations.

"That old fool, Sir Harry, had issued a command you were to be hanged, as you well know," said the captain, "And it was my duty to obey it. I don't know whether you're a pirate or a privateer, but in either case I'll admit you're a very civil gentleman."

There was, however, a certain enigmatic quality about the captain's manner, as if he hadn't quite given up hope; as if he still cherished the hope that the fortunes of war might turn in his favor.

As for Sir Harry, Patrick had seen that he was supplied with all the wine he wanted. He had been indulging copiously in the excitement of those days, and remained for the most part in a stupor, attended by his daughter, who glared at Patrick whenever he showed his face at their door.

By nightfall on the second day good progress had been made. About midnight, however, the wind fell off and the two ships lay idly in the water. Patrick fumed as he paced his deck the remainder of the night, waiting for the first puff of breeze to fill his sails.

The moon was down, the heat was intense, even in the small hours. It seemed one of those intense calms that herald a tropical hurricane. "What think you, Mr. Melchior," O'Shea asked the mate, "shall we bring the *Queenstown* into Baltimore, or cut loose and run for our lives?"

The black stared out toward the faint luminosity in the eastern sky that betokened dawn. "It will be foul weather, sir," he answered. "God grant we may

(Continued on page 88)

GHOST PLANE

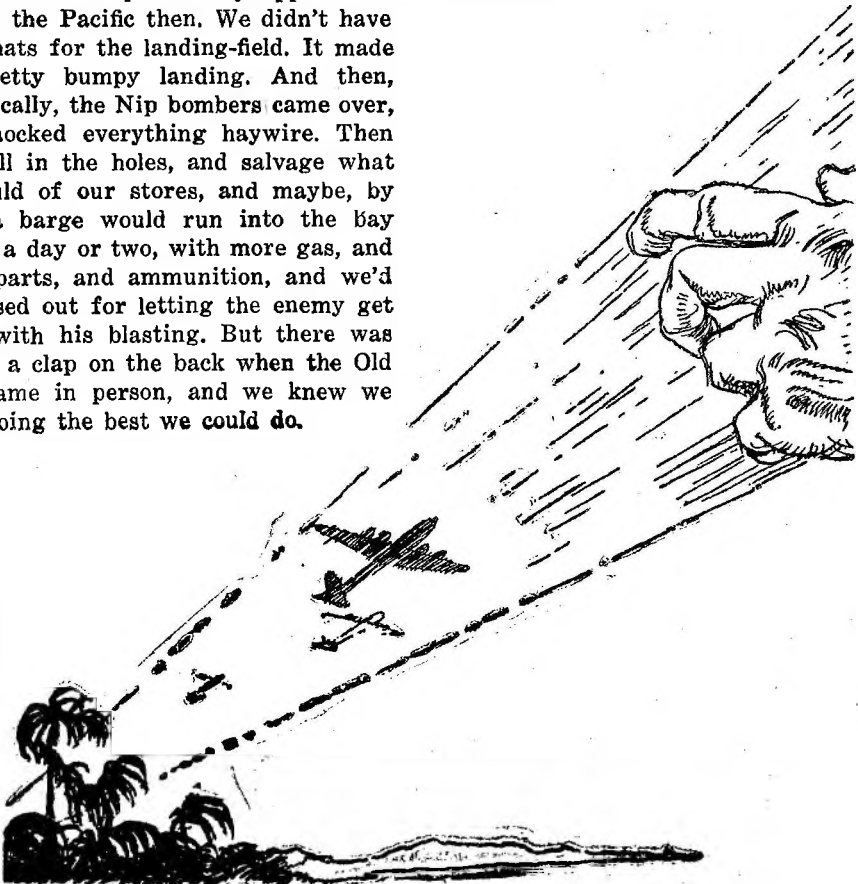
The Doc was known as the Holy Terror. Soured, embittered, he hadn't a friend in the world. "Battle fatigue" was an expression that wasn't in his vocabulary. Yet everyone acknowledged that he knew his job, and in any case that wasn't of nervous origin, he was as gentle as a woman

WE FLYERS on Peipo Island were a happy little group. The Marines had captured that one square mile of level jungle, and we'd made a landing-field of sorts, and brought in gas and supplies and equipment. Our outfit was an escort squadron, and our job was to meet the bombers that came roaring overhead, and convey them to their destination, to intercept any Zeros that might challenge them.

We hadn't conquered any appreciable part of the Pacific then. We didn't have steel mats for the landing-field. It made for pretty bumpy landing. And then, periodically, the Nip bombers came over, and knocked everything haywire. Then we'd fill in the holes, and salvage what we could of our stores, and maybe, by luck, a barge would run into the bay within a day or two, with more gas, and spare parts, and ammunition, and we'd be cussed out for letting the enemy get away with his blasting. But there was always a clap on the back when the Old Man came in person, and we knew we were doing the best we could do.

This one by one Peipo Island had been taken as a preliminary to operations on Devo, twelve miles across the strait. Peipo had fallen into our hands with hardly a casualty, but Devo was different. It's a big place, and for weeks our men had been battling the Japs there.

The capture of Devo meant that we'd be able to strike straight at the main Jap stronghold, instead of our bombers having to fly five hundred miles, to pick



By HUGH SPEER



us up as escorts, then three hundred more to engage the enemy—and then eight hundred back to where they operated from. There were half a dozen airfields on Devo, and all our bomber supplies were being run onto the landing beaches our boys had captured.

So, while the guns thundered day and night on Devo, we made the best of things on tiny Peipo. We flew as interceptors, and lost a plane now and again. I guess our mechanics were the real heroes, though—those greaseballs who never got into the air, but never let us down for service.

Dick Ferris and I had trained together from the start of things, and we'd been posted together. I was an ordinary sort of pilot, but Dick was A 1. I come from Georgia, and he was a Canuck from a little town near Toronto, but we were as thick as two thieves. He came home with me when we had a furlough together, and met my mother and kid sister, Evelyn, and they both fell in love with him at sight.

Most everyone did, both men and women. Dick was a straight six feet, with baby-fawn hair and blue eyes, and he'd never said or done anything in his life that wasn't exactly on the mark. You couldn't picture Dick in connection with anything the least bit shady. I was proud to have him for a friend.

And, before our furlough ended, he came to me and asked permission to be engaged to Evelyn. It knocked me for a loop. She was just turned eighteen, and I'd never thought of her as anything but

a kid. But it made me just as glad as it made mother.

You see, I'd realized at once they were both the same kind of people, who might have been made for each other, honest and straight and clean. I knew they'd both have a long way to go to find anybody else of the same caliber.

We'd just about finished our training course, and expected to be sent overseas. That was the tragedy, the universal tragedy that overhung us all. If they had wanted to be married before Dick's furlough was up, mother and I would have said nothing to dissuade them. But they didn't. They didn't even talk it over, as far as I know. There was a sort of timelessness about their love that touched everybody who saw them.

There was a sureness, too, as if there wasn't really anything to care about—as if death couldn't come between them. "I'm coming back with four stars," Dick said, as he kissed her good-bye. They looked so happy and contented, but mother was crying, and I felt choky.

Then the train came rolling into the station, and Dick and I climbed into our compartment.

THE FIRST we knew that Devo had been captured was when an adjutant came aboard Peipo in a barge, with orders in an envelope. "You're to evacuate at once," he told our C.O. "Barges will be here within three or four hours. Your field is being prepared for you. You'll fly your planes, and the barges will transport as much of your equipment as they can carry. The brigadier will want an immediate inventory of your stores. You've got it ready?"

"I'll have it ready within an hour or two," said the C.O.

Of course, the inventory was supposed to be kept up to date daily. We had to know the amount of gas on hand, to within a few hundred gallons—also exactly what supplies were available. I knew—everybody knew—that when an army clerk has got to balance his accounts, he's going to balance them. If he's got a few hundred gallons of gas he can't account for, he's not going to

show it. And if he's got a few hundred gallons too few, he's going to make them up, some way, in his triplicate returns.

That's standard practice, I guess in all the armies of the world. We got busy as bees, helping the greaseballs get their gear together, pulling down tents, dismantling hangars. About the middle of the afternoon the interceptor arrived that was to guide us to our new landing-field on Devo.

We had just formed up when a flock of Jap bombers dropped out of the clouds, and for fifteen minutes we went through the worst strafing we'd ever known. When it was over, we'd shot down seven of them, and lost four of our planes, the field was a ruin, and the hangars a smoking mess.

But Dick and I came through in safety. Dick had two bombers to his credit; I had only a share in a possible. We reformed, and flew across the strait to Devo. In the middle of the strait about a dozen of our barges were lying, black and burned out. About a dozen more were steering straight for Peipo, to see if there was anything left to salvage.

M'Kenzie, our new medic, was known as the Holy Terror. Now somewhere in his middle forties, he'd flown as a kid airman in the first world war. He ranked as a lieutenant-colonel. If ever a guy was devoid of the smallest drop of the milk of human kindness, that was M'Kenzie.

Soured somewhere in his progress through life I guessed. A man without a friend. He never drank, but he smoked raw black stogies that would have eaten the heart and guts out of anyone less hard-boiled.

Tall, lean, and gaunt, with all the bitterness of intonation that a Scottish accent can produce. Death on malinger-ing. "Battle fatigue" wasn't in his vocabulary. He'd sent back shell-shocked, crazy men, into the front lines. But he knew his job. He was one of the finest surgeons in the world, and as gentle as a woman with the cases he recognized—that is to say, cases that weren't of nervous origin.

They'd sent off half our little group, together with our C.O., to some desti-

nation unknown, but my luck and Dick's held. We were still together, on Devo, and our field was being prepared so that we could accompany our bombers from their start, instead of their picking us up after they'd covered five hundred miles.

That took no more than a week. We had time to get acquainted with our new outfit before we started operations. They were just the same swell bunch of fellows I'd always known, from the C.O. down—all except M'Kenzie.

He didn't often show himself. He spent his days and nights at the hospital. We hadn't any nurses at that time—we were too close to the front—but the orderlies hated him. Everyone hated him. He seemed to like that. He had a bitter humor that spared no one.

That's one of the things you have to take in war. There was no way of getting rid of him. One could only hope that a Jap bomb would fall straight on top of him.

IT WAS after the first raid on Saipan that Dick went to pieces. We'd bombed the daylighters out of them, and all our interceptors were flying back, escorting the big bombers. We were within about a half-hour of our Devo base when Dick, who had been flying a little below me, suddenly lost formation, and went plummeting down like a stone.

We were up a good many thousand feet at the time. I dived, but I couldn't dive from my elevation as fast as he was falling. I guessed that was the end for him. But then, about fifteen hundred feet above sea-level, Dick pulled out, leveled off, and zoomed upward. And so we came onto our field in perfect formation.

You can guess what a scare I'd had. I'd supposed Dick had been cut down by a Zero bullet, had held up as long as he could, then suddenly collapsed. But there wasn't a wound on him when he climbed out of his plane, and stood up, straight and stiff.

"I'm okay, Jacob," he said, when he came out of the office. "I had a blackout, the first time it's ever happened to me. It's those sinuses of mine, I guess—even air pressure, you know. I had a taste

of it once before, when we were training in Georgia."

The Old Man seemed to be satisfied with Dick's explanation. I was worried for a few days, but we flew on another raid, and another, and nothing happened. But the third time, the same thing occurred again.

We were not in tight flight formation at the time, because the Zeros were going down in flames all about us, and we were following them, to make sure they really did go down. I saw Dick on the trail of one that was belching out a cloud of fiery smoke, and thought it odd Dick wasn't satisfied. Then I knew, of course. He was going down faster than the frantic Jap pilot. He was a thousand feet beneath him, and I was plunging down after him. But he pulled out again, about one hundred feet above sea-level.

It was a miracle of aircraftmanship, for Dick's plane was almost skimming the waves when he got her on a level keel. Then he went up—and a few minutes later we were flying back, after our most successful raid of the war.

Dick had four Zeros to his credit, and nobody but myself seemed to realize what had happened to him.

I said: "Dick, why don't you get M'Kenzie to look at those sinuses of yours?"

"That ———?" he answered. "I'll be okay, Jacob. It's getting used to the atmospheric change."

"The atmosphere's the same over Devo as over Peipo," I answered. "Look here, Dick, if you don't report to M'Kenzie, I'm going to speak to the Old Man."

"Like hell you will! Want to get me grounded, or what? If you do, Jacob, you're no longer any friend of mine."

I said: "You'll have to report, Dick. I'm thinking of my sister, and the good plane you're going to crash, and of you."

WELL, he did, and came out of M'Kenzie's quarters fuming. "I hope you're satisfied with what I've done," he barked at me.

"Well, what's the verdict?"

"What would you expect from M'Kenzie? He as good as accused me of

malingering, to get out of the service."

"Didn't examine you?"

"Oh, I'm to be X-rayed tomorrow, but I've a crazy sort of hope I won't be grounded. Remember that mechanic who was dying of dengue, whom he sent up to the front on that new construction job?"

"It was sinuses and ear-drums, and M'Kenzie and Captain Santony almost came to blows over me. Santony wanted



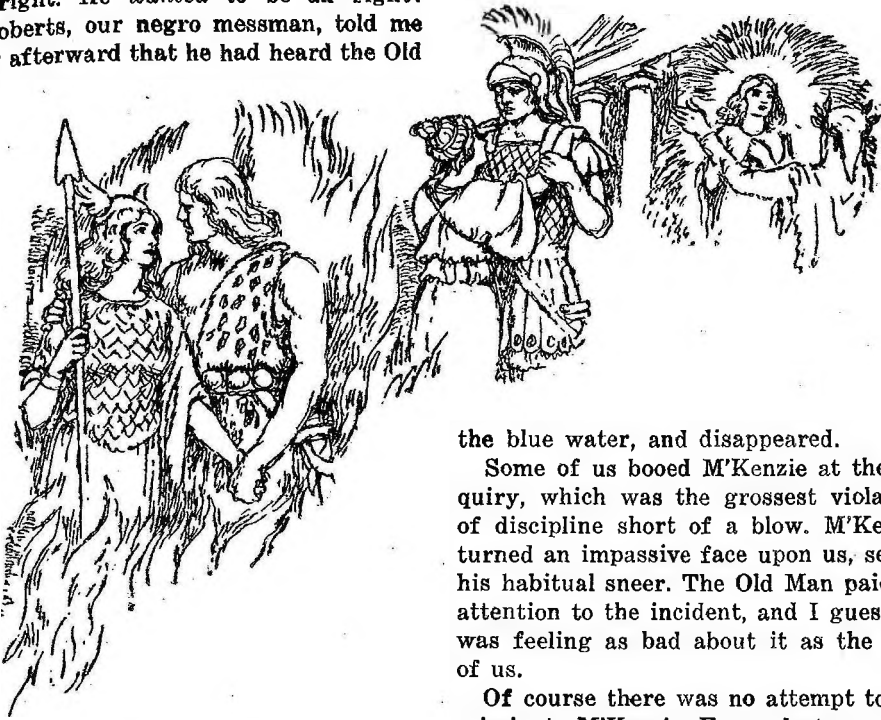
I remembered. The boy had literally died in the traces, and the bitter feeling against M'Kenzie had been stronger than ever since then.

When I met Dick next day, his face was jubilant. "I'm fit for duty," he grinned at me.

"It wasn't your sinuses then?"

to ground me and send me back to the base. M'Kenzie said I was fit for duty. He said, if he grounded every flyer who showed traces of ear and sinus trouble, he might as well hand the skies over to the Japs. Don't worry, Jacob, I'll be okay. Remember I told you I had a touch of it back in Georgie and I pulled out of that

all right. He wanted to be all right! Roberts, our negro messman, told me long afterward that he had heard the Old



Man talking to Dick, and growling, and cussing out M'Kenzie. It was plain to me that he'd offered to transfer Dick to ground duty for a while, and that Dick had refused to volunteer. There wasn't anything more that the Old Man could do.

But I'm glad none of the other members of the flight had any suspicion about the terror that was stalking me. I don't think they would have shot down so many Japs, if they had known.

Three more flights. The Nips were taking an awful pounding from our bombers, and they seemed to have green crews in their Zeros. We shot them down like flies. Dick must have had fifteen to his credit, and I had a score of five. Gradually I began to regain hope. I hadn't said a word to Dick about his condition since that day, but I tried to make myself believe it wouldn't happen again.

And then that lurking terror sprang. We were returning from a flight, and nearing Devo. There wasn't an enemy plane in the sky when Dick dropped out of formation and nose-dived. This time he didn't pull out—just plummeted into

the blue water, and disappeared.

Some of us booed M'Kenzie at the inquiry, which was the grossest violation of discipline short of a blow. M'Kenzie turned an impassive face upon us, set in his habitual sneer. The Old Man paid no attention to the incident, and I guess he was feeling as bad about it as the rest of us.

Of course there was no attempt to incriminate M'Kenzie. Every doctor makes mistakes, and he wasn't on trial. Next day he was back on duty at the hospital, bulldozing sick men who hadn't hard and definite symptoms to show, and gentle as ever with the really sick.

You know, there's a certain latitude given to airmen, on account of their supposed nervous tension, which isn't given members of other branches of the service. That's how I got away with what I did. I was burning up, and I went to M'Kenzie's office and waited till he came in.

He gave a quick glance at me, and I could see he knew I had been Dick's friend. In that swift look, something seemed to be revealed, beneath the truculent surface of the man, something pitiful, almost weak. Then he was his old self again. "Well, Dix?" he snapped.

I was shaking with fury. "I want to tell you, sir, that you're a damned murderer," I said, "and you sent a fine boy to his death, somebody too fine for you to begin to understand, because you've got the mind of a crook and a fool."

"That's one way you won't get your discharge, lieutenant," he snarled at me.

"You'll stay on duty, and you'll keep on flying!"

I'd said he had the mind of a crook, and it was true. I'd never imagined he would be able to turn the trick so neatly. I'd thought I'd be court-martialed, and that the evidence might convince somebody in Washington that we had a murder doctor with us.

"Return to duty, Dix. There's nothing at all the matter with you, except a slightly subnormal grade of intelligence, and I have no authority to reverse the I.Q. that was given you in the beginning."

I spluttered something, and strode away. I was checkmated, much more effectively than if he'd had me court-martialed.

I HAD to write to Evelyn, and what made it worse was that I'd just received a letter from her, telling me how much she was looking forward to Dick's return, and about her love for him, and how she was sure God would protect him. She opened her heart to me in that letter, and showed herself as a mature woman, instead of the kid I'd always thought her.

Maybe I shouldn't have written her about M'Kenzie, but I was heartbroken to think that Dick's life should have been destroyed because of that blustering fool. There were letters of hers among Dick's effects, and I mailed them back to her, of course unread.

Outwardly things were going on much the same as ever, but even M'Kenzie must have felt the unanimous verdict of our outfit, the silence that greeted him whenever he appeared, the aversion stamped upon the faces of all with whom he came in contact.

I knew that the Old Man and he were hardly on speaking terms. I didn't know, and don't know to this day whether he requested M'Kenzie's transfer to another unit. It must have been all of two months later when the news was posted that he was to be relieved by another medical officer.

He went off on a transport, in charge of a batch of men who were being invalided home. His successor, Major

Turner, was almost M'Kenzie's opposite, a middle-aged man, keen, shrewd, and gentle, the ideal medic for a high-strung bunch like ours.

Postal facilities had been greatly improved, and I was hoping to get an answer from Evelyn, but her letter didn't come, although there had been time for her to write. Then, some ten days after M'Kenzie's departure, we learned that the transport had been torpedoed almost within sight of Devo Island. Most of the crew and sick had been rescued, but M'Kenzie's name was not among them.

We'd all hated the man, and yet his death seemed to effect a sort of reconciliation in our memories. Some of our mechanics, who had been patients in the hospital, spoke affectionately about him.

I had no particular feelings about M'Kenzie. I only knew that Dick was gone, and that nothing much seemed to matter. It was odd, but every time we flew I had an odd feeling that he was flying with us, protecting us.

MAJOR TURNER said quietly: "Now that M'Kenzie is gone, maybe I can tell you something that will make you feel better about him. You see, I knew him in the last war, when he was a pilot, and I was a lieutenant in the medical corps.

"He was a skillful pilot, shot down three or four enemy planes—and then appeared to crack. Ugly stories about him began to circulate. It was hard to substantiate them. As you know, combat flying was mostly solo work in World War I. A flyer went out to get his men, firing twin guns through his propeller, by synchronization, and aiming his ship, because the guns were stationary.

"Finally, a very sinister charge was made against him. That he had constantly evaded enemy challenges, and finally turned tail when he saw a comrade engaged in duel with a German plane. He denied these charges absolutely—said that on that particular occasion his gas tank was empty, which proved to be true, and that he had to hightail it for home or crash over the enemy lines.

"If I believed the truth of these charges, I should be silent now. I believe M'Kenzie was a brave, skillful, and efficient pilot, but that he did crack—and didn't know it. I've never handled a plane, but I've seen plenty of cases where a man had cracked and didn't know it.

"M'Kenzie was acquitted, but his career was finished. He was sent home, resigned, and began the study of medicine. I understand he made just as brilliant a showing at his university as he'd at first done in the air.

"I believe that his experiences in the first war actually destroyed his mental balance, and that, if we had had the efficient and intelligent psychiatry of today, he'd have been returned to duty, and made a still more brilliant record.

"I believe he had a complex about malingering, born of the harsh treatment that had been meted out to him. I think he considered that, in sending sick men out to fight—or up to fight—he was in a way repudiating the accusations that had been made against him, and redeeming his own record. He was a mentally sick man, and I think deserving of pity rather than censure."

I KNEW that that feeling of Dick's presence was something more than imagination that time we tangled with the Zeros over Saipan.

They had set a trap for us, had let the bombers pass, and concentrated upon us interceptors, four to one. It was a milling dog fight under a crescent moon, a mad whirl of death in which it was hard to distinguish friend from enemy. I got my plane, and then, almost before I was aware of it, two others were on my tail. My instrument board was smashed to ribbons, and I got a slug through one arm.

I was trying desperately to shake them off, when another plane zoomed up from beneath me, and the Zero that was riding me fell away, and then went spiraling down, spurting smoke. I swung upon the second, but my rescuer had got him too. I could see the dead Jap crouched at the controls as his plane went down in the wake of the other.

Then I was alone in the sky, weak from the gush of blood from my wounded arm. I milled around, looking for the rest of our flight, and then set a course as best I could for Devo. It was just a trick of luck that I found the island, and our field, and managed to make a landing with my last half-gallon of gas and what blood remained in me.

They had given me up for dead, they told me, when I was fully conscious in the hospital. We'd lost a dozen of our men, but we'd given the Nips the worst mauling that they'd received yet. There was something they didn't want to speak about; they were waiting to see if I'd say it first. So I said:

"Who's the guy that came to help me when I had two Nips riding my tail, and shooting me up?"

Little Baldy—six feet one from Arkansas—drawled: "I guess it was the same guy who went alone into that cloud bank, where the Japs were waiting for us, and drove them out. And he wasn't one of our formation—I mean—I mean—"

"He means," said Dan McGee, "he ain't one of our outfit *now!*"

That was when I got wise. Of course it couldn't be so. A dead man doesn't come out of the sea, and fly a phantom plane, with real guns and ammunition, and shoot up Japs. But the crowd believed it. And belief is something more powerful than reason. I couldn't believe it. Yet—

YET there was that time, three months later, when I was flying again, and we got ambushed once more. Same story again. I was fighting hard against what looked like a whole sky full of Zeros when that phantom plane loomed out of the dark and saved me. The sight of him seemed to scare the Nips, for they turned tail, and I got two more to my score. By the time I was through, there wasn't a Zero in sight.

I felt sure, then, that it was Dick. You'll laugh at this, but a fellow gets superstitious when he's living on the razor-edge of collapsing nerves. I've known many who believed in gremlins.

(Continued on page 92)

By LEW MERRILL



FULK, son of Martin! Dreaming as usual! Stir your lazy legs, and go cut turf for fuel! Don't you know we may no longer cut turf from our lord's lands come Michaelmas? Would you have your father freeze when Winter comes, now he is old and feeble?"

The youth, who looked in his earliest twenties, tossed his long fair hair back about his shoulders, and fixed his blue eyes upon the speaker with a smile part humorous, part bitter.

"Edith, wife of Martin," he addressed the virago, "you have never been a mother to me, and therefore it has been in my mind to renounce you, despite the commandment of Holy Church to honor one's mother. It has always been my opinion that I am a changeling, and that the fairies stole me from a noble cradle and placed me in yours."

Fulk looked scornfully at the peasant hut, set in its clearing at the edge of the vast forest, which stretched away to the

Though every one knew Fulk as a peasant lad, there was something in his blood that set him apart from the others



*Even while the king
snoored on his throne,
the woman struck
savagely with her
dagger.*

BOWS OF FORTUNE

Welsh border.

"Aye," he continued, "I dream of taking my longbow to the wars, to seek adventure beyond the seas."

"You have a devil," screamed old Edith. "That longbow of yours will yet bring us great dole. Whence came that tasty venison we ate of late? Had our lord's verdurer found that, it had meant the loss of your right hand, for killing our lord's deer."

"And as for war and adventure, there has been no war these twelve years, since the Red Rose went down before the White, and now the land is at peace under King Richard. Aye, you would become a lord yourself and wed Mistress Blanche, our lord's cousin," she shrilled.

"Peaceunder Richard? What of our rightful king, the child he caused to be murdered, with his brother, in the Tower of London?"

"Stop that tongue of yours," gasped the old woman in terror. "We poor folks may not listen to such tales. If that came to our lord's ears—"

"Aye, he is all for King Richard, but he has turned his coat twice, and would doubtless turn it again, if he thought Henry, Earl of Richmond, could shake the usurper from his throne!"

DUMB with horror, old Edith gaped at Fulk. And then a comely, strong-limbed peasant wench came up to them, her arms filled with roots.

"Se him, Matilda," cried old Edith. "He is possessed, and speaks of going to the wars, when there are no wars!"

Matilda smiled at Fulk. She was one of the numerous brood of a villein, living in the village, half-a-mile away, and came daily to assist old Edith in the hoeing season. Then suddenly the sound of a horn rang through the forest.

"Sir Geoffrey rides again," said Edith. "Hide yourself, Matilda. Remember what happened last time he came upon you."

"He did but crave a kiss," said the girl pertly.

Fulk, who had turned to go, stopped as the horn rang out again. "I shall stay till

he has gone by," he said. "No man shall offer you insult, Matilda, even though he be the son of Baron Westover."

"Go, son, go!" pleaded Edith.

Old Martin appeared at the edge of the forest, his arms filled with fagots. Now the horn rang once more, and out of the glade rode young Sir Geoffrey, accompanied by a falconer, with a hooded bird upon his arm. At the sight of the three he whooped drunkenly, and rode toward them, spurring his heavy horse as if to trample them: then reined in laughing.

"Good fortune, even if the deer be shy," he bellowed. "Come here, Matilda. How say you to a ride upon my saddle?"

Then he became aware that Fulk was standing near, and swung about, scowling. "Out of my path, clown!" he shouted, and let the lash fall about Fulk's shoulders.

Suddenly Fulk leaped at him, wrapped his arms about him, and pulled him from his horse. The women screamed as they rolled on the ground. The falconer, with a cry of horror, leaped from his saddle and ran forward, the hooded bird clawing at his wrist for balance. Old Martin dropped his fagots.

But Fulk was on his feet, and, as Sir Geoffrey rose, Fulk's fist connected with his jaw in a clean, hard hit, that sent the knight reeling back again. Then Fulk turned upon the falconer so fiercely that the fellow drew back in terror.

Sir Geoffrey got on his feet, mounted his horse, and then, shaking his fist and yelling threats of vengeance, rode away, the falconer following him.

OLD MARTIN was the first to find his tongue. "Never was anything so evil known," he cried, "as to strike our lord's son. For this he will doubtless hang you from his battlements. God grant his vengeance fall not upon us instead. Flee now, I say, before the hue and cry be raised. Why do you stand there?"

"And would you have me stand by idly while Matilda was borne off by that drunken ruffian!" asked Fulk hotly.

"Alack, what a word to use about our lord's first-born," sneered the girl. "Was

It your business, fool, if Sir Geoffrey deigned to jest with me? Would I wear these peasant rags if he gave me a dress of dainty satin. I hope you hang," she cried, and burst into tears of rage.

"By the Rood, he had been welcome to you, if I had known," shouted Fulk. "Well, then, I go to the greenwood. Fare you all well, for I think we shall not meet again. And he strode toward the barn, in which, because it leaked less than the hut, he kept his longbow.

He slung it across his shoulders. At his side were the case of strings and a quiver of arrows. Above his wrist he buttoned the bracer. In one hand he held the finger-glove.

Old Edith came running out, a little bundle in her hands, consisting of cakes of rye flour. "Take these," she cried. "Alack, that your dreaming should have brought you to this. Make for the Marches and seek shelter among the wild Welsh—"

But at that instant a young woman on a horse came riding out of the clearing and reined in. "Alas, what is this?" she cried. "I passed Sir Geoffrey and his falconer, both riding like madmen toward the castle, and there was blood on Sir Geoffrey's face."

"This madman struck him—aye, and unhorsed him, Lady Blanche, for jesting with Matilda here," cried Edith.

The girl turned troubled eyes on Fulk's face. She was less than his own age, very fair, almost childlike.

"And so you go to the greenwood? Hasten then," she said. "And farewell, Fulk. I shall not sleep in peace until I learn that you have escaped my cousin's vengeance."

Fulk strode forward, raised her hand to his lips, and kissed it. He turned and kissed old Edith. He clapped old Martin on the shoulder. Then, with never a word to Matilda, he shifted his longbow across his shoulders and plunged into the forest.

DEEP in those woodlands lurked outlaws, debtors, poachers of deer, murderers, as well as old Lancastrian soldiers, who had refused to bow to the Yorkist cause when the White Rose over-

came the Red. Fulk was almost within those recesses when he heard shouts behind him, mingled with clanking armor. The hue and cry was out.

Turning at the entrance to one of the trails were known to him, he saw come eight or ten men-at-arms from Castle Westover, wearing cuirass and helmet, and carrying swords and maces. At their head was the reeve, a tabard of white linen, emblazoned with his newly purchased arms, over his mail—for the good man was a cordwainer.

Yelling anew at the sight of Fulk, the men-at-arms spring from their horses, and began spreading out through the ferns.

"Yield thee, Fulk, yield thee!" cried the reeve.

"Tally-ho! Yoicks! Have at her, puss!" roared the men.

Fulk pulled his bow from his shoulder, backed against a huge old tree, and fitted an arrow to his notch. "Call off your hounds, Master Reeve," he shouted. "Stir not, for your next step will be your last."

"My dear young man! My good young man! Yield now and lay your bow aside," panted the reeve. "Trust to our lord's mercy. By Saint Thomas, knaves, hold back, or he will let fly at me!"

But a stunning blow on the side of the head sent Fulk spinning dizzily, clutching at his bow with nerveless fingers. Next instant they were upon him, maces and swords upraised.

"Nay, kill him not!" shouted the reeve. "It is our lord's command. He'll sing a different song when his ears and nose have been nailed to the door."

Still half-stunned, Fulk realized that one of the men-at-arms was carrying a crossbow. The iron quarrel had struck a tree and ricocheted against his head, which a direct shot would have broken like an eggshell.

"Thomas, tie him to your stirrup and let the dog trot," said the reeve. "He shall learn, before the day be done—"

He broke off in dismay. At every opening among the trees stood a bowman,

dressed in Lincoln green, bow bent and arrow ready.

"God's mercy!" shrieked the reeve.

A huge man, with a red face and pro-

truding belly, stepped forward, grinning. "You're like to need it some day, Master Reeve," he boomed. "This seems a proper fellow, lads, and it's lucky we



The falconer watched while Fulk charged on Sir Geoffrey.

came this way. Begone, Reeve, and come not again within the realm of Robin Trueman, or it will fare hardly with you. Begone all of you, save only the knave with the crossbow, an unchristian, godless weapon. Loose shafts at him, fellows."

But Falk sprang in front of the hapless crossbowman. "No, he did but his duty. Let him go, too," he said.

"What?" roared Robin. "What are thou, man, a stout archer or trembling girl? Oh, aye, let the fellow depart, then. But 'tis a queer way to requite the bearer of so foul a weapon."

"How fares that head of thine, lad?" asked Robin, as they sat wait-

ing in the dark of the moon. "We have gone six leagues since you were wounded, and you have marched as well as any of us."

"But for a little weakness and a big bump, I am well again," returned Fulk, gnawing a rib of deer-meat.

"And so you dismounted Sir Geoffrey and pummeled him soundly. A proper fellow, Brother Ambrose—did I not say so? And thus you took to the greenwood. Well, you are welcome to our band. Here is Brother Ambrose, a priest full-fledged and a marksman second to none, though he may not shed blood on account of his calling. He has other means. Show Fulk your club, brother.



"Know also Simeon Carpenter," continued Robin, nodding at a lank, melancholy-visaged fellow on his other side. As good a craftsman as was ever born, but having been crossed in love, he has forsworn the world. We three welcome you to our company, who are for the most part old soldiers from the wars, and sworn never to bend the knee to that dog Richard Crookback, in London.

"And now, Fulk, you shall know why we are here. Our true sovereign, Henry, Earl of Richmond, is on the high seas, ready to land near Chester, and raise the land against the usurper, while my lord Buckingham raises levies in Wales to adventure for the Red Rose again. There be several hundred of us gathered in the Welsh Marches.

"But word came to us yesterday that some great lord travels with his retinue from London to Castle Westover, to command my lord Westover to take the field against Buckingham. And he carried with him a store of gold. Therefore we wait for him here, and, after we have taken our toll of him, there should be money enough for Buckingham to raise all Wales against Crookback.

"You're with us, Fulk? Then swear to follow me in all things, for I, Robin True-man, have been appointed to the leadership by the votes of all here."

He had but finished speaking when the sound of an approaching force began to be heard—trample of horses, clank of armor, creak of wagon-wheels. The moon, just rising, showed at least twoscore men, with the wagon-train groaning behind.

"Now!" shouted Robin, and instantly the sides of the track were lined with archers, their shafts drawn back till the strings were level with their ears.

Robin's shout, echoed back by his men, sent the horses plunging in confusion. The mounted men came spurring forward, jamming the trail. They saw the archers lined up on either side, and heard bows twang.

But it was the horses of the leading wagon, not the men, that were the mark. Now there was neither advance nor re-

treat, and Robin raised his voice in a stentorian roar: "Yield, my lord, or you are all dead men!"

A RIDER pushed to the front. He was a handsome man in his middle thirties, unarmored, with a full beard curling down over his cloak and doublet. He wore a chain of heavy gold about his shoulders, a knight's belt, and golden spurs that glittered in the moonlight.

"Who be you to treat us so scurvily?" he demanded.

All the outlaws recognized him by the beard, unusual in those days. He was Earl Stanley, who ruled over vast estates in the west of England, and it was his allegiance that had given Crookback the throne.

"Why, my lord, we are but poor men who covet your golden chain, and whatever you may have of value in that wagon of yours," said Robin.

Stanley laughed, took off his chain, and handed it to him. "In those wagons is nothing but arms and armor," he said. "I am come to raise loyal men to fight for King Richard against the pretender, Richmond, and there is a silver penny a day for all who will enroll. As for the wagons, look and see."

"We are poor, condemned men," answered Robin, "some of whom have killed men, and others deer. We shall be on our way. Ho, Brother Ambrose, take four men and inspect the wagons! I do not doubt your word, my lord, but our needs are sore. And, when we are satisfied, yet you on your way."

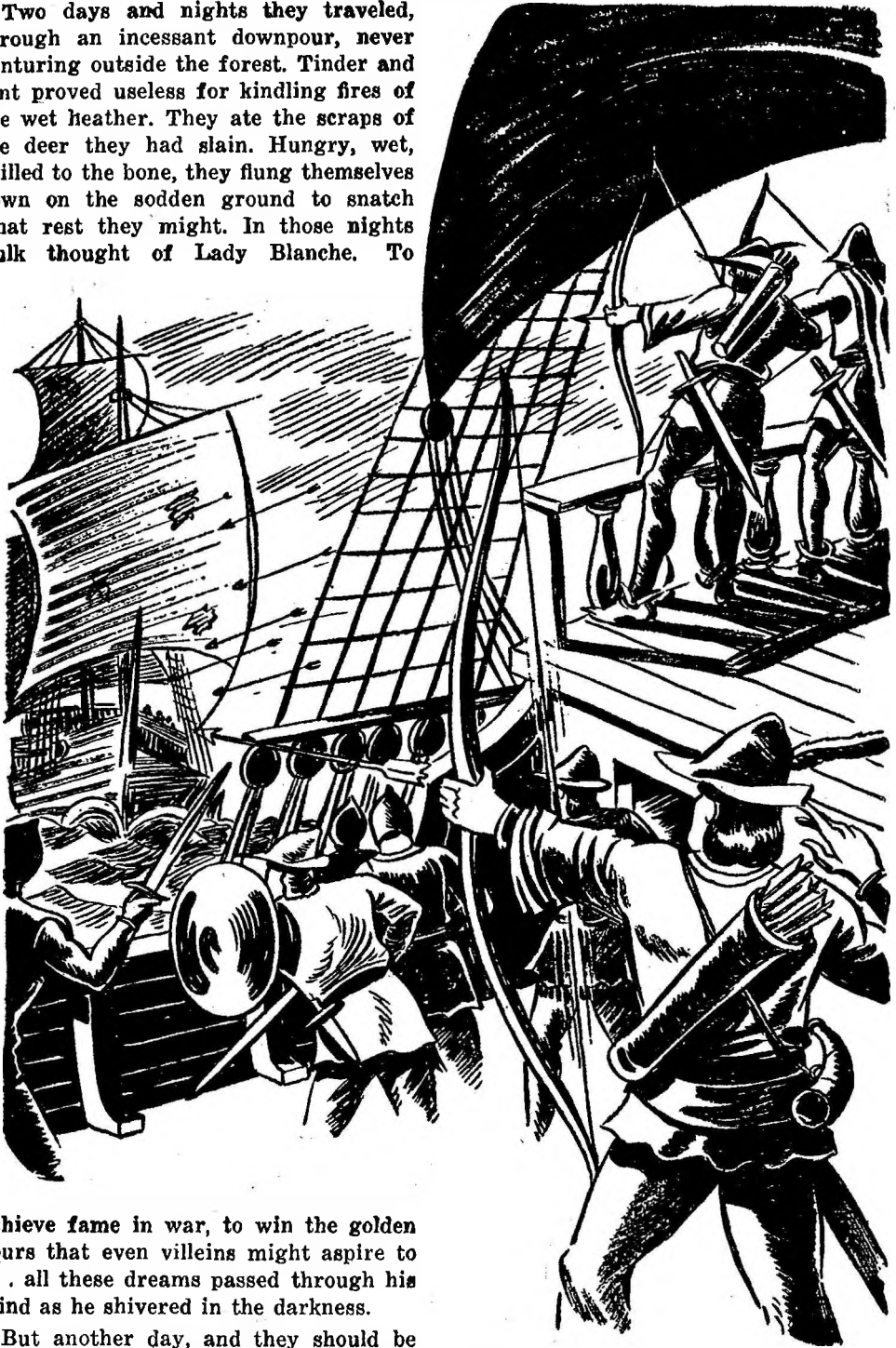
CHAPTER II

The Sea-Rover

EARL STANLEY hadn't lied: there was nothing of value in the wagons save the arms. As soon as the troops and wagons had departed, after an uneasy truce, Robin said:

"Now, indeed, Stanley and Westover will raise the whole countryside against us. We must make for the Marches with all speed, to join our comrades there, or we are all dead men."

Two days and nights they traveled, through an incessant downpour, never venturing outside the forest. Tinder and flint proved useless for kindling fires of the wet heather. They ate the scraps of the deer they had slain. Hungry, wet, chilled to the bone, they flung themselves down on the sodden ground to snatch what rest they might. In those nights Fulk thought of Lady Blanche. To



achieve fame in war, to win the golden spurs that even villeins might aspire to . . . all these dreams passed through his mind as he shivered in the darkness.

But another day, and they should be in the Marches, and across the Severn. It was on the dawn of that day than outpost brought in an uncouth fellow, clad in

Shaft after shaft sped at the pirate ship.
the evil-smelling skin of a sheep, and bawling in an unintelligible speech.

It was Simeon Carpenter, who understood the speech of the wild Welsh, interpreted. "This is sore news," he said. "This man has been sent by my lord Buckingham to warn us to disperse, since the swollen Severn has forced the postponement of the enterprise. And Crookback's troops hold all the fords. We must try to cross, and make for Chester."

They stared at one another gloomily. Simeon said, in his lugubrious fashion: "And we might have been faring sumptuously on a silver penny a day, had we listened to my lord Stanley."

Neck-deep, they crossed the Severn. Across it, the Welsh lambs made good eating. It was a wet, but no longer hungry crowd that roystered down the main street of Chester.

The town appeared deserted. The houses were barred and shuttered. It required much hammering upon the doors of "The Golden Sequin" before the bolts were pulled, and the pale-faced landlord stood in the entrance.

He stared at their faces and their ragged clothes. "I am a true man, gentles," he quavered. "Of which side be ye?"

"Bring forth your wine. We shall speak of that anon," said Robin Trueman.

Squatting on either side of the long table, they filled their bellies, and quaffed stoups of ale and sack, waited on by the trembling landlord and his wife. It was evident that both were in deadly fear.

"Of which side be you, host?" demanded one of the bowmen.

"Gentles, I am a humble man, and my task is but to serve whoever comes to my door. Matters political are above my head."

"Aye, but where is Buckingham?" shouted another. "If he be fled, he is no longer leader of ours."

The landlord's face cleared as if magically. "Now God be praised, you are of the Red Rose!" he shouted. "As for us, we follow my lord Stanley, and he is on this side today, on the other tomorrow. When I saw you, I was afraid you were of the White Rose party, since they say that King Richard is moving west, to destroy Buckingham's little army. And,

since my lord Stanley is now on the King's side, we poor people of Chester have to be careful, most careful.

"Now it stands this way: three days ago, Earl Richmond's fleet was dispersed by a storm, thus preventing Buckingham from giving the signal to rise. And Buckingham's troops were held back by the swollen Severn. Thus the enterprise seems to be postponed, for which we people of Chester are not sorry."

While he was speaking, the lad who helped wait on the table had disappeared. New faces began looking in at the doors, and then a motley crowd came pouring into the tavern.

"Wine for our comrades of this town!" shouted Robin, clinking down some silver pieces.

With that there was animated buzzing. After a while a grizzled old sea-captain came forward. "And ye would join Earl Richmond," he said to Robin in a low voice, "my ship will take you, free of charge, to where he lies off the Irish coast. I am all ready to sail, and I know our lord will welcome so gallant an array of archers."

"Good!" shouted Robin. He staggered up tipsily. "Come, lads, our troubles are at an end," he cried. "Lead the way, Master Captain!"

"**IF ALL** the sea be like this, God wot I would I were I back in the green-good," mumbled Brother Ambrose, as he squatted among the others on the poop of the ship, looking out into the darkness, just before the dawn.

"And I in Shrewsbury," groaned Simeon Carpenter, "where he who betrayed me sits at ease with her who should have married me, and we here, tossed like corks upon the waves."

But the rest only groaned in the throes of sea-sickness. They could see nothing, there was no moon, and the rain was coming down again.

"He said that we shall reach Earl Richmond's ship today at noon," groaned one archer. "But it seems God's will that we shall perish in this ocean."

But it was beginning to grow light. A pale dun was increasing in the east. Slowly the sky brightened. Suddenly there came a stentorian cry from the captain, taken up by the sailors.

A lean, low vessel, her sails bellying in the wind, was coming up, no more than two bowshots away. It was evident from her movements that she had hostile intent.

"Gramercy," shouted the captain, "it is years since the paynim of Barbary ventured into English waters. This is what comes of our wars and strife. Lads, if she overhaul us, our sole hope lies in your bows, for I have hardly a dozen shots for my falconet."

A shot boomed out across the waters, and a stone cannonball crashed upon the deck, and bounced on into the sea. The captain, yelling to his sailors, set them hauling at the rigging. But it was plain that his vessel was no match in speed for the stranger. The cannon boomed again, and the mast broke, and dropped across the side, dragging with it the sails and a mass of cordage.

"God help us!" cried the captain. "These be no paynim, but pirates from the Baltic sea, who are still more savage and unchristian, they say, than the infidels of Barbary. Shoot, good bowmen, shoot!"

Their sea-sickness forgotten, the archers sprang to their feet, and took stance upon the poop, their strong legs planted sturdily, despite the roll of the vessel, buttoning their bracers, drawing arrows from quivers.

"Let them come within fair distance," shouted Robin. "So shall we give them better measure, and show them what English arrows can do."

Silently the group awaited the oncoming craft, while the master maneuvered so that she should be broadside on to Robin and his men.

NOW a chorus of challenging shouts came from the pirate ship, which all could see was crowded with men. The captain of the English vessel and one of his men came running with roundshot



A Mongol who had been feigning death came at Fulk with slashing sword.

and a bag of powder, while others followed with more of the stone balls. Simultaneously the falconet roared, and a dozen shafts sped into the packed mass aboard the pirate.

Yells, oaths, confusion followed. Shaft after shaft sped from the English bows. But suddenly the sun rose in the east, a huge red ball, blinding the archers. The enemy gun roared again, and the concussion splintered the poop to match-

wood, killing three archers, and flinging the rest upon their faces.

Exultant cries came from the pirate as she closed in. An iron ram raced through the water and struck the English vessel in the waist, tearing a hole in her side. Through the deluge of water thrown up by the impact, grapnels fell, locking the two ships together. And instantly a score—two-score of men in morions and cuirasses, with swords in their hands, leaped aboard the Englishman.

Fulk saw the sailors instantly cut down. Upon the poop some eight remaining archers stood, steadily plying their bows. Fulk, Robin, and Simeon Carpenter loosed a volley together, and the pirates, leaping up from the waist, fell back. "At them!" yelled Simeon, drawing his dirk.

"No," shouted Robin. "Let us finish our work here. Lend me some arrows, Simeon."

"Alack, I have none!"

"But I have plenty," shouted Fulk.

Before he could offer them, the pirates had understood, and were upon them, with a fresh outburst of yells, swarming up to the poop deck.

Dirks in hands, the bowmen ran to meet them. At their head was Brother Ambrose, club in hand, and into the thick of the enemy he crashed, smashing through helm and head. Fulk's dirk was torn from him; he snatched a sword from a fallen man, and thrust and sliced furiously. But Brother Ambrose was down. Fulk slipped on the bloodstained poop. Then it seemed as if the entire sky collapsed upon him. And, with a sigh, he dropped, and lay inert upon the deck.

"ROBIN, how long have we lain in this stinking hold?"

"More than three weeks, I think, lad, though indeed there is no keeping clear tally in this darkness."

It was actually a month since Fulk, Robin, Simeon, and Brother Ambrose had been taken prisoner. Seeing that these were the leaders of the band, the pirates had been at pains to spare their lives,

while the rest had been flung overboard, wounded and dead indiscriminately.

As to the nationality of their captors, none of the four could guess, though Brother Ambrose was convinced they were not from Almayne, being still more uncouth, hairy, and strangely accoutred. As for their speech, it sounded like the growling of beasts.

Twice a day coarse bread and water had been given the prisoners, who lived in almost perpetual darkness, save when the sun shone through small openings in the hatches for a brief period daily.

Nevertheless, the four had recovered from their wounds, and had not spirit during their confinement.

"Robin, where do you think we go?" asked Simeon. "If to be enslaved in Barbary, the air is strangely cold."

"And the days are long and the nights short," said Brother Ambrose. "It's my belief they are taking us to the land of Muscovy."

"Where is that?" asked Fulk.

"It lies east of Almayne, I have heard, and is inhabited by cruel men, yet Christians, who are fighting the yellow, heathen paynim, with slits for eyes, and black hair like wire. So said a traveler who came to worship once at Canterbury."

"Yellow men? That passes belief," said Fulk. "Yet, since God has made white, brown and black, it may be as you say."

"Ah, had they not taken our bows," sighed Robin. "An archer without his bow is a deer without horns, or a dog without teeth."

It was a few days after this conversation that the hold hatches were flung back and the captives ushered up on deck. They looked about them in amazement. The vessel was lying in a little cove, so close to the bank, one might leap ashore. Pine forests came down to the edge of the water.

To the astonishment of the prisoners, their captors made signs of friendship. The freight of the pirate ship was unloaded. It consisted mainly of wine-skins, bales of dyed cloth, arbalests, and other small weapons of war, and was loaded

onto the backs of small pack-ponies that were in waiting.

On one of these, to their delight, the prisoners saw their bows and equipment, but their six guards, armed with short bows of lacquered wood and horn, kept them well to the rear of the animals and their drivers, short, sturdy men of the same nationality.

At a signal, the four plunged forward along a track that ran into the forest.

FOR DAYS they traveled. Sometimes they passed villages of squalid huts, inhabited by people even more barbarous than their captors, who fled into the forests as the party approached. On the fifth day the forest thinned, giving place to wide, desolate plains. On the seventh, they came upon a battlefield.

The first sign was the flocks of crows and ravens that rose screaming, and wheeled overhead. And, as far as the eye could see, the whitening bones of the dead extended.

Here and there were squat white pyramids, built solely of human skulls, pierced by a thousand eyeless sockets.

Brother Ambrose picked up a broken sword that lay beside one of the skeletons.

"Curved," he said, "like those of the paynim Turks. Truly these dead men must be the yellow folk of whom the pilgrim spoke. And see their hair. Did ever Christian men have hair like this?"

Robin said: "We must get back our bows, lads. I mislike this land, and I greatly dread what is to come."

They were hardly past the confines of the battlefield when the leader of the party uttered shouts of alarm, and pointed across the plain. Far in the distance could be seen a black line that resolved itself into a body of horsemen.

With cries of alarm, the guards snatched up their bows. As the enemy drew near, it could be seen that they, also, were armed with bows. They galloped to within fifty yards and then discharged a cloud of arrows, which fell a few paces short. Wheeling and circling, they kept up this maneuver, while the



Yataghan against sword, the two faced one another.

guards fired back impotently.

"By the Rood," yelled Robin, "our own bows, lads, or we are lost!"

Braving the storm of arrows, while the guards were engaged, the four ran to the pack-horse and snatched down their weapons. A half-minute only—for their bracers were still on their arms—and the Englishmen were pouring a cloud of arrows into the ranks of the attackers at a distance of a hundred yards.

Amazed, panic-struck, the horsemen retreated, but still that deadly cloud pursued them, at a hundred and fifty, at two hundred, at an extreme range of more than two hundred and fifty yards, until the attackers, terrified and bewildered, vanished over the horizon.

Awed and humble, the chief of the guards came forward, and bowed till

his forehead almost touched the ground. Not a word of his speech was intelligible, but the archers understood that now they were no longer prisoners, but guests of honor.

CHAPTER III

Mongol and Muscovite

ALTHOUGH the journey had been for the most part over open plains, there were still patches of forest on the horizon, and the Muscovite leader indicated by signs that they should withdraw into one of these for a day or two, in case the enemy returned with reinforcements. During this interval, the four occupied themselves with replenishing their store of arrows. The guards had an ample supply of their own short shafts, and watched with wonder while the Englishmen fashioned ell-length bodies to them.

They willingly surrendered their own feathers and tips, and on the second day, re-equipped the four proceeded on their way.

It was on the third morning that Ambrose, who had been scanning the horizon intently, shouted, and caught Fulk's arm, and pointed.

"What do you see, lad?" he asked.

Robin and Simeon Carpenter had come up. It was Simeon shouted: "I see a great cross against the sky!"

"Aye," cried Ambrose. "And now I am sure where we be. This is indeed the land of Muscovy, and those who attacked us are the paynim, known as Mongolians, who do battle with the Christian Muscovites. And that cross stands above the city of Moscow, which is the chief city of Muscovy. Let us be thankful that we have fallen into Christian hands, even though I have been informed that the Muscovites be not true sons of Holy Church."

And he swung the huge club that he had fashioned in the forests.

Slowly, as they went on, the city of Moscow began to unfold along the horizon, topped by domes that seemed fashioned of pure gold. But now, beneath the

walls, tents of black came into view, then tiny figures of men, swarming like ants beneath the walls, on which were other figures.

Suddenly, from an invisible gate, a swarm of ants came pouring forth.

"A siege and a sally!" shouted Robin. "What say you, shall we charge our paynim foes?"

"That would be madness," said Simon lugubriously. "Four against thousands?"

The guards had fallen back, and were pointing toward the forests, signaling to the four bowmen to flee with them. It was Fulk shouted: "Throw off the packs! Seize the horses! Charge for Saint George of England!"

And, with shouts of delight, the four obeyed, and went sallying across the plain.

TO FULK, this was the fulfillment of his dreams when he was a vassal on Lord Westover's lands. It was madness, but neither he nor his three companions paused to weigh the odds before riding into almost certain death. They had not yet been seen, but, as they neared the walls, they could see catapults hurling stones against them, and men engaged in seen. There was a stir among the Mongols battle at their foot. But now they were directly in front of them. They were within two hundred yards.

"Archers! Ho, Archers!" shouted Fulk.

They leaped to the ground, and poured flight after flight of arrows into the Mongol ranks. Beneath each shaft a man went down. Perhaps the rumor of the affray a few days earlier had reached the ears of the attackers, for their line broke in confusion. Bows on their backs, the four raced forward, and armed themselves with swords from the fallen.

At the same time the Muscovites, encouraged by the wavering of their foes, came charging fiercely forward. The Mongols broke. All along the line of the walls they could be seen in flight.

A Mongol who had been feigning death suddenly leaped to his feet and came at Fulk with clashing sword. Fulk parried

his blows, as he had done at singlestick upon his village green, looking with horror into the yellow face, with its little slits of eyes. The fight appeared interminable. Time and again the slashing blade flashed within an inch of the face of the Englishman.

And then suddenly Fulk found his opening, and the Mongol, his head half severed from the body, dropped dead at his feet.

Exhausted from the struggle, Fulk dropped beside the body. Suddenly it had all become meaningless to him. He had been dreaming; he was back in England, where was Lady Blanche, whom he would never see again.

After a long time he raised his head, and saw that the battle was dying into the distance. All about him lay the dead, and wounded men were groaning or staggering to their feet, and swaying about the field. A cavalcade was approaching, and Fulk rose, ashamed that he had yielded to his dreams again.

But it was Robin, Simeon and Ambrose who led the cavalcade, accompanied by a tall man in armor, and, at the sight of Fulk, Robin galloped ahead, shouting:

"Thanks be to God, lad, we were afraid you were dead! By Saint Thomas, I know not who this lord is, but he looks to me like the king of the Muscovites, and this other one—he pointed to a man behind him—knows a few words of English, and believes us great lords in our own country. Lad, it looks to me as if our fortunes are made!"

“WELL, Fulk, lad, did ever your dreams approach this reality?" cried Robin, some weeks later. "Here we four be, great lords in Muscovy, and Brother Ambrose like to become a bishop, or higher. And thou, son-in-law to King Borislav, by virtue of the fact that the Princess Miriam hath deigned to look on you with favor.

"Nay, lad, have done with that folly about the lady in England, of whom I have heard you speak in dreams. Here we be, officers in His Grace's bodyguard, and

some day, when we return to England, we shall stand higher than Westover himself."

During that brief period, the fortunes of the four had certainly undergone a magical transformation. They were learning to speak the Muscovite tongue, they were honored to the point where they had aroused the jealousy of the Muscovite lords; they sat at King Borislav's table in the hall of his great wooden castle.

They had discovered that the land was in rebellion against the Mongul rule, and had driven the enemy from the principality of Moscow, though from his camp upon the Volga Timur, the lame leader of the Golden Horde still hurled his horsemen against the Muscovite armies, and built his hideous towers of human skulls.

And there was the Princess Mariam, daughter of King Borislav. Hardly more than eighteen, with Raven hair and black eyes whose slight obliqueness denoted her Tartar ancestry, she had shown unmistakably that she had selected Fulk for her husband.

That Borislav had yielded to her wish was demonstrated in his exaggerated friendliness to the lad, sending him his golden wine-cup to drink from at festivals in his hall, while the bearded boyars glowered, and the princess said with downcast eyes, and a slight flush staining her cheeks.

"Say what you like, Robin," Fulk declaimed, "but my resolution is made, and I shall never be forced into marriage with anyone save her who has my heart!"

IN THE audience chamber, on the second story of the palace, King Borislav was holding council, his boyars and chief officers about him. Among them was Brother Ambrose, in full episcopal regalia. The eyes of all were turned on the three others, who advanced toward the dais on which Borislav was seated, his sons grouped behind him, and the princess standing at his side.

The King's measured tones rang through the hall. Fulk caught only the general tenor of what he was saying,

which was to the effect that measures were being taken for the vigorous prosecution of the war. But then he turned to the three, and the interpreter translated:

"His Grace thanks you all for the help you have brought him and his realm, and, even more than for your prowess with the bow, for the knowledge that England has sent her greatest lords to serve with him.

A hundred thousand warriors now take the field against the heathen hosts of Timur, to move upon his camp and destroy him. It is His Grace's plan that you, Lord Robin, since you have been a great captain in the army of the English king, shall have command of a part of the Muscovite forces.

"You, Lord Fulk, being young in years, shall accompany Lord Robin, but without direct command. As for Lord Simeon, he shall remain in Moscow in command of my palace guards.

"And I particularly charge you, Lord Robin, to see that Lord Fulk does not expose his life recklessly, since it is my intention, on his return, to honor him with the hand of my daughter, the Princess Miriam."

He ceased, and Robin whispered to Fulk, "Lad, one contrary word, and we are all undone. Do you think such a great king would suffer such an insult as the refusal of his daughter's hand? Aye, I know that girl in England has bewitched you. But only let the King think you feel honored, and let the matter pass till we return. Or will you send us all to our death?"

Fulk whispered back: "You are right. It would be selfishness to let my love stand in the way of your life and the lives of my friends. Tell His Grace that we gladly obey his commands, and that I am greatly honored," he said.

The Princess Miriam raised her black eyes to Fulk's for a moment, and then let them fall.

A week later the army marched out from Moscow, moving eastward toward Timur's stronghold on the Volga. Robin and Fulk rode together at the head of a

section of the horse, carrying bows and swords. Behind the horse came the foot-soldiers, the artillery, the wagons and supplies, and herds of cattle.

Night fell, the walls of Moscow sank into the plain, the camp-fires blazed, and Fulk sat motionless in his tent.

"Rather than wed where my heart does not lie, let me die in battle against the paynim," he said softly.

NEARLY a year went by before the remnant of the Muscovite army appeared again before the walls of Moscow. It was neither a victorious nor a defeated army. It had fought a hundred skirmishes, and never a battle, and the cold, disease, and the arrows of an almost unseen foe had accounted for two-thirds of it. It had returned some thirty thousand strong.

For Timur had broken camp and disappeared, and the Muscovites had followed him through the lands of Cossacks, Turks, and Tartars, and never brought him to bay. Finally the news arrived that Timur was besieging Bagdad, more than a thousand miles away, and laughing while his pursuers wasted their strength against his mobile rearguards.

In that year Fulk had grown from youth to manhood, with beard on his chin, and three arrow wounds for his experiences. And through the hot pestilential nights of Summer, and the icy ones of Winter, it had always been the face of Lady Blanche that was before him.

"And so I go to wed the Princess Miriam," he sighed.

Robin clapped him on the back. "Nay, lad, now who can say?" he answered. "Much may have changed since we left Moscow."

At the palace entrance King Borislav greeted the returning host in person, and, at his side, Simeon Carpenter, bearded like a boyar, and in the uniform of captain of the royal guards. He was chattering fluently in Muscovite, and he greeted Fulk and Robin with a kiss on both cheeks, much to their dismay.

There was a wariness in his eyes that puzzled Fulk, a shrewdness in his man-

ner that seemed new to him. He broke into a forced laugh.

"How queer it seems," he said, "that we three, who were but a year ago hunted men, should now be lords in Muscovy, and you, Fulk, to become the husband of a princess. At the feast tonight King Borislav will announce it."

"How fares Brother Ambrose?" Fulk inquired.

But at that moment Brother Ambrose came waddling down the steps of the palace, clutching his bishop's skirts about his knees. He had filled out mightily; he was stout and rosy. He, too, kissed his companions.

"Be on guard, Fulk," he whispered, when the opportunity arose. "If I can, I shall warn you. Treachery is afoot, and I have much to tell you."

A MULTITUDE of candles flickered in the great banquet hall, where half a hundred of the leading boyars feasted with King Borislav. Haunches of venison, boars' heads, sides of beef adorned the tables, and the guests, using their daggers, cut and transferred their portions to the huge slabs of bread that served for plates. In the rushes that strewed the floor the dogs growled over the bones.

High on a dais at one end sat King Borislav. On his right was Fulk, on his left the Princess Miriam, clothed all in white. She had lifted her eyes once to Fulk in silent greeting, but had not spoken a word.

Beer, wine and mead passed continually along the tables. As the night wore on, the shouting became louder, the drunkenness more evident. In the street outside a roaring mob was celebrating the return of the army in the same way. Soon only Fulk and the Princess remained sober, watching each other covertly across King Borislav, who was as drunk as any, and howling out a paean of victory. At length the Princess rose and slipped silently from the room.

At the far end of the table Robin was roystering, and shouting tipsily. Neither Simeon nor any of the bishops had re-

mained after the conclusion of the meal. Many of the guests had slipped from the benches, and lay among the dogs in the rushes.

Fulk wearied of the scene. He stepped past King Borislav, who lay snoring on his throne, and raised the heavy curtain that shut off the banquet-hall from the room behind it. He stepped from light into darkness. It was instinct rather than perception that made him step aside, so that the hand with the dagger struck his shoulder, and the blade only grazed his neck.

He was beginning to see dimly now. He saw the woman who leaped at him on the other side, and, again by a miracle of luck, managed to avert the thrust. Then the Princess began screaming curses at him, and writhed furiously in his grasp.

"Have at him, Simeon!" she shrieked.

But Fulk tore the blade from Miriam's hand, and thrust savagely at Simeon as he came on again. Simeon ducked—and encountered the full force of Fulk's left fist, which knocked him to the floor. It was just such a blow as had knocked all the will to fight out of Sir Geoffrey.

He flung the Princess from him. "Now what does all this mean?" he demanded.

She began moaning: "We learned to love each other while you were away. You never loved me, nor I you, and my father would make us wed against our will."

"Small cause for murder," answered Fulk.

"We hoped that you would not return. When you came back, we knew there was nothing else to do."

"You think I would have wed you? I hated you when I first looked on you, and I have a lady in my own country whom I love more than my life." He turned to Simeon. "Rise, fool and traitor," he said. "I give her to you. It is a simple matter. Well? Why are you silent?"

"Forgive me, Fulk. I think I have been mad," Simeon whimpered. "But we love each other so much. We would have fled together, only there is no place to flee, for the Mongols swarm everywhere."

"You are forgiven," muttered Fulk, "although—"

Simeon clutched at his sleeve. "Then I must tell you more. Certain among the boyars took it ill that two men from a foreign land should be placed over them in high office. And so they planned to kill you and Robin—when, I do not know. It may even be tonight. Therefore, for the sake of our old comradeship do you bring Robin from the feast, and I have certain men of the guard on whom I can rely. They will protect Robin and you."

Fulk's face cleared. "Then I acquit you fully," he said. "And I pledge myself to do all in my power to forward your suit with the Princess. No, don't thank me. I shall go back and bring Robin out, as it were on a matter of private business."

He turned. But of a sudden there broke out a distant shouting that was swiftly taken up, rolling from street to street, until it reached the environs of the palace. There was a rush of feet upon the stairs.

"Too late!" screeched Simeon. "Too late!"

CHAPTER IV

Timur

FULK ran into the banquet-hall. A score of yellow men in leather armor, wielding their curved swords, were already rushing in through the front entrance, driving back or cutting down the few of the palace guards who still offered feeble resistance. King Borislav and Robin were standing in the midst of the drunken boyars.

Fulk ran to Robin's side, and dragged him back into the ante-room, thence to the chamber beyond, where all the weapons had been left, in accordance with the Muscovite custom at feasts. They snatched up bows and swords. King Borislav came staggering after them. Behind him, a few of the boyars stumbled, on the same mission. The Mongols were already in the banquet-hall, which resounded with their yells, and the screeches of their victims.

"Into the keep, sire!" shouted Fulk.

The three raced on from room to room until they reached the keep, a stout central room of wood, like the rest of the palace, but with a stout palisade surrounding it. Some score of the palace functionaries were already huddled within it, some of them armed, but the majority without weapons of any kind. Moscow was on fire in a dozen places, and the flames, shootink skyward, made the night as bright as day. And everywhere throughout the city sounded the shrieks of the dying, and the screams of women.

The enemy were swarming toward the keep. Inside it, Robin, Fulk and Borislav stood, awaiting them. It was surprise at the sight of the three that held the Mongols momentarily still.

Then through their midst a little, limping man strode forward. He wore a long cloak, which he flung back over his shoulder, revealing iron armor ornamented with gold. His face was at once powerful and bestial. There was no mistaking who he was, as he stepped disdainfully toward the palisade. This was Timur the Lame, the ruler of the Mongol horde.

"Ha, Borislav, King of the Muscovites, come forth and meet your death!" he called, in halting speech.

There was a full half-minute of silence. Then Borislav replied: "Grant me the right of a king, that I may die sword in hand!"

"That right is yours," came the answer. "And much honor shall attend your death, for you shall die by Timur's own hand!"

He stepped back, shouted a command in Mongol, and a space was cleared by the soldiers. Borislav hesitated for a moment, then raised the heavy bars that held the gate of the keep and stepped outside. Timur spoke to one of his men, who handed him a curved yataghan.

Yataghan against sword, the two faced one another, but Timur was armored, whereas King Borislav wore only his royal robes. Timur crouched, but Borislav stood straight and erect.

Little more than half the height of his enemy, the Mongol looked like an incarnate devil, his yellow face twisted with

malignancy and scorn. With a shout, Borislav ran forward, slashing at his antagonist. But all his strength could not break the guard of the limping little yellow man, who caught the sweeping blade time and again in the curve of his own weapon.

Around the two, the Mongols looked on with impassive faces, while within the keep the Muscovites watched and prayed. But now the Mongols began muttering and snarling like beasts as the fight grew hotter. Still Borislav kept pressing Timur back, but still he couldn't break his guard.

Sweep and parry, thrust and hack. Borislav's arm was tiring. And now it was Timur who was advancing, and Borislav who was retreating. And now the yataghan was snaking through the air in streaks of light.

SUDDENLY, like a tiger, Timur leaped, and the head of the Muscovite king, swept from the shoulders with a single blow, whirled through the air. For an instant the headless body continued to stand erect, the hand still clutching the sword.

Then Borislav dropped in a huddled heap at Timur's feet.

Like a cat preening itself after a kill, Timur stood, glancing from side to side. Then he spoke, and the Mongols rushed forward against the palisade.

Fulk clove one of his assailants to the waist. Then a sword-hilt, thrust into his mouth, knocked him backward. A dozen pairs of hands clutched at his throat. The sword was torn from his hand. A stunning blow brought down a curtain of darkness.

"Fulk, lad, wake! Why, lad, here we four be! We have lived through much, and it may be the will of Timur that we continue living, seeing that he hath spared us alone of all his prisoners."

Fulk sat up. His head ached badly, and he was dizzy, but in a moment his vision cleared. He was sitting on straw in a dungeon somewhere. Beside him was Robin; a short distance away Simeon

and Brother Ambrose, the latter still in his episcopal robes.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"In a vault beneath the palace," answered Robin. "They would not take our lives, despite the many whom we slew, but have reserved us for some purpose of their own."

"And the Princess?"

"Curses on her," growled Simeon. "I saw her greet Timur laughing, with outstretched arms. Would to God I had slain her!"

"But why has Timur spared us?" asked Robin.

The harsh click of the door-lock interrupted him. Two Mongol guards appeared, armed with yataghans. They gestured to the four to proceed them out of the vault.

It was morning, though no sun broke through the overcast sky. Fulk found himself in the square before the palace. Moscow was still afire, but here the fires had been extinguished about the palace, leaving only the charred embers of the houses.

On three sides the Mongol troops were drawn up, as if some ceremony was expected. Timur, in rich robes of saffron and scarlet, was standing among a group of Mongol chiefs, on a sort of low dais against the city wall. And hard by was the Princess Miriam, bound fast to two iron points projecting from the wall.

Her head was fixed immovably in an iron hoop; her mouth was gagged. She was bound so fast that any movement was almost impossible.

The interpreter, who had always resented the presence of the four Englishmen, came up to Fulk. "Ha, dog," he sneered. "Timur is merciful. Would you four knaves like to be free, to find your way back to your own country?"

"If Timur has proposals, let him make them to us in person," answered Fulk haughtily.

Timur bawled something; the interpreter beckoned to the four to approach the dais. An armed Mongol guard stood at either side of them. Timur spoke, growl-

ing out the words in guttural speech, and the interpreter translated:

"Timur has heard of your prowess with the bow, and wishes to see it with his own eyes. Which of you is the best archer?"

"Robin said: "It is this lad, Fulk. His skill is greater than that of any of the rest of us."

A leer played about Timur's lips. "If you can meet the test that I shall give you, you four shall go free," he said, "and shall be transported back to your own country, with gold enough to keep you all in kingly state for the remainder of your lives. But, if you fail, you shall die."

"What is this test?" asked Fulk.

"Standing no more than a man's length from the palisade, you shall nail that woman by the ears with two successive shots, and with two more shall put out both her eyes," said Timur.

Gasps of horror broke out from among the three others when the interpreter translated. But Fulk merely measured the distance from the palisade to the wall with his eyes. A hundred yards. Of course, no archer in the world could perform such a feat.

Robin said in a low voice, "Accept the offer, lad, and then send a shaft through the heart of that yellow dog, so that we may not die in vain."

But doubtless Timur wore armor beneath his robes, and even to hit Timur's face at that distance would be a difficult matter.

Meanwhile, the Mongols, who evidently understood the nature of their leader's jest, began to show signs of excitement. Derisive laughter rippled along their ranks.

"Timur awaits your answer," said the interpreter.

"Tell him that I accept," said Fulk.

HE DREW a fresh sinew from his case, and strung it. He examined his arrows. He measured his mark again. He fitted an arrow to the notch amid a breathless silence, and drew the sinew back till it reached his ear, and the great

supple bow, as tall as himself, curved slowly.

Then swiftly Fulk swung about, and the arrow sped past Timur's ear, and stood quivering in the wall behind him. Another followed, and another, and shaft after shaft so fast that before the astounded Mongols could utter a cry, Timur stood cased in arrows from head to waist. Each of them had come within a hair's breadth of his face or body. His head was held fast in his pinned turban, his sleeves were fastened against the wall. Immobile, he glared at Fulk as he approached him, the last arrow in the notch of his bow.

There was no fear in those slits of eyes—only a frowning wonder. He, great Timur, who called himself Emperor of the World, master of a wider domain than any man had ever owned before, was now imprisoned in the midst of his soldiers, helpless, and in danger of imminent death.

"Come hither!" Fulk roared to the interpreter, who came up cringing:

"Tell Timur that his life is forfeit unless he fulfills these conditions:

"First that he have us conveyed to our own country, with gold enough to make us rich all our lives, as he himself said.

"Second, that he spare the life of the Princess Miriam, and permit her to go where she will, unscathed.

"Third, that he spare the lives and liberties of all Muscovites within the walls of Moscow.

"And let him swear by the Oath of the Golden Horde, that may never be broken."

For a moment utter silence reigned about them. Then Timur swore.

"**W**HAT means this array?" asked the countryman in astonishment. "Know ye not that King Richard fights at dawn with the rebels under my lord Richmond, whose head is like to roll from the block before many days are over? Whence come ye, in those rich furs, such as only nobles wear?"

Standing on a hill, trapped by the encircling armies, the four could only watch

as the fight unfolded. Shrilling of trumpets ushered in the dawn, which glared red over Bosworth village. In front of either army stood the archers. Behind them bristled columns of pikemen. On either wing the horsemen waited for the charge. In the center of the royal troops, white rose, stood Crookback.

With savage yells, Crookback's horsemen charged up the slope at Richmond's lines. Instantly the ground was strewn with dead and wounded as the arrows of the defenders took their toll. But they could not stop the fury of the royalist assault. Now the two lines closed, and swayed to and fro in a cloud of dust that hid the combatants.

"Oh to be among them!" sighed Fulk.

"Whist, lad! Have you not yet had enough of battle?" asked Robin. "Let us be glad to have returned with whole skins."

The dust was lifting, and now it could be seen that Richmond's troops were being broken up by the fierce charges of Richard's cavalry. The White Rose seemed again triumphant.

Now a body of troops was seen advancing from the right, and Robin, peering at them, cried: "'Tis Earl Stanley's banner! Now God help Earl Richmond, for his cause is lost."

But suddenly Stanley's men veered, and his horsemen flung themselves against the royal flank. And, cheering wildly, the foot followed. The rush of squadrons, the flash of pikes vanished in the dust. Out of that dust came the cries of battle, banners appeared, swaying to and fro. Then the dust lifted.

Now the watchers could see that the royal troops were in flight. Only in one spot did a little knot of men resist des-

perately, till they were cut down one by one.

The last man, helmeted, and a little hunched, waving his sword, plunged madly into the heart of the opposing host, and vanished.

"God help us and save his soul!" said Robin in awe. "Lads, that was Richard Crookback!"

In the great hall of Castle Westover the body of Sir Geoffrey lay in state. Beside it, bowed with grief, stood the old Baron. Killed at Bosworth, last of his line, with Sir Geoffrey the estates must pass to the crown after his father's death, which could not be long delayed.

With this tragedy, the entrance of the four sumptuously clad strangers passed almost unnoticed. Fulk saw old Edith and the wench, Matilda, in the line of weeping villeins. The old woman was trembling as she approached the coffin. Then of a sudden she shrieked:

"My son! My dear son, Geoffrey!"

"Come away, woman!" said the seneschal, taking her by the arm.

"Now, I must speak now! I speak God's truth by the dead body of my son! Aye, he was my son, my lord. For, while you were at the wars, my lady Westover gave birth to a boy, as you are aware. And I, poor fond fool, who attended her, seeing that she must die, changed my two-weeks old son for hers, so that my son might become lord of Westover. The boy Fulk, who vanished long ago, is your heir."

"He is here!" Fulk stepped forward. There was consternation in Lord Westover's eyes. But in those of the Lady Blanche, beside him, Fulk read something more than amazement—something that told him sometimes dreams come true.

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Guns for Sumatra

(Continued from page 21)

who had tricked him with a wooden rifle were about to eat fire and steel from their own real Arisakas . . .

Then the Old-Man-With-the-Beard noted the luminous hand of his watch as it reached the appointed figure. He spoke softly, but his voice moved those flattened men as though trumpets and drums had sounded. They marched.

Only Allah can see battle as it is; and there is the commander, who in his human way must see the event as a whole. The others, if they see what is before them, and do what is to be done, have done their part.

SALIM, and Aswad who led the file, marched like Japs, and in the first glint of a rising moon, they looked like Japs: the guard, coming to post a relief. It was only a few minutes before the proper time, and no soldier ever worries when relief is early.

"Halt!"

At the challenge of the sentry who paced along the bridge outside Telok Betong, the span over which passed all freight from Palembang, the file halted, and at a Japanese command which Aswad had learned.

Salim watched him go forward to be recognized. What followed was not prescribed by the manual. A bayonet licked out. The sentry, though at port arms, was helpless against surprise. The steel bit so deep that he could not cry out.

The relief advanced. The sentry, rolling down the embankment, made gurgling sounds. Salim fell out, and stopped the noise with a single thrust. One of Aswad's detachment took the Jap's place. If the officer of the day inspected, the guerilla would know what to do.

They marched to the next post, which was nearer town. The garrison, ever alert for allied bombers, had no instruments to detect the approach of unfriendly men; they had only sentries, and those

were being replaced by Tok Jangut's men.

Somewhere, Tok Jangut waited, counting on each group to arrive on time. Somewhere, Tok Jangut looked at his watch, while Allah looked at him, and at the town all blacked out; at the warehouses along the waterfront, at the ship ways, and at freighters which tugged at their moorings.

Fireflies laced the thinning gloom. Bats twittered. The soft webbed wings of one brushed Salim's cheek, but he scarcely felt it, for he was beyond feeling.

Finally, there remained of the column only Salim, and Aswad. The two faced each other. Salim asked, "When does the slaying start? Where do we go next?"

"Tok Jangut did not say. It will be easy for him to pass the sentries we left."

Aswad found a dark doorway and squatted in it. There was nothing to do but wait. And, of course, he was right. But Salim, though not as strong as his comrade, forgot that a man must rest whenever he has a chance. "Thou and I, we may be the only ones left of our *kampong*. But there is the family of Tok Jangut, somewhere in this town, let us find them."

Aswad's ape-face twisted in a scowl. "O, thou fool, let Tok Jangut look to his family as I have looked to mine! It is forbidden to make disturbances. What of all the others who move by order?"

Salim wedged himself beside Aswad. "Allah curse thy religion! That girl in Bukit Merah, she and her mother, they are Tok Jangut's family. A traitor betrayed them, they could have escaped, but to save the people of Bukit Merah, they went back."

"You mumbled all that in your sleep as you marched, I understand, and God does what He will do. There are lots of women who have already got what Tok Jangut's family are going to get. And what of our men, do you want to trade them for one girl?"

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Though Salim had an answer, he did not give it, because a motorcycle sputtered. Its headlight made a glowing patch at the street intersection to the left. Aswad snapped to his feet.

"The officer of the day! He goes to inspect!"

Motorcycle with sidecar whipped around the corner.

Tok Jangut must have taken this possibility into his reckoning; but Salim was too tired to have a broad view of things. He bounced out of the doorway, and was at the position of port arms when he landed in the middle of the narrow street. The headlight, raking low, played on his cartridge belt, on his Arisaka, and on his hands, which were correctly placed. Since the distance was too small for the beam to rise and blind him, he could see that an officer rode in the side car.

"Halt!"

A SENTRY is a proxy for the Son of Heaven. That there should be no sentry in this block did not matter; the cyclist at the handlebars booted the brake, and came to a stop. The officer got out, stamped along the cobblestones, first to be identified, and then to flay the fool who was off his post.

Aswad, silently calling Allah's damnation on all recruit guerillas, got set to break up this interruption of Tok Jangut's well-ordered plan.

Salim recognized the officer: Captain Iguchi, square-faced and stupid-looking, yet smarter than he seemed.

"What is this?" the captain demanded. "What—?"

This was the hand of Allah, bringing before Salim the man he had cut down a thousand times in his dreams. Of all the tricks that exhaustion had played him, this was the strongest, for a sharp edge of craft came through his stupor, and he said, "Honorably Captain, in the market I overheard news of Tok Jangut, he comes to find his family, move them, quick—quick!"

This was once he did not want to take Iguchi's head. This was his chance to trick the Jap into hurrying to Amai's

prison to verify the rumor, to double the guards, or to move the captives.

"Honorably Captain, send me with orders, where to?"

The excited Jap didn't recognize him. It was working. But Aswad spoiled it. He came from cover, pouncing for the motorcycle driver.

Steel flickered. The driver's cry was cut short. Iguchi whirled, tugging at his Nambu pistol. Salim whipped the rifle from port to full extension, letting the weapon's own weight drive the bayonet home. He followed through, ripping the point clear as he pivoted, and bringing up with a butt-strike; though the stock struck a man as good as dead, since a throat so ripped leaves no more than a few seconds of life.

Silent slaying. Aswad had made no greater noise, yet he thrust a second time, and a third, for good measure. The orderly toppled from the sidecar.

Then Salim croaked, "Allah curse thy religion! Allah curse thy ancestors! This father of pigs would have hurried to where they are locked up—oh, thou fool, thou father of fools—"

CHAPTER V

Combined Operations

THE FURY was knocked out of Salim before Aswad could turn on him to ask why he had spoken so wildly. Automatic rifles chattered, and there was a sullen rumbling, long drawn out, from the direction of the railway. For an instant, a ruddy glare reached down the street. Fragments began to drop. The bridge had been wrecked. Howling guerillas who had passed the sentries Aswad had posted were sweeping into town.

They hosed the guardhouse with rifle fire, and they heaved grenades and satchel bombs into it. Others did the same to the barracks; but bugles were braying, sirens were screaming, and bells jangled. The Japs, though caught flat-footed, rallied to man their posts.

Flame leaped high. Searchlights laced the rising smoke. Mortars coughed. The crackle of musketry became an unbroken

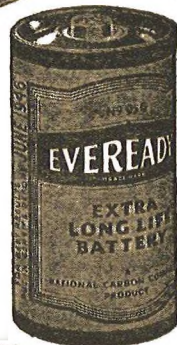
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ripping. Telok Betong was a whirlpool of squads and platoons, attack and defense hopelessly tangled; bayonet and kris, *sundang* and cane knife, pistol and grenade, all hewing and blasting. Salim flung aside his helmet and wriggled out of his tunic to keep his comrades from drilling him in the confusion. Tok Jangut's orderly plan had been scrambled, and the battle was now a hundred separate brawls with gun and steel. The blaze of copra warehouses and of gasoline dumps lighted the confusion.

Wherever Amai might be, the enemy was too busy to think of unarmed victims, for discipline had to beat panic before it could deal with Tok Jangut's men.

But now machine guns raked the street. Discipline began to prevail. Salim saw only what was nearest him, and what he saw, he ripped with his bayonet, for his rifle was empty. He howled, "This isn't wood! This isn't wood!"

He saw Aswad stumble, and heard him cough. And Aswad cursed, and cried, "Where are they? Where are they?"

Where was who, and where was what?

Amai, of course. All became clear again to Salim, but he did not know which way to go.

He got a glimpse of Tok Jangut, empty-handed except for a *kris*. The Man-With-the-Beard was calling to his men to fall back, to take cover in the plantations through which they had advanced minutes ago, or days ago, or years ago.

"Where are they?" Salim yelled, and would have gone back, but Tok Jangut struck him with the flat of the blade. "Back, you blockhead! Back!"

Salim had never heard of Tok Jangut's running, but now he saw it happen. And then the old man fell. He rolled kicking into the gutter.

There was no longer any need to order retreat. The Japs, tightening up, fought cunningly, house to house. Numbers favored them, and their advantage grew. They were fresh, they had not marched day and night without food.

As Salim reached the saving darkness and got beyond the merciless light of

blazing buildings and gasoline dumps, a strange thing happened: from the sea came the rumble of heavy guns. There were explosions such as he had not heard since the bombing of Palembang. The blasts were behind the Japs. Above the thundering, and the scream of shell fragments, he heard the rattle of small arms. Men shouted. Their voices were strange, yet the like of which he had once heard, long ago.

WHEREVER Tok Jangut was, he was not needed. His second in command was darting about, gesturing and yelling. The guerillas obeyed, and in the growing light, Salim saw enough to make him believe. Big men, red-faced men, white-faced men, infidels in dungarees, had come up from the waterfront, following the bombardment of five-inch shells. Explosions shook the harbor. Flame came up out of the sea. Between them, the guerillas and the Dutchmen gutted Telok Betong, and did with the town what they pleased . . .

Salim, swept along with the counter attack, saw his dream come true: "All that walks, all that runs, all that crawls, all that lies, cut it down!"

The sun rose through smoke to reach into ruins. Finally Salim saw the one thing he had not believed possible: the landing party, having done its work, went back to the submarines. Then, to escape reprisal by air, the strange ships sank beneath the water.

Tok Jangut's strategy became clear to Salim: the raid from the land had been timed to distract attention from the comandos coming by sea. And before the guerilla band withdrew, Salim saw how right the Man-With-the-Beard had been. They found Amai and her mother, freed by the shells which had wrecked their prison. The Japs had been too busy to think of reprisal against hostages.

Later, in the safety of the mountains, Salim told Amai, "I saw your father fall. He did not get up, I beg pardon for Allah for telling such news."

Nejeeb, tightening her mouth, looked toward the sea. "He saw the Dutchmen land. It was done well, he knew that it

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was good, and power is with Allah. You met Captain Iguchi?"

Salim gestured toward Aswad. "Let him witness that my face is no longer blackened."

He tried to get Amai's eye, but she was now looking toward the sea which had swallowed the submarines. Finally she turned to Salim, and said, "My father saw them return. Some of us will see

them come back again, and the next time, they'll stay. It's like I told you, that night in Bukit Merah."

Salim did not answer. He crumpled up, to lie on the red earth as though he had grown roots in every joint. The old lady said, "He needs sleep, much sleep, Amai. There are no more men like Tok Jangut, but this one, such as he is, one could have worse in the family."

Gun-Brand Banker

(Continued from page 39)

the damning disguise and his guns where he had left them. He judged he had best get the hood and slicker to a safer spot, so he crumpled them into a small bundle, sticking the guns under his waistband.

Anson had no warning. What was probably a gun barrel cracked down upon the back of his skull. He was barely conscious of his face slamming into the mud and that was all.

COLD WATER was being thrown into Anson's face. As he opened his eyes against a splitting headache, he recognized the interior of the old blacksmith shop at the edge of town, apart from other buildings. A hard hand caught his shirt collar and yanked him to his feet. The ruddy, flaming face of Otis Clumb showed in the light of a lamp.

"You can quit the shammin' and start talkin', Anson!" rasped Clumb. "We cotched you redhanded! Where've you cached the bank money, most of which is mine an' Millie's?"

Blood pounding over Anson's eyes dimmed his sight. But he could see that Clumb had Pardee and two other tough riders with him. The big door of the smithy was closed.

Clumb's hand twisted until Anson was choking and he tried to ease his throat. Clumb let go, staggering him back.

"Talk, Anson!" repeated Clumb. "There wasn't no holdup! You took the

cash money and was figurin' on gittin' out when the hunt died down! That'd make up for what you've lost on them poor-mouth ranchers!"

Bill Anson's head cleared. He saw that Pardee was holding the hood mask and slicker he had worn, and that he had his wooden-handled guns.

Anson's mind jumped to Millie. The girl had headed north toward home and she must have met her father, who had turned back to town. But he didn't dare ask about that, about what might have been said.

Millie had lied to protect him, but maybe she had changed her mind. If so, Clumb's attitude proved she hadn't changed her story. It had been Anson's dumbness in leading the way to the disguise that had trapped him.

Clumb topped him by inches, was broader of shoulder. Moreover he had given evidence of his ruthlessness in what he had planned for the Copper Ridge ranchers. He faced Bill Anson now, one big hand drawn back to strike.

"I'll beat you within an inch o' your life if you don't say where you put that dinero!" stated Clumb. "An' I ain't askin' again!"

Bill Anson had to figure that he was ticketed for Calhoun's jail in the end. But he was convinced that Otis Clumb would come as close to killing him as he could

before the sheriff returned with his posse.

Anson shook his head. He was even more concerned than Clumb as to the whereabouts of the bank cash. And he couldn't tell Clumb what he didn't know.

"I haven't got the bank money, Otis," said Anson without raising his voice. "I can't tell you what I don't know."

Clumb cursed and swung his flat hand, a weapon huge enough to cut down any man of Anson's size and weight. Anson shifted his head instinctively, felt Clumb's hand breeze by, then Anson was suddenly fired to action.

ALL OF THE hate for Clumb's merciless effort to steal all that honest ranchers had worked to gain surged through Anson's lean figure. It sent his left fist digging into Clumb's paunchy stomach and snapped his right into an upward hook as Clumb's big head was bent toward him by the belly blow.

"I'll kill yuh for that!" roared Clumb, staggering, but keeping his feet and rushing Anson with all his weight.

Anson shifted, but instead of dodging back as Clumb evidently expected, he met the big rancher head-on, punishing him with short, stabbing body blows that went under Clumb's arms, lifted to guard his face.

Clumb grunted and went to his knees, but Anson stepped back until the rancher was on his feet.

"That ain't gittin' us nowhere, boss!" said the rider Pardee in a hard voice. "Once Calhoun gits him in jail yuh won't find out nothin'!"

But Clumb had a red fog of anger in his brain and he rushed Anson again, only to miss the banker's face by an inch or so, and have Anson's short left connect solidly with his nose.

Anson started in then with a finishing right. And Pardee hit him across the back of the neck with one of his own guns.

In the next two minutes Anson was beaten down and kicked until he felt sure his ribs were caved in.

"You talkin'?" demanded Clumb. "If

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you don't you'll never walk straight again! Bust his back, Pardee!"

Anson passed out with the driving kick that seemed to splinter his spine.

BILL ANSON felt the heat of the noonday sun on his face.

"I'm tellin' you, Clumb, if it ain't proved Bill Anson robbed his own bank an' took your money, I'd shut my eyes to a killin'!"

Sheriff Calhoun was talking. The sheriff and another man were supporting Anson between them. Anson's legs went out from under him as they saw his eyes open and eased their hold.

"He held up the bank, an' if that money ain't found, there'll be a new sheriff in Copper Gap!" In the forefront of a line of scowling citizens Otis Clumb uttered his threat. Then Clumb added: "You can put him in jail, but there's others here who've lost their savin's to this thief, an' the jail ain't built to hold him from 'em."

Muttered oaths ran along the line backing up Otis Clumb.

"Maybe you'd be smart to tell where you hid the money, Bill," advised Sheriff Calhoun. "I ain't heedin' any threats of violence, but I've been watchin' an' fearin' you'd slip back to the old ways. If you had any excuse, an' if you'd give up the dinero you took, it'd make it easier for you."

If he had any excuse? The sheriff's words rang in his brain. Who would believe what Otis Clumb had meant to do, even if he would tell it?

And now that Sheriff Calhoun had hinted at his past, who would take his word on what he had meant to do with the Clumb money? That he had taken it to save the ranchers and the grassland of Copper Ridge.

Then Bill Anson knew that even if it would save him, he couldn't tell it. His whole body felt as if he had been tromped by a stampede. Clumb had kept his word and had all but killed him.

He had fought fairly with Otis Clumb. But the rancher was still Millie's father. And Bill Anson knew that if he faced a

hang-rope or years in prison, it couldn't change his love for the girl.

Moreover, she had lied to try to protect him. Anson guessed Millie didn't want to face him after that, and that had sent her riding home to the Ladder. Undoubtedly she had met her father, but she had told Otis Clumb nothing.

All Bill Anson could do was to face this out and take his slim chances.

"I don't know about the money, Calhoun," he said truthfully, finding it difficult to speak through his swollen lips. "I can't tell what I don't know."

Two of Calhoun's deputies stood at one side with hands touching their gun butts. The crowd followed Clumb's lead and uttered a combined threat of what might happen.

"C'mon, then, Bill," ordered Sheriff Calhoun. "There'll be a heap of folks disapp'inted in you, 'specially them Copper Ridge boys you was tryin' to help out. Maybe you still want to say somethin', Bill, 'fore I lock you up."

Anson weaved to his feet, but he shook his head.

His whole plan had collapsed. It seemed certain that someone right here in Copper Gap, possibly in this crowd, had trailed him and grabbed the bank cash.

Otis Clumb might be balked temporarily. But Anson knew that Clumb would probably raise the money in some way to buy the Harvey Gillis ranch. Afterward, some of his friends might understand what Anson had meant to do, but right now Bill Anson was headed for jail.

And from the temper of that crowd, egged on by Otis Clumb, it was evident there might never be a trial. If Calhoun could beat off a drunken mob, it would mean bloodshed.

Bill Anson turned, weakly, still supported by Calhoun and his deputy.

"Let's get it over with, sheriff," he said.

AS they moved and Otis Clumb was waving one big hand that invited all and sundry to the saloon, the running ponies came into the head of the street.

A buckboard swayed behind the plunging beasts, and the rear of the buckboard was piled high with a trunk and some other personal belongings.

Old Harvey Gillis, his whiskers streaming in the wind, was sawing on the reins of the ponies. Behind the buckboard came two score riders, and Bill Anson saw Curt Hylan and the other ranchers of Copper Ridge among them.

"What the thunderation?" bellowed Otis Clumb. "Millie! You lost your senses? How come you ain't home—?"

Millie Clumb's pretty, oval face appeared tired and drawn, but her eyes smiled as she slipped from the buckboard seat beside Harvey Gillis.

Bill Anson straightened, concealing his hurts as much as possible. He watched the slender girl walk between her father and him. Sheriff Calhoun steadied Anson's rigid figure.

"I said, where in tarnation you been, Millie?" repeated Otis Clumb. "Your place is home! What are these—?"

"That's right, dad, my place is home!" rang out the girl's clear, challenging voice. "But my home isn't on the Ladder any more. I've just been closing a deal for the Harvey Gillis spread. Paid forty thousand of my own cash money, and that's where I'm meanin' to live."

Bill Anson saw a crafty smile begin to spread over Otis Clumb's face.

"Smart gal I got!" boasted Clumb suddenly and loudly. "Showed hoss sense grabbin' that spread! I was meanin' to—"

Suddenly Otis Clumb's voice faltered. He looked at the smiling girl uncertainly. It had just come to him that something was all wrong here.

"Millie, you was sayin' you paid your own cash money?" said Clumb slowly. "But your dinero was part o' that took from the bank when Bill Anson robbed me o' a hundred thousand, an'—"

All other voices were abruptly hushed. The girl stood before her father, her chin lifted.

"You can't prove Bill ever took a penny of your money, dad," the girl said calmly.



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"Here's all of your hundred thousand and not a dollar missing."

Millie reached back into the buckboard and produced a sack to extend it to her father. A low chuckle came into Sheriff Calhoun's throat.

"You can't be confessin' you helped Bill Anson rob the bank?" roared Otis Clumb. "Even if I've got my money, Anson's goin' to jail for holdin' up that bank! An' what you own, I'm also ownin' as your father—"

Millie held up her hand. She turned to Sheriff Calhoun.

"Please to have Judge Barker be ready to say the words for Bill and me," said Millie firmly. "You can't prove Bill ever thought of robbin' his own bank, because I took out after the holdup thief and saw where he cached the money, and I got it all back."

Bill Anson bowed his head to keep from choking and to hide the grin on his broad mouth.

"You're not having any part or passel of the Gillis ranch, me being of age and changing my name to Mrs. Bill Anson," went on Millie. "I'll be sending for my clothes at the Ladder, dad. And before you get an idea you can make it different,

have a look at all the boys who rode down from Copper Ridge to be at our wedding."

Bill Anson glanced up at the grim faces of the Copper Ridge ranchers and their toughest riders. Otis Clumb also raised his eyes to Millie's own idea of a wedding escort.

Then Millie said with slow emphasis: "I wouldn't want the Copper Ridgers to know what you told me you was plannin' to do if you got your hands on the Harvey Gillis ranch, dad."

Bill Anson watched the big shoulders of Otis Clumb start to sag. He saw pudgy Judge Barker hurrying from his house, carrying a book.

He realized now that Millie had meant to prove beyond any doubt where her heart interest would always be. Anson heard Sheriff Calhoun suddenly slap his hand upon his thigh and laugh.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed the gray-haired lawman. "Think of that sprig of a gal goin' out an' runnin' down a thief, then robbin' his money cache!"

Bill Anson knew he would never come to trial. He wondered only if he was man enough to live up to a girl as smart as Millie.

Letters of Marque

(Continued from page 49)

not fall in with those frigates in this calm."

"Sails to starboard!" came from the lookout.

BEFORE it had well grown light it had become plain that an English frigate lay not more than a mile on the starboard side, becalmed, as the *Brian Boru* was. And now Patrick understood that look on Captain Jeffreys's face. He saw the trap in its completeness. Not only had Jeffreys and his men been concealed in the hold of the *Queenstown*, but at the same time it had been planned for the

frigate to lie in the offing, ready to pounce upon the *Brian Boru*.

Of course, the rakish privateer could show a clean pair of heels to the lumbering freight, but, if she could be lured within range of her forty guns, she might be quickly disabled and made helpless.

The sun rose on the two vessels, just out of gunshot range of each other, lying upon a sea of glass. And it looked as if the issue of the encounter depended on which of the two was able to take advantage of the first puff of wind.

Patrick's men were all in the tops and crowding the ratlines. His guns were use-

less against the frigate's armament, and he had no intention of using them if he didn't have to. He did pride himself that his seamanship would enable him to dance away out of range.

Reluctantly he have the orders to cut the tow. The *Queenstown* would have to be abandoned. As soon as the rope was cut, the prize crew understood, and, even before Patrick had hoisted the signal to abandon ship, they began to lower the boats, to cross the intervening space to the *Brian Boru*.

But the English ship was lowering boats, too. Four of them, crammed with men, and a cannon pointing at the privateer from the bow of each. O'Shea understood then. The English crew was planning to take the *Brian Boru* by assault.

The crew raced down the ratlines. Two bow guns were manned, the starboard and larboard carronades made ready. Silently they watched the four boats moving toward them, oars striking the water in perfect rhythm.

Now they were dividing—two to starboard and two to larboard.

Now they were within range. O'Shea shouted the order and his guns rang out. The mast of the foremost boat toppled into the sea, carrying with it the bodies of a dozen men. But that boat still came on, and the rest were nearing the *Brian Boru* also.

A SALVO from all four boats, directed at the same place, tore into Patrick's bow. It knocked the two guns from their carriages, and left a dozen crushed and mangled bodies lying in a bloody welter. And now the boats were too close for the carronades to be sufficiently depressed to fire. Another salvo raked the *Brian Boru* on either side, tearing into her vitals. Grappling irons were flung, and the boats made fast against the vessel's sides.

Stripped to the waist, their cutlasses between their teeth, the English sailors leaped aboard. Then, yelling like devils, they swung their cutlasses against the pikes and muskets of the defenders.

Patrick to starboard, and Melchior to

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larboard, fought bloody paths into the enemy ranks. The big mate, wielding a length of chain, did hideous execution. Patrick's sword made havoc among the English. Twice they forced their way to the mainmast, only to be driven back over a pile of dead and wounded. In those few nightmare minutes, none had the least idea how the fight was going. In was only when Patrick stood, gasping, blood-dripping sword in hand, that he realized the victory was his.

It was won at a frightful cost. Half his men, and at least half of the mate's, were out of action. Of the sixty-odd men who had manned the ship, barely half could have remained in a condition to fight.

Jeffreys darted down the companion to his cabin, rapped at the door, set his shoulder to it, and sent it crashing inward. The room was in complete disorder, for a round-shot had ploughed through it. But there, standing facing him, was Mistress Bess, unharmed, and on the day-bed lay her father, in a drunken stupor.

"Thank God!" said Patrick. "I came to see if you were harmed. The English have been repelled and are in flight back to their frigate."

"You don't know the English," answered Bess, with a sneering little laugh. "Out of this room, butcher!"

And suddenly an inferno of yells rang out above, and Patrick turned and ran back to the deck.

THE ENGLISH were attacking again. They had veered off for a consultation, and now they came scrambling over the bulwarks with the same determination, outnumbering the defenders by more than two to one. And the same bloody nightmare followed, during which Patrick was conscious only of slow defeat. He seemed ringed by the English sailors, blood and tar dripping from their pigtailed, their cutlasses slashing with deadly effect.

At first the pikes of the Americans presented a formidable phalanx to the attackers; then this was broken, and it became a series of single fights, man

against man. Patrick staggered as he felt the impact of a cutlass, that slashed his cheek. As the man raised his blade again, Patrick ran him through. And, with a little knot of men about him, among them Melchior, whose black, naked chest was a smear of blood, he fought on.

"Yield, pirate!" shouted a voice above the din.

With a quick gesture, Patrick brushed the blood out of his eyes, and saw Captain Jeffreys, very cool in his clean uniform, a sword in his hand.

"Surrender and you shall hang in chains ashore, instead of from the yard-arm," called Jeffreys in a mincing voice.

At the sight of him, rage lent O'Shea new strength. As Jeffreys thrust he parried, their blades twirled and clashed, and then, thrusting with all his force, he drove beneath the other's blade and pierced him through the throat.

The sword dropped from Jeffrey's hand, the face above the transfixing sword became the monstrous parody of a face; Patrick pulled out his sword and let the body fall.

There were still some dozen of the defenders, ringing the mainmast, and it was Melchior, dangling his bloody chain, with the skull-battered corpses about him, that kept the attackers at a distance.

Patrick saw it all dimly, for now his strength had utterly left him. There was a haze before his eyes, and the cries of the attackers sounded faint. But of a sudden fresh shouts sounded from the stern. And along the decks came running a new body of men, pikes in their hands.

This was the end, then. He called to Melchior, "You may yield, if you wish, for the men's sakes. I'll fight on—fight on—"

But they were all about him, cheering wildly. And then O'Shea understood. It was the prize crew he had placed aboard the captured merchantman, who had left her in the boats when she was cut adrift.

The carronades were firing on the English boats, fleeing back toward the frigate. Only one of them reached her. The rest were splintered wreckage, with

floating corpses bobbing on the waves.

Melchior touched Patrick on the arm. "The apothecary's alive, sir. He'll bind your wound for you."

"How are you, Mr. Melchior?"

"I'm blood all over—from other men's wounds," grinned the black mate. "But go below, sir. There's a breeze coming up. I'll outsail that Englishman. I've sent my men aloft."

"We lost a good prize," murmured Patrick. "But we've put a flea in the ears of the Englishman—and we've got Sir Harry."

HE STUMBLED DOWN the companion toward the cabin he had occupied the past two nights. A figure barred his way. He looked, and it was Bess. She cried out in affright, and Patrick, too tired to question her or resist, let her lead him into his own quarters and place him on a chair.

In a few moments she was bathing the wound in his face and compressing it with a pad of linen. "I'm a surgeon," she said proudly. "I learned to attend my father's negroes. I have needle and thread, and as soon as your wound has stopped bleeding I shall sew it up for you. Now you must have some wine."

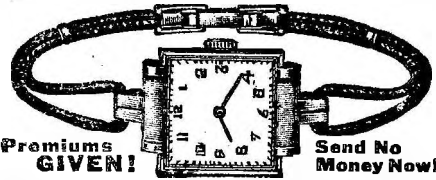
She reached toward the bottle on the table and poured out a glass. Patrick said: "You don't understand. The English have been defeated, and you and your father are still my prisoners."

"Drink this and don't talk," said Bess.

On the day-bed Sir Harry mumbled: "Home at anchor—home at anchor—hanged at the yard-arm—" and subsided into his stupor again.

"Well, mistress, you will have to make your choice," grinned Patrick, "to lie in your graves, as you said, or to see Baltimore, for 'tis for there we're sailing."

Mistress Bess refilled Patrick's glass thoughtfully. "I suppose there are worse cities in the world than Baltimore," she said.



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Ghost Plane

(Continued from page 57)

I felt sure, even if it wasn't Dick, that the ghost-pilot was specially interested in saving my own carcass. I didn't say a word about it when we got back to the field. Nobody had much to say, but we eyed one another, and suddenly it all came out.

Nobody had seen that flyer saving me. They'd all been too busy with their own troubles. But everybody seemed to think the flyer had saved him in particular. He'd been all over the sky at once. He'd flown alone into the thick of the Zeros, into what looked like certain death, and broken up their formation, and that was what had saved the day for us.

After that I knew everyone was convinced it was Dick, because nobody referred to the flyer any more.

We had been flying for about six months, and we still had more than half of our original crowd. The fight for Saipan was on, and we had thrown the enemy out of the sky. We had a succession of routine flights, protecting our bombers—though by now they could take care of themselves against any number of Zeros. We were coming in in force, and pushing them back.

The phantom flyer didn't put in an appearance during the month or two of routine duty that intervened, before the final Jap attempt. But by now other flights claimed to have seen him. He had become a legend all through the west end of the Pacific. Everyone knew somebody who had been saved by him, but nobody could bring the witness forward.

Mother had written me, telling me about Evelyn, and how she had received my letter, but Evelyn hadn't written, and I wondered whether she felt I had failed in my duty toward Dick.

I was due for a long furlough, and I needed one. I had grown stale, and I knew I was upon the verge of cracking. And then came the Japs' last attempt to smash us in the air.

I'VE got to hand those devils credit: they didn't wait to be attacked. They collected everything they had, and hurled it at us over Devo. We knew we were going forward to the new bases on Saipan shortly, and the Nips knew it too. They had an air armada of bombers and interceptors, and they threw it at us in the light of a full moon.

We had just time to get off the ground before they came over us, blasting our fields and hangars, bombers and interceptors all mixed up in a furious free for all. There wasn't any time for tactics or formations. We were just glad to be off the ground, with our guns spitting, and whirling like moths in the light of that huge, yellow, Pacific moon.

I zoomed into a bomber, and planted a burst of slugs into its vitals, and saw it sag and smoke, then burst into flames, and go scooting down. I remember the strange tricks that the night sky played on me. One moment I was haywire, shooting it out with half a dozen Nip planes, and the next, the sky was empty, and I was trying frantically to find a target.

And then a cloud dissolved into a dozen Zeros, and I was alone, and sending up an unvoiced prayer: "Dick! Where are you, Dick? Come and help me! This is your time!"

He came. Whirling into the moonlight, guns flaming, tracers shooting like meteors through the sky. One little Nip was riding me. He came so near, I could see him crouched over his controls, and we'd fired at each other so many times without a hit, it seemed I'd have to go on fighting him through all eternity. And then the phantom plane came shooting alongside, and I saw the Zero catch fire, and go hurtling down.

But Dick was going down too. Incredulous, I saw the ghost plane send out a great spire of smoke, saw Dick slump over, and begin to nose-dive.

Can you kill a ghost? Alone again, in that vast immensity of sky, I saw Dick go down, and I followed him in his drop. I thought he was going into the sea again, but the plane veered over the rim of tiny Peipo Island, crossed the reef of coral, and crashed at the edge of the jungle.

Five hundred feet above, I saw the smoke change to a bright sheet of flame, which slowly dimmed, and went out, leaving a black blob in the jungle. I circled, and flew back to our field. My gas was almost gone, and I just managed to make the landing.

Our planes were coming in. One by one we gathered in the operations office. And this time there wasn't any silence about the ghost plane. Everybody had seen it. It had appeared from nowhere, led the fight, and smashed the Nip attack.

THE OLD MAN listened. "I'm going to talk turkey to you boys," he said. "I don't believe in that ghost plane. It's a case of mass hysteria, hypnotism. By heavens, if I hear another word about it, I'll ground you all, and get a new crew!"

I said: "It happens to be true, sir. That flyer saved me for the third time, and he was shot down."

"What's that?" yelled the Old Man.

"He was shot down over Peipo Island, sir. I saw him go down in smoke, and crash at the edge of the jungle, then catch fire. I circled over that plane, and watched it burn out."

"Rubbish! I'm going to ground you, Dix. You've cracked—that's what's the trouble with you, you've cracked."

I could see that he was on the edge of cracking himself. He'd lost too many men to take it easily. I said:

"Before you ground me, sir, I'd venture to suggest that you let me take you to the spot on Peipo where that plane crashed. If it's not there, I'll know I ought to be grounded. If it is there—"

He must have seen the indecision in my eyes. He shouted: "Is there anybody else who claims to have seen this plane crash?"

Nobody answered, and then said: "There's your answer, Dix. You're due

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for a furlough, and, till then, I'm going to ground you," he added. "Take a week off, and think it over."

"Okay, sir," I answered. "But we could clear up the matter inside of an hour."

He glared at me, but this time I didn't waver. "Okay, Dix," he said. "You shall fly me over there tomorrow afternoon. If you can prove your case, I'll—eat my insignia."

IT WAS ONLY a few minutes' flight to Peipo, but those ten minutes were even harder to live through than the times I'd had the Nips riding my tail. If the whole thing had been delusion, I'd certainly cracked. But then, peering down through a gap in the clouds, I knew it hadn't been a delusion. There were the charred and twisted remnants of the plane, lying at the edge of the jungle.

There wasn't much landing space, but I made it, circled into the wind, and came down at the edge of the torn up field, within a hundred feet of the wreck. It was half hidden in the hole that it had punched out when it crashed, and was just a jumbled mass of metal, covered with dust from the ridge of coral it had uncovered.

Balanced upon the edge of the hole was what remained of the engine. But it was one of our engines, and one of our planes.

The Old Man stepped over, and looked down at the ruin. He grunted, turned, and beckoned to me. I went up, and I saw the fragments of a skeleton inside. It wasn't a nice, well-wired skeleton, such as they show you in museums and medical schools.

It was just a crushed heap of splintered bones, bleached white by the fire, and coated with a sifting of some black ash that must have represented the uniform. Only an anatomist, and a good one, could have told whether those bones had been the property of a white man, or of a Jap.

"You were half right, Dix," said the Old Man. "Under the circumstances, I'm withdrawing what I said about grounding you." He added, with a burst of

passion: "We lost six of our boys last night. Prove that this wasn't one of those six—prove it, Dix."

I was experiencing the same kind of blackout that Dick had gone through. But I couldn't make myself believe that this had been Dick—that he had survived the crash, and swum ashore to Peipo, and gone crazy, and started flying solo. We had been more than fifty miles from Peipo when Dick crashed.

Surely some fragment of identification might be lying somewhere in the vicinity of the wreck. I circled it—and then suddenly I saw something at the edge of the line of fire that had run out into the wet jungle and died out there. It was a small, brown, cylindrical object—and there were several more, scattered about. I picked up a handful of them, and went back to the Old Man.

He was striding up the field, working his way around the holes made by the Jap shells. He stopped beside a pit, turned and beckoned to me again. When I got up, I saw that the pit had originally been used for the storage of some of our gas. There were still about a dozen drums there, intact and uninjured.

"Now why the devil did you leave all this gas behind, when you transferred to Devo?" he asked. "That's a fine way to waste government property!" He went on, and I trailed him. Of course, I knew the answer now, but I knew it would be best to let him ferret things out for himself. We came to the ruins of what had been a shed with a concrete roof. As I'd expected, it was strewn with spare parts, and tools. And somebody had been using them. The tools were clean, and, on Peipo, steel rusts in a day, unless it's made with an alloy that we hadn't been having in those days. When it has the alloy, it just goes mouldy.

"You're a little more than half right, Dix," said the Old Man grudgingly. "The man who flew that plane had been living on Peipo, servicing it himself, using up government octane, and eating government stores that he must have uncovered. I'm going to run this thing down. If we could find his fox-hole—"

IT WAS both dark and dazzling in the ruined shed. The sunlight, streaming through the roof, cast bands of light and shadow over the floor, like a pineapple shed with a slatted roof. But I was beginning to see better. I walked around, and said: "Here's where he slept, sir, on these blankets. And here's a coat, hanging from this peg."

It was a white linen coat.

"I don't think we've got to look much further, sir," I said. And I handed him what I had picked up at the edge of the jungle.

They were long cigars, of the kind that is called stogies, or cheroots. "Know who smoked these?" I asked.

"Good Lord!" He understood, and the sight of them had hit him like a blow between the eyes.

He said: "I've seen enough, Dix. And, inasmuch as our visit here was unofficial, I don't believe I shall turn in any report. It's too crazy to be believed; it would make trouble for everybody. He must have swum ashore when that transport went down. Insane, of course. Yes, I remember he used to be a flyer in World War I. He must have been under a strain, Dix. Now he always seemed to me to be the sort of man who didn't know what emotional stress was. Damn it, he was a good doctor, and kind to his patients. Only he had that complex—"

But I could picture M'Kenzie, tortured all through the interval between the wars, feeling himself shamed and degraded, and working out that complex by imagining malingering in sick men.

Only I couldn't understand how he himself had cracked at the end, after the transport sunk. A destroyer had been quickly on the scene; he could have been picked up, if he had chosen to be.

It wasn't until I read the letter that I had taken from the pocket of his coat that I understood how M'Kenzie had cracked. Because that letter was from Evelyn. It was in reply to mine, which she hadn't answered, and she had written to M'Kenzie direct, telling him he was a coward and a murderer. And he'd set out to prove his cause—in his own crazed fashion.

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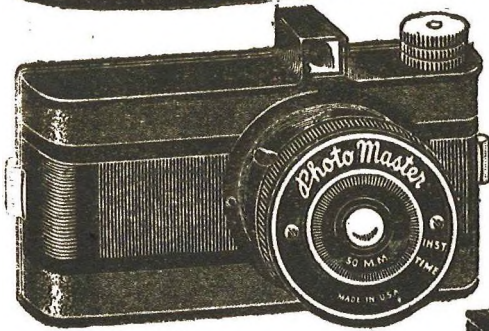
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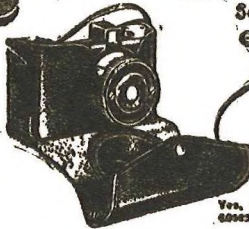
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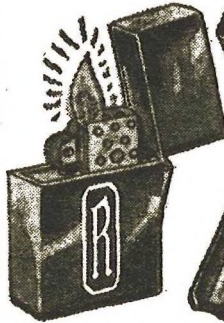
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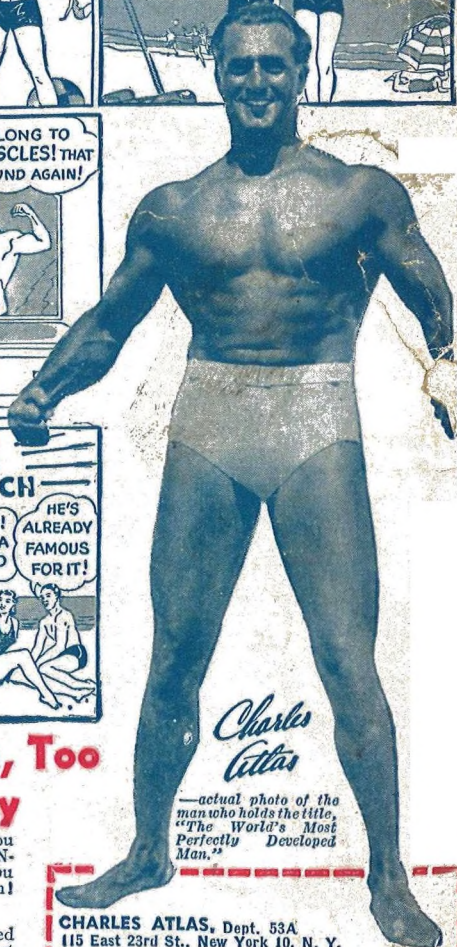
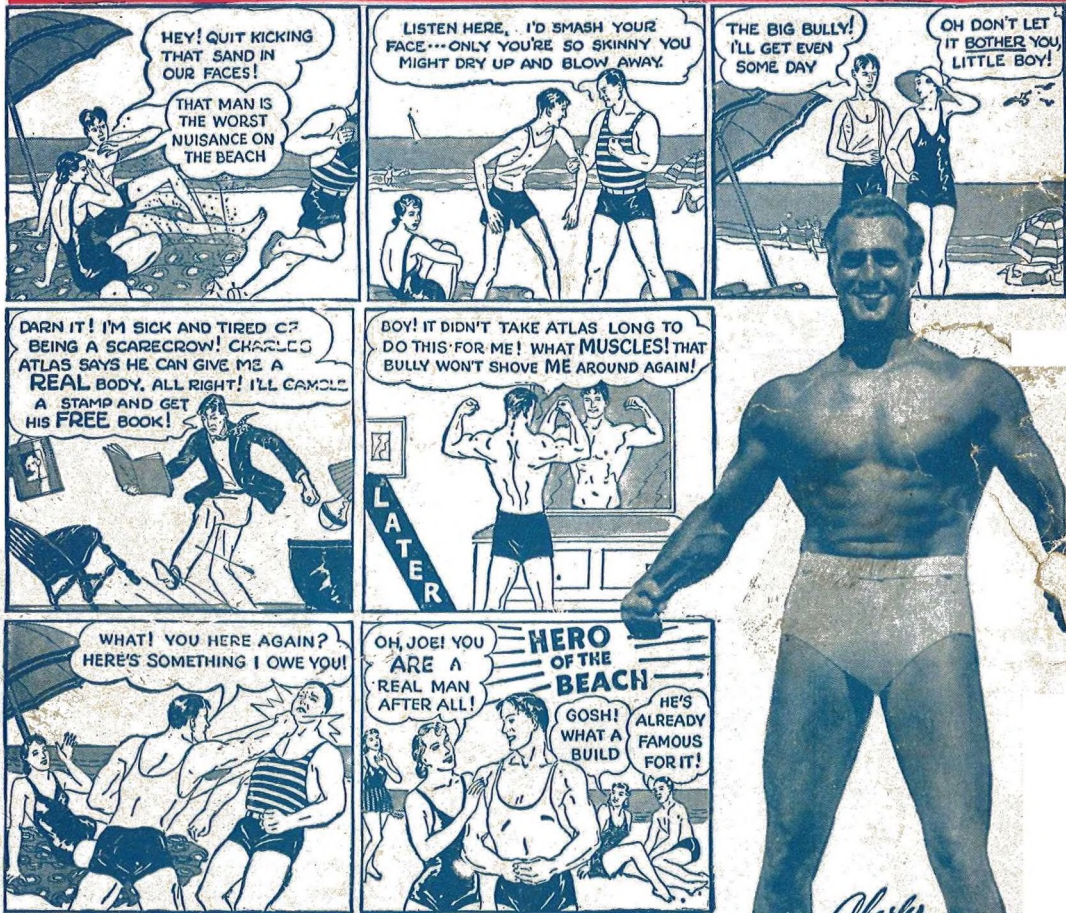


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