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ADVENTURES
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THE SCARLET KILLER
A Complete Book-Length Novel
BY
MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON
THE LEOPARD MAN
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THRILLING ADVENTURES
APRIL, 1932

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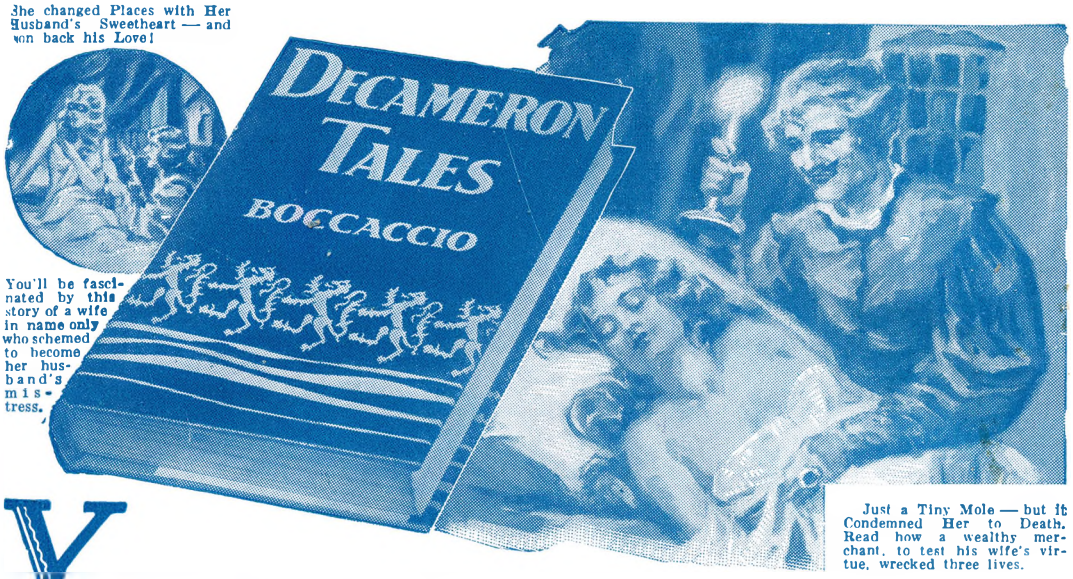

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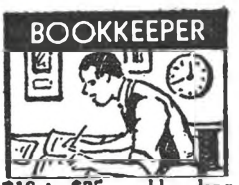

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THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. I, No. 4 J. S. WILLIAMS, *Editor* April, 1932

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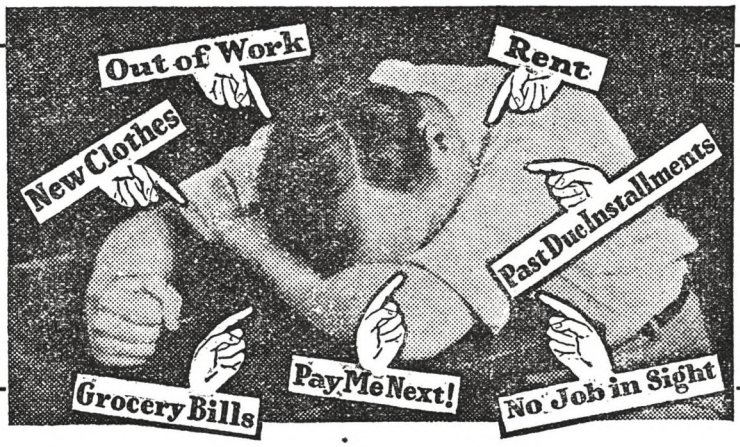

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The SCARLET

An American Engineer's Grim Conflict With Sinister Outlawed Forces in the Wastelands of Siberia

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

Author of "Guarded by Fire!" "The Corral of Death," etc.

CHAPTER I

The Thing in the Cabin

THE SHOT came as the leading man of the three horsemen was half-way down the slope. It cracked forth from some point about four hundred yards ahead, near the railroad tracks, and a sudden spurt of dust flicked itself against his horse's feet.

To go back was about as dangerous as to go forward—but he spied a small depression at the foot of the hill which might provide shelter. Beckoning to his companions to follow, the horseman in the lead, a young man in riding breeches and Norfolk jacket, drove his spurs into his mount.

The three of them slipped and slid down the steep declivity as another shot rang out. This one drilled a neat hole through the felt hat of the last man just as they reached the bottom of the hill where the narrow draw afforded a shelter of sorts.

KILLER

A Complete Book-Length Novel

Once under cover, the man in the rear, a red-faced, middle-aged man, examined his hat and swore wholeheartedly. The young man quickly leaped from his horse and climbed up the slope in front of him, peering over the edge.

"By God, they're Americans!" he exclaimed and rose up waving his hat. Another shot rang out and he ducked back under cover as a bullet thudded into a tree trunk on the hill behind him.

"What in blazes do they think they're tryin' to pull!" growled the red-faced man.

THE third man of the party, a young Cossack officer, dressed in a Cossack coat with silver mounted cartridge holders across his chest, shook his head.

"They are—how do you say eet? Nervous," he exclaimed. "It would be better to take care, for nervous men shoot quick."

THE blankety-blank recruits shootin' at anything that moves!" The red-faced man swore fluently as he proceeded to dismount and climb up the slope. Once arrived under the crest he cupped his hands and let forth an ear-piercing bellow.

"What the hell are you tryin' to do? you blankety-blank, splay-footed, ham strung gang of blankety-blank fools!" he roared.

The young man beside him saw a campaign hat lift itself from the mound near the railroad track. There was silence for a moment and then a voice hailed them from far off.

"Who in blazes are you?" it called.

Again, Gans, the red-faced man, bellowed forth, "This is Mr. Richard

Farnsworth, mining engineer and his assistant and an interpreter, going through the country by permission of the American military authorities at Vladivostok." His bellowing voice carried conviction for there came another hail, telling them to stand up and show themselves.

The three climbed up out of their shelter leading their horses.

"Okay!" called the voice, "C'mon in!"

As they approached the mound several soldiers in olive drab rose from behind shelter and a corporal came out to meet them, a rifle across his arm.

"Yeah, I know all that," he put up an admonitory hand as Gans began to upbraid him for the promiscuous shooting. Without paying further attention to Gans he turned to Farnsworth. "It's like this, sir," he explained, "we can't take no chances out here. We been shot up a couple of times already and we're expectin' to be rushed at any minnit."

While he was speaking he led them towards a small building near the tracks, a shack whose solid walls were made from railroad ties, the places evidently having been used formerly as a tool shed. It was now converted into a shelter for these doughboys, a squad of seven or eight men, one of those many small squads distributed along the Trans-Siberian Railway.

THE worried air of the corporal and the tense attitude of his men as well as the sentinels placed about the shack gave an impression of nervous watchfulness. The need for this was proved after they entered the shack, for a soldier lay there on a rough bunk, his leg bound up and a tourniquet applied to a wound in the thigh.

"We've had one man killed, one wounded and one captured already," explained the corporal.

"Who did this?" asked the newly arrived mining engineer.

The corporal shook his head.

BLAMED if I know, sir, some says it's a guy called Kargadoff, a Bolsheviki who hangs out back here in the woods somewhere with his gang."

Farnsworth and Gans glanced swiftly at each other.

"Kargadoff? Haf you said Kargadoff?" asked the Cossack officer.

"Yep, that's the name. What about him?"

"Oh, nothing . . ." the Cossack officer replied thoughtfully.

"It looks to me like a pretty badly exposed situation for a small outfit like yours," said the mining engineer gazing around the shack and out towards the railroad track.

"Yes, sir, it's worse than that," agreed the corporal. "It was bad enough before but now we got word this guy Kargadoff is sendin' a gang down here to rush us tonight or tomorrow. . . ."

"Where does Kargadoff hang out?" interrupted Farnsworth.

"Somewheres fifteen or sixteen miles back in the timber."

"What did you do with the body of the man who was killed?" asked the engineer.

"Shipped it into Vlady—into Vladivostok, sir."

"Who was the man that was captured and where is he now?" came the next question.

"It was Sergeant Collins. He was commandin' here. He went moochin' around down the tracks yesterday and a gang o' these here Bolshies slipped up on him and grabbed him. They got away on their horses before we could get a shot fired." The corporal scratched his head. "I dunno where he is now, if he's still livin'—but I got this letter this mornin', found tacked up on the door. It's in

Russiki and ain't no one here can read it." He brought forth a soiled letter written on cheap paper in flowing Russian script.

RICHARD FARNSWORTH looked it over and handed it to the Cossack officer standing by, who glanced through it.

"Thees is veree bad," he said, "eet iss letter from Kargadoff. And he hass captured Collins . . . and he also says that he iss going to poot Collins to death today in the evening—very painful, verree bad death, to teach Americans a lesson!"

The soldiers crowding about, listened to this with set faces and a low growl went up from them as the full import of the words sank in.

"This evening? He doesn't say what hour?" Farnsworth glanced at his wrist-watch. The Cossack officer, their guide and interpreter, shook his head. The soldiers looked hopefully at the engineer's stern face.

"Well," he said, "while there's life there's hope! We'll drag tail out of here and try to spoil Kargadoff's little scheme. How far did you say that place is where he is supposed to hang out?"

"'Bout sixteen miles, I dunno exactly, sir. One of these here Russki's, an old trapper that lives up the valley half a mile or so back in the timber told me he'd seen the place and knew where it was exact." The corporal paused and stared at the capable face of the man before him and the two men with him. "But Mister, you ain't aimin' to go after that fellow with jest the three of you, are you?"

"I'm looking for Kargadoff myself," exclaimed the engineer. "He's been playing fast and loose with a gold mine belonging to the big American corporation I represent."

"But Mister," expostulated the corporal, "that guy has a whale of a big gang with him. . . ."

"How many men do you suppose?" the engineer interrupted quickly.

"At least two hundred, Mister."

The engineer's face became gray. He stared reflectively at Gans, who shook his head and at Paul Semionovich, the young Cossack officer, who flung out his hands and shrugged his shoulders in the typical Russian gesture of negation.

"My chief didn't say anything about Kargadoff's having a couple of hundred men," said the engineer thoughtfully.

"Our chief wouldn't," grunted Gans sarcastically.

". . . but orders are orders," continued the engineer, "and besides we've only got 'til this evening to save Sergeant Collins from a pretty nasty death. I'm for going on. How about you, Gans? It's pretty risky and you don't have to go unless you want to."

"Sure I'm going with you," returned Gans in no very pleased tone and tightened up his belt as he spoke.

"And you, Paul?" the engineer looked inquiringly at the Cossack officer. Paul Semionovich shrugged his shoulders fatalistically.

"One man can onlee die one time. Sure I go."

"All right, that's that, then," announced the engineer. "The next question is how do we find this trapper who knows the way to Kargadoff's hangout?"

ALL you got to do is follow this trail leadin' up over the hill until you come to a road. The road goes past a little valley just a few yards after you strike it. This Russki lives in that valley. All the same Mister," the corporal shook his head, "you're walkin' into a pretty tough outfit. Couldn't a few of us go along with you?"

"No," returned the engineer, "as long as we're not in full strength the fewer that go the better. Let's be on

our way," and he strode out to his horse followed by his two companions.

THE soldiers of the detachment followed them out and watched them mount up in silence.

"So long," said the engineer.

"So long, sir," came a chorus from the men and the civilian received a last impression of set, grave faces and eyes that looked after him with something of commiseration in their depths.

There was not a man there who did not want to go on this hopeless expedition to attempt the rescue of Sergeant Collins but there was not a man there who did not firmly believe that those three horsemen riding away into the woods were going to certain death.

* * *

And for once in his life even Sergeant Collins, that ordinarily cheerful and optimistic soul could find no ray of hope in the gloom that surrounded him.

He was fairly young to be a sergeant, was Collins, but it was easy to understand how he had been made a non-commissioned officer when one saw the kindly but firm face and the steady eyes with the humorous quirk in the corners. Sergeant Collins was a non-com who got things done and made men like it. The infectious quality of his kindly grin took the sting out of any command he uttered and his men hurried to do his bidding, impelled by liking for the non-com rather than by any fear of the guardhouse. And somehow his men always turned out first in formation with the cleanest rifles and kit and the least amount of friction.

But Sergeant Collins thought of none of these things at the moment, he still cursed himself out for having let a gang of whiskery Bolshies sneak up on him and grab him. He had been hustled none too gently into a saddle and hurried through the forest some fifteen or sixteen miles to this lowly, rambling house deep in the woods where so many queer things went on.

The place in which he was confined was nothing to write home about, it being a narrow cell with walls of hewn logs and a single door heavily barred with iron and a single window with six stout bars across it. The place smelled abominably of former occupants but that was not the least of his troubles.

His captors had gone to great pains to inform him that this was his last day on earth. They had even gone to greater pains to hint to him concerning the uncomfortable method they had devised for terminating his earthly career.

The Slow Death, they had called it, and grinned maliciously as they tried to bring a quiver of fear into his set features. Whether by accident or design they had placed him in a cell whose window gave out upon a corner of a courtyard. In his range of vision there lay a pile of torn and mangled human bones and skulls thrown carelessly in a heap.

As he had gazed upon this with a faint, sickly feeling at the pit of his stomach two men had appeared with something in a blanket and tossed a fresh supply on the pile, these last bones still showing traces of blood and shreds of flesh. It was not a pleasant sight, being faintly reminiscent of the back yard of a butcher shop.

HOUR after hour passed but what time it was he had no means of telling, his captors having taken everything from him, including his watch. He must have dozed away when suddenly he sat bolt upright on the wooden cot. There was a tramp of feet coming towards his cell door. A swift picture of those torn and mangled human bones flashed through

his mind as the footsteps halted outside his door and a key sounded in the lock.

"Take your medicine like a man, kid," he whispered to himself as he rose to watch the door slowly opening.

* * *

THERE was little difficulty in following the trail that the corporal had pointed out to them and the three horsemen. Dick Farnsworth, Tom Gans and Paul Semionovich, rode with pistol holsters open, speaking in whispers when they spoke at all and watching out for any sign of the enemy.

They followed a dim trail through the woods, coming at last to the mouth of the valley where the friendly trapper and his cabin were supposed to be. After a careful look around, they decided to conceal their horses in the brush and to advance on foot up the valley.

Moving cautiously, they made their way beside a brook until at last they came in view of the place they sought, a small square dwelling built of hewn logs.

All was silent in the valley and there was a brooding sense of desolation around that dwelling that made Dick Farnsworth and the Russian pause before it, staring at each other inquiringly as Gans returned to bring up the horses.

The queer silence of the place affected both men in the same manner and their voices dropped to whispers as they stared at its single door and single window. A rusty axe and a chopping block stood in a sort of lean-to at one end and while at the other end a chimney made of field stone and clay, rose above the roof, which was fashioned of crudely split boards.

There were signs of recent occupation of the place. The pathway to the door was smooth. No grass had had time to spring up there. A wooden bucket beside the door was half filled with water. Whoever had lived there had not been absent very long.

Dick was the first to stride forward and knock on the door. As his knuckles rapped against the wood there came over him an instinctive feeling that there would be no reply. He sensed somehow that the place was deserted but could not for the life of him shake off that feeling of depression that the cabin exerted upon him.

After knocking again he tried the handle of the door. It gave easily to his touch and he pushed it inwards and stepped over the low threshold, bending his head to avoid the door jamb. At first he could see nothing except the vague outlines of a crude table and chair.

Glancing to the right he repressed a start as he saw a man seated in another chair before the fireplace. His first thought was that the fellow was asleep but some unnatural stillness and silence about the figure told him the truth in another flash of comprehension.

Whoever it was was dead. The two men gravely stepped inside and on to the hard packed earthen floor of the cabin, approaching the silent figure in the chair. As their eyes grew more accustomed to the dim light in the cabin they saw the body before them sagged against ropes which had bound it to the chair.

COMING around to the front of the figure Dick repressed a faint start of horror.

For the man's throat was cut from ear to ear. This detail was drowned in a fresh horror, however as they glanced at his bare legs. The legs stuck straight out into the fireplace. The feet were nearly charred away.

"Tortured first and then killed!" said Paul Semionovich in a level

voice, "that iss what this poor fellow earned for warning the Americans!"

"My God!" exclaimed Dick, his face white, "what beast has done this?"

"What beast hass done this?" Paul Semionovich laughed harshly, his face filled with bitterness, "there is only one man who iss capable of doing this!"

"And that is. . . .?"

"Kargadoff, him that men call The Scarlet Killer!"

CHAPTER II

Cossacks

"THE SCARLET KILLER?" repeated Dick in amazement, "but I thought that was only a local myth, that this name, The Scarlet Killer, was given to every unknown murderer and robber, and that the so-called Scarlet Killer was blamed for everything that happened!"

Paul Semionovich shook his head. "Does this look like a myth?" he pointed out at the crippled and burned body in the chair. "No, no, Dick, he iss real, very real, this Scarlet Killer. It is only now that we are near his lair."

Dick's reply was interrupted by the sound of voices outside and both men stared at each other in surprise as they went to the door and looked out. They saw Gans leading the three horses and beside him a soldier, leading a fourth horse. The two men were deep in animated conversation.

"Where the dickens did that bird come from?" asked Dick half to himself.

The question soon provided its own answer, however, for the new man left his horse with Sergeant Gans, stepped up to the doorway, bringing forth a long official envelope from his blouse and handing it over.

Dick broke open the thing and read the letter, his face growing grave and thoughtful and then refolded it, and stuffed it into his blouse pocket.

"Well, it looks as though things were going to get complicated," he stated to no one in particular. In the meanwhile Gans was tethering the horses and came up carrying the saddle bags.

"We've got a nasty mess in here, Tom," said Dick, and drew aside, pointing over his shoulder into the cabin. Gans strode in, and in a moment Dick heard him cursing fluently.

"Who done that?" he asked as he came to the door, and jerked his head back towards the dead man. Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," he said, "but Paul here says it's the work of a fellow they call The Scarlet Killer."

"Scarlet Killer! I'd like to scarlet him if I could lay my hands on him!" growled Tom Gans, "what kind of a brutal thug is he anyway to be pullin' stunts like this?"

Again Dick shrugged his shoulders. By now the soldier had attended to his own horse and had joined them. He also had entered the cabin and viewed the murdered man. He came out, his face white and his jaw set.

"You'll have to ask Paul here about the Scarlet Killer," repeated Dick, "but in the meantime let's bury this poor devil. Look around and see if you can find a shovel, Tom."

A SHOVEL was found and a hasty grave dug under a tree behind the cabin. Very tenderly they laid away the broken body of the poor devil who had come to such a horrible end for showing friendship to the Americans. A large white stone was put up to mark the burial place.

Not until this was finished did Dick Farnsworth announce his news. From his pocket he took the envelope that the soldier had just brought him.

"Tom," he said to Gans, "I've got orders here from our boss and from

the military authorities to return immediately to Vladivostock. If I don't return I am liable to lose my job and land knows what the army people will do to us for disobedience of orders. If I do obey the orders that soldier, Sergeant Collins, loses his life. To lose a job isn't very pleasant and we risk being jailed by the military. But I probably could survive it. On the other hand Sergeant Collins won't survive this Scarlet Killer's treatment if we go back. I'm for going ahead."

"YOU said it Dick," growled Tom Gans, "there's ways of fixin' bosses and crusty generals but there ain't no way of bringin' a dead man back to life!"

Dick Farnsworth glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Not much," the engineer shook his head and taking out his notebook unfolded two squares of paper, "let's see. It says we're to get through to Kargadoff at all costs and there is an Allied safe conduct by which we're authorized to call upon any Japanese or loyal Cossack forces to aid us if necessary. With it is an order in Russian from Ataman Kalmikoff, the Chief of the Ussuri Cossacks, requiring any of his subordinate commanders to assist us with their forces."

"Don't the letter say anything about where we are liable to run into this guy, Kargadoff?" asked Gans.

"VERY little," he admitted, "all it says is that he was last reported somewhere in this vicinity near a village called Petrovna. Do you know of any village by that name around here, Paul?"

The slim Cossack officer nodded.

"I know where sooch a village used to be. I think the Scarlet Killer, he hass kill everybody in that place. They are all verree mooch in fear of the Scarlet Killer, the peoples around here."

I can't say as I blame 'em much," grunted Tom Gans, jerking his head out at the newly made grave, "if that's a sample of the way he treats people."

"A very poor sample," said Paul in a quiet voice, "usually his victims don't leave that much trace."

"Well, we'd better pull out of here," said Dick decisively and rose from his place, then turning to the newly arrived soldier. "What's your name and what orders did you receive after delivering the letter?"

"Private Schneider, and I received orders to remain with you and to pitch in and help any way I could."

PACKS were adjusted and girths tightened and within a few minutes the small group mounted up and moved off down the valley to the main road, looking behind them for a last glimpse of that newly made grave.

They had not left that small valley more than five minutes behind them when the American soldiers, two of the men from the detachment under the corporal by the railroad, entered the clearing. The taller of the two halted as he came to the cabin.

"They been here all right but they're sure as hell gone now," and he pointed to the tracks leading down out of the valley towards the road.

"Ain't no chance of catchin' 'em now, we bein' on foot and them with a head start on horseback," the shorter soldier shook his head.

"It's too blame bad," commiserated the taller one, "they're liable to run into a heap of trouble if they meet up with that there Cossack outfit."

"Ain't it the truth?" agreed his friend.

"Well, there ain't much use of our hangin' around," said the taller of the two, "it ain't none too healthy in these parts," and the two men rose.

"Maybe they'll be comin' back this

way," said the other, frowning in thought. "Why not let's write out a message and tack it up on this here door? It maybe won't do much good but it's the best we can do."

THE other one nodded and brought out a stub of a pencil. Searching around in his pockets he found an envelope and carefully wrote out a message. This done the two pinned it to the door of the cabin with a sliver of wood and returned whence they had come.

The valley again grew silent and deserted, the freshly turned earth of the new grave already beginning to dry out in the sunshine. On the cabin door there was a small square of white paper.

"Mr. Farnsworth. Dear sir," it read, "we were trying to find you to pass on a message we just received from down the line. Look out for a Cossack officer named Nagoi, commanding some Cossack soldiers. He is a Bolsheviki spy trying to fool everybody. His own men don't know it. Don't take any chances with this guy if you meet up with him." It was signed, "John T. Hawkins, Private."

But no one came to read the message on the door and there was no sign of life about the place except an inquisitive squirrel who sat up on his hind legs and stared at the square of white paper as it flapped up and down in the breeze.

* * *

The warmth of the sun brought out the odor of pine balsam in the woods. The horses were fresh and moved out briskly as they rode two by two. Dick Farnsworth and the Cossack officer in the lead with Tom Gans and the soldier, Schneider, following.

Dick was very thoughtful but not too preoccupied to keep an eye out at front and flanks in watch for any possible enemy. Siberia was filled with marauding bands of lawless men of all shades of political opinion but all alike in that they were possessed of a desire to loot and slay.

The countryside was strangely deserted. There was no sound of a peasant's creaking cart nor of the ring of a woodsman's axe nor were there signs of any wayfarers along the road.

The four horsemen had been traveling about ten minutes when Gans, who had been riding in rear, edged his horse up alongside of Dick's and pointed backwards.

"Dick," he said, "I think there's someone follerin' us!"

Dick halted his horse and turned about, listening.

"I heard a horse whinney back there just a couple of minutes ago," amended Tom Gans.

Dick looked about him, glancing ahead to where the road turned. Saying nothing he moved his horse towards this, followed by the others. Once around the turn he dismounted and crept back on foot, peering through the tree trunks down at the length of road between them. For several minutes he saw nothing and was about to give up his vigil, thinking that Gans had grown over-imaginative, when some slight movement at the far end of the road caught his eye.

Beckoning the others a warning to be silent, he watched the road in rear. The slight movement grew more pronounced and as Dick continued to stare, a single horseman appeared in view, his hand over his eyes as he peered towards the concealed Americans.

HE was a burly looking fellow, dressed in peasant costume and carrying a rifle over his saddle and two bandoleers of ammunition across his shoulders. Another man in like costume rode out from behind and another and another until there were all of fifteen men in view. After a mo-

ment's colloquy they moved their horses out, coming towards the Americans.

"Bolsheviki!" whispered Gans, who had crept up beside Dick.

"Yes, they're Bolsheviki all right," returned Dick absently as he measured the distance between his own force and the approaching enemy. Then he suddenly galvanized into action and raced back towards his horse accompanied by Tom Gans.

"Paul, you hold the horses and stay mounted ready for a quick get-away," he ordered in a low tone. "Gans, you and Schneider get your rifles and I'll get mine!"

And he pulled his Mannheben sporting rifle from his boot, the rifle that he always carried in the hope of getting a shot at some game, and accompanied by Tom Gans who carried a Winchester 30-30 and by the soldier with his rifle, he hurried back to the turn of the road where the three threw themselves down just inside the cover of the trees.

The Bolsheviki by this time had advanced to within less than five hundred yards, and were in good battle sight range.

"Wait 'til I give the word," whispered Dick, "and then cut into them with rapid fire as fast as you can work the bolt!"

The three of them snuggled their rifles against their shoulders and lay tense and ready, fingers on triggers as the Bolsheviki broke into a trot and came rapidly towards them. The distance shortened to four hundred yards and then to three hundred.

"Now!" said Dick.

THE word had scarce left his mouth when the three rifles cracked forth like one weapon and they were firing into the midst of the clump of the startled Bolsheviki. It was rapid fire with a vengeance for those three Americans, trained shots, fired, ejected the empty shells and fired again with machine-like motions and the swift certainty of long habit.

THE bullets swarmed and stung in amongst the Bolsheviki like deadly hornets. Now three horses, now four were down, men sagged from the saddle. Suddenly the Bolsheviki broke and scattered into the woods on either side leaving several threshing horses upon the road and several dark huddled figures. Scarce had they disappeared into the woods when there came a shot from their direction followed by another and another while bullets smacked and thumped into the tree trunks around the Americans and bits of severed branches and leaves drifted down upon them.

They could not see their foe now. Dick whispered to his companions to stop shooting. Emboldened by the silence from the Americans the dismounted Bolsheviki began to show themselves as they came stealing along by the side of the road dodging from tree to tree, advancing slowly on foot and firing as they came.

"Let's tickle 'em up again," said Dick.

And aiming and sighting carefully he fired at one of the enemy just as the fellow was in the act of climbing over a fallen log. Gans got his man as well, another Bolsheviki who had appeared suddenly in an open glade not a hundred yards away.

This was getting too close for comfort but the Americans continued to fire until they heard the trample of hoofs far down the road in the rear of the enemy and saw the head of another column of Bolsheviki galloping to reinforce their foes. They lobbed a few shots into this just for luck and had the satisfaction of seeing these men in turn begin to dismount and scatter.

The enemy rifle fire deepened in volume. Dick figured out there must

be all of thirty or forty men against them by now.

"Time to beat it," he grunted. He rose swiftly and the three doubled back to their horses, swung into the saddles and continued on their way at full gallop.

Behind them the rifle fire suddenly ceased and the forest trees echoed to the yells of their enemies who had seen their precipitated flight. It was only a matter of seconds now until the Bolsheviki remounted their horses and followed.

With Dick in the lead, the little party of four men swept along the road urging their horses to faster and ever faster gait, Dick glancing behind occasionally.

Ahead of them the road wound across a meadow and went up over a hill. If they could make that hill top before the Bolsheviki burst out of the woods they could hold up the enemy again, as Dick well knew, and he spurred his horse to fresh efforts, striving desperately to cross that open space before the Bolsheviki arrived. They were half way across the meadow when Dick turned his head to the rear and listened to the yells of their pursuers still in the woods.

"Come on, we've got to make that hilltop!" he called to the rest of them.

THE four horses fairly flew across the intervening ground and swung up the hill. So steep was it that they began to labor at the ascent but their riders drove them on remorselessly. They were almost two-thirds of the way up the hill when a wild, exultant yell behind them forced Dick to jerk his head about and he saw their enemies breaking out of the woods at the far edge of the meadow.

A bullet sang viciously overhead, followed by another but the four swarmed up the last few yards and over the brow of the hill while the Bolsheviki were still not halfway across the meadow.

"Grab the horses, Paul!" panted Dick and threw himself off, followed by the other two riflemen. They flung themselves down just under the crest and began to pump bullets into that compact mob of Bolsheviki horsemen.

THE steady rifle fire came just in time and caught those exultant pursuers out in the open. A horse went down and two men rolled out of their saddles at the first volley. The Bolsheviki checked their horses on a sudden and streamed back towards the woods followed by the vengeful rifle bullets which kicked up the dust about them and brought down two more of their force before they found shelter amongst the trees.

Dick ceased firing and his example was followed by the others as first one rifle and then another began to bark at them from the edge of the woods across the meadow.

"We can hold them up here a few minutes," said Dick, "but now they know how few we are they'll come on pretty boldly."

The enemy rifle fire grew in volume and bullets began to sing through the air around them and thud into tree trunks.

"Wait 'til they show themselves," said Dick, "and we'll take another crack at them before we leave. I only hope they haven't got sense enough to send out a flanking detachment to circle out behind us while they hold us in front!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when Tom Gans pointed off to the left to where a sort of alley led into the woods. At the far end of this they caught a momentary glimpse of a clump of horsemen galloping at full speed out to the flank. Dick grunted and shook his head.

"They've got more sense than I gave them credit for," he said, "now we've got to watch our step for those babies will come galloping in and step on our tails."

Turning, he stared down the hill in the other direction. There lay a lot of open country ahead and Dick well knew that they would be in extreme danger of the Bolsheviki rifle fire once they left the shelter of this hill. Casting an occasional sharp glance out towards the left where he expected to see that flanking group of Bolsheviki appear any moment he placed a careful shot or two into the enemy in front when they showed signs of too great boldness and appeared in the meadow.

It was Tom Gans who first sighted the flanking force as it reappeared.

"Here they come!" he called, and pointed down the hillside to the left where the clump of horsemen were rapidly crossing a cleared space and circling around the base of the hill to catch them in the rear.

"Come on, let's beat it," called Dick, and streaked for his horse followed by the other two. They wasted no time in throwing themselves into the saddles and charged down the hill, desperately trying to reach the bottom before that flanking detachment of Bolsheviki could cut them off.

It was going to be nip and tuck whether they made it or not for even now the Bolsheviki had sighted them and were racing to be first at the bottom of the hill with an even chance of making it.

THE little group of fugitives was nearly half way down the hill now, the horses slipping and stumbling in the steep going. From this point Dick could see the countryside below, fields and woods and streams and another road about a quarter of a mile ahead, coming in from the left and joining the road upon which they were traveling.

As he stared at this a glint of steel caught his eye and he drew Gans' attention to it. A cloud of dust was coming rapidly along that lefthand road to join the main thoroughfare. Above the billowing dust clouds they saw the sparkle of sun on lance tips and the flash of scarlet lance pennons.

"Cossacks!" Dick called, "a whole *sotnia* of them!"

CHAPTER III

The Cossacks' Prisoner

THE Bolsheviki charging around the base of the hill had not yet seen the Cossacks and came on undeterred. With the new hope caused by the sight of these reinforcements, Dick and his men drove their horses to supreme efforts so that they literally tore down the last few hundred yards of the hill, galloping out on to the level just as the Bolsheviki burst through the woods behind them.

There were a few wild shots as their pursuers changed to the new direction but the little group of four rode low in the saddle sweeping along the road at full speed.

By now the *sotnia* of Cossacks, noting the cloud of dust and hearing the shots, had speeded up their gait and were hurrying towards the main road. The Bolsheviki sighted them at the same instant, and, checking their horses, they faced about and galloped back from whence they had come.

The group of four fugitives drew up in a cloud of dust as the Cossacks came jingling out of a side road and halted.

There were nearly a hundred of them, riding in column of threes, wearing the blue and gold of the Ussuri Cossacks, bearded men for the

most part, wearing shaggy black fur *papahkas,* and riding shaggy Cossack ponies. Above their heads the long, black lances reared aloft like a forest of slim saplings and the scarlet pennons whipped and snapped in the freshness of the morning breeze.

RIDING at the head of the *sotnia* was a *khorunji,* a Cossack lieutenant. He was an exceedingly beautifully built man, more than six feet tall but narrow-waisted and so lithely graceful that the breadth of his shoulders was disguised. He wore his Cossack uniform, the long, flowing coat with its silver and ivory tipped cartridge holders spread across his chest, with an assured grace and a seeming awareness of its picturesqueness.

His *khubanka* was of gray fur, perched jauntily on the side of his head. Slung at his waist was a beautifully and intricately bejeweled dagger and an ivory and gold-handled curved sabre. These with a revolver completed his armament.

He drew up his horse with a graceful gesture and his *sotnia* of Cossacks obediently halted behind him with much stamping of ponies' feet and a slow settling of dust clouds.

In a single swift glance, Dick judged him to be about thirty years of age or thereabouts. He was undoubtedly a man accustomed to command, carrying himself in an arrogant, swashbuckling sort of fashion. His handsome features were somewhat marred by the droop of his heavy underlip which added a tinge of beastliness to his face.

While the Cossacks stared back at the fleeing Bolsheviki this officer rode forward reining in his horse in front of Dick.

"Greetings!" he called in a loud, firm voice. "Whither are you bound and what means this mob back there?" and he pointed to where the Bolsheviki were disappearing over the hilltop.

It was Paul who made the reply explaining who Dick was and upon what mission he was bound while the Cossack officer looked them over. Dick spoke at last in his slow Russian, telling of the brush with the Bolsheviki and introducing himself to the Cossack officer. The man bowed deep in his saddle, saluting at the same time.

Bringing forth his orders and the letter signed by the Cossack chief, Ataman Kalmikoff, Dick handed them over. As the Cossack officer read this his eyes flared strangely for a second but again he bowed and handed back the missive.

"I am the *khorunji,* Nagoi, and I and my *sotnia* are at your orders," he announced.

"Fine," returned Dick. "We ran into you in the nick of time. And I'll have need of your services to reach this fellow Kargadoff. If you are ready to move out we can be on our way."

The Cossack officer, Nagoi, boomed out a command to his men and they came streaming out of the side road following behind the little group forming Dick's party.

"It is indeed strange that we should have met at this point," said Nagoi as he rode up on the left of Dick's horse, his spurs and silver sword slings jingling musically.

"For I also am seeking for this man, Kargadoff."

THAT'S very fortunate," agreed Dick, "do you know anything about where he can be found?"

"*Nyet,*" Nagoi shook his head, "God and the Saints alone know where to find such a character!" and the Cossack officer went on cursing the man they called the Scarlet Killer.

As the man talked, Dick cast an

occasional appraising side glance upon him, trying to form an estimate of his probable usefulness, but the man baffled him. There was so much that was fine about the forehead and the eyes and so much that was bestial about the mouth that the two parts of his face did not seem to belong to the same person. But, as he told himself, he was not there as a character analyst, but as a highly paid mining engineer sent out to secure an accounting of a valuable mine preempted by a Bolsheviki bandit.

"Have you any idea how many followers this fellow, Kargadoff, has?" asked Dick.

"Oh, I don't know," returned the Cossack, airily, "some say a hundred. Some say two hundred. He does not lack for men and horses, of that you can be sure. This is his country we are going through now."

Dick glanced ahead and to the flanks in worried fashion. His common sense rebelled at moving forward without at least a semblance of an advance and rear guard.

"Don't you think you'd better put out some patrols in front and rear in that case?" he asked.

"Assuredly, assuredly, if you wish it," returned the Cossack leader and barked out some orders in guttural Russian.

THREE Cossack soldiers immediately galloped up from the rear, lance pennons streaming, and flung out to the front. Another set of three men moved off to the right flank and still a third set to the left, while a small group dropped back further to the rear, so that the column moved forward like the shaft of a spear, the three patrols out in front forming the point and flanges. It was only then that Dick felt more secure.

"We have ridden far this morning," stated the Cossack officer, "and my men are in need of rest and food. There's a small village around the turn of the road where we can find shelter. Is it your wish that we halt for a time?"

"If we don't stop too long," returned Dick and explained the pressing need for speed in order to arrive in time to save Sergeant Collins' life. Nagoi received this information without any particular show of surprise but promised to hurry his men through their meal.

AS they came around the turn in the road Dick reined in his horse sharply and glanced at some dark object swinging from the outjutting branch of a large pine tree.

Two more trees, slightly beyond, bore the same strange fruit. Dick and his men came to a halt as they stared at those silent, swinging figures and he rode forward to examine the first and nearest.

The object hanging in the tree, swinging by the neck, was a bearded Russian *moujick*, a man of some fifty or sixty years of age, judging by his long white beard. He had been dead two or three hours, as nearly as Dick could judge.

Beyond this grizzly figure were two more. These had been younger men. In addition to having been hanged their bodies had been riddled by bullets and their feet and legs were scorched and their clothes half burned away by fires which still smouldered beneath them.

Dick stared at the sight with tense, set face.

"The Scarlet Killer!" whispered Paul Semionovich.

Turning, the American found that Nagoi had halted the *sotnia* and was staring not at the corpses, but at him with something faintly sardonic in the expression of his eyes. Dick moved away again as the Cossacks were set in motion and they rode

on leaving those three figures to sway in the breeze.

ANOTHER turn in the road brought them to a small clearing where stood five or six deserted log *izbas*.

Here Dick and his men dismounted. The Cossacks opened out and leaped from the saddles, stacking their lances and drawing their horses on to the grass of the meadow where they unloosened bits and allowed them to graze.

As the Cossacks spread out in column and Dick saw the end of the command, he discovered for the first time that there was a prisoner in the *sotnia*.

From where he stood it seemed to be a slim youth in peasant blouse and boots and baggy breeches, all of them of generous proportions for the slimness of the youthful figure. The young fellow had his hands bound and another rope passed around his elbows, the end of which was held by one of the Cossack soldiers who rode at his side.

The prisoner was very pale and Dick felt a twinge of pity go through him as he saw the evidences of grief on the youth's rather fine features. He promptly registered a resolution to look into this matter when opportunity offered, for he had little confidence in the justice of the Cossacks.

Fires were built about the meadow and pots of water were put on for the preparation of the inevitable Russian tea. The Cossacks laughed and sang and Dick watched them at their labors.

They were Cossacks of the Ussuri, all of them, and, in keeping with their custom, they had probably all had Mongolian foster mothers who fed them their chestnut meal and mare's milk from wooden bowls cut from the beech wood on the slopes of the sacred Wtai Shan, bowls lined with silver beaten from dollars which had been minted in Mexico and carried across the Pacific to the ports of China.

Their features in many cases were Mongoloid and Dick could visualize them as having descended from those reckless warriors in black enameled armour who had swarmed out of the highlands of Asia to devastate Persia and Europe.

But his musings were interrupted by Tom Gans' voice:

"Dick, you'd ought to see the rifles them birds carries! They're so dirty that they stink! I never see such rifles! And if any of these babies has had a bath in the last ten years I'll eat my hat!" Strong disgust and the utmost repugnance shone forth from Gans' scandalized eyes.

The sight of that prisoner again glimpsed sitting forlornly on the log step of one of the houses brought back Dick's resolution to him and he quietly strolled down in that direction. On the way he met Paul Semionovich whose face looked rather worried.

Paul stepped up to him and glanced about before speaking.

"Meestair Farnsworth, be on your *guard with that Cossack khorunji*, Nagoi. He is very queer man. There iss something strange about him. Mind what I tell you, don't trust him too far!"

"Oh, he's all right, I guess," returned Dick.

HE noticed out of the corner of his eyes that the prisoner had dropped his head in his arms and was shaking with sobs. Certainly this must be looked into. Excusing himself to Paul, he kept on his way, coming up at last in the rear of the weeping youth. Then he stood stock still, rooted to the spot, puzzled.

For that sound of sobbing certainly did not come from a man.

It was a girl who sat there, her slim shoulders shaken with her weeping.

CHAPTER IV

Rifle Fire from the Forest

FROM where he stood, Dick could see Cossacks busied about their fires. Others of them were tending to the horses and a small group near at hand examined with immense curiosity the American saddles on the horses of the Americans.

Of the *khorunji,* Nagoi, he could see nothing and wondered where he might be but *khorunji* or no *khorunji* he meant to find out what this girl was doing here as a prisoner.

Striding forward, he touched her gently on the shoulder. She looked up, startled, an immense fear in her eyes, and stared at him like some trapped animal. She was exceedingly beautiful in spite of her disordered hair and her tear-stained face.

"I heard you weeping," said Dick, "and I came to find out what your trouble is," he spoke in halting Russian, but the girl replied in English, speaking with scarcely a trace of accent in an extremely clear and musical voice.

"You are an American, yes?" and a wild hope dawned in her eyes, "Oh, maybe you can help me. Please, please help me. It is terrible this—I cannot stand it—if only I could kill myself—" she broke forth incoherently.

"Steady now, steady," said Dick soothingly, "I'm here to help you if you'll only tell me. How do you happen to be a prisoner with these Cossacks?"

"How do I happen? I do not happen! They have stolen me, it is, how do you say in English—robbery and abduction in broad daylight—"

Dick looked startled. He had heard of such things in this unfortunate country, but this was the first time that he had had proof of it.

"Abducted you—in broad daylight—from where?" he asked.

"From Khabarovsk where my father is an ancient professor of the Petrograd School of Music. It was when I was on the outskirts of the town."

She looked about her fearfully. "I was visiting another girl and the Cossacks rode by. It was Nagoi who saw me and called out to his men and they have put me in these clothes and are carrying me to Kargadoff!"

"To Boris Kargadoff!" exclaimed Dick in surprise.

"Yes. To him that men call The Scarlet Killer. He pays much money for girls, two thousand rubles in gold," she went on very calmly.

"Do you mean to say Nagoi is taking you to sell you to Kargadoff, The Scarlet Killer!" Amazement and disbelief were in Dick's voice.

"But surely," she replied, slightly surprised, "many girls have been taken from the villages and from Khabarovsk and Blagavostchensk. There is much money to be made."

"But my God, this is terrible!" Dick's mind was slow to grasp the full truth of the matter but as it dawned upon him his face settled into angry lines. "Well, you are one girl that won't be sold to Kargadoff!" he growled.

I SEE you are interested in our prisoner," a voice came from beside him, and he turned to find Nagoi behind him, lounging gracefully with his arrogant head to one side and with a half smile on his face.

"I see you're interested in our little captive," he repeated, "she is a terrible little Bolsheviki, this Nadina Alexandrovna, and a spy of the worst," went on Nagoi smoothly as Dick eyed him. There was something

about the harsh glitter of Dick's eyes that caused Nagoi's own to flicker but he recovered and went on, talking smoothly. "It is very unfortunate that we have to take her prisoner but in these dangerous times everyone must suffer the consequences of their own acts, be they man or woman."

THE girl had cowered down during this speech, gazing at him in dread but as he continued talking her indignation blazed forth.

"You lie! You horrible man!" she blazed. "There is no truth in you. I dare you to take me back to Khabarovsk to my father and my friends and prove that I am a Bolsheviki!"

Nagoi shrugged his shoulders.

"There is little truth in women," he said lightly, "and the least of all this one—"

Dick found his voice at last and interrupted him.

"All the same, *Khorunji* Nagoi, I can't countenance having this girl dragged along as a prisoner on this expedition. Whether she is innocent or guilty she is entitled to a hearing and it is a shameful thing to handle a woman in this fashion," Dick's voice was calm. A calmness that was mild enough and so quiet and self-contained that it deceived Nagoi, who stiffened up and thrust out an arrogant chin.

"Yes, my friend, your ideas are very interesting, I am sure, but just what do you intend doing about it? It seems to me that I hold the upper hand," and he glanced around at his Cossacks which filled the meadow.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do about it, *Khorunji* Nagoi," Dick's voice came with a ring of anger in it, "I'm going to unbind this girl and take her under the protection of myself and my men until we return to Khabarovsk!"

Dick stared steadily into the eyes of Nagoi. A battle of wills went on at that moment, a wordless battle in which the will of the American at last triumphed for Nagoi's eyes dropped and he turned away with a careless shrug of his shoulders.

"*Nitchevo,* have it your own way," he flung over his shoulder. "We will settle the matter later."

There was a mocking note to his voice as he swaggered towards the road where a Cossack orderly had spread a cloth and laid out a bottle of vodka, some *tchorni kleb,* the Russian black bread, with some cucumbers and salt and a steaming glass of tea.

Suiting his action to his words, Dick drew forth his pocket knife, opened the blade and cut the ropes that still held the girl's elbows in durance. The severed ropes dropped away and the girl rose, a grateful flush overspreading her face and her eyes shining with gratitude. She looked down at her ankles and Dick saw that they were tied and cut the rope in the same manner.

"Come," he said to her.

He led her through the groups of Cossacks towards the upper end of the bivouac where Tom Gans, Schneider and Paul were gathered in a little group. Out of the tail of his eye he saw Nagoi, who was in the act of drinking a cup of vodka, arrest the vessel half way to his mouth and stare at Dick sardonically. A silence fell over the Cossacks who watched their erstwhile prisoner being led away by the American.

They gazed curiously from Dick and the girl to Nagoi who sat there squatting by his lunch cloth, smiling to himself.

TOM GANS looked up startled and none too pleased as Dick brought the girl into their midst.

"A woman, by gum! Here's where the trouble starts! Never knew it to

fail yet!" grumbled Gans, but in so low a tone that none heard him but Schneider. Schneider, on the contrary, straightened out his blouse and slicked an errant whisp of hair with the palm of his hand. Schneider's maneuver was not lost on Tom Gans.

"There you go, tryin' to get yourself up to look halfway human just because a skirt blows into camp. You better change that face of your'n if you want to live up to the title of good lookin'," advised Gans, heavily sarcastic, "but all the same don't let that skirt get your mind off your job!"

"She ain't wearin' no skirt," objected Schneider mildly, but Dick was explaining the presence of the girl in their midst, winding up his explanation by turning her over to Gans' care.

Tom Gans' face was a study in mixed expression and Schneider had the lack of grace to giggle at the older man's predicament. But orders are orders, and Gans, in a voice that he strove to render polite, started operations immediately by asking the girl if she had had her "chow". When the meaning of the word "chow" was explained to her, she admitted that she hadn't and Tom bestirred himself to supply some food.

In the meantime Dick sent Paul after the horse she had ridden and it was brought up as the Cossacks began to make preparations to resume the march. They packed up their saddles, put the bridles on their horses and started to line up in column on the road.

DICK'S group followed their example. He was in the saddle and the girl had mounted her horse as Nagoi rode up to the head of the column and shouted some command in Russian which had the effect of accelerating his men into sudden activity as they grasped lances and flung themselves on their horses.

NEARLY everyone was mounted at last and Dick had started to move out to the head of the column when a single rifle barked from far back in the rear of the column somewhere.

Nagoi's reaction was instantaneous. He shouted forth a single command and the long column of Cossacks split down the center and cleared the road instantly as Nagoi galloped towards the rear. Dick followed along after him to see what this might portend but as they reached the end of the column of Cossacks, Nagoi waved him back and rode on around the turn of the road out of sight.

It seemed a foolhardy thing to do. Dick was in two minds whether to follow or not but finally he decided to trail along and see what was taking place.

Rounding the turn, he drew his horse to a halt and stared in puzzled fashion down the road. Some sixty or seventy yards away Nagoi sat his horse, talking to a group of nondescript looking Russians, the very same Bolsheviki who had pursued Dick and his party so short a time before.

Nagoi was in animated conversation with these fellows but Dick was too far away to make out what it was all about. Had he been able to hear the conversation he would have found plenty of food for thought.

For Nagoi had galloped up to the startled Bolsheviki very arrogantly. The Bolsheviki, with rifles leveled, had quickly surrounded him but he sat there calm and indifferent, asking for their leader.

There came at last a thick shouldered Russian with a great red beard.

"Who are you?" asked Nagoi in that same arrogant tone.

The red bearded Russian drew himself up with a grandiloquent gesture.

"I am the commissar Ivan Smelkov, commander of the Third Partisan Band of the Communist Interior Defense. And who may you be?" he glared truculently.

"Look at me, Smelkov, don't you know who I am?"

NAGOI was serenely indifferent to the rifles leveled at him. The red bearded leader stared from him to his men. One amongst them whispered something to him. The word ran around like wild-fire, the rifles were lowered.

"By God, it is Nagoi himself!" the whisper went around.

"Aye, it is Nagoi himself," returned the Cossack officer heavily sarcastic, "and what are you fools trying to do? Are you trying to ruin my careful plans?"

The red bearded leader called Smelkov looked uncomfortable.

"No, Comrade, no," he protested, "I am but leading this group of comrades to join Boris Kargadoff—"

"Yes?" Nagoi's voice was still charged with sarcasm, "and I am leading this stupid bunch of Cossacks *and* some even more stupid American prisoners to the same place."

Murmurs of astonishment rose from the encircling mob of Bolsheviki.

"But aren't you in great danger, Comrade Nagoi?" asked the red bearded Smelkov, "don't you need our aid to disarm the Cossacks?"

"I need nothing," retorted Nagoi flatly, "all that is arranged. Not two *versts* from here Boris Kargadoff has set an ambush. I am leading these silly sheep into it without a suspicion entering their heads. You make it your business to stay out of sight and don't run the risk of spoiling things with your stupidity. Even now one of the Americans is watching me. Quickly! as I start back, pretend that you are attacking and as I ride down the road fire some shots in the air!"

Thus it was that Dick Farnsworth, watching from the edge of the trees by the turn of the road, saw Nagoi suddenly whirl his horse about in what seemed to be a milling mob of attacking Bolsheviki, saw him gallop as if for life back along the road pursued by the hoarse shouts of his assailants and by wild rifle fire.

In a second Nagoi was up level with him and Dick was galloping alongside as they rode back to the *sotnia*.

"It was no use," said Nagoi, shrugging his shoulders, "I went back to parley with them and to try to win their friendship but they are bad men. Hurry, we must ride on!"

And with this Dick had to be content although the whole scene had puzzled him and made him vaguely worried, he knew not why.

CHAPTER V

Doubts!

NAGOI reassembled his *sotnia* and in another minute they were on the march again, the Cossacks themselves silent and a little puzzled by the actions of their commander. Nagoi was conscious of this and to allay any suspicions they might have had and to divert their minds, he ordered them to sing. Obedient, the long column of mounted men broke into song, their voices crashing through the woods and startling the birds and rabbits.

As beautiful and melodious as the song was, Dick and Tom Gans were none too pleased with it.

"Anybody layin' in wait for this outfit could here us comin' a mile away," grunted Gans in disgust.

Dick could not help but agree with him. It seemed queer to the American, somehow, that the Cossack

leader should deliberately advertise the presence of his men while going through heavily wooded country thoroughly infested with the enemy. Shrugging his shoulders, Dick put it down to Russian carelessness and let it go at that.

But it was not long until he noted that again Nagoi was neglecting to put out his advance and rear guard, a failure that might easily end in defeat and death for the entire outfit. This lack was one that surprised Dick somewhat for the Cossacks had always been noted for the skill and care with which they protected themselves on the march and in camp.

He noted that Nagoi was moving forward at greater speed now, glancing occasionally at the sun and seeming anxious to get forward, much like a man in danger of being late at some rendezvous. Dick began to wonder what might be the occasion for the increased speed.

Studying Nagoi he found the Cossack leader showing signs of suppressed excitement and impatience, complicated by a worried air that came over him as he glanced back at his troopers riding, three by three, in the long column behind him.

Dick was of no mind to have the march delayed by a surprise attack, and leaning over, spoke to Nagoi about the lack of any advance guard. Nagoi raised his head sharply as though to make an insolent retort. The words were almost on his lips when, evidently, he thought better of it.

WITHOUT making any reply to the American, he barked out a few brusque orders to the nearest Cossack troopers and they obediently moved out as a small advance guard.

Dick glanced at his watch, noting that several hours had passed since he had started on this expedition. He dreaded to think what might be happening to Sergeant Collins and resolutely put the matter out of his mind, trusting that somehow he would arrive in time to save the life of the American soldier.

GLANCING from time to time at Nagoi he noted that the Cossack *khorunji* was staring to the front, peering at each turn in the road and each hill which rose before them. It was the first time on the march that Nagoi had betrayed any interest in the road ahead and the possible danger that might lie on their route.

Dick began to puzzle over his sudden interest of the Cossack officer. Finally he decided that Nagoi had begun to realize that they were getting nearer the lair of the Scarlet Killer and was taking correspondingly more precautions.

No suspicion of the real reason came to Dick's mind—nor did it occur to him that Nagoi might be leading him and his companions and the Cossack *sotnia* itself, into a trap.

Strive as he might, Dick could not keep the thought of Sergeant Collins from returning to plague him. Even now, he reasoned, the unfortunate American soldier might be writhing under the tortures inflicted by the Scarlet Killer. It was not a pleasant thought, and he strove to drive it from his mind and to keep his thoughts on the problems at hand.

Looking up suddenly, he caught Nagoi's glance bent upon him. It was just a flash of a second but in that time, before the Cossack averted his head, there came to Dick the impression of malicious triumph, a sinister gloating expression in Nagoi's eyes that sent a chill of danger and foreboding through the American engineer.

So powerful was the impression of evil that Dick glanced around hastily, almost fearful of a descending blow. But Gans rode unper-

turbed at his side, behind him rode Paul and Nadina, the Russian girl while the long column of Cossacks wound along in rear. Glancing ahead at the country through which they were passing, Dick noted that they had left the heavier woods and were now marching through a series of forest bordered meadows, interspersed with clumps of trees here and there.

The road wound and twisted away ahead of them, losing itself between two low lying hills, thinly wooded but covered with a heavy growth of underbrush. Dick's subconscious mind, the mind of a trained engineer, skilled at observing terrain, noted that those two hills flanking the road would be an excellent place for an enemy ambush but his common sense scouted any idea of an enemy ambush at this place and time. Moreover, he credited Nagoi with knowing something of his business as a cavalry leader.

The feeling of danger wore off. Following Nagoi, he continued to move forward, approaching nearer and nearer those two low-lying hills which crouched like two predatory animals on both sides of the road ahead.

TO Sergeant Collins, standing in his tiny cell, watching that door slowly open, it seemed that there was little hope left. All the sinister stories he had heard of this Scarlet Killer and his men and the bestial things that happened in this out of the way place, came to plague him as he waited the entry of his captors.

There flashed through his mind the picture of that torn and mangled pile of human bones and skulls thrown carelessly in a heap in the courtyard outside his prison. By what means those poor devils had perished he could not figure but there came to him again that expression that his captors had used, the slow Death.

WHO and what the slow Death was he could not reason out but there was plenty of proof that its effects were certain, as evidenced by that pile of human bones, some of them with the shreds of human flesh and gristle still upon them.

As the doorway widened he caught the glint of bayonets, poorly kept and rusted, as his professional eye noted, but nevertheless sharp at the tip and capable of inflicting an ugly wound. Behind them were three husky bearded men in Russian peasant boots and baggy breeches and loose blouse criss-crossed with bandoliers of ammunition.

The three gazed at him in dead-eyed and dispassionate fashion, saying nothing but beckoning him on out of the cell. And Sergeant Collins marched out, head held high and face composed. His three guards fell in before and behind him.

It was then that he noticed the presence of a fourth man, a shambling, long armed creature who looked scarcely human as he edged up to the group, sidling sideways like a crab. Collins felt a faint wave of nausea go through him as the fellow looked him over appraisingly with dead, lack lustre eyes that yet contained something aloof, incurious and inhuman in their cold depths.

They were eyes that had never warmed to pity nor kindliness, they were eyes that could look unmoved upon suffering and agony—they were the eyes of a killer, as pitiless as the eyes of a cobra.

For the first time a faint chill came over Collins and he felt his courage ebbing as this creature stared at him, looking him over as a butcher might look over the beef about to enter the slaughter pen.

His captors led him across the

courtyard, directly past that grisly pile of human bones and skulls. At sight of these he turned his head. At the motion of disgust one of his captors nudged him with his elbow and pointed at the bone pile, thereafter pointing at Collins and back to the bone pile again in suggestive and unmistakable threat. It took all of the American's courage to keep his face from showing his horror and disgust.

THEIR way now led them past the rear of the main house, a long rambling structure, through a shed where were tethered many horses and finally to the entrance of a long, low, building that looked like some sort of blacksmith or tool shop. There were several guards lounging about the door and they eyed Collins in the same dispassionate fashion as had the others.

His own guards halted here while the strange shambling creature with the deadly eyes, who had accompanied them, slid on into the interior of the building. Minute after minute dragged by as Collins waited. From inside came the sound of a scuffle and a blow. It was followed by a yell of fear and protest in a man's voice.

Suddenly the yell of fear rose to an agonized scream of pain which quivered through the air and rang like a knell in Collin's soul. It quavered and died down in a queer, animal, gurgling noise only to rise again in another scream even more heart-rending than the last. Then came the sound of groans of pain and anguish and the stumbling echo of footsteps.

Men gave back before the door and two guards appeared, supporting between them the figure of a young man in Russian peasant dress, whose head was sunk on his chest in strange fashion and whose arms were raised over his face. The man staggered and nearly fell.

The guards roughly jerked him up again and led him past Collins, half carrying him. Just as the stumbling figure came opposite him, the unfortunate man dropped his arms. Collins recoiled in horror and a gasp went up from him as he stared.

For the man's eyes had just been burned out and the hollow sockets gazed unseeing into space.

Collins' backward step brought him up against the bayonet of one of his guards. The fellow shoved him forward roughly.

"You next," he said in broken English, "first eyes out—then slow Death!"

Not until then did the full horror of what was intended strike Collins with sickening force. These fiends, not content with killing their victims, first burned out their eyes and then sent them in to face some unknown and lingering death in the darkness of total blindness!

He drew a deep breath, resolving to die fighting here and now rather than be subjected to the fate of the preceding victim. He half turned, ready to lash out at his guards when suddenly he found himself surrounded with a ring of steel bayonets.

The other guards had come to reinforce the three who had him in charge. Their bayonets pricked at him. Slowly and inexorably he was forced towards the door. Inside he saw the light of a fire and a shadowy figure blowing upon some glowing metal.

HIS elbows were grasped in powerful hands. He was hurried forward to where a chair was placed near the brazier. Into this chair he was forced and held into place by powerful hands.

The shambling, inhuman creature with the lack lustre eyes picked up

an iron from the brazier, an iron that glowed at cherry red heat. With this in his hand he advanced upon the helpless prisoner seated in the chair.

* * *

Strive as he might Dick, riding along behind Nagoi, could not keep his mind free from worry about those two low-lying hills in front. Had he been in command he would never have approached them without careful reconnoissance and every instinct within him revolted at exposing men to danger without taking precautions.

Strange suspicions began to form in his mind. There was that matter of Nadina's statement, her calm assertion that Nagoi was taking her captive to sell to the Scarlet Killer. If she was telling the truth, then some sort of relations must exist between this Nagoi and the Scarlet Killer, Boris Kargadoff. And if these two were in collusion, it spelled danger for Dick and his party.

Looking back at the column of Cossacks behind him, Dick felt that his fears must be exaggerated for their broad, not overly intelligent faces showed no trace of guile nor deceit. If Nagoi were a traitor to the Americans, then how could he be in command of these Cossacks who were plainly Cossacks of the Ussuri, allied with the Japanese and Americans here in Siberia?

IT was all too preposterous and Dick chided himself for being over imaginative. And yet—he looked long and carefully at those two hills ahead. What worried him the most was the fact that the men of the advance guard, sent out grudgingly at his insistence, were too close to the main body, being scarcely a hundred and fifty yards out on the front and flanks. This meant, of course, that the advance guard was valueless, for both advance guard and main body would come under rifle simultaneously.

WITHOUT wasting words, he told Nagoi of this, pointing out the danger. Nagoi shrugged his shoulders in annoyed fashion and called out to a man in rear, giving him some instructions. The Cossack soldier went ahead at the trot, making slow progress in catching up with the scouts in front.

Meanwhile the *sotnia* was approaching nearer and nearer that dangerous point with every minute. Dick at first put aside his suspicion of those two low hills as being the product of overwrought nerves but saner thought convinced him that it was just plain common sense.

Peering intently ahead along the road his eyes swept over the two hills and suddenly he stiffened in his saddle.

"We're running into a trap, Nagoi," he said sharply, "we'll be under fire in five minutes. Look at those hills ahead. There's an armed force ambushed there waiting for us!"

"My friend, you are over timorous," smiled Nagoi, lightly, as he turned and looked at Dick. But Dick saw that tell-tale shift in his eyes and strong suspicion suddenly seized him.

"Nagoi!" he said in quick, biting words, "you're running us all into danger. I don't know if you know your business as an officer or not but you're not going to lead me into that trap. Halt your *sotnia* at the side of the road here, under shelter until the scouts ride forward and report on what is on the road ahead."

"As you say," Nagoi again shrugged his shoulders, then his tone grew scornful. "If you are so very timorous, I, myself, will ride forward and come back and tell you what is there, if anything!"

There was a flicker of studied and deliberate contempt in Nagoi's face and voice as he said this. But if he hoped to move Dick from his purpose he was mistaken.

"Good idea, Nagoi," returned the American, grimly, "I'll remain here with the *sotnia* until you report back."

With an ironical salute, Nagoi set spurs to his horse and galloped alone up the road.

Watching him, Dick waved the *sotnia* to the side of the highway where trees provided cover.

He himself moved out in to the open, where he watched Nagoi sweeping along the road at the gallop and catching up finally with the three Cossacks who acted as point. But Nagoi left these men behind and went on alone, leaving Dick to admire the fellow's courage. But, quietly and unobtrusively, a slow doubt began to creep into Dick's mind.

Was it courage? Perhaps Nagoi had an understanding with the leader of that force ahead, if a force there was. Dick swung his field glass case around and drew forth his powerful binoculars, focussing them on the two hills that crouched there over the road like two animals tense and waiting and ready to spring.

Under the powerful lenses of the binoculars, the hill and the road with Nagoi galloping along it, leaped into startling distinctness. The glint of steel amidst the underbrush that Dick thought he had seen with the naked eye, was certainly evident. Through his glasses he saw dim figures crouched in the underbrush, rifles at the ready.

LOWERING his glasses a trifle he picked up Nagoi's figure galloping along, giving easily to the motion of his horse. As Dick watched, expecting to see Nagoi riddled with bullets any second, the *khorunji* galloped between the two hills and halted his horse, gazing about him. Through his glasses Dick saw crouching figures not two yards on either side of where Nagoi stood. The Cossack leader could not help but see them.

Dick waited with bated breath to see what the *khorunji* would do. But Nagoi seemed absolutely oblivious of the crouching figures almost at his horse's feet.

Turning about in the saddle he waved back towards the *sotnia,* signalling them to come forward into that treacherous ambuscade!

CHAPTER VI

Charge!

THERE was no doubt now in Dick's mind that Nagoi was deliberately trying to lead him into a trap. The Cossacks were already climbing into their saddles again behind him, preparatory to moving out in obedience to the signal of their *khorunji.* They were all mounted and looking at Dick questioningly where he stood out and to one side, on the road.

It was that questioning look of the horsemen that decided him to take a chance on frustrating Nagoi's scheme. By much association with the Cossacks since he had been in Siberia he had learned some of their drill commands and signals.

Ahead of him the road led straight up through those two hills. To his left the forest crowded down to the meadow which extended two hundred yards or so between the trees and the road just ahead. By leading the *sotnia* up along the edge of the trees he could keep them under cover until he was opposite those two hills. All this went through his mind swiftly.

With an assumption of confidence that he was far from feeling, he

raised his hand and shouted the Russian command for "Forward March" and rode confidently to the head of the column, leading it into the fringe of trees.

TO his immense relief the *sotnia* of Cossacks trained to implicit obedience followed him unquestioningly and the dark column of men and horses twisted and flowed along at the edge of the woods.

The *khorunji,* Nagoi, whom Dick could see through the intervening tree trunks, stared back in surprise at this maneuver and then turned tail and galloped across the open space to intercept his men at the edge of the woods ahead.

To succeed at all he must move quickly, Dick reasoned. Emboldened by the first response to his commands he gave the command and signal for "Trot." The winding column behind him immediately quickened into a swifter motion, the clever Cossack horses weaving in and out of the tree trunks as their riders depressed the lances and bent low in the saddles to avoid the overhanging limbs.

The *khorunji* was now halfway across the meadow, directing his horse at a point some two hundred yards ahead. The men in ambush, whoever they were, grew careless in their surprise and Dick saw their heads bobbing up as they stared at this unexpected turn of events.

In order to take full advantage of the element of surprise, he shouted the command to gallop and the column behind him surged into the increased gait, flashing in and out through the trees with a steady, subdued thunder of hoofs against the forest mould.

Dick rode low in his saddle, Tom Gans, Paul and the girl, Nadina directly in rear with the leading elements of the *sotnia* galloping along behind them.

So rapidly did he advance that now Dick had reached a point where he could see a group of saddled horses concealed around the turn of the nearest hill. As he eyed these, men began to dribble out of their concealment on the other side of the hill and climb into the saddles. The *khorunji,* Nagoi, had miscalculated the speed at which Dick was riding and came in to the column far to the rear.

More and more of the men who had been in ambush were pouring out of their hiding and men and horses were mixed in the milling crowd, partly mounted and partly dismounted.

A rifle shot rang out from the hillside. It was followed by another and another and bullets began to whir overhead and leaves and bits of branches drifted down. Dick had now drawn level with the milling group of the enemy who were still in the confusion and turmoil of mounting their horses.

He saw them plainly enough, men of all nationalities and races, wearing odds and ends of uniforms interspersed with the Russian peasant blouses. The rifle fire from the hill continued but Dick paid no attention to it. Somewhere in the rear the *khorunji* was galloping, trying to catch up with his runaway *sotnia.*

NOW was the time to strike and Dick turned in his saddle, waving to the Cossacks. He swung his horse at right angles and moved out in the meadow, halting until the *sotnia* had galloped on a few yards farther until the center of the long column was approaching.

Then his voice roared forth in the Russian command for forming line and he gave the signal. It met with instant response, for every Cossack

wheeled out of the woods and galloped towards him in a long, loose double rank. Once free of the trees they closed in and straightened the line. They were now galloping across the meadow, a wave of shaggy horses and men, the front rank leaning low in the saddles, lances at the charge and the rear rank with sabres drawn.

AT sight of this force advancing so swiftly upon them, the enemy redoubled their efforts to arrange themselves in some sort of defensive formation. But their efforts only resulted in worse confusion. Men shouted and horses plunged. About three-quarters of the force was mounted now and they endeavored to loosen their rifles and succeeded in firing a few wild shots.

Out of the tail of his eye, Dick saw Nagoi, far out on the right flank, waving his arms and shouting. But the Cossacks in that *sotnia* did not see him, having eyes for nothing but Dick riding at their head and the enemy so near at hand.

As Dick's horse galloped along, he took a quick glance to the left of the line where he saw a little clump of riders following along far out on the flank, and knew that Gans, Schneider, Paul and Nadina had withdrawn out of harm's way.

Drawing his pistol, Dick raised it and spurred his horse, driving straight at the enemy. The thunder of the steel shod hoofs behind him rose to a crescendo. The line of horses, their shaggy manes flying in the wind, bore down on the enemy like a tidal wave. A vast shout rose from the Cossacks, the wild barbaric shout of the nomad horsemen at the charge.

The intervening ground between Dick and the enemy flowed rapidly under his horse's hoofs and suddenly the American had struck the first fringe of the excited enemy force.

A second later with a crash like a wave smashing aside wreckage, the Cossack line struck. Its solid mass threw the disorganized enemy before it. Dick's pistol barked as he swung to avoid a vicious cut from a sword wielded by a huge bearded enemy.

In a second the Cossack force, men and horses, were mixed in a shouting, yelling, cursing mass, with lances spearing in and swords flashing and the occasional bark of a pistol rising above the chaos. Dick had fired all save two of the cartridges in his pistol, when, glancing to the right, he saw a force of dismounted men hurrying up the road from between the two hills. It was time to extricate his men, reform and attack this new outfit.

Forcing his horse through the press of enemy before him at the cost of his two remaining cartridges, he returned his pistol to its holster. One of his own Cossacks was on his right, stabbing with his long lance and Dick reached over and drew the man's sword from its scabbard. Rising in his stirrups, he thrust and cut, lunging and smashing with edge and point and pommel, until suddenly he was clear and on the far side of the tangled mass of combatants.

HERE he filled his lungs and shouted forth the rallying cry of the Cossacks. Again and again he shouted and signalled as man after man edged his horse out of the press and galloped up behind him until in a few more seconds ranks had been re-formed. The road and meadow were covered with wounded and dying men and horses.

Some of the enemy horsemen had fled and were galloping away to all points of the compass. The remnants left on the road stared in

stupid wonder as the Cossacks swiftly re-formed. There was a sudden bark of rifle fire from the dismounted men coming up the road.

Dick, waving to the line behind him, galloped straight at this new force. The splutter of rifle fire died down as the leading individuals of the dismounted enemy force saw with consternation this terrible wave of horsemen descending upon them like a wall.

Dick and his Cossacks struck and scattered them. The long lances rose and fell. The sabres hewed and cut. Wild barbaric yells of the Cossacks mingled with the screams of the enemy and their shouts for mercy. The momentum of the Cossack charge carried it down the road between the two hills and into another group of riderless horses held there by a few horse holders.

These in turn were scattered like chaff before the wind and in a moment the field had been cleared of any formed groups of the enemy who were fleeing individually and in clumps of frightened men, some on foot and some on horseback, over the hill and across the meadow.

The Cossacks broke and started to pursue when Dick again rang forth the rallying cry and they came back by twos and threes, regretfully but obediently.

ABOUT half the *sotnia* had re-formed and Dick shouted at the remainder to hurry as they came in from every direction. A few of them out of the range of his voice were still riding down the survivors, slashing them with sabres and spearing them with their long, thirsty lances.

At that second Nagoi, his face black with anger, came sliding down the hill and on to the road. He trotted his horse up to Dick and halted.

CHAPTER VII

Nagoi Rides Ahead.

THERE was belligerency in every angle of Nagoi's figure as he rode up. But Dick did not wait for him to commence his tirade. He rode forward to meet him.

"Nagoi, I think you're a traitor!"

The suddenness of the attack stopped the utterance of whatever Nagoi was going to say. He flushed darkly and his hand dropped to his sword hilt. But Dick went on bitingly.

"I've come here with an order signed by your Ataman, requiring you to place yourself and your troops under my command. And what do you do? You attempt to lead us into a trap so clumsy that a child would have discovered it!"

"I did not know the trap was there," mumbled Nagoi, but his eyes dropped below the blazing fury of Dick's glance.

"Nagoi, you lie!" returned Dick, flatly, "and before we go any farther this matter must be settled here and now. If you don't immediately give me your word of honor to cooperate with me loyally and faithfully, I will tell the whole thing to the Cossacks here and let them decide whether they will continue to follow you!"

Nagoi raised his head sharply. Dick sensed that he had made a wrong play but he swiftly determined to brazen it through.

"I will tell the Cossacks myself, what you have said," stated Nagoi and half turned his horse towards the *sotnia* lined up a few yards in rear of them.

"You will do nothing of the kind, Nagoi," said Dick his hand dropping carelessly to his pistol butt. "Your men have followed me once and they will follow me again, especially

when I tell them that it is by order of their Ataman that I take command. Do you wish to risk disobeying the commands of Ataman Kalmikoff and do you wish these men to know that you are disobeying them? I have his signed letter here in my pocket."

DICK paused, waiting and studying his man, knowing full well the fanatical obedience that the Cossack renders to his Ataman who is not only a military commander but a sort of tribal chieftan in addition, subject in time of peace to the votes of the *stanitza* but in time of war an autocratic leader with the power of life and death over every member of his command.

There was some doubt in Dick's mind as to whether the Cossacks would follow him again if it came to a choice between himself and their *khorunji,* but he knew that these men respected and looked up to the Americans of whom they were allies and subordinates. And this particular American had led them successfully in battle, always a powerful argument in the Cossack mind.

He waited, outwardly calm but inwardly tense, wondering how far his bluff would work. Nagoi studied him through half-closed eyes, as enigmatic as the Sphinx itself. At last, after a long silence the Cossack officer spoke.

"I will give you my word of honor to serve you and cooperate with you loyally," said Nagoi smoothly.

The surrender left Dick elated although experience should have taught him the lesson of the relentless East, which says, that once your enemy is in your power render him powerless. He was to regret this in time, but for the moment the situation had cleared up and he was magnanimous to the surrendered Cossack officer.

"Alright!" returned Dick, heartily. "We'll shake on that!" and he reached out his hand and grasped that of Nagoi, finding it cold and dead to the touch, so that he was a little chilled by the contact.

Gans and Schneider, Paul and Nadina rode in, examining curiously the bodies of the fallen men and horses. A group of Cossacks driving prisoners before them followed along in their rear, prodding the wounded and disheveled refugees with their lance tips. Dick's eye fell on these prisoners and he turned to Nagoi.

"The first thing I must know," he stated, "is the identity of this force who tried to ambush us. Who are they?" he asked Nagoi. The Cossack officer shrugged his shoulders. Dick turned instantly to Paul.

"Examine those prisoners and find out who is their leader," he directed.

Paul nodded and swung his horse around facing the prisoners. Halting them he commenced a rapid fire of questions, carefully noting the frightened replies of the men on the ground. At last he turned to Dick again.

"They are belonging to the forces of Boris Kargadoff, the Scarlet Killer," stated Paul.

"Was the Scarlet Killer with them?" demanded Dick.

NO, I think not. I think he is in his *stanitza,* not far from here," answered Paul, and he turned and flung some more questions at the miserable prisoners. Their replies came haltingly and in monosyllables but at last Paul turned again.

"These men say that they were on a raiding party commanded by one of Kargadoff's lieutenants."

Nagoi listened in impassive silence to this exchange. The Cossacks

started to drive their prisoners down the road and Dick turned away, temporarily forgetting them. He was aroused to the remembrance of the prisoners again when he saw the Cossacks lining them up in a group preparatory to shooting them down.

"*Nyet, Nyet!* No. No!" he shouted.

THE Cossacks turned questioningly, looking from Nagoi to Dick. Nagoi nodded and the astounded Cossacks stood there, not knowing what to do until Dick ordered Nagoi to have the prisoners released and turned loose.

It was plain to be seen that the Cossacks were very much upset by this unusual way of treating prisoners in revolution-torn Siberia, but they obeyed nevertheless and the dazed captives shambled off down the road, marvelling at their unlooked for escape.

By now the wounded were cared for and crippled horses dispatched and Dick gave order to move out.

This time he quietly saw to it that the advance guard was sent out to a sufficient distance and, to insure a proper functioning of this important part of the command, he sent Tom Gans along with the leading elements to guard against any further attempts at treachery.

They moved along the road in column once more but Nagoi no longer rode at Dick's side. He dropped back in the column. Once or twice Dick saw him in low-voiced conversation with different ones among the men. This was a little disquieting but there was no way of preventing Nagoi from talking to his own soldiers.

Paul and Nadina chatted away behind Dick. Their voices rose and fell to the beat of the horses' hoofs and snatches of their conversation came to his ears.

Their conversation drowned in the sound of the voices of the Cossacks —suddenly raised in song. The melody started somewhere in the rear of the column and rippled forward, picked up by man after man until the entire *sotnia* was singing that famous Cossack melody about their legendery hero, "Shtenka Razin." It was a beautifully sung melody, its echoes rising up and echoing amongst the huge trees of the forest they had entered.

Nagoi rode to one side of the column, his head sunk on his chest and Dick saw him there, looking like some brooding hawk as they rode along.

"This village of Petrovna," he interrupted Paul's conversation to ask, "how far is it from here?"

"We are very near it," answered Paul, "it is just beyond this forest."

Nagoi seemed to be roused from his reverie by these words and Dick whose head was turned in his direction saw a gleam of resolution came into the Cossack officer's eyes.

"What new deviltry is that bird up to now?" Dick asked himself, and the question reoccurred to him when two or three minutes later Nagoi set spurs to his horse and galloped on ahead up the road.

This worried Dick in spite of himself and he almost made up his mind to follow when he remembered that Tom Gans was riding with the advance guard and decided that the wary old hunter was well capable of taking care of himself.

Had he known what was happening to Gans at that moment he might not have been so confident.

CHAPTER VIII

The Killer Proposes a Trade

TOM GANS had galloped ahead to join the advance guard, rather pleased at the prospect, for he had also observed

the carelessness with which Nagoi arranged for the security of his command. He found the three Cossacks riding well up forward in a little clump, all busily laughing and chatting together with none of them paying any attention to the road.

THIS offended Gans' sense of the fitness of things and he growled at them. Being unable to speak Russian, his words carried little weight but he forcibly demonstrated what he was driving at by riding between the nearest two and pushing them out at such distance from each other that one volley of rifle fire would not account for all three.

This done he rode in the rear, making up his own careful scrutiny of every fold in the ground and turn in the road, for the Cossacks' seeming indifference to possible danger. In this manner they continued for two or three miles with an occasional glimpse to be had of the flanking patrols out to right and left.

It was when they got into the heavy timber that Gans really grew alert and redoubled his vigilance. There was something foreboding and sinister about this dim, brooding forest of pine trees with their soft carpeting of needles into which the horses' hoofs fell silently.

They came at last to the forest edge and saw before them the walls and roofs of a deserted village, blackened by fire. Into this rode the three Cossacks, calling gaily to each other as they trotted along and scarcely looking to the right or left and neglecting entirely to look back to the rear.

The road narrowed and led between two walls for a short space. Gans rode into this unsuspectingly, noting that the road turned at the farther end and that the three Cossacks ahead of him were already out of sight.

When he was about half way through the narrow alley he felt and heard something whirring above his head and looked up in time to see some coily, snakey thing descending upon him. He put spurs to his horse and leaned far out of the saddle in an attempt to avoid it but the rope settled down over shoulders and arms, pinning these latter to his sides.

It was suddenly tautened and he was jerked out of the saddle on to the ground. In falling his head struck the angle of the wall with such a jar that he knew no more.

Seven or eight minutes later Nagoi came galloping through. Suddenly he pulled his horse down to a halt in this narrow alley and shouted. There was an answering cry far off to the right behind the wall somewhere and Nagoi turned about and rode back to where the head of the *sotnia* was just approaching the edge of the woods.

In a few more minutes Dick, followed by Paul, Schneider and Nadina, trotted into the narrow street, the *sotnia* of Cossacks with Nagoi at their head directly behind them. The walls threw back the echo of the trampling hoofs of a hundred horses as the *sotnia* rapidly trotted through it and came out into the broader main street of the village.

IT made a desolate scene, that village, with only a few houses still standing and these half destroyed, while of the majority of the dwellings nothing remained save heaps of blackened ruins.

The Cossack advance guard had halted at the far end of the village and the men were deep in conversation with three rough looking heavily armed Russians mounted on shaggy ponies. As the head of the column of Cossacks came in view, the three men of the advance guard rode

back towards Dick accompanied by one of the Russians.

This fellow drew up before Dick and Nagoi, who had now joined him.

THE Russian, a gross, sleepy-eyed fellow who examined the Americans in dull and dispassionate fashion, began to speak.

"The Cossacks are not to move out of this village," he announced calmly.

"By whose order?" Dick bristled up.

The Russian looked at him curiously before replying.

"By order of Boris Kargadoff," he answered.

"And if we do not choose to obey his order?" asked Dick.

"The American soldier, Sergeant Collins, dies as soon as the Cossacks start out of the village!" The fellow announced this threat in a matter of fact tone, and without another word, turned his horse about and rode back whence he had come.

Dick stood nonplussed for a second. There was one ray of hope at any rate and a chance that Sergeant Collins still lived. If he still lived there was no sense in precipitating his sudden death by disregarding Kargadoff's ultimatum. Night was coming on. Once darkness concealed their movements Dick felt that he could take one or two men and penetrate Kargadoff's stronghold.

"It is better that we stay here, Nagoi," he announced and found a quick look of relief come into the Cossack officer's eyes. Evidently this decision suited Nagoi's plans admirably.

There was water in the place and the remains of haystacks. The deserted village soon resounded to the cheerful bustle of men and horses breaking ranks and the crackling of fires as preparations were started for the evening meal.

Dick selected a small log *izba* close to the edge of the village for the shelter of himself and his party. Schneider soon had a fire going in the earthenware stove and Nadina, her horror and fright forgotten, cheerfully busied herself in cleaning out the place and making it habitable.

It was not long before Dick began to wonder when Gans would return. There was no sign of him in the village as he quickly determined by going out amongst the Cossacks. Puzzled and commencing to grow worried, he sought Nagoi. A burly Cossack engaged in broiling some *shashlik* over hot coals, directed him toward a cabin in the center of the village and Dick strode towards this.

Arriving in the doorway he called for Nagoi, only to be greeted by silence. Entering the one room cabin he sought for the Cossack *khorunji*, but there was no sign of him. It was a little disquieting for he was certain that Nagoi was nowhere within the village, as he had been all through it.

It was a baffling sort of situation and Dick stood awhile trying to puzzle it out. Finally an idea came to him and he sought for the chief non-commissioned officer of the *sotnia*, a great, big shouldered, powerfully built Cossack sergeant, and asked him to point out the men who had been out on the advance guard in the afternoon's march.

The Cossack sergeant was willing enough and soon found the three men who had been out in the advance when Gans rode forward.

YES, they had seen the big American. He had followed along close behind them for one or two *versts*, but they had lost sight of him after they entered the village. The men were palpably telling the truth and seemed honestly puzzled over the disappearance of the American.

His search so far had led only to

a blind alley and Dick began to grow intensely worried, for over half an hour had passed since he had first missed Gans and it had grown dark. No one seemed to know where Nagoi had gone. The men of whom he inquired simply looked blank.

THEY were decent sort of fellows, those Cossacks, and seemed genuinely anxious to help, several of them volunteering to go back along the road and search for traces of the missing man. Others made a house to house search of the village but their efforts ended unsuccessfully.

Another worry began to weigh on Dick as Nagoi's absence continued, and he was forced to drop his search for Gans for the moment while he inspected the measures taken by Nagoi for guarding the camp. These measures proved on examination to be very superficial for as far as Dick could find out there were only two men on guard, one at either end of the village, watching the road that passed through. No attempt had been made to guard against attack from the deep woods which flanked the village on either side.

Dick took it upon himself to put patrols out on these dangerous places, placing three Cossacks on either flank of the village so that the place, in effect, was guarded on all four sides. This done he returned to the *izba* where he found that Nadina and Schneider between them had managed to prepare supper with Paul Semionovich as an absent-minded helper.

His failure to find Gans cast a pall over the spirits of all of them.

"But what I can't figure out," explained Dick thoughtfully, "is what has become of Nagoi."

Paul Semionovich shrugged his shoulders.

"That iss very simple," he answered, "Nagoi has gone to visit with the Scarlet Killer, Boris Kargadoff!"

Dick suddenly put down his glass of hot tea and stared at the young Russian.

"What makes you think that?" he asked sharply.

"It iss simple enough," answered Paul. "He iss carrying on some sort of business with the Scarlet Killer. The Scarlet Killer has his lair not more than half a *verst* from here. Nagoi has simply ridden out there and is now probably closeted with Boris Kargadoff, the Killer, plotting against you."

Dick nodded slowly to himself.

"We can verify that pretty quickly. Do you remember that black horse with the blazed face and three white stockings that Nagoi rides?" he asked. Paul remembered it. "You take a turn down amongst the horses, Paul, and see if that horse is there, hurry back and tell me."

The young Russian wasted no time in setting about his task, moving off very quietly through the various log houses until he came to the place where the Cossacks had turned their horses loose in a small pasture.

THE three behind in the *izba* waited silently for his return. He had not been gone more than five minutes when his form filled the doorway again.

"Nagoi's horse is gone," he said simply.

Dick rose and began to buckle on his belt and pistol.

"What are you going to do?" asked Paul.

"Do? I'm going to find the Scarlet Killer. He and Nagoi are together and it's dollars to doughnuts that Gans is a prisoner close by!"

He had scarcely finished speaking when there was the thud of horse's hoofs coming in from the end of the village somewhere. The little group

in the log *izba* stood silent, listening to that sound as it came nearer and nearer, until finally the horse drew up outside the door. There followed the sound of someone dismounting and striding towards the *izba*.

In another second the tall form of Nagoi blocked the doorway.

"I have very bad news for you, very bad news," he announced without any preamble, "Your man, Gans, has been unfortunately captured by some patrols from Boris Kargadoff's force. Your man is now a prisoner with the American sergeant, what is his name—Collins? Yes, and in half an hour Kargadoff will put them both to death!"

Dick listened to this startling message in silence, studying Nagoi through half-closed eyelids.

"Yes," he said at last, "that's all very interesting. What's the answer?"

"The answer? The answer? I do not understand," Nagoi looked puzzled.

"Yes, the answer," Dick returned impatiently, "Boris Kargadoff sent you with this message, what does Kargadoff want to exchange for the lives of the two Americans?"

"Oh, I see what you mean!" said Nagoi, smoothly, "it is very simple I think. Boris Kargadoff wants nothing but that you should go away from here—*after*," he placed a significant emphasis upon the word, "after you have given him Nadina Alexandrovna, here, in exchange for your two Americans!"

CHAPTER IX

To the Rescue

THERE was silence in the log cabin, broken only by a gasp from Nadina who gazed wildly around at the circle of faces.

Nagoi stroked his mustache and leaned comfortably against the doorway as though indifferent to the outcome.

DICK'S eyes blazed with cold anger as he studied the Cossack *khorunji* but he gave no other outward sign of the effect this outrageous message had upon him, nor did he say anything for a minute or two. At last he spoke.

"That's very kind of Boris Kargadoff," he said drily, "but it just happens, Khorunji Nagoi, that I am here to interview this so-called Scarlet Killer and you are here under orders from your Ataman to aid me. It is high time we stopped beating about the bush and got down to business. You turn out your *sotnia* immediately and we'll march to Boris Kargadoff's lair and see him!"

There was a ring of command in Dick's voice. Nagoi straightened out with his indifferent poise gone. He threw out his hands helplessly.

"Yes, but what can I do? My *sotnia* is surrounded by Boris Kargadoff's men who outnumber us three to one," and he waved, pointing to the outskirts of the village.

"Go check up on that Paul," bade Dick quickly.

The young Russian made his way past Nagoi and disappeared outside into the darkness. Inside the little group waited. Nadina, the girl, in her blouse and peasant breeches and boots, was the first to recover from the surprise of Nagoi's startling proposition. She came up to Dick and placed her hand on his arm. Looking down into her great, dark eyes and sensitive, beautifully modelled face he suddenly found her very beautiful and very lovely. But she was speaking in a tense whisper.

"Come with me out of ear-shot," she said.

Dick followed where she led to the other side of the cabin's one room.

"I have an idea!" she whispered tensely, her face alight with eagerness. "Agree to Nagoi's plan! Let me go with him. Only give me something, a knife or a pistol and I will end this terrible Scarlet Killer once and for all."

Dick looked at her, startled.

"N-no. No!" he said quickly, "that would be a terrible risk to run! Even should you have courage to do this thing—"

"You forget that I am a Russian woman," she interrupted proudly, "and there are many of us who would gladly kill that beast!"

But Dick shook his head.

"I could not permit it," he said, "even should you succeed, this fellow Kargadoff's beastly followers would set upon you like a pack of wolves and tear you to pieces. No, it is impossible!"

Her face fell and she stared morosely at the floor, tapping the hard packed earth with her boot tip, like a child that has been denied a toy. At last she raised her head again. Her face once more lighted up and she placed her hand coaxingly on Dick's arm. He found something strangely thrilling in the contact of that dainty hand but she was speaking again.

"So be it," she said, "I will not try to kill Boris Kargadoff. But only let me go as though you agreed and then follow, you and your men!"

There was some virtue in this plan, Dick reflected swiftly, its greatest recommendation being that it might succeed in saving the lives of Gans and Collins for the minutes were fast slipping away.

AS though reading his thought, Nagoi spoke up from the doorway, looking at his ornate gold watch in bored fashion.

"Ten minutes of the time have already gone. It is far to Boris Kargadoff's headquarters. And he is a man of his word. In twenty minutes from now your two men will meet a terrible death—the most terrible slow death that Boris Kargadoff can devise!"

DICK looked at him in puzzled inquiry. He heard a low moan at his side and turning, saw Nadina cover her face with her hands as though to shut out the sight of some awful thing. The slow Death! It certainly had a gruesome sound. But he had no time to inquire as to what it meant, for at that moment Paul appeared in the doorway and entered the room. His eyes were serious.

"It is true," he said, "there are many men in the woods on both sides of the village and two more large groups stationed on the road at each end. The place is surrounded!"

Nagoi nodded casually.

"You see, I have told you the truth," he said.

Dick looked him over, studying the man and then suddenly called Paul Semionovich to one side, whispering to him. Whatever he had to say did not take long for he turned again to Nagoi.

"There seems to be nothing for it but to agree," he stated quietly. "The girl says that she is willing to sacrifice herself to save the lives of the two Americans. It is a noble and a heroic thing that she offers. If she does not wish to go we will die fighting for her. What do you say, Nadina Alexandrovna?"

"I go," answered Nadina, simply and walked across the room to Nagoi. "Is it you with whom I go to Boris Kargadoff?" she asked.

Nagoi nodded his head in assent and straightened out from his leaning posture.

"It is too bad," he said, "but I see nothing else to do," and he bowed and drew aside to allow her to pass

out the door. But suddenly she turned back and ran to Dick, quickly and impulsively, like a frightened child.

"You will not fail me?" she whispered, something like a catch in her voice, her eyes wide with inquiry.

"I will not fail you," whispered Dick in return and patted her comfortingly on the shoulder.

The gesture seemed to unnerve her, for she trembled against him like a child afraid of the dark. His arms went out. She raised her face to his innocently and their lips trembled together.

And then she broke away, running lightly to the door and waving back to him, seemingly with all her courage returned. In a second she was gone.

There came a trample of horses' hoofs in the darkness and the two moved down the road.

Dick wasted no time in watching them disappear. As quickly as Nagoi's back was turned the tall, young American and Schneider, the freckle-faced soldier, slid quietly around the corner of the cabin where their horses were tethered.

It took them a minute or two to throw on saddles and bridles and they were quickly on the road, following those two whose progress they could hear dimly ahead of them.

As they passed by the cabin door Paul Semionovich waved encouragement to them and stood watching them out of sight.

THERE were few men abroad in the village, most of the Cossacks having gathered within two or three of the larger houses where they were drinking the inevitable Russian tea and indulging in the inevitable Russian talk.

Dick and Schneider rode along at a walk, peering ahead into the darkness in an endeavor to sight first those enemies who were reported to have surrounded the village.

The two were almost at the outskirts of the place when they saw a clump of dark shadows on the road ahead. From the group came Nagoi's voice, evidently answering a challenge. His answer must have been satisfactory, for Dick heard him moving out again with Nadina riding beside him.

LAYING his hand on Schneider's rein, Dick motioned to him to follow and turned aside from the road, moving into the meadow on the right and heading for the trees at its edge. Below him on the road he could hear the mutter of the voices of many men and reasoned that a large group of Boris Kargadoff's followers were on guard there.

But the woods seemed to be silent and deserted and he moved his horse into the fringe of trees, keeping a route that paralleled the road below. It was his hope to be able to move through here unobserved and to move back to the road again where he could follow Nagoi.

There was not much underbrush beneath the trees and the two horses moved silently on the heavy carpet of fallen leaves. Halting occasionally, he listened for sounds of Nagoi and Nadina and heard them trotting briskly along the road to the left ahead of them.

He must hurry if he was not to fall too far behind Nagoi and lose him in the darkness. Putting spurs to his horse, he risked increasing its gait to a trot and moved more rapidly through the woods, Schneider close behind him. By now, he figured, that he must have over-passed the guards and he swung his horse down towards the road again.

It was when he was within some ten yards of the road that a dark bulk on his left evicted his suspicion

and he reined in his horse suddenly. At that second some heavy weight struck him from behind and he felt his senses reeling. He heard a muffled cry from Schneider and suddenly the woods seemed alive with men.

A rope settled down over him and tightened itself around his arms. Horsemen closed in on either side of him, one of them thrusting a rifle against his back. So far not a word had been spoken, but now a voice came out of the darkness in front.

"Hurry," it said, "Boris Kargadoff is waiting for these two!"

CHAPTER X

Condemned to Death

NOT over a half a *verst* away from the village a side road turned up into the trees and entered a small valley. The road wound through this until it came out at last in an open space that was dominated by a long, low building, constructed partially of heavy cut stone and partially of hewed timbers.

Lights shone from the open doorway and from small openings that were more like loop holes than ordinary windows. The road led through a heavy log gate and swept up to the porch. A central hall led to the rear of this building. On the right was a large room containing a fireplace. It was furnished in luxurious fashion with many silken rugs and many tiger skins and much ornately carved teakwood furniture.

A similar room on the left seemed to be a sort of banqueting hall, for a great table occupied the center and there were many chairs set along its sides, with a great, heavily carved mahogany chair dominating one end like a throne. A passageway led back into kitchens and pantries. In the rear of the house were many stables and long, low buildings that looked like barracks.

There were few men about these barracks and few about the house. Two guards lounged in front of the doorway and two more at the gate, all of them heavily armed. In the room on the right was a heavy teakwood desk. Behind it sat a strangely odd figure of a man.

This man was almost dwarflike in his proportions, with an immense head surmounting a slender body. The face of the man behind the desk was the most arresting feature about him. There was something sleepy and catlike about his eyes, something tigerish and feline about the heavy jaws and sharp teeth. The tigerish effect was heightened by the bristles of a small mustache which reared themselves like the whiskers of a cat animal. The eyes blinked sleepily and the man moved with the sort of dainty, feline grace that the cat tribe effects.

But all this was as nothing to the startling color of the fellow's face, whether from a disease or a terrible burn or from a birthmark, the man's face was a vivid red, so vivid as almost to be scarlet.

It was Boris Kargadoff who sat there, he whom men called the Scarlet Killer.

Facing him, standing in front of the desk, stood Tom Gans, his hands tied behind him. At his sides stood two heavy-faced and sullen guards, dressed in nondescript remnants of uniforms but carrying rifles with fixed bayonets and wearing double bandoliers of cartridges slung over their shoulders.

TOM GANS regarded the man before him stolidly, with something of faint contempt on his face. Boris Kargadoff let his sleepy eyes rest upon him for a second, those eyes that resembled a cat animal's in another respect, that they never could long withstand a direct stare. And like

a sleek cat, Boris Kargadoff raised a dainty hand and smoothed his mustache as he started to speak.

"You see, my good friend," his voice came out almost ludicrously in a high pitched, whining note, "that your time has almost come. Thirty minutes I gave your chief in which to save your life. It is too bad. You are a very strong man. It will take you a long time to die by the Slow Death!" and Boris Kargadoff raised his sleepy looking eyes to the great clock which ticked above the fireplace.

THE hands pointed ten minutes to the hour. Gans followed the direction of his glance, watching the minute hand move inexorably towards its goal. To himself, Gans admitted that he had been in some pretty tight places but never had he been in as tight a place as this, with a maniac like the man in front of him, counting off the minutes until he should be killed.

What this slow death consisted of he did not know, but that it was some fiendish type of killing conceived by an Oriental brain he was quite certain. He hoped, in dumb resignation, that when his time came he would not disgrace himself by whimpering at pain.

The minute hand traveled slowly and inexorably, it now lacked two minutes of the hour. The queer man at the desk struck a jade gong with a tiny silver hammer. The note rang softly through the house, mellow and musical. There was a stir in the passageway and a soft-footed, long-armed sort of creature, that looked only half human, came shambling in.

"Is everything ready?" asked Boris Kargadoff in that same high, queer voice.

The shambling creature with the long arms nodded, and then turned to Gans. As strong as he was, Gans felt a sudden qualm of fear as the creature looked him over with dead, lack lustre eyes that contained something aloof, incurious and inhuman in their cold depths.

The fellow examined him from top to toe, studying his breadth of shoulders and chest and strong frame. Then he nodded, turning to Boris Kargadoff. The queer man at the desk rose and gave a signal. The two guards swung Gans around between them, the shambling man led the way and Boris Kargadoff came around the corner of the desk, licking his lips with satisfaction as he started to follow.

He was scarcely half way across the room when there came a challenge at the gate and a trample of horses' hoofs. Boris Kargadoff gave a sharp command. The guards halted with their prisoner and the shambling, long-armed creature waited resignedly with folded arms.

Outside the trample of hoofs stopped in front of the door and shortly thereafter there was a sound of footsteps followed by the appearance of Nagoi.

He stepped into the room with something extremely bold and confident about his bearing, with the air of a master no less. Tom Gans watching, noted that Boris Kargadoff rose respectfully at his entrance and bowed low. Suddenly it became clear to the American that Nagoi was the real leader of these Bolshevists and Boris Kargadoff naught but an executioner and a name behind which Nagoi operated.

FOLLOWING Nagoi came Nadina through the doorway, glancing about her wide-eyed and obviously frightened but making a brave effort not to show it. She stopped still and stood staring at Boris Kargadoff and from him to Nagoi. The dwarflike little man with the terribly red face

rubbed his hands together sleekly and obsequiously.

"YOU have picked yourself a beauty this time, Comrade," he said to Nagoi. "She is really the prettiest little dove you have captured so far," then he looked up curiously, "how about the American fool?"

Nagoi laughed easily.

"He fell into the trap like the stupid ox he is. With one of his men he follows along behind as a prisoner." Then Nagoi's face grew cruel and wolflike, "but the fool, at that, nearly ruined my plans. I had the devil's own time doing away with the officer who originally commanded that *sotnia* of Cossacks, and then impersonating the new commander, ostensibly sent by headquarters to take them over.

"All went well until this blundering idiot of an American came into the picture and I had the devil's own time keeping him from making the Cossacks suspicious. But I'll make the idiot pay for it!" said Nagoi.

His face lit up with an unholy expression of malicious triumph as there came another trampling of hoofs, followed by the stamping of feet upon the porch outside. In another few seconds, while Nadina and Gans watched fearfully, Dick Farnsworth, white-faced and staggering, was shoved into the room, accompanied by Schneider.

Their arms were bound behind them with stout cords. The doorway in their rear was filled with the faces of the guards who had brought them. Again the queer man with the horribly disfigured red face rubbed his hands together and blinked his eyes happily.

It was plain to be seen that the American was still dizzy from the blow that had knocked him out but comprehension began to dawn in his eyes as he stared about the room, taking in the figures of Gans, Nadina, the red-faced little Kargadoff and Nagoi's tall figure dominating the whole scene.

"So you were just a dirty traitor after all, Nagoi!" said Dick and the quiet contempt in his voice flicked like a whip.

"The stratagems of war, my friend, the stratagems of war!" returned Nagoi easily, placing his thumbs in his sword belt and surveying his captives with much satisfaction.

"Yes?" returned Dick indifferently and stared about the room for another figure.

"Where is Sergeant Collins?" he asked and strove not to show the anxiety in his voice.

Nagoi looked questioningly at Kargadoff who smirked all over his evil red face and rubbed his hands together propitiatingly.

"As you ordered, Comrade Nagoi, I started to have him blinded and then treated to the slow death but just as Katagai here," and he nodded towards the long-armed, shambling creature with the dead opaque eyes, "just as Katagai started to operate on him, the American kicked out with both feet and hurt poor Katagai so that he dropped the hot iron. Then this beast of an American picked up the hot iron and fought his way out, seriously burning several of the guards. A terrible fellow," Kargadoff shook his head commiseratingly, "but even now he is being sought for and will undoubtedly be recaptured very shortly."

NAGOI'S face grew black with anger. With one swift stride he advanced on Kargadoff and struck him brutally across the face.

"You red-faced dog!" he shouted, "learn to carry out my orders without excuses!"

He turned from the whimpering red-faced man as though he did not

exist and towered threateningly over Dick.

"And as for you, you swine of an American, you and your filthy comrades will learn what it means to interfere with my plans." His eyes narrowed as he studied the group of three men. "I'll give you a taste of the Slow Death. One taste of that and you'll never ask for another."

NADINA listened to this with pale face and eyes round with horror. Nagoi glanced toward her, and laughed.

"And as for you, little pigeon, you can have the pleasure of watching them die, and see your brave defenders writhe and scream. After that I will comfort you."

He patted her arm, visibly enjoying the way in which she shrank back and stared about her, with all the anguish of a trapped animal in her eyes.

Dick looked up, his eyes smoldering.

"What buffoonery is this?" he asked gruffly.

"You can ask that question later," answered Nagoi smoothly, "such buffoonery as will be seen will be furnished by you as the actors and with me as audience. I hope you do not disappoint us and die too quickly. The last man was very good, he stuck it out for nearly three quarters of an hour, did he not Katagai?" he turned to the shambling long-armed creature who nodded gravely.

"Shall I heat the irons?" asked Katagai in a queer animal-like voice.

"No," returned Nagoi after a seconds thought. "I think it would be better not to blind them, seeing that there are several of them and they can enjoy seeing each others reactions to the Slow Death."

"And the Cossacks down in the village—what are your orders about them?" asked Kargadoff humbly.

"Let them alone until we are through with these. The Cossacks are well guarded. Once we have finished with these dogs and the Cossacks are asleep we'll overcome them and slaughter the vermin."

Boris Kargadoff, his hideously disfigured, red face wreathed in smiles, led the way to the entrance, rubbing his hands together with visible enjoyment of what was to come. Watching the man, Dick came to the conclusion that the fellow was one of those sinister variations from the normal known as sadists, individuals who delight in the inflicting of pain.

Studying the cruel, tense face of Nagoi beside him, Dick saw traces of the same abnormality in the expression of the psuedo-Cossack. As though in answer to the unspoken thoughts of the American, Nagoi turned to him.

"What you are about to experience is an idea conceived by Boris Kargadoff after studying the Chinese masters. He's a queer fellow, is Boris Kargadoff," chuckled the Russian, "but he has his uses. The terror inspired by his name and the reports of his unusual methods are of great value to me in keeping our enemies properly terrified. I ask you to look here."

HE pointed to a pile of something near the wall of the building. One of the guards obilgingly flashed a lantern on it and in spite of himself, Dick recoiled slightly as he gazed upon that pile of human bones and skulls, some of them with the flesh and gristle stick clinging to them. Nadina repressed a low moan of horror and pressed close against Dick's back, shielding her eyes from the sight.

Boris Kargadoff waited within the

opened door of the log building, standing aside as the prisoners were shoved within.

At first Dick could see little, so dark was it, but his ears detected immediately a peculiar rustling sound above which rose a chorus of sharp, squeaking, cries and the thump and thud of small bodies leaping and falling.

A PECULIAR musty, stale, odor assailed his nostrils, an odor compounded equally of stale blood and a faint suggestion of carbon mixed with some animal smell that he was at loss to recognize.

As more lanterns were brought, the gloom of the interior of the building became gradually relieved and Dick made out a large square room, the center of which was filled with a circular enclosure surrounded with a strong wire mesh wall. So large was this enclosure that it occupied nearly the entire room, leaving only a narrow passage way around the outside next to the wall of the building.

A door, also made of steel mesh, led into the enclosure opposite the main entrance of the building.

Staring at this enclosure, Dick became aware of thousands of small greenish eyes reflecting the light of the lanterns. The rush and sweep of movement grew louder from within the enclosure and the squeals and sharp cries more intense as furry bodies flung themselves against the mesh.

"They are hungry, our little pets!" came Nagoi's smooth voice at his elbow as more lanterns were brought and hung about the tops of the wire mesh walls.

In their rays Dick stared uncomprehendingly at the floor of the enclosure, a floor that moved in brown waves, ebbing and flowing and leaping high, filling the air with chattering squeals as the huge brown rats, thousands of them, leaped and fought and shrieked hungrily.

"It is only the Chinese who know properly how to utilize the rat as an assistant to the executioner," Nagoi's voice came again, "but Boris Kargadoff here is their apt pupil!"

Dick turned to where the small figure of the man with the hideously disfigured face, busied itself with some large wire contraptions that looked not unlike huge rat traps although they were long and narrow and slightly longer than a man's body.

Still curious and uncomprehending, nay, even unaware of danger, Dick watched with interest as the dwarf-like figure of the red-faced Killer shoved one of the wire arrangements across the floor to the door of the enclosure, being assisted by the long-armed gangling creature who acted as his assistant.

Behind him he felt Nadina trembling against his back. Around the outside door were clustered several guards but the most of them including Nagoi, had moved into the passageway on the far side of where Boris Kargadoff was working with straps and clamps and small steel gates that he raised and lowered inside of the wire contraption. The interior of this affair was divided off into some five compartments.

"Interesting, is it not?" came Nagoi's smooth voice. "The Chinese call this the Five Heavenly Gates in their poetic and beautiful fashion. It is a very charming arrangement, allowing time for one to contemplate and reflect while life is gradually being shortened and ended."

DICK wracked his brain in an effort to remember where and how he had heard of the expression—the·

"Five Heavenly Gates." In truth there were five, small, steel, gates separating the wire contraption into six compartments. While he still tried to reason out the thing, Nagoi's voice broke in again on his thoughts.

"THE idea is to place the patient prone in the basket," he explained. "Once he is made comfortable, the first of the Heavenly Gates is opened and the rodents allowed to fight their way in and feast as far as the Second Heavenly Gate. This generally accounts for the feet and half the lower legs of the patient. Once this is done the Second Heavenly Gate is opened which allows the rodents to continue their feast through the knees. Some weaker men quit at this but the majority are of sterner stuff and last much, much longer. Are you ready Kargadoff?" He turned to where the evil, little red-faced man was rubbing his hands.

A sudden blinding flash of comprehension came over Dick as full realization of the horror they were about to undergo smote him. The rats within the cage enclosure fought and leaped and squealed, their small red eyes gleaming evilly as they smelled food, their wicked sharp teeth snapping at each other and at the wire mesh of their compound.

No one but the mind of a fiend or a degenerate sadist could have conceived of a torture so bestial as this. And looking at the excited faces of the hideous little red-faced man and the cruel glare in Nagoi's eyes, Dick realized that he was up against madmen.

Boris Kargadoff's shrill voice yowled, cat-like.

"You see my little darlings!" he screamed exultantly. "They are hungry, the pets!"

Dick looked about him wildly. Nadina was directly behind him, pressed close, her hand resting on his bound wrists. To his right was Schneider and slightly in the rear was Gans. To the left were five or six guards massed behind the prisoners, but the most of them were with Nagoi and Kargadoff on the far side of the door entering the cage.

"The honor of going first shall be given the big American," he pointed at Gans, "so that the others may see and study for himself how pleasing it is to die the Death of the Five Heavenly Gates!"

The shambling, long-armed creature who had assisted Kargadoff rose from his task and turned toward Gans. Tom Gans, as grim and as hard as he was, blanched white and looked about him for some means of escape. But means of escape there were none. Behind him stood the guards, armed with bayonets while in front of him the shambling creature with the long arms advanced.

DICK noted that the inner gate, giving entrance to the enclosure, opened outwards into the narrow passageway. The light, strong steel contraption with its five gates, stood to one side ready to be filled with its victim, to have its form-fitting gates closed down over each section of his body and to be pushed inside the enclosure where the starved rats would do the rest.

A sudden wild plan came to Dick. If only Nadina—

"Have you that knife with which you intended to kill Kargadoff?" he whispered over her shoulder.

The girl, half dazed and overcome with horror roused herself at the sound of his voice. Instantly she understood what he meant. As the shambling long-armed creature laid hands on Gans, Dick felt a knife slip through his bindings and the cords fall away from his wrists.

HIS eyes intent upon the door of the enclosure, he heard Gans groan despairingly as the shambling creature laid hands upon him. The burly American, determined to sell his life dearly, suddenly crouched, preparing to leap on his aggressor, in spite of bound arms.

At that second, while everyone's attention was on that scene, Dick felt the knife being slipped into his hands.

Leaping forward, before anyone could see what he intended, he jerked back the bolt which held the door which entered into the enclosure.

"Back Tom!" he yelled.

Obedient, Gans flung himself backward in time to crowd behind the steel-meshed door which Dick was opening wide into the passageway. Such was the width of that door that it effectually closed off the passage, screening Dick, Gans, Nadina and Schneider and the handful of guards with them from the leaping torrent of rats that rushed squealing out the opened way.

The starving beasts leaped at the nearest human and Boris Kargadoff went down in a brown wave of snapping teeth and scurrying forms. His ghastly shrieks were echoed by Nagoi who kicked and struck ineffectually at the living wave as it flooded over him.

The guards behind these two screamed and fought in agony and fear as the vicious animals attacked them and drove them back along the passage.

The outflung steel mesh door effectually guarded the prisoners from the army of rats but danger threatened from the several guards who by now had recovered their wits.

Leaving Nadina to hold the door in place across the passageway, Dick leaped to aid Gans quickly uncutting his pinions and performing like service for Schneider while Gans went into action tooth and nail against the guards.

In that narrow space there was no room to use the bayonet or the long rifle and the Americans sailed in with fists and knees, desperate and ruthless. In a few seconds they had overcome the frightened guards and relieved them of their weapons.

On the far side of the door the first fury of the rats had spent itself. The guards who had fled down the passageway began to gather courage once more and their rifles spoke as they fired into the swarming masses of rats. The huge brown beasts squealed and fought, their eyes shining redly. The echo of rifle fire suddenly reverberated outside.

The doorway filled with Cossack figures. Volley after volley was unloosed on the rats and they were driven down the passageway onto the few remaining guards.

FROM somewhere Paul Semionovich appeared and with him a man in the uniform of an American soldier. It was Sergeant Collins who had escaped from his captors and joined the Cossacks, aiding Paul to lead them quietly out of their camping place and to attack Kargadoff's den.

Paul Semionovich had carried out Dick's instructions nobly, having left sufficient men to keep the fires going and to give the camp an air of being inhabited while the bulk of the Cossacks slipped out into the woods by twos and threes and assembled.

While the Cossacks busied themselves in chasing down and slaughtering the remnants of Nagoi's beastly crew of men and rats, Dick Farnsworth busied himself in trying to comfort Nadina, who shook with sobs of happy relief in his arms.

BLACK CATS

A Tense Story of Hate and Superstition on a Tropical Island Where Only Two White Men Live

By GERALD DE VRIES

Author of "The Orchid of the Moon God," "Sinister Silence," etc.

NED HARRIS sat in the doorway of the crude little hut staring sullenly about him. He hated the little tropical island upon which he had been marooned for six weeks. Heat, stifling and intense, rose from the bright-hued foliage of the dense jungle that surrounded the fever-laden swamp which formed the center of the place.

Harris cursed softly as he glared out at the sea. He had not wanted to be put ashore here, yet he had been given little choice. Broke, save for a few dollars which he had been hoarding, he had been discovered on the mail steamer, a stowaway. The captain had been vindictive about it. Harris had been put ashore on the island and argument had proven useless.

When the ship had sailed away Harris had learned that there was but one other white man on the island. That was Jed Wilks, the fat, slovenly uncrowned king of the territory who

ruled the natives through fear of his stock brutality while he plied his sordid liquor trade among them.

AT first Harris had been grateful for even the presence of Wilks. Though he had moved into a deserted hut which he had found on the beach the new arrival had spent much of his time at the big shack where Wilks lived and did his trading.

But Wilks had suddenly decided that there was not room for two white men in his domain. It was all because of the native girl, Lela. When Harris had first landed she had come to him, whimpering and frightened, with Wilks close behind her.

There had been a beautiful glitter in the oily hulk of the man as he gazed at the girl. The fear in Lela's face had been too much for Harris. He had drawn his revolver and ordered the trader away.

Wilks had gone angrily and reluctantly, yet when next he had encountered Harris he had said nothing. It was only now that Harris was beginning to realize how clever the other man had been. Always pretending that they were friends. Seemingly delighted whenever the younger man had come to the big shack, and at the same time doing things under cover to try and get rid of him.

He would have succeeded if it had not been for the girl. Always she was on guard, trying to protect the younger man from the trader. There had been that poisoned coffee which Lela had refused to let him drink. Harris shuddered as he thought about it. It had caused a dog to die almost instantly when the animal had taken a sip of it.

But that had been only one of the attempts on Harris' life. There had been others, some not so subtle. Twice he had been shot at as he made his way along the beach. Once he had found an evil looking poisonous snake curled up in his bunk in the little hut.

He had killed it with a shot from his automatic revolver. He knew the snake had not gotten there of its own accord. That was more of Wilks' work.

The other night for the first time the big man's emnity had come out boldly. Harris had sat across from him at a little table in the big shack watching, always ready for every action of the stout flabby creature.

"I'm speakin' plain, Harris," Wilks had said, the words gurgling from his mouth like heavy syrup from a stone jug. "I want Lela, and I'm gonna have her, understand!"

"You'll never get her, Wilks," Harris had stated quietly and coldly.

"Want her yourself, eh?" Wilks laughed harshly.

"No," Harris had said slowly. "I've sunk pretty low, with little left but a mad craving for liquor, but I haven't gone native—and I don't intend to do so!" he smiled grimly. "But you'll never get Lela!"

"You lie!" Wilks had roared. "I always get what I want, no matter how. There ain't room for us both on this island. I was here before you come an' I'm gonna still be rulin' th' roost when you're gone." He had leaned forward and poked Harris in the chest with the black nail of a stubby finger. "Either I get th' girl an' you get out on th' next boat that stops here, or you die, get me?"

TO his own surprise he had not been afraid, just disgusted, and seething with rage. He longed to reach out and slap that ugly, sweaty face in front of him, to break the big man's head with the butt of the automatic that his fingers clung to tightly within the side pocket of the torn white linen coat. But he had not done so, that would have been too much like Wilks' way of doing things.

"I don't give a hoot what you want, Wilks," he had said. "You won't get the girl, and I'll leave when I get damn ready!"

Wilks had started to speak and then glanced at a calendar which hung on the wall. As he did so a strange, frightened expression passed over the stout man's face.

Harris noticed the other's expression, and then glanced at the calendar. As he observed the date he smiled faintly.

"Friday, the thirteenth, eh?" he had said. "They say that's an unlucky day, Wilks."

"Uh huh," Wilks had stared down at one huge arm, across the wrist of which ran the jagged scar of a knife wound. "It's unlucky, all right. I got that slash on Friday, the thirteenth, just after a black cat had crossed my path."

"Just a little superstitious, aren't you," Harris had said. "Afraid of black cats, Wilks?"

"Black cats!" Wilks had shuddered. "I hate 'em—they're the very worst kind of luck!"

"Did you know that I've one at my cabin?" Harris had asked. He had been lying, but had felt it might be wise to play upon the big man's superstition. "Lela found it near the swamp."

"You—you got a black cat?" Wilks had demanded, glaring at him wildly. "It's a lie!"

"Drop around and see for yourself," Harris had said as he left. "I hope it crosses your path."

HARRIS smiled now as he thought about that conversation. The funny part of it was that he did have a black cat in his kit bag. Not a real one, just a toy that he had picked up in his travels. To him it had been sort of a mascot. He didn't believe in the bad luck of black cats.

He had taken it out of his kit bag and given it to Lela that afternoon. She had been afraid of it at first. The furry object had looked realistic, with its back arched as though it would utter an angry hiss at any moment.

HARRIS frowned as he realized it was growing dark. Lela had overheard Wilks tell one of the natives that he intended to get Harris tonight. That he would wait no longer.

As night descended over the island a faint chill of fear swept over him. Wilks had said that he was going to get him, and he suddenly found himself afraid of the big man's sly, sinister ways. The weeks of drinking Wilks' stomach-searing liquor had weakened his morale. He got to his feet and stood gazing anxiously about him.

Yesterday had been the thirteenth and the mail steamer was due again on the fifteenth. Why that was tomorrow! He hadn't thought of that before, but it meant a chance to get away. Yet the captain would never let him on board without money. He grinned mirthlessly. Money! Wilks had plenty of it in that heavy belt he wore around his waist. If there were only some way that he could get that money from Wilks!

Suddenly he caught sight of a dim figure moving toward him along the beach. A heavy, massive form. Wilks! He was coming now. For an instant the younger man stood there, staring. Slowly, deliberately, the fat trader moved toward him. Harris could see the evil sinister glitter in Wilks' little pig-like eyes.

With a frightened oath Harris turned and went crashing into the jungle, the automatic in his pocket forgotten. He did not realize that he was heading for the treacherous growth of the swamp, his one thought was to get away—he did not want to die.

Behind him came Wilks. The big man had increased his speed, he, too was running now. Once Harris glanced over his shoulder. He shuddered as he caught a glimpse of the wicked looking knife that the trader held in his hand. He didn't want to die—life had suddenly grown very sweet. Once Harris tripped and fell, as he did so the automatic slipped unheeded from his pocket.

THE younger man got hurriedly to his feet and ran on. The ground over which he traveled was growing moist and slippery. The swamp! Why hadn't he realized that before! Behind him he heard Wilks crashing heavily through the brush. It was too late, he could not turn back now.

Harris glanced ahead. He saw a clearing, a spot where the murky black water of the swamp lapped about a big flat rock. With a swift leap he landed upon the rock and then jumped again to find himself in the dry brush a few feet beyond.

He paused abruptly, panting. He could not go any further. He had to face Wilks here and now. For the first time Harris thought of the automatic. He cursed bitterly when he found that the weapon was gone. He turned and waited as the big man drew nearer.

Wilks gave a shout of fiendish joy as he saw the other man standing there, and flourished a knife.

Harris waited grimly. Even the lowest rat will fight when cornered, and he had once been a man, had Ned Harris.

Wilks leaped onto the rock. As he did so he paused and stared at something which Harris had not even noticed. The trader turned hastily as though about to run back in the direction from which he had come, then uttered a scream of terror as his foot slipped and he fell, the knife in his hand turning inward as he did so.

For a long time Harris stood watching the huge figure as it lay in a motionless heap upon the rock. Finally he moved closer. He jumped onto the rock and touched Wilks with his foot. The big man did not move. He was dead, the blade of his own knife sticking in his heart.

Anxiously Harris glanced about him, wondering what had frightened the man. He uttered a startled exclamation as he caught sight of the little furry figure near the edge of the big rock. The toy black cat stood there, it's back arched as though it were about to spring.

Harris picked it up and gazed at it thoughtfully. Then he looked again at Wilks' limp form and saw the outline of the money belt beneath the man's shirt. Harris found he did not regret the other's death. It had been his life or Wilks, and fate had dealt the trader the black ace.

With the money that would now be useless to the fat man, Harris could get away tomorrow and start afresh. Those on the mail steamer would demand explanations perhaps, but Harris intended to tell the truth if they did. The natives of the island knew that Wilks had planned to kill him, they would testify upon his behalf.

HARRIS thought of Lela. Stamba, one of the native youths loved her—she would return his adoration when there were no white men there.

Harris glanced at the toy black cat in his hand. Lela had probably tired of it, and left it here in the swamp where she often wandered. Then he looked again at the still form of Jed Wilks.

"The superstitious fool!" he murmured. "Black cats are unlucky, huh? Maybe—but not for me!"

Famous Soldiers of Fortune

Stookie Allen

JEAN DE GERVAL

BORN OF FRENCH PARENTS IN THE CATTLE COUNTRY OF THE ARGENTINE YOUNG DE GERVAL BECAME AN EXPERT HORSEMAN AND A CRACK SHOT WITH A RIFLE OR PISTOL.

HE LEFT HOME WHEN 19 TO ENTER A REVOLUTION IN VENEZUELA WHERE HE SAW DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AND WAS WOUNDED TWICE.

HE WAS AWARDED A SMALL FORTUNE FOR HIS PART IN THE REVOLUTION — FIGHTING WAS NOW IN HIS BLOOD — ...HE JOURNEYED ALL THE WAY TO EAST AFRICA TO FIGHT WITH THE BRITISH ARMY AGAINST NATIVE UPRISINGS — WAS COMMISSIONED A CAPTAIN.

WHILE SCOUTING ONE DAY A NATIVE HURLED A SPEAR THAT WENT ALL THE WAY THROUGH HIS SHOULDER HE QUICKLY RECOVERED AND WENT TO KOREA TO FIGHT IN THE JAPANESE-RUSSIAN WAR.


HE WAS WOUNDED AGAIN IN KOREA AND BECAME KNOWN AMONG SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE AS - —·· GERVAL, THE MAN WITH A HUNDRED LIVES.
HE NEXT SIGNED UP WITH THE FOREIGN LEGION AND WAS PUT IN COMMAND OF A TROOP IN ALGERIA WHERE HE ENGAGED IN MANY BATTLES WITH THE FIERCE RIFFS —— WAS TRANSFERRED TO FRENCH INDO-CHINA IN 1895 WHERE THE TONQUIN BORDER BANDITS WERE WARRING ON THE PEACEFUL CITIZENS.
IN THIS TONQUIN WAR GERVAL WAS CAPTURED BY A FIERCE BAND OF TONQUINS LED BY LULY-KY WHO ORDERED THAT HE BE EXECUTED —— ON THE WAY TO THE EXECUTION BLOCK A BAND OF LEGIONAIRES RUSHED THROUGH THE LINES AND RESCUED HIM. —— ....THE MAN OF A HUNDRED LIVES, LIVED AGAIN.
LULU-KY
FIERCE CHIEF OF THE TONQUINS.
TWO YEARS LATER HE HELPED MANUEL BONILLA SEIZE THE THRONE IN NICARAGUA— HE WAS REWARDED WITH MUCH GOLD AND RETIRED TO ARGENTINA.

A Thrilling Serial Novel of the Mystery,

The Leopard Man

A Three Part Serial

By

PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

Author of
"Those Who Walk in Darkness,"
"Dead Men Talk," etc.

CHAPTER I

Bayou Tanga

THE story of the Solomon Bush, as the thing is called, is as old as Africa. They say that the Queen of Sheba carried a branch of it when she came up from Africa to visit Solomon. That's why the black wizards of half the tribes of Africa are still calling it that—the Solomon Bush. But so far as this account is concerned, the history begins at Lac Perdu — Lost Lake, as it would be called in English—which lies at the head of Bayou Tanga, down on the Gulf coast of these United States.

It was there that Dr. Holbein, at that time curator of the Botanical Gardens, up in the Bronx, first met that curious young gentleman, Pierre Bayard, who told him about the thing and then went and got the specimen they now have at the Botanical Museum.

The specimen isn't much to look at. There's just a branch of it—such as Sheba herself might have brought to Solomon; just a foot or so of dried twig with a dozen or so of leathery brown leaves attached.

But weird! You begin to understand why they have it sealed up in a glass jar and have given it a special room to itself. You can feel the effect of it the moment you open the door.

EVEN Dr. Holbein has been known to admit, privately, that this is so, Although he doesn't like to talk about it. Much as some old timer from the Congo or Dahomey doesn't

Magic and Fantasy That Is Dark Africa

like to confess to all he knows, or believes, about native magic. Not just tourist magic. The real sort—like killing people and then keeping their bodies alive, or turning children into creatures such as Mother Nature never dreamed of. Things like that.

Dr. Holbein, as the guest of certain millionaire friends of his, had been cruising along the lonelier stretches of the Gulf Coast out from Pensacola. As the weather was fine and the tarpon were jumping, they'd dropped anchor at Bay Calibar—Bahia Calibar, on the older charts—and decided to stay awhile.

This suited the doctor, who at once took one of the smaller boats and started off by himself, as his custom was, to see what he could find in a botanical way.

Bay Calibar was better known in the days of pirates and slave runners than it is today. It's as beautiful as ever, but lonely; it has a reputation for being haunted.

TOWARD the sea it's protected, and also hidden, by high dune-islands covered with brush. Shoreward the high forest begins at once, lush and dense, hung with vines and spangled with flowers. It's this forest that screens the entrance to Bayou Tanga.

In the old days they used to haul full-sized, ocean-going ships, the sort they used to sail on the African run, right away into the woods and hide them there until the coast was clear. Or, if the ships belonged to a Bayard, they'd probably be hauled right on through the woods, by way

of Bayou Tanga, to Lac Perdu, where the ships would be cleaned and the raw slaves "seasoned" before being auctioned.

BAYOU TANGA never had been what would have been called friendly, exactly, to strangers. It wasn't a good country for a stranger to get lost in even now. There were too many snakes and mosquitoes, quaking bogs and old bull 'gators—not to mention other things that even the natives didn't care to meet.

But Dr. Holbein didn't mind. He was used to jungles. Anyway, he wasn't the sort one usually thinks of when a scientist is mentioned. He was a square and rugged man, built like a stevedore, inclined to red hair and freckles. He didn't mind, that is, until he found that he had pushed his boat so far into the watery jungle that he could no longer go either ahead or back.

Then, in order not to alarm his friends on the yacht, he tried to get out of the tangle on foot.

He kept his nerve, but things were getting pretty bad—he was up to his waist and night was falling—when Gozeli came his way.

Just how Gozeli happened to come his way is one of those things hard to explain. He'd made no outcry. This place where they met was remote from any trail that Gozeli usually followed. It might help some to say that this was the night of a full moon and that Gozeli had a white rooster under her arm. But to those who know Gozeli, no explanation would be necessary. Gozeli was an old woman supposed to have "powers."

She'd been a part of one of the last cargoes ever brought to Lac Perdu from Africa. This was, of course, long after "the ebony trade," as they called it, had been banned from the seven seas. So, more than ever, the slavers of that time were stowing their freight into tighter quarters. Yet they still told how on that ship that brought Gozeli from Africa the "ebony" came through intact—not a death, a thing unheard of—and it was she who got the credit for it.

There was something about her. At that time she couldn't have been more than, say, fifteen. Yet the other Negroes were already calling her "Ma"—not mammy but "Ma"—a title of respect all through Africa. Even the white men, it seems, had respected her—feared her, even.

You would have believed this and understood it if you'd ever seen Gozeli, even today when she must be upward of a hundred. For, as it's turned out since, she was as fine a specimen as you'd ever find anywhere of that race whom the Haussas of the Soudan call the Baturu-Dudu, which is to say, "the Black White People," to which the Queen of Sheba herself is said to have belonged.

They owe their name to the fact that they have the bodies, and the heads and the faces, of handsome white people, and yet are black, jet black.

AS for that, they are supposed to have been white, originally, and that if they are black today it is because they, or their ancestors, choose to be black. For they are credited with great gifts of—not magic, exactly, but of secret science, the sort of science that Moses, for example, is supposed to have turned against the Egyptians and which, you can be sure of it, has never disappeared.

So Gozeli, in the murk of mist and moonlight, found Dr. Holbein lost in the swamp about a mile or so south of Lac Perdu. It was an ugly place—one no native even would have

liked to be in at that time of night. She put out a branch to him and guided him to solid ground.

There wasn't much said. The doctor was too exhausted. Gozeli herself wasn't much given to speech. She did assure him, though, that everything was all right, that he needn't worry about his skiff—he hadn't told her that he had a skiff—and that someone he'd want to know was waiting to see him.

They'd gone but a little way, after this, when Gozeli called out in some curious language that the doctor couldn't recognize. In the same language, softly, someone answered.

And it was like that, there in the depth of the Bayou Tanga swamp, with black Gozeli as his guide, that Dr. Holbein was brought to meet Pierre Bayard of Lac Perdu.

CHAPTER II

The Murder Cults

THERE had been, undoubtedly, both pirates and slave runners—no end of them—among the ancestors of Pierre Bayard. But there was nothing in either his appearance or his speech, or his manners generally, to indicate the fact. Even standing there in the swamp and roughly dressed there was nothing of the hoodlum about him. He was tall and slender. His voice and manners were those of a man of the world.

Yet he was barely twenty.

Young Bayard and Gozeli—the old black woman still with her white rooster under her arm—brought the doctor through the dark swamp as pleasantly as if it had been a private park. They brought him to where Lac Perdu stretched away under the risen moon like a flat green meadow. But all around it was black jungle. Except near the place where they'd emerged from the swamp and here, close to the shore of the lake on a low bluff, was a great old white house standing in the denser black of a magnolia grove.

It wasn't long before Bayard and the black woman had Dr. Holbein into the house and seated before a blazing fire; and wrapped in a quilt while his own clothes were off somewhere being dried and cleaned. In the meantime a man had been sent off to notify the doctor's friends that he was safe and would pass the night at Lac Perdu.

Then while Bayard and Dr. Holbein talked Gozeli speeded up what she'd referred to as a bit of supper but which turned out to be an affair of state—served in a great old dining-room with silver and candles, fine porcelains and forgotten wines, just as if she and her young master had been expecting this visitor of theirs.

Holbein was impressed.

But what impressed him most, perhaps, was Pierre Bayard himself.

If he'd had any suspicions to begin with, these had disappeared. Pierre Bayard was white, all right. It was no matter either of birth or of education that was keeping him here buried in the woods. Nor could have it been a matter of money. This old house where the last of the Bayards lived apparently without other companions than his dogs and his servants showed no sign of poverty. Was it possible that the boy had committed some crime?

The doctor put the thought from him and mentioned that he had found certain African plants along the bayou.

BAYARD explained that Bayou Tanga itself had got its name from Africa—"Tanga" was an old Guinea word meaning "white" or

"foreign." This led him to tell of the slaves who'd been brought here in such large numbers in the old days—some of them by no less a person than his own grandfather, his mother's father, the late Captain da Silva. It was Captain da Silva, for example, who'd brought Gozeli to this part of the world.

ALL the time that Bayard was telling the doctor this, the latter could feel that Bayard was on the point of some important confession—that instead of trying to hold something back he was trying to get something out.

"Gozeli," the doctor said, "appears to be a most remarkable woman to have been brought to this country as a slave."

"More remarkable than you might believe," Bayard responded simply. "She's taught me more than I ever learned in school."

He hesitated, yet ready to go on.

"And what, may I ask," the doctor inquired, "was that language you and she used when you were bringing me through the woods?"

"I didn't know we used it," Bayard answered, coloring slightly. "It must have been what the darkies call 'bush mouth'—a language Gozeli taught me as a child. My mother died when I was seven; and as I remember it I hadn't been with her very much."

"Bush mouth," said the doctor. "What's that—some African language?"

Bayard nodded and was about to go on when he stopped. Both of them had heard that sound that had come thumping through the night. It was faint and far away, but it seemed to have taken possession of the night itself—a pulse with a curious rhythm.

Dr. Holbein at first gave no sign that he had heard it, or that he attached any significance to the sound if he had. But his eyes met Bayard's.

"Sir," the young man said, "this is voodoo night."

"A night of the full moon," the doctor replied. "That also was something brought over from Africa."

Bayard smiled.

"Gozeli's modified it a lot since then," he said. "That's one of the things she's taught me—not only the modified ritual but the original form."

"What was her idea in teaching you that?"

"She expects me some day—to kill a man." Pierre Bayard must have noticed Dr. Holbein's start. "A man who is now in Africa," he added, by way of reassurance.

"Murder by voodoo?"

Bayard shook his head.

"She's taught me all sorts of things besides—obeah, for example, which works with poison; the soul trap magic, which makes people crazy; the leopard cult—all those murder cults. And my grandfather, Captain da Silva, also taught me a thing or two before he died."

"What would he have said about—your killing a man?"

Bayard's answer came smoothly: "He swore me to it—the last thing he did before he died."

The drum music continued to beat, but now with a changed rhythm. Bayard listened.

"They're dispersing," he said. "There'll be no service tonight. Gozeli must have decided she'd better stay here. The others will do nothing without her. She's thinking now of what I have to do."

HE opened his shirt and revealed an oval locket—a rather large one, about three inches long and almost

as wide, but thin—suspended from his neck by a slender gold chain. He detached this and passed it over to Dr. Holbein.

"There's also such a thing as a 'safee,'" he said; "an amulet, a talisman. May I show you mine?"

The locket contained the portrait of a young woman painted on ivory. Dr. Holbein studied this for a long time in silence. He could see a resemblance to his host.

"Your mother," he ventured. "She was very beautiful."

Bayard's dark eyes shone. He took the locket back and replaced it carefully.

"She was killed by a leopard," he said with tightened lips. "By a Leopard—with a capital L—meaning a Leopard Man."

"How?"

"In one of the oldest and most terrible of Leopard ways. Some day I shall find him. His name is Farouk. When I find him I shall kill him—that is, if he doesn't kill me. But I am trained. I have hopes. And I am—well, fated. I'm only sorry that I can't kill him as he killed my mother."

"How was that, Pierre?"

"Farouk killed her by—as they say—putting his face on her. You probably do not believe in magic. But it killed her."

CHAPTER III

Leopard Tracks

GOZELI, silent as a black ghost, brought in coffee and liqueurs. Without a word she looked at the two white men seated before the fire. She looked at them lingeringly, first at one and then at the other. She was gone again.

Farouk, Bayard explained, had begun by killing his (Bayard's) father. That would have been all right. Men who went out to Africa, especially the Guinea side, were apt to die in unusual ways. But, in this case, Farouk had used poison. And he had done this as an act of vengeance not on the man he killed, but on the lady in the case—that Lily da Silva, Bayard's mother, for spurning him, as they say. Farouk, it seemed, had wanted Lily da Silva for himself.

"You used a peculiar phrase," said Dr. Holbein.

HE put his face on her," Bayard repeated. "It's a way they have. It's one of the oldest tricks in Africa, brought down by the 'kahinas,' the witches of the Soudan, from Egypt, from Arabia, from India. It's murder mixed with luxury."

"I don't understand."

"You'll find references to it in books on psychology," Bayard said, and he had read considerable on the subject, for his grandfather had accumulated a lot of such books, in French, and English, and Portuguese. "Farouk made it so that my mother saw his face wherever she looked," he tried to explain. And he began to repeat some of the things he'd heard from Gozeli. "When my mother looked in my cradle, she'd see Farouk's face floating there—nothing but his face. And it would be in the looking-glass when she brushed her hair; on the hearth-rug if she sat by the fire; up in a tree if she looked at a bird; or lying in her lap; or blurring the pages when she opened a book. She went to Mobile and New Orleans. She couldn't escape. She saw it on the sidewalk; or up in an awning; grinning at her from a window-pane; against the inside of the door when she tried to shut it out. It was this that took my father back on his last trip to Africa; then my

grandfather, Captain da Silva, my mother's father."

"Him, too?"

"He picked up Farouk's trail down in Loanda, the Portuguese West Coast; chased him from there right up to the old Slave Coast."

"Wasn't he afraid that Farouk would kill him also?"

NOT him! My grandfather had spent most of his life in Africa. He knew too much. He had too many friends — friends everywhere who were helping him—a lot of them 'ogangas,' witch-doctors, who had tricks of their own—and my grandfather was paying fancy prices for heads."

"Heads?"

"The heads of Leopard Men. He must have bought a hundred of them, always hoping that one of them would be white, Farouk's. But Farouk disappeared. That's a way they have. Captain da Silva traced him away up into Haussa-land, in the Soudan, and from there to Habesh-land—Abyssinia, as we call it—where he finally lost him. And by this time my mother was dying, so the captain came home."

Bayard got up and lifted a lamp to show Dr. Holbein a portrait of his grandfather hanging on the wall. Captain da Silva had been an eagle of a man. But now he seemed to smile down at the two of them standing there. It was a flickering smile, one that seemed to give the painted likeness a changing expression—now tender for this last of the Bayards, then with something of command and challenge in it for this guest of the house.

The moon was still high when they went to bed, but the hour seemed late. Things were very still. You no longer heard the voodoo-drum. There was that haunted feeling in the air that always comes with what Gozeli used to call the death-watch of the night. Bayard saw the doctor to the room that Gozeli had fixed up for him. Himself, he slept where he always did, in what had been his mother's room, which was fetish, giving him a sense of protection. And he'd barely closed his eyes, it seemed, before he'd opened them again, and there was Gozeli peering down at him with a lighted candle in her hand.

Most folks would have taken her for a witch. Her snow-white hair was loose, and she had a lot of it. It shone by contrast to the blackness of her skin. And her eyes were black, showing no whites at all, as if they were nothing but pupil. Also there was that something oily and and coily about her, to remind you of a flame of black fire. Bayard saw right away that she was *'ebum-tup,'* as his grandfather used to call it: the power was on her; she had her gift of second sight.

So Bayard sat up in his nightshirt and waited.

"This stranger," she began, using the language she had taught him in his childhood, "is the white man I've been looking for. Still I was tempted to leave him in the swamp."

"Why?" Bayard asked.

THEY were speaking softly. It was a language they could speak that way, without whispering or effort—developed in a country where it's often deadly to be overheard.

"Because," she said, "he has come to take you away from here. I've talked just now with his duppy (his double or ghost). As soon as this flower-doctor was asleep, his duppy came and told me what I knew already. He has come to take you away."

The news filled Bayard with such

excitement that he could hardly breathe.

"You mean," he asked, "that he's going to take me to Africa?"

She grunted a laugh, short and uncanny. "You're a Silva," she said. "You're a Bayard. No one has to take you to Africa."

"But I'll go."

"You'll go?"

"And find Farouk."

She scowled. Her animal eyes were fixed on him, but he could feel that she was looking at Farouk instead. Her scowl became so tense, her face made Bayard think of a mad leopard. If he hadn't known her so well he would have been scared.

"Farouk!" she breathed. "Now look on my face, Farouk! You've got power, Farouk! But, at last, you'll see my face; and when you see it, you die!"

"I'll kill him," Bayard whispered. He didn't like to put it in the form of a question, for that would have been throwing the responsibility on her.

Gozeli didn't appear to notice what he'd said; but her face relaxed and it was no longer the murderous Farouk she was looking at.

"Maybe," she said, "you'll find the Solomon Bush. It's time. It's the old herb of beauty for women and wisdom for men. You'll need it, Daddy Pierre, on both accounts."

BAYARD had heard that part of it before—what the Solomon Bush was supposed to do for women and men. That was the tradition that linked it up with Sheba and Solomon. That was why it was called the Solomon Bush, in half a hundred African dialects. The Solomon Bush had itself become the subject of a cult. It was guarded, he'd always been given to understand, by a jealous and powerful clan of hereditary guards.

Suddenly, Gozeli looked away. "I'm coming, Miss Lily—is that you, Miss Lily?"

And that meant Bayard's mother, long since dead.

CHAPTER IV

"Miss Lily"

IT was with those final words of Gozeli's in his ears—"is that you, Miss Lily?"—that Bayard finally went to sleep. They seemed to be there still when he woke up and found that it was already pink dawn. The impression lingered. He'd heard someone speak that name. Then he was hearing something else. There was a motorboat coming up the open channel at the edge of the lake.

It was a strange boat. He could tell that. He was familiar with every exhaust—and with the grate of every oarlock, almost—within a radius of fifteen miles.

He piled out of bed and looked through the tilted slats of the shutters. A trim white hull came into sight and slid up neatly to the landing-stage. It was as fine a boat as he'd ever seen—mahogany, brass that shone like gold, wicker chairs and plenty of cushions. In the boat there were three men and a woman.

No, not a woman, he decided; just a girl. And no sooner had he decided it than one of the men sang out to her and he learned that her name was Lily.

"Lily," the man had said, "suppose you stay here!"

The word rocked in Bayard's brain as the waves of the launch were rocking in the grass and hyacinth down by the landing-stage.

"Lily!" he said to himself; and straightway he felt a grudge against this girl, although he knew in his heart that this was unjust, as if she'd

appropriated something that wasn't hers.

As a matter of fact, her name was Lilian—Lilian Estelle. And the man who'd spoken to her was her father, Commodore Haven, owner of the yacht that had brought Dr. Holbein to the Gulf.

It was clear that Lilian Estelle Haven, moreover, had no idea of accepting that suggestion of her father's that she remain in the boat. She made some jesting remark and hopped out of the boat to the landing-stage as nimbly as a deer. Then, and thereafter, without much delay, Bayard was to notice that agility of hers, although she looked neither strong nor graceful.

As a matter of fact, there was some peculiarity about Lily Haven that he couldn't quite explain. It was something that both fascinated and yet repelled him—something that made him feel angry with her, as he'd already felt angry with her for usurping his mother's name, and yet made him feel sorry for her. First off, he thought that she was one of the ugliest girls he had ever looked at. Then, curiously, he thought he'd caught some gleam of beauty about her.

AFTER that—and after having been introduced — he decided simply to ignore her. After all, she was nothing but a kid—sixteen, seventeen, not very large for her age; with a skin too dark for her oddly colored eyes. It was hard to tell whether her eyes were brown or blue. Sometimes they looked one color, then the other, and again, a combination of the two—like violets among dead and fallen leaves.

They'd brought up enough food and fixings from the yacht for a dozen picnics, even hot coffee. It wasn't long before Gozeli had a table spread, and Bayard was settling down to hear Commodore Haven and Dr. Holbein talk, when the commodore turned to him.

"Mr. Bayard," he said, "it's an outrage to impose on you further; but may I ask you to have an eye on that daughter of mine? I fear she'll be getting herself lost."

"Most certainly, sir," Bayard answered.

HE was about the finest man Bayard had ever seen—not excepting Dr. Holbein—with something stout and merry about him, like a liveoak shaking its leaves in the sun.

Yen Billy, who'd been helping to wait on table, gave Bayard a signal with his eyes. As he passed him he whispered, "Her done head fer duh barracoons." And Bayard lost no time.

Anyway, he could hear the hounds working off through the woods in that direction. There were always from ten to thirty hounds hanging about Lac Perdu, belonging to nobody and everyone, ready to follow no matter whom or what, just as an excuse to get out and hunt; and sometimes inventing excuses of their own, so that there would be times when they'd all be off for a week together; and maybe you'd hear about it, months afterward, how they'd been away off in some other county or parish, twenty miles away, visiting with some other pack.

Bayard wasn't very easy in his mind about the barracoons. They were the old slave-pens, built solidly of lime and rock on a hammock island, but so deserted and overgrown with jungle that they'd become a favorite nesting-place for rattlesnakes and highland moccasins.

Miss Lily had passed this way, all right. He found the prints of her shoes in a boggy place. He let out a whoop to let her know he was coming. No answer. He scouted

around, not liking it at all, and wanting to get back. No one down on Lac Perdu ever came this way unless they positively had to, for it was pretty generally believed that the barracoons also were haunted.

BESIDES, well, ever so often, some transient or other who was trying to shake off the revenue men or a sheriff's posse would be camping here and it was ethical to respect the privacy of such.

Bayard killed a rattler and a coral snake, and knew by the sign in the grass that Miss Lily couldn't have missed them herself by very much. It made him shiver and it made him mad, for he was thinking of her father.

Then, pretty soon, he found where she'd left the hammock inland on the further side—crawling along a rotten log over a bit of deep water.

"Lawd Marster!" he said to himself. "Has she started out to follow those hounds?"

That's precisely what she'd started out to do.

The hounds were making such a lot of noise that he could hardly blame her for not having heard him right away, although he kept whooping. But finally there was a lull, and she gave him an answer.

"Is that you, Miss Lily?" he shouted.

You know how a shout goes echoing off through deep woods. The words kept sort of bouncing back in a whisper, to remind him that these were the same words that Gozeli had spoken the night before. It seemed like a couple of minutes before any answer came back. He judged she must be about a quarter of a mile away.

"Yes! What do you want?"

"You stay where you are till I get there."

"I can't."

"Your papa wants you."

"The hounds are chasing a bear or something."

"Wait!" he yelled.

But she didn't.

All this part of the woods was ridges and sloughs—ridges covered with pine and palmetto in strips and patches, but mostly with hardwood growth of hickory and oak, sweetgum and maple, growing so close and brushed so thick that even the wild razorback hogs stick to the trails; sloughs, many of them, with no bottom at all in places, yet still far better going than the ridges, for here, at least, you're free of the brush. Only, naturally, you have to look where you walk, not only on account of the deep places, which you have to cross on sunken cypress, slick and misleading, but on account of the stump-tailed moccasins.

Moccasins by the hundreds—thick as your leg but never much longer than your arm, only about five minutes behind a rattler when it comes to killing a man. But sluggish. You pass them floating in the water, or coiled on a log, right within reach of your hand—bloated and black—and all they'll do, if you leave them alone, is to open their broad white mouths at you and sometimes hiss like a goose. Often you could count as many as a dozen at a time.

Here and there the brush was broken. Bayard found an occasional print of Lily Haven's shoe. It looked woefully small; and that was about all there was to keep him from wanting to murder her. There were roiled places in the sloughs. He saw where she'd sat down by an old otter-slide and squeezed out her skirt.

BY this time he was considerably distressed. It wasn't good tracking country and he'd lost considerable headway. Hounds, as he could tell

by their voices, had now treed a wildcat or a panther, somewhere over on Rivière Morte, so he finally took a short-cut off in that direction.

She wasn't with the hounds.

SO he back-tracked, feeling sick and anxious. It was more than an hour before he picked up her trail again. He could see that she'd been running. He wondered what from.

Altogether, he may have been away from the house for about two hours. The place seemed terribly quiet when he returned there. The launch was gone. There was no sign about of either Commodore Haven or Dr. Holbein.

Bayard slipped around to the back and looked in at the kitchen door.

And there she was. She was seated in an old rocker by the kitchen fireplace, with the same quilt more or less wrapped about her that Dr. Holbein had used the night before. For she'd taken off her dress and Gozeli was now ironing it out for her. She looked like a child—a small child with a neck too thin for the size of her head, skinny white shoulders, and her arms and her legs looking somehow fantastic in the way she had them twisted about.

Bayard sneaked away again.

She was waiting for him, it seemed, when he showed up again after having changed some of his own clothes.

"Hello," she said; "I missed you in the woods."

"You want to keep out of those woods," he told her.

"Why?"

"They are dangerous for a girl alone."

She gave him a curious look. "Not for me," she said. "I love a jungle. I saw the panther the hounds had treed. But I couldn't get very close, unless I swam a creek."

He looked at her speechless.

"There were a couple of alligators in that creek," she went on. "And I saw so many snakes. It make me think of Africa."

"What do you know about Africa?" he asked, with a touch of sarcasm.

"Africa!" she said, after a little silence. She didn't smile. She was looking at him with her large almond-shaped eyes. He noticed for the first time that they held a sort of odd beauty.

"Africa we-country," she said softly. "He wo-wo. That place Sassa-bonsum live."

She broke off with a little start. What had startled her, Bayard believed, had been his own unconcealed shock of surprise.

"Sassa-bonsum" was a word for an evil spirit—an African word—almost the devil himself. Only, up and down the coasts of Guinea there are so many devils that just their names alone would fill a dictionary.

What she'd said really was that Africa was her native land, that she'd known great sadness there, and that it was the abiding place of the devil.

CHAPTER V

"O Tangani"

THERE was a mystery about this Lily Haven girl, all right. But Bayard didn't get very far with it just then. As a matter of fact there was too much else to absorb his interest. The Havens, and Dr. Holbein, were to linger about the Lac Perdu country for the better part of a month. And it was after only the first day or two that they began talking to Bayard—and to Gozeli—about taking him away with them when they went back to New York.

They said that this was no place

for a white boy of his age, and education, and so forth, to go on living. He didn't like the "boy" part of it, as he was actually better than twenty, and had, for a number of years, been something of a boss about these parts. But he was eager to go. He was crazy to go. And the mystery of Lily Haven was a mere speck of the general wonder that had come over the face of the world.

THE time came when Gozeli was to give them a farewell dinner at the old house. Bayard had continued to live there, of course, although he'd taken to spending a good deal of time on the Haven yacht down in Bay Calibar.

During this period he saw Lilian Estelle Haven hardly at all. He did notice, though, that she was spending a good deal of her time with Gozeli and that Gozeli and she seemed to get along together. It might have been from Gozeli, he thought, that the girl had picked up those few West Coast words she'd used.

After the farewell dinner had been eaten they went into the library—the Havens and Dr. Holbein and Bayard. There'd been none others present, because this was a sort of family affair.

The library of that old house on Lac Perdu merited the name. It had books from all over the world, many of them old and in wonderful bindings. Besides, it was a first-rate museum. For, ever since the house had been built—and before that, in preceding houses, presumably—the Bayards and Silvas, the Hawtreys and the Fontillacs, sea-rovers and adventurers all, had been using Lac Perdu as their home-port, so to speak, and the only place of permanence to which they could bring the things they wanted to keep: books, manuscripts, weapons and gods.

There was one old map in the library that Bayard prized more than all those other things put together. It was his grandfather's own private map of Africa. Bayard had been brought up on that map. As a child he'd look at it instead of picture books. He'd spent rainy days with it, traveling and fighting and exploring, while lying down on his stomach on the floor.

A map about four feet square, engraved in Paris, printed on thick paper—with a smell of tobacco and musk about it—and dated 1825.

Originally, except for Egypt, Senegal and the Sahara (spelled with a Z), most of the continent had been left blank. But on this map the blank spaces, all across the heart of the continent, had been filled in by hand, most of this work as cunning and fine as that of the original engraver had been. And this had all been the work of Bayard's own people—Portuguese, English, French, American—passing on their secrets and guarding them like the members of a guild.

He knew those markings by heart, whatever the language: "Foul swamp," "Southern limit of cannibal tribes," "Gold and Ivory," "City royal of the Fungeno."

MR. HAVEN and Dr. Holbein had begun to stroll about to look at other things. Bayard had the map laid out before him on the table and he was so fascinated by it again that he didn't notice Lily at his side until she spoke. And when she did speak, it was as if he'd heard the voice of Africa itself. What she'd said was this:

"O tangani!"

It meant, "O white man!"

He took a few moments to recover himself, then he asked her: "Who taught you that, Gozeli?"

As she didn't answer, he turned

and looked at her. She kept her eyes on the map. He thought he saw a shade of extra color in her cheek. He turned to the map again, with those syllables of hers still echoing in his brain.

"O tangani!"

Somehow or other that didn't sound like Gozeli. Gozeli might have taught her other words. But there would have been no occasion to teach her these.

Presently Lily spoke again, this time in English. She'd put her finger on a place near the center of the map.

"And what's this, Pierre?"

"It's a mountain," he said. "It's a mountain called Gumbah, which means 'Lightning' or 'God.'"

"Why do they call it that?"

"For one reason," he said, "it shines in the dark."

"What makes it shine in the dark?"

"No one knows—no white man, at any rate."

"Why do all the trails stop before they get there?" She had good eyes, all right, and no one could accuse her of being dumb. He'd once asked that very same question himself, and he gave her the answer now that his grandfather had given him that other time.

"Because it's fetish," he said. "It's sacred. That's where the Solomon Bush grows."

"The Solomon Bush?"

He could catch some sudden tension of her nerves.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that you've heard about that, too?"

HE felt a little peeved. If Gozeli had been telling this girl about the Solomon Bush, Gozeli, he felt, had gone a little too far. He'd come to look on the Solomon Bush as, to some extent, his own private property. He intended, some day, to go and get the Solomon Bush, find out all about it. There weren't too many treasures left in Africa to reward an explorer. In any case, the Solomon Bush was the greatest.

"I've been to Africa," she said.

"And it was there you heard about the Solomon Bush?"

HE turned and looked at her. She seemed to be very solemn. She also had looked up from the map. Her curious eyes met his.

"And you know why it's called the Solomon Bush?"

She nodded.

"And what it's supposed to do?"

She nodded again.

He thought she might be putting it on a little, so he asked her: "What?"

He expected her to tell him—that is, if she knew—that it was supposed to make men wise and women beautiful, but she fooled him. She said:

"It is supposed, O tangani, to bring people back to what they were before—"

She stopped.

"Before what?"

She stood there looking at him in a way that reminded him of a fox that he'd once caught in a steel-trap by both front feet. He couldn't explain it. But he'd given up trapping after that. He gave up trying now to find out about this mystery of Lilian Estelle Haven and what she knew about Africa.

It was Commodore Haven who saw that Bayard got a berth with the big Natural History Museum in New York—in the African Section, which was the commodore's pet department. But all the time that he was there Bayard never forgot that special destiny of his. And at times he talked of it again to Dr. Holbein. The doctor and the commodore were powerful friends.

There was proof of this—or was

it Fate?—the day that Bayard's chief in the African Section came and suggested that Bayard ought to go to Africa, to investigate a number of things that the experts were in doubt about and also to bring back such material as he might be able to collect.

Bayard was outwardly calm—or hoped he was—as he stood there before his chief. But inwardly he wasn't calm. Inwardly it was as if he'd just heard another voice. It was the voice of Africa.

This was what it said:

"O Tangani, the time has come for you to go and kill Farouk!"

CHAPTER VI

Good-bye to All That!

THE night before he was to sail, Commodore Haven had a number of friends up to his apartment for dinner—the apartment was one of those triplex affairs with a good deal of the castle about it, and overlooking the rest of the world from the top floors of one of the newest skyscrapers.

"Just the museum crowd," he called it; but before the evening was far gone there may have been a couple of hundred there at least. He was going to show some new sound pictures one of his parties had just brought back from the Amazon. Then, those who preferred to dance were free to do so. There was so much room that no one disturbed anyone else.

Bayard himself wasn't in a mood for either of these things. He was thinking—or wanted to think—of Africa, of his grandfather, of Gozeli, of his mother and his father and Farouk.

"Here," he thought, "is New York. The best of it is yours. You can travel high and wide, become rich and famous. And you're going to chuck this chance for the privilege of killing a man—or getting killed yourself."

He slipped through a window-door to a terrace. The terrace was like a country garden, with shrubbery and flowers, and he was in a shadowy corner near the parapet before he discovered that someone had come there ahead of him. A second later he saw who it was.

"Hello, there, Lily," he said.

She'd turned and saw him at about the same moment he'd seen her, so there was no escape.

She was alone. She'd been leaning on the parapet, with her chin in her hands, like one of those chimeras you see in pictures of Notre Dame de Paris. The place suggested a cathedral tower—so high, so still, so suddenly solemn and somehow sad.

"This is unexpected, Pierre," she said. "I had no idea you'd follow me." Her voice was soft. Her mistake was genuine.

He felt a little foolish. He'd have to pretend that he had followed her.

"I just thought," he said, "that you might be wanting a wrap or a cigarette or something."

She turned and looked away again over the twinkling smother of Manhattan.

"Well, your dream has come true," she said. "You're off to Africa."

"Yes, that's part of the dream," he said, and he leaned on the parapet beside her. It was like standing at the rail of a boat at sea—the phosphorescent dark rushing by below and a sense of infinity all around. "I wish you were going along," he said.

SHE gave him a quick glance. She smiled slightly. He was watching her from the corner of his eye. Her face went serious again and a little strained. He could see that she was thinking hard. There was a certain

animation in her face when she thought that made her almost beautiful. Not pretty. Beautiful, with the curious beauty of the great Egyptian sphinx.

"Are you really going to try to find Farouk?" she asked.

After a time he said: "I'm sorry Gozeli told you about Farouk."

She replied: "You shouldn't be."

"Why shouldn't I be?"

She sank her head a bit and closed her eyes as if the better to concentrate.

"Why shouldn't you be? Well, let's see! I'll tell you why. I'm like you in one respect. When I was little I also had a black nurse. It made me laugh—and also want to cry—when I saw how it made you jump when I called you 'tangani.' You see, I'd almost forgotten it; but when I was just a baby they called me something almost like that. 'Sanga-tanga.' What does that mean, Pierre?"

"It might mean a number of things," he said. "I suppose in your case it means a little stick with the bark taken off. You know, like a piece of willow. As you might say, 'Peel White.'"

"That's it," she said. "That's the picture. I remember. And I had a big white doll that I called Sanga-Tanga."

SHE stood there for a while longer with her head down and her eyes closed. Then, with one of those quick movements of hers, she was facing him. She was trying to say something, it seemed, and was having difficulty of a sort. Bayard couldn't surmise just what.

"What's that got to do with Farouk?" he asked.

"Maybe," she said, "I picked up some of that African magic myself. As for that, I know I did. And it's a curse." She was serious, but she succeeded in forcing a smile. "The name of Farouk is a curse. I don't know why, but I feel that it is. And I don't want you to run into it. I'm afraid." She burst out: "I'm afraid for you!"

BAYARD felt a shiver—a hot one, not a cold—play about the back of his neck. He'd never suspected that she was capable of such feeling.

"I told you," he said, "I was sorry Gozeli told you about Farouk."

"It wasn't all she told me," she said.

"What else?"

"Gozeli is 'kahina'—she's got all the old magic of the Soudan."

"I know that."

"And I got her to teach me."

"That's not good."

"It is. I wanted it. I needed it."

"Why should you need it?"

She gave him a slow look. "Maybe I'll be going to Africa again myself. Father and Dr. Holbein are talking about it. I'll go with them when they go. I understand that Farouk is still living there. What he did—what he did he may do to others."

"You think that what he did to my people he might do to yours—or you?"

She shook her head.

"Pierre, don't you think it's foolishness for you to follow up this Leopard business when you have such brilliant prospects?"

At that Bayard fiared out. "What do you want me to do? Forget what happened to my father? Forget what Farouk did to my mother?"

"No."

"Then what?"

She was very white in the dim light. She didn't answer. When she did speak, he thought she was trying to change the subject. She said that Gozeli had showed her a portrait of Bayard's mother—it was

one that hung in his room, down on Lac Perdu. She began to praise his mother's beauty—a rather obvious way of pouring oil on the waters, it seemed to him. But she hadn't intended to change the subject, after all.

"Pierre, do you suppose she'd want you to go on thinking about Farouk? You see, she—she loved you."

He didn't answer. They were standing there facing each other, and something or other told him that she was a better friend of his than he'd ever imagined her to be—that she might have been, in fact, even more than a friend. It's queer how men—some men—will leave the one woman, leave comfort, leave everything, for some murderous dream or other. But they just have to do it, it seems.

"Good-by, Lily," he told her, and she made no objection as he kissed her cheek.

He'd never kissed her before.

"Good-by, Pierre," and that was all.

But early next morning, before going down to the ship that was to carry him to Liverpool, he sent her that old family map of Africa. She knew—and he knew she knew—that it was about the most precious thing he owned.

His heart was heavy. But—as they say—what will you? Africa, not New York, was what he was meant for. Just then it was; and not Lilian Estelle Haven, but a Leopard Man named Farouk.

CHAPTER VII

Senhor Faro

BAYARD had been in Africa a year up and down the West Coast—along "the Bights," in the Guineas, "upper and lower."

A month down there is equivalent to about a day in New York, when it comes to getting things done; and the time had somehow slipped by more swiftly than he'd taken count of. He hadn't even taken the fever—none to speak of; having inherited, he supposed, a sort of inoculation both from his ancestors and his childhood on Lac Perdu.

HE got off a number of shipments to his chief in New York and was thinking some of returning there himself—with Farouk still somewhere in the future, like any other necessary evil, like old age, like death—when he got a hurry call from one Senhor Faro.

Dom Gonzalo Faro, a friend of his grandfather's; but, Bayard knew, a most dissolute old soul; formerly, it appeared, a personage of importance down in Loanda, Portuguese West Africa, and now an exile because of some misdeed or other, in charge of a small factory a long way up an obscure branch of the Ogowé, Congo Français.

We'll say this for him, that there weren't many white men in the world who could have held a station like his. The fever got them, or the solitude; or they'd have a falling out with the natives, which might become as fatal as anything else.

There were so many ways to die in this part of the world that most white men quickly took advantage of at least one of them—occasionally two, like the two kinds of fever, "jungle" and "cork."

Senhor Faro didn't mind.

He sat in this place that was his and watched the world roll by. His world was the river. It was low. It was high. It carried a casual traffic of native dugouts. Once a month the company's big canoe came up from the great Ogowé, remained an hour, then dropped away again, down through the mystery of the forest, which here was like that mys-

tery of space that surrounds the greater world.

THE forest never changed. It never had. Perhaps it never would. It stretched away almost beyond the limits of imagination. Tornadoes, flooding downpours, lightning that flared and struck like a thousand pieces of massed artillery, left the forest just as it was before.

The river only seemed like something human and companionable. So Dom Gonzalo sat and watched it now, after he and Pierre Bayard had dined, and the swift, six-o'clock African night came crowding in.

"Full moon," said Senhor Faro. "You'll be hearing some music."

He had sent for Bayard and Bayard had gathered from his message that whatever it was the old man wanted him for couldn't wait.

The "factory," or trading station, was about the size of a four-car garage, made of corrugated iron, set on piling and extending mostly over the water. But shoreward the establishment had been extended into a compound, hacked out of the jungle and strongly stockaded. Inside the stockade were huts and other constructions of sorts, made of bamboo and palm-leaves, so that it looked—and smelled—like a native village.

The resemblance went even further, Dom Gonzalo said; for pythons just would get into his hen-house and leopards just would crawl over his fence—so long as he ever tried to keep a dog or a goat.

The full moon rose.

"Black man's sunrise," said Dom Gonzalo. Then there was a sort of throb in the silence, felt rather than heard. "I thought so," the old Portuguese added. "They've started their music."

"A drum!"

"The pulse of Africa!"

"I don't quite get the rhythm," Bayard observed.

"That's cannibal fash," the old man explained, with an interest subdued. "Fungeno village up the river. Fungeno, Fans! They're cannibals!"

Bayard was silent. So was Senhor Faro.

Under the moon the river smoked. Bayard watched it, just as Senhor Faro did. A pageant of silver misty shapes went by—spectres, as if bound for the village—ghostlike and leisurely, dissolving before you could make them out yet leaving some shred of uneasy recollection behind them.

"So that's it," Bayard said. "Cannibals!"

"You can't stop them," Senhor Faro intoned, with perfect resignation. "They're afraid of the French, but they don't mind me. We're all together back here in the bush. I know what they were up to when they went past here two days ago with a fat Manoko man tied down in a canoe."

"Couldn't you threaten them?—argue with them?"

The old man didn't answer. The question was foolish. The nearness of tragedy, a sense of gloom, recalled to Bayard that last interview of his with Lilian Estelle in New York. He'd thought of her often since, always with a certain wretchedness, as if he'd done something cruel and wrong. He'd tried to write to her, but he couldn't.

A PECULIAR association of thought was linking Lilian Estelle with the unhappy Banoko man—as if she also were a victim of sorts.

"Paint themselves white when they eat it," Dom Gonzalo observed. "They'd tell you it was religion. But a Banoko man! He's just chop!" He drew himself together, and Bay-

ard was aware that Dom Gonzalo had taken to studying him through the gloom. He whispered: "Now, if it had been a white woman, a white unmarried girl—"

THE old man got up abruptly and went into his store. He was more than a little daft, Bayard imagined. Old gentlemen living alone in the bush too long generally were. But he'd been a friend of his grandfather's. He'd sent a canoe for him and a message that the affair was important. There was something on his mind.

Dom Gonzalo came back bringing bottles and glasses, although he could easily have called a black boy for the service. Bayard surmised that he'd wanted to escape—for another try at his problem alone—if only for a minute.

"There's a son of mine," the old man announced, as he started to pour out the drinks. "He was born down in Loanda. He turned out to be so white I thought I'd bring him up as a white man."

"So this was it," Bayard said to himself. But all he could do was to wait.

Back in the compound he could hear, even now and then, a faint note as if someone had touched the strings of a native harp very soft, very plaintive.

It must have been the sort of harp that has strings made of orchid roots. This sound expressed what was in his thoughts better than any words he could have found. He knew something about this tragedy of mixed color and race.

Suddenly, Senhor Faro put the question to him:

"Pierre, did you ever know the name of that Leopard Man who pestered your sainted mother?"

"Yes, sir," Bayard said. "His name was Farouk!"

And his skin was crawling; for not until this moment had he put the two names together in his mind; Senhor Faro's and this other name. Faro, Farouk! The two names were one.

"Your grandfather and I," said Dom Gonzalo, blankly, as if he were speaking without breath, "also were Leopard Men. Captain da Silva first, then me. We broke away from it that time we were chasing this son of mine. God knows I tried to kill him as much as the senhor capitan, your grandfather, ever did."

"And he's still alive?" Bayard was trembling; but he was trying to master his nerves.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Drink," Dom Gonzalo invited. He himself sat down as if his revelation had exhausted him. He took a long drink. But Bayard couldn't. He didn't want to. He wanted every atom of sense and nerve he might have been blessed with, for this was a mere beginning, he foreknew.

It was.

The old man wiped his rather soiled beard with his hand.

"Farouk!" he continued. "We'll get around to that, where he is now. Did your grandfather tell you how he managed to give us the slip?"

"Not in detail."

FAROUK stole a baby—a little white girl named Mary—Mary Smollet. Her folks were missionaries, friends of mine, Americans; friends of Farouk; friends of everybody. This used to be their station. Reverend Smollet he used to trek through the bush—he'd go a hundred miles to keep some village from eating a friend or even an enemy—leaving his wife and his baby here alone with the Fans. It was one of their witch-doctors who got down word—got it to me in private."

"They'd found Mrs. Smollet clawed to death. Leopard sign! Fixed so you'd have said that a leopard had jumped the fence to carry off the baby and the mother had tried to fight the beast off with her hands. The baby was gone. Reverend Smollet, he went home later; died in America.

"Mary! That was the little girl's name. Two-year-old, maybe three! Yellow curls! Used to cuddle up to me in a way to make me repent of my sins. And to others, too. That's why we never caught him. Farouk used this little Mary as a hostage, as a shield."

"Couldn't you have found a native to pot him?"

"He was a Leopard. And he was white."

"But white and with a white child! That should have made it harder for him to hide himself."

"It should have, and it would have," said Dom Gonzalo guardedly. "But he didn't stay that way. He went African. He got both himself and the little girl turned black. Black! Negro! Understand?"

Bayard didn't understand. Not right away. Things had been coming too fast. He was still miles behind —years behind—back to where his mother was still on earth, seeing the face of Farouk, seeing the Leopard face, wherever she looked. His breathing wasn't easy. The world was rocking. He felt as if he were a baby himself in the claws of a Leopard Man.

Old Senhor Faro looked at Bayard. He did so, it seemed, with a gust of pity. But back of his pity was a determination, all right. He'd suffered too. He'd made up his mind for some sort of an operation, one that he hoped, no doubt, would save the two of them—kill or cure!

He turned and called out something through the blackness of the store.

Follow the Amazing Adventures of Pierre Bayard in Africa Pursuing Farouk and the Solomon Bush . . . in the Weird, Fascinating Second Instalment of "The Leopard Man" in next month's THRILLING ADVENTURES. Don't Miss It—It Throbs with the Pulse-Beats of Africa Itself.

The Preying Hands

A Weird Tale of Murder, Mystery and Fanaticism in Borneo

By HUGH B. CAVE

Author of "The Midnight Horde," etc.

LIKE a keen-edged knife blade, the sliver of light crept across the veranda of K'Ruga Post—the only visible ray in a vault of utter darkness. No sound disturbed the silence of the government outpost—no sound except the whisper of the river against the piles under the low veranda. The jungle was a buried corpse, wrapped in its winding-sheet of gloom.

But that single thread of light, emanating from the oblong window, revealed something. Revealed a pair of clutching hands at the veranda rail, and a scowling, twisted face straining upward over hunched shoulders. An instant later the floor of the veranda quivered under the impact of a heavy body, as the intruder slid over the rail and dropped on hands and knees.

The glimmer of light did not reveal him then. His bunched body was nothing more than a shadowy thing, vague and indistinct, worming across the veranda to the closed door. The thing groped up—stood erect.

The two clutching hands reached

up again, holding something. In the dead silence of the surrounding darkness came the sound of a blunt instrument thudding on wood. Then silence again.

THE figure dropped to hands and knees and wriggled backward. For a single moment it was visible as it crawled through the thread of light. Then, like a great ape, it swung over the veranda rail and vanished, leaving but one thing.

It hung there, with a rusty nail driven through it to hold it in place. Blood, wet and sticky, dripped from it and formed a little pool on the boards underneath. It was a human hand.

Next morning, when the infernal darkness of the jungle had changed to a gray, drizzling dawn, Limey Wetren discovered the thing on the door.

"My God!" he wheezed.

And his thin little face went white. It was a very ordinary face, with pointed nose and tapered mouth. For that matter, Limey Wetren was not an extraordinary Englishman—merely a common, undersized jungle trader who had arrived at K'Ruga Post two days before, expressly to see "me old friend, Roberts, God bless 'is bloomin' 'ide. Ain't seen 'im in a long time, I ain't. Not since I was wearin' a Foreign Service uniform and shootin' Afridi niggers in the Khyber alongside of 'em!"

That was Limey Wetren—full of sudden emotion and temperament.

He went inside very quickly, stumbling about and calling Roberts' name.

"Are you *drunk?*" Roberts demanded. "Chasing through the place like a wet hen with D. T.'s—"

"There's a 'and," Limey faltered. "A 'uman 'and, Corporal, stuck on the door!"

"What in blazes are you raving about?" he said curtly. "Where've you been?"

Limey Wetren clutched his arm and dragged him along the passage.

"A 'uman 'and,' Corp'l!" he repeated thickly. "Spiked right onto the door! A 'uman 'and—I'll show yer!"

Corporal Roberts followed him, pacing quietly behind the Englishman's stumbling legs. Along the corridor Limey pulled him—out to the hideous thing that hung on the veranda door.

And then, standing on the threshold, Wetren clutched the sides of the door frame and gaped. His face went white again—even whiter than before.

"It—it was right 'ere," he mumbled. "Right 'ere on the door it was. Somebody's 'ooked it!"

Roberts took hold of his shoulders and swung him around.

"Look here. Are you mad?"

"It was 'ere, I'm tellin' yer!" Wetren whispered fervently. "I seen it. Stickin' right on the door it was, with a nail hammered through the middle o' it. The fingers was curled up like a spider prayin' to the good God A'mighty. It's the truth. 'Ere's the blood as dripped from it!"

ROBERTS looked down. His eyes hardened. There was no denying that damning blur of dried blood.

"You—sure?" Roberts said slowly.

Wetren nodded. His fingers groped over the door.

"'Ere's the place where the nail was stuck in," he said triumphantly. "You can feel it."

Roberts didn't need to.

"A human hand," he muttered half to himself. "What in the devil could anyone mean by nailing a human hand to— Was it a native's hand?"

"It was black," Limey said. "It

'ad long fingernails and there was a scar in the middle o' it—a criss-cross scar like a letter X."

"And you saw it here only a minute ago?"

"It was 'ere when I come in to get you!"

"And now it—isn't."

"Somebody's 'ooked it," Limey repeated in a whisper, peering around as if he expected to find the "somebody" crouching behind him.

The corporal turned, very slowly, and walked inside again.

"A hand—with a criss-cross scar—nailed to the door and then removed. A native hand—"

He swung about abruptly.

"Go to Faraday's room, Limey," he said sharply. "Ask Frank which one of the native servants is missing?"

Limey Wetren, still gaping at the death door, nodded mechanically.

A moment later, he stood inside the door of Captain Frank Faraday's room. He told his story hesitatingly, but Faraday leaned very quietly over the table and heard him through. A big man, Faraday—a block-shouldered, straight-jawed English soldier who could look down on six feet with a laugh. But he was not laughing as he listened to Limey Wetren's faltering words.

"WHAT does Roberts think of it?" he demanded.

"'E wants you to find out which one o' the niggers is missin'," Wetren explained. "'E figgers if 'e can find out who's missin' 'e'll know where the 'and come from."

Faraday stood up deliberately, then left the room.

During the next ten minutes Limey paced the narrow room again and again, turning abruptly more than once to look behind him. In the end, Wetren's nerves got the upper hand. Shivering, as if he were hot and cold with jungle fever, he went to the corporal's room and sat down at the table near Roberts. He said nothing, nor did the corporal.

THEY were still sitting there, the two of them, when Frank Faraday came into the room. Faraday stood at the table, waiting for one of them to speak. And Roberts, removing the pipe from his mouth, said quietly:

"Which one was it?"

"Two of them are missing," Frank declared. "One is Laori Ghan, leader of the four Hindu bearers that Limey brought with him. The other is Ghorja Rhej, the Sikh—Wetren's private boy."

The corporal looked directly at Wetren.

"*Wetren's* bearer and *Wetren's* boy," he said softly. "Know anything about it, Limey?"

"What am I supposed to know?" Wetren faltered. "I picked up them four Hindus in the middle of India, up in the Ajmere district more'n a month ago. They been workin' for me ever since."

"And—Ghorja Rhej?"

"Ghorja Rhej is a Sikh. Sikhs're all alike—honest as yer own mother. Ghorja Rhej don't do nothin' except comb 'is bloomin' beard an' wind that damned turban around 'is thick 'ead. I've 'ad 'im for three years. 'E's a part o' me!"

Frank Faraday leaned forward abruptly.

"You say the hand on the door had a criss-cross scar," he said sharply. "Did either of your men have—"

"Do I know every mark on their blinkin' bodies?" Limey complained. "It's bad enough lookin' at 'em all hours o' the day without inspectin'—"

But Roberts was on his feet buck-

ling a revolver belt around his middle.

"Two men are missing," he said quietly. "One of them is dead. Where the other one is, I don't know—but I believe I can locate your dead man. Wait here!"

ROBERTS found the thing he sought, because Roberts knew where to look.

Pacing the river band on the K'Ruga Post side, he searched every clump of reeds, every tiny inlet, every shallow pool, until he found the thing he sought. Strangely enough, the slow current invariably carried those things about half a mile below the house, on the K'Ruga shore.

Reaching down, Roberts dragged the thing out of the water and examined it. And it was the Hindu, without doubt. There was no mistaking that shaven head with its characteristic top-knot of black hair straggling over the crown. No mistaking the Hindu *dhoti* that clung to the fellow's loins.

The victim was Laori Ghan. And Laori Ghan's arm—the right arm—terminated in a stump, washed clean and white by the water. The hand was gone.

Roberts was satisfied. Dragging the thing farther into the reeds, he covered it with *nipa* leaves and left it there. He was satisfied.

The hand on the door had been Laori Ghan's hand. That much was certain. But who had severed it and nailed it to the door? And who had removed it, after it had been impaled there. And finally—*why* had it been hung up on exhibition?

The problems would not solve themselves, of course. They were still unanswered when Roberts reached the government post and paced through the inner corridor to his own room.

Limey Wetren and Faraday were waiting for him. Wetren, in particular, came forward eagerly and gripped the corporal's arm.

"You found anythin'?" he demanded.

"I found the Hindu—dead. When you turn in tonight, Wetren, lock your door. That's all I know—now."

But that was not all. Later that day the corporal paced along the corridor to Wetren's room. Frowning slightly, he confronted the trader curtly.

"I want some information," he explained quietly.

"Well—wot is it?"

"You say you picked up the four Hindus in India, Limey?"

"I got 'em in Ajmere, Central India."

"Did *you* hire them, or did they hire themselves?"

"They come t' me, I guess," Limey faltered. "I was lookin' for some bearers, an' they asked for the job."

"What were you doing in Ajmere, Limey?"

Wetren licked his lips, wondering why these sudden questions were being fired at him.

"Tradin'," he said.

"Is that all?"

"Well—I done a little drinkin' an' palaverin', I guess. And I shot a couple o' pigs for amusement."

"You shot some Hindus?" Roberts demanded sharply.

NO—pigs. Real pigs. This here knife handle"—Wetren reached into his inner pocket and brought out a short, straight-bladed dirk with carved hilt—"was carved out o' the tusk from an Ajmere boar. I shot the thing myself an' carved 'is tusk out. You won't see carvin' like that more'n once in a lifetime, I'm tellin'

you. A nigger from the Marquesas showed me 'ow to do it, an'—"

"You didn't play loose with any Hindu women, Limey?"

"Me—with women? Not much!"

Roberts nodded. Evidently his questions had not brought the answers he expected. He turned away, scowling.

"Remember—lock your door when you turn in tonight," he warned again, as he left.

"Look 'ere. Are you tellin' me I'm goin' to be murdered or somethin'?"

"I'm telling you to be careful."

At midnight, Roberts went the rounds, inspecting every room and corridor. He found nothing. He expected to find nothing. The post was as peacefully quiet as ever—no sign of intrusion, no sign of the missing Ghorja Rhej. Nothing but empty darkness, and the river water sipping softly against the veranda piles. But Roberts expected something to happen.

Less than an hour later—it came. A slinking, creeping shape, with curled fingers groping along the wall of the passage. Naked feet made no sound. The black corridor revealed only a shadowed form—slinking toward the door of Limey Wetren's room.

It was a Hindu, this intruder. The counterpart of the thing that the corporal had discovered down there in the roods—the same shaven head—the same drab-colored *dhoti.*

BUT there was something else. At the extreme end of the corridor, the veranda door slid open noiselessly. A huge figure shadowed the entrance for a single fleeting instant; then the door swung shut. The ape-like form crept forward, twenty paces behind the crouching Hindu. And the Hindu, intent on his own silence, heard nothing.

A MOMENT later the Hindu reached his destination. As he bent over the door of Limey Wetren's room, sliding the long-bladed knife from his belt, the second intruder, behind him, melted into the wall and became motionless.

The Hindu's knife slid into the crack of Wetren's door. For a long instant it hovered there, seeking to grip and throw back the crude bolt on the inside. Then, with a sharp intake of breath, the Hindu straightened up. The door moved inward.

Like a curled spider, the Hindu entered, with the knife still gripped in his hand. Behind him, the ape-like figure snaked quickly forward.

But it was not murder—not yet. The Hindu had other intentions. With a quick glance at the bunk where Wetren lay unconscious, the intruder slipped quietly to the wall—to the chair where Limey had thrown his clothes. Deft fingers ran through the trader's pockets until they found the thing they sought. And then, with an ugly gleam of triumph masking his face, the Hindu crept toward the bunk. But now his own knife was back in the folds of his *dhoti;* and Wetren's knife—the keen-edged dirk with the carved handle—lay in the Hindu's fingers.

Three soft steps, and the murderer slid down on one knee beside the bunk. The dirk swung up quickly, with its cunning point aimed straight at Limey Wetren's breast.

And then, from behind, a mighty arm twisted around the Hindu's body. Steel fingers choked the outcry that rose to his lips. He struggled slightly. The thing behind him was hellishly powerful—so powerful that the Hindu's frame was held rigid while those cruel fingers fin-

ished their task. In the end the Hindu went limp. The ape-like figure bent over him, knife in hand.

It was daylight when Limey Wetren climbed out of his bunk. Yawning, he sat up and stretched himself. His eyes blinked open—and stared.

A SINGLE sharp exclamation came from his lips. His face lost color as he looked down at what lay on the floor. He reached down to touch it, and withdrew his hand again. And the hand was shaking.

The bone-handled dirk glared up at him. It was stuck there, joint down in the soft wood. More than that, it was holding something *else* in place—and the something was a severed human hand!

Wetren recoiled from it, as if it had been a living thing, threatening him. For a long time he sat there shivering, gaping at it. Then, very slowly, he bent over and picked up the piece of paper that lay on the floor beside it.

It was a very ordinary piece of paper—dirty and ragged. It bore no words—no warning—no threat. Nothing but a single black X-shaped mark, scrawled with a heavy pencil.

Trembling, Limey Wetren pushed himself up and went to the door. Once again his eyes widened. The bolt was no longer in place. It had been pushed back. The door was unlocked.

Limey flung it open abruptly. Grim-lipped he strode through the passage to the corporal's room. With clenched fist he hammered on the door until it was opened to him.

And then he stood there, white-faced and fearful, holding the cross-marked paper out to the corporal. Roberts peered at him in bewilderment for fully thirty seconds; then took the paper and glanced at it.

"Am—am I crazy?" Limey pleaded. "There's another o' them prayin' black 'ands stuck t' the floor o' my room an'—"

"Where did you get this?" Roberts interrupted curtly.

"I'm tryin' t' tell you, ain't I? It was layin' there on the fioor, along with—"

But Roberts was already striding through the corridor to that room of mystery.

Limey Wetren crept to his side. He shrank back automatically when Roberts swung on him. Roberts was holding out the ragged bit of paper.

"This cross ought to mean something to you," the corporal muttered. "It's the second time you've been deliberately warned."

"*I* been warned? Why—why *me?*"

Roberts pointed grimly to the hand on the floor.

"Look at it!" he rasped.

Limey looked—and saw something that he had not discovered before. This hand, too, was marked with that significant criss-cross scar! The same infernal signature!

"The hand was put there to warn you," Roberts said evenly. "If you could exert that feeble brain of yours and remember where you've seen this damned scar before—"

"I'm tellin' you I ain't ever seen it before!"

THEN you should have used your eyes. This is the second time it's been hung up in front of you to make you think about it."

"But I ain't—"

"Never mind. Go to the native quarter and bring all the servants to this room. We'll get to the bottom of this bloody thing yet."

"You mean—bring the Hindus?"

"I mean all of them. K'Ruga Post servants included."

That biting voice called for no hesitation. He left the room imme-

diately. When he had gone, Roberts followed him, and went straight along the corridor to Faraday's room. Grimly he led Frank to the murder room.

BRIEFLY he explained to Faraday what had happened. Frank listened quietly—said nothing. There was nothing to say that had not already been mouthed a dozen times.

But there was plenty to do. Limey Wetren had obeyed the corporal's order, and even now, with slow, shuffling steps, a slant-eyed Hindu was pacing into the room. Behind him came a second Hindu—and four native police of K'Ruga Post. Limey pushed them forward and closed the door after them.

The corporal looked into each face, one after the other.

"Line them up, Frank," Roberts ordered evenly. "I want to talk to them."

Faraday motioned them back against the wall. They stood there, indifferent to what was going on. They did not bother to watch Roberts, as he bent over and picked up the hand of the dead man. Nor did Roberts bother to ask them where the third Hindu was. It was not hard to guess that this severed hand, with its infernal scar, belonged to the missing man!

"Last night," Roberts said deliberately, "a Hindu was murdered in Wetren sahib's room. His hand was cut off and placed on the floor. *One of you did it. Which one?*"

There was no answer, of course. Dyaks of Borneo—and Hindus of the far east—are not the kind of men who make blubbering confessions when faced with threats.

Roberts stepped toward them.

"Not very talkative, eh?" he muttered. "It was a messy job, this last killing. Don't want to own up to it—do you?"

Still there was no answer.

"Blood doesn't wash off easily, does it?" the corporal demanded suddenly. *"Hold out your hands!"*

They obeyed him reluctantly and very slowly. Once again he paced the length of the line, examining the fingers that were spread out toward him. He gripped each wrist, studied each unclean palm. More than one hand trembled as he took hold of it; and yet Roberts' face revealed no emotion whatever.

"Go back to your quarters," he shrugged. "Take them back, Limey."

They left in silent file. Limey Wetren went out after them.

"I think I know, Frank," Roberts said softly.

"You mean—"

"The man we must find is Ghorja Rhej. Put the facts together, man. Two Hindus have been murdered. In both cases their hands have been severed and propped up where Limey would see them. Both those hands bore a significant scar—which means something. And Ghorja Rhej is missing—either he is hiding somewhere or he is dead. I'm inclined to think he is hiding."

"And the scar on those hands?"

THAT'S the hellish part of it. I'm dead sure that the scar is the key of the whole bloody mystery. Whoever cut those hands off knows what the scar signifies—and has been trying to make Limey Wetren realize the danger. That's why the thing was drawn out on paper—so Wetren *couldn't* fail to see it!"

Faraday nodded. It was all very well, this theorizing. But Faraday was primarily a man of action—rough, hard, ready action—and the waiting was getting on his nerves.

"What do we do?" he demanded.

"Sit here until the next hand appears?"

Roberts' mouth tightened. "We wait," he said curtly, "until tonight. And then this blasted affair is going to come to a finish. Keep an eye on Wetren, Frank. Don't let him out of your sight. I'm going to find Ghorja Rhej!"

FARADAY stared. Abruptly Roberts went to the door. The door opened—and closed again. Roberts' mouth was screwed in an unpleasant frown as he strode along the passage to the veranda—to the door that led out to the jungle.

K'Ruga Post saw no more of the corporal that day. It was dark when he returned; and the bitterness in his narrowed eyes revealed that he had not succeeded. His uniform was stained with sweat—torn in a dozen places by the jungle creepers along the river trail. His face was grimy with dirt. But he failed.

He went straight to Faraday's room. Frank, sitting at the table with Wetren, looked up with a start.

"You—"

"No! I found nothing! We've got to go through with it without the Sikh. Either they've killed him, or he's a damned good ghost!"

"Go through with wot?" Wetren demanded, peering from Faraday to the corporal in bewilderment.

Roberts sat down, dragging his chair close to the table. He said nothing for a moment. When he looked up, he said simply:

"We're going to play a little game, Limey."

Wetren grinned. He had expected something more momentous.

"Poker'll suit me," he answered. "I'm getting all on edge, thinkin' o' wot's been goin' on—"

"It isn't poker, Limey. We're going to lay a trap, Limey."

"Wot?"

"A trap—to catch whatever happens to fall into it. You're the bait."

"I'm the—wot the hell are you talkin' about?" Limey demanded.

"There are certain men in this house," Roberts explained, "who are bent on murdering you. Two of them have already tried it—but they were intercepted. Unless we get the others first, they will get *you*."

"Well, wot of it? I ain't sure but I wouldn't rather be bumped off than be sittin' around waitin' for 'em to come. This 'ere racket is gettin' on my insides, I'm tellin' yer."

"It's getting on all of us, Wetren. We don't relish the uncertainty any more than you do."

"And wot are you goin' t' do about it?"

"*You're* going to do it. You're going to sit here at this table, near the lamp, and go to sleep. That's all."

"That's *all!*"

FARADAY and I are going to inspect the native quarters, and while we're there we're going to drop a hint or two, loud enough for the devils to hear us. For instance, we might let the natives know, without meaning to, that you are alone in this room, asleep. We might also suggest that we—both of us—intend to go out on the veranda where the air is a bit cooler. You understand?"

"An' you're goin' to leave me 'ere, alone, after tellin' 'em just where to find me?"

"We shan't leave you here, old man. As soon as we've done our little inspection duty, we're going to return very quietly and make ourselves part of the shadows here. We both have revolvers, Limey. You are merely the bait in the trap. We'll do the catching and—"

Roberts' voice clipped off. Of the three men in the room, he was the only one facing the half-open door and the corridor beyond. He groped to his feet with a rush, dragging out his revolver as he got up. Like a tiger he leaped to the door.

The others had heard no sound. For that matter, Ghorja Rhej had made no sound for them to hear. A Sikh can tread very softly when he has need to; and Ghorja Rhej had attempted to creep past the open door without being seen.

"Inside," Roberts ordered curtly. "If you make a move to escape—"

The Sikh came forward without a word. He went straight to the table—straight to Limey Wetren—and salaamed. Roberts followed him. The revolver did not waver.

"Where the 'ell 'ave yer been?" Limey rasped.

The Sikh answered slowly, in a rolling voice with great dignity.

"I have been hiding, sahib—in the cellars of the house."

"Wot for?"

"So that I might see and hear all that went on, and be ready in case you needed me, sahib."

Wetren stared for a moment, bewildered, then turned with a shrug toward the corporal—who stepped forward abruptly.

"Your knife, Ghorja Rhej," he demanded curtly.

The Sikh turned. Obediently he drew the knife from his belt and held it out. Roberts took it.

AS he did so, Roberts stiffened perceptibly. He had meant to ask the Sikh a number of questions—questions which would bear out his theory as to what had already occurred. Instead, he gripped the Sikh's outstretched hand savagely.

"My God—Faraday, look here!" he thundered.

Faraday's lips tightened as he obeyed. Ghorja Rhej held that right hand out stiff as a rod, without the least quiver. He made no attempt to conceal it, or to hide the tell-tale mark in the middle of it. There it was—the same infernal criss-cross scar that had appeared twice before!

"Take him to Wetren's room and lock him up!" Roberts rasped. "Sikh or no Sikh, I know that hellish mark when I see it! Bind him—gag him—make sure he stays in that room for the next twelve hours!"

FARADAY'S revolver was already sticking unmercifully into the Sikh's side. Strangely enough, Ghorja Rhej offered no resistance. He merely shrugged as he was pushed toward the door.

"When you've made him secure," Roberts barked, "come back here immediately."

Then, dragging out a chair, he sat down. His fingers shook unsteadily as he fumbled for a cigarette and lit it.

"Where did you get Ghorje Rhej, Limey?" he demanded.

"Where did I— Oh, I saved the blighter's life one time. 'E was a soldier then. After I dragged 'im out o' rifle fire up in the Khyber, 'e come to me an' stuck like a leech. When I left the service, 'e left with me, and 'e's been with me ever since, I guess."

Roberts nodded thoughtfully. He said nothing, then, until Faraday returned. Then:

"I was wrong," he said thickly. "All wrong. The Sikh has the same infernal mark as the two men who were killed. He's *one* of them—not the man who murdered them! God knows the solution now! Wetren, are you willing to go through with it?"

Wetren nodded slowly. But Rob-

erts gave him no time to hesitate. He *had* to be willing. Gripping Faraday's arm, the corporal strode out of the room. And Limey was alone—with his own fears.

DURING the short interlude that he was alone, Limey got up once to close the window. Then, when the room became unbearably hot and stuffy, he got up again to open it. He was nervous. Twice he took a little automatic from his pocket and laid it on the table in readiness; and each time, remembering that he was designed to be the innocent bait of the corporal's clever trap, he dropped the gun back into his pocket.

He was relieved, very much relieved, when his two protectors returned.

"You—did it?" he demanded fervently.

"We did," Roberts said bitterly. "We did enough suggesting to bring the whole native quarters here, all bent on murdering you. Even now we're supposed to be out on the veranda, enjoying the air. And it's just—" glancing at the luminous dial of his watch—"eleven o'clock."

Faraday moved quietly into the shadows. At one end of the room, ten paces behind the chair in which Limey sat, stood a six-foot rifle case concealed by heavy curtains. Shoving the case a little to one side, Frank took up his stand behind it. The curtains hid him from the door.

"I'm leaving the door slightly ajar," Roberts suggested. "It's better that way. Don't face it, Limey. Sit sidewise. Let the rest of us do the watching."

"An' supposin'," Limey mumbled, "you get near-sighted or somethin'. It ain't *you* they're comin' after—it's *me!*"

"If you face the door, they won't come at all. They'll wait. And you'll get a knife in the back some night when you're looking the other way."

Limey shifted his chair around, grumbling at the injustice of it. Satisfied, the corporal stepped quickly to the side of the room opposite Faraday. There, sliding a big chair deeper into the shadows of the wall, where the lamp light did not reach it, he sprawled full length on the floor behind it. He could guard the door very effectively, and shoot without danger of putting Limey in the line of fire.

Altogether, the trap could not have been more neatly arranged. Whoever came creeping to the door of that room would see only Limey Wetren, sitting half asleep at the table.

And now it was a case of patience. The three white men could do no more than wait—and hope that the tiger would be hungry enough to come to the water-hole.

Roberts' watch indicated that the time was nearly eleven-thirty. The jungle, outside the post, would be black as thick pitch. The rest of the house would be in utter darkness. The light on the table seemed a very small, feeble flame, barely able to cast its yellow glow over the surrounding floor. And Limey Wetren slouched there in the chair.

AT twelve-thirty the situation was unchanged. The corporal was frowning slightly — and thinking. During the past half hour he had found plenty of time to think; and most of his thoughts concerned Ghorja Rhej, who was trussed up in a nearby room.

First of all, Roberts *had* been positive that the Sikh was responsible for the two severed hands which had haunted K'Ruga Post. But Roberts had been wrong—dead wrong! The Sikh was a member of the same unholy clique, and—he was somehow

associated with the two Hindus who had been murdered. But how?

And who had done the murders? The question wouldn't be answered until the trap was sprung. Perhaps not even then. Meanwhile, there was nothing to do but wait—and wait.

Roberts' watch read twelve minutes after one when the door of the room eased slowly inward. It hardly moved, and made no sound at all. Limey Wetren, who had long ago ceased his covert glances in that direction, did not notice it. On one side of the room, Frank Faraday's revolver lifted a half inch off the edge of the concealed rifle-case. On the other, the corporal's gun swung on a direct line with the doorway.

BUT neither of them saw the shadow that moved suddenly across the open window. They were not in a position to see that!

The door moved a foot inward, and stopped. Naked feet, creeping over the sill, made not a whisper in the silence. A hand slid forward—then an arm—and finally a crouching body, bent double to the floor. Even in the shadows, the corporal recognized that slinking form as one of Limey Wetren's Hindu bearers. He was not surprised. He had expected it!

But he had not expected the terrible malice that was engraved in the Hindu's face. It was hate, positive hate, and it increased a hundred-fold as the native wormed across the floor toward the back of Wetren's chair.

Roberts' revolver hung on a dead line with that dragging body. But he hesitated. He expected the other Hindu, as well. He knew the other would come. A little while back, when he had examined the hands of the K'Ruga Post natives, he had seen the mark of the cross on both the remaining Hindus! Now, if he pulled the trigger too soon, the second murderer would take warning and escape.

But it was dangerous, waiting too long. A scant ten feet separated the Hindu from Limey Wetren, and the native's knife was already out, glistening in the light of the lamp. The corporal's finger tightened on the trigger.

He was too late, by a fraction of an instant. The thing that happened was almost too sudden, too horribly abrupt, for him to prevent it.

The Hindu straightened up swiftly, lifting the knife over his head. Behind him, the door of the room hurtled open with a resounding crash. A lunging figure—mighty of shoulder and fighting mad with rage—swirled across the intervening space and hurled himself upon the murderer.

Roberts caught a fleeting glimpse of the newcomer's face. It was not necessary. No man in K'Ruga Post, except one, possessed a body so magnificently powerful as this. Ghorja Rhej had broken his bonds and escaped!

The Hindu turned like a startled rat, knife still clutched in his hand. He leaped aside, striking against the table as he fell back. For a single instant Ghorja Rhej's mammoth body was directly in line with *the half open window.*

ROBERTS blurted a warning as he saw it. His revolver spit fire with a terrific roar—but it spoke too late. That skulking figure, framed in the window opening, had already thrown death into the room.

It was the second Hindu. Roberts' bullet bored a hole through his snarling face. He toppled backwards and vanished—and he was dead before he fell. Dead—but he had done his work well in his last split second of life. His knife, hurled with uncanny accuracy, was buried to the hilt in the

heaving breast of Ghorja Rhej. And Ghorja Rhej was standing in the middle of the floor, clawing at it with both hands.

He dragged it out, dripping blood—his own blood. With a great snarl he hurled it to the floor and surged forward again to finish his task. His colored tunic was stained horribly—a great crimson blotch spreading over the front of it. But his mighty shoulders contained all the strength that was needed.

The Sikh's big hands groped down. They closed over the shrinking body of the first Hindu—the slinking devil who had tried to stick a knife in Limey Wetren's back. Standing rigid, Ghorja Rhej lifted the Hindu in his arms.

The three white men did not interfere. Roberts was on his feet, watching in amazement. Frank Faraday had stepped from his place of hiding. Limey Wetren was twisted around in his chair, gaping.

The Hindu squirmed. Ghorja Rhej held him as a great ape holds some struggling, impotent rodent. And then, with awful deliberation, the Sikh broke his victim in half. *Broke* him—and tossed him into the corner of the room.

FOR a moment Ghorja Rhej stood bravely erect. He tried to tear the drenched cloth from his chest. Half of it came away in his hands. Then he crumpled.

Limey Wetren went down beside him. The little Englishman gripped him by the shoulders, just in time to hear the Sikh's dignified words.

"They are all dead, sahib. You—may sleep now with no danger."

Wetren bent closer. Limey's eyes were wet, and he was not ashamed of it. He knew that Faraday and the corporal were standing over him, but he did not care.

"I will never attain the true destiny, sahib," Ghorja Rhej whispered. "Already I have angered the mighty ones by killing your four Hindus. But I am dying—and if I do not tell you before I die, you will be in danger."

WITH an effort, the Sikh raised himself on one elbow. The effort brought a great spurt of blood from the knife wound in his chest. His lips tightened in pain.

"The four Hindus are my blood brethren," he said. "They were members of a Siva cult in Ajmere—and I, too, am one of the cult. You slayed a boar in Ajmere, sahib—without thinking. The boar is Siva. You slayed Siva. Then you blasphemed further by carving Siva's body into a knife handle. It is a terrible sin, sahib—but you did not know."

Limey Wetren was beginning to understand.

"The four Hindus were told to appease Siva by killing you, sahib. They were ordered to destroy the knife and to destroy you. But I could not warn you, sahib, because I had sworn never to reveal the secrets of the cult—and—a Sikh does not betray his trust. Now—it does not matter. I—am—"

The Sikh's voice trailed into silence. Then, very abruptly, Ghorja Rhej stiffened. Gripping the leg of the table, he lifted himself up. Straight as the wall itself he stood in front of Limey Wetren.

"Good-bye, sahib," he said huskily. "If you encounter any more men whose hands are marked with a criss-cross scar, be—careful—"

Then he crashed; like a stricken ox. His hand, as he fell, lay outstretched on the floor. That infernal criss-cross scar grinned up into Limey Wetren's face.

Voodoo Vengeance

A Thrilling Story of African Adventure Amid the Throb, Throb of Drums and Dire Portents of Weird Danger

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A Complete Novelette

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

Author of "Hunchback House," "The Orchid Hunters," etc.

CHAPTER I

DENNING got to his feet impatiently as he again heard the distant throbbing of the native drums. The sound seemed to come from somewhere further up the river, but he knew that meant nothing. Stretched out for miles along the river and far back into the brush were other full-throated drums pounding out their mysterious message that no white man would ever learn.

The grim darkness of a cloudy night brooded over the river bank and the dense jungle beyond. Denning glanced further along the bank where the twenty half-naked blacks that formed his *safari* had stretched

themselves out for the night. He could tell by the tenseness of their attitudes that they were listening to the voice of the drums.

"What's eatin' you, Hal?" demanded the small wiry man who sat near the fire that had been built in the clearing made by the natives for the two white men. "You ain't lettin' the drums bother you, are you?"

"I don't like it," Denning shook his head. "Those drums have been going constantly ever since early this afternoon. It means trouble, Jake."

"Sure." Jake Sloan yawned. "Maybe the Witch Doctors are givin' a party somewheres. You know, Voodoo stuff. It happens in the brush. I've seen it before."

"So have I," stated Denning grimly. "That's why I don't like it." He raised his voice. "Tembo!"

As he heard the white man call a powerful Swahili who was in charge of the other natives of the *safari* came quickly into the clearing. A man of remarkable strength, it seemed fitting that he should be called Tembo, after the Elephant in the language of the Swahili.

"Yes, Bwana?" he said. "You call Tembo?"

"What do the drums say, Tembo?" asked Denning.

THE native hesitated before he spoke and both of the white men watched him keenly. Finally Tembo shook his head.

"Tembo not know."

"You're lying!" exclaimed Denning impatiently. "Tell me the message of the drums!"

The big Swahili scowled but merely shook his head.

"All right," said Denning, realizing that any effort upon his part to question the big native was futile, if Tembo refused to speak. "We go into the brush at dawn. Be ready to start then."

"Tembo does, Bwana."

The native turned and moved swiftly and silently back to his companions. Denning frowned as he dropped down on the ground beside Sloan and filled and lighted his pipe.

"They're all the same," remarked the little ivory trader. "This Tembo has been your head boy every time you've come into the brush, ain't that true?"

"Yes," Denning nodded. "And as a field man for the firm of Linstill and Knottwyn of London I've been in Africa often."

"Sure," Sloan grinned. "That's where I first met you two months ago, when this orchid hunting business of yours was a new game to me. I never figured that the big dealers in rare and unusual flowers had guys like you looking for them in out-of-the-way places of the world."

"Well, you know it now," said Denning with a smile. "As I've told you, I spent months at a time in jungles and swamps and in scantly explored portions of Africa, Central America, New Guinea, Borneo, and even China searching for rare and unusual specimens of orchids. I'm still looking!"

"Sure, I know," said Sloan. "An' I've seen you find some that you considered swell," he grinned. "They looked right pretty to me, too, even if we did come damn near gettin' killed before we got 'em."

ALL of the specimens I have secured so far are nothing compared to the one I am after now," said Denning. "But that's why I don't like the sound of those drums, Jake. I'm afraid that a white man will not be very welcome where we're going, especially if the Witch Doctors have the natives aroused."

"You mean the Temple of the Wind God?" Sloan unconsciously lowered his voice as he spoke and peered sharply into the darkness beyond the light of the fire. "I still don't believe there is such a place in all Africa."

"There isn't as far as any white man save ourselves knows," said Denning. "From what little I have learned it is well hidden in the very heart of the jungle. Just a small temple that was probably built many centuries ago. The natives know about it, of course, though I doubt if you could ever get one of them to admit it."

"How did you learn about it?"

"From another orchid hunter, a friend of mine. I found him dying. He had been captured by a weird band of Witch Doctors who use the old Temple as part of their black magic. The poor devil had been fiendishly tortured, and managed to finally escape more dead than alive. He had discovered an orchid growing near the temple that would have made him famous if he had managed to secure it, but he failed." Denning frowned. "But I don't intend to fail."

"I hope not," said Sloan slowly. "I've seen Voodoo vengeance, and it ain't pretty." He shuddered and said no more.

For a few moments the two men sat in silent thought. To their ears there still came the pounding of the distant drums. Again Denning glanced at his native bearers, and saw that they were still listening.

HE felt that the natives were nervous, perhaps even frightened by what they heard from the mysterious telegraph of the jungle.

Denning did not like the idea, he knew the primitive superstitious nature of the blacks. Even these supposedly more than half civilized boys of his *safari* could be changed into ruthless demons of destruction when they had been worked into an insane frenzy by the witch doctors and medicine men incanting their weird voodoo spells.

Those drums worried Denning, for it meant that somewhere in the brush the tribes were gathering for a mad orgy that might last for days, and tomorrow the *safari* of the two white men was to head straight into the very heart of the jungle, seeking the hidden temple of the Wind God.

TEMBO worried Denning more than anything else. He had always considered the big Swahili faithful and loyal. Never before had Tembo refused to answer as he had done tonight when the orchid hunter had asked him to tell the message of the drums.

He had been proud to display his knowledge of the jungle to the white man he addressed as "Bwana," the Swahili word for master. He was proud of the English which he had learned in his youth from a missionary.

Denning had shown that he trusted the big native by presenting him with an elephant gun as a reward for his faithfulness during one of their trips into the heart of the brush. That Tembo refused to tell the message of those drums was alarming.

The orchid hunter was sure that the Swahili knew, and perhaps it was fear of powers that he considered far greater than the tall, lean American, who was a field man for the London firm, that kept him silent.

Suddenly from somewhere in the jungle came the unmistakable crack of a rifle, and a bullet thudded into the ground a few yards from the fire.

"Look out, Hal!" exclaimed Sloan

sharply, as both men leaped hastily to their feet.

THE orchid hunter grabbed up his heavy rifle from where it rested near the tent. Sloan had picked up his gun at the same instant. The eyes of both men were hard as they leaped back into the shadows beyond the light of the fire.

"A white man, I think," said Denning, peering into the jungle. "That was close!"

"Yeah," said Sloan. "I ain't sure it's a white man, though. Some of these natives can shoot pretty good." His eyes were searching the darkness of the brush. "I can't see nothin', can you?"

"Not yet," said Denning grimly. "But I'm hoping."

Sloan fired suddenly at a dim object some distance to their left. There was a faint howl and then a crashing in the brush that steadily grew fainter, as though the hidden marksman was running away.

Denning glanced toward his native bearers. They stood motionless watching the two white men. The orchid hunter saw a huge figure disappear into the jungle, and he realized that Tembo had gone after the man who had just fired the shot. The big Swahili was a dangerous foe. Denning felt sorry for whoever had done the shooting.

CHAPTER II

IF it was a white man I don't get the idea," said Sloan a little later. "Far as I know there ain't no reason for anyone wanting to kill either of us."

"Nor do I," said Denning. "But I don't believe that bullet was meant to kill, merely to warn us that this part of the brush wasn't healthy."

The two men were seated in front of the tent outside the range of the fire which they had allowed to die down to a smoldering glow. They both had their rifles across their knees ready for action. It had been nearly half an hour since Denning had seen Tembo disappear into the black darkness of the jungle, and the big Swahili had not as yet returned.

As they sat there the two white men could still here the throbbing beat of the savage drums coming from somewhere up the river.

"Why would anyone want to warn us?" demanded the little ivory trader finally. "Can you tell me that, Hal?"

THERE'S only one possibility that I can think of right now," said Denning slowly. "And that is if it was a white man, and remember we don't actually know there was only one, they want to frighten us away. Perhaps because there is something hidden around here that they don't want us to find."

"Somethin' in that," said Sloan thoughtfully, and then he smiled. "But don't tell me its that orchid you're looking for!"

"It might be," said Denning. "There are other field men in Africa. I've run into them all over the world. Fine chaps, most of them but there may be one or two who are not willing to take a shot at a rival orchid hunter in order to scare him away."

"Maybe," said the little ivory trader doubtfully. "But there ain't no orchid hunters beating them drums up the river. It's beginnin' to get me the way it did you a little while ago. I don't like it."

"Neither do I," exclaimed Denning. "I wonder what happened to Tembo?"

"That's right, he did go after the feller in the brush," Sloan frowned. "Say, Hal, you want to be careful

how far you trust that Swahili. For all you know the man who fired that shot might be a friend of his!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Denning. "Tembo is loyal."

"Yes, but I notice he wouldn't tell you what those drums are saying!"

THE drums continued their steady beat, and somewhere far back in the jungle a jackal barked. From a spot further down the river there was a soft splash as a crocodile glided into the water.

"Listen!" said Denning softly.

The sound of the drums had changed. The beats had become louder and more rapid.

The orchid hunter glanced at the natives of the *safari*. They had all risen to their feet and were talking and gesticulating excitedly. From time to time one of them would glance in the direction of the white men's tent.

"Trouble," said Sloan, also watching the natives. "Those blacks have just heard something. I'll bet there won't be one of them here by morning!"

"There will be one," said Denning. "Tembo is loyal, I tell you, he will stay!"

"You right, Bwana," said a soft voice at the orchid hunter's back. "Boys of *safari* 'fraid what drums says, but Tembo stay with Bwana Denning!"

"Good!" said Denning as the big native moved around in front of him. "Who fired that shot, Tembo? Do you know?"

"It was white man," answered the Swahili. "But he very quick run fast and hide in brush. Tembo not find."

"Then how'd you know it was a white man?" demanded Sloan doubtfully.

"By this," the Swahili held out his hand in which he held a sterling silver cigaret case. "White man drop it, when Bwana Sloan's bullet hit tree. Tembo find place, very dark, but Tembo see what happen there."

"Hum," Denning took the cigaret case and examined it carefully. "Looks like it belonged to a white man all right. No initials on it though."

"Look, Hal," said Sloan abruptly, as he glanced in the direction of the native bearers. "They're leaving."

"Tembo!" exclaimed Denning sharply, rising to his feet. "Stop them."

"Can do nothin'," said the big Swahili with a shake of his head. "Boys very much frightened by what drums say."

AS the two white men stood watching, the natives began to edge toward the brush. The drums had warned them, and nothing else mattered.

Standing beside Denning, Sloan cursed. Both men were experienced enough in the ways of Africa to know there was nothing they could do to stop the departure of the black boys. Grimly the two white men stood watching until the last of the bearers had disappeared into the jungle.

Tembo was the only one that remained. He stood near the two white men, his tall figure like ebony in the faint dying light of the fire.

"You say you'll stay," said Denning. "That you are loyal, Tembo. Then tell us what those drums say!"

Tembo hesitated for a moment before he spoke. His dark face grew sullen, and the two white men watched him anxiously. So much depended upon what he would say. If they could learn the message of those drums that were throbbing constantly they might be able to

combat what danger there might be lurking amid the brush.

They realized that a struggle was taking place within the mind of the big native. His loyalty was fighting against something deeper, something that was part of his primitive soul. To speak would be to go against all of the weird fetish that was part of the lives of the black men. Those drums told of things that no white man had ever known and to speak now might mean Tembo's death.

To the Swahili the mysterious and hidden gods of the witch doctors were mighty. They were all seeing and all hearing and the drums were beating out the message of their black magic, messages sent by those grim demons of destruction that were their high priests. Deep amid the dark and shadowy jungle where the lions stalked their prey at the water holes, and huge lumbering elephants followed the spoor that they had traveled for hundreds of years as softly as would a cat the natives were gathering. They were coming from the mountains, from the forests and from the veldt, for the witch doctors had called them upon a mission of vengeance.

STANDING there beside the two white men Tembo still hesitated. From the jungle there came faint rustlings as some small animal moved amid the brush, and up stream there was a faint splash as another big crocodile glided into the water.

The three men paid no attention, they were used to the sounds of the African night. Both Denning and Sloan were staring at Tembo. They half sensed what was going on in the big native's mind, and they were waiting tensely.

Finally Tembo glanced around him anxiously as though half afraid that someone beside the two white men might be listening. He scowled as he spoke in a low tone.

"Only for Bwana Denning would Tembo speak," he said. "Death for black boy to tell what drums say."

"Nonsense!" said Denning. "We have our guns, and we are not afraid. You know I'll protect you with my life, Tembo."

"Yes, Tembo know," the Swahili nodded. "But guns no good when fight jungle gods!"

"Never mind that. Tell us what the drums say?"

"Drums say death to all white men in jungle. White men steal jewels from sun god way up river. Drums beat say not let any white men get out of brush."

"White men robbed the sun god, eh!" exclaimed Sloan. "That's bad. Looks like we are in for it, Hal!"

"Yes, urged on by the witch doctors of those mysterious Voodoo cults that few people realize actually exist in the jungle, the natives will be hard to manage," Denning smiled grimly. "But I came into the brush to get that rare specimen of orchid, and nothing is going to stop me!"

BUT good God, man, you must be mad!" exclaimed the little ivory trader. "To go where you say that flower is to be found brings you right into the midst of the blacks. They'll be gatherin', round that temple!"

"I'll take a chance on it," said Denning. "We start into the brush in the morning. At least I do!" he smiled. "You and Tembo can remain here if you wish."

"Nope," Sloan grinned. "Anyone that's as big a fool as you are needs a nurse. I'll go along."

"How about you, Tembo?" demanded the orchid hunter.

"Maybe we not come back," said the big Swahili slowly. "But Tembo go with Bwana!"

CHAPTER III

IT was early dawn before the three men were ready to start into the bush. The two white men had agreed that it would be advisable to travel as lightly burdened as they could be.

The outfit that had been carried by the boys of the *safari* had been packed as compactly as possible in the two boats that had brought the *safari* down the river and hidden carefully in the weeds and dank undergrowth that grew along the river bank. There was a chance that their stuff might be discovered and stolen by the natives during their absence, but they had to risk that.

Their weapons they were taking with them of course. Denning carried a .577 elephant gun, and a .22 smokeless, while Sloan possessed a Jeffrey, and a high velocity small caliber gun. Tembo carried the .577 rifle that the orchid hunter had given him and also a shot gun which belonged to Denning.

"I got a feelin' we're gonna be needing all these guns before we get out of the jungle again," said Sloan as they inspected the weapons and found they were all in good working order. "The more I think about going into the brush right now the less I like it."

"You can still stay here if you wish," said Denning impatiently.

"Yeah, I can, but I ain't going to do it!" the little ivory trader shook his head. "We've been through some pretty tough ones together, Denning, and I ain't going to back out now."

The big Swahili had worked busily, and his muscular, half-naked body gleamed with perspiration. The drums had ceased suddenly with the coming of the morning and the jungle and river were grimly silent. The hot sun beat relentlessly down on the three men as they finished removing all traces of their having camped for the night.

"Guess we're about ready," said Denning glancing about him. "Let's start. Tembo you lead the way."

Silently, the big Swahili stepped into the brush and the two white men followed in single file. They went on for about half an hour, pressing further and further into the heart of the jungle. They moved slowly, for they had to force their way through dense undergrowth and occasionally circle around big trees that blocked their path.

Finally they came to a cleared space leading straight ahead that was evidently an old elephant trail.

"This is an elephant region, I guess," said Sloan brushing the flies away from his face. "They won't bother us none, unless we happen to be down wind from a herd."

"And if that happens," said Denning. "I hope they don't get it in their heads to charge us."

"You said it."

For another half hour they continued on in silence with Tembo in the lead. The two white men were too busy watching the brush on all sides of them to have any desire to talk. They both felt that the jungle was much too quiet.

THE boys of the *safari* had disappeared into the brush. Perhaps they had gone to join the other natives that Denning and Sloan knew were gathering some place not far away. That the drums had ceased for the time being meant nothing. At any moment they might start again. Not only that but the boys of the *safari*, anxious to gain the good graces of the medicine men might have told them that there were two white men close to this section of the jungle.

"Elephants!" exclaimed Sloan suddenly, pausing abruptly, and listen-

ing tensely. "Sounds like they're comin' our way!"

Both Denning and Tembo had halted. The three men stood with their heavy guns ready as they heard a steady rustling sound to their left that seemed like a sudden strong wind was blowing through the trees.

The three men released their safety catches on their weapons and stood waiting.

"Don't shoot if you can help it," said Denning in an undertone. "The natives might hear it and get our location."

In the distance they heard a series of grunts and rumblings. Then suddenly a huge bull elephant came into the view. His ears were spread out and his reared trunk moved swiftly from side to side as he sought the scent of human flesh that had brought him in that direction. As was usual with the great beasts he was depending more upon his senses of smell and hearing than he was upon his eyes.

He tore across the trail and into the brush beyond apparently without discovering the three men.

"We're safe from him anyway," said Sloan in a tone of relief. "That is unless he circles around. There ain't much chance of him catchin' our scent from that direction. The wind, what little there is of it, is comin' from the west."

"More come, Bwana!" said the Swahili sharply.

AGAIN they heard a crashing in the brush, and a moment later a second bull elephant much larger than the first tore into the old trail. He grunted and charged as he detected the three men.

Denning brought his weapon to his shoulder and fired. The bullet tore through the elephant's right ear. Sloan fired a fraction of a second later, striking the elephant in the head, but failing to stop his charge. A third shot came from Tembo, closely following that of the ivory trader in the head.

The elephant halted and turned sideways. Denning fired again sending a bullet thudding into the big beast's heart, and it dropped to the ground to remain there still and lifeless.

"We better get away from here quick!" exclaimed Sloan. "Them natives in the brush is gonna hear that shootin' sure as hell, and if they finds us it's gonna be too bad!"

"Bwana Sloan right," said Tembo starting on a dog trot along the trail with the two white men following close behind him. "Black men hear guns all right."

They continued swiftly for some distance and then gradually slackened their pace to a steady walk. The body of the dead elephant had disappeared from their view, for the old spoor of the big beasts along which they were traveling had curved to the left.

WONDER what became of that white man that took a shot at us last night," remarked Sloan as they went along. "If he's one of them guy's that's been robbing the jewels from the gods of the natives he sure started somethin'."

"I have been wondering about him myself," said Denning. "I don't believe he is one of the white men that have incensed the natives though. I still think he is another orchid hunter."

"Well, if he is and he's headin' the same way we are, he's going right into trouble," remarked the hard-boiled little ivory trader. "I've been roamin' round Africa for years, trading ivory, from the natives for salt and lots of junk that they like to wear, but I don't believe I ever

seen them as worked up as I know they are right now."

"I've seen very little signs of excitement so far," said Denning calmly.

"Yeah, I know that," remarked Sloan. "But as they say back in old New York you ain't seen nothin' yet!"

"Much too quiet," said Tembo halting suddenly, and looking about anxiously. "Me think Tembo better go back. See if anyone follow."

THEY had made a turn so that the trail over which they had come was hidden by brush and trees. As the three men stood motionless, listening Denning felt that the Swahili was right. They were in a dark and shadowy part of the jungle and the silence that hung over the place seemed ominous.

"All right, Tembo," said Denning. "You go back and see what you can find."

Sloan started to speak as he glanced at the big native and then at the orchid hunter, but evidently changed his mind. He stood silently watching as Tembo turned and started on a run back along the trail. The little ivory trader smiled ironically as the Swahili disappeared.

"You'll never see him again," Sloan said finally.

"What do you mean?" demanded Denning.

"Aw, don't be dumb, Hal. I mean that Tembo has been gettin' more and more nervous all the time. That business of goin' back along the trail to see if someone is followin' us is just a stall so he can get away!"

"I don't believe you," said Denning. "Tembo is loyal, I tell you, Jake!"

"Sure, until it comes to gettin' in the thick of it with the best of the blacks. He was scared to death that some of those gods of his would hear him last night when he told us what them drums said."

"Yes, he did act frightened then," said Denning slowly.

FOR the first time a shadow of doubt regarding Tembo's loyalty crossed the orchid hunter's mind. It might be that Sloan was right and that fear of what they might encounter as they went deeper into the brush had made the big Swahili seek a means of escape. Separated from the two white men the possibilities were that he would be unmolested. He would merely be another native who was answering the call of the drums.

"Might as well count Tembo out then," said Sloan after a thoughtful pause. "He's not so dumb at that, if you ask me. We're still headin' straight into trouble."

"Maybe you'd also like to go back and see if there's anyone following us," stated Denning dryly. "I'm keepin' on ahead."

"All right, so am I," said the ivory trader. "But we're gonna be sorry. I feel it in my bones."

With Denning in the lead the two men moved steadily forward. It was not until nearly a half hour had passed that the orchid hunter realized that Sloan had been right.

As they were making their way through an exceptionally dense section of the brush their came a high pitched yell to their right. It was echoed by a second on their left.

Suddenly natives began to pour out of the jungle on all sides of them. Big savage looking creatures with their faces brightly painted with weird designs, and flourishing long sharp pointed spears, and all sorts of crude weapons.

They came so swiftly that the two white men did not have a chance to use their guns. Denning half raised

his to his shoulder, only to have the heavy rifle knocked from his hands by a blow from a war club that left his fingers tingling with pain, even though the blow had only hit the barrel of the gun and not his hands.

Sloan swung the barrel of his Jeffery so that it caught a native just below the left ear and knocked him sprawling into a senseless heap. A moment later the little ivory trader himself went down stunned by a blow on the top of the head. Denning was fighting out blindly with his bare fists but it seemed as though a thousand black hands were grabbing at his arms and legs, and he could not shake them off.

He realized that it was no use, but he kept on fighting, struggling madly, though both he and Sloan were outnumbered ten to one. Finally Denning crumbled as had the little ivory trader and lapsed into unconsciousness.

The leader of the savages uttered a wild yell, as he saw what had happened and then issued orders in the native tongue. Swiftly the two unconscious white men were bound hand and foot with thongs made from the skins of animals then four husky natives picked up Sloan and four more grabbed Denning and at a word from their chief they disappeared into the darkness of the jungle, taking the two white men with them.

CHAPTER IV

DENNING never knew just how long it was before he again regained consciousness, for afterwards he realized it must have been some considerable lapse of time. His first sensation was one of surprise at finding himself still alive.

He had thought that the natives would kill both himself and Sloan at once. But then recalling the madness that hung over the blacks when they worked into a frenzy by the Witch Doctors he realized that some far worse fate than sudden death might be in store for him. The savage tribes were in the mood to relish seeing the white men tortured slowly and horribly.

As his brain grew clearer Denning was positive of that. He knew the jungle people and only by making the white men suffer unspeakable horrors would they feel their fantastic gods had been appeased. Nothing but ruthless killing would placate those weird and grim effigies that the blacks had hidden in the remote and shadowy depths of the jungle where few white men had ever ventured.

THEIR guardians, the medicine men and witch doctors demanded far more than that. There were strange and ghastly rituals to be performed before they would have satisfied the blood lust of their gods and brought about Voodoo vengeance.

Denning found he was in semi-darkness as he opened his eyes. He tried to move and discovered that he was bound hand and foot. From somewhere nearby he heard the constant throbbing of the drums.

The sound was loud, but not as loud as one might expect it to be from the savage instruments whose tone carried for so many miles. He found that by an effort he could sit upright. He did so, his head aching from the terrific blow that he had received.

As his eyes grew more accustomed to the semi-darkness he found that he was in a crude native hut and that Jake Sloan was stretched out beside him."

"Jake!" he called softly.

The little ivory trader moaned but he did not answer. Denning realized that Sloan was still unconscious. There was nothing that the orchid hunter could do to revive the other

man. He was tied hand and foot and helpless.

Denning gradually discovered that they were alone in the hut but outside he could hear the sounds of many voices, intermingled with a wild yell every now and then, and the thud of many feet. He realized that the blacks were dancing to the steady beat of the drums. He knew what that meant. The climax would come with the death of himself and Sloan at the hands of the witch doctors.

HAL DENNING was a brave man and he had faced death in many forms, but he shuddered as he sat there in the semi-darkness listening to the voices of the natives and the steady beat of the drums.

"Jake!" he called again softly.

"Huh?" Sloan mumbled dazedly, and then as he became more conscious. "That you, Denning?"

"Yes," answered the orchid hunter. "They've got us."

"Where are we?" Sloan sat up painfully. "Ouch! My head sure hurts. The black that knocked me out sure didn't fool. What happened to you, Hal? Last I seen of you you were givin' them hell."

"There were too many for me. Finally knocked me just like they did you."

"That's bad," said Sloan. "Sort of looks like they're savin' us for somethin', and I don't like that at all."

"Neither do I," said Denning. "Those savages out there are getting well worked up, and torturing us will give them a lot of pleasure."

"Ever seen one of them little parties the Witch Doctors give?" asked the ivory trader slowly. "I did once. It wasn't a white man though, but ever since then I've been kinda tryin' to forget about it."

"No, I never saw one," said Denning. "But I can imagine that it wasn't a very enjoyable sight."

"You said it," the ivory trader peered about him. "We got to try and figure some way to get away from here."

"Of course, but how?"

"I never was much good at riddles," said Sloan, and then a thought struck him. "How have they got you tied?"

"My wrists fastened behind my back, and my legs bound. Two separate ropes evidently."

"That's a help," said Sloan. "I'm fixed the same way. These birds ain't as bright as they think they are. If we roll back to back maybe one of us can untie the other guy."

"There's a chance," exclaimed Denning softly. "Let's try it."

BOTH men stretched out at full length and then gradually rolled closer to each other until finally they found themselves back to back.

"Better let me try it first," said Sloan. "And if I don't get you free, then you see what you can do with me."

For a long time the ivory trader's fingers picked patiently at the thongs that bound Denning's wrists. He was working slowly and blindly, for he could not see behind him, and the thongs were tightly knotted.

"No use I guess," said Sloan finally. "They got you tied too damn tight."

"Let me try it," said the orchid hunter.

His fingers fumbled and pulled upon the tight thongs until the tips were raw and almost bleeding. He was about to give up in despair when he thought he felt Sloan's bonds give slightly, and he continued working feverishly. He gave a gasp of relief as the ivory trader's wrists finally parted.

"You got it!" exclaimed Sloan in a delighted undertone. "I'm loose."

Swiftly Sloan sat up and began working on the thongs that held his feet. When he had removed them he started in on Denning and finally released his wrists. The orchid hunter then loosened his feet.

"That's that," said Sloan standing up. "Now the next thing is to try and get out of here."

He crept to the closed door of the hut, that had been built of rough bark fastened together in layers. He pulled it open slightly and peeped out. As he did so Denning moved close behind him.

"There's guard out here," said Sloan softly. "I was afraid there would be."

"Just one?" demanded Denning.

"Yes," answered Sloan as he continued to peer through the crack in the door. "The rest of them are all dancing around a big fire and they ain't payin' much attention to anything else."

"If we could only get that guard!" murmured Denning, as he stepped a little to one side. "But we have no weapons."

"Never mind about that," said Sloan. "Get him in here and I'll strangle him with my bare hands."

WELL, that might—" Denning uttered an exclamation as his foot struck something hard. He reached down and picked it up. He found that it was a heavy stone. "Look, Jake! I've found a rock. You decoy that guard in here and when he comes through the door I'll try and knock him out with this rock!"

"Right!" Sloan drew open the door wide enough for the guard to see him, but he was still shielded from view of the savages that were engrossed in their mad dance. "Hey, you," he cursed the guard vindictively.

The native, a tall black with a heavy spear, turned at the sound of the white man's voice. He uttered a growl as he rushed toward the door of the hut with the spear upraised. Denning stood at one side of the door holding the heavy rock above his head with both hands.

As the native entered Sloan retreated suddenly, anxious to keep out of reach of the point of that wicked looking spear. At the same instant the rock in Denning's hand crashed down upon the guard's head with all of the orchid hunter's strength behind it. The native toppled to the ground without a sound as the rock caught him full on the top of the head.

"Got him!" exclaimed the ivory trader. "Come on, let's get out of here quick, before they notice the guard's missin'!"

IT was night now and the two men wasted no further words as they moved cautiously and silently out of the hut. They glanced hastily toward the center of the big clearing at the edge of which the hut stood, the end house of a row of six similiar native dwellings.

The light from the huge fire gleamed weirdly upon the gleaming bodies of the blacks with their half naked forms leaping high into the air, and wailing and shouting as they danced their mad dance to the steady beat of the big drums.

Like moving shadows Denning and Sloan glided around the corner of the hut. Behind was the dense undergrowth of the jungle and freedom lay in that direction for the two white men.

Suddenly they heard a howl from someone around the fire. There was a note of anger in the sound, then the loud babble of voices that grew nearer the front of the hut.

"Run for it!" exclaimed Denning. "They've discovered the guard is missing!"

The little ivory trader did not

waste any time with words. He crashed into the brush with the orchid hunter close at his heels. As they started tearing through the jungle Denning glanced back over his shoulder. He was just in time to see the natives rounding the hut in a steady stream.

"They're coming!" he shouted.

"Run for it!" called back Sloan over his shoulder. "It's our only chance!"

Running madly the two white men plunged into the jungle further and further. They had not the slightest idea in what direction they were going, or what their destination might be. They had only one thought and that was to escape their pursuers. Even as they ran they could sense that the blacks were swiftly gaining upon them.

AS they glanced back from time to time they could see that there were faint lights gleaming in the distance behind them and they realized that some of the natives were carrying burning torches, brands that they had grabbed up from the fire.

"Stop where you are!" a voice called sharply from the brush ahead of the escaping men. A voice that spoke their own language. "Go back!"

"Go back?" Denning and Sloan both paused.

They found themselves staring at the dim figures of four white men whose hard eyes watched them over the sights of heavy rifles.

"You heard me!" said the man who had first spoken. "Go back, I tell you!"

"But the natives!" exclaimed Denning. "To turn back will mean they will catch us!"

"They'll kill us if they get their hands on us again," protested Sloan.

"I don't give a damn about that," said the leader of the four men. "If they've got you two, they won't be looking for us, and that's what we want!"

The orchid hunter glanced over his shoulder. In the distance he could hear the crashing in the brush and see the moving lights as the natives drew closer.

He understood now. These four men were the ones who had robbed the sun god, and they were willing to send Sloan and himself back to a fate that was worse than death in order to protect their own safety.

It had been these men who had stirred up the savages and driven them into a state of insane hysteria that only a wild orgy of torture and killing would gradually alleviate.

"I'm giving you just ten seconds more," said the leader of the four men. "Then if you don't turn back we'll shoot!"

"Good God," exclaimed Sloan. "You guys ain't human! Sendin' white men back there!"

"You're wastin' time!" said the leader. "Get going, or I'll kill you both like dogs!"

Sloan glanced at Denning. The latter shook his head as he swung around and started back the way they had just come. He was sure that the leader of the white men had meant what he had said.

They were evidently laboring under a desperate state of terror over the proximity of the natives. That they were sending two men of their own race back to certain death meant nothing to them, it was only themselves that counted.

"Go back," said Denning. "They'll shoot if we don't. There is still one chance left. Come on, Jake, hurry!"

The orchid hunter started to run straight back toward the oncoming blacks. Sloan followed him reluctantly. He found it hard to make himself believe that the four white men had actually meant what they had threatened. It was almost impossible for

him to feel that men of his own race could be so callous.

When they had almost reached the natives Denning suddenly swung sharply to the left. It was the one chance that he had mentioned. If they could out-run the savages there was still a possibility of escape in that direction.

The natives were still some distance away but coming swiftly and it was impossible for the four white men to shoot with a degree of accuracy on a dark night at such a distance. Denning doubted that they would attempt to shoot even if he and Sloan had made better targets.

They might have done so a few moments ago but now the four white men would fear that the natives would be attracted in their direction by the sounds of their guns.

On and on the two men ran. They had run at top speed ever since they had left the hut and they were both panting heavily as they became more and more winded.

THE leaders of the horde of blacks had seen the direction and they were after them shouting like baying hounds upon a scent. As Denning glanced over his shoulder he saw they were steadily drawing closer and closer. His heart sank, as he realized there was no real hope of escape, it was merely a question of time.

Yet there was a dogged strain in his nature that made him keep on, as did Sloan, straining their hearts and their muscles unmercifully and hoping against hope that they might find some way to safety.

It was the little ivory trader who broke first under the strain. He staggered and almost fell as he halted.

"You—go on," he panted. "I'm all in. Can't—run—anymore."

"I'm staying with you, Jake," said Denning, as he gradually regained his breath. "If they get us, it will be us both!"

"It's both then," said Sloan staring over Denning's shoulder. "They're comin' fast and they ain't more than twenty yards away!"

CHAPTER V

SLOAN had been right. It was both of them. But a few moments later the natives had surrounded them, and when the two white men realized that they had been again captured they made no attempt to struggle.

They stood passively, dejectedly, and the black men swarmed around them again tying their hands tightly behind their backs, and then half leading, half dragging them back to the clearing where the drums were still throbbing.

"Kinda looks like we're still the feature act of the little party they're givin'," said Sloan ironically as he gradually regained his hard-boiled composure. "They're still treatin' us much too gentle to suit me."

Denning said nothing. He did not feel very much in the mood for jesting. Surrounded by natives on all sides he knew that he and Sloan were in all probability doing their death march. It was not a pleasing sensation.

"Them four white men deserve to be gettin' all this," said Sloan. "I'll bet they're the fellers that robbed the sun god and got these blacks all worked up. By damn, I'm gonna see that they do get some of it."

The little ivory trader motioned to a tall native who appeared to be the leader. As the man came closer Sloan began to talk to him swift in a smattering of native tongues that he had picked up during his years in Africa.

At the first the chief sullenly shook his head in disbelief, and then

as the little ivory trader grew more insistent the tall native became interested. Finally he nodded, and stepped aside. As he did so he uttered a few sharply spoken commands. Half of the blacks separated from the rest and hurried back into the brush.

"What did you tell him?" demanded Denning as the chief moved away.

"Told him that he might be able to find them four white men that robbed the sun god if he looked hard enough," said Sloan grimly.

"But, Jake," protested Denning. "You're sending those men to their death!"

"Maybe, if the natives find them," said Sloan. "But they didn't exactly invite us to no meetin' of the sewing society! I'm kinda funny that way. I like company!"

The two white men said nothing further as the native band lead them closer to the clearing. As they approached they saw that the huge fire had been rebuilt and the whole place was brightly lighted by the flames.

NOW for the first time Denning observed a small white structure that was apparently built of stone or marble. He could not tell which, but he knew that it was obviously part of what must have been a beautiful city centuries ago. From time to time man had been finding such indications of a bygone civilization all over the world, but to find one such old temple still standing in the very heart of the jungle seemed fantastic.

Denning's eyes gleamed as he saw the mass of rare orchids that grew in the dank moss at one side of the building. He knew that he had reached his goal, for even at the distance he could see that the flowers were different from any he had ever before discovered. If only by some quaint trick of fate he and Sloan could escape and secure one or two specimens of those flowers then Denning felt all the turmoil they had gone through would be worth while.

"Jake," he said. "There are the orchids I was seeking."

"Huh?" Sloan glanced at the flowers. "Yes, there they are and a lot of good they'll do you now."

"We mustn't give up hope," said Denning.

"Nope, I guess you're right," Sloan glanced around him as they were again lead toward one of the huts. "Funny. I don't see any signs of a witch doctor," he frowned. "Maybe that's why they're waitin' to decide what to do with us."

"But I thought there was always a witch doctor or a medicine man of some sort on guard at places like this where they have those queer looking idols of theirs," said Denning.

"They do," said the ivory trader as the two men were thrust roughly into the same hut from which they had escaped but a short while before. "Only the witch doctors ain't gonna appear before the rest of the natives until they're good and ready. That's how they keep 'em all worked up, and thinkin' that everythin' their medicine men does is some sort of black magic."

THE two white men had again been left alone in the hut, but this time the door remained wide open, and they knew that outside there were now at least six big savages guarding the place. Even if they should again be able to release themselves from their bonds any hope of making an escape as they had before was futile. They were not particularly interested in trying the same thing over again. The result of their first attempt had been far too discouraging.

Yet they had not completely given up hope. They were both brave men and they would cling to the idea of

finding some way out of their difficulties until the last moment. Already their brains were working busily, trying to devise some means by which they might save their lives.

That it was a question of saving themselves from some ghastly form of death they did not doubt. In the clearing, dancing and moving restlessly in the bright light of the huge fire were over a hundred of the black men of the brush and they all craved vengeance against the white men because the sun god had been robbed.

IT did not matter to them that Denning and Sloan had had nothing to do with the pilfering. Their gods must be avenged, and the message that the drums had beat all through the previous night had been death to all white men that could be found in the jungle.

To their surprise Denning and Sloan found that their feet had not been tied when they had been placed in the hut. They were free to walk around with their hands tightly fastened behind their backs. They both stood just inside the open doorway watching all that went on in the clearing.

In the distance they could see four big natives pounding on the huge drums that stood half as tall as they were. The steady *throb, throb, throb* of those drums dominated everything. The pulsating beating drove the blacks into a wilder and wilder state of frenzy. Denning saw one madly dancing savage thrust the point of his spear into his own broad, naked chest until the blood spurted.

"Look!" exclaimed Sloan as he stood beside the orchid hunter in the doorway. "Over there to the left. They got them!"

Into the clearing the four white men who had robbed the sun god were being marched. Their weapons had disappeared and the clothing had been torn from the upper portion of their bodies so that the bare skin of their chests and backs gleamed strangely white in the bright but flickering glow of the fire.

Near the fire the natives were erecting high poles with cross-pieces stretched between them. As Denning and Sloan watched they placed six such structures, and then began piling brush and broken branches of dead trees beneath each one.

"The Swinging Death," murmured Sloan as he saw what the natives were doing. "That's what they are going to do to us, Hal!"

"What is it?" demanded Denning. "I don't quite understand."

"You'll learn soon enough," said Sloan grimly.

As he spoke the natives who had brought in the four white men suddenly crowded around their captives. Denning watched tensely as he saw them take one of the white men and carry him beneath the cross piece that had been tied between two high poles. They fastened him to the cross piece by his feet so that he hung head down, swinging in the air.

A FEW moments later the other three men had been dealt with in the same fashion. A wave of horror that made him ill swept over Denning as he saw the natives light the fires that they had built beneath the hanging white men.

As the flames began to rise natives with long-handled spears poked them at the helpless figures swinging their bodies back and forth above the roaring infernos beneath them.

"Horrible!" muttered Denning. "Jake, those are white men, we can't let them die like that!"

"I know," said Sloan slowly. "I'm damn sorry that I told that chief anythin' now. But what can we do, Hal? We're helpless. They're just givin' those fellers a taste of what's

comin' now. You notice that them fires ain't quite big enough to reach 'em yet," he shuddered. "But the blacks will make the fires bigger in a little while."

"We're next," said Denning as he stared at the two as yet unoccupied scaffoldings.

"If they haven't something worse for us," said Sloan. He glanced to the right of the clearing. "Now hell is goin' to break loose," he said as he did so. "Here comes the Witch Doctor."

DENNING glanced in the direction that the little ivory trader indicated and saw a strange procession entering the clearing.

In the lead was a tall savage, his face completely hidden by a weird looking mask and head-dress that vaguely resembled some sort of a strange devil with horns. From his shoulders and dragging along the ground behind him was a robe made of lion skins. Behind him marched a group of natives their faces painted, and all carrying long spears.

A wild shout went up from the savages in the clearing as they saw the witch doctor. He waved the spear that he held in his right hand as he advanced slowly.

As the chiefs of the various tribes crowded around him the two white men saw the medicine man gesticulate excitedly. He was apparently angry about something.

"Acts like he was sore because they started the party without him," remarked Sloan as he watched.

A moment later some of the natives were taking the four white men down from their hanging positions.

"Guess the witch doctor figures that ain't a tough enough death for them," said the little ivory trader. "He probably knows of a much better way to torture them—and us!"

"Those poor devils are half dead now," said Denning as he watched the natives carry the limp figures of the white men away.

Suddenly the procession of the witch doctor began to move across the clearing toward the huts.

"Comin' for us now," said Sloan. "It's the end, Denning."

"I know," said the orchid hunter.

The two men said no more as the procession paused in front of their hut. The witch doctor issued a command and the guards dragged out the two white men as they heard the hoarse croaking voice.

Again the witch doctor spoke sharply, and with natives on all sides of them Denning and Sloan were led toward the temple of the wind god.

When they reached the place Denning again found himself gazing at the orchids that grew in the dank moss. They were perfect specimens and if he could only have secured one or two of them and escaped he would have been able to bring back a new and rare type of orchid to his firm, and from the one many more could be cultivated.

AGAIN the witch doctor uttered a hoarse command. Instantly all of the natives save those who had appeared with the medicine man when he had entered the clearing stepped back. Then the witch doctor entered the temple, his men following as they lead Denning and Sloan with them.

As they entered the two white men saw that the place sheltered an odd-looking wooden idol, with a body carved like a great cat, and a leering face that was that of an evil old man.

The witch doctor spoke, and two of his men stepped back through the door. They returned in a few moments and Denning cursed softly to himself as he saw that each of them carried a rare orchid. That they were evidently going to use the

flowers that had been his goal as part of the ceremony of his death seemed horribly ironical to the orchid hunter.

"Look, Jake," he murmured. "The orchids!"

Sloan merely nodded. He understood just how Denning must feel. To be so close to his goal and yet know that he would never accomplish his mission.

Again the witch doctor uttered a harsh command. As he did so he moved forward, passing to the right of the idol.. His men followed dragging Denning and Sloan with them.

To the surprise of the two white men the witch doctor lead the way through a back entrance of the temple and out into the dark jungle beyond.

"I can't figure this out," said Denning as they continued on through the brush.

NEITHER can I," said Sloan. "Unless the witch doctor is takin' us to some place where he's got a new kind of torture all ready for us!"

The witch doctor suddenly turned his head and growled something.

"What did he say?" asked Denning.

"Sounded like he told us to shut up, in the native tongue," said Sloan, and then lapsed into silence.

They went on through the jungle for what seemed miles to the two white men. The witch doctor had not spoken since he had called back over his shoulder.

From way in the distance behind them Denning heard the sound of guns.

"Shootin'," said Sloan to Denning in a whisper. "I hope it's them four devils that the natives captured. Probably is, I guess."

"I hope so, too," said Denning. "I'd like to feel they had at least a chance to escape. Even if we haven't."

For over an hour the strange procession pressed on with the witch doctor always in the lead.

"The river," exclaimed Denning suddenly glancing ahead. "We must be somewhere near where we camped last night. If we could only escape, and reach the boat we hid!"

WHEN they had reached the river bank the witch doctor paused. He looked all about him, and then impatiently tossed his mask and headdress aside.

"We better go down stream quick, Bwana," he said. And it was the voice of Tembo, the big Swahili that spoke.

"Tembo!" exclaimed Denning, in startled amazement. "You—the witch doctor?"

"No," the big native shook his head. "Tembo capture real witch doctor in brush. Tie up—take headdress, robe—and come rescue Bwana."

"But these men," said Sloan looking around him anxiously. "Where did they come from?"

"They boys of safari," said Tembo, he frowned as he glared around him. "They do what Tembo say now. Me beat 'em all up so they listen good."

He spoke suddenly in his native tongue. Two of his men stepped forward, and Denning's heart leaped with joy as he saw they were each holding a rare specimen of orchid.

"Bwana go to get flower," said the big Swahili. "So we bring." He smiled at Sloan. "Tembo loyal to Bwana Denning—and you!"

"I'll say you sure are," said the little ivory trader holding out his hand to the Swahili. "You are great simba of the jungle!"

The big native was pleased as he shook hands with the white man. He knew that Sloan meant it when he called him lion of the jungle.

"No," he said. "Just Tembo," he laughed. "Elephant pretty smart sometimes, too!"

The Blood Trail

A Dutch Secret Agent Averts Trouble Between the Whites and the Fiery Head Hunters of the Jungle

By WALLACE R. BAMBER

Author of "The Bushrangers of Australia," etc.

"WE are nearing the bend, O Pumbakal!"

Pumbakal Harn nodded his answer silently. He was intent upon the surging white water on all sides of him. The prahu, guided by the Dyak who crouched in the stern, was shooting the rapids at uncomfortable speed, not conducive to conversation.

In a little while, Harn knew, the seething white water would make a sudden sharp twist, break out of the gorge, and lapse once again into broad sluggishness. On the left shore would appear the kampong Data-Laong, where he must make camp over night or else travel by torchlight.

The prahu swerved end-wise with a sudden quiver. The jungle shore shot closer. Writhing in the current, the boat hurtled around the bend, darted into deep water again, and levelled with a jerk. The wall of giant mangroves broke apart as if ripped by angry hands. Data-Laong rushed into being all at once, as if

flung forward. With a sigh, Harn relaxed.

Presently he lifted his head to peer at the straggling line of nipa-thatched houses on the shore. His angular, gaunt face, framed beneath its solar-topi and bronzed almost to blackness, contracted sharply. His eyes tightened.

"Soldiers," he muttered. "What the devil are they doing way up here?"

The Dyak looked up quizzically, but said nothing. The blunt bow thudded against solid ground. Harn stretched to his feet, peered about him lazily, and stepped out. The Dyak answered:

"Tuan, they are soldiers from Long Iram."

"Set up there," Harn pointed deliberately with a long, bony arm, "under the sagos. We camp here, Bats."

Batu-bini scrambled to obey, after first dragging the prahu higher on shore. The kapala's shack stood close by; and here, in the shade of the palm-frond leaves, lounged the soldiers who had first caused that tightening of Harn's mouth.

Their presence was inexplicable. The Long Iram garrison was a full six days' journey distant. But soldiers did not come this far without reason; and Captain George Clayman, their controleur, would be in the kapala's house, chatting with the Saputan chief. The men were watching Batu with idle curiosity as he set about erecting the tent. Darkness was already creeping in.

PRESENTLY Pumbakal Harn strolled to the tent, spread open a chair, and sat down. Stuffing his pipe, he settled back to await the impending visit.

Half an hour dragged. The Dutch soldiers retired to their tents behind the kapala's house. Later a man in uniform descended the crooked ladder, turned deliberately, peered in Harn's direction, and strode forward. In a moment he stood coldly critical, hands on hips, glowering down into Harn's face.

"Sit down, won't you?" Harn shrugged, without rising.

THE captain complied silently. Folding his thick arms over his knees, he bent forward without more ado.

"Well, why are you here?"

"One never knows, Clayman," Harn smiled. "Whim of the moment, perhaps."

"I was in hopes the Ibans had finished you. You've come from the head-waters. Don't deny it. A handful of Long-Glits from Panangi got out before you."

"My dear fellow, I've just come in from the River Uggo. Been there for the past six months."

"And you know nothing of what's happened?"

"Not a thing," Harn nodded.

"What has?"

"I'll tell you." Clayman's lips curled suggestively; he looked much like an angry gibbon as he scraped his hair closer and scowled vehemently. "While you were on the Uggo," this with unveiled sarcasm, "a raiding party of ten Ibans came over the mountains from Sarawak, built prahus, and went amuck on the Kasao. They raised particular hell in the Panangi kampong upriver. Took six heads. Panangi is wiped out, demoralized; natives scattered in the jungle. Three of the escaped Long-Glits got down to Long Iram with the story. Now—you still sure you've not been up there?"

Harn knocked out his pipe methodically.

"You really don't like me, do you?" he murmured.

"Like you? You—"

"I thought as much. But it doesn't much matter, Clayman. I suppose you're taking your soldiers up there to—er—assume charge in your usual blundering fashion?"

Clayman found his feet unsteadily.

THIS time, Harn," he barked. "I'll settle with you. Two of my men stay here to make sure you don't check out. When I get back, you and I have a show-down coming. As for your being on the Uggo these past weeks, I think you're a damned infernal li—"

Harn was up with a jerk. Trembling a little, yet not obviously, he reached out to grip Clayman's forearm.

"It wouldn't do to spoil our harmonious relations, Clayman," he warned.

"You—you infernal—"

"Good night, Captain. Be careful of the mosquitoes. They sometimes —sting."

Harn turned on his heel and stepped to the tent entrance, crouching to pass under the opening. Clayman stood rigid for a moment, watching him with smouldering eyes; then the Dutchman fell back, swung about, and paced into the darkness. The sucking sound of his lips was audible even after the shadows had engulfed him.

Pumbakal Harn stretched himself quietly on his cot. For a while he played idly with the bowl of his pipe, listening to the intermittent hum of insects outside. Presently he turned his head and said evenly:

"Fetch a drink, Bats."

Batu came out of nowhere with magical swiftness, holding a gutshi of tepid water. Harn drank slowly, then lowered the jar and stared into the boy's face.

"We're prisoners," he smiled. "You heard him say so, Batu?"

"Yes, Tuan."

"I don't think Clayman likes us," Harn murmured. "There's been a head-hunting raid upriver. He thinks we had something to do with it."

"It is bad business, head-hunting, O Pumbakal!"

Harn smiled appreciatively. Wise Batu! Being a Penihing, Batu had once indulged in head-collecting on his own hook.

"Clayman has been waiting for this chance for five years," Harn shrugged. "Well, we're here and I guess we stay here."

"He is angry, O Pumbakal, for what happened last year on the Barito?"

Harn nodded. A smile crossed Batu's lips. He remembered, even better than Harn, the details of that affair. Clayman had made a ten-day trip upriver to bring back a Bukit murderer, only to find that the man he sought, being innocent, had been advised by Harn to vanish in the jungle; while Harn had already dealt with the true culprit.

On another occasion, Clayman had ordered an entire kampong of thirty Katingans to isolate themselves because four of them were afflicted with beri-beri. Finding his orders disobeyed, he had gone there in a rage, only to find Pumbakal Harn in charge of the kampong and caring for the sick men. And there were other incidents.

BUT one thing Batu did not know. One thing, concerning Pumbakal Harn, was known only to Harn himself and to certain high officials of the Dutch Government in Bandjermasin. Apparently a wandering trader and gentleman of fortune, Harn was actually in the employ of

the ruling forces. For seven years he had received the same orders: "Go where you like; do what you like. Keep the inlanders (native tribes) satisfied. Most of all, keep the whites and natives on peaceful terms."

THUS, for obvious reasons, Harn could expect no assistance or recognition from the government. He could wear no uniform. The inlanders looked with suspicion and ill-will upon government men; but they considered Pumbakal Harn their chief, their pumbakal, and had so dubbed him.

White men, too, considered him an unattached trader. This, too, for obvious reasons, since secrets, no matter how important, have ways of leaking out through innumerable channels.

Thus it was impossible for Harn to be more than a trader. And the arrangement suited him perfectly. He had no complaints.

But there was a problem now. He could not stay in Data-Laong.

Frowning, he swung himself off the cot and stepped to the tent flap.

"Have everything ready for quick departure, Bats," he said grimly. "I'll be back in a while."

Then he went out toward the kapala's. He noticed, as he went, that two of Clayman's men were hauling his prahu high out of the water and dragging it toward the army tents.

Climbing the tree-trunk ladder, he pushed aside the lallang mat which hung over the entrance.

"Akko domo, Kapua," he said softly.

The kapala rose quickly from his mat. A small man, garbed in embroidered sarong with the usual parang, finely carved, protruding from his belt.

"Munduk (sit down) O Pumbakal!" he grinned.

"Thanks. I'd have come sooner, but—well, you know why, I reckon."

"I know, Tuan."

Harn squatted and proffered a cigarette. The kapala, not to be outdone, fetched out a gutshi of arrack.

"The Captain Clayman called you evil names, O Pumbakal. Drink this and wash out the sting."

"I don't mind the sting, Kapua. You didn't argue with him?"

"No, Tuan. What use?"

"None. He's taken my prahu. I've got to get downriver to the Mahakam at once, and then to Long Iram. Think we can arrange it?"

"The captain will be very angry, Tuan." A frown twisted Kapua's long mouth. "He will be like a stuck babi (pig)."

"I've a plan, Kapua," he shrugged. "You see, I can't stay here."

"You want to chat with some one, Pumpakal?"

"Yes. Roger Mull."

"The white blian (witch-doctor) Tuan?"

"Yes. Not a blian; a missionary." Harn smiled tolerantly. "I've promised to take him to the Upper Barito. He's waiting in Long Iram for me."

"He was here, O Pumbakal!"

"Here?" Harn's fingers tightened on the gutshi.

YES, Tuan. He has gone to Pangi kampong, upstream where the Ibans made their raid. He went to talk peace with them."

"Good Lord, no!"

"But he has, Tuan."

"Damned fool." Harn was muttering to himself. "He doesn't know that country. He'll be chopped to pieces. One doesn't preach to Ibans."

"Tuan—"

"Listen, Kapua," Harn said with forced calm. "I've got to go after him. See? You've got to help—"

The kapala listened quietly. Many minutes passed. Finally Harn rose stiffly and said dully:

"Well, akko buhao, Kapua. Don't fail me."

"Kapua is your friend, O Pumbakal."

Harn descended the ladder slowly and paced across to his own tent. Batu was waiting for him. All was ready for quick departure.

"We go now, Tuan?" the Penihing questioned.

"In a little while, Bats. Panangi is only six hours upriver."

"We are going to Panangi, Tuan?"

"Yes."

"Then—what are we waiting for?"

"You'll see," Harn said grimly.

He sat down. It was very dark outside.

Half an hour passed with uncanny slowness. Harn sat patiently, without movement, watching the fireflies blink about the tent.

Presently his patience was rewarded. The familiar jungle voices were silenced under another louder scream. It came from the far end of the kampong; a human voice lifted in anger.

A grin crossed Harn's mouth. He turned quickly.

"Sit tight, Bats," he grunted. "Won't be long."

Batu nodded without answering. He was listening.

THE single voice had become a dozen, rising in crescendo with enough penetrating power to split a normal ear-drum.

Harn's gaze fixed on the army tents behind the kapala's house. For a moment nothing moved there; then a uniformed figure appeared, followed by others. The men stood quiet, peering in the direction of the racket. Then Captain Clayman, huge in the shadows, pushed through the flaps and rasped something. The soldiers trotted across the kampong.

NOW!" Harn snapped. "There's a Saputan prahu lying in the reeds, near the jungle."

Batu grasped two of the chop boxes with animal dexterity and straightened up.

"I'll wait for you, Tuan," he said quickly, and was gone.

Seizing the remaining chop boxes, Harn darted into the shadows. It was unpleasant, leaving like this. His equipment had to be left behind. But he could get more supplies, if necessary, in any of the Dyak kampongs of the district.

He found Batu expecting him, with the prahu already floating in shallow water. The supplies thudded into the stern. Batu leaped catlike to the bow and seized a paddle. In another instant, with Harn wielding a heavy pole, the prahu swirled into deep water, turned its nose upstream, and swung into a well of darkness.

Batu turned, grinning like a wahwah.

"Aiii! The Captain Clayman will be angry, Tuan!"

"No doubt," Harn said grimly.

Then the jungle closed in, with giant taphang trees towering on both sides and immense buttressed roots curling through the bamboo rushes into the water.

Unconscious of the myriad jungle noises on all sides, Pumbakal Harn forced the pace, allowing no rest, seldom speaking. Hour after hour went by without interruption.

And daylight, with its accompanying fever mist, was just seeping through the great trees when Batu,

squatting in the bow of the boat, turned suddenly to say:

"We are coming to Panangi, O Pumbakal."

THE Penihing's eyes were keen. Presently the river shore opened into a clearing, studded with nipa huts about twenty in number. There was no sign of life, no greeting.

"Abandoned," Harn said grimly. "Pull in, Bats."

The prahu glided inshore. For a moment after the boat struck solid ground neither man moved; then Harn stepped into the reeds and paced forward.

Batu waited restively. Half an hour passed before Harn reappeared; then the white man climbed into the prahu, picked up his paddle and nodded. Once again the boat crept upstream between thick jungle walls.

"Tuan, what did you find?"

"This," Harn shrugged, passing something forward.

Batu took the thing and examined it. It was a bit of wood, carved crudely to represent a female figure with fantastic head and one hand uplifted, pointing.

"Tuan, this is a head-hunter's kapatong!"

"I know."

"But it means—"

"I found it," Harn admitted, "in the kapala's hut. I also found a dried head. It means that the Long-Glits are on the blood trail, for vengeance. They have gone after the Ibans who raided them."

"But the kampong was *empty*, Tuan. The women—"

"Do not take the blood trail, eh? I know it, Bats. Where the women have gone, I don't understand. But the other signs were unmistakable."

Batu shuddered. He did not ask questions; he knew that Harn understood Dyak signs. And Harn did understand. That dried head, newly covered with paddi, had been damnably significant.

And the wooden kapatong, now gripped in Batu's fingers, had been stuck up in the kapala's hut, with its upraised arm pointing upriver. It had been set there for protection, to guard over the departed warriors and warn them in case of danger.

Before nightfall, the long boat snaked into the yawning mouth of a jungle hell and scraped against the rushes.

The Penihing twisted suddenly backward from his position in the bow, screeching in a shrill voice:

"Down, Tuan! Sumpit!"

Harn obeyed instinctively. He did not see the dreaded blow-pipe until another sixty interminable seconds had elapsed, an insignificant rod of polished ebony, more than four feet long, protruding between the lantana fronds not twenty feet distant. And as he saw it, the thing spit death. The feathered dart zunged over his head with its dreaded whining sound.

Harn whipped the revolver from his holster and lifted it deliberately. The gun belched. The native, crouching unseen in the reeds, jerked into the open. He stood for a single second erect, head twisted grotesquely; then stumbled to his knees, slid forward and fell with his head in black water.

HARN rose very slowly to his feet, to his full height, and stood motionless. He had recognized the Dyak—one of the savage Ibans from the Sarawak villages. There would be no second blow-dart—not after the roar of the revolver.

Harn stepped out of the boat. Then he turned in a slow circle, gazing all about him, and called out in a loud voice in challenge:

"Akko domo!" (Literally: "I arrive." A general salutation.) And then, in Iban dialect, mingled with Malay, "Come out of your hiding places. Are Iban fighting men like skulking wah-wahs?"

THERE was no immediate response, but, before another moment had passed they came, after the fashion of the gibbons he had named them. Skulking, timid, eyeing him furtively, they crept out of the dense brush on both sides of the kampong. Nine fighting Ibans in full war attire, parangs in their belts, sumpits tipped with spear points in their hands, tufted war shields slung over their shoulders, and the familiar antohs painted over their lithe bodies.

Harn waited until they surrounded him, then turned and surveyed them caustically.

"Where is your kapala?"

The chief moved a step nearer, with surly face.

"Why did you come here, Tenali?" Harn said quietly.

"For heads, Tuan."

"It is wrong to hunt heads. You know that."

"The evil spirits sent us."

"And why did you attack me?"

"Tuan," the Iban's face fell; he was lying, yet a less experienced white man might have thought it the truth, "we did not know you. We thought you were soldiers from Long Iram, come to kill us for disobeying the company."

Harn nodded. Batu had reached his side and was gripping his arm as a signal to be careful.

"You must go back over the mountains," Harn said coldly. "The soldiers are coming here and—"

Then he stopped talking, as his eyes fixed with a sudden twitch upon the doorway of one of the nipa-shacks just beyond the circle of Dyaks. He stood very stiff. His fingers tightened imperceptibly on the revolver.

"Harn! Pumbakal Harn!" The voice that came from the entrance was feeble, almost inaudible.

Harn strode forward. Found the man who had cried out. And the man was Roger Mull, the missionary, white-faced, emaciated, more like a man of the jungle than a civilized English church representative.

"Harn—"

"You are hurt," Harn said curtly. "Bats, give me a hand." The missionary had been struck with a spear. The weapon lay on the floor, where he had thrown it after drawing it out of his leg; and it was the usual four-foot ebony sumpit with sharpened spear-point affixed to one end.

"I—I was too late to help them, Harn," Mull choked.

"Hmm. Got anything on that leg?"

"Only a handkerchief. I had no medicine, Harn. I came upstream so quickly, to help those unfortunate devils at Panangi."

Harn's mouth formed a suggestion of a smile. Poor, thick-headed Mull! Knew less about the jungle than the high officials of Bandjermasin! He would learn one day that head-hunting parties never raided the same kampong twice in succession.

THEN I came here," Mull sobbed out, "to talk to the raiders. But they were too excited. They were camping here, making ready to go back to Sarawak; and they were going through some sort of ceremony, swinging those Long-Glit heads about by the hair and singing songs to them and—"

"You were lucky," Harn shrugged, "they didn't take your head, too."

"I—I interrupted their dance, Harn. I walked into their midst

and talked to them, the best I could."

"Wouldn't listen to you, eh?"

"I—I should have waited, Harn. They were too excited. They fell upon me and killed my two Saputan boat-boys."

"Get any of 'em?"

"You mean—shoot them? No, no! I have frightened them; that's all."

"Hmm. Better if you shot a few. Well, we can get you out now, I reckon. Can you make it, with Batu and me to help you?"

"I think so, Harn. If you'll give me your arm—"

His voice was smothered in a sudden high-pitched yell that rose from the kampong square outside. Abruptly Harn ceased his efforts to get the Englishman to the door. His mouth clamped shut.

"What's that?" he snapped.

A wild racket followed the scream.

"Might—have known it," he muttered. "The Long-Glits. No use now, Mull. Better lie down. I'll see what's up."

Roger Mull stared at him in consternation. No fear; merely bewilderment.

Harn walked softly to the doorway. The racket outside had risen to a terrific din, filled with the savage shouts of the attacking Long-Glits from Panangi who had made a surprise attack.

"What—what is it?" Mull whispered.

TELL you — presently," Harn shrugged. Then he stepped out into the open, taking a frightful chance. Standing erect, Harn lifted his arm and shouted. Then, quick as a cat, he flung himself backward; and the answer to his greeting thudded into the nipa thatch beside him. No mistaking the significance of that Long-Glit spear!

Abruptly Harn flung the mat down and turned with a shrug.

"No good," he said quietly. "At any other time they'd give me the skin off their backs; now I'm just more meat for murder."

He dropped down beside Mull.

HERE. I'll tourniquet that leg of yours. Keep the pain out. You may have to move fast."

He tore a strip from his linen coat and wound it with unmerciful pressure above and below the spear hole.

"We're safe here," Harn muttered. "It's two to one down there. Be over in ten minutes. Long-Glits are the best fighting men in Borneo. When it's over, they'll be rational. I can talk to them. Damned fine men. Don't blame them for wanting revenge."

He rose quietly and stuck a cigarette between his lips. Batu had shuffled to the doorway and was peering through a slit in the mat.

"Tuan! Come here!"

Harn jerked to his side. The entrance was high above the ground, commanding a clear view of the bloody battle being enacted in the kampong clearing. What he saw caused him to whip back with a snarl.

"Clayman!" he spit out. "Damn the man, why couldn't he have waited another hour!"

"Clayman—is coming here?" Mull whispered.

"Yes. Here!"

"He—he hates me, Harn. He'll kill me."

Harn was back at the aperture again, clenched fists. In a few moments the Dyaks below would be aware of the soldiers' coming. They hated Clayman with poisonous fervor. Finding him here, far from civilization, there would be only one conclusion. They would combine forces, secrete themselves along the river shore, and settle their old smoulder-

ing scores with—sumpits. They had waited a long, long time for this chance!

"By God—" Harn muttered. "I'd like to let them do it. He deserves it. But—"

He thought of the other soldiers. Good men, not at all like their captain. White men.

"Got ammunition for that gun of yours?" Harn snapped. Then, as Mull nodded. "Take the gun, Bats. Come here, quickly!"

The Penihing obeyed with intelligence. Harn snatched the parang from the man's belt and gripped it with nerveless fingers.

"Get close to the door," he snapped. "Keep firing. Don't kill—just keep their attention. Understand?"

"Yes, Tuan."

Batu took his place. Harn ran across the room and dropped to his knees, slashing at the rear wall.

"Harn!" Roger Mull's voice came weakly. "You can't go out there. They'll chop you."

"Got to stop Clayman."

"But Clayman will kill you. You don't know him. He'll shoot you on sight!"

"Won't be any sight. Sit tight. Wait for me."

The knife ripped through dead bamboo. Harn tore the nipa thatch frantically, widening a hole. Then he was through, hanging at arm's length.

RELEASING his hold, Harn dropped with a thud. It was getting dark, thank God. The jungle had lost its definite form and became a massive black spectre. Harn slipped beneath the house, unobserved, and reached shelter. The Long-Glits and Ibans were fighting hand-to-hand, knife to knife, not twenty feet distant, filling the darkness with gluttural voices and stumbling, heaving collisions of naked bodies.

Harn slid into the protecting jungle. The prahu still lay against a great mangrove buttress. Heaving it into the stream, he flung himself into the bottom of it. The boat snaked into deep water with a soft gurgle. Losing its momentum, it hung for a moment in the slow current, turned easily, and began to drift downstream.

THE prahu made no sound, hardly any movement. The savage cries of the Dyaks came softer and softer. Presently the heavy, rhythmic dip of paddles became audible.

Harn heard voices then. Clayman's voice in particular.

"Look! A prahu—drifting—"

"Empty, eh? Sign of something, anyhow."

". . . find something before long. There's a deserted kampong up this way somewhere. Damn this darkness."

The paddles lost their monotonous sound. Harn's prahu moved on without interruption. The voices came closer.

"Move over—" this was unmistakably Clayman's guttural—"we better have a look at the thing."

A splash of paddles then. The prahus met.

"By God, it's Pumbakal Harn! They've finished him!"

A hand gripped Harn's shoulder, shook him.

"Still warm. Dead as hell. Blast them, I'd hoped to settle that score myself."

Clayman bent over, off balance, to paw at the still form. Roughly he jerked it over; then he fell back, snarling, as the inert mass jerked into a kneeling position and the limp hand, concealed beneath Harn's body, whipped out and up to thrust a blunt muzzle against the captain's midriff.

"You—"

"One move," Harn snapped, "and you have it."

Clayman twitched. Harn peered beyond him, to discern the fixed amazed faces of the four uniformed men who crouched farther back in the prahu.

"WHERE'S the rest of your men?" he demanded.

"A mile — back. Second—boat," Clayman choked.

"Hmm. Convenient. Tell these fellows to paddle down-stream, the way you came."

"I refuse. Damn you, Harn, I am a government official—"

"You'll be a dead one. Do as I say."

Clayman had to obey.

The prahu moved swiftly, impelled both by the current and the four paddles. Harn did some fast thinking. If he stayed with the boat, he must chance an encounter with the second prahu, pushing upstream. That would be fatal.

Suddenly he saw something. His own prahu was sidling away, falling out of reach. Abruptly he scooped out to seize it. Quick as a krait, Clayman took the opportunity to strike.

The revolver was wrenched out of Harn's hand. A battering ram of knuckle smashed into his side, twisting his lips in sudden pain and hurling him down.

But he did not wait for the bullet. With a sudden lunge he fell over the side and turned the boat over on top of him. The occupants were spilled.

Clutching fingers raked Harn's arm. He tore them loose. He was staring into the wet, terrified face of Clayman. On all sides of him the men were splashing about in frenzy, seeking holds on the upturned prahu. One man was screaming in a loud voice, repeating the word *crocs* over and over.

Harn paid no attention. The men were in no danger on that side. There were no crocs in these waters; none above the rapids. But there was Clayman, fighting mad, slashing at him, snarling in the water like an enraged Orang Blana.

Warding him off, Harn sprawled backwards and made for shore. Clayman followed.

The two men gained their feet simultaneously. There was no outcry. With a savage lunge Clayman threw himself forward. But Harn was quicker. His clenched fist rammed out, smacked hard, and sent the big man plunging once again, unconscious, into the fetid water.

Harn was beside him instantly to drag him out again. Clayman's men, clinging to the overturned prahu, had already drifted out of earshot.

Harn turned quickly, made for his own prahu, seized the pole and began the journey upriver. He was smiling grimly.

No sound drifted down from the kampong. It was very dark; so opaque that Harn could not discern the details of the shore. He had been gone a long time, but hardly realized it. He jerked about when a voice—the voice of Batu—sang out to him from the kampong twenty yards ahead in the gloom.

The kampong was abandoned, except for the lone man who waded into the shallow water and dragged Harn's prahu on shore. Harn stepped out stiffly, grinned.

"All over, Bats?" he shrugged.

"Aiii, O Pumbakal! There was no fight even. Those Long-Glits they are devils. How they fight!"

"The Ibans?"

"Dead, Tuan."

KNOWING what you would have ordered O Pumbakal," Batu said with puffed chest, "I ordered likewise. I told them to return to their kampong Panangi and take the dead men with them."

"Mull gone too?"

"With them, Tuan. To tell them

about the white man's god, now that they are ready to listen to him. Aiii, he is a brave man, that Mull. So soon as the fighting was over, he stepped out of the house and began to speak to them and—"

Harn nodded curtly.

"We should have a fire, O Pumbakal. You will get malaria sickness."

"Not now. We're going to have visitors."

Batu stiffened abruptly.

"Listen," Harn shrugged.

The Penihing stood with head cocked; then turned swiftly, frowning.

"Prahus coming, Tuan. Two of them."

"Right." Harn stretched, drew the Dyak back into the shelter of the thick mangrove.

"Just sit tight and watch," he smiled. "It ought to be funny, Bats."

Presently the two prahus appeared, drew closer, and ran ashore. One was the same which Harn had overturned. The other was its companion boat. Climbing out of the first, hunched up like an angry maias, came Captain George Clayman.

For half an hour the soldiers examined the kampong. Finally they returned. The boats pushed off, swung about, and drifted into the darkness down-stream. A gutteral voice reached Harn's ears.

"By God, if I ever meet that blasted trader again, I'll cut out his heart—"

Pumbakal Harn touched the naked arm beside him and said, with a dry grin:

"All right, Bats. Light a fire. And mix up some sayur. I'm starving. We've done our duty tonight; but the good old Dutch government will probably never know it."

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Pearls *of the* Luzon

A Vivid Story of the South Seas And a Bitter Struggle For the Wealth That Lies in the Sea

By JONATHAN EDWARDS

HE was a filthy bum, eh? The thud of Mark Horner's crashing fist against Big Joe Gann's cheek sounded like the plop of a following sea smacking the poop.

There was the power and anger of a hundred and eighty pounds of fighting sailorman behind that blow. The trader from Haolia was knocked back against the bar. Knuckle marks on his cheek gave way to a rising flood of crimsoning anger.

Gann dropped his hand behind him. Quickly Tack Delaney, the bartender, reached across and grabbed that arm. The trader's hand came up with a vicious German automatic. Delaney tightened his grip and shook. The pistol dropped to the floor as Gann's swarthy features flinched.

Holding on, the barman swung across and picked up the pistol.

"None o' that here," he scowled. "Use yer fists if ye got an argument."

Gann scowled as the other flung the snub-nosed weapon behind the bar. Then he nodded and turned toward Mark Horner. He had not run a trading schooner and a crew of Solomon Islanders through the Southern Seas from Honolulu to Port

Darwin, without learning something of fists.

BUT this was Port Darwin. Delaney had been right. The constabulary wouldn't bother him for an ordinary brawl—but guns were something else.

Gann sneered. On the *Striker* he could have shot this upstart American beachcomber and tossed his body to the sharks. He had done that before, but not in Port Darwin.

Mark dropped back a pace and shrugged off his worn jacket. Sleeves chopped off at the elbows showed brawny arms that had fought mountainous seas and mutinous sailors. He was a mate, down on his luck since a typhoon had wrecked his ship, none too well fed from a month on the beach—but American and game to the core.

A penny bowl of rice from a Chinaman's stand was all that lay behind that broad leather belt. It was not the first time Mark had postponed a meal. Privation, the lack of a decent berth and the uncertainty of food he could endure—but to be called a filthy bum was something not to be taken standing up.

A buzzer sounded and Tack Delaney cocked an eye through the slot. Then he opened the door and Harry Levings, of the *Roamer,* a free-lance trader working up the Banda, Celebes and Sulu Seas to Hongkong, came in. Levings took in the situation at a glance and a broad grin lit his face. He backed to the wall.

From the way it started it looked like Mark's fight. Gann came rushing in, head lowered, flailing thick arms, slugging. Mark jabbed the trader with a left and came up and under with a right. Short blows—but they stopped Gann and lifted his head.

Those kidney wallops set Gann back. He hauled off an instant, then bored in. Shaking his head he lowered his guard and reached with a side-wise swipe for Mark's stomach.

The powerful swipe caught Mark just above the belt in a terrific jolt—and he flinched. Mark skinned a knuckle on Gann's yellow teeth, but the old speed was almost gone. That stomach swipe had told. Mark knew he could not stand many more of them. Backing, he sparred for time.

Weaving aside, Mark caught the other with a sharp kidney slap and danced away—then ducked in, countered and got a one, two and three on that big head before the trader could recover. The fighting became mad—fast and furious, all over the place.

Suddenly Gann saw the other's vulnerable stomach before him and jolted two straight jabs at the wet warm flesh. Instantly Mark folded in agony, dropping his chin on the trader's dirty neck. It was all he could do to raise his hands and drop them down heavily on Gann's kidneys, banging away.

That snapped Gann back and his head came up. As it did he raised his knee and aimed a kick at Mark's groin. The mate saw the kick, caught it and yanked.

Off balance, weakened by the blows over his whisky-soaked kidneys the big man plopped down on his back—and rolling on his side he lay still. But Mark never knew it. Yanking, he had drawn the other's boot into the pit of his stomach. Dropping the foot Mark wrapped both arms around his middle and fell to the floor writhing.

"THAT will be about all of that," Harry Levings caught Delaney's eye. "They're both through," he nodded at Joe Gann. "Sluice a bucket over him. I'll take care of the mate."

Bending down the Hongkong trader straightened Mark Horner

out. "Somebody get a brandy," he said, jerking his hand toward the bar. "Boy what a scrapper. Wait 'til I get those muscles loosened up and a steak chucked into his belly. Then you'll see a fightin' man."

Mark's contorted face smoothed under the gentle hands of the skipper. A wan smile trembled on his lips as the brandy trickled down and he sat up.

"What happened," he demanded.

The others explained. He shook his head shoving them aside to look at Gann. Reaching toward the bar he yelled at Delaney.

"Give me a bucket full. Let's see just how much of a filthy bum I am."

Delaney handed over a brimming bucket and Mark shot it full on the face and chest of his late opponent. Big Joe shook his head, raised it and looked at Mark through one crooked eye. Seeing the other standing there, a bucket in his hand, the trader looked around at the grinning circle of faces. Then he lay back on the floor.

Mark set the bucket on the bar, grinning. Turning to the skipper of the *Roamer* he motioned to Big Joe's wet head.

"Let's get this bozo out of here. I don't like him," he nodded at the door.

Outside they propped Gann up against an alley door and walked to the street.

THANKS," Mark slipped on the jacket, the *Roamer's* skipper handed him. "I forgot that. I wish I could say come on, let's have a meal—but I can't. You were a big help."

"I figured as much," the other grinned. "You don't owe me a thing. That was the sweetest scrap I've seen for a year. How about having a meal on me. I'm just in and cleaned up plenty on a bit of shell. What'll it be, John Chinaman's food or the Royal Arms?"

MISTER, if I had a piece of lemon pie that meal would be complete," Mark grinned as he shoved back his plate. "That's the only thing I hold against the East. You can't get good American pies and desserts, and do I love 'em."

"How about an American cigarette?" Levings held out a cellophane package. "I brought 'em down from Manila."

"Boy, howdy," Mark grinned. "I wish I'd met you instead of Joe Gann when he landed here this morning. Say, how soon will your schooner be ready to sail?"

"Just as soon as I can line up another cargo," Levings took a cigarette himself. "Why? You got something on your mind. Spill it. If it will make money I've got a damned good boat and a crew that will jump."

"I was just thinking," Mark blew a cloud of smoke at the ceiling. "I can pay you back for this meal and plenty besides if you'll take a chance, and not much of a chance at that. Just the matter of finding an island in the Molucca Pass and picking up a fortune in pearls, then cutting across to the States and selling them."

"What was an old freighter like the *Luzon* doing with a fortune in pearls?" Levings frowned. "Sounds fishy my friend. You're welcome to the meal but—"

Mark shook his head. "I know it sounds like a lot of the yarns you hear along the beaches from Tahiti to S'pore but I'm not kidding you. The old man had 'em in his cabin. He was smuggling 'em into the States. Besides him, I'm the only one that knew about it. He got sick and told me the story.

"I was the only one who knew where he had them hid. He begged

me, when he died, to get 'em, sell 'em and give his widow half. I promised that. That's got to be in any agreement we make. That's what Joe Gann kicked about.

JOE thought he had me. Admiralty charts show where the *Luzon* went down, but I didn't say where the pearls are hidden. That's my secret until we pick 'em up. There's at least a hundred thousand for the two of us."

"How about salvage? How about the underwriters?"

Mark Horner laughed. "I guess you've never been close up to the currents around Halmahera," he chuckled. "Feller, there's some currents there that are as bad as the Niagara rapids. Part of the *Luzon's* super-structure is out of water or was when I last saw her, but there's no salvage. If they'd build a cofferdam around her she'd raise an inch and be swept on more rocks. It can't be done. Salvers looked her over and reported a total loss according to Sidney papers. Besides, they don't know about the pearls."

As Mark Horner spoke Levings weighed his man. He had seen the clean fighting the other did in Jack Delaney's. Mark's story was rather fantastic but there was a ring of truth in the other's words. Not only that but the man seemed in earnest. The way he spoke of saving half the treasure for the captain's widow—somehow made it sound straight.

"When the *Luzon* piled up in the typhoon the old man gave the orders. We got the crew off safe enough and they caught junks and spread from here to Halifax. I knew I couldn't get by the Dutch authorities with pearls on a Chinese junk so I hid 'em. They're safe until I go hunt 'em up."

Levings watched the other's eyes shrewdly. He was more impressed by the other's manner, his gestures and his tone than by what he said.

"I tell you I've seen the pearls, they're all sizes. The biggest, the size of my little finger nail. Two money belts full of them. Each pearl wrapped in a little paper all by itself. They're new pearls, never even drilled. The old man said he got them from a Greek. I don't know pearls, but he did. You couldn't fool the old man on them."

"I don't know much about them myself, except that they're pretty," Levings said. "About how many were there?"

Mark picked up his officer's cup and inverted it. "They'd fill that to overflowing. You couldn't hold them all loose in both hands. They'd spill over."

Levings nodded and lit a cigarette. He hadn't exactly told the truth when he said he knew little about them. He knew a great deal about the little oyster's children and he recollected a tale of a wealthy Greek pearling trader who had been found mysteriously murdered and robbed in Singapore about the same time the *Luzon* had been there.

More than once Levings had sold a pearl to the same Greek. Rumor had it that old Kickapopolus had more than a million, and not a little of it invested in the precious little gems of the South Seas.

I BURIED the captain as best I could," Mark was saying. "We hailed a junk loaded with Chinese and got to Palmerston. I got a copra schooner and came here. I've been kicking around for weeks looking for a boat and a man I could trust. They told me Joe Gann was ready for a fight or a frolic. He didn't look so hot but I propositioned him. I was desperate. You know the rest."

"I've been watching you, Horner

and you talk straight," Levings nodded. "I'm game. What comes out of what we make before the split, aside from the widow's share?"

JUST what you need to run the boat, from here up into the Molucca sea while we pick up the pearls and whatever we need to go on across to Frisco. I'll let you go with me when we peddle the stones. You can see me send the money to Mrs. Tonkin. Then what's left we split fifty-fifty. Isn't that fair?"

"Fair enough if we don't run foul of Joe Gann. Remember, Horner, you've told him the yarn. Gann's a slick customer. He's dodged in and out of these seas for years. What if we have to fight him after we get the cache?"

"Cripes, I hadn't thought of that," Mark scowled. "He might follow and lay for us after we got the pearls. Try to sink or murder us. Yeah, that's a thought. Well, then we'll have to buy you a new boat," he grinned. "Cut out the 'if'. You'll get yours as soon as Mrs. Tonkin gets hers. We'll split the remainder."

It was dark by the time they got to the wharf but in the bright moonlight Mark could make out the lines of a trim little schooner, spoon bowed with a short raking stern.

"Damned pretty," he told Levings as they climbed over rat guards and dropped to the smooth deck, "but what in blue blazes is that smell?"

"Old cargoes of copra, beche-de-mer, sharks fins, turtle and pearl shell," Levings smiled. "The hold's clean as a whistle but the smell lingers. I believe I'd be lost without it."

"Hell, I don't mind," Mark grinned. "It was just new to me, that's all. The junk smelled of sandalwood and camphor and the schooner from Palmerston smelled of fish. I just wondered what this was, that's all."

"The cabins are plain but comfortable."

Levings led the way down the companion ladder and lit the lamp. Mark saw the trader was right. Smooth unvarnished teak gave a feeling of strength, comfort and solidity and a rack over the side board held shot guns and a high powered rifle.

"She's got good sticks and a new suit of cotton," Levings grinned. "Notice the narrow beam and the diesel kicker," he opened a door and pointed to the engine. "Bottom's not as clean as I'd like and she's not as fast as the *Striker*, but she'll stand a heap of driving and we'll drive her. Joe Gann just had the *Striker* hauled out and scraped in Haolia. That'll give him the edge on speed, but otherwise we're pretty even. Let's turn in and sleep on it. Tomorrow's our busy day if we're catching the ebb at sundown."

A week of three square meals a day had done wonders for Mark. The feel of a ship's deck under foot, the whistle of the wind in his face, the companionship of Levings whom he knew he could trust, that and work again made a new man of him.

They had found the island unerringly. Levings and Mark agreed they should pick it up at the dawning and there it was, dark, sinister and gray, like a monument to the sad old *Luzon*. The sound of the surf rose and rolled back at them. Stars winked out and like Kipling's poem, the sun came up from the glassy sea to the East, paused an instant on the horizon and shot up into the sky.

THE long sentinel rock was a good way out from the mainland of Halmahera. South, a haze of the island could barely be made out, but directly East there was nothing but sea.

Sea, and the golden path of the sun warming the surface, burning a

jagged javelin at them, chasing the shadows about the lonely sentinel rock, frigate birds and gulls, wakening squawking parrots, standing up blinking goats on the craggy sides of the slope and tinging the green of the tropical trees with an amber glow.

Little wispy clouds of vapor clung to the hillsides, rising like shadowy valleys to lofty ragged gray top of the cone. Except for color the cone might have been a huge brown chicken croquette rising from many sprigs of parsley.

The tropical forest, thick, choking, so close to the equator dropped to the waters edge and sprawled about the island. Ahead swooping waves identified the wreck of the old *Luzon.*

She was piled high on a coral reef, listed on her port side, hull down. Lashing waves passing completely over her every few seconds. Like a broken, has-been old lady she lay, her gaunt stern frame turned like a back to the pounding waves. Mark looked at her and shook his head.

Levings looked at the old vessel with a gleam in his eye. Two of the sailors nodded between themselves. This was just another milestone for them. The next stop would be Ponape, their home, hibiscus blossoms for their hair, dances, two years pay tied under their G strings and freedom.

AS the *Roamer* came up by the old Luzon the skipper opened an Admiralty pilot and thumbed through it. He looked at the notations and studied the fringing coral reef through his glasses. He shook his head at Mark.

"Pilotage says there's a channel through the reef about a hundred yards this side of that spur," he pointed to a jut of palms that led off to the North. "It doesn't look good to me. I want to get inside if we're going to be here long. How much time'll you want," he lowered his voice and jerked his head at the two men for caution—"to pick up the stuff."

TIME to go ashore and ten minutes to get the cache out of a little tide water pool where I hid it," Mark grinned. "I don't know the lagoon very well, but that pilotage spot doesn't look so hot. Let's pass it. The junk came in close to the spur. There's plenty of water there. Let's try that. Put Pakini out on the bowsprit with a lead. I'll start the kicker. Then we can ease in. If things look bad we can back. How's that?"

"Swell," Levings grinned. "Pakini!"

The frizzy-headed savage came back on the run and Levings explained his job. Pakini scowled, looked at the island and back at the skipper. Calling Takito he pointed to the island and the two boys carried on a sing-song jabber in their native dialect. Levings listened attentively, put in a question and stood aside puzzled as Pakini stepped to the wheel and took it, watching the shore.

"What's the matter?" Mark demanded.

"Pakini's been here before," the skipper frowned picking up the glasses. "He says he knows a better channel. I've always been able to trust him before. I guess he's still loyal."

"You're skipper," Mark frowned. "Anyhow I'll start the diesel. If he's wrong we can back."

Levings nodded and studied the reef.

Pakini held the *Roamer* on her course past the spot marked in the pilotage and headed for a pair of jagged coral ridges beyond. Oppo-

site them he yelled at Takito. The other native held back on the jib and Pakini swung the wheel.

THE little vessel came around sweetly, filled on the port tack and headed between the ridges.

Galloping through, the stern just cleared the last of the coral when the *Roamer* swung lazily in the lagoon, canvas slatting as though resting after a hard day's work. Takito laid a hand on the anchor fluke and hissed at the skipper. Levings turned to Mark. Mark nodded.

The skipper held up two hands, fingers spread wide. The native bent over and overhauled the chain.

"Ten fathoms?" Mark asked.

"Yeah," Levings stepped to the side and looked down. The water was crystal clear. Waving fronds of sea weed swayed on the white sandy bottom. Lazy sheepsheads swam in and out. "Looks like about five fathom. That'll let five more lie on the bottom. The tide'll hold us off the reef until ebb."

"Sure," Mark nodded. "Well, here we are. Want to come along?"

"Might as well," Levings grinned. "Here's where we pick up the fortune." Turning to the small boat he whipped off the lashing and motioned Mark to the forward fall.

They got the little boat over in a jiffy. Dropping into it Mark held it for the skipper. Levings slid down the fall and settled himself in the stern sheets while Mark picked up the oars and sent the little craft dancing across the glassy lagoon. In a dozen strokes they beached and climbed out.

Leading the way opposite the spur of land Mark halted at a trickling spring that led down from the gray old sentinel that made up the island. Near the salt water there was a tiny pool some three feet across. Mark knelt at its edge and felt in the water.

Pulling at a waving bunch of sea weed he drew it out, spreading a gray mud that darkened the water like indigo. Reaching in again he drew out two bulging canvas money belts and laid them beside him.

Beckoning Levings he sat down by the pool and opened one of the pockets. From within a soggy leather bag opened with a draw string and Mark drew out a hand full of soggy paper wrapped pellets. Holding his hand out to Levings he dropped a part of the hand full into the skipper's palm. As they dropped the wet paper parted on some the spheres.

"Whew," Levings held the shimmering gems close to his eyes. "Perfects and pinks! And two belts full! Cripes man, your guess at a hundred thousand pounds worth of pearls?"

"I discounted that some," Levings nodded happily. "But I felt the trip would be well worth it if you found ten thousand. My share of ten would be a nice season's profit."

"Well, you'll get more than ten thousand for your own cut," Mark assured him. "Help me buckle this belt under my shirt. You wear the other one. Then we'll get back and get out of here."

IN no time they were back aboard the schooner. The two natives thought Mark had gone to look for a knife he lost so they made no comment. Below by the diesel Mark watched Pakini head them out again through the coral and nodded as Levings took over the wheel swinging the *Roamer* north again to round Moratoi, reach for Ponape and Honolulu before heading up toward the States.

Mark had barely shut off the diesel when Levings' whistle sounded down in the little cabin. Looking up Mark saw the skipper motioning frantical-

ly and looking through the glasses as he held the wheel with his knee.

Mark jumped for the companionway and looked out. Levings handed him the glasses. From around the spur that led to the North came the *Striker*, sails drawing, not three hundred yards away. Not a soul was in sight aboard her. Steered as though by a ghost she bore down on them.

There was no time for preparations. Levings hailed Takito and sing-songed an order. The black dropped to the deck beside the skipper and hooked a prehensile toe in a spoke of the wheel.

Levings nodded and jumped for the companionway. Mark was ahead of him yanking out the bottom drawer of the sideboard where the shells were kept.

"Shot guns," the trader screamed. "We've no time for rifles. Give the double barrels to Takito and Pakini. Take a pump for yourself. I've got the other."

Grabbing up a box of shells he began stuffing the magazine of a pump gun. Mark did the same. Filled, the skipper loaded a double-barrelled gun and slid it out the companionway to Takito.

A knock came from the door that led into the hold and Levings opened it. Pakini shoved a woolly head into the cabin and the skipper grabbed the double-barrel Mark had just loaded and poked it into the hand of the grinning savage.

"FILL your pockets with shells and follow Pakini forward," Levings ordered. "I know this Gann's method of attack. He'll come alongside and hook onto us with grapnels. Then watch the rush. You take the bow, I'll take the stern. Beat it." He motioned the way Pakini had come.

Mark nodded and followed the Caroline through the dark dank hold to the forward cubby where the boys slept when the weather was bad. Up the hatch he wormed and saw the approaching masts of the *Striker* bearing down on their port.

THE mate lay flat as the high bow sprit nosed and scraped alongside. As the fore shrouds of the two vessels bumped, seven yelling Solomon Islanders, huge scarified brutes with bits of bone in their nostrils stood up tossing galvanized grappling hooks across the *Roamer's* rail.

As they stood they yelled. There was a grinding crunch of wood and Pakini cut loose with his shot gun. Two of the Solomon boys collapsed on their own deck.

A double report smote the air from the *Roamers* quarter and three more of Gann's natives fell writhing in the scuppers. The two remaining *Striker* boys teetered on the rail panic struck. They saw what had happened to the others and were scared. Turning they fled across their own boat.

Then Mark saw Big Joe Gann for the first time since the *Striker* had closed in. He had hidden below the cabin slide. Raising his head and shoulders he stuck out an arm with a vicious automatic and cracked down on the two fleeing boys!

Gann's first shot lifted a boy clear off the cabin roof to fall crumpled on the pump well. The trader's second shot caught the other yellow boy diving over the side.

Mark raised the pump gun and swung at the trader but his shoulder caught against the job sheet block and the twelve gauge exploded, doing nothing worse than sweep the cabin top ahead of Big Joe. But that sweep was enough.

The swarthy trader had prepared for the battle by laying out all his guns, oiled, loaded and in order atop his cabin roof. His boys could use their short knives. The firearms

were all for Big Joe. But Mark's shot had cleaned rifles, shot guns and an extra revolver off the cabin of the *Striker* and into the sea.

WITH an oath the burly trader raised his automatic and turned to swing down on Mark. Mark took aim at the hand in air and blazed away with the twelve gauge again.

With the crash the automatic went sailing out of the other's hand. Cursing, Joe Gann climbed out of his cabin and rushed across the schooner's rail empty handed.

Grinning, Mark dropped the pump and yanked the double barrel out of Pakini's hands.

"Don't shoot," he yelled aft at Levings and climbed the fore hatch to meet the trader.

The swarthy one came with a bull-like rush. Mark set himself and, as the big man bored in, the mate met him with a straight arm piston jab. The shock of that jolt nearly upset Mark but he caught himself on the tolling hatch.

This would be a fairer fight. A week of good food in the mate's stomach had done wonders. The jab he had handed the trader staggered him. Swinging wildly about, head lowered, he came back as though to butt Mark into eternity. Mark sidestepped and brought a left up from his knee.

"Ugh," Gann grunted as the mate's stiff knuckle dug into the flabby nose. Rising Gann swung a haymaker that Mark ducked. Underneath he came up with a right that followed the angle of Big Joe's swing and clipped the trader on the ear.

The man went down like a limp football dummy. He lay there for an instant while Mark stepped back. As the mate backed he could see the trader struggling with something under his belt.

Mark couldn't see what it was but he jumped and crashed an elbow against the bigger man. Falling he caught the other's wrist and dragged it out. In the trader's hand was a heavy lead-filled weapon that would prove deadly in any fight.

Furious Mark tore at the murderous leather, ripped it from the trader's hand and brought it crashing down with a dull thud on the thick swarthy head.

"The dirty — —" Levings came across the cabin top, a shot gun in his hand. He shoved the muzzle into the big man's face. Mark caught the skipper's gun barrel and jerked it aside.

"Not that, Harry," he shook his head. "We don't want to kill a white man. We'll carry him over on the *Striker* and cast her off. He'll come to in a while but he won't make us any more trouble."

"Let's throw the dirty blighter to the sharks," Levings scowled. "He ain't worth saving. Better we drop him over and scuttle the *Striker*. There's many would thank us for it."

"Maybe," Mark pursed his lips. "But we're not inhuman, Harry. Big Joe Gann has had plenty. We'll drop his anchors, cut his halliards and dismantle his wheel. Without help it will take him a week to straighten the *Striker* out and get into a port. Then he'll have to hire a new crew before he can put to sea again. By then we'll have cleared Ponape. Come on. Help me carry him aboard."

WELL," Mark grinned as they came out of the San Francisco post office where they had registered a letter containing a certified check for Mrs. Tonkin, "a hundred and thirty-eight thousand dollars to split between us isn't bad, is it?"

"Not a bit," Levings laughed. "We'd have had more though if you hadn't insisted on giving that bonus to Pakini and Takito. Well, I suppose you'll go blow yours in on some fair haired damsel somewhere."

"Not me," Mark grinned. "I'm not ready to swallow the anchor just yet. I've been thinking. I'd like to get a boat and go after pearls and shell myself—honestly this time."

"You want to get a boat! Say, what the hell!" Levings demanded, a hurt look wrinkling his brow. "What's the matter with my *Roamer?* Why not buy in shares with me? You're a pukka scrapper and not so bad as a navigator. I like you. Come on, we'll pool in together."

"I hoped you'd say that," Mark slapped Levings on the back and held out his right hand. "Man, that's just what I've been wanting. You're on. And say," he pointed to a restaurant window. "Do you see that big lemon pie in the window? Well, let's go in there and have a meal on me this time."

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Name..... Age.....

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Address.....

THE editor of THRILLING ADVENTURES is mighty curious. He wants to know just what you readers think of the stories in this number. He thinks they're about the most interesting collection of adventure stories ever gathered together between the covers of one book, but he realizes that in the last analysis it's what the readers think that counts.

Of course, we expect a lot of mail praising this story and damning that, but we want an even more accurate check on the readers' tastes, inclinations and opinions. This is *your* magazine and we want *you* to dictate the editorial policy. That's what will make it possible for us to win more friends right along.

Look at the coupon on page 113.

Here's the low-down on the contest:

We're so anxious to get your opinion that we're willing to pay for it—

Naturally the reader's taste is the one most worth following—

So that those sending in lists most approximating the average, determined by a consensus of all lists, will be awarded prizes as follows:

First Prize	$15
Second Prize	10
Third Prize	5
Next Five Prizes	$1 each

This is called the "Readers' Choice Contest" because the selections you make will bring home the bacon in exact ratio to their closeness to the average expressed opinion. In other words, it isn't what we think of your selections, but what other readers think of them, that will determine your success or failure.

Letters will not be considered in this contest, only bona fide coupons clipped from THRILLING ADVENTURES.

Everyone is eligible — except employees of THRILLING ADVENTURES and members of their families.

If two or more contestants tie, the full amount of the prize competed for will be paid to each.

All coupons must be in by April 15, 1932.

Now come on, all you adventure fans! Send your coupons in just as quickly as you can so that Ye Impatient Editor can know just what you think. And put your hat in the ring for the money prizes.

* * *

Among the many interesting letters we have received from adventurers who read THRILLING ADVENTURES is the following from Brigadier General John H. Soper, N. G. H. retired:

> Have just finished your editorial, "Adventurers All," and am accepting your invitation to drop you a line. Born November 17, 1846. Lived in England, Chicago, Bloomington and San Francisco up to 1863, when I made a 24-day trip in a covered wagon. Drove six horse team on the old Placerville Road, 1864. Was Justice of the Peace and Notary in California from 1870 to 1877. Manager, sugar plantation, 1884. Marshall Hawaiin Kingdom, resigned 1886, reappointed 1888. Commander Provisional Government of Hawaii following downfall of the monarchy, Adjutant General and Chief of Staff from 1894 to 1907, retired with rank of Brigadier General Aug. 1907.

There's a fascinating life for you!

(Continued on page 126)

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First calls give big cash profits. Greatest and most complete line in America. Finest dress shirt selections. Stunning neckwear. Smartest hosiery. Complete Underwear and Heavy Outerwear Departments. All handsomely sampled and illustrated. Over 200 unbeatable values... each priced at the lowest figures in years... Sight sellers, all!

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Send for New Fall Outfit—also details of extra $25 Cash Bonus and 40% Profit Sharing Plan. Depend on Carlton to give you the lion's share of the profit. Your ambition gets free rein as a Carlton Representative, and this opportunity will prove itself the minute Uncle Sam's postman hands you the complete Carlton sample equipment... so mail the coupon—don't delay—there's a harvest here for hustlers.

MAIL *this* COUPON

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Mr. Mandel: I know I can give away Free Shirts, Ties, Underwear and Hosiery. Send sample outfit Free. I'm ready for big pay... and cash profits on first calls.

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The editor of THRILLING ADVENTURES is certainly proud of the cavalcade of letters that came in on the "Why I Like THRILLING ADVENTURES" contest.

Last month we announced the prize winners. Below we are printing some of the letters which ranked honorable mention.

William Waterer, Clarkston, Wash., expresses his opinion as follows:

"Here I come in ink. Perhaps I can't write it down as well as I can say it, but I'll try.

"I have a wanderlust in my blood, as has everyone in my family. But having been born and raised in the Salmon River region, I never have yet had a glimpse of the outside world, until I attended school in the small town where I now live.

"I have stopped wishing for things that I cannot afford. THRILLING ADVENTURES has brought travel to my bedside and soothes my yen for it. I await each issue expectantly.

"May it always live for that vast multitude who find the joy of traveling in reading its pages."

* * *

John H. Mackey, Jacksonville, Fla., is the writer of another interesting letter:

"Some of the best, most intensely interesting adventure stories I have ever read have appeared within the covers of a single issue of THRILLING ADVENTURES.

"The ten cent price makes the book a big bargain.

"I gave my copy to another adventure story fan, saying, 'Read the best yet.'

"I estimate the value of THRILLING ADVENTURES to me, as reading matter, at 70c per issue, a dime per story, and therefore I make a clear profit of 60c every time I buy the magazine. Don't be sore!"

* * *

Rex Eidson, 935 Patterson St., Eugene, Ore., sent us this most flattering missive:

"The other evening I felt the urge to read something that wasn't of the usual hackneyed type, something that would lift me, get into my blood and sweep me away from these dark days, this moaning financial depression. So I stopped in at the corner drug store and invested ten cents.

"Why do I like THRILLING ADVEN-

Give this little beggar ... A NAME

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Simply Suggest a Name For This Puppy

YOUR NAME MAY WIN $250.00

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SEND A NAME TODAY . . .

That's All You Have To Do To Enter

A real opportunity for you! Simply send us a name for this cute little Scotty—you may win this cash prize for only a few minutes of your time—just suggest a name—nothing more for you to do—it's about the easiest way we know of to win $250.00. We are going to pay this cash prize just for a winning name *and we will give a real live Scotty to the winner besides!* Think of a name RIGHT NOW! Send the name that you would call this puppy if he were your own—*there's nothing else to do* towards winning this $250.00 cash and a puppy too!

IT'S EASY—TRY IT—WIN $250.00

Sounds easy! It IS easy! There is nothing to buy or sell to get this cash prize of $250.00 and a real live puppy. The first name that comes to your mind this minute may be the very one to win $250.00 cash and a Scotty too. Don't let this opportunity to win cash and a real high-grade pedigreed puppy slip through your fingers. Think of a name NOW—Send it TODAY!

SENDING NAME QUALIFIES YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO

WIN $3,000.00 CASH

OR BUICK-8 SEDAN AND $1,500.00 CASH

This huge prize is *Extra* and separate to the cash prize offered for the Puppy's name. No wonder we say that here is your opportunity to win a fortune. Think of it! $3,000.00 cash besides—all coming to you at once! Hundreds of other prizes—3 fine automobiles to be given in this startling prize distribution. Some unknown person is going to win a fortune—why not make it yours? You have as good a chance as anyone. Just send a name for the puppy to qualify for this opportunity of a lifetime—that's all you have to do to qualify. But Do It Now.

$1,000.00 FOR PROMPTNESS

We will pay One Thousand Dollars EXTRA if you are prompt and win first prize in our final Grand Prize Distribution. You see how it pays to be prompt—Write Today! *We guarantee that every person who takes an active part will be rewarded in cash!* Think what winning will mean to you—$3,000.00 all cash or a Buick-8 Sedan and $1,500.00 besides—DON'T WAIT! BE PROMPT! WIN $3,000.00.

SIMPLE EASY RULES

Only one name may be submitted from a family—sending more than one name will cause all names sent by you to be thrown out. This naming the Puppy Contest is open to everyone except employees of our Company. $250.00 cash and a five Scottish Terrier puppy will be sent to the person sending the winning name. In case of duplicate winning names duplicate prizes will be paid. Names must be submitted before midnight, May 31st, 1932. Every person sending a name qualifies for the opportunity to win $3,000.00 all cash or a Buick-8 Sedan and $1,500.00 cash besides. Use the coupon or write a letter for all details.

A PEDIGREED SCOTTY

We will give a pedigreed Scottish Terrier Puppy of the finest breeding to the person who sends in the prize winning Name. His sire, Glenisla Cheil (imported) was a winner at the great Crystal Palace Show, London, England. His dam, Tweburn Lorna, a beautiful show matron, is sired by the Famous Champion Tweburn Clincher, a winner of five Championship Certificates in Great Britain. This Scotty will be furnished by the well known Hudson Kennels at Mason, Ohio. The Kennels agree to register this puppy with the American Kennel Club under the name sent in by the winner. SEND YOUR NAME SUGGESTION AT ONCE!

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"Primarily the purpose of fiction is to entertain. Do THRILLING ADVENTURES do this? Yes, sir! They do more than that. They kick boredom into the middle of a stormy night, and send gloom whisking up the chimney."

* * *

Jack Cox, of Greenville, Tenn., knows just what he wants in the way of fiction, according to his brief, but pithy, letter:

"When I want stories, I want stories. None of this tame stuff for me, such as the mushy stories some of the old thriller mags that I used to buy are getting around to. I had begun to think that my type of story had passed.

"Then look what I found on the newsstands — THRILLING ADVENTURES. Stories that have the old adventure thrill in them—French Foreign Legion, Cults of India, Revolutions in South America. I know where my dimes are going now. WHOOPEE!"

* * *

And here's a woman's viewpoint on the magazine, as expressed by Mrs. Mae K. Rae, 313 West Second St., Waterloo, Ia.:

"Once in a long while a real SURPRISE comes to us, and I did have a real SURPRISE when I bought a copy of THRILLING ADVENTURES the other day.

"The contents are so diversified as to meet the tastes of all types of readers.

"The authors represented are very good in their particular fields. Their stories are 'different.'

"I especially liked 'Dangerous Heritage.' I would have been willing to spend $1.50 or $2 for a story like this in book form."

And we've hundreds of other letters like those! So come add yours to our collection—whether you think as highly of THRILLING ADVENTURES as the above writers or not. A knock is as welcome as a boost, always, with us.

Don't fail to clip and send in the coupon on Page 113!

Rupture No Longer Spoils My Fun

"Now that I am rid of my rupture and do not wear a truss, I enjoy dancing again. Many strenuous activities are pleasures, because I am not handicapped in any way. My work is no longer a task—I enjoy it. No one would ever believe I was crippled by rupture."

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New easy way to health, strength. Sweeping the country! Thousands of rowing machines have been purchased at $12 to $55 each! RO-EX IS NOW ONLY $2.98!

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You can do standing - up workouts, too—strengthening muscles of back and stomach.

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Send me the RO-EX with HEALTH CHART and illustrated instructions for use. When postman delivers the package I will deposit with him $2.98, plus postage charges. It is understood that my $2.98 is to be returned promptly should I decide to return RO-EX within 6 days after receiving it.

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WIN $750.00 CASH

Here is a movie actress in need of a name. Give her yours, or any other name you think of, it may mean $750.00 in cash to you.

THIS extraordinary announcement has attracted the attention of representatives of leading magazines and newspapers throughout the country and we are sure it will interest you because your suggestion may be the name wanted. This means you may be richer by $750.00 cash if you mail it to us at once.

$250.00 EXTRA FOR PROMPTNESS

Bear in mind only one name must be submitted by each contestant. If the name we choose has been submitted by a number of people, everyone submitting that name will receive $500.00, and all winners whose name has been mailed and postmarked within three days after this announcement is read will receive an extra $250.00 or $750.00 in all. This contest closes May 28, 1932, but send your name at once; be in time for the promptness prize. Please remember any name may be the winner, so help this beautiful little Hollywood girl by sending your name today. All entries must be sent to the Publicity Director's office.

Copyright HMPCO 1931

This movie actress, whom you have probably seen on the screen of your favorite motion picture theatre, is the beautiful Helen Mann. Like most of the stars, she prefers to use a name other than her own, and we have decided to help her obtain it by giving $750.00 in cash to the person who is quick in sending us the most suitable name.

Now what shall we name this beautiful and coming star? Most any name may win. It may be your very own, a name of a friend or relative, or a coined name made up by you. Just make it easy to pronounce, and easy to remember. But send it right away, or you may be late for the promptness prize.

Take a pen or pencil right now and fill in your suggestion for a name at the top of this announcement, tear out coupon and mail to us with your name and address. There is absolutely nothing else to do to win this big cash prize of $750.00.

E. A. WILLIAMS, Pub. Director, Studio 128, 1023 N. Sycamore Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

New Improved SAVAsole Pays You Up To $42 a DAY

No more costly shoe repairs. No more wearing worn-out shoes with leaky soles that are harmful to health. This amazing invention—now perfected—*saves your money*. It's called Savasole, a scientific, plastic, repair set that puts new soles on worn-out shoes. Makes them like new for as low as 4½ cents a sole. Rebuilds run-down heels for as low as 1 cent. New way of applying. Just take a spoonful out of the can and roll it out. Trim it to size. See picture below. Then it cements on to the old sole and hardens overnight. You have a solid, non-skid, waterproof surface that covers all cuts, holes, cracks.

Cash In Now on This HARD TIMES NECESSITY

Now! SO EASY! A Child Can Apply


Before

No muss. Just roll out the plastic Savasole to a thickness of about ⅛ inch. Trim it to the size of your sole. (See picture above.) Then apply cement to Savasole and shoe. Press together firmly and let harden overnight. Wears better than ordinary soles—and can't come off.


After

THE PERFECT MFG. CO. D-127 Daylight Bldg., Cincinnati, O.

This sensational specialty has captured the country and is filling distributors' pockets with gold. Even in hard times it has proved a gold mine for agents! We give you quick, one-minute demonstration that amazes prospects and compels them to order. Sure repeat business. Good territory still open. Rush coupon for Free Sample on leather and new exclusive territory plan.

AGENT Makes $135 in a Week

Hundreds of Other Letters Like This

G. C. Miller writes:

"I gave up my former connection where I ranged in earnings from $315 to $386 per month. I started out with three gross of Savasole. Since that time, my earnings have netted me over $135 a week and I am sure that I will soon hit $200 per week. Savasole has solved my financial problems, and you are the whitest bunch of people to work with I ever saw."

R. R. BOLLMAN, Pres.

It's GUARANTEED!

Do not confuse Savasole with cheap imitations that spread on with a knife, sometimes drying rough and uneven. Savasole alone is applied in one solid piece and dries thick, smooth and even. And Savasole is the only one that has the Bollman Double-Action Cement process that means Savasole **cannot come off.** It actually outwears the uppers. My money back guarantee protects you and your customers.

Mail for FREE SAMPLE

R. R. Bollman, Pres.
PERFECT MFG. CO., D-127, Daylight Bldg., Cincinnati, O.

Dear Mr. Bollman: Please send me a Free Sample of Savasole applied to miniature leather sole and tell me how I can make up to $42 a day. I am not obligated.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

Territory preferred .....