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AUGUST

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THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. II, No. 4

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

August, 1932

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KWA of the



A Complete Book-Length Novel of

CHAPTER I

Big Spider

MOK, the great ape, who weighed upward of three hundred pounds but who could move—when the occasion demanded it—with the speed and silence of a shadow, emerged from the cover of a bamboo clump. He listened. He tested the breeze with his wide flat nostrils. He stood there for several seconds while his flickering, close-set and jet-black eyes took in the lay of the land. At a crouching run he went to a higher level and hid behind a mossy rock.

Both while he stood and again

when he ran the looks of him were enough to justify that name of his. He was Mok. It was a name of terror. It meant the Big Spider—or as the Furry People, the Cave People, would have put it, “the Big, Big Spider,” meaning really the Spider King or the Spider God.

For Mok was no ordinary ape. His own people had driven him out long ago. They had done this for good cause. Had they been able to do so they would have killed him. But by his cunning and strength he had been able to get away. Thereupon he had come to live here in the home of the Cave People, the Mu, as they called themselves.

JUNGLE

By PAUL REGARD

Author of "Jungle Joss,"
"The Abyss of Wonders," etc.



a Man's Adventures Among the Apes

Mok, from his new hiding-place behind the green rock, could now watch a band of the Younger Cave People coming in his direction.

Ever since the big ape had come into the land of the Mu these people had fascinated him. They were neither men nor apes. Mok knew both men and apes. He'd had a wide experience of both. But the Mu were neither. Men had no fur. The Mu were almost completely covered with a soft fur—a fur as soft and silken as that of a mole, but longer; sometimes dark and sometimes light. The last girl-child of the Mu he'd captured was furred over in the bright golden shade of a lion-cub.

Mok envied the people of the caverns because of their beauty. They were beautiful like certain of the monkey tribes. Yet they could walk erect like men; they could talk and laugh like men. Yet, unlike men, they wouldn't fight. They lived on terms of friendship with all the creatures of the jungle who would tolerate their friendship—the non-killers, that is, from dik-diks, those tiny antelope no bigger than rabbits, on up to elephants.

Instead of fighting Mok, as his own people, the gorillas, had done, the Furry Men simply feared him. To them he was as a god. To keep him appeased they daily offered him sacri-

fices of fruit and the wine they made, chaplets of flowers. He ate the fruit and drank the wine. The flowers he scattered about.

Still, it was a good thing to keep them frightened. It amused him. But most of all it amused him—when he was in the mood for it, as he was now—to seize some young son or daughter of the Mu as a spider catches a moth or a humming bird.

Mok looked like a huge hairy spider—one of the bird-catching spiders—as he crouched and waited. His hair was almost as coarse as that of Guh, the wild pig, and about the same color, a reddish gray. He had the spider's black face and beady eyes, the terribly quick and murderous fingers. And now the spider's blood-lust was on him again as the young Mu continued to approach.

HE knew the terror that he inspired among these people. He knew the name they'd given him.

He was so still now as he watched and waited that a wood-dove failed to notice him as it fluttered down and poised on the rock. It was a beautiful bird, pearl-gray with a rainbow collar.

Mok reached up one of his great paws and caught the dove. It was a movement like that of a striking snake. And in an instant the bird was dead. Without even looking at it Mok crushed it and began to pull it apart. And while he was doing this he kept his bright black eyes on the young sons and daughters of the Cave People who were headed in his direction.

His name was justified. He was more spider than ape in many ways. That was why the real ape people had driven him away. He liked the feel and the taste of hot blood. It was this that made him such a terror in the Valley of the Mu. Ever

so often, when the mood was on him, he'd waylay one of the furry youth of the Cavern People—it was generally a girl he selected, a young woman—and there would be traces enough of her left about, but the girl herself would never be seen again.

MOK was like a huge hairy spider now as he lurked there back of the mossy stone. And the children of the Caves themselves were almost like birds. Their play was as light as that of winged creatures. Their voices as they laughed and shouted sounded through the silences of the valley like music.

It was a wide valley lost in the depths of the great African forest. It was almost completely surrounded by tall cliffs that went straight up from the valley floor. There were several traditions as to how the valley had been formed. One was that it had been formed by a great explosion from the center of the earth. The other was that it had been formed by a falling star.

In any case, not only the valley itself but the surrounding jungle was tabu for many miles. The native tribesmen in all directions called it, in their various languages, the Devil Bush—meaning a forest region to stay away from.

The valley lay at the center, moreover, of a shaggy and broken mountain that went up in places, steeply, to where the snows lay all the year round under the burning tropical sun; and where again the mountain as it fell down to chasms too deep for the sun to reach.

It was a weird, wild mountain of needle peaks and jungle-choked ravines, cliffs and caves, which even white explorers had given up in disgust.

The natives called the mountain—from a distance—Sango Lobango,

meaning the Father of Lies. And this was the name that the white man had finished by putting on his maps. Yet here, in the very heart of Sango Lobango, Father of Lies, the Cave People had gone on living since—it was said—the Father of Lies himself had risen from the waters of a great flood.

Now and then the bristles rippled up and down the spine of the big ape as he watched the children of the Cave People drawing nearer. They played like monkeys. They swung themselves far out over cliffs with a sheer drop of hundreds of feet—swung as monkeys swing, just for the fun and the thrill of it, on ropes of vine, taking chances, screaming and chattering.

But unlike monkeys the children of the Mu loved water. They splashed into pools and through the cold drench of cascades coming down from the snow.

ONCE they chased and caught a mountain-goat and they harnessed this with vines. But the goat entered into the spirit of the game, prancing and only pretending to use its horns.

There was one girl-child of the Mu in the approaching group that Mok picked out from all the others, and after that he kept his attention almost entirely on her.

There were about twenty in the bunch altogether, and, to an ordinary observer, they would have all looked pretty much alike. They were all adorned in the usual Mu style, with twists of the purple-flower vine about their middles—the boys and girls alike. But some of the girls had added flower-wreaths about their heads. This particular girl whom Mok's eyes never left wore a chaplet of small red flowers interwoven in her mane—a mane that was tawny

and smoky dark like that of a black-maned lion.

Mok tensed. Apart from that ripple of his spiny back, which was now repeating itself every few seconds, he allowed himself no movement. There was a fleck of red on the rock where he'd killed the dove. The color was the same as that of the flowers the girl wore in the hair of her head.

By this time the girl was not more than fifty or sixty jumps away.

Still Mok waited. He didn't dare take too big a chance, for he'd learned by experience that the young of the Cave People were even fleetier than he was. And this girl might be the fleetest of them all.

She walked as a deer walks, light and springy. Again like a deer or a mountain-ewe, she didn't have to look where she put her feet. There was much that was deer-like about her face—liquid eyes, dark and deep as a jungle pool, set wide apart—as she walked with her head up.

Mok had the wind of her. He'd seen to that when he was stalking the bunch. Otherwise scent of him would have stampeded them long ago.

Mok sprang.

As he sprang he roared. It was a paralyzing roar—cliff shaking. The girl had stopped as if an arrow had struck her.

Just then it was something else that struck the Big Spider.

CHAPTER II

Son of the Sun

IT was a hurled club that struck Mok. It was a club formed by the natural growth of a mountain root—a knob of tough wood almost the size of a baby's head with a slender, flexible shaft a couple of feet in length. It had been hurled with such precision that it had

caught the ape-spider's head while he was in full charge, in the midst of a spring. The solid impact of it might have split a rock.

Even so, Mok had not been completely stopped.

The instant the thing had touched him he'd twisted his head and taken the blow at an angle.

He came down straddled at right angles to the line of his charge and facing the direction from which the attack had come. He didn't see his enemy at once. But he saw other things.

Even in that twinkling his spring had been checked, the girl had recovered from her panic and was gone. So were those who'd accompanied her. They who had been so noisy and frolicsome but a few seconds ago had melted out of sight.

Yet there wasn't much cover—scarcely a way open for flight except back in the direction the young Cave People had come from.

This place Mok had selected for the capture of his victim had been chosen with these facts in view. The place was high up against the valley wall. There'd been a landslip here in the recent past, leaving a wide scour in the banked-up green.

Most places, along this side of the valley, the jungle piled up against the cliffs like tremendous green breakers. But these merely hid the broken pits and cliffs beneath those that rose sheer from the floor of the valley. Then came this narrow, zig-zag, sloping shelf where Mok now stood. Beyond him the cliffs rose sheer again.

SUDDENLY—as all things are sudden in a hot-blood time—Mok saw his enemy and knew him to be such.

Up there, not more than three reaches above the place where Mok stood, a youth had appeared. He

wasn't even trying to hide. There was about him still the poise of suspended effort. He'd come from somewhere on the run. He'd thrown his club. Now there he was.

Mok greeted the discovery with an intake of the breath as savage—if not so loud—as his roar. At the same time Mok brought up the knuckles of his right hand and struck his chest. It was a drum-like thud. Next, the knuckles of his left hand struck his chest a similar blow. The thudding for an interval was like the slow preliminary throbbing of one of the great war-drums made from hollowed log—a sound not very loud but with a shock and vibration to it which, once started, never seems to stop.

"You are Mok," said the youth. "You are the Big-Big Spider!"

ALL the Cave People spoke a language that the animals of the jungle could understand. The animals spoke their tribal languages—exceedingly simple, for the most part—and these the Cave People, like the other animals themselves, could understand in turn.

"You are the Spider-God," said the youth, with rising passion, in response to Mok's drumming. "You are Fear and Blood. You ought to be killed—as your own people tried to kill you!"

Mok stretched his mouth, showing fangs like a tiger's. He rushed forward a few steps—a dash like the flight of a shadow despite his great weight. There was a threat in a charge like that such as few creatures in the forest could face. No leopard would face it. A lion might.

So did this youth.

The fact gave Mok pause. The boy now stood but two reaches away. He stood on a narrow uncertain shelf of the cliff-face, just in the fringe

of the green near the clearing made by the landslide.

Already Mok had noticed something strange about this youth besides this strange courage of his. He was much larger than most of the cavern people. His body seemed to be free of fur. The Cave People had dark eyes. The eyes of this youth were frightful in that they were the color of eyes that are blind. They were blue. Yet these eyes saw. There could be no mistaking that. They were bright and fierce.

How different he was from the regular Cave People, Mok now had a chance to see, by way of comparison and contrast. Silently and swiftly the whole troop of young people—they that had fled—were now showing themselves through the green. They were still frightened—ready to disappear again on the instant; but it was clear that the presence of this newcomer had rallied them to some extent.

Then, even the girl with the red flowers in her hair—she whom Mok had selected for a victim—appeared. If anything, she was bolder than the rest. She'd appeared at the newcomer's side—a scant two reaches above and away from Big Spider's murderous hands and slaving mouth.

"Kwa!" she cried softly. "Kwa!"

SHE'D caught one of the boy's arms and was pressing it to her cheek. Her face, which had appeared fair before, now seemed dark against the bright shine of the arm.

"Kwa!" came a rasping grunt from the killer-ape.

"Kwa!" the youth declared himself. "I'm Kwa. They call me that. And that is who I am. Kwa! Son of the Sun! Kwa the Golden!"

To announce himself like this was equivalent to a challenge. It was

equivalent to Mok's drumming on his breast.

All this had slipped past swiftly, like the slipping past of a python across a jungle glade. Not once had Kwa's blue eyes left the jet gleam of Mok's eyes—not even at the caress of the girl's face against his arm. But it may have been to her Kwa spoke as he spoke again, more softly. "Kwa will kill him!" he was saying. "Kwa will become the slayer of Mok. Kwa will be killing—killing!"

It became a hum.

MOK had started another rush. Fear was one thing Mok had never known except as something that he inspired in others. Even when his own brethren were trying to bring about his death he'd known no fear. He'd saved himself by running away. But that was merely because, of the two things, he preferred life to death. He feared nothing at all.

Just as Mok sprang Kwa sprang also.

Kwa had leaped far to one side. He'd come down on all fours, on the steep and rocky incline of the landslide. But even so he'd lost not an instant in recovery of his balance. He came up from his stoop with a splinter of rock in each hand. These he threw, right and left, hitting Big Spider two thudding blows.

Once more Mok had flashed his great weight half-way round in the midst of a rush. It was when he saw Kwa jump. In an instant Big Spider had almost hooked him with those murderous crooked fingers of his, but the plunging rocks Kwa threw made Mok waver.

Mok bellowed his rage—first the great gorilla clamor. It was hot thunder from the sound pockets at the sides of his hairy throat. The

roars were broken by coughing explosions:

"*Kh-ah! Kh-ah!*"

And at first the spellbound watchers from the green thought the ape was trying to pronounce the name of their hero. Some of them jeered, in spite of their tensity. Not so the girl with the red flowers in her head.

"It's his murder-cry!" she bleated softly.

And she also jumped down into the clearing. As she did so she shrilled a cry of her own.

Big Spider, from where he stood, without change of the position of his feet, sprang sideways in her direction—a shooting spring like that of the small gray spider after flies. He came so close to catching the girl that for an instant his hooked fingers were in her hair. The fingers brought away a strand of the small red flowers.

Then, at the very moment the girl's life seemed ready to sparkle out, Kwa the Golden again sprang to the attack. He'd seized another rock. With his right hand he'd thrust the girl to safety and struck Big Spider a chopping blow along the side of the face.

THE whole movement of the encounter was a whirling vortex. To be seized and held by Big Spider—to be seized and held by him for so much as two heart-beats—was equivalent to death. No man could fight Big Spider close in.

But Kwa the Golden knew this as well as anyone. He was fighting with the concentrated lore inherited from a million fighting ancestors. So was Mok, the renegade ape. But Kwa's was the higher intelligence.

The fighting vortex split apart.

Mok shook his great body in a single vibration—a movement that made all who saw him think of a

fighting black cobra. Dark blood was spilling down the side of his black face. His crooked fingers still held a strand of the red flowers.

"*Kh-ah!*" he was saying. "*Kh-ah!*"

Neither had Kwa the Golden escaped unscarred. There was a cut in one of his shoulders that gaped like a mouth. There was a crooked welt from this same shoulder down across his gleaming body to the opposite hip like a red bandolier. But he didn't appear to feel these wounds.

He was smiling slightly. His blue eyes were blazing. His bright mane was like a sunburst.

"Aya," he spoke softly to the girl. "Get me my club!"

CHAPTER III

Battle Song

AT that first roar that filled their valley the Cave People ceased sharply to think of anything else. They'd all heard it. They all knew what it meant. They were a people of many gods. But of all their gods—of all except the One, the Snake King—Mok, Big Spider, was the worst, and this was his voice.

The Cave People—the Mu as they called themselves—were not very numerous. Perhaps all told, from whelps to elders, male and female, there would be fewer than forty fires—five to a fire—say two hundred.

Mu, the Half-Men. They had many names: the Furry People, the Cave People; but most of all, the Fear People. They lived in fear. The fear was on them now as they swarmed together in front of their largest cave where Moa, "the Father of Them All," had his home.

Moa was typical of his kind. He had luminous, large eyes set deep and wide apart in a bony skull. His

face was broad. His nose was small and his mouth was wide. But the general expression of his face was pleasant.

From close above his shaggy eyebrows his mane began, giving his head and shoulders a leonine appearance. His shoulders were powerful and well-formed but rounded. His arms, in muscular development and length, were almost equal to his legs.

Arms, back and legs, were covered with a fine growth of soft brown fur; but otherwise he wasn't particularly hairy. His face and most of the front of his body—what, in an animal, would be called the underside—was bare.

He leaned forward from the hips as he stood, although he could straighten up with ease when he wished. But his habitual position was that of leaning forward, often with his finger-tips resting on a log or stone.

The clan pressed about him. All were dressed in the same way—with coils of vine about their middles; except the young children, who wore nothing but the soft fur with which they had been born. In a general way, all the children were hairier than their elders—just as the children of other races are more apt to display ancestral traits during the period of their infancy.

THEY stood there looking in the direction from which the roar had come.

"Mok, Mok!" they breathed. "It is Mok!"

And the ears of many of them twitched as they followed up that original message by the sounds that followed.

"He has surprised our young," a woman breathed in her shaking whisper. "But a moment ago our young were laughing and singing."

"We must go!" said Moa, the Father of Them All. "Ho, I hear Kwa!"

"Kwa is in danger!" came a voice from the cave and Moa's wife came running out.

Her eyes were smaller and fiercer than Moa's eyes. She was Wami. She was the Mother of Them All. And in times of sharp decision it was generally Wami, not Moa, who actually ruled the clan.

"Kwa is in danger!" she cried. "I'll offer myself. Who else? Who else?"

A dozen names were answering her as they started to run in the direction of the battle-sounds. The children were left behind, but the children were like quail as they huddled together, then crept into the entrance of the nearest cave.

The Mu had never fought. They were brave enough to die. They would die for one another. But of their own volition they'd never broken the Jungle Peace. It was the sound of battle that told them Kwa was there.

Kwa the Golden—he was different. Strangely different.

BOTH Kwa and Mok noted this arrival of the Furry People from the caves. But each kept his eyes on the other. They'd clashed, then clashed again. Each was bruised and bleeding. Each knew that one or the other must die.

So far, they had been about evenly matched—Big Spider with his superior weight and power; Kwa balancing this with his knowledge of weapons. They faced each other in the clearing of the landslide—Kwa now with his club, Big Spider brushing the ground with hands and feet while he measured the distance for his next attack.

Then, Aya, the girl.

Aya stood above them a little

ways, up the slope of the scarred earth toward the cliff. She was ready to run again, as Kwa had told her to be. But she was no longer like the other people of her clan. She'd struck a blow. She'd learned to fight. Now she reached again for a piece of rock. She flung this at Big Spider.

Big Spider flinched and growled. The rock-splinter had hit his shoulder with a blow that he could have barely felt. Then there was a swift transition. Mok had thrust over his black paw from the opposite side and caught the rock before it could fall to the ground. There were plenty of rock splinters all about him. But not until now had the idea flickered in his brain that these could be used as weapons. This was so, even though he had seen the rocks used as weapons against himself. But now—here was a rock already in his grasp.

"*Kh-ah!*" he howled in a coughing roar. "*Kh-ah!* Mok also is a man!"

He balanced the rock with a circling movement, as if he were undecided as yet whether to throw it or use it as a clubbing weapon.

A MOANING cry went up from the watches as Big Spider, still swinging his rock, started another rush.

The two came together.

Kwa had the longer weapon, but Mok had the longer reach. Kwa was taller, but Mok was the more powerful. And the ape's heavy thatch of hair clothed him like an armor except on his face and massive breast. Moreover, the ape had the advantage in those powerful jaws of his. His lips were back. His fangs were bared. In his mad brain was but the single motive—the motive summed up in that curious word of his:

"*Kh-ah! Kh-ah!*"

He was repeating it over and over again like an imprecation.

"Kill! Kill!"

All that saved—or would ever save—Kwa now was the one advantage he still retained, his power of thought. They were fighting in the sun. Yet even in the sun the watching Mu could see the glint of thought in Kwa's blue eyes—something fiercer than the sun.

He'd struck two slashing blows with a whipping motion before Big Spider struck his first. But the rock in Big Spider's black flail of an arm had found Kwa's flank and torn into it. A little higher and it would have split him open like a gourd. Even so Kwa went to a knee and almost fell. All that saved him this time was that Mok had also been staggered for the moment by the blows he'd taken—howling, shaking his head to get rid of the blood in his eyes.

Kwa, on his knees, went lower—his whole thought now to escape the flailing arms. Each arm ending in those powerful hooks of black fingers deadly as a leopard's claws Kwa spun from under and was up again. He was sagging on his wounded thigh. The fight couldn't go much longer. That was clear.

Mok seemed aware of this. He'd lost his rock. It was beyond him now to think of picking up another. Besides, he needed none. He had fang and claw, a fury that had become a force in nature.

He rushed. Kwa met him.

THERE was a surging impact of such a swift violence that for a breath the Man and Beast seemed to have merged. It was an impression that grew as they came to earth and tumbled, locked, with eccentric jumps down the rock-covered slope.

It wasn't until they came to rest—the single compact mass of them,

Man and Beast, Kwa and Mok—that the watchers saw that the hairy monster was on top.

Swift sparks of perception, all of these, each distinct but hard to follow.

A woman had flung herself from the tribal circle the moment the Mu had reached this place.

She was Wami—not only the Mother of them All, as co-chief with Moa, her mate; she was the mother of Aya, the girl; she was the foster-mother of Kwa the Golden—it was she who had named him.

SO swift had been the movements of the fight, she'd had no time to interfere, to offer herself as a victim to the Spider-God, Mok, the Blood-Drinker, the renegade ape.

"Mok!" she screamed, and she hurled herself down the slope toward the quivering, straining heap.

Wami was not alone. Aya, the girl, was equally swift.

For a breathless moment the two of them, mother and daughter, were dragging at the hairy giant.

In a moment, surely, he would turn and do to them what he'd done to Kwa.

But now a wonder happened.

The great body of Big Spider yielded. He was lifted from beneath, rather than dragged from above, and rolled aside.

And from underneath him Kwa propped himself to his arms, then stood—bleeding, at least the half of him painted red with blood, yet golden still somehow as he stood there in the sun.

He was groggy. But he raised his arms and threw back his head.

"I am Kwa!" he crooned. "Wah! I am greater than Mok. Mok is dead. Kwa—Kwa of the Cave people—killed him!"

CHAPTER IV

"Man of the Half-Men"

WHILE Kwa was recovering from his wounds he was thinking as few of these Mu people were able to think. Sunny days Kwa would lie outdoors, half propped up to a sitting position, in a sort of litter that had been made for him. Nights, or when the rain lashed down into the valley of the Mu, his litter would be brought into the great cave where he'd lived with his foster parents and his sister Aya ever since he could remember.

But it was always the same, inside the cave or out in the sun. The Mu People, the Furry People, sat about him in a circle and looked at him, ready to do his slightest bidding, ready to listen to his slightest word.

The caves the Furry People lived in were very ancient. They might have been old sea-caves, dug by the sweep of prehistoric currents while the mountain now called Sango Lobango, Father of Lies, still lay at the bottom of the sea.

Yet, at the present time the caves where the Mu people lived lay well above the floor of the valley, well above the great lake of jungle-green that filled the valley throughout its width and length. And on all sides, as far as the eye could see, the green pool of the jungle sent up its jungle-breakers against the encircling cliffs. The cliffs themselves were enclosed in that wider and loftier enclosure of fantastic peaks and ridges that so often went up to snow-line.

IN the caves where the Mu lived there were warm pools and cold. Further on there were steam-caves—"cloud-caves" the Furry People called them—that sent up white vapor in great columns which on clear and windless days looked as solid as marble—marble coiled and shaped

like the great white clouds they supported against the blue of the sky.

"I am Kwa," so Kwa would say.

But he was wondering. These were his people who sat about him. Yet he was not like them. He was not of them. He brushed his hand across his forehead. His forehead was higher than other foreheads were. He'd put a hand over his shoulder and feel his back. There was no soft fur on his back as there was on other backs.

He looked at Wami and Moa. He looked at his sister Aya. They were all different from himself. Their ears were larger than his and they were pointed. Often they could hear things that he couldn't hear at all. His eyes were different. Not only in color. All of the Mu could see in the dark, as practically all the animals of the jungle could. He couldn't see in the dark. Darkness blinded him.

AND now he couldn't comprehend their unwillingness to fight. He'd never thought much of this until he'd had his fight with Mok. He'd never thought much of anything except what was before his eyes or under his hands. He'd always been too busy.

His first memories went back to when he and other infants of the tribe were still too small to leave the neighborhood of the home-caves—when, at the slightest provocation, they would hide and lie still. They would do this at any strange sound. They would seek cover at the approach of a floating shadow—twice in Kwa's recollection a Mu-child had been carried off by eagles.

There were later times when he and his band of growing playmates roamed about pretty much at will. Down in the valley jungle were black buffalo. The Mu People and the Buffalo People were great friends.

The Mu would give the buffalo fruit; in exchange the buffalo would give the Mu children milk. And, anyway, the Mu elders knew that so long as their children were with the buffalo the children were safe.

Kwa, lying there in his dry-grass litter while his wounds were healing, could remember wonderful rides, Luh, the old buffalo-bull had given him.

HIS pulse quickened now at memory of the day when Luh, the buffalo chief, gave a signal. The blood taint came back. He'd sprung to the back of a friendly cow-buffalo when the signal came and he'd stood there where he could see the whole affair as Luh pinned a leopard to one of his horns and tossed it about.

Leopards were the deadly enemies of children and calves.

"Ho!" Kwa spoke up from his reverie. "I'm Kwa. I killed Mok. Luh, the buffalo, killed Ja, the leopard. Killing is sometimes good."

This was one of those rainy days when all of the Mu were gathered in the big cave. In the center of the cave there was a cheerful fire. It was a fire that never went out, a fire that was never allowed to die.

Kwa reclined on his litter. Half the muscles of his body were still sore and stiff. His wounds were healing fast. But, even so, each time he tried to move it was as if a hundred hot thongs were bidding him to lie back again and take his ease.

At his side and all about him, in firelight and shadow, his people, who were yet not his people, squatted on the floor in a wide circle and looked at him. Since his killing of one of their terror-gods, Kwa had become to them something of a god himself.

He could see this new expression in their faces, even in the faces of Wami, she who had nursed him and had become his mother, and Moa, the

chief, or, as the Mu called him, "the Father of Them All."

There was silence as Kwa made that declaration of his. It was something so wholly contrary to all the teachings of the clan that the silence itself was a sort of gasp.

Wami, the mother, was the first to break the silence.

"It's the truth," she said.

She was seated cross-legged on the floor at Kwa's side. She leaned over and pressed her cheek against his hand.

Then Moa, the father, struggled into speech. He was seated on Kwa's other side.

"Wah!" he said. "It is true for Kwa, but is it true for us?"

Kwa spoke up with a roused ardor. For the first time in his life he was finding these long silences irksome, even with the fire to look at. Yet he could remember weeks together when he'd been willing to sit and look at the fire—eat, sleep, look at the fire. No more. Somehow, his battle with Mok had changed all that.

"Wah!" he exclaimed. "It was true for Luh when he killed the leopard. It was true for Kwa when he killed Big Spider. Wah! What is good is good!"

FROM the elder people in the circle about the fire there now came a sort of wailing cry of negation, very soft.

"Nay! Nay!" they were saying. "It cannot be— It is not so!"

At the same time Kwa could tell that most of the younger people were on his side, urging him with their dark eyes and pointed chins to maintain his stand. He'd always been a hero among them because of his greater strength and courage. He was a thousand times more their hero now that he had accomplished the

impossible feat of killing off Mok, the Big Spider.

Aya, his little foster sister, seated at his knee, pressed her cheek against his knee.

"Why do you say 'Nay, nay, it cannot be'?" Kwa demanded.

Wami, the mother, spoke up: "Tell him, Moa, or shall I?"

"Son," old Moa now spoke again in the breathless silence that had fallen; "know you not yet that we, the Mu, are but Half-Men?"

He stopped, pained and embarrassed, as even animals may be shamed. And as he stopped, the other elders were taking up his declaration.

"Wah! We are Mu. We are the Furry People, the Fear People, the people who are but Half-Men!"

KWA looked about him. For the first time some dim comprehension of the truth was stealing over him. All the years of his life he'd known that in various ways he was different from these people who had been his people. But differences were everywhere. Luh, the Buffalo, was different. So was great Tembo, the Elephant. But, even as he followed this reasoning, he knew he was following a wrong track of thought.

"And me, Kwa?" he demanded.

"You are—man," old Moa answered, as if to the cave at large.

"The Man of the Half-Men," a dozen of the elders breathed in confirmation.

And while they were saying this, in the new tenseness that had come into the silence of the cave, Kwa could see the strained looks on the faces of the younger people, the boys and girls who'd grown up with him. Aya, at his knee, had first let her head sink forward. Now she had thrown it back and was looking at him from the tops of her eyes. He

put out his hand and brushed her hair.

He was Man. These were but Half-Men.

The situation struck him as so strange, with a strangeness that he could not explain—and also as so sad, with a sadness that he could not explain—that he felt his heart swelling.

"Then, how come I to be here?" he asked, at last.

"You came from the sky," someone answered.

It sounded like one of the old myths that the elders still told around the fire.

"Why have I never known all this before? Why wasn't I told?"

"Zal, the serpent, forbade."

At the mere mention of Zal—that god the Half-Men feared most of all—a tremor ran through the cave. Then silence. Through the silence came the creeping rustle, winding, unfolding, of Great Zal himself.

CHAPTER V

Zal, the Fear

ZAL was one of the mysteries in this world where Kwa had grown up and which was the only world he knew. Zal was a snake. Kwa knew many snakes—they were numerous in the valley of the Mu and along the rocky cliffs that hemmed the valley in. But Kwa had never liked the creatures, except some of the smaller varieties that lived exclusively on the eggs of ants or other sorts of dawn-life that didn't matter.

Zal was the largest snake that Kwa had ever seen—perhaps the largest snake that anyone had ever seen.

There were pythons in the wetter parts of the valley jungle that could crush and swallow antelope. Once Luh, the Buffalo, had carried Kwa

into the high grass and there showed him a python that lay asleep after such a feed. Kwa had seen others on his own account. All these great snakes fed on the bodies of his friends—especially the innocent and friendly smaller peoples, like the dik-diks, the tiny gazelles not much larger than a rabbit; on squirrels and birds; on the young of larger animals.

And all these victims of the snakes were as the Furry People themselves were in the presence of Great Zal, the biggest snake of them all and said to be the oldest. The Mu accepted Zal as the dik-diks accepted the lesser pythons—without reproach, without thought of fighting back.

SOMETIMES the Mu referred to Zal as "the Fear." Mostly they referred to him not at all. Only now and then when, in the morning, some number of the Furry Clan would be reported missing—maybe a child, maybe some older person—the whisper would run about that Zal had taken him. Then a long time would pass and there'd be no more talk of Zal at all.

Zal came creeping into the fire-cave with that air of mystery and fear quivering about him like a cloud. It was like the scent of him which now slowly filled the cave. The great snake flowed from dark to dark and through the zones of fire-light like a strange substance neither water nor solid—a fluent bronze, thick as the leg of Tembo, the elephant, but seemingly endless.

All the time he was flowing his sinuous way about the darker shadows of the fire-cave the Furry People sat where they were, very still, with shoulders hunched, looking at nothing but the things they saw in their imaginations.

Kwa felt the tenseness, as he'd often felt it before. He felt again

the fear that these people felt in the presence of Zal. It was a fear that had become his own.

Kwa straightened up on his litter. He felt the hundred strands of burning pain that would have kept him lying on his back, but he ignored them. Still they may have added to some anger that was beginning to flame inside of him.

"Ho!" he shouted. "Who moves there?"

There wasn't an animal in this part of Africa that didn't understand the talk of the Half-Men.

Beyond the fire and beyond the bowed and shrinking circle of those who sat beyond the fire, the swaying column of Zal's head and neck reared up. Even then, after this part of the great snake was motionless, Kwa—and these others—could hear the slithering ripple that went on and on as the great snake drew the remainder of his body into a compact but pliant coil.

Nor was there one in the cave who, hearing that sound and old enough to comprehend anything at all, but knew that Zal had fasted long and was probably ready even now to eat again.

Kwa could see that the eyes of the Snake King were fixed on his own. He'd thought that the snake was motionless. He could see now that this was not so. Zal was swaying slightly. It was a slow rocking motion, perfectly timed. For a moment of dizziness Kwa felt himself also swaying. The whole cave seemed to sway.

BUT he steadied himself. He stiffened. Now the burning of his half-healed wounds was completely forgotten.

"Sh-h-h!" he hissed.

That was straight serpent-talk.

"Don't sway at me!" he commanded, speaking softly. "I am Kwa. I came from the sky. I am Man."

With a wrench that he scarcely felt he was on his feet. He stood there with his feet apart, staring across the veil of heat and smoke.

"I am Kwa. I am Man. I killed Mok."

Kwa flung these statements at the flattened head that now held motionless on its bronze column. Zal's eyes were like blazing emeralds. From the curved slit of the wide, cruel mouth the flickering black tongue ran out like a tongue of black fire.

Strangely enough, even to himself, Kwa felt his cold fear now dissolving and something warmer taking its place. It was a part of the silent speech of the snake clan that was reaching him. It was almost as if Zal spoke aloud:

"Cold fear is my weapon. Lo, this is man! He has turned my weapon back upon myself!"

Kwa spoke softly to those about him.

"Go quickly, softly," he told them. "All of you, out! Out! This is my affair!"

WHILE he spoke he kept his eyes fixed on the burning emeralds. He could tell that the Cave People were obeying his command.

But not once would he flinch. The cold fear in him was melting away like a handful of snow he'd tried once to bring back from the Crystal Cave, high in the mountains. To flinch now the cold might harden again, drive out the warmth that was taking its place.

"Sh-h-h!" he hissed again as Zal once more began to sway.

But now that cold fear that the great snake himself distilled like poison had turned back on Zal himself indeed and the poison was driving him mad. Instead of stopping at Kwa's sharp hiss as he'd stopped before, the serpent had uncoiled another reach of his great length and

was now striking back and forth to either side of the fire.

It was a swift and silent motion like nothing else in nature. It was as if instead of one Snake King there were now two, striking alternately in swift succession, one to the right of the fire haze, another to the left.

Kwa watched until he could watch no longer.

He knew now, by some sense other than his eyes, that the others were gone—that none but he and the snake were still in the cavern.

"I am Kwa!" he shouted. "I am man!"

And he knew that he was shouting this to himself.

With a speed like that of the snake itself, he'd caught up the grass litter on which he'd been lying and whipped it into the fire.

"I came from the sky!"

And back of his shout this time was the flash of the thought that fire also came from the sky. This fire did. Long, long ago, a finger of fire had reached down from the sky and touched off a dead-tree torch. This was the perpetuation of that fire.

There'd been an upward rush of sparks, then a gush of flame as the dry grass of the litter caught.

In a frenzy of his own, Kwa caught up a flaming stake.

For a moment he was blinded. His own momentum and the unexpected weight of the stick he'd selected for a weapon had almost thrown him into the fire. He staggered back.

HE was no sooner free from the scorch and brilliance of the shooting flames than he felt a chill coil against his back. The nearness of the fire was all that saved him from instant destruction. Once the great serpent had thrown a single coil of its lethal strength about him he would have been crushed.

KWA half turned and saw above him the spectral head of Zal with his wide mouth open. It was like the sudden blooming of some poisonous pale flower. It was as if the waning moon had fallen and entered the cave to hover over him—falling still—to crush him—make him mad with the sudden madness of the Serpent King.

Reeling he brought his flaming torch around.

Next it was as if he'd been caught in the whirlpool of a freezing river and he was flung through space—from ice to fire. It must have been an accidental throw. Some portion of the great snake's body had caught him in its writhing as Zal reacted to his flaming torch.

The fire had served him well, but there was no time to select another firebrand. Kwa, almost without thought, or acting in response to something within him that was swifter than thought, caught up an ancient granite block that sometimes served old Moa as a sort of judgment seat.

So heavy was this block that ordinarily not even Kwa himself would ever have dreamed of tossing it about. Yet he swung it up, glad of its weight, some hot gale of prophecy already blowing through his brain.

He went at a trudging run with the judgment stone above his head.

Dimly he saw the flow of a great bronze body. He poised. Then down on the snake he flung the crushing granite.

"I am Kwa!" he panted. "I am Man!"

CHAPTER VI

"Zal is Dead!"

ALREADY, it seemed, even while the fight between Kwa and the Great Fear was in progress, Moa and the others of the Cave

People had not been idle. Lying here and there about all the caves were various conch horns that had come down from ancestral times and which could be used on solemn occasions. The occasion had to be so very solemn that there were a good many among the Cave People—and these not the youngest of them either—who'd never even heard before the trumpeting of these horns.

Moa himself used the great conch known as "the Elephant Whisper."

Exert himself as Moa would—blowing until his lungs split, almost—nothing came from that prehistoric sea-shell but a mumbling soft roar that was like an echo of the prehistoric sea itself. Yet the shell was rightly named. The bellowing whisper of it was like the strange voice that elephants use for their own communications, from herd to herd, often at great distances—sounds that pass over the heads of men like a flight of unseen birds.

There were ram's horns also that sent up their shrill, harsh bleat to the hills. Then the horns of antelope which sent out a bugle note like that of high-flying swans.

No such call as this could be sent out lightly. It was serious business to interrupt the business of the animal world—the world of all those four-footed and four-handed people and the world of the feathered tribes who were friends of the Mu.

Then, almost before the first echoes were coming back from the distant cliffs, cliffs and jungle echoes alike were showing signs of life.

A HERD of gazelles were the first to appear, then a flight of red and green parrots, other birds, antelope, a rush of black buffalo.

But inside the cave while this was going on Kwa was ready to believe that that panting cry of victory he'd

raised when he cast down the rock on Zal would be his last. Zal, dead or dying, was, it seemed in those first rushing moments, more terrible than Zal alive.

Suddenly the great cavern had become a place of writhing horror, the place of a thousand coils, coils that lashed and threw the sacred fire about, scattering equally brands and darkness.

THERE was just light enough for Kwa to see again the waning moon of Zal's open mouth. It was a moon in flight. Or was it the moon that was standing still and the cave itself in flight?

That first exhalation of dread that the Snake King had brought with him on his entrance into the fire-cave had now intensified a thousand times. It was like a sickening gas, such as the gas that escaped from some of the fissures in the cliffs—an effluvia so deadly that it struck dead unwary birds in full flight when they came too close.

Kwa crouched and reeled, his back against a wall of the cavern. Dimly, far away, he could see the wide, high cleft that led from the cavern to the open air. But his strength was failing and he knew that without help he would never reach it.

All his wounds had opened again, it seemed. In a moment one of those writhing loops he'd tried to kill would crush him against the wall.

The entrance-cleft gave on the direction of the setting sun. Earlier this day there had been no sun. Now, almost like a mockery, the sun struck through the smoky shadows of the cave.

Toward this Kwa made a gesture. It might have been a gesture of appeal or a last farewell.

He was sliding, falling, the sun-rays were blotted out.

Once more he hauled himself upright by sheer force of will and as he did so—there was Luh the Buffalo.

Luh had asked no questions. From that first trumpeting of the conchs the big black buffalo had answered with a trumpeting of his own. It was a call that set the herd in movement—a scudding black cloud that found its way through the woods like a roll of thunder. No thick jungle here—although it wouldn't have made much difference if there had been; but "gallery woods," fairly open, so grazed through by wild herds and flocks from prehistoric times that long ago great avenues had been opened through the forest.

THE black bull thundered at the head of all the others. He was picking up strands of jungle talk even as he ran.

"The Mu were calling . . . Kwa the Golden . . . Kwa, slayer of Mok . . . Kwa now fought the Serpent King. . ."

Luh the Buffalo had lunged up the slope. Before he was half-way up his delicate nostrils had told him what had happened—a part of it, at least. Tail up, that battering-ram head of his held tensely forward on a line with his powerful body. He plunged straight on into the cave of the dreadful smell.

A moment later his huge body was like a bulwark between his friend, Kwa, and the writhing monster who was the enemy of them all.

But Zal was dying—Zal was already dead—although he continued to beat and menace as some horrors will even after they have passed.

"Come you out," Luh breathed on Kwa. "Your work in here is done."

And at the fragrant breeze of the

buffalo's breath and the touch of Friend Luh's purple tongue against his face, Kwa felt refreshed. But just the same he crooked an arm over one of Luh's polished horns and he was glad of that support on his way to the open air. . . .

The jungle was old. Trees had grown and trees had fallen. But the jungle itself had been there practically ever since the great Third Day of Creation.

The jungle must have seen some strange sights in all that time—processions of behemoths, flights of dragon-birds, dinosaur fights, migrations of woolly giants who may have been the ancestors of the present timorous, kindly Furry People.

But it is doubtful if it had ever witnessed a stranger pageant than that which was to pass through its galleries this night.

FIRST of all, it was the night of a Jungle Truce—such a truce as might only happen once in every thousand years or so. All sorts of jungle people present—kinds that spent their ordinary lives in a forever-lasting game of hide-and-go-seek, like the antelope and the leopards, the zebras and the lions, the mice and the lesser snakes. Everything from mice to elephants. Monkeys and apes no end—from tiny nocturnal mic-mics on up to chimps and gorillas—on up to Man.

Kwa the Man—Kwa of the Cave People!

This was the first Jungle Truce in which there'd ever been a Man. There'd been truces before, no doubt, in which Half-Man had taken part. The Mu had a tradition of such a one. It was a truce that they and the best of the jungle folk still maintained—the grass-eaters, the great apes, the elephants.

But a truce in which there was a Man.

Tembo, the elephant, leader of his herd, showed his great spirit by offering to carry the Man. It was an offer that Kwa didn't care to refuse, although, for his own part, he would have then preferred the less showy assistance of his friend Luh the Buffalo.

But this was a Truce. And Kwa now learned that not since the beginning of time had Tembo and his people known any enemy save one—Man! And now in all friendship Tembo was offering to carry Man on his head.

Besides, anyway, Luh and his people were to have another sort of honorary place in the pageant.

At Luh's own suggestion he and his people had put on a harness of lianas. The vines were left very long because of the thing they had to haul. First, this thing had been hauled from the fire-cave—the body of Zal, the Snake King—"the Fear!"—and fearful still, even though he was dead, to thousands of the jungle people who had crowded about to see.

From the fire-cave also—where the fire had been saved and replenished—most of the Cave People had brought torches. The Cave People rode on the backs of their friends, the buffalo, and behind them trailed the great body of the snake.

At the head of the pageant, among the elephants, rode Kwa, the Man.

AND a good many of the animals didn't know which was the greatest wonder, the living Man, or the great dead snake.

They dragged the body of Zal far over toward the poison swamps to the east of the Valley of the Mu—as far as any of the living cared to go. It was a lonely place, where

flames of carbonic acid gas—probably from beds of decaying vegetation—ran straight up at times and stood there, for a while, vibrating and swaying like angry, dancing children of Zal himself.

Only the knock-kneed slobbering hyenas remained behind when the pageant was over. . . .

To celebrate the Truce, a good many of the animal leaders were returning to the fire-cave with the Furry People and Kwa the Man. The place was larger than a cathedral. The fire in the center of the vast room had been replenished with cedar and gardenia-wood, which purified the place.

And there, lying in the zone of light thrown out by the fire, was something as strange to Kwa the Man as it was to any of the other creatures assembled here, although some of them had actually seen such things from a distance.

CHAPTER VII

The Sky Canoe

YOU fell from the sky, O Kwa the Golden," old Moa began in his ceremony-palaver style—but he soon got out of this. "You were not yet born, O Son of the Sun! But the Man and the Woman were riding in the sky-canoe. With a great roar they were riding in it when the canoe came falling into the Valley of the Mu. And the Man was killed. But the Woman was not yet dead when we reached her. And our women took her, and the Woman gave birth to a child. And you were that child, O Kwa. Wherefore you are Man and we others of the Mu but Half-Men, though we made you as one of us, O Kwa!"

Kwa walked about the curious mass of twisted steel and charred canvas lying in the firelight. He

looked at it very intensely but, as a matter of fact, as yet, the thing was a haze in his eyes.

He belonged to a people who had sailed through the skies. Their sky-ship had been wrecked. It was an explanation of many things—the beginning of an explanation at any rate.

The wonder of it had put a mist before his eyes. There was a pain in his throat that made breathing difficult. His brain was hot and luminous with a fire of its own.

All this time he continued to walk round and round the wrecked monument which was all that was left of the sky-canoe. He stamped his bare feet on the floor of the cave as he walked. It was a way to show that he was thinking deeply. It was almost a dance. And he kept his eyes on the relic lest the others—Half-Men and jungle friends—should see that there was a mist before his eyes.

“Did the Woman also die?” he asked.

“She died even as you were born, O Kwa.”

“She was golden like yourself,” crooned Wami, the Mother of Them All. Kwa’s stomping march about the relic-heap became a little quicker.

Other crooning voices reached him—some from the shadows, where various of the big cats and shyer of the jungle herds held back, others from the fringe of light where all the Cave People, the Furry People, sat in a circle. Kwa heard all that was said—a mere spider-web of crooning talk, a sort of musical murmur to which he was setting the time of his strange and solemn dance.

BUT all this time the pattern of the thing that had happened here in the valley was becoming a design in his brain.

Twice, after the wreckage of the first sky-canoe, other sky-canoes had passed over the Valley of the Mu in search of the first one, evidently; but this search had been foreseen by the Cave People and before the other canoemen of the air passed over the valley all trace of the wreck had been carried off and hidden in the cave.

THE wreck had been burned somewhat in falling. But neither the man nor the woman had been burned. And the wrecked canoe, trailing sparks like a falling star, had slid at last through the Waterfall of the Buffalo Voices which had quenched the fire.

Wreck, Man, and then, later, the Woman, had been put away into a cave of their own. Cave of the Sky People—Cave of Kwa—they had called it. Then Zal, the Snake King, had chosen this particular cave as his sleeping place. This was magic. Zal was the keeper of all magic. Zal had forbidden the Mu to reveal the mystery to Kwa. Zal had done this for some mysterious reason of his own—just the mystery of Hate, perhaps.

“You’ve told Kwa the Man but the end of the story,” came an animal voice that was very soft but which yet filled the cavern.

And they knew that this was the elephant-whisper—that it was old Tembo, the Leader of the Elephants, who spoke.

Tembo knew everything.

Kwa seated himself by the relic pile to hear.

No one could have told who was speaking as Tembo’s gray mass loomed there in the shadows with its swaying trunk. But there was no mistaking that whisper. Nor was there any doubting the story that the whisper told.

Tembo knew everything—gossip picked up even by the parish dogs of the coast towns, relayed by jack-crows and parrots, chattered by monkeys.

THERE was a world of water where the sun went down. And beyond this world there was another world from which the White Men come—Men like Kwa—the Utangani, as the Black Men, little brothers of the White Man, call them. From this Far World came the Utangani who was the father of Kwa. With him came the Woman, Kwa's mother—the Golden Woman, not only as Wami had just now described her but as others had described her.

Hence the disaster that was to happen.

The Utangani, Father of Kwa, came up a river that ran far back into the jungle, and there started to make a great clearing, using herds of black men to do the work. And for the direction of these black men, the Utangani, who couldn't speak the language of the black men, took an associate, a man who claimed that he was Utangani also, but who, as a matter of fact, was neither white nor black.

When the clearing was made, thousands of other trees were planted instead of the trees that had been removed. The new trees were of a kind from which the Utangani take the sap and which they transmute later into a substance resembling the skin of elephants.

Then a great house was built, such as only the Utangani understand, and the Utangani went back to the Coast to get his Golden Woman. And she was a wonder in the jungle world because not only was she the first of her kind that anyone here had ever seen, but the Utangani had brought her in the sky-canoe—

the same which now lay here, what was left of it—and so was this also something that the Black World then had never seen before.

The Utangani landed his canoe on the river like a flying swan and brought the Golden Woman ashore to the house that had been built for her. And there he introduced her to Mario, the man who was neither black nor white, but who claimed to be Utangani.

After that the real Utangani made frequent trips up and down the river in his sky-canoe, and each time he was gone, the white-black Mario would try in every way to win the favor of the Golden Woman. She was cold to him. She would never see him alone. She always kept her women about her. And when the Utangani, her lord, came back from his trips in the sky-canoe, she would tell him nothing of Mario for fear that the Utangani would murder the man.

But there was one thing that she told him at last. Her lord was to have an heir.

SO they looked at a White Man's picture of the country—showing rivers and mountains, villages and towns, forests and grasslands. The Utangani said that the Coast was no place for such as this affair. All along the Coast the Utangani graveyards were bigger than their towns.

But far-far—over beyond the great Devil Bush, over the Sango-Lobango, Father of Lies—there was a great White Mission, where there were white women dressed in white (fetish color) and white doctors who would see that all was well when the heir arrived.

The Utangani himself told Mario of his plan to take the Golden Woman away. He was taking her away in the sky-canoe on the following

morning. But the Utangani did not tell Mario the reason for the trip. And Mario—maddened—could only believe that the woman had talked about him and that the Utangani, after getting the woman away, would come back and kill him.

THAT night, when it was dark, Mario went out to the sky-canoe where it lay in the river, and there he did certain things to it.

"What did Mario do to the sky-canoe?" asked Kwa, still under the spell of what he'd heard.

"He did that which made it fall from the sky," came the whisper. "He had enough White Blood in him to understand how to do such things."

"What became of him?" Kwa asked.

"For a while he became master of the lands that the Utangani had caused to be cleared and planted. But, after that, because he had mistreated his brothers, the black people, other Utangani came and drove him away. He now lives in a new town others of his kind have established in the country on the Father of All Rivers."

"Tembo, do you know the name of this river in the Utangani speech?"

"Yea, Kwa, the name is the same in every speech. It is called the Congo."

"Is it far?"

"Far-far!" came the answering whisper. "But forest all the way. There are trails!"

Kwa stood up.

"I will dance," he said. "And while I dance, then will I tell you what I have thought of in my dance."

He leaned slightly forward with his head inclined and his eyes fixed on the relics of the sky-canoe and whatever else that monumental pile of wreckage from an Unknown World—His World, the World of the Utangani—might include.

Stamping with his bare feet on the stone floor of the cave, he began his slow circling of the mystery. It was just a slow walk at first. But it went faster. As it went faster a humming and a drumming rose from all those who watched. Then Kwa began to chant.

"Lo, I am Kwa, Man, White Man," he chanted. "I killed Mok. I killed Zal. Lo, I now go forth to the killing of the black-white devil, Mario!"

CHAPTER VIII

Strange Freight

KWA would have started out then and there, naked as he was, broken and weakened with unhealed wounds, knowing nothing of the world except what he had just heard and otherwise had seen and dreamed—he would have started out then and there if Tembo and certain others of the jungle sages hadn't argued him out of it.

But that night, after the great council of the Cave People, the Jungle Tribes, and the solitary White Man Who Was the Friend of All, had broken up, Kwa slept fitfully.

All night—what was left of it—old Wami, his foster mother, Moa, who had fathered him, and Aya, his milk-sister, sat on their heels in the dark about his bed of leaves and spelled such magic over him as had been handed down to them through the ages.

These Furry Ones, the Mu, had the gift all animals have to some extent, of communing among themselves in perfect silence. It was a gift that Kwa himself had always known. He'd acquired the gift while he was still an infant at Wami's breast.

And now, as he lay there in his half-sleep, he could not only follow the course of his own wild dreams

and speculations, he could also follow all that passed between these others.

"The time has come," said Wami.

"It had to come," said Moa.

"He will come back to us," said Aya.

"I am afraid that he will be killed," said Wami. "He goes out to kill in a world of killers."

"Killers are sometimes good," old Moa groped in his thought.

"I love him and he loves—us," breathed Aya.

Kwa heard all this, and yet he slept. . . .

"Into the world where you are going," old Moa warned, when Kwa was up and about, "there is powerful magic of a sort that we of the Mu know nothing about. And you, O Kwa, having been as one of us for all the days of your life, know nothing of it, either."

"That's right," Kwa agreed.

"Yet," Moa went on, in the all but silent language of the older Mu, who spoke much as animals speak when they are alone together, "I think that you will come by the Utangani magic readily enough, since you are Utangani yourself."

"I am sure of that," said Kwa.

"But we have a feeling that before the Utangani recognizes you as one of their own they may try to kill you. They are the only people who kill for the pleasure of killing."

Kwa was silent.

"And we've thought of a sign."

A number of other elders of the Furry People had assembled while Moa was speaking, and it seemed strange to Kwa that some of these now turned to the fire and lit incense-torches that they had prepared.

THE Mu, for all ordinary purposes, could see as well in the dark as they could in the light. They had

this gift in common with the animals. But it now became evident that this was no ordinary occasion.

They formed a procession with Moa, also bearing a torch, leading the way. From the fire-cave they followed a passage that Kwa already knew. But soon they had left this behind them and entered a narrower corridor through the rock—one with an entrance so low that they had to stoop to enter it. And over this entrance was the taboo sign of the dead.

This taboo corridor brought them to what was like the bottom of a stupendous well, with ridged walls going straight up, up, to a patch of clear blue sky.

And although it was now light enough where they stood for even Kwa, the blue-eyed, to see everything distinctly, still Moa and his fellow-elders of the Mu, kept their torches flaming.

They crossed the floor of the great pit and penetrated only a little way into a sort of arched recess on the further side. Through this arch from unseen passages further back there came a steady wind. There was something in the air of this wind that reduced the flame of the torches at once to small balls of blue fire.

AND there, on the rock table in the depth of the niche where the blue-fire wind had preserved them, Kwa now saw two still figures which he knew at once to be the figures of his father and his mother.

He knew his mother by the length and flow of her yellow hair. She was the Golden Woman. She looked as if she slept and had but fallen asleep a little while ago.

The Furry Women who had brought her here had covered the Golden Woman with vines and flowers. These

were now withered, but the form of them remained. Only a white hand, the white face, and the golden hair remained uncovered.

"Take, O Kwa," said Moa, "a strand of your mother's hair."

And he passed to Kwa an ancient knife of black crystal, such as no one knew how to make any more. Kwa took the knife. He advanced alone. He cut a thin long strand of the golden hair and was careful not to touch the white face of the sleeper while he was doing this. His hands were trembling.

"And now, O Kwa," the voice of Moa reached him, "on the wrist of him who was your father you will find a strange bracelet. That also cut and bring away."

Kwa turned to the other figure, which was more completely covered by the faded vines and flowers than the other, and found the bracelet.

But here his white brain must have asserted itself, for almost immediately he saw that here he would not need the knife, for the metal strap of the strange bracelet had a buckle which he comprehended at a glance. He unfastened the bracelet, then, still without turning, he fastened the bracelet on his own wrist.

He wanted a little time to himself.

TO gain this, he stood looking at the bracelet, which was stranger than anything he had ever seen before—a bracelet finely wrought of gold almost white, bearing a tiny box not much larger than a thumb-nail, and on the face of the tiny box, a circle of strange marks with two minute arrows pointing in opposite directions. . . .

This wasn't all of the Utangani magic that Kwa was to carry with him on his excursion into the outer world.

In the wreck of the sky-canoe which Kwa now felt bold to examine as something of his own, he found a light but strong iron-bound box with a lid that could be opened.

As the lid came up there reached him like a breath of some far-far land the faint scent of strange flowers. Even without this, some instinct would have told him that he was looking at the possessions of the Golden Woman.

Then, in a corner of the box, on top of the curious soft tissues with which the box was filled, there was what he knew only a long time later to be a book. It was a small book with writing in it.

"Ho," he said, "this I will take, for I feel that it is also strong magic." He put the book aside and closed the box. "And now," he said, "let this also be forever tabu. It belongs to the Golden Woman. I myself will take it to her before I go away."

He turned next to a wonderfully made sack, or kit-bag, made of the belly-skin of crocodiles finely prepared. He didn't have to be told that this had belonged to the Utangani, his father. And this he would take along.

He'd climbed during his boyhood to the tops of many of the cliffs and peaks that surrounded the Valley of the Mu.

He'd often gone on these trips alone or in the company of mountain-goats and wild sheep. And from up there in the high places he'd often looked out over the rolling green billows of the Devil Bush and wondered what lay beyond.

EVEN there in the Valley of the Mu, stories kept drifting back of other worlds. But they might as well have been stories of life in the stars

CHAPTER IX

Colonel Rahan

so far as the Mu were concerned, and Kwa himself had more or less absorbed this way of thought.

He spoke all the languages of the Jungle Tribes. He understood them and they would understand him. And some of these Jungle Tribes stood very high in wisdom and experience—higher even than the Mu, perhaps, although the Mu had the ancient secret of fire.

But Kwa was now glad that in going out to explore these other worlds than the world he had known, he'd have Tembo, the Elephant Leader, to guide him.

Nor Tembo alone.

In Tembo's great family herd were old elephant men and women who'd traveled the length and breadth of Africa.

They knew all the languages of men.

They knew all the tribes of men, from the terrible pygmies, who hunted them with fire and poison, on up to the great and terrible Utangani, who carried thunder and lightning in rods of iron.

All men were terrible.

YET Tembo and his people came to the cliff of the Cave People, the Only Half-Men Who Were Still Furred, and there sent up their reassuring whisper.

This, then, was that dawn when Kwa the Golden was about to leave to explore other worlds.

Kwa brought his strange freight with him—the Utangani bag of his father, his father's strange bracelet, that strand of his mother's golden hair which he'd coiled into his mother's book. . . .

The straining Mu saw Kwa and great Tembo and the elephant herd fade away into the mists of the valley.

THAT tragedy of the Utangani and his Golden Woman who'd gone sailing into the blue never to be seen again by people who knew them was an old and forgotten story along the West Coast of Africa by this time. There were too many tragedies among the white people in that part of the world for them to remember any one tragedy for very long.

But there was one man there who'd never forgotten. Year after year he'd kept coming to the West Coast looking, looking—just using his "big-game shooting" as a sort of excuse to save his face before his friends so they wouldn't get to pitying him.

His name was Rahan—Colonel Nathaniel Z. Rahan, of Newport and Palm Beach. He'd never forgotten the story because, in the first place, the Utangani of the sky-canoe happened to be the colonel's only son Nat, Jr. Then, the colonel and his son had quarreled—chiefly on account of that Golden Woman.

The colonel, like many another crusty old millionaire, had always wanted to have his own way in everything—positively!—and right now, sir!—and this hadn't gone so well with the son. Not even when Nat was a kid, it hadn't. And as soon as he could he'd broken away and started out on his own.

He'd already drifted around the world a couple of times looking for a good place to anchor and something to anchor to. For the former he selected the wilds of West Africa. He was that sort. Nothing too wild for him to tackle, from a bronc to a jungle. And he'd found what else he knew he was fated to have—somewhere down in Texas.

Her name was Nellie Harmon.

And just to square things up Nat brought her to Newport, Rhode Island, to meet the old man.

THE girl was a beauty, all right—a natural blonde, and all gold the rest of the way. She was so altogether beautiful that the colonel must have thought that there was something phony about her, especially as her folks were nothing to brag about. Anyway, the colonel couldn't see her at all—not as a Colonial and Mayflower Rahan, at any rate; and the result was a row.

Then young Nat and his Golden Lady decided to become millionaires on their own, just to show the old man, and they picked on Africa and rubber as the means to that end.

At the time word came back to America that Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Z. Rahan, Jr., had disappeared from their plantation—up a river with a name the colonel couldn't pronounce, near a place he'd never heard of—the colonel took it calmly enough. He wirelessly his agents in Liverpool to get the facts. He was cruising on his yacht at the time.

The yacht was his famous *Faustina* and the colonel, as usual, had a party of notables on board.

It wasn't until about three months later before any detailed information began to come back to the colonel. Africa was somewhat bigger and wilder than he thought.

He was a little peeved at having his routine upset, but, anyway, the colonel decided to go and have a look for himself. . . .

He'd been looking ever since—from Dakar, in Senegal, to Boma, on the Congo, and all points between. The *Faustina* was coming into a new sort of fame. She poked her stem into yellow rivers that had never seen a yacht before; she lay weeks at a time in Douala, in Libreville,

in the old slave ports of the Gold and Ivory Coasts.

The plantation of young Nat Rahan had been planted—characteristically for Nat—in the very wildest bit of Africa, midway between Calabar and Bas Congo.

It was in Calabar, eventually, that the colonel discovered a Portuguese half-breed named Mario. And, after that, Mario was to lead the life of Reilly. He was—for about the next ten years, that is.

FOR Mario—according to Mario's own story—was not only the last "white man" who'd seen the young couple alive; he'd been the dear and intimate acquaintance of both of them. It had always been in his care, Mario's, that Nat left the Missus when Nat flew to the Coast for the mail.

For Mario, the Missus became just Nelly!

According to the way he told it, Nat and Nelly and Mario had lived in a state of mutual adoration—"you know, nuzzing crook', eh; nevaire no scandalle — all-same-for-one seester-bruzzaire—Nelly, ha!"

And Mario would end up an affirmation like this by kissing the tips of his blue-nailed fingers. He'd kiss his fingers with a slight sucking sound, then jerk his hand away as if he'd just pulled a cork.

There was a whole lot about Mario Colonel Rahan didn't like—Mario's invariable fashion, for example, of mistreating what Mario himself called "damn' niggers"; then, his general dirt, his use of perfume, his manners, his morals, his looks.

But, after all, Nat's friend!—the friend of Nat and Nelly!—the last white man to have seen them alive; and perhaps, also, the colonel's own last chance of ever finding out what had become of them.

For Mario was right at home in this part of Africa.

Jungle and surf! Surf and jungle!

They pushed the lordly *Faustina* as far in toward the bar of the Bagangh River as they dared. They visited the plantation young Nat had started. And there Mario pointed in the exact direction—so he said—that Nat and Nelly had taken as they waved him their last farewell.

"South!" lied Mario. "Headed straight for Libreville!"

It had taken the colonel about ten years, or a trifle longer, to find out just what sort of a liar Mario was, and then the colonel had done his best to kill the liar, but Mario had got away.

Ten years of searching. But not quite wasted.

THOSE ten years had made the colonel a pretty good Guinea and Congo man himself. That's how he'd come to get the truth about Mario. All these years the colonel had been "dashing" the natives—giving them presents, that is, and treating them right; while Mario had gone on doing just the opposite.

It was only because the natives thought that there was a tie-up of some occult sort between the colonel and Mario that the colonel had been kept in the dark so long.

But, at last, down in the Cameroons, back in the bush, a strange Negro came to seek the colonel one day while Mario was off on a hunt. He introduced himself as Manja, a Bwea man, and declared that his mouth was sweet. To prove this he called for a cup of water. When this came, he poured some on the ground between himself and the colonel, then offered the cup to the colonel, who drank a little and passed

it back, whereupon Manja also drank.

"Palaver done set," said Manja. "Me no lie; you no tellum Mario."

And Manja told how he'd worked for the young white sangwoso-you-him—daddy.

"My son—your master?" "Sangwoso" meant that.

"Toto-many!—I speak the truth."

And a little at a time—a bit in Trade-English, a bit in Bwea—Manja not only began to unveil the true character of Mario but also of the lady the colonel had scorned to accept as a daughter-in-law.

The natives have sharp eyes. They are never shrewder than when judging the Utangani—the Bokara, as the Bwea call them. White men. Bokara: Buckra.

Time and again the colonel thought that Manja had finished his story, was lingering on for a "dash." Not so. Manja shook his head at the offer of money. He and the colonel had drunk from the same cup—made "mo-sary" together.

"What became of them?" the colonel asked, at last.

IT was a question that the colonel had been trying to ask for a long time, and now he felt Manja knew.

Manja spat. He meditated. He scratched himself. And all the time his eyes were flickering to the Buckra and away again. He then made solemn answer:

"'M lib fer die!"

"Live for die! Dead? Are you certain?"

"Most certain."

It was Manja who'd paddled out to the plane that night with Mario. And Manja mimicked the part that he'd watched Mario play in the dark that night—unscrewing here, twisting there, listening, sweating, and, finally, taking Manja by the throat

and threatening him with a rotten form of death if Manja ever breathed this to a living soul.

SEVENTEEN years — eighteen years. The colonel still coming to Africa, more from habit than from any hope he still had of ever learning anything more definite about his son and the fair-haired girl his son had married.

The old *Faustina* had been junked long ago and a new *Faustina* had taken her place—a great white yacht especially designed for tropical waters and the bringing home of long-lost children! Who could tell? God, but Africa was big! And still dark, in spite of all the railroads, motors and steamboats.

The colonel shot a good deal. Big game. One hope remained—of getting a shot at Mario! And the colonel little guessed how this great, mysterious Africa was sitting in judgment on him.

So with all other Buckras who came her way.

CHAPTER X

Converging Trails

NEITHER did Kwa the Golden guess the queer, sardonic way old Africa had of doing things. After all, he also was a Buckra, a Utangani, although he spoke no language save that—or those—of the Not-Yet-Men and the Half-Men, the Animal Folk and the Furry People.

The elephant herd, Tembo's clan, with which he rode and ran, was drifting steadily southward, headed for the Congo. Forest all the way, but alive with variety and interest.

There were swamps, rivers and pools, all lost in the forest. Kwa rode Tembo through the swamps; or sometimes Amma, the old elephant

mother, who had a husky infant at her side with whom Kwa frolicked; and after which frolics, or as often as they wished, Amma out of her abundance would give them both their dinners.

But in rivers and pools Kwa swam and had no fear of crocodiles. Not with the elephants about.

Then, also, in the midst of the jungle, there would be many a grassy clearing. Put there, so Tembo said, by elephant ancestors before the age of man. And here the elephants loved to rest.

YET, even when they rested, the elephants were never still—weaving, rocking, never tired, lightly balanced on the huge soft cushions of their feet. But most of all they sought these glades on moonlight nights. The elephants loved the moon—loved it better than the sun.

This love of theirs for the moon, said Tembo, once became known to an Azandeh chief—always great killers of elephants, the Azandehs—who made an artificial moon that he hung in a tree and so lured many elephants to their death.

There were always men who were luring elephants to their death, said Tembo. With no slightest anger or vindictiveness he said it.

"And the strangest of all, O Kwa," said Tembo, throwing up his trunk to where Kwa sat on another elephant and playfully tweaking his ear, "are the Utangani, your people, whom as yet you do not know."

"Why strangest?"

"While others kill us for greed or plain necessity," Tembo answered, "the Utangani kill us merely for the fun it gives them."

"It is strange," Kwa admitted, horror-struck. "But are you sure?"

"Sure!" Tembo asserted as he softly padded along the trail. "They

kill not only my people but even their cousins, the four-handed people."

"I killed Mok."

"But not for pleasure."

"None of my people would kill for pleasure," said Kwa.

He was thinking of his father and mother when he said this. He had his father's leather box across his knees, his father's bracelet on his wrist.

Tembo swung along in silence for a while. The whole herd, trailing out behind, could hear the conversation, yet the talk blanketed no other sound. The smallest sounds in the forest could be heard—rustle, chirp and squeak.

This was still "morning-time," as the jungle people called it—early morning, before the sun was hot; after the sun got hot—say by the middle of the forenoon—there would be no sounds at all.

NOW a thousand birds were singing, near and far. Bees and other humming insects wove a haze of tuneless harmony. It seemed impossible to Kwa that people would kill in a world like this merely for the fun of it. But he could sense the listening of the herd—some knowledge that Tembo and his people seemed to be keeping from him.

"There is—one such old Utangani," Tembo told Kwa softly, "who comes out here every year. A great man in his own country. Very rich. Yet a killer. Up the Nepoko River you will find him. . . ."

Tembo broke off. He fell to telling of other and darker tribes of elephant-killers.

For instance, the dark Fan tribe. The Fans, or Fenjani, had learned the secret of an elephant poison harmless to themselves. And having

surrounded a herd the Fans would spread their poison on tree and bush in an ever-tightening ring until the elephant-people could no longer run and there the bowmen would shoot them down with poisoned arrows.

Again the little pygmies. Worse yet. The pygmies, in a time of drought, would spy on an elephant herd looking for a water-hole in the middle of a swamp. And then, when the herd had a mile or so of tall bone-dry reeds about them, the pygmies would set fire to the swamp in a thousand places and so burn the whole herd to death.

"Why?" gasped Kwa.

"Ivory!"

KWA often marveled at the way the elephants could pass through the thickest jungle and make no sound. At will they could check their stomach-rumblings even, check all motion.

Kwa marveled at their knowledge of all jungle-trails and the way they were posted on the latest news concerning each. But often in still noons when all the world seemed to be asleep there'd come through the forest a sound that might have been mistaken for the stirring of a breeze, although no leaf moved and even the tops of the lofty silk-cotton trees were steady against the blue of the sky.

Then, if Kwa listened carefully, he would know that this was the famous elephant-whisper and he'd be able to understand most of what was said.

He came out of one of these noon-dozes one day as he lay on a rock with that leather bag of his father's under his head for a pillow. And instantly he was awake and listening to the whisper that was now running through the herd.

"Lo, all ye elephants," it said,

"Kwa's enemy and ours is headed this way!"

The whisper had barely died away, it seemed before there was a ripping explosion—then another!—then another!—as if the whole world were cracking. And added to these throbs of thunder a dozen of the elephants had begun to scream at once.

This wasn't just the ordinary trumpeting. This was the scream—one of the most terrible and terrifying sounds that any animal can make.

Just one of those screams could Kwa recognize. It was the voice of old Amma. And what she said was this:

"They've murdered my baby!"

KWA couldn't even then get the horror and the truth of this until he saw one of the young tuskers come crashing through the brush, then lurch and fall as if he'd been tripped.

It was all swift confusion. Yet even now Tembo took time for a thought of Kwa's safety.

"It's Mario—he whom you seek," said Tembo. "Hide! Hide, Kwa, under the rock!"

And even as he said this there came a blaze of fire and other thunder-shocks.

Kwa was down from his rock. He was dazed with the excitement and the fear of all this. He'd never heard the blazing of firearms before. But voices were reaching him—silent voices that still somehow reached him through the chaos of fire, smoke and volcanic shakings of the noise.

They told him that Mario hadn't come alone. He'd come with a band of outlaw Azandehs. Ivory poachers all! Killing young and old!

Tembo had been hit.

Tembo had screamed. He'd rushed at the nearest blaze of fire.

Kwa, unthinking of himself, sprang from the rock and charged in the same direction.

He also screamed a battle-cry.

For a moment he was under the gray cloud of Tembo's charging bulk. Tembo wasn't running right. No one but Kwa or some other jungle-creature equally trained could have noticed it. But Kwa knew. And the knowledge was a whip. He hurled himself ahead of Tembo. How he never knew. But there he was.

Like a springing leopard he'd come alone into the edge of a glade. Almost in the center of this glade he saw a band of men. All of the men were black and nearly naked—all save one. Yet all had heavy weapons—the thunder-and-lightning rods. One man was lighter but bearded black, and clothed—yet savage also.

"Mario!"

Kwa had screamed the word, and instantly he saw that his scream had carried fear. It was a fear he couldn't understand. . . .

WHAT had happened was that Mario and his Azandeh poachers had been working through the forest so silently that they'd found themselves in the midst of the scattered, dozing elephant-herd before they knew it. The surprise had been as great for Mario and the Azandehs as it had been for the elephants.

But while the elephants, on making such a discovery, would have ghosted away in peace, Mario and his black killers had begun at once to shoot.

Then, only a few seconds having passed, this strange creature springing from the brush! Ghost or devil! Maybe both! Congo, all West Africa, was hag-ridden!

At Kwa's cry of Mario's name, it was as if another sort of lightning

had flashed—a dash of cold white over even that dark group.

The delay was fatal to them.

A dozen gray shapes were converging upon them. In an instant the killers themselves were stricken.

CHAPTER XI

Death! Death!

ONLY two of the poaching band had escaped immediate death.

One was an Azandeh. Through luck or cunning he'd got away altogether, but without his gun. He was picked up later by a forest-patrol and sent to prison. But at the time of his arrest and forever afterward he talked of the white ghost that had sprung upon him and his brethren from the bush.

So would this part of the forest become a Devil Bush perhaps—a place for natives to stay away from.

None but the blacks believed the ghost part of it. Still, even the cynical, hard-headed whites were forced to believe him to some extent.

There'd always been talk of "mystery creatures" in the woods—strange snakes, strange deer, strange crosses of the sort that had been reported as "wild men," "men with tails," "missing links."

Then the albinos. The thing the frightened Azandeh and his companions may have seen was a white N'gleko, a white N'glena—an albino chimp or gorilla.

More than one hunter—white or black—began to dream dreams of bringing down a trophy like that. Whoever did would be famous. News of the event would travel around the world. All the museums of the world would be bidding for the skin. The specimen might bring a hundred thousand dollars. Then lectures, a book, and picture-rights!

Zowie!

A dozen safaris, secret or not so secret, were organized with the definite purpose of going out and tracking down and killing the white chimp, or gorilla, or whatever it was. . . . And Colonel Rahan was among the first. . . .

The only other who'd escaped instant death in that elephant charge was the Portuguese half-breed, Mario.

MMARIO had been stunned. The blow that had stunned him had also partially scalped him, so that he looked as if he were dead. Which was probably all that saved him.

Mario awoke from a whiff of nightmare to see that white face again staring into his own. The face was surmounted by a mane of tawny hair with glints of yellow gold in it.

Such hair, Mario remembered, had belonged to a woman he'd once loved in vain and sent to her death by way of a doctored airplane. The face—there could be no doubt about it—was the face of the woman's husband. There was the same nose, the same chin; the line of the mouth was the same; so was the line of the brows.

But what was most terribly convincing was the look in the eyes.

It was as if both young Rahan and his bride were staring at him here at once and demanding:

"Why did you kill us?"

Mario murmured a combination curse and prayer in Portuguese. It cleared his mind somewhat. It cleared his mind enough to recall the event immediately preceding his eclipse of sight and thought. This was the apparition that had sprung from the woods. The apparition must have been consorting with the elephant herd. The creature had called him by name.

Mario rolled his eyes.

WHAT he next saw was not encouraging, either. Death! Death! There were more dead men than elephants. After the appearance of this red-headed ghost there hadn't been the chance to fire another shot. With tusk and trunk and padded foot the elephants had executed judgment.

Kwa had been trying to speak to Mario in some of the jungle ways of speech, but he could see that Mario did not comprehend.

But Kwa heard the call of another voice—old Tembo's.

Kwa, swiftly on his feet, took Mario by the hair. It was a natural movement, with neither hate nor cruelty as its motive, and dragged Mario along as he ran in the direction from which Tembo had called.

Tembo was in a sort of kneeling position—his great legs extended forward and back. His body was still held upright, soaring high. His eye was mild. It was the first time that Kwa had ever seen his great friend off his feet.

"O Tembo!" Kwa cried; "are you hurt?"

"Hurt!" said Tembo. "I thought you might care to be with me while I pass."

Kwa said nothing.

"What is that you've brought along?" asked Tembo.

"Mario!"

"Put him here where I may see him. Still alive!"

Kwa dragged Mario forward without looking at him and let him drop in front of Tembo's feet. Mario uttered no sound. He lay very still. But Kwa no longer felt any interest in Mario at all. Kwa's interest was centered on Tembo.

And during the silence that followed Tembo and Kwa talked of other things.

Presently, Tembo said: "I started to tell you once about an old man who comes to Africa every year."

"He who also kills?"

"They all kill," Tembo said. "But they are not all bad. This one is not all bad. You must find him, Kwa."

"Why should I find him, Tembo?"

"He is the father—of your father, Kwa."

Kwa once again could say nothing.

"An old man, bitter and sad," said Tembo. "Searching! Searching!"

"Searching for what, O Tembo?"

"For something he destroyed, O Kwa. In finding you he will find at least some part of what he has been looking for, O Kwa. But be careful—careful—or he will destroy you also."

This was beyond Kwa's power to understand. But Tembo's words were to come back to him afterward.

"And when you go among men you must dress yourself as a man, O Kwa. Look at Mario. You will see how he is dressed. There are the things your father wore in that kit of his you brought along. In all ways possible, O Kwa, you must be as much like your own kind as you can. Else they will look on you as one of us and treat you as one of us, O Kwa."

Kwa felt such grief and fury in his breast that it was a moment before he could express something of what he felt.

"I think, O Tembo," he said, "that I'd rather remain as one of you—one of the people I both love and understand."

MARIO, lying on the ground, was wise in certain of the ways of animals. To him there had been no speech. But, lying still, playing dead, he could see that these two creatures, the elephant and the wild thing in the semblance of a man, were communing and absorbed.

He pursued his researches further.

Stealthy as a wounded leopard he was. His brain was clearing. He'd escaped serious injury. No bones were broken. Almost within reach of his hand he saw an elephant-gun that had been flung here when one of his men was tossed.

He recognized the gun. The gun of Akkor, and Akkor had been holding his fire. The gun was loaded and ready.

Mario measured his movements. The old bull was pretty far gone. A quick roll and a spring, and Mario would be away with the gun. There came to him the consoling thought also that here was ivory and no one now with whom he'd have to share it.

"Your place is among men also, Kwa. But never forget—"

The sentence remained unfinished. Suddenly, Tembo had uncoiled his trunk and flashed it forward. He'd seized Mario just as Mario had seized the gun.

Kwa had recoiled a step. A single glance had told him what had happened—and also, perhaps, what was about to happen.

Tembo had lifted the Portuguese from the ground and was holding him there suspended—but so far carefully with a coil of his trunk about Mario's body. Mario still held the gun, unable through some swift paralysis of his nerves to let it fall.

AND Tembo now turned Mario over somewhat so that his staring eyes could once again look on that white specter of the man and the woman whom Mario had sent to their death. Tembo shook Mario slightly, then once more held him motionless.

It was as if Tembo had said:

"Look a long look, Mario! What you see will be the vision that will go with you into the other world."

Kwa got the meaning. And half between horror and exaltation he was

glad that Mario was to die like this. Kwa himself was looking hard. He never turned away while Mario's face went blacker, blacker, as Tembo crushed him. Then, at last, Tembo, apparently without effort, flung Mario, already dead, out of sight into the brush.

There was a silence. The silence lasted. Kwa thought that his great friend had already left him when Tembo's whisper reached him:

"Good-by, Kwa."

"Tembo!"

Tembo's great head went lower and lower. Tembo—was gone.

It was "sun-time," as the jungle people call it—the heat of the day, the one time of a great silence in the jungle world.

And now, silently, with a silence in his heart, Kwa left the place of death.

CHAPTER XII

The Red Frontier

A MOON had passed. And Kwa, feeling very sad and lonely, climbed to the top of another rock with his father's bag. It seemed almost like a thing of evil omen. It stood for this other world into which he'd come and which—for the time, at least—he wished he'd never seen. He felt as if he'd crossed some red frontier—into a land stained red.

He turned his face from the leather bag and squatted on his heels. Should he go back or go on? His heart was telling him to go back—back to the Valley of the Mu, to Wami, Moa, Aya, all the Furry People in the shelter of their caves.

Yet, at the same time, something just as deep as his heart—something that was stubborn—wouldn't let him go back.

He sat there brooding in the great silence and loneliness about him until

he heard a slow drubbing cadence through the forest and he knew that this was the end of "sun-time"—about four-thirty, as white men measure time—and that the forest and the African world in general was coming to life again.

Scarcely had he awakened from his brooding when he saw a leopard slink into sight from behind a towering acacia tree. The leopard was stalking a scent. Kwa knew. Then the leopard looked up and saw Kwa. The leopard was greatly surprised.

Kwa laughed. He reached behind him and lifted the leather sack for the leopard to see. He knew that it was this that the leopard had scented.

"Come up," said Kwa; "I would speak with you."

"I'm hungry," the leopard replied.

"So am I," said Kwa; and he moved over slightly. And the leopard, with a silken movement, sprang lightly to his side.

"You're Kwa!" the leopard purred.

But for moments longer the interest of the spotted cat was more centered on the thing Kwa had shown him than on Kwa himself. It sniffed the leather bag all over. Satisfied, the leopard seated itself and began to lick its breast.

"We're both hungry," said Kwa, "but as we eat different food I suppose that we can't be of much use to each other."

The leopard, with that gift of instant concentration, whether of thought or action, characteristic of his kind, paused in his licking to consider.

"We might help each other, at that," he mused.

"How?"

"Hear that drumming?"

KWA had heard it all along, but he hadn't known what it was.

"That's Masu Town," the leopard said; "a village of blacks. They sleep

through sun-time like the rest of the jungle; but as soon as the men wake up they begin to drum while the women go about their work. There'd be food for us both in Masu Town."

"I don't want to kill," said Kwa.

"You won't have to kill," said the leopard. "There'll be a cook-pot on every fire, a bunch of bananas at every other door."

"Won't they drive us away?"

"Drive us away!"—the leopard grinned. "You're Utangani—you're White Man, Kwa. I'm Leopard! Those Masu people know us to be the two strongest fetish lords in the world. I'm just wondering what those drummers will think when the two of us show up together."

"Shall I dress?" Kwa asked.

The leopard looked him over. "Go as you are," the leopard advised.

THEY left the rock. With a twist of vine Kwa made a sling so that he could carry the leather kit on his back. He and the leopard headed away through the forest in the direction of the drum.

They'd gone not more than forty steps when the face of another leopard appeared—in the green shadows of a fernbrake.

"This is Kwa," the first leopard rasped as it paused.

"I heard you when you were talking together on the rock," breathed the second leopard smoothly. "It's a great idea."

And it silently fell in with Kwa on the other side.

A third leopard joined them, then a fourth. They also seemed to have heard about the surprise visit to Masu Town, for nothing more had been said.

"Queer company!" Kwa said to himself.

It was the first time in his life that he'd ever traveled like this in the company of blood-drinkers;

but, after all, it was a part of the new world into which he had brought himself. He'd crossed the red frontier.

Nor was there that feeling of companionship between him and the leopard as there'd always been when he was with the elephants, the deer, the buffalo. The leopards were forever near him, and yet they disappeared. They traveled silently. So had Tembo and his people. But there was a slinking and furtive quality about the silence of the leopards that had in it something foreign to Kwa's nature.

There'd been times when lions had come into the Valley of the Mu. He'd gone among them and felt at home with them. And they were killers. But about these leopards there was something that reminded him of Zal the Snake-King, Zal, the Fear.

It was well past sun-time now, and the shadows were slanting more and more and getting deeper. When darkness came in this part of the world it came with a rush. In an hour or so it would be dark. And for the first time in his life Kwa felt no desire to spend the night in the woods with his animal friends—not with the leopards.

The forest was swarming with life—with music, voices, the throb of drums. But Kwa felt that he and the leopards moved along in a drift of silence—of a silence compounded of hate and fear.

His first premonition, though, of the actual trouble he was running into was when, but a little ahead of them, a woman appeared leading a goat.

The goat bleated. The woman cast a glance in their direction. In a moment she'd cast away the vine-rope with which she'd been leading the goat. She fled with a choked and babbling scream.

The goat would have followed. It might have done so if it hadn't been for the glint of delay caused by the trailing vine. The glint was enough. One of the leopards had sprung.

Before the goat could finish a bleat its back was broken and the leopard's fangs were fastened in its throat.

Kwa also was fast. He'd been almost as fast as the leopard. It was the pack he was carrying on his back that had held him up. The leopard saw him coming and divining his purpose sought to jump aside taking the goat along.

BUT Kwa caught the two of them, the killer and the victim, and jerked them apart. He dropped them both, the goat to one side, the leopard to the other. The goat, of course, was done for; and knowing this, Kwa also knew that in some way his unmeditated action had been foolish.

The leopard probably read his thought. It was grinning up at him.

As for the other leopards, they were slinking about in their nervous way, bellies to the ground and their yellow eyes filled with speculations.

Kwa knew that in some way he'd have to assert himself. He couldn't simply back down. At the same time he perceived the truth that the leopards also had their right. They were blood-drinkers. They were—what they were. But so was he—what he was.

"I'm Kwa!" he asserted with simple directness. "I'm Utangani! And this is the law. Kill, you killers, when you will. But not in my presence! When you kill in my presence it will be by my direction."

The leopards purred. They understood.

But Kwa noticed, just the same, that even while he was talking the slain goat had disappeared.

"Come on!" he said.

More than ever now he wished to

reach the village before the alarm there should become too great. Not in his whole life as yet had he ever been in a village of men. But he felt a longing to be there—among a people almost, perhaps, like Moa and his people, the Half-Men, the Furry Tribe.

He'd half expected the alarm that the woman must by now have spread would result in a silence. Alarm brought silence in all the world with which he was familiar. But now, instead of silence, the woods were throbbing with a noise like that of a rising storm.

It was a noise made up of barking, shouting, then the shrill of fifes, the dirge-hoot of African horns, then the boom and throb of other drums.

The noise was such that the slinking leopards themselves began to be shot through with emotions of panic. They looked at each other with quick glances and paused with a forefoot lifted. They cast their yellow eyes up at Kwa, the Utangani—in a way to show that, after all, they knew who was the real fetish in an affair like this.

They'd come into a sort of jungle-road formed by the junction of many trails. Ahead of them Kwa saw a strong stockade.

THEN, just where the road entered the village there was a gate, still open, and through this opening Kwa saw a swarming black crowd—a crowd which appeared to be occupied just then with the double purpose of getting the gate shut and at the same time thrusting through it an odd and terrifying figure which didn't seem to want to be thrust out.

But as the crowd saw them—Kwa and the leopards—there was a sobbing roar. And in a moment they'd pushed their living scarecrow through and closed the gate.

CHAPTER XIII

Men and Apes

THE living scarecrow who'd been thrust through the gate turned out to be Futa, the leading devil-doctor of Masu Town. He'd been hiring out as a specialist in different cases—selling "sassy-water" (poison) and trapping souls—ever since the town's special devil-tree, now a forest giant, was a sapling.

He'd been enjoying his evening smoke of hemp when the alarm sounded. But the Masu mob had had its way—dragging him out, throwing his official robes about him, shoving the devil-mask down over his head.

The leopards were impressed. They circled around in writhing curves like the living section of a spotted snake, big as Zal, but with neither head nor tail. They stopped; they were on the run again.

And all this time the booing and drumming rose and fell from behind the stockade.

Then the noise and the leopard-dance subsided as Kwa went forward.

Fear or the hemp he'd been smoking had weakened Futa so that he'd reeled this way and that and finally come to his knees, then forward to his hands. The mask and helmet that concealed Futa's head had a grotesque face painted white and red with a grinning mouth and staring eyes. Feathers crowned it and formed an encircling beard. The robe that covered him was of grass-rope coarsely woven.

Kwa looked at him with interest—while the leopards slunk and stared, while a silence like that of the moon settled over Masu Town.

Kwa heard a whisper; but whether it was Futa's voice or just Futa's thought he heard, he couldn't tell.

"Spare me, Great One," Futa said.

"You can have the town and all that's in it. Only, spare me, Futa, your servant!"

Kwa could feel a thousand eyes upon him, the strain of a thousand breasts.

-Gently, without a word, he leaned over the grotesque shape and pulled away the head-dress. This he tossed aside. For the moment he was forgetful of everything but that here was a poor old black man with gray wool and bleary eyes.

But the watching leopards must have felt differently about it.

No sooner had they seen that natural head appear from under its devil-mask than they'd made a concerted run for the stockade. They were going over it like streaks of yellow fire just as Kwa turned from his first glance at Futa.

Instantly from beyond the stockade there was now a fresh explosion of sound—different, this time. It was a screaming, a shrieking, the wild note of human panic.

At the sound, Kwa threw himself against the stockade gate. It yielded a little. He set his shoulders and drove on through. There'd been the remnant of a huddle about the gate. They gasped and squalled and fell away. But Kwa had no eyes at all except for the leopards.

HE could see them here and there along the broad village street—slinking again, now that they were free to make their choice. No other animal or man himself, could have been more certain of the helpless panic about them.

Kwa shrilled a call.

It stopped the leopards for a moment. But only for a moment. One flashed a paw and struck a dog. Another flicked its black and yellow tail as it crouched in front of a cornered girl.

Kwa dropped the load from his shoulders and shrilled his cry again as he flashed ahead. He was just in time to stop the leopard in front of the cowering girl.

"Demons!" he gasped.

And with a blow of his fist he broke the creature's neck.

He'd escaped from Masu Town, bringing his leather bag along, after having driven the leopards out of the gate ahead of him. The whole memory was a horror to him.

It was as if he'd caught some infection of horror as one might be infected with a plague. He'd had no stomach to eat, no desire to remain in the place.

Even after he'd whipped the leopards into line the people had hidden from him, snatched their children out of sight.

ANYWAY, he was alone. To be alone was better than the society of leopards. He'd discovered that. Leopards were furred snakes.

He looked up at the moon and got his direction from it. Deeper and deeper into the forest he went. He gave the buffalo call and waited. Deer and antelope came first. They kept their distance until he spoke to them, because of the taint of leopard and town he carried with him.

Then they came up and nosed him and talked to him as if he'd been living among them all his life.

There was a crashing and a big black buffalo showed himself. If he'd made that crashing noise it was merely to serve notice that he was on his way, for buffalo also could move more silently through any sort of going—even as the elephant could.

"Greeting!" said Kwa.

"Greeting, O Kwa, friend of Luh!" the black bull answered.

And, after that, Kwa's troubles were over for the time. Other bulls

and cows of the buffalo herd, and toddling calves just able to keep up with their mothers, circled around in the flecked moonlight to hear the story of Kwa's adventures since leaving the valley of the Mu.

All the jungle-creatures knew about the Valley of the Mu. To them it was the Valley of the Truce, as well, and Kwa, in a way, had been the chief actor in that Truce, sole member of the Wholly Human, the Entirely Man, and Utangani at that, ever to have made a truce with the jungle clans.

IT turned into almost another Great Truce before Kwa finished telling all he had to tell. Only, this time, none of the killers were present—none but Kwa's own self, and he'd taken an oath never to kill again—or ever—except in case of absolute necessity.

The monkey people filled the trees, although they weren't given to wandering about at night. There were chimpanzees and gorillas here and there among the groups of deer and antelope.

It was an ancient chimp who rode away with Kwa at last toward the river—both of them seated on the back of the same black leader of the buffalo herd. For it had been agreed that after Kwa had bathed and dined—on the fruits and milk to which Kwa was accustomed—the chimp would teach him various things Kwa ought to know before trying further experiments with men.

For upward of a year this chimp himself had lived among men, white and black. They'd called him Manjarooma, a name he still preferred to his native name of Kek.

A wise old chimp was Kek—or Manjarooma, to give him the more nearly human name of his preference. He confessed frankly to Kwa

that sometimes he wished that he was Man. Again, the mere thought of being Man was a nightmare to him. It was like that with his manner of living. There were times when he longed for town-life once more. Then some spirit of the forest would come over him and he could think of towns with nothing but dread.

Manjarooma took Kwa home to where the chimp colony was nested for the night, and there with a few dextrous turns of his powerful hands the good ape had made Kwa a sleeping hammock in the branches. . . .

It was along toward the break of day when an alarm was given. Men and a Utangani among them—were creeping through the trees.

This meant flight.

The chimps—and Kwa with them—were about to descend to the ground when a second alarm, silent like the first, sent its shiver through the family clan.

Men were headed in from all directions. The Utangani leader must have had at his command a thousand beaters—it was a way of the great White Man hunters—one especially.

"Which one? Who, O Manjarooma?" Kwa asked, and he was conscious of a desire in his teeth to chatter as he asked the question. For suddenly Kwa was remembering that parting information that dead Tembo had given him.

Manjarooma looked at Kwa, and in Manjarooma's wrinkled face was a kindly, human look.

O KWA," said Manjarooma, "it is he of whom you think—he of the Nepoko River—father of your father."

"Run!" Kwa whispered. "Go through the trees. It's your only chance. I'll stay here."

Manjarooma pleaded with a look. But he knew there was no appeal.

He touched Kwa's face and started out of a branch. He paused, came back.

"O Kwa," he said—

"I'm all right," Kwa broke in. "I'm Kwa—a man!"

"But lest they think that you are one of us," Manjarooma took time to say—a loss of seconds that might well mean the loss of his life; "O Kwa, open your father's kit and at least put on his coat."

Kwa promised.

The faithful Manjarooma was gone.

They'd been nesting in a mulberry tree that towered upward a hundred feet or more. And now Kwa, taking the precious bag along, climbed higher—higher yet. . . .

He'd just struggled into that strange garment his father had worn, when he heard a shot and then he felt a stab of pain.

CHAPTER XIV

Trophy

FIRST there had been that report by the Azandeh ivory-poacher that had set the big-game shooters and other sportsmen to talking of "mystery beasts," of albino chimps and white gorillas. Following close on this had come the wild reports from Masu Town, telling how a great white devil had come into their village at the head of a band of leopards.

Both stories had come in within a few days of each other and both from the same neighborhood—back in the dense forest drained by the Nepoko and its creeks. The Nepoko always had been famous for its wild life—everything from elephants to cannibals.

It was this fame of the Nepoko for wild solitudes and a chance to get a trophy or two different from

the common run that had taken Colonel Nathaniel E. Rahan up that river.

Something was telling him that this trip of his might be his last. Africa was like that—sealed as the great Gizeh Sphinx in most respects, yet whispering, whispering, to those who came back often enough with an eternal question in their hearts.

THE colonel had been coming to Africa now for almost twenty years. The trophy rooms in his two great homes—in Newport and down in Palm Beach—had become places for curators of big museums to come and look at. But he was getting pretty tired of shooting things—elephants, lions, gorillas.

It was as if a man had started out to find a lost gold mine—that only son of his—and had been mocked by the gift of a handful of nickels.

Anyway, it was getting so, nowadays, that ladies and young missionaries, flatfooted old bankers and lisp-ing lecturers at ladies' clubs—anybody at all—could come out to Africa and kill a lion. A Swedish prince had lately butchered nineteen gorillas and never soiled his hands.

But when the colonel heard that report from Masu Town he felt a flash of his old-time fire, a return of his old-time pride. He'd go out and get this white pelt—he swore he would—if it cost him a million dollars. Like that, he could go home for good. He could tell his friends that that was why he'd really been coming out to Africa all these years. He'd heard of this albino chimp—or white gorilla—God only knew what the thing might be! There were "mystery beasts" in Africa. He'd become almost sure of that.

The colonel had unlimited funds. The natives knew that. At his summons they came flocking in—to that

semi-permanent camp of his up the Nepoko.

He was getting data right along.

Among the wild tribes, it seemed, the Thing he was after had been a subject of talk and conjecture since a long time.

The Thing was white. It had been seen with buffalos. It had been seen with elephants. It had been seen with leopards. . . .

Neither big male gorillas nor chimpanzees would be afraid of leopards especially if the chimp or gorilla happened to be a freak. Leopards like snakes, were curious creatures and out of the usual run. That was why leopard-worship, in some form or other, was prevalent all over West Africa, just as serpent-worship was.

And then came a final report from a wandering Bagangh medicine-man—a genuine specialist, this time—who'd been going through the woods at a necessary time and phase of the moon to collect certain plants that couldn't be harvested except just so, and he swore that he'd seen the white mystery hustling through the woods with a regular N'gleko—a regular chimp, that is.

He'd had the nerve to follow the pair and find out where they nested.

THE colonel called for his "tepyo"—his traveling chair. It was a tepyo of special construction—so comfortable he could sleep in it, as he often did, while his special carriers swung him along. So far, this had been a night when nobody slept.

But the colonel slept in his swinging tepyo. The motion of it was as lulling as that of a canoe in a swift-flowing river. He dreamed, half-awake, that he was afloat on some such river—that he was being carried now toward some odd and grotesque fate by the black nocturnal forces of this land of mystery.

When he wakened finally it was to see the great black form of Joe Jack, his head guide, leaning close—and veiled like a bride in the folds of the mosquito netting.

"What ting?" the colonel whispered.

Joe Jack answered: "Me look him! Me see him!"

"Sure?"

"Come one time, quickly, 'fore him hear him noise!"

The colonel had never seen Joe Jack excited before—ordinarily as steady as a black rock in any sort of a trying situation. The knowledge now swept in on the colonel with a glint of unholy joy—yet a joy with something of terror in it—that Joe was telling the truth that he'd go home now with a trophy unique in the world.

HE swung from his chair and followed the black guide step by step through a forest glade, through a zone of brush, through a clump of fern.

Then the guide was pointing up into the high branches of a mulberry tree—a tree higher than all those about it and just beginning to shine at the top with the near approach of sunrise.

The colonel saw half a red mane, the tremor of a twig. He put out a hand back of him and immediately his favorite gun was in his grasp.

The colonel took long and careful aim. He couldn't miss. He was about to kill something unique perhaps in the history of the world. He fired—and had the satisfaction of knowing that he'd scored a hit.

Still, without undue elation, he passed back his gun and received a fresh one. No one in Africa had better gun-bearers than his own.

He covered his quarry with his second gun.

He heard a cry, not very loud, such as might have been made by a wounded animal—and fired again.

This time there was a short scream, so nearly human that any sportsman with less experience would have been seriously shaken. As a matter of fact, the colonel was merely vexed.

He passed the second gun back and there was his favorite weapon again in his hand. He raised it and would have fired again. But suddenly, incredibly, Joe Jack seemed to have lost his head.

"Daddy! Daddy!" Joe Jack cried as he caught the barrel of the gun and thrust it up, "Wo-wo! Him bak-ara! Him 'tangani!—all along you!"

Colonel Rahan stood there very still, just waiting, saying nothing—and feeling the blood drain away—from face and feet and hands—as if it had been himself who'd just been murdered. . . .

In that part of Africa the sun comes up with exceeding swiftness. Almost on the instant of that second shot there'd been a splash of gold across the top of the tree.

From second to second the light descended.

Now something came hurtling down from the upper branches; and the colonel had a flash of relief as he saw that the thing was dark and not very large. It might well have been the body of a half-grown chimp—and dead as a doornail, to judge by the way it fell.

But the relief was only a flash. Joe Jack's quicker sight had seen in this object mere confirmation of the tragedy. He ran to get it.

BUT when Joe came back with a leather kit-bag in his big black hand and a look of petrified horror on his shining black face, the colonel didn't notice him. The colonel stood

there gazing up—his mouth open, trying to swallow and never quite succeeding. Already his No. 1 gunboy, just behind him, had deftly relieved the colonel of the gun he'd been holding.

And neither had the colonel noticed that.

The sunlight was now creeping down the tree like a descent of golden fire, and keeping pace with this—no slower, no faster—came the golden mane that the colonel first had noted—came the face and shape of what the colonel had believed to be something less than human.

He could almost have believed that both shots had missed—though he knew they hadn't—the movement of the limbs was so steady, the look in that strange face so calm. . . .

Kwa reached the ground at last, so nearly dead that he was thinking of not much else than Tembo. Tembo had shown him how to die. If this was death he'd like to die as Tembo did. Only, only, Tembo had had a friend to talk to. . . .

He wouldn't cry out. He wouldn't speak. He was afraid even to think of his jungle-friends—for fear that they might respond and so get themselves killed also. . . .

Colonel Rahan, almost beside himself, had managed to command that his tepoy be rushed forward and runners sent to the nearest Congo post for a doctor. He helped ease Kwa to the ground at the foot of the tree.

KWA was naked—all pale bronze and gold—except for the coat he wore. A nature-god!—all sorts of frantic queer ideas were racing through the colonel's mind as he looked at Kwa's face—so like a remembered face!

The colonel saw a wrist-watch—then an old passport in the pocket

of the coat. . . . He saw the name: Nat—Nathaniel—Rahan. . . .

CHAPTER XV

Moon Country

IT was about a month after this when Kwa awoke from a dream of protracted torture. He knew that he had been in the safe keeping of friends. But these were not friends who understood him. That had been an element of the torture. They'd kept him bound up when he wanted to be free. They'd kept him hot when he wanted to be cool.

He'd dreamed of sousing in cool rivers with buffalo and elephants about him, only to find himself parched in airless coverlets, the sweet air strained through a cotton web, made noisome by strange medicine smells.

He lay still for a long time thinking of Tembo. He felt a great longing to die as Tembo had died—the woods around him, the earth beneath him, the sky above.

Without moving he could survey this prison where he lay.

It was night. The light in the place was dim. It made the mosquito-bar that enclosed the bed seem thicker than ever. Outside the mosquito-bar a great white room. In the corner of the room, seated in a rocking-chair asleep, an old white woman in a blue dress. About her neck was a long string of plain black beads and on her head was a queer white bonnet very large with turned-back flaps.

In the room and all about in the outlying nearness all was very quiet. But now as Kwa listened there came to him with a distinctness and a meaning that he'd all but forgotten the voices of river and forest.

Out there—he could tell by the voices—the moon was shining. The moon was the real sun of half the

African world. By moonlight there was sport and murder, mystery and queer half-glimpses of things hidden by day.

Kwa moved to the edge of the bed and made no sound. He slipped his feet to the floor and sat there panting.

It seemed an eternity before he was out of the room even—and every tick of that eternity a gasp of pain and weakness—but what he was after was worth it. He'd see the moon. He'd touch the earth. Perhaps he could call a buffalo or even an elephant. He'd ask to be carried to some river—deep with a jungly shore. He'd live for a while with a herd of hippos.

HE was frightened by the length of the corridor in which he found himself. But he groped his way along it with his hands and face against the wall. He had to face the wall to support at brief intervals his sagging knees. His feet were like pads of nettle. The sweet earth would make them right again.

He passed an open door and saw an old white man who sat there looking at a book. But a few steps further and he was at the screened door leading to the night. It was almost like tearing himself apart to pull the simple latch. But he managed it, still without creating an alarm, and swayed out upon an open porch.

He could have sobbed for gratitude, for joy.

It was as if a great presence, cool and fragrant, loving and filled with understanding, had rushed in upon him and was swirling him away.

After that, his memory dimmed.

He found himself in the middle of a gravelly desert—half-seated, half-reclining. And he had his arm over the back of a large and patient dog who was helping him on his way. He and the dog talked moonlight and

river; and the dog, it seemed, had mentioned leopards. But Kwa had reassured the dog and—more oblivion. . . .

WHEN Kwa again awoke to his surroundings he was exceedingly tired and weak; but this was offset by the air and the moonlight. Then, hearing voices, he perceived that the dog had been joined by a small donkey and an ape, the ape seated on the donkey's back.

They'd been consulting together what they'd better do about him. But he settled that. They must reach the jungle, else he'd die. Or, if he had to die, there was the proper place. They listened to him earnestly. They were all of his opinion. The only thing that had kept them here in town so long was that they were afraid to go to the jungle alone. With Kwa they wouldn't be afraid.

"I know the way," the donkey said.

"If I could get a buffalo or an elephant," Kwa said; "we'd get there faster."

"I'll carry you," the donkey said.

And both the ape and the dog assured Kwa that the donkey had carried even bigger loads.

But getting to the donkey's back was another matter. Still, somehow, desperately, Kwa managed it, both the dog and the ape helping him—with sympathy and encouragement if in no other way.

Kwa dozed and reeled down a moonlit road. Sometimes he imagined that the four small feet of the donkey were his own, and he admired the nimble patter of them. They were better than the nettle-padded feet he'd had at the hospital. His body was racked at times by almost killing shocks of pain. But at every gasp there rushed into his lungs the healing air. It was like breathing the sky—breathing moonlight.

Somewhere, three cats had joined the procession. They ran ahead with tails straight up. Then two more dogs. They made a frolicking step now and then. But they were silent. The ape ran along at the donkey's side, sometimes four-footed style and sometimes man-fashion, with one of its little hands on Kwa's bare foot.

The jungle was near. . . .

Now, it was there to one side of them, and into it the donkey led them by a path it knew.

Here under the trees the air was moist and sweet and the moonlight was a silver mist. In spite of his pain and fatigue, Kwa was drunk with air and freedom. He sent out calls to all the animals who were near to come and hold a Truce, the while he assured those that were already with him that they need have no fear.

He wasn't quite sure how he managed it, but at last he was seated on the ground at the foot of a tree, where he could look out over a space that was fairly free of trees and brush, and here he saw the animals come and go—phantoms a good many of them were, no doubt: chimps and gorillas, hippos, buffalo, all the grass-eaters, elephants; but the tame animals who'd come out from the town with Kwa told him that they could see these animals, too.

THE man Kwa had seen looking at a book back there in the hospital was Colonel Rahan himself. The book the colonel read was the diary of the lady who'd married the colonel's son. It was a book that would serve anyone as a companion through hours of trial such as the colonel had known since he'd shot his grandson.

By and by the colonel closed the book reverently. He walked silently

down the long corridor to the room that was Kwa's. He entered.

Not an hour hardly, day or night, since the catastrophe had fallen, had the colonel failed to make a visit like this. The room was silent. He glanced at the white-shrouded bed. But the mosquito-bar prevented him from seeing that the bed was empty.

He glanced at Soeur Marie de l'Annonciation, one of the best nurses in all West Africa—or the rest of the world, if devotion counted—seated in her rocking-chair. Neither had she had much sleep this past month.

But the good soul was dozing now.

The colonel turned and tiptoed away again.

It was not until first dawn that they discovered that Kwa was gone. That was when Nero, the hospital dog, came in and volunteered to show them something they might care to see. Around Nero's neck was a strip of gauze bandage, which Delphine, the ape, might have put there. That was a trick of Delphine's—putting ribbons of sorts about Nero's neck. But when the old nurse in the white bonnet noticed this particular bit of gauze she went straight to the empty bed. . . .

THEY found Kwa sleeping under a tree in the jungle, all but naked and bathed with dew. He had no fever. He was smiling in his sleep.

There were other things of lesser import that they noticed but which were recalled only later when a tradition—something of a myth—began to grow up about this wild man that had been shot in the woods.

The donkey from the hospital stable was still there, quietly grazing, with Delphine on his back. Under the tree, close to the sleeper, were a dozen cats and several dogs. None of these animals appeared es-

pecially happy when they saw the hospital people arrive with Colonel Rahan at their head. Then, all about the glade were tracks of other animals, great and small.

And everyone who was there recalled that there had been also an unusual number of birds about, from crows to herons.

All along, the doctors had been warning the colonel that it would be dangerous to have Kwa moved. But even the doctors were forced to admit that this wild escapade of his had done him no harm. On the contrary. For the first time since he'd been brought in from the Nepoko woods it was generally agreed that he might live after all.

So the colonel had a special tepoy made for Kwa—a palanquin for which any African king would gladly have given a hundred of his men or women. And the patient was carried down to the great Congo where the palatial white *Faustina* lay anchored.

That same evening the *Faustina* set out in pursuit of the setting sun.

CHAPTER XVI

Homesick—for Home

THEY called him, formally, Nathaniel Rahan, 2nd, Nat, for short. The society editors generally referred to him as "the heir to the Rahan millions," or words to that effect. The sports writers had a habit of referring to him as the best amateur this or that and ragging him a little because he'd never take part in a contest any more unless it happened to be a sure-enough "benefit" show.

And even then he was so modest or timid or something that he'd be out of sight before the applause was over—unless he was collared and held.

Good-natured, honest, direct, but always with an air of puzzlement about him—always with an air of wondering what in the devil it was all about. But the best-looking creature on the top of God's green earth, according to the girls—and everyone else, just about.

WINTERS, down in Palm Beach, he'd disappear early in the season though. And he'd take his grandfather with him—the old man as crazy as a child headed out for an all-day picnic.

They had a big Seminole canoe, hollowed out from a single cypress log—sweeter than any gasoline launch ever invented. And Kwa—Nat to the white world—would pole this dugout of his out and back through the winding water-runs of the Everglades to places that no white man had ever seen before except as a green and blue blur from an airship.

There were islands back in the Everglades like fragments of Eden—designed by a master silversmith and set on a tablet of jade. And into some such island Kwa and old Colonel Rahan would disappear to remain for possibly a month or so.

Here Kwa would teach the colonel all the things *he* knew in exchange for all that the colonel himself had taught Kwa.

Kwa had learned rapidly enough. His English was perfect, although it always sounded a trifle slow and studied. He'd absorbed about as much of modern science, politics, religion, etc., as most people have, even the best of them. After all, these great nations of Utangani seemed to take a lot for granted.

Kwa, for example, would light a match; and the idea might suddenly occur to him to ask some friend whom he believed to be better in-

formed, why the match lit, why it burned, just what was fire, anyhow?

Always something of a child; but learning like a child—learning all the time.

Now the colonel was trying to catch up on Kwa's own sort of science. The first time a wild fox-squirrel came up and sat on the colonel's shoulder in the woods he was prouder than the day he got that Congressional Medal for something or other.

But he never ceased to marvel at Kwa's way with the children of the wild. In these lost islands of the big swamp there were bear and deer, otters and 'coons, wildcats and panther, a multitude of birds.

All these creatures knew Kwa and Kwa knew them. They came to know the colonel also, to some extent; but they evidently regarded the old man—millionaire though he was—as a person of small consequence. Kwa was the one who mattered. Kwa could talk to them in their own subtle ways. And he'd tell them stories—especially after moonrise—about Africa. Stories of the Devil Bush and the Father of Lies, about Luh the Buffalo and Tembo the Elephant, and about the Great Truce—the night they buried Zal the Serpent King.

Although there was plenty he never told to either animals or man.

ONE thing was that there were times, such nights as these, it was a greater jungle that he was pining for—a greater moonlit world. He felt as if Africa were a battleground, the last great battleground of Man and Beast, and that he wasn't there to do his part.

He loved America, of course. To him it was the Holy Land—land of the original Utangani and the Golden Woman. But himself, he'd been born

in the Devil Bush. And that was his We-Country. Home! He was homesick for home.

Still, he lingered on. He had no thought of deserting his grandfather now. His grandfather was getting old. And one day he told the old gentleman what might still be seen in a certain cave, back of the fire-cave of the Mu. He half-offered, a little wistfully, to take his grandfather there for a look, if the colonel wished.

But the colonel, thinking things over, at last shook his head. Perhaps things had changed. Perhaps he'd merely be destroying a dream.

The last time Kwa—Nathaniel Rahan, 2nd—got his name in the papers was the day of the great circus fire.

IT was one of those almost terrible affairs—one of those things that might have folks wonder how such things were ever invented. The big circus-tents crowded with women and children and a dozen elephants in one ring doing their act and in another ring a cageful of lions doing theirs, when there was a yell of fire.

The flat-car with the big top on it, had been in collision the night before with a tank-car of some sort, and thousands of square feet of the canvas had become like so much gun-cotton.

There were the makings of a first-class panic as the fire ran up and around. It was going to be a panic not only among the spectators but among the animals. That seemed certain.

But the circus-people, trained in one of the oldest and best schools on earth, were taking care of the crowds. The circus-people were cool, fearless, working with all the intelligence any people could have shown in such a crisis.

Then suddenly a young bull elephant named Kali went mad.

Kali screamed. The stampede began. Kali took the big lion-cage as a fence barring his way to safety and started in to wreck it. . . .

But Kwa, indifferently playing bridge in a neighboring house, had heard that scream. He dropped his cards. He was through the window.

It was one of those large houses of Palm Beach surrounded by a great garden that all the arts of man have converted into something like a jungle. Anyway, jungle scents and jungle sights, then more jungle sounds, were transforming Kwa as he ran.

He lost his shoes and coat, lost most of his shirt and practically all of his civilization as he ran. He took the wall at a bound. He was into the flaming tent just as Kali was ramming the iron grille of the "den" where the lions were now getting out of hand.

Kwa screamed.

He'd been screaming the big-cat and elephant calls ever since he'd started through the garden, back there.

Beulah, the leader of the herd, had heard Kwa's call. It was something that had reached her even through the growing chaos of fire and panic and the desperate knowledge that her leadership was gone. She met Kwa at the canvas and had immediately caught him up in a coil of her trunk. In an instant he was on her head and the animals, all of them, knew that a leader had appeared among them—Kwa of the Cave People!—Kwa the Truce-Maker.

HHEY, you jungle-people," Kwa was shouting. "Hey, you Children of the Moon!"

Old Beulah, fortified, butted Kali, the mad young bull. And Kali, still screaming, turned and reached for

the strange cornac who rode Beulah's head. Then Kali also heard the elephant-call—something that had ruled elephants the world over since time began, and Kali wilted and began to tremble.

The elephant herd rounded up and subdued, Kwa next squeezed into the broken lion cage and talked to the beasts. It was as if a breath of Africa had reached them, a breath of the infinite nights when the earth goes up to the sky and the sky comes down to the earth and the two are dissolved together; it was a breath of that last Great Truce of the Valley of the Mu.

So, there was no great disaster, after all. No damage, except to the big top—and that covered by insurance.

KWA had spent the night among the animal-men of the circus and their charges. There was a pity in his heart. There was a yearning. But he kept these things to himself. He knew only too well that all of these men and beasts were feeling a good deal as he felt—they were, at least, such times as they dreamed.

Dreaming of a great We-Country somewhere—living in cages—homesick for home!

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The Terror Comes to Chatigny

*The Shadow of the Guillotine Hung Over the
Chevalier and His Kin*

By DANIEL BUNDY

THEY were setting up the guillotine in the great courtyard of the Chateau Chatigny. The mob had arrived late in the afternoon, headed by Citizen-Representative Montral—a huge ruffian who boasted of the women who had fallen beneath his axe. The Terrorists had marched from Lamoignon visiting each chateau on

their way; and they had come at last to Chatigny. Here was more corn, ripe for the Red Reaper.

Here lived the Chevalier de Chatigny—that terrible old blind noble who, in his day, had made his name feared by all within a hundred miles of his demesne. Lately he had lost his sight, and now, while the guillotine was being erected, while the

mob of Revolutionists yelled and sang and rioted in the garden, and wrecked the chateau, the Chevalier sat in his great salon, stern and silent. Near him stood his wife, a sweet-faced lady, who was loved by her own people as deeply as her lord was feared; and his ward, Mademoiselle Manon de Beauvais, pale and beautiful and fearless.

Here and there, upon couches and chairs, sat or lay or sprawled the leaders of the mob, Montral among them, gloating over their victims and making vile jests amid a roar of jeers and brutal laughter.

Neither the Chevalier, nor his wife, nor Manon de Beauvais had prayed for mercy. They were facing the storm and awaiting with haughty indifference the fatal moment when they would mount the steps of the scaffold.

HAD the mob arrived an hour before, the ladies would have been in torment, for the Chevalier's grandchildren, Jacques and Fleur-ette, would have shared their fate; but Heaven had willed that the children should escape. They had happened to go into the woods with Adrienne, their nurse, and before the Terrorists took possession of the chateau, Madame de Chatigny had managed to send the old house-steward, Pierre, after them.

Pierre had crept away safely. He would hide them. He would care for them. Fatherless and motherless, the children had lived for two years under the care of madame and of Manon. There should have been another at the Chateau Chatigny—the Chevalier's son; but ten years ago he had quarreled with his father, had been cast out, disinherited. He had never returned to the old home.

He was now as if dead, save that

his image was enshrined in the heart of his mother and in the heart of Manon, who had loved him, mere child though she was.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

THE noise of the hammers sounded like a death-knell as the mob prepared the guillotine. The crimson glow of the sun, setting in royal splendor, illumined the woods, the garden, the terrace, and the beautiful façade of the old chateau. Manon, even at this hour of peril, remembered that it was on such an evening as this that Francois de Chatigny had bidden her farewell. She had gone with him upon the terrace, below which his horse had waited, and he had kissed her and told her to forget him. And then she had watched him ride away in the red afterglow. She had waited until the sounds of hoofs had grown fainter and fainter, until they ceased; and that night she had cried herself to sleep.

A man in a reddened smock suddenly climbed from the garden to the terrace, and entered the salon by one of the great open windows.

"The guillotine is ready, Citizen-Representative!" he cried. "Which is to be the first to go?"

He glared first at the Chevalier, then at madame. Montral rose from his seat and swaggered toward them, his huge head sunk forward, his cruel eyes aflame with the lust for blood. He was arrayed in a suit of soiled white satin, which he had doubtless stolen from the wardrobe of some murdered aristocrat; on his breast and in his hat appeared the tricolor cockade.

Drawing his saber, he pointed it at the Chevalier.

"Take him first," he growled. "Bring the women to this window that they may watch him die."

The Chevalier arose and thrust forth his hand. A grim smile played upon his face.

"Where is the executioner?" he said. "I am blind, you see, so I must ask him to lead me to the scaffold. Stay! Ere I go, will you permit me to say farewell to my wife and to mademoiselle? I would speak to them alone. You will not refuse that small boon?"

Montral, by a gesture, commanded his comrades to withdraw to the other end of the salon.

"Now make your farewells, aristocrat, and be brief," he cried.

The old Chevalier, groping about, took first his wife's hand, and then Manon's.

"I only wish to say one thing," he said. "Now that I am about to die, I want to tell you, Therese, and you, Manon, that I forgive Francois, my son."

Madame was silent, but Manon broke into a low cry.

"Oh, why did you send him away?" she whispered. "Why did you drive him from the chateau? There was no evil in him! He was only wild and disobedient. He was but a boy. If he were only here now to strengthen us, to die with us—he even might have saved us an hour ago had he been present when these wretches first appeared!"

MADAME threw an arm around her waist.

"Hush! hush!" she murmured.

"Oh, forgive me!" whispered Manon, pressing the Chevalier's hand. "I did not know—I did not think I should have one moment's dread of death! I did not dream that I should weaken! Hark! What is that?"

Her face froze with terror, and madame sank upon her knees. They heard the sounds of children's voices,

and amid a din of fiendish exultation from the Terrorists, Jacques and Fleurette ran into the salon, followed by a portion of the mob.

"We have seized the whole brood. We will make an end of all to-night!" yelled a woman—a dreadful figure, with tangled hair and wolfish eyes. She brandished a sword, and the children, shrinking from her in terror, ran to Manon and crouched there mute and trembling.

"Come!" roared Citizen-Representative Montral. "Let us begin the work. Seize the old man! Citizen Farouche, you must play the executioner again, though you made a bad job of it last time. I had hoped the man from Paris, Sanson's own pupil, would have joined us ere now, as Robespierre promised me he should."

"I am here!"

A tall figure stood at the door, towering above the rabble.

"I am here!" he cried again. "I am the executioner from Paris!"

CITIZEN - REPRESENTATIVE **M**ONTRAL was enraptured. The mob broke into frenzied yells of exultation.

"Now we shall see the guillotine worked as it is worked in Paris!" cried one.

They pressed around the newcomer as he advanced into the salon—a gigantic form in the waning light. He was magnificent of presence. Samson himself could not have commanded more admiration; and Montral informed him that he had come at the very moment when he was most needed.

"For look!" cried he. "Here is the old wolf and his pack! There is time, ere the light goes, to guillotine them all."

The executioner from Paris waved him aside.

"Patience! Patience, Citizen-Rep-

representative!" he answered. "You forget that I have ridden far. You forget that I have been traveling day and night that I might overtake you. After all, this is but a small matter, which can wait.

"The light is going fast, and I am weary and hungry. Let the prisoners, therefore, be guarded, and I will deal with them at dawn on the morrow, ere you recommence your march."

EVERY face was crestfallen, and presently some murmurs sounded—murmurs of disappointment and of anger.

The executioner from Paris glared around him like an angry lion.

"Silence!" he roared. "What! Must I, the pupil and friend of the Chief Executioner, be told when I must begin my work? I have not yet inspected the guillotine; I have not yet examined the scaffold. I do my business cleanly, citizens; and I am never in a hurry. So I will sup in this chateau, and sleep in this chateau, and deal with the aristocrats at my own time—in a word, at dawn tomorrow."

"But, citizen—" began Montral.

Once more the executioner waved him aside and took a paper from his pocket.

"Here is my warrant!" he cried. "Here it is! Signed by Robespierre, and none other, and it gives me power to do my work in my own way, without interference from anyone."

"But listen!" bellowed Montral. "We must be at Choin tonight. It was my plan to guillotine these aristocrats, burn the chateau, and then march at once."

"Then march!" cried the executioner. "What do I care, so long as you leave me three or four patriots to help me guard the prisoners and

to assist me on the scaffold tomorrow? Loot the chateau, if you please, when I have supped, and then march on.

"I will join you tomorrow at Choin at noon. Are these aristocrats? What! A blind man! I have never yet dealt with a blind man; 'twill be a new experience! And this woman—his wife? Ah! And the other—this tall, pale girl, who gazes so boldly upon me? The old man's ward, you say? And the children—the old fellow's grandchildren, eh?"

"Now, Citizen-Representative Montral, let us find a chamber where we can confine our captives. We had better, I think, place them together. They will require less guard. You will leave me four, I suppose?"

"Certainly—certainly!" said Montral, sourly. "You are sure you will not change your mind and do the work now, and then accompany us to Choin?"

"Nay; I will not go to Choin until tomorrow!" shouted the executioner, in a tone so fierce that even Montral shrank from him.

"Then I, too, will remain here and keep you company," he said. "Citizen Darcourt can lead the patriots to Choin, and tomorrow you and I, with our four assistants, will rejoin them. It will, I think, be fitting that I should be present at the execution, seeing that this chateau was on Robespierre's list."

THE executioner from Paris growled assent, and before darkness fell, the whole mob, with the exception of Montral and his four comrades, had marched away, many of them furious with rage at the postponement of the execution.

But they were cheered by the knowledge that at Choin there would be a great welcome for them—good food and good lodgings, and the

prisons full of aristocrats, also awaiting the arrival of the executioner from Paris.

The chateau was very silent after the mob had left. Candles were lit, and when the Chevalier and the rest had been taken to a chamber in one of the round towers of the chateau, and the four guards placed over them, Montral and the executioner proceeded to the kitchens and foraged for food and wine.

They found both, and ate heartily. Afterwards the guards, two at a time, were allowed to finish the remains of the feast. Later, in the salon, the executioner and Montral sat at ease, with a bottle of wine between them, until at last the Citizen-Representative fell asleep.

The executioner waited for a little while, watching his companion. Then he stealthily arose and made his way toward the stair leading to the room where the aristocrats were imprisoned. He had freed his feet from riding-boots, so that he stole noiseless as a panther up the stairs, halting now and then to listen.

"Go down and fetch the Citizen-Representative, one of you," said he to the guards. "We will discuss this matter. In the meantime, these people need not be bound. Lend me your sword, and I will cut the cords which bind the prisoners' wrists."

WITH a surly murmur, one of the men handed the executioner a heavy saber. He ran his thumb along the edge.

"Sharp as a razor," he reflected. "A good blade this, citizens."

The guard nodded, and smiled, and the next moment the executioner was alone with the aristocrats.

A single candle was burning in the room. The old Chevalier sat on a stool in a corner, his back against the wall. Madame and Manon stood

near him, and to their skirts clung the trembling children.

The executioner from Paris closed the door, and for an instant silence reigned in that little room. All eyes were upon him, all were waiting, and standing, they believed, at the portals of death. Suddenly Manon sprang forward with a cry and caught his hand, falling, at the same time, on her knees before him. Her eyes were closed, her face was deathly white, but her lips were moving. Bending his head, the executioner heard her murmur:

"*Mon Dieu!* It is Francois!"

THE executioner stooped, lifted her to her feet, then crushed her to him.

"Little Manon!" he whispered. "Ah, but I have waited, I have prayed for this—this love of yours, which has atoned for all. I have come home at last—home to the old chateau—home to you, and in this hour of peril I have found my heaven!"

Weeping, she clung to him.

"Oh, strong arms! Blessed strong arms!" she murmured. "They will shield us all. Only tonight, in the first hour of danger, I was weak, Francois, and a coward, because I realized that we were helpless, alone, with none to pity us, none to aid us.

"And then—and then—those wretches caught the children, and for their sakes I was strong again. I had promised your sister, now in heaven, that I would guard them and protect them all my life. For Antoinette is dead, Francois. She and her husband both died upon the scaffold!"

Suddenly she tore herself away from him with a scream of agony and terror.

"*Mon Dieu!* It is a lie—a lie! You are not Francois! You are not

Francois, my lover! You are the executioner from Paris!"

She would have fallen had he not caught her once more in his arms.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Be still, sweetheart! I am the executioner from Paris only to those ruffians who wait in the next chamber. I am here to save you! I came disguised. Listen! The real executioner lies dead. I came up with him ten miles from the chateau. He confided his name to me—his dreadful trade.

HE boasted of the heads which were soon to fall. He named the Chevalier, my father, and told me that the rabble was on its way to Chatigny—that he hoped to be here by the time the guillotine was ready. I killed that executioner from Paris. I took from him all that I needed to complete my disguise, and in his pocket I found the warrant, signed by Robespierre, which has been my passport tonight and my weapon. Now go and tell my mother!" he whispered. "Quick! I cannot bear to see her crouching there beside the children, gazing at me!"

Manon turned toward madame.

"It is Francois!" she whispered. "Francois has come! Do not be afraid! He has come to save us all!"

Francois de Chatigny threw his arms wide.

"Mother," he said softly, "I have come back to you!"

Even then, for a moment, madame could not understand—could not believe. She stood staring at her son like one dazed. Not until he stepped forward, not until she felt herself swept into his strong arms, did she comprehend and lay weeping on his breast.

"Francois! Is Francois here?"

It was the old Chevalier. He had

risen from the stool, and was groping his way across the small, ill-lighted chamber.

"Aye, father, I am here."

NOTHING else was said. They silently embraced and swiftly Francois turned to Manon.

"I must leave you for an instant," he whispered. "There are five men in the adjoining room with whom I have to deal. Wait here until I call."

Before she could answer he was gone, and the door had closed.

In a dreadful agony of suspense the captives awaited his return. In the center of the room towered the old blind noble, clasping his wife's hand and Manon's, as he stood between them; while the children, awed and silent, clung to madame's gown.

Voices sounded, angry murmurs and growls—then a cry from Montral. Somehow Manon divined that Francois had gone into the adjoining chamber and locked the door. She had seen him pull the naked saber from his sash as he went out into the passage; and now, frozen with terror, she stood listening to the dreadful noises. What was happening? God in heaven! She tried to shriek—tried to call his name, but her lips were sealed.

Madame dropped upon her knees and prayed, the children whimpered, the Chevalier stood like a figure cut in stone, but Manon could bear it no longer. She ran to the door, threw it open, and rushed out into the passage.

Wildly she beat with her hands upon the locked door behind which Francois was fighting for his life. Dreadful sounds came from the room: the clash of steel on steel, wild cries of agony; then silence reigned. As the door opened a tall

man, wiping a saber, strode out into the passage, on the floor of which lay the body of Montral.

Manon had crouched by the wall, but as the light from the captives' room shone upon his face she saw that he was Francois.

THERE was no other way," he said gently.

"Come—let us go! I shall take you to that land across the ocean—to that America where Frenchmen are free and where there will be no more terror.

"There are horses in the stables. I will go out and prepare for our departure. Be ready, all of you, as quickly as you can."

Francois hurried away, and soon the rumble of the coach sounded, and the little group of fugitives, waiting in the portico, saw him bring the four horses to a stop just at the outer gate of the courtyard.

A few hours before the hammers had been clanging, and the rabble had danced and shrieked. Now all was silent, save for the footsteps of the fugitives. Madame led the Chevalier to the coach.

All were within, and Francois was about to mount to his place and take the reins, when a thought struck him. Telling Manon to mind the horses, he ran into the chateau.

To those in the coach minutes seemed hours; but at last he came striding toward them in the moonlight.

THE whip cracked smartly, and with startling suddenness the horses leaped forward, and before long the fugitives had reached the crest of the hill.

For the first time since leaving Chatigny, Francois spoke.

"Take your last look at the old home."

"Ah!" sighed madame. "I would the chateau were no more. I cannot bear that others—others than the de Chatignys—shall ever live there, shall ever walk upon the terrace, and in the gardens amid the flowers."

Manon, gazing at Francois, saw him smile.

"Look!" he said, and pointed with his whip toward the chateau.

But there was no chateau to be seen—only a great flame rising up and up toward the sky.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of Thrilling Adventures, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1932.

State of New York }
County of New York } 85.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and Country aforesaid, personally appeared N. L. Pines, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the managing editor of THRILLING ADVENTURES and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication, for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are:

Publisher, Metropolitan Magazines, Inc., 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Editor, J. S. Williams, 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor, N. L. Pines; Business Manager, none.

2. That the owner is: Metropolitan Magazines, Inc., 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; N. L. Pines,

570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; M. A. Goldsmith, 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none.

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N. L. PINES.

Sworn by and subscribed before me this 24th day of March, 1932. Harry Kavesch, Commissioner of Deeds. Commission expires March 24, 1933.

DESERTER



*A Mutinous Private in a South American Marine
Detachment Clashes With a
Dangerous Outlaw*

A Complete Novelette

By LIEUT. JOHN HOPPER

Author of "Dangerous Heritage," "Voodoo Magic," etc.

CHAPTER I

A Desperate Man

THE headquarters of the Marine detachment was a small hut made of rough boards and covered with a thatch of dried grass. Its interior was dim and shadowy, for the only light came through a square hole cut in one

wall. The floor was of mud, packed by many feet to the consistency of hardened clay.

Sergeant Stone, in command, sat at a rickety, scarred table, which served him for a desk. He was gray, short, and stout. His stoutness, however, was not that of the belly, for he was massive throughout, and as hard as tough beef.

His thick neck and big face, beneath a grizzled, silver beard of several days' growth, were criss-crossed with fine wrinkles, the heritage of twenty-two years' service with the U. S. Marine Corps.

BEFORE the desk stood a private, a tall, slender, young man. A disordered shock of brown hair fell over his pale forehead, beneath which his blue eyes stared at the sergeant.

"Quinlan," began Stone sternly, "Corporal Hines tells me that you refused to go with the scouting patrol this afternoon. Maybe you don't know it, but that was mutiny. Understand? What have you got to say for yourself?"

Private Quinlan licked his dry lips, while his hands twitched nervously at his trouser legs.

Quinlan's squad leader, Corporal Hines, lean, tanned, with ten years' service, stood with his hands on his hips and frowned at the rebellious member of his squad. In a corner of the hut, the detachment clerk, a youngster by the name of Kelly, stopped rustling papers in the field desk and prepared interestedly to listen.

"Well?" prompted Sergeant Stone grimly.

Private Quinlan's dry throat swallowed hard.

"I—I can't! I can't stand this life any more! I want to go back to the States!"

The corners of Sergeant Stone's mouth curled.

"You're in the marines now, Quinlan. That sort of stuff doesn't go. You should have thought about what you were getting into before you joined up."

Quinlan's mouth quivered. Words came from it slowly.

"But I didn't know it was going

to be anything—like this. I didn't think—"

Then hysteria swelled within him and his words fairly spouted out as his voice rose higher and wilder.

"I can't stand it, I tell you! This blistering sun is cooking me alive! The bugs—ants, flies, mosquitoes—crawl all over me, night and day! They drive me mad! Biting me, sucking my blood, swimming in the bean juice in my mess kit! The meat's so rotten, I can't put it in my mouth without holding my nose!"

Corporal Hines looked disturbed. The detachment clerk's mouth gaped.

"Careful, Quinlan!" warned Sergeant Stone, his gray eyes snapping angrily. "You'd better shut up and get the blazes out of here and do as you're told! No leatherneck in my outfit is going to refuse to obey orders. Get that? I have enough trouble trying to run down that blasted bandit, Mendoza."

QUINLAN raised clenched fists above his head in the agony of a tortured body and a tormented mind.

"You know it's all true!" he cried. "You and the rest are suffering as much as I. You must be! And what's it all for?"

"I'll tell you!" he went on fiercely. "So the United States can dominate Central America! So a few, bloated, money lenders in Wall Street can drain the very lives and living out of a handful of half-starved, ignorant, brown natives and niggers!"

"That's what we're frying and suffering for! That's what we're *dying* for! I'm sick of it! Sick, sick to death of it, I tell you! I want to live like a white man. I want to be cool and happy, and eat decent food, instead of filling a dirty shirt with sweat, and scooping ants out of my coffee!"

Sergeant Stone's lips tightened.

DISREGARDING the danger signal, Quinlan plunged on, "Why should I take the chance of getting a soft-nosed bullet in my chest from some rifle hidden in the jungle, and rot in the swamps with snakes and alligators?"

"I haven't anything against these Nicaraguans. I don't want to kill them, and I don't want them to kill me. Why can't we leave them alone? What business have we got down here?"

Without pausing for breath, he answered his own stabbing questions.

"So Washington can be the big boss of Central America! So Wall Street can make more money!

"Curse Washington! Curse Wall Street! Curse the marines, the country, the flag, and all the rest of that rot! I'm—"

Sergeant Stone leaped up from behind the desk, his gray eyes ablaze. His big, hairy fist drove upward in a short, powerful jab. It smashed against Quinlan's jaw, snapping his head back, and crowded the words tumbling on his lips down his throat.

Quinlan flung his arms wide and crashed back against the wall of the hut. Then he slumped to the floor.

Stone glanced up from his bruised knuckles at Corporal Hines. The detachment clerk stared wide-eyed at the unconscious man on the floor.

"It's against the regulations," said the sergeant slowly, "but I can't stand that sort of guff. I'm sorry it had to come from a marine."

HINES eyed Quinlan's white face and his lips curled superciliously.

"He rated it, Sarge. He was a nice lad when he joined the outfit, but I guess the tropics have got him."

"No, I don't think so." Sergeant Stone shook his old, silver head wise in the ways of a tough service. "I don't think the tropics are entirely at fault. This is one helluva lonely

post, right enough, set down in the most God-forsaken jungle in Nicaragua. But I think a lot of it is inside of Quinlan.

"He should never have joined the Marine Corps. I've got him figured out to be one of these here sensitive sort of men. Life is tough on them, and they're tough on life, sometimes."

"You never can tell," replied the corporal, shrugging his shoulders. "The Marines is getting to be a regular Foreign Legion. You don't know who you're serving with. I got two college boys, an ex-lawyer, a ditch digger, and a Greek waiter in my squad—besides that hunk of yellow cheese on the floor."

The sergeant shook his head again.

"I don't believe he's yellow, Hines. But watch him. His kind is liable to do almost anything when they get started."

THAT night, the moon rose late, slipping out of the jungle like a new gold coin sliding out of a strip of black velvet. It bathed the village in the clearing with a greenish, blue-white glow.

Only one hut showed light. There two reliefs of the guard slept fitfully, while awaiting their turns to take post. A sleepy corporal of the guard sat on a soap box inside this hut, and slapped singing mosquitoes as he tried to keep awake by watching the progress of a centipede on the wall opposite him.

Aside from the guard hut, moon-glow and shadows possessed the rest of the village. The huts of the natives, and those built and occupied by the detachment, all were dark and silent.

Private Ralph Quinlan lay on his back staring into blackness. He listened carefully, but could distinguish no sounds other than the snoring and deep breathing of his squad.

He slipped cautiously out of his blanket and groped for his rifle and pack. Then he silently made his way between the forms of his slumbering comrades. Near the opening in the wall which served for the door, he nearly ran his toe against Corporal Hines, who moaned and stirred in his sleep.

Quinlan froze motionless. His heart thumped in his chest. Once, a wave of madness surged through his brain. He would not be frustrated now. He would rather bash out Hines' brains with the butt of his gun.

HOWEVER, Hines did not stir again, so finally Quinlan passed over his body and through the door. Outside, the dry season wind blew cool on his face.

He took a deep breath. He was free—free!

Now to slip through the shadows of the village and into the jungle trail. Once this cursed marine outpost was behind him, he would make his way to the sea coast there to take passage on a ship for the United States.

Deserting? The mental question intruded in spite of him. No, he answered back mentally, he was not deserting. A man's first duty was to himself. He had a right to save his own life.

The heat, the monotony, the poor food, and the insects of this lonely, jungle outpost had been killing him as surely as some, slow, deadly poison. Had it been for a worthwhile reason, he would not have cared. But it had all been for power and gold. Someone else's power and gold.

Well, he was through with it. As he stole past the huts of the native section of the village, his heart was lighter than it had been for weeks.

The path came to a level field,

white under the moon. Beyond the field lay the black jungle.

Before starting across, Quinlan paused to look carefully around him. He knew that in the night, there were sentries. But nothing moved. He heard nothing.

Satisfied, he left the shadows of the village.

"Halt!"

Sharp and clear, out of the night, rang the challenge.

Bending low, his heart beating violently in his chest, Quinlan dived into a run.

The sentry's voice came again, loud and peremptory.

"Halt! Halt, damn you, or I fire!"

The report of a gun thudded against Quinlan's eardrums. At the same time he experienced a sensation as if someone had shoved hard against his shoulder. He realized that he had been hit.

"Damn you!" he screamed, plunging at last into the jungle bushes edging the field.

With the thought burning in his brain that he would be pursued, caught, and brought back to the outpost that had become hell-on-earth for him, he floundered on through inky blackness.

His mind, disordered by that fear, and the wound fever that was beginning to set his veins on fire, was no help in keeping his frantic feet to the trail. Consequently he soon found himself battling with tough vines and creepers and wading through knife-like, waist-high grass.

FOR hours, it seemed to him, he kept to his progress, ever dogged by fear behind. Whip-like bushes, unseen in the dark, lashed his face. Thorns tore his hands and clothes. Once, with a mad shriek, he stepped on something soft that squirmed under his foot, and then wriggled away.

At last, almost completely exhausted, he paused in a little jungle clearing, wanly illuminated by the white moon high above. When his pounding heart had quieted sufficiently for him to listen, he heard only the never silent voice of the jungle, sibilant, murmurous, shot with mystery.

He had escaped. He had escaped. His brain pounded that one thought over and over.

NOW, however, bright pin-points of light flashed before his eyes. His head swam like it always did when he had taken a drink too much of the native *chi-chi*.

He touched his hand to his left shoulder and pulled it away quickly. The substance between his thumb and fingers was wet.

Blood, his own blood! He could feel it trickling down his belly, inside his clothing.

Suddenly he felt faint, and in that jungle glade he fell on his knees, casting his rifle and pack from him, heedless of where they fell. The moon glowed serenely on his white, tortured face.

"Oh, God! Don't let me die! You wouldn't let me escape from hell just to die here! Oh, why did I have to be hit? It wasn't fair! It wasn't fair! I only wanted to live!"

The creeper-festooned, jungle aisles, dim with the moonbeams that trickled through the tree-tops, received and hushed his frantic prayer.

But in the depths, somewhere, a prowling night creature heard, and lifted its voice in answer with a prolonged, lugubrious howl.

The sound, mocking, weird, terrifying, pulled Quinlan to his feet in panic.

He hurled himself, crashing and tearing wildly, into the jungle's thick undergrowth.

CHAPTER II

Curtain Rises on Hell

THAT same night, Domingo Mendoza, bandit leader, rode silently along a moon-shadowed, jungle trail. His brain was full of schemes, and so deep were his ponderings that he permitted his horse to have its head.

Behind Mendoza rode a small cavalcade of men, their wide, straw sombreros bobbing and glistening in the moonlight. With them moved the sounds of their progress, the dull thudding of horses' hoofs, the creaking of saddle leather.

All at once those familiar sounds were overcome by a sharp crackling in the bushes on the bank beside the trail. Then a figure hurtled down the slope, stumbled in the gully, and plunged prone across the trail.

Mendoza's horse shied away abruptly from the lump that had almost collided with its forelegs.

"*Dios!*" ejaculated Mendoza, whipping a revolver from his belt. "What the devil is this?"

He dismounted from his horse and kicked the huddled figure over on its back.

"*Carramba! Soldado Americano!*"

At this, the horsemen, about twenty in number, spurred their horses and milled closer for a look at that which had been spewed from the jungle.

As Mendoza unhooked a canteen from behind his saddle, he explained his discoveries to his curious men.

"A marine, *hombres!* Doubtless from the outpost at Bruja. He has been wounded. But what omen brings him here?"

Quinlan revived suddenly and choked on the fiery liquid pouring down his throat from Mendoza's canteen.

"Don't let them catch me!" he cried, grasping the bandit leader's arm. "Don't let them take me back!"

"So-o-o!" remarked the Nicaraguan. "This one sounds like a deserter!"

HE whipped out several, short commands, which brought two men tumbling from their horses. They cut away Quinlan's shirt, and bound his wound. Then, with an easy loop, they roped his hands together and set him upon a horse.

"He shall see something tonight—that one," Mendoza grinned at his men. "Juan, remain with him to see that he is not lost. Perhaps we shall find use for him. *Quien sabe?*"

"Forward!"

To Quinlan, with his brain aflame due to loss of blood, pain, and exhaustion, the events of the rest of the night seemed to take place in a nightmare. There were periods when he fell almost into blissful unconsciousness; then, a rude jolt, sending slivers of pain through his body, would drag him back to buzzing, tortured consciousness. The moon seemed cloudy, and swam in a dark blue sea above him. The world seemed enclosed by a black wall.

Finally, the jolting motion of the horse beneath him ceased. He opened his eyes with difficulty and saw that he and his guard had halted in the dense shadow of a clump of trees. The rest of the cavalcade had vanished.

Beyond the shadows, in a clearing, Quinlan saw a group of darkened buildings, peaceful in the stillness of the night, fair in the moonlight.

Then, even as he gazed, the quiet was shattered to crashing fragments. Sprurts of flame streaked from behind palm trees and out of the bushes that edged the clearing. A burst of demoniacal yells followed the series of jagged concussions.

Lights flared up immediately in the windows and began flitting through the buildings. They were darkened quickly, and soon jets of

red and orange spurted out from the walls in answer to those flickering in the night.

The noise pounded Quinlan's head. The yells, rising higher, wilder, more ferocious, racked his nerves like brute hands punishing a raw wound.

He clenched his eyelids to shut out the hellish din. When he opened them again, he saw that flames were beginning to lick hungrily up the walls of the buildings and dance gleefully over the roofs.

The scene, now well-lighted by the fires eating the buildings, looked too horrible to be real. It seemed to Quinlan, with his feverish brain, that he was deep in the throes of a glaring red nightmare. The night was continuously rent by the rattle of firearms, yells, shrieks, and screams, and the crackling of the flames.

Dark figures rushed from the buildings, which now were too blazing to be tenanted. Then palms and bushes yielded up other figures, in greater number. All came together in the clearing.

Pistols spurted color and cracked savagely. Some of the figures folded up and collapsed upon the ground. Some grappled and fell, clawing and flailing with fists.

Juan, the guard, leaned over to murmur in Quinlan's ear.

"They are your people, *mi amigo*. *Americanos*. *Madre de Dios*, how I hate them! And I must be the one to watch your worthless carcass!"

A WAVE of nausea began at the pit of Quinlan's stomach at the words of his guard. Still it seemed that he could not tear his horror-fascinated eyes from the scene. He was unable to move. He seemed to be only a pair of bulging eyes.

Suddenly he caught sight of an elderly lady fleeing from a burning house. The firelight glistened on her silver hair. She was able to take

only a few steps, when she was met by a fiend in a sombrero. He used his rifle for a bludgeon.

Quinlan shuddered, closed his eyes, and felt sick to the soul. A shrill, thin, despairing shriek cut into his ears and passed through his heart. When he opened his eyes again, the woman was on the ground and her silver hair was turning red.

HER assailant faced about, and Quinlan stared at him. He saw a wolfish, triumphant, lustful grin on a face that was dark and thin. In it, a pair of small, beady, black eyes glittered. Quinlan knew that he could never shut that distorted face out of his memory.

Now the wave of nausea in Quinlan's stomach surged upward, gradually engulfing him. He sagged forward against the neck of his horse. The contemptuous laugh of the guard, Juan, grew fainter in his ears.

Quinlan gradually became aware of voices. He opened his eyes and saw that it was daylight. He was lying on a dirt floor, with his head resting on a bundle of rags. Above him was a roof of dried grass and banana leaves.

His gaze wandered, and he discovered that he was in a large hut constructed of logs. A window, sliced by rusty iron bars, let in a white block of sunshine.

Then, his eyes fell upon the four persons at the far end of the hut. They were seated in line, with their backs against the wall. He pulled himself to a sitting position to meet their curious gaze.

One was a woman. She was young, and probably would have been unusually beautiful had her face not been so drawn and pale, her large, dark eyes not so red-rimmed and swollen from weeping. Thick, curly, black hair cascaded to her shoulders.

The other three were men. Next

to the woman sat a blond giant. His blue cotton shirt and khaki trousers were faded and ripped. A dirty, blood-soaked handkerchief bound his left shoulder.

Beside him was a short, stocky, elderly man, whose grim features were covered with a thick, silver-gray beard. The last in the row was a stripling, a youth evidently still in his 'teens. Both his eyes were discolored, due probably to the tremendous bump over the bridge of his nose.

Seeing Quinlan's eyes upon him, the grim, elderly one suddenly jumped to his feet. With an oath, he rushed at the marine.

"Blast you—and all your kind!"

Quinlan crouched away from a foot raised to kick.

"Don't, Mr. Wilkins!" interrupted a voice calmly. "That won't help matters any."

The giant in the blue shirt gently drew away the man named Wilkins.

"Come on, Eddie," he called to the young man with the black eyes. "Talk to your father."

While the son drew the father back to the wall again, the big fellow dropped down beside Quinlan.

"I think," he said, shaking his head soberly, "the old man's going crazy. He jumped on you because you are a marine. There weren't any marines around last night," he added grimly.

"Where are we?" asked Quinlan.

MY name's Gardner," was the answer. "The others are my wife, Mr. Wilkins, my boss, and his son, Eddie. As far as I know," Gardner added grimly, "we're the only survivors of the Wilkins' coffee *finca*. There were four other Americans: Ed Durkee, Jack Shandoff, Bill Hickey, and—Mrs. Wilkins."

Quinlan was silent. Last night's nightmare had been reality!

"We're prisoners of a dirty, little bandit—Mendoza," continued Gardner bitterly. "I guess you marines know as much about him as I do."

"Yes. I know," said Quinlan soberly. "My outfit has been trying to catch up with him for a long time."

"Oh, it's a rotten country!" snapped Gardner viciously. "I don't know why I ever came down here! I guess," he laughed mirthlessly, "a foreman's job looked pretty big to me back in the States."

"But, by heaven," he swore, "if these brown rats touch my wife, I'll—!"

WITH his rage choking him, Gardner rose abruptly to his feet and went to the window. For several minutes he remained there, staring morosely through it. He returned finally to sit beside Quinlan again.

"I wish," he said quietly, "we had more of you fellows down here. We need you. And now I hear that the government is thinking of withdrawing even the few marines we have. I don't know what will become of the Americans down here. Same thing as what happened last night, I suppose," he said in a bitter voice.

"It's all wrong," he continued. "People, safe in the States, say that Americans should stay home if they don't want to get hurt. They believe that we're exploiting the poor, down-trodden native. They think that rats like Mendoza are fighting for their country. Bah!"

Quinlan stared at the strong, clean-cut features of the foreman. The bitter lines in it awed him.

"If an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a German, anyone," said Gardner, "goes to the United States and invests money to set himself up in business, if he runs that business decently, obeying the laws of the land,

he is entitled to protection. And he gets it.

"But this government down here!" he snorted angrily. "It invites foreigners and foreign capital. It knows that it is the only way the country can get developed. It gives many natives a living—which they would not have otherwise. But when foreigners come here, what happens?"

The foreman cast a pitying glance at his employer.

"Look at Wilkins. He came down here with every cent he had, could beg, and borrow.

"Maybe it wouldn't sound like a lot of money to Wall Street, but it was a lot to Wilkins.

"Besides his money, he put in plenty of honest work. The plantation was just beginning to pay for itself when last night's damnable affair happened. Wilkins is ruined. All he had went up in smoke. Worst of all, he lost his wife."

THE picture of a white-haired lady fleeing through the flame and shadows rose before Quinlan's eyes.

"That," the foreman was saying, "is about as tough a blow as can happen to any man.

"The trouble lies in the fact that the Nicaraguan government is not strong enough to put down these bandits. Any Pedro, or Carlos, or Juan, can buy or steal a few rifles, shout 'Down with the Americans!' and thereafter proceed to rob, pillage, and murder to his black heart's content. Some people may call it patriotism, Mister Marine, but I call it by its right names.

"A robber and a murderer is an outlaw the world over. If Nicaragua is unable to protect the lives and property of innocent people from such outlaws, then some government that can, should."

Quinlan continued to be thoughtful.

"How did you land in this mess?" asked Gardner. Now that he had relieved himself of his pent-up bitter feelings concerning the state of affairs in Nicaragua, the foreman looked at the marine curiously.

However, before Quinlan could answer, the door of the hut opened to admit a file of ragged, dirty stunted soldiers, with rifles in their hands and cartridge belts crossed over their thin chests.

"What now?" breathed Gardner, glancing quickly at his wife. "Is this a firing squad?"

Quinlan swallowed thickly.

CHAPTER III

The Dark Face of Death

DOMINGO MENDOZA sat in a hut that was as well equipped as an office. His oak desk was flat-topped, and occupied the center of the room. In the corner farthest from the door was a typewriter desk, at which was seated a young native, who smoked a brown cigarette and indifferently toyed with the keys of a typewriter. Around the walls of the room were filing cabinets.

Mendoza was a short, heavy-set man. His skin was pimply, and of the color of coffee with cream. A full, black mustache curved away from his upper lip. He wore a rumpled uniform of khaki, with up-standing collar and English pockets.

When his prisoners had been conducted to him, he stared gloatingly at them.

"Your lives," he said, addressing the senior Wilkins, "are worth less than notheeng to me. You on'ner-stan'?" He beamed oilily. "But to you, they are worth sometheeng—eh?"

"You—!" choked Wilkins, his eyes blazing in his gray beard.

Mendoza's hand darted swiftly to the holster hanging at his side.

"Please to be full of thee care, Señor Wilkins! Have I not said that your lives are worth notheeng to me?"

"For the four of you, ten t'ousan' dollair—gold. Eet ees not much, eh? No, no! Eet ees cheap. But I need the monee, so—"

His bluish lips parted to show strong, glistening, white teeth.

"You dirty skunk!" snarled Gardner, the foreman. "We're live coals in your hand, Mendoza, and you know it. Better drop us before the marines—"

"Bah!" sneered the bandit, getting excitedly to his feet. His black eyes flashed angrily. "Your mareens—bah! Domingo Mendoza weel deal weeth them.

"You have one week to have the monee brought here," he snapped. "Otherwise—" he shrugged his thick shoulders.

"We can't raise the money, Mendoza," said Gardner. "You cleaned us out last night. There's no place—"

MENDOZA held up a fat hand. His eyes, deep set in fat folds of brown flesh, flashed from one prisoner to the other, but lingered longest on the woman.

"Eet weel be a peetee," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"My secretaree," he continued, glancing toward the native at the typewriter, "weel write any letters you may weesh to send. I advise you," he concluded grimly, "to make arrangements queekly to have thee monee delivered."

The soldiers who had been standing silently against the walls came forward at his signal to take charge of the prisoners again.

Mendoza's glance went back to the foreman's wife. Suddenly the bandit

said, "The woman, she weel go in thee small cabin—alone."

Gardner whirled around, his fists clenched.

"Mendoza," he choked. "If you dare—!"

"No," grinned Mendoza, leaning forward insolently. "There ees notheng to fear, *Señor* Gardner—for a week. You have my promise."

Mendoza's secretary turned toward his typewriter to hide a sly grin.

"Take them out!" ordered Mendoza. "But leave thee marine with me."

MENDOZA leaned back in his chair and surveyed Quinlan through slitted eyes.

"You are a deserter? No?"

Quinlan met the bandit's gaze steadily, but declined to speak.

"Your shoulder?" Mendoza went on solicitously. "How ees eet today?"

"Sore—and stiff."

"Eet ees too bad! The marines care liddle about their men that they shoot them, eh?"

Quinlan compressed his lips and answered nothing.

Mendoza leaned forward over his desk.

"We weel talk beesness," he said confidentially. "You hate the marines, yes? Othairwise you would not have deserted? Ees eet not true?"

Quinlan's head ached. Thoughts whirled around and around in it. What was this dirty, greasy, sly bandit driving at?

"You have served at thee outpost of Bruja," said Mendoza, steadily holding Quinlan in his sharp, bright gaze. "Tomorrow night, I lead my men there. Come weeth us, and show us where thee guards walk, and where thee machine-guns are placed. That ees all, my fren'. Eef you weel do thees for me, I shall see that you escape from thee hated marines, and

from Nicaragua. An' I weel feel your pockets weeth gold besides. Now, 'ow about eet, eh?"

Mendoza sat back in his chair. Beneath his black mustache, his puffy lips curved in a leering smile.

Quinlan stared at him. He was being offered and assured the very things for which he had deserted. Escape. Escape from the marines, and from Nicaragua. And money, gold, with which to enjoy life, to forget that there ever were such things as blistering heat, foul jungles, whining bullets, rotted meat, and crawling insects.

"Well?" Mendoza leaned forward again. "What do you say, my fren'?"

"No!" cried Quinlan suddenly. "No! A thousand times, no! My countrymen—!"

Mendoza sprang to his feet. Ugly anger twisted his features.

"Hah! Your countremen!" he sneered. "Remembraire, you are a deserter! You forget that, eh? You have no more of thee countrymen. Eef they catch you, they weel hang you, or put you een preeson for many, many years. I geeve you escape, reeches, everytheeng!"

Quinlan backed away from the desk. He covered his face with his hands, and then flung out his arms convulsively.

"No! Never!"

FOR a moment, Mendoza looked at him silently, with his lips curled contemptuously. Then the bandit bowed.

"Veree well. But you are thee beeg fool, *Americano*. I 'ave pitee on you. I weel geeve you one night to change your mind. Eef you do not do so, een thee morneeng, I weel shoot you."

The hut in which Quinlan now found himself confined was tiny. In one wall, there was a narrow, barred

window, hardly larger than the width of a man's body. It let in air, and a small rectangle of light.

Quinlan paced the floor nervously. He was face to face with death at last. Day was waning rapidly. The light rectangle that lay on the dirt floor of the hut was growing grayer. Soon it would be black. All would be black. The hours of night would pass, and dawn would bring—death.

Quinlan shuddered at the thought. Death was so hard to face, so inexorable, so complete. It ended everything.

THE thought of it was becoming more than he could stand. He walked to the window and stared through the bars at the short, swiftly fading, tropical twilight. If death had overtaken him suddenly, it would not have been so bad as this. This was torment, worse than death itself.

As he stood by the window, the temptation to yield to Mendoza fought to enter his mind, and finally conquered. After all, he had a right to save his own life. Life was sweet, infinitely precious. To go on breathing, a man was entitled to do anything.

What did he owe Sergeant Stone, Corporal Hines, any of the marines at the outpost, that he should give up his life to save theirs? If they were attacked and overcome by Mendoza's bandits, it was their own fault for joining up and coming down in this God-forsaken, dangerous country.

The still voice of self preservation kept up its insistent, insidious argument with him. The government of the United States had been glad to get him and send him down here.

It would not have cared if he had taken his death in a swamp from an unseen sharpshooter's soft-nosed bullet. The marines had drilled him,

sweated him, had laughed at his sufferings, and had called him yellow.

Quinlan clenched his fists. It would be just revenge on them. He would be alive, happy, and comfortable, while they would be dead, rotting dead.

Yes, yes. He would go to Mendoza now, at once. He had been a fool to have turned down the opportunity offered him that morning. Escape to a new life, riches, clean bed linen, food that didn't stink in your nose when you lifted it to your mouth.

Perhaps it was too late now. Perhaps Mendoza had changed his mind. Full of panic, Quinlan rushed to the door and hammered on it with both fists. It caused his wounded shoulder to burn, but he disregarded the pain.

At last he attracted the attention of the guard outside.

"*Si, señor?*"

"Let me out of here! Let me out of here!" cried Quinlan frantically. "I want to—"

His voice trailed away. He staggered back from the door. What were these pictures that had risen suddenly in his mind? A gray-haired woman fleeing from a fiend's clubbed rifle, blood-soaked, gray hair—smoke and flames of hell, cruel, lustful cries of human devils, rattle of firearms to kill, to *murder*—the outpost of Bruja in black, smoky ruins, American faces turned up to the night sky, men slain, slashed before they had a chance to get out of their beds.

WITH what he saw in his mind, Quinlan heard clearly the bitter voice of the blond foreman of the Wilkin's coffee *finca*, "I don't know what will become of the Americans down here. Same thing as what happened last night, I suppose."

"You want sometheeng, *señor?*" de-

manded the perplexed guard through the door.

Quinlan's answering voice was hoarse.

"No. Nothing. Never—mind."

Quinlan's face was copiously beaded with perspiration as he stumbled through the darkness of the hut to the window. He pressed his face against the bars. Through the warm, tropical night, the sounds of Mendoza's village came to him. Somewhere, a dog barked. Two men passed by, chatting rapidly in Spanish. Their laughter drifted back to Quinlan.

Laughter! In the cool of dawn he would stand against a wall. Rifles would crash. It would be the end.

Quinlan grasped the window bars in agony. Then his heart almost stopped beating.

THE bars were loose in their sockets.

After the shock of this startling discovery had passed, Quinlan backed away from the window. Fearful that he had been observed, that there was a trick in it, he glanced rapidly around the hut. The dimness of the interior did not hide that he was still alone.

With his heart beating rapidly now, he retired to the corner farthest from the window and sat down on the dirt floor with his back against the wall and thought. He knew that he could wrench the bars loose sufficiently to allow him to escape. To make the attempt now, however, in the early evening, was foolhardy. He would strive to control his impatience until the noises of the village had died away.

During the interminable interval of waiting, a guard entered once with his supper. The sombreroed soldier found the marine huddled dejectedly in a corner.

"Ah-ha," gibed the Nicaraguan, placing a tin plate of beans, a hunk of bread, and a cup of water on the

ground beside Quinlan, "thees ees your las' meal. Eet well, *Americano peeg!*"

Quinlan tried to appear more dejected than ever, and the guard, with a contemptuous laugh, went out, barring the door after him.

LITTLE by little, the village became quiet. At last, after what had seemed hours of waiting, Quinlan heard no sounds other than the occasional restless shiftings of the guard on a bench outside the door of the hut. The stronghold of Domingo Mendoza must be asleep.

Quinlan stole softly to the window and labored patiently with the bars. One by one, he loosened them and pulled them free of the sockets. Finally, holding his breath, he pulled himself through the window, taking desperate care not to make a scraping noise that would alarm the guard on his bench just around the corner of the building. It was difficult, hampered as he was by the wounded shoulder.

Quinlan hit the ground almost silently. He stood motionless for a moment, listening. All was quiet.

He glanced around him to decide which way to go. A full, white moon was high in the heavens. By its light Quinlan saw that he was in the midst of a number of log huts. On all sides save one, these seemed to be in a cup made by sheer, black, vegetation-matted hills.

Quinlan had served long enough in the tropics to know that his best chance of escape lay not in the hills covered with impassable tropical vegetation, but through the gap which appeared at the far end of the village.

That way, he knew also, was the most dangerous. First, he had to pass through nearly the entire village. Chances were many that he might run into someone in passing through the village.

SECOND, as Mendoza must have chosen this particular location for a headquarters for himself and his bandits, the only passable way out of it would be securely guarded.

Quinlan hesitated and then decided. He would try to win through the village and the outer guard. Once through, he would be on a trail. He then could make speed and would have some hope of finding the way to the outpost of Bruja.

His mind was wholly made up now. The marines must be warned of their danger. And help must arrive before a week to succor the survivors of the Wilkins' coffee *finca*.

Accordingly, Quinlan began his cautious stealing from shadow to shadow. He kept mainly to the road running squarely through the village, utilizing the shadows of the darkened huts he passed.

He could see beyond the edge of the village now. There was a clearing which he must cross. It was wanly illuminated by moonlight. He lifted his eyes to beyond the clearing. There he saw a barricade of logs rising blackly.

His heart dropped. The barricade, surely well guarded by sentinels, would be almost impossible to pass.

Even as he stared at it, he heard a foot kick against dirt in the road and saw a dark figure approaching him out of the night. For a moment terror held him rooted to the spot.

Then his sense of danger breaking through terror's bonds of paralysis not any too soon, he darted between two huts and found himself in the shadow of a third behind them. In this third hut was light. Quinlan, trembling, found himself crouching beneath a window of this hut.

HE heard voices coming through the window and listened.

"You are certain, Manuel," said one which Quinlan recognized as belong-

ing to Domingo Mendoza himself, "that the marine has escaped?"

Quinlan's blood ran cold. He strained his ears to catch the reply of the unknown person.

"Positive, *mi général!*" replied a voice. "As positive as I am chief of the guard. The bars, which I loosened myself this morning, have been torn from the window. The bird has flown. And I have given orders to all my guard to turn their backs if they should see him. Nothing has been left to stand in the way of his complete escape."

"Good!" approved Mendoza heartily.

QUINLAN, grateful that he had in the past taken the trouble to learn the native tongue, crouched, stunned at what he had overheard. His escape had not been a matter of chance. Mendoza had engineered it! Why?

He listened again to Mendoza's voice, striving to find a clue to the reason.

"The bird, Manuel," came the bandit's oily voice, "is a homing pigeon. The pigeon may often wish to become an eagle or a hawk, and desert the rest of the pigeons.

"But when trouble comes, it will always fly home to its kind. This marine is a pigeon. A very yellow one. He will return to the other marines to warn them that Mendoza plans to attack them tomorrow night.

"Silly hens! They will not wait for Mendoza's attack. They will attack Mendoza to surprise him. Our marine will show them the way here. And—they will find themselves in the trap."

"Ah, yes, *mi général,*" said Manuel, the chief of guard. "But if the marine should escape by the upper path, the secret one which starts at the ammunition magazine and goes over the hills above the fort? It would be unfortunate if he should

bring back his marines that way. We should be lost."

"Ah, bah!" derided Mendoza's voice. "You are afraid for nothing, *mi Manuel*. There is not one chance in a thousand that the marine will find that path. He will go where he can. He will think the hills impassable and will try to escape through the barricade. And he shall escape!"

Mendoza laughed exultingly.

"We have them, Manuel! We have these cursed marines. Like sheep they will enter the ravine before the fort. Like sheep we shall slaughter them as they dash their lives out against our strong barricade. They will not escape, I tell you. When they are all in the ravine, we shall also cut them off in behind.

"Fifty American marines! They shall not look for Mendoza any more. Oh, no, no! They will find him.

"Manuel, good comrade! Do you not see what this will mean? Mendoza will become a name known throughout Nicaragua. He will be the great leader who wiped out fifty marines. Sandino will turn green with envy. Recruits will flock to me by the hundreds. Who knows where we shall go then, eh *mi Manuel*?"

"Ah!" breathed Manuel. "We shall have Nicaragua in our hands."

"Gold! Power!" shouted Mendoza, evidently drunk with his visions.

His voice stopped abruptly.

QUINLAN placed his ear against the rough logs of the hut to hear more. He heard Mendoza's voice again, lower, strangely vibrant.

"Manuel, you stay here, eh? I feel I have a great need to celebrate. You remember the woman we took last night? Don't grin at me like that, you rogue, Manuel!"

Mendoza's voice became almost crooning in quality.

"She was pretty, eh? And young and white, Manuel. Oh, so white! I

go now to her cabin. She must be lonesome, eh?"

Quinlan heard both men laugh. Then came the voice of Mendoza's chief of guard.

"But you have promised her husband one week, *mi général*!"

"Bah! Must I, Domingo Mendoza, be bound by a promise made to an American? I will settle them and their promises for good and for all. I will give your men some target practice, Manuel. In the morning, shoot them."

"Yes, *mi général*."

CHAPTER IV

Trapper Trapped

QUINLAN crouched lower into the shadow under the window. His mind rapidly mulled over the conversation he had overheard. He was forced to give some admiration to the cleverness of Mendoza.

It had only been chance and a late wayfarer's footstep on the road that had brought Quinlan to the window where he had learned so much.

The deserter was faced with perplexing problems. His own escape was assured by the wily Mendoza himself. But after escape? He could undoubtedly find his way back to the marine outpost of Bruja and tell his story. In doing that, however, might he not play the very tool which Mendoza desired?

Quinlan knew the ways of Sergeant Stone. Even if he faced that old leatherneck, he would still have a try at overcoming it, confident of the ability of his marines to win through.

Quinlan shook his head in the dark. There was one hope, and that one was very slim. If he could find the secret path which began at the ammunition hut, and led over the jungle hills—

At that moment he heard the door of the hut open and close. Quinlan

hugged the wall closely and crept to the corner. Peering cautiously around this, he saw Mendoza's short, burly form in the moonlight.

The bandit leader was evidently taking a moment or two to enjoy the soft, cool night air, the glorious beauty of the tropic night. Quinlan heard him humming to himself.

It was then that the marine deserter remembered that which he had almost forgotten in his self-debate about the Bruja outpost. Mendoza was humming in delightful anticipation of his visit to the hut where the American woman was confined alone.

Then Quinlan thought of the others—the woman's husband, Mr. Wilkins and his son. In the morning they were to be butchered. Mendoza had commanded it. No matter if Quinlan reached the marines, these lives could not be saved.

MENDOZA sauntered cockily away from his headquarters and across the main road of his fort. Creeping silently, Quinlan followed him, taking advantage of every shadow.

Mendoza finally paused before a small darkened hut that had no guard. First glancing around him, the bandit leader then took a bunch of keys from his pocket and fitted one to the padlock. Crouching at the corner of the hut, Quinlan heard the Nicaraguan take a deep, gusty breath. This was followed by the click of the lock and Mendoza stepped inside.

Quinlan bounded to the door and found that it yielded readily to his touch. As he stepped silently into the hut, he heard a woman's gasp of fear. Quinlan remained motionless in the nearest dark corner.

Moonlight, flooding through a single small window, gave enough illumination so that the center of the hut was distinctly light. The edges of the one room, however, were dim.

By straining his vision, Quinlan saw the bandit, like a bloated, misshapen shadow, cross the room on his tip-toes. At the far end, the woman, fully clothed, sat up suddenly on the small cot.

Mendoza stretched out a hand reassuringly.

"Do not have thee fear, my good wooman," he said, in his oily voice. "I 'ave come onlee to help you."

"What do you want?" demanded Florence Gardner, shrinking back to avoid his touch.

Quinlan, waiting, watching, tensing his muscles, heard the terrible fear in her voice.

"Do not treat me thees way, *Senora!*" said Mendoza in an injured tone. "I 'ave come onlee to make your mind rest easy. You are afraid for your loved one, yes? Do not 'ave the fear any longer.

"I 'ave decided that I weel let them go in the morneeng. Also *Senor* Wilkins and his boy. All right, eh?"

Mrs. Gardner's surprised cry sounded pathetically relieved.

"Oh!" she breathed from her heart. "I'm so glad!"

Mendoza drew closer to her.

"For that, you weel be nice to Mendoza, eh?" he whispered.

THE woman jerked away from him. "No!" she cried. "No! No!"

Mendoza's voice suddenly became cruel and hard.

"It would be too bad," he said, "to shoot such a nice husband as yours."

Mrs. Gardner caught him by the shoulders and shook him.

"Oh, no!" she cried in terror. "You couldn't—you wouldn't—!"

Quinlan, in the corner, felt his blood boiling as it had never done before. The filthy, lying beast! He had already given orders that Gardner and the Wilkinsons were to be shot!

Now he was trying to trick a wo-

man to achieve his dirty aims—and break her heart afterwards—and laugh, doubtlessly, as he was laughing at the moment.

"Come, my leetle dove! You do not weesh your husband to face thee firing squad. No, no. You love heem too much."

Mendoza's laughter increased as he drew the desperately struggling woman to him.

"Let me go!" she cried. "Help!"

"Ha!" giped Mendoza, clapping a rough hand over her mouth. "Ees eet help you want, leetle one? There ees no one here but Mendoza. And he—"

Quinlan left the darkness of his corner precipitously and flung himself at Mendoza's back.

"*Carramba!*" swore Mendoza. "What ees thees, you fool!"

He whirled angrily around, evidently expecting to face one of his own men, who had come running at the woman's cry for help. Quinlan had fought desperately to hold him, but the wounded shoulder had proved too great a handicap.

"*Dios!*" cried Mendoza, recognizing the marine. "*You!*"

He groped for the gun at his waist.

Quinlan was thankful that chance had selected his left shoulder to be wounded. Putting all his strength into the punch, he swung his right fist against the bandit's jaw.

MENDOZA staggered back groggily. His eyes seemed spurted black flames as he tore his gun from its holster. Mrs. Gardner, crouching frozen on the bed, watched with frightened gaze. Her hands were pressed against her mouth, which was too paralyzed by fear to emit a scream.

Quinlan knew that he could not favor his bad shoulder now. So, like a furious panther, he hurled himself at the bandit leader before he could raise the gun. A tense,

straining struggle immediately ensued for possession of the weapon. The two men panted in the dark and tore madly at each other's hands.

Quinlan felt that someone was running red hot pokers through his left shoulder, but still he held on relentlessly. More than death depended upon the outcome of the wrestling for Mendoza's pistol.

Suddenly there was a dull crack of a snapping bone. Mendoza groaned deeply and cursed. Quinlan, with a final, mighty heave, flung the bandit from him and stepped pantingly back into the center of the room. In one fist, he held Mendoza's pistol, on whose barrel a moonbeam glinted.

Although his left shoulder seemed to consist wholly of fire, Quinlan spoke grimly.

"Open your mouth to call for help, Mendoza, and I'll plug you!"

Nursing his broken right wrist with his left hand, Mendoza sneered through his grimaces of pain.

"Now what you do, deserter? You theenk you get out of Mendoza's fort, eh? Ha-ha! No one can get out of here, you fool, unless, I, Mendoza, geeve the word. Thee guards, they weel shoot you on sight, like a rat!"

"I think not," said Quinlan quietly. "You have already given the word. You know the guards will let me through."

Mendoza started, forgetting his pain.

"*Carramba!* How you know that?"

The woman on the cot stared at the two men with wide eyes.

"No matter how I know," answered Quinlan dryly. "But as it happens. Mendoza, I am not going to try to take advantage of your nice scheme."

"So?" sneered the bandit. "You weesh to take the wooman weeth you, perhaps? No, no, my smart fr'en'," he said with conviction.

"Thee guards weel never let you through weeth a wooman. Of that, I am very sure."

Quinlan narrowed his eyes.

"Mendoza, I'm not only going to take the woman with me, but I am also going to take the rest of the prisoners, her husband, Mr. Wilkins, and his son. I'm afraid your men are going to miss a little target practice in the morning."

At this, Mendoza surged forward as if to hurl himself at the marine. Quinlan merely brought the muzzle of the pistol in line.

BACK, you skunk!" he ordered. "Get this! You do as I say from now on. The first break you make will be your last. It would give me great pleasure to ventilate that rotten heart or yours.

"Now listen to this. We're going over to the hut where you've got the others. There'll probably be a guard at the door, but that's nothing, understand? You talk to him and give him a good excuse why you're taking out the prisoners. Anything, as long as it gets over okay. You can do it all right. I know that there's nothing dumber than these natives. Understand?"

A sudden gleam lighted up Mendoza's black eyes.

"I un'nerstan'," he replied softly.

"Yeah? I know what you're thinking. You're thinking I don't know the lingo, and you can tell the guard something that'll put us in a hole. Well, don't try it. I happen to know Spanish."

The light faded from Mendoza's eyes and he snarled aloud.

Quinlan laughed shortly.

"You haven't heard the worst yet, Mendoza. After we get the others out of the hut, you're going to show us the way to the secret path over the hills. You know, *the secret one that begins by the ammunition hut.*"

Mendoza spat as if he had swallowed something bitter.

Quinlan motioned with the pistol.

"All right. Get going. And remember, one slip and it's curtains for you. I happen to be a pretty good shot. Most marines are, as you'll find out some day."

CHAPTER V

One Must Die

QUINLAN kept the gun in his pocket, where Mendoza had no trouble in seeing the ominous bulge of it. They walked through the sleeping village, Mendoza slightly in advance of Quinlan and Mrs. Gardner.

Once, a sentinel's sharp, challenging cry rang out through the darkness. Quinlan was quick to step behind the bandit and shove the hard nose of the pistol into his back. With a voice that trembled slightly, Mendoza reassured his sentinel.

They came finally to the large hut where Quinlan had been first confined with the others. Mendoza spoke rapidly to the sleepy, startled guard beside the door. The soldier hesitated, eyeing Quinlan and the woman doubtfully, until Mendoza, catching sight of the glitter of danger in Quinlan's eyes, rebuked the man harshly.

The foreman, Gardner, was awake, haunted doubtlessly by fears for his wife's safety. He came out of the hut first and, seeing her standing before the door, took her into his arms hungrily, not noticing or caring about the onlookers.

Wilkins and his son followed after the foreman and looked around them suspiciously.

At Quinlan's low order, which reached only the ears of Mendoza, the group started off, leaving a wondering guard behind. While traveling through the darkness of the fort,

Quinlan advised the others of the circumstances of their escape.

Gardner's fingers closed tightly around Quinlan's right arm.

"My wife told me," he whispered. "I know thanks is a small word, but you know how I feel. Somehow, I had a hunch that something like this would happen. A cause is never lost as long as there is a marine around."

At Gardner's words, the most peculiar thrill he had ever experienced shot through Quinlan. He straightened subconsciously, and gripped more firmly the butt of the pistol. At that moment, a vagrant moonbeam struck the bronze world and anchor insignia in his campaign hat and showed it in clear light. Gardner noticed it, but said nothing.

The surly Mendoza led them through the fort. They came out behind it and saw before them the walls of the hills frowning blackly. Mendoza stopped at a small hut set apart from all the others of the village.

"Thee ammunection hut," he said briefly, and bitterly, to Quinlan.

Quinlan held out his hand.

"The keys."

Mendoza hesitated and looked as if he were going to remonstrate. Quinlan's frowning eyebrows checked him.

GARDNER took the keys from the bandit and opened the door. The hut was solidly built of logs. It possessed one, tiny window, which barely lessened the obscurity of the hut's interior.

The foreman struck a match and was about to enter when Mendoza sprang forward chattering volubly.

"No, no, no! These ees powder, dynamite, een there. Eet weel blow us all to pieces! Please to 'ave thee care!"

"He's probably right, Gardner," said Quinlan. "Don't light a match,

but go in there. Your eyes will get used to the darkness in a minute. Get some rifles and ammunition. You never can tell what we might happen to meet on the way."

"Bright fellow!" murmured Gardner, stepping inside. "I'd have never thought of that."

Gardner returned quickly. He handed a rifle and a bandoleer of ammunition to each of the men.

"Phew!" he said. "That's a regular arsenal in there! All kinds of rifles and bayonets, a couple of machine-guns already set up for use, and about a ton of dynamite and stuff."

Finally they were ready to start again. Mendoza, with a queer, cold, haughty expression on his face, showed them the barely perceptible, bush-guarded entrance to a narrow path that vanished quickly into the blackness of the brush and trees of the hillside.

"Now," said Gardner, with his eyes agleam with hatred, "what are we going to do with this buzzard here?"

"We'll take him along with us," replied Quinlan. "I know a marine sergeant who would be glad to see him."

"Like hell we do!" snarled Gardner.

The elder Wilkins crowded in, his face in the moonlight contorted with intense hatred.

"No!" he said fiercely. "I kill him now! With my own hands, see, I choke him!"

WILKINS' hands darted forward for a death grip on Mendoza's throat. The bandit leader was forced to crouch back to protect himself.

Quinlan stepped in between the two men and only with difficulty succeeded in pushing Wilkins back.

Gardner, his eyes hot with passion, his voice cold with fury, faced the marine.

"It's no use, leatherneck. We're going to kill him right here and now, before we leave. Then we'll know the skunk is dead. We know what'll happen to him if you take him into the marines."

GARDNER'S voice became caustically sarcastic. "The good, kind government will make him promise not to be a naughty boy again. Sure, he'll promise, to save his dirty, yellow hide! Then they'll turn him loose to burn, and kill, and pillage, and ravish. Nothing doing! Here's one bandit who's going to get what's coming to him."

"Paul!" interposed Gardner's wife anxiously. "Please!"

Gardner whirled on her angrily.

"Don't 'please' me!" he cried. "I know what I'm talking about. When I see a poisonous snake, I kill it. What about Mrs. Wilkins? What about Ed Durkee, Jack Shandoff, and the rest? He murdered them, didn't he? Shot 'em down in cold blood. We're just lucky it wasn't us! What about yourself? Where would you be now, if it hadn't been for a piece of luck? No! You keep out of this, Florence! I'm going to kill Mendoza if it's the last thing I do!"

With that, Gardner turned away from his wife and glared at Quinlan.

Wilkins spoke up, his words dripping hate that was almost madness.

"And if you stand in our way, marine, we'll kill you, too! We've got rifles now. Marines! Ah, how I hate them! If they knew their business, my wife would still be alive."

Mendoza's glance flickered from face to face of the group quarreling around him. Then he looked in the direction of the huddled huts of his fort.

"Well, leatherneck," said Gardner,

his voice edged with steel, "what are you going to do?"

Quinlan looked steadily into the man's burning eyes.

"He's my prisoner. He belongs to the marines. It is my duty to take him back."

"Yeah! Well, *take that then!*"

Gardner's fist flew up suddenly to smash against Quinlan's wounded shoulder. The marine, caught off guard, staggered back against the wall of the ammunition hut.

This was just what Mendoza had been waiting for, hoping for, praying for. He darted away from the group suddenly, yelling at the top of his voice as he went.

Gardner cursed and flung up his rifle. A line of red split the darkness and the sharp crack of the shot sent echoes resounding about the hills. Mendoza pitched forward as if he had been suddenly tripped. He lay still where he had fallen, crumpled in an odd, ominous fashion.

FOR a moment, the silence was deep. Then, from the village came the banging of doors, shouts, and the sound of running feet.

Gardner looked at the marine.

"I'm sorry," he said shakily. "I—I guess I was a bit off my nut for a minute. You don't know how I felt," he explained earnestly. "My wife, and all."

Quinlan was listening to the growing clamor in the fort.

"I understand," he replied, without rancor. "But listen to that! You've got to get out of here! You've got to go—*quick!*"

"I know," said Gardner miserably. "I guess I've spoiled our chances of escape. We could never make it through that trail now. They'd be on us before we'd gone a quarter mile.

"But," he jerked up his head, "we'll fight! We'll make them pay!"

Quinlan's hand was on Gardner's arm.

"No. You go. All of you."

He looked toward the village where darting forms could now be discerned.

"I'll stay here and give you a chance to get away. They'll have to get by me to reach the trail and," he hesitated, smiling grimly, "that may take some time."

"You can't do that!" cried Gardner.

"Man, we all stick together!"

QUINLAN smiled at him, and then glanced toward the woman.

"You can't ask her to stick. You've got to get her out of here. One of us has to stay. I'm the logical one."

"Nonsense!" exploded Gardner. "I'll stay. It was my fault that this happened."

Florence Gardner flung herself around her husband's neck.

"No, Paul!" she cried in fear. "No, no! Not you!"

"You see?" smiled Quinlan. "She needs you. Wilkins needs his son, and the boy needs his father." Quinlan smiled again. "I'm not that lucky," he confessed. "Besides," he added, "it wouldn't be so very pleasant for me to go back. I'm a deserter from the marines."

"What!" cried Wilkins and Gardner together.

"Sure thing," confirmed Quinlan cheerfully. "That's why I'd like to stay. See? I'd sort of feel like a marine again. And, oh, Lord, how I want to!" he finished earnestly. "That's a marine's job, isn't it? Protecting American lives."

Gardner grasped Quinlan's hand. He tried to speak, but found that his voice had somehow become stuck in his throat. He could only nod his head dumbly.

Quinlan slapped the foreman's shoulder.

"Okay," he said. "Now," he continued anxiously, "you'd better get going. They're forming up at the edge of the village. They don't quite know what it's all about yet. But in a minute they'll come charging over here, and I want to have a little surprise fixed up for them. There are some things in the ammunition shed which interest me."

Wilkins stepped up next to clasp Quinlan's hand.

"The marines will hear about this," was all he could say.

Then Gardner herded them into the path. Quinlan was alone.

CHAPTER VI

A Terrible Decision

QUINLAN stood for a moment in the shadow of the ammunition hut staring in the direction which the others had taken. His chest rose and fell once in a sigh. Then he glanced around him to take stock of the situation.

The back of the ammunition hut was practically against the steep slope of the hill. The door of the hut faced a moon-bathed clearing, beyond which were the black blots of the houses of the village.

Quinlan smiled grimly. To reach the path taken by the fleeing Americans, the bandit soldiers would have to cross the clearing.

He glanced up and discovered that a small group was already starting across from the village. Quinlan raised Mendoza's pistol and took deliberate aim. The weapon cracked three times in rapid succession, stabbing the night with spurts of fire.

There was immediate confusion in the group of figures, indistinct in the clearing. Two men staggered and would have fallen had not their comrades grasped them. Shouting curses and firing their weapons, the disordered group retired to the protec-

tion of the village. Only Mendoza's still form tenanted the clearing.

The shots fired by the excited bandits flew wide. Quinlan heard a couple sing like mosquitoes and then bury themselves with dull thuds in the logs of the ammunition hut.

Now the marine acted quickly. He darted into the hut and groped about in the darkness until his hands met one of the machine-guns which Gardner had mentioned. His discovery brought a thrill to him. He actually patted the cold weapon before he set about dragging it to the open door.

His wounded shoulder hampered him somewhat. The gun itself was heavy, and was, in addition, mounted on pieces of solid timber.

Quinlan's eyes gradually grew accustomed to the darkness. The machine-gun finally placed in the doorway in a position commanding the clearing, Quinlan looked about him for ammunition. He found plenty, in small, wooden boxes, already belted for use.

AFTER he had a pile of these boxes placed conveniently near the gun, but protected by the wall of the hut, he strained his eyes toward the village. He could discern moving masses of men and could hear a confused murmur of voices.

He concluded that the time was not far off when the ammunition hut would be attacked in force.

Until that time he decided that he would employ himself in making his position as impregnable as possible. To his delight, he found a pile of empty ammunition boxes and some boards. With these, he hastily improvised a breastwork in front of his machine-gun.

He stepped back to survey his handiwork.

"There!" he smiled grimly to himself. "It's a regular, little fort."

He seated himself behind the gun

and ran the brass tab of an ammunition belt through the magazine. He was pleased with the smooth working of parts and the business-like, metallic clickings of the weapon.

HE began to grow nervous waiting for action. Once he spoke aloud to relieve the tension.

"Wouldn't it be funny if I stood these greasers off entirely! One man battle stuff. Congress would either give me a medal—or a rope necktie."

He laughed aloud, and immediately regretted it. The sound made him shiver.

He turned back to look at the kegs of powder and the boxes of dynamite which filled the rear of the hut to its ceiling. He shivered again.

"It would be good-night," he said, under his breath, "if a stray bullet should hit that stuff!"

He was not given long to think about such a gruesome end. From the edge of the village suddenly came shouts and yells. The bandits were advancing to the attack.

Quinlan saw them coming, bending low, running like dogs, their shadows fleeing in the moonlight before them. He pulled down the nose of the machine-gun in line and let them have it. The weapon crackled deafeningly and belched a wide arc of flame, through which poured a deadly, leaden hail.

The attackers halted abruptly and sent up cries of astonishment, consternation and pain to the serene moon. Many sank to the ground, cut down ruthlessly by the thin line of lead streaking and singing from the doorway of the hut.

The rest raced back in confusion for the darkness and protection of the village. Of those left in the clearing, some were wounded and some were dead. The wounded ones struggled grotesquely to crawl back to the village.

Quinlan watched their spasmodic, desperate efforts with pity, and felt a deep pang of revulsion stab him. This strife and bloodshed was horrible, so futile.

But he closed his lips grimly. He recalled the frightful scene he had witnessed at the Wilkins' coffee plantation.

FOR a long moment after the unsuccessful charge there was silence in the fort save for the moans and groans of the wounded. In the clearing there was now a number of still, huddled forms. General Mendoza was recruiting about him an army of dead.

Quinlan, watching, waiting, listening, heard a hail in English from the edge of the clearing.

"Leesten, *Americanos!* You surrender now and we let you go free and unhurt. You surrender?"

Quinlan laughed exultingly at the anxiety in the voice. They evidently thought that all the escaped prisoners were bottled up in the ammunition hut. The proposal to surrender he did not consider for a moment. He knew how much the bandit word was worth.

"Americans never surrender!" he shouted back. "But if *you* surrender, I promise you nothing worse than hanging."

A chorus of threats and curses answered him, and here and there a rifle flashed.

The bandits settled down to light, but continuous, firing from the cover of the village edge. Evidently Mendoza's men had had enough, for the time being at least, of attempting to win across the clearing in the face of the machine-gun most efficiently handled by the marine.

This style of fighting satisfied Quinlan. If it kept up, he could hope to hold out indefinitely. The moonlight, the shadows, and the dis-

tance across the clearing, made small the chance that he would be hit.

Even while he was congratulating himself that the Gardners and the Wilkins were gaining time to make good their escape along the jungle trail, a bullet from the village smashed into the door jamb of the hut and sent a long splinter of wood flying through the darkness.

Unerringly, as if it had been a directed bullet, the splinter met Quinlan's head. The marine had a sudden, terrible sensation as if a bomb had exploded in his face. He struggled desperately to retain hold upon his consciousness, but felt himself slipping inexorably into blackness.

HOW long he had lain unconscious beside the machine-gun, Quinlan never knew. All he comprehended was that he was awakening from a dull, laborious sleep, in which he had been very ill, and had been tormented by feverish, horrible nightmares.

His head felt heavy and large. It buzzed when he held it still, and it was filled with unbearable pain when he moved it. He placed his hand to the side of his face, and brought it away, thick with a sticky substance. Clotted blood was also in his hair.

Suddenly he sat up straight, fighting off the dizziness that strove to overwhelm him. He grasped dimly why he had awakened. He had been summoned by that strange, sixth sense of danger, which seems never to sleep.

A groan of pain bursting through his lips, he leaned forward to look over the top of the machine-gun at the village. What he saw made him snatch at once at the trigger of the weapon.

The clearing was filled with dark, stealthily creeping shapes. Their straw sombreros gleamed and bobbed in the moonlight. With his heart frozen with desperation, Quinlan saw that the leaders of the mass were

almost to the door of the hut, hardly five yards from the muzzle of the gun itself.

Quinlan gritted his teeth. He did not know how long he had been unconscious, but evidently it had been long enough to give the bandits confidence that something was wrong in the ammunition hut, and encourage them to start across the clearing. Now they were squarely on top of him.

THIS time Quinlan knew he would be unable to fight them off. There were too many of them, and they were too close.

He thought fast. If the bandits were to get into the trail now, they would be sure to catch up with their fleeing prisoners.

Suddenly his mind gave birth to a thought which made him catch his breath. To carry it into execution was horrible, unthinkable. And yet, if it were done, he doubted that any pursuit would be started after the Americans.

Sitting motionless, Quinlan could see that the bandits had collected in a group just before the door. They were deliberating their course of action. The silent hut puzzled them.

Quinlan removed his tense finger from the trigger of the gun. His right hand drew Mendoza's pistol from the pocket of his breeches.

Suddenly the stillness outside was shattered by wild yells and cries. The bandits had made up their minds. Quinlan heard their feet thudding up to the doorway.

Quinlan took a deep breath and pointed the pistol at the kegs of powder and boxes of dynamite which filled the rear of the hut to the ceiling. The foremost bandits were

smashing through the barricade when Quinlan fired.

The world was suddenly split asunder with a mighty roar.

TWO days later Sergeant Stone, at the head of his marine detachment, entered the cup in the hills that once had cradled the fort and hideaway of the bandit, Mendoza.

The sergeant glanced around slowly at the scene of terrible havoc.

"Jehosaphat!" he murmured.

Gardner, the foreman, had guided the expedition. Now his face was very grim.

"We left Quinlan at the ammunition hut," he said.

"Jehosaphat!" said Sergeant Stone. His voice was filled with awe.

They found the ground around the ammunition hut viciously torn and scarred.

It was Corporal Hines who discovered and picked up the blackened and dented world and anchor hat insignia of the Marine Corps. He extended it silently to Sergeant Stone.

The old sergeant stared at it silently for a moment. When he looked up again, his eyes were suspiciously misty.

"Where's that blasted detachment clerk?" he roared savagely.

Detachment Clerk Kelly stepped forward.

"Here, sir!"

"You rub out that entry in our morning report making Private Quinlan, U. S. Marines, a deserter, you hear? Put him down as killed in line of duty. If all you flea-bitten leathernecks were as good a marine as he was, we'd—we'd—"

And here twenty-two years' service with the Corps stuck in the sergeant's throat.

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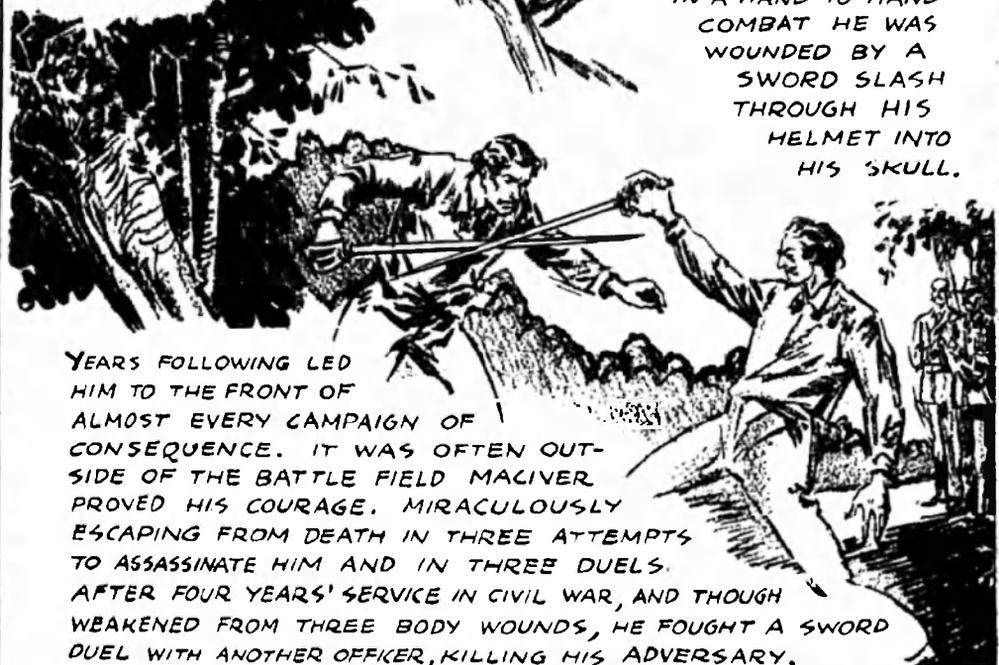


MAJOR GENERAL HENRY DOUGLAS MACIVER

BORN, CHRISTMAS DAY, 1841, AT SEA OFF THE SHORE OF VIRGINIA. ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST DISTINGUISHED SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE WHO PLAYED PART IN EIGHTEEN CAMPAIGNS.



MACIVER AT THE AGE OF 16 WAS AN ENSIGN IN THE EAST INDIA COMPANY FIGHTING IN THE INDIAN MUTINY. THERE, IN A HAND TO HAND COMBAT HE WAS WOUNDED BY A SWORD SLASH THROUGH HIS HELMET INTO HIS SKULL.



YEARS FOLLOWING LED HIM TO THE FRONT OF ALMOST EVERY CAMPAIGN OF CONSEQUENCE. IT WAS OFTEN OUTSIDE OF THE BATTLE FIELD MACIVER PROVED HIS COURAGE. MIRACULOUSLY ESCAPING FROM DEATH IN THREE ATTEMPTS TO ASSASSINATE HIM AND IN THREE DUELS. AFTER FOUR YEARS' SERVICE IN CIVIL WAR, AND THOUGH WEAKENED FROM THREE BODY WOUNDS, HE FOUGHT A SWORD DUEL WITH ANOTHER OFFICER, KILLING HIS ADVERSARY.

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AFTER FIGHTING IN MEXICO UNDER EMPEROR MAXIMILIAN, MACIVER JOURNEYED TO SCOTLAND, ORGANIZED AN EXPEDITION TO ASSIST THE CRETAN INSURGENTS AGAINST THE TURKS. IN HIS NEXT VENTURE HIS BRAVERY — DURING A FIERCE ONE-SIDED BATTLE HE CUT HIS WAY THROUGH A BAND OF BRIGANDS IN KISSISSIA AND RESCUED ANOTHER OFFICER — WON FOR HIM THE HIGHEST GREEK DECORATION.

WHEN THE GIOCOURA-CHRISTY EXPEDITION WAS SCATTERED IN CUBA MACIVER ESCAPED THE SPANISH SOLDIERY ONLY BY PUTTING TO SEA IN AN OPEN BOAT. ADRIFT FOR THREE DAYS HE WAS FINALLY PICKED UP AND RETURNED TO NEW YORK

LATER IN THE SERBIAN ARMY HE REACHED THE PEAK OF HIS ADVENTUROUS CAREER. FIGHTING WITH HIS OLD ENEMY THE TURKS, MACIVER WAS A HERO OF THE TIME. HIS BRAVERY AS GENERAL OF THE CAVALRY BRIGADE BROUGHT RAPID RISE AND HIGHEST HONORS FROM THE KING AND QUEEN OF SERVIA.



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PART II

SYNOPSIS

Robert Stanley, Bostonian, is a wealthy tea plantation owner in Assam, located between Tibet and India. Assam is dominated by ancient ritual. Tarvin, overseer of the plantation, is maddened by the heat and his superstition, and murders Stanley. Tarvin also kidnaps Stanley's little daughter, Doreen.

Mrs. Stanley and a young son return to America. Twenty years later Robert Stanley, Jr., comes to the plantation. Ferguson, now in charge, is unfriendly in his attitude. Robert is attacked by an ape and overcomes the animal. But there is something strange about the attack—Robert suspects foul play and Ferguson will explain nothing. How could an ape open the door of his house, ponders Stanley.

While visiting the English agent in Assam, Robert meets MacGraw and Somers. A poisoned arrow darts into the agent's office. MacGraw, the one most friendly to Stanley, explains that it is a native arrow and means approaching death.

Stanley feels that he is quite unpopular in Assam.

MacGraw becomes his friend, accompanies him home. Robert finds an old woman in his room fastening a frog to the

leg of his bed. She says: "To Nizam Ghat—there you will find her." A few moments later, outside the house, an arrow puts an end to the life of the old woman.

MacGraw explains she has been practicing Frog Magic, and the words she spoke were a message to Stanley telling him that he must go to Nizam Ghat, a place no white man has ever been. There he will find someone. Suddenly a shrill scream comes through the air from the native quarters.

Now go on with the story.

BOB looked inquiringly at MacGraw.

"What's that?" he asked. "Some more of this tribal mystery?"

Mac shook his head. "It sounds like a plain scream to me. Probably some native amusing himself by beating his wife."

Twice more the shrill sound assailed their ears, and in it was a plaintive supplicating quality that tugged at a listener's heart strings. Bob rose purposefully.

Weird Adventure and Jungle Superstition



"Let's investigate," he said.

Mac rose to his feet slowly. "If you insist," he said:

"Though I advise you to let the blacks handle their own domestic problems."

But Bob was not to be dissuaded. The appealing wail had sent the blood racing excitedly in his veins.

Perhaps, this incident, too, was some more of the mystery which had fallen upon him during the past few days.

TOGETHER the white men strode quickly toward the low line of thatched huts that housed the natives who worked the plantation. A little knot of savages parted to permit the Sahibs to pass through their ranks. Bob heard them muttering to each other in some unintelligible tongue as he passed through.

Mac, well acquainted with native

dialect muttered. "So, I was wrong, it's not a native beating his wife."

He placed such a peculiar emphasis upon the word "native" that Bob turned to look at him, but before the Irishman could vouchsafe an explanation, they had come upon a scene which set Bob's blood boiling.

IN the centre of the group of muttering natives, stood the figure of Ferguson. In his right hand he held a long snaking whip which he was wielding with all his strength. The vicious buffalo hide sang through the air, then cut deeply into the skin of a young native girl who lay, writhing in agony upon the ground. A wail of agony broke from her lips.

Bob Stanley acted on instinct, rather than of his own thoughtful volition. In a single bound he was at the overseer's side. His hand grasped the Scotsman's wrist, while

his other fist swung in a wide arc to the other's jaw.

The blow was ill-aimed and glancing, and it was surprise more than physical injury that caused the overseer to drop his whip. Then, suddenly, as he took in the situation, he turned savagely on Bob.

"You keep out of this," he snarled. "Stay in your own quarters where you belong. You damned meddler. You—"

Words, for the moment failed him, so great was his rage. He flung himself at Bob like an enraged tiger. Bob measured his bulk coolly as he charged. Then, he let fly a perfectly timed blow which struck the other full in the face. Ferguson rolled to the ground.

Bob turned to Mac. "Will you bring this girl here to my quarters? You can fix her up."

MAC bent over the prostrate figure of the bleeding girl. Ferguson slowly got to his feet. He walked to within a few feet of Bob.

"You," he said. "I could have saved you. But you'll die for this. You—"

"I've had enough from you," Bob said sharply. "If you've anything more to say to me, see me at the office in the morning, or else we'll resume this discussion where we left it off."

He clenched his fists and glared at the overseer. Ferguson, however, suddenly decided that discretion, is after all, the better part of valor. He backed away mumbling to himself. Mac made his way through the mob, carrying the girl in his arms. Bob turned and followed him back to his own bungalow.

While Mac busied himself at the medicine chest, Bob helped himself to a stiff drink of whisky. He had just emptied the glass when, rather to his surprise, he saw Ferguson

standing before him. The overseer seemed to have lost his belligerent attitude of a few minutes ago. He seemed quite chastened now.

"I'd like to explain about this affair," he said in a conciliatory tone which was quite foreign to the man. "But if you expect to get any work out of these natives, you've got to use the whip. I'm sorry I attacked you, but I was beside myself with anger."

DOB regarded him keenly for a moment, then smiled ironically.

"That won't do, Ferguson," he said at last. "You've got more to explain to me than that. Furthermore, you seem to have forgotten that you've just threatened me with death. Well, under the circumstances, I find I can dispense with your services. I'll expect you to be gone by the end of the week."

For a fleeting second the peaceful attitude of the overseer vanished. Something dangerous and threatening flashed in his eyes. It seemed that he underwent a swift struggle for control. Bob waited, alert for any overt move the other might make. But then, Ferguson, without a word, wheeled around and walked out of the room as suddenly as he had just come into it.

Mac came into the room a few minutes later.

"She's got a touch of fever," he reported, "but she'll come round all right."

Bob nodded. "I just fired Ferguson," he announced.

"I doubt if he'll leave."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Simply this. Ferguson is undoubtedly mixed up with some funny business right here. He may pretend to go, but he'll stick around until whatever he's up to works."

"I guess you're right," said Bob slowly. "And I guess that we're up

against a stone wall. Running a tea plantation isn't as easy as I thought it would be."

"No," said Mac gravely. "And I'm willing to agree with your overseer on one thing."

"What's that?"

"Get out!"

Bob stared at him. "You want me to quit?"

"Call it what you like. You can't buck an unseen threat. You can't avoid a death you know nothing about. If you had any idea what this is all about, I'd tell you to stay and fight it. But you can't fight men you can't see. You can't fight native magic if you have no magic of your own."

"Magic?" ejaculated Bob. "You don't mean to tell me that you believe in this native mumbo-jumbo with the frogs and what not."

"I'm old enough," said Mac slowly, "to believe nothing, and for that matter to disbelieve nothing. I've seen some things happen out here in the jungle that you'd never credit unless you saw them with your own eyes. I wouldn't stay here for a fortune after what I've seen. Now take my advice and get out."

"No," said Bob determinedly. "I'll stick until it's all cleared up or until they kill me."

MAC eyed him quizzically for a long while, then he said: "I told you I had no money."

"Well?"

"You'll have to feed me."

"You're welcome to anything in my house."

"You'll have to buy my tobacco."

"What are you driving at?"

"Well," Mac filled his worn pipe with a deliberation that was maddening. "If you're such a damned young fool that you're going to stay, the least I can do will be to stay with you."

Bob looked at him through moist eyes, then impulsively, he crossed the room and thrust out his hand.

"Shake, you faker," he said. "I knew you were lying. I thought you said you wouldn't stay here for a fortune."

They shook hands with a firm grip and in that moment a splendid friendship was born.

CHAPTER V

The Man of Magic

THE following day Leci, the Abor girl whom Bob had rescued from Ferguson, was well enough to return to the palm-thatched hut of her people. Despite Mac's questioning they could discover no reason for Ferguson's brutality save that every once in a while he strode through the native quarter and wielded his whip for apparently no reason other than because of the vicious nature of the man.

Ferguson kept under cover that day, though Bob learned from the natives that he had not yet left the plantation. Mac stuck close to the house, immersed in his pipe and the problem that lay before them, while Bob kept the men at work beneath the broiling sun.

At noon he returned to the bungalow, dripping wet with perspiration and thoroughly enervated by the terrible heat. Mac puffed at his pipe within, and regarded with a tender eye a huge bunch of multi-colored orchids that stood in a cooking pot on the table.

Bob eyed the flowers wonderingly. "Where'd you get those?"

Mac grinned. "From an old friend of ours. One Rehko."

"Rehko? Who's that?"

"It seems to be the sweetheart of our little patient of last night. He must have heard that I had a weakness for orchids. For he arrived this

morning with this baksheesh for me, and some information for you. As you weren't here, I took them both."

"What was the information?"

"He told me that your trusted and honorable overseer has a secret trail through the jungle—a trail that is unknown to native and white man alike."

Bob lit a cigarette and considered this. "Well," he commented. "I appreciate it and all that, but if no one knows where it is, it evidently isn't going to do us much good."

"We're going to find out where it is."

"How?"

"Magic. Leci, hearing that I wanted very much to know where it was, has gone off to dig us up a Mishmi magic man."

Bob threw his hot weary body into a chair and stared quizzically at his newly found comrade.

"Mac," he confessed. "I can't figure you out. Sometimes you appear to be the sanest man I ever met, then at other times you seem to be amok. You come up to this God-forsaken hole because you like to look at orchids. You cure malaria with your skill, which is sensible, then you fall back on native magic, which is crazy. Do you really believe that this Mishmi chap is going to find a secret trail that no one but Ferguson has ever traversed?"

MAC nodded. "Yes," he said with his slow grave air. "That's one of the things I believe, Bob. I admit there's no scientific foundation for it. I admit it would sound crazy if you read about it in the papers back home, but I've seen them do harder things than that. And now that there's no way of us figuring this thing out ourselves, I'm well content to put it in the medicine man's hands."

Bob raised his eyebrows and

poured himself a stiff drink from the decanter on the sideboard.

"All right," he said. "Anyway, I admit we have nothing to lose. Bring on your magic man."

"I have come, Sahib."

THE voice, low and sonorous came from the door. Bob, startled, spilled half his drink as he whirled around. Even Mac stared quickly at the huge bronze figure who stood upon the threshold with little Leci on one side of him and a youth dressed in the garb of a rhinoceros hunter on the other. That was Rheko.

Bob beckoned the trio into the room. They salaamed low before the white man. Then the Mishmi turned to Mac and spoke rapidly in the hill dialect. Bob glanced at the Irishman inquiringly.

"He says," translated Mac, "that he has come four hundred miles from the North in answer to Leci's signal. He is here to do your bidding."

Bob smiled. "How could he have traveled four hundred miles when Leci never even knew he was wanted until this morning?"

Mac turned to the magic man and put the inquiry, then turning to Bob, he again translated the answer.

"He says he has made great magic to travel so far, so fast, because he knows you are in great danger. He is here to do your bidding. He insists on that."

Bob's smile grew broader. Now that the medicine man claimed to be able to travel at airplane speed, he had less faith than ever in his abilities.

"Go ahead," he told Mac with a grin. "It's your show. Tell him anything you want."

He sipped his drink and smoked, the while watching the byplay between the Irishman and the Mishmi. First Mac spoke at some length, then

when he had finished, the native bowed his head and talked earnestly for a short while. When he had finished the three natives turned, walked to the door, and bowing low to Bob, disappeared across the clearing.

"Well," said Bob when they had left. "I suppose he gave you the real inside dope. Where's Ferguson's trail?"

"When the full moon wanes, we shall know," said Mac.

"My God, you're beginning to talk like a magic man!"

Mac smiled. "Perhaps. He's going to use the same frog act that you witnessed once before in order to tell us."

"How will that tell us?"

"Well, I know you'll laugh, but he claims that the test of the python frog is infallible. The frog must be bound for the length of one full moon in the outer fibre of cane. It must be fed with rice grains which have been covered with sweets, then coated with insects from the hide of a water buffalo. Then, when the moon wanes, he'll return and perform the rest of the rite in person."

Bob laughed. "Well, that's that. Now we can get back to normal. What do you think we ought to do?"

MAC surveyed him keenly for a moment. "I'm doing just as the Mishmi counseled," he said quietly.

Bob put his glass down on the table. "You mean you're going to all that trouble for a mad idea like that?"

Mac nodded. "Rehko is catching the frog. Leci will feed it. I have arranged it all."

Bob's levity vanished at the grim seriousness of the Irishman. He inhaled deeply from the cigarette he was smoking and said:

"All right, Mac. You're the doctor. I'll leave it to you, and if you're right, I'll apologize."

They let it go at that and for the rest of the day the affair was not mentioned.

Ferguson had disappeared. No one had seen him leave. He had taken no natives to carry his belongings. Yet his shack had been cleaned out and the man had not been seen for days.

It occurred to Bob that the overseer had gone up his own private trail into the jungle. Though for what purpose he had not the slightest idea. He said nothing of his speculations to Mac, inasmuch as the latter seemed willing to put his trust in the Mishmi when the moon should wane.

THEN, when the days passed, a strange circle formed one night at the edge of the jungle, at the side of the bungalow that Ferguson had occupied.

Leci and Rheko stood hand in hand gazing with wide, awed eyes at the Mishmi magic maker. On his right Mac and Bob regarded the weird scene, enthralled by the uncanniness of the tropical night. The magic maker alone seemed oblivious to everything.

He bent low over the mottled bloated frog, stuffed with food to its uttermost capacity. A string of fibre held the animal to a small stump stuck in the ground. The Mishmi squatted on his haunches, and lifted his eyes to heaven. His mouth opened and a strange unearthly gibberish issued from it.

Despite Bob's skepticism in the native's powers, he was aware of an odd thrill as the rhythmic cadences flowed sonorously from the savage's lips. Before them loomed the jungle, dark and implacable, while at their feet was an insignificant amphibian which was about to reveal to them a secret which had baffled the mind of man.

The sorcerer withdrew a gleaming knife from his loin cloth, and with a

deft stroke severed the fibre that held the frog. Then he stared at it with unwinking eyes.

Awkwardly the animal moved. It jerked hesitatingly forward toward the north, then gathering its strength, it disappeared in the thick growth on the rim of the jungle. The Mishmi straightened up, and turned to Leci and the rhinoceros hunter. His arm extended itself at full length and pointed in the direction of the frog.

"Go," he commanded. "Follow!"

The two of them sprang forward through the undergrowth into the darkness of the jungle. The magic maker and Mac stared after them intensely, Bob standing by, tolerantly waiting until what he considered the horseplay was over. For, perhaps, five minutes they stood there in complete silence.

Then suddenly, the greenery parted and Rheko and his sweetheart stood before them with shining eyes and fast moving tongues. The Mishmi heard them unmoved, but Mac turned excitedly to Bob.

"They've found it!" he cried. "Ferguson's trail. It's hidden in there beneath a tangle of brush that almost obscures it. The frog led them right to it."

Mac turned gravely to the medicine man without giving Bob a chance to answer, and spoke to him gravely. The native bowed and walked off followed at a respectful distance by the two Assamese.

Mac took Bob's arm jubilantly and led him off toward the house.

"He did it," he said happily. "Now, tomorrow we can take a few boys that we can trust and follow that trail. It must lead somewhere, and I've got a strong hunch that somewhere it will explain a number of things to us."

BOB walked in silence, his brow corrugated and his heart beating as he pondered the utterly mad situa-

tion that he had just witnessed. After all, how was it possible for a stupid python frog to find something that no man had been able to find? And why must this miraculous frog be bloated on insect-coated rice grains in order to make it function?

Despite the concrete evidence that he had just had of the witch doctor's power, he could not find it in his civilized mind to believe in the supernatural.

Once inside the bungalow he turned troubled eyes to his friend.

"Mac," he said. "I'm worried. I suppose I must believe in the Mishmi now, but good God, man! How on earth does he do it?"

Mac shook his head, and laid a fraternal hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"I don't know, son," he said soberly. "But he does it somehow. I've seen it done too often to doubt. Just take it for granted and forget about it. At least he's accomplished more than we were able to do. Now go to sleep and save yourself for tomorrow. For I've got something stronger than a hunch that we're going to run into trouble before we've reached the end of Mr. Ferguson's trail."

CHAPTER VI

Ferguson's Cache

THE heat of hell itself belted down from the sky as the little caravan set out the next day along Ferguson's secret trail. Rheko, the rhinoceros hunter broke trail in the lead, closely followed by three other native boys, who's integrity he had vouched for. Mac and Bob came after them walking slowly through the tangled undergrowth. In the van were a quartette more of natives, all of whom had been carefully selected by Rheko.

Bob was amazed at the interior of the jungle, where he had never before

been. It was a veritable paradise to the eye, a paradise which skillfully concealed behind a screen of glorious color, the death which lurked behind its splendid red and green.

It seemed to Bob that all the orchids in the world lined the sides of the trail, and Mac went into ecstatic eulogies of the flowers which he called the jungle's hearts of gold.

To Bob it was a long and arduous walk and he marveled at the manner in which Mac and the boys seemed to disregard the heat and the difficult walking. Saving his wind he made little reply to Mac's glowing tributes to the flowers.

Head down he plodded doggedly onward, conscious of nothing save a bull-dog desire to reach their destination. For almost two hours, he walked thus. His head was still bent when he heard a shout from Rheko. Then he looked up.

The entire party was staring straight ahead to a weed tangled clearing in the midst of the jungle. An air of excitement pervaded the group. The natives chattered excitedly, and Mac clutched his arm.

"Look," he said, flinging an outstretched arm in the direction of a dilapidated building that stood some hundred yards down the trail.

BOB'S eyes followed the other's arm and he saw an archaic broken-down structure surrounded by an even more broken-down enclosure. The natives broke into a dog-trot and the white men quickened their pace.

"You think that's Ferguson's hide-out?" asked Bob.

"Perhaps. Take it easy anyway, and have your gun ready. We might find trouble here."

He issued a sharp word of command to the boys and they slowed up and permitted the white men to take the lead. But as they approached they

saw no signs of life in the crumbling ruin.

Cautiously they peered into the snake infested courtyard.

"It's a funny sort of a place to find in the jungle," remarked Bob. "It must have been here for years."

"Undoubtedly," said Mac, "it apparently was an old fortress erected perhaps by a ruler of Assam who long since has turned to dust. Or perhaps the great Alexander himself built it. His armies ran through here two thousand years ago."

ASSURED that there was no sign of life in the hoary structure, they made their way over the rotting flagstones into the huge building which loomed before them. Mac stationed the blacks around the outside of the building, instructing them to give an immediate alarm if they should see anyone approaching down the trail, then Bob and he entered the edifice.

Within, the place was damp and gloomy. Bob took a flashlight from his pocket and with the aid of its light they walked through a tremendous empty room into a long corridor beyond. He tried an iron ring which hung down on an oaken door. The door swung slowly open. He played the flashlight around the room, then shouted to Mac who was behind him.

"Mac! Here, quick!"

In an instant the Irishman was at his side, staring in bewilderment at the array of supplies that filled the room.

"Hold this," said Bob. "While I take a look-see."

Mac stood in the doorway while Bob examined the numerous packing cases that the room contained. Most of them were marked with his name, and had obviously been taken from the plantation. Mac stood silently for a few minutes, then his curiosity could stand it no longer.

"What is it?" he asked. "Ferguson's stuff?"

BOB returned to his partner's side, a grim look on his face.

"Ferguson's," he replied, "and plenty of it."

"What's there?"

"Damned nearly everything. He's got enough gunpowder and contra-band rifles to start a revolution. He's got a pile of cash, probably stolen from the plantation, and enough food to feed a fair-sized army for quite a while."

"I'll put the flash on top of that box," said Mac. "And we'll both give it a look-over. He might come back any minute, so we'd better hurry."

Bob busied himself examining the cash and supplies which had obviously been stolen from the plantation. At least one of the mysteries was clearing up. At last he knew the answer to his mother's question as to why the tea plantation had never been making as much money as she had estimated that it should.

So intent was he on his own scrutiny that he failed to notice Mac delving into a huge wooden chest on the other side of the room. An excited gleam shone in the Irishman's eye as he examined its contents. His eager fingers trembled slightly as they ran hastily through the old and age discolored documents that he had found there.

Then in a low excited voice he called to Bob. The latter, looking up, noticed the other's triumphant attitude. Dropping what he was doing he raced to Mac's side.

"Look," said the Irishman. "How do you figure this? Here are a number of newspaper clippings referring to your father's death and your sister's kidnaping."

Bob took the proffered papers and scanned them hurriedly. There

were a great many of them clipped from the provincial and European papers of the period. All of them told of the tragedy at Sadiya, and of the mad overseer's running amok with the young child.

"Well," said Mac impatiently, "where did they come from? It's a cinch Ferguson never put them there. He wasn't here when that happened."

Bob shook his head and frowned deeply. "Perhaps my mother collected them," he said. "Though she never mentioned it to me. And if she did, I fail to see why Ferguson should steal them and carry them out here."

"On the other hand," theorized Mac, "it may have been the maniac overseer himself who clipped them. Perhaps it was him and not Ferguson who originally discovered this place. Ferguson may have stumbled upon it years after the other chap."

"Perhaps."

"Then," said Mac, his eyes lighting up with eager excitement. "This may be the clue we've been looking for. This may be—"

RHEKO came racing through the doorway on his bare feet at that moment. He spoke rapidly to Mac. The Irishman snapped a staccato order at him, and said to Bob: "Ferguson's coming up the trail with half a dozen *Nagas*. I've told the boys to conceal themselves until he comes in here. We'll hide and observe him. I'm to whistle for the boys if we need them. Quickly now!"

Hastily replacing the documents and closing the chest, they shut the door carefully behind them and crept down into the now friendly shadows of the corridor. Scarcely had they taken cover when they heard the tramp of Ferguson's heavy boots coming across the flagstones. A moment later he entered the corridor

followed by a handful of warlike *Nagas*.

He walked straight to the door which the two intruders had just closed and, opening it, disappeared inside with his men. As he went he spoke to them in dialect. Bob turned inquiringly to Mac.

"I couldn't catch," whispered the Irishman. "I caught the hill-tribe word for destroy. But that's all. He can't mean to destroy the whole place. We'll have to sit tight and watch."

For three or four interminable minutes they crouched down and waited developments.

Then the door reopened and Ferguson appeared. Behind him came the *Nagas* carrying the huge chest in which reposed the newspaper clippings which Mac had just discovered. Ferguson's burry Scotch voice said something to the natives.

"Quick!" whispered Mac to Bob. "We must stop him. He's telling them to destroy the chest and its contents. There's some more stuff there we ought to see. Come on!"

They sprang from their hiding-place and a weird whistle from Mac's lips echoed reverberatingly through the long corridor. Bob raced down the passage at the Irishman's side, his revolver held ready for action in his tense hand.

FERGUSON was taken by surprise. He turned a startled countenance toward them. The surprised savages dropped the chest to the floor. Then, as the pair of adventurers were almost upon them, the overseer recovered.

He barked an order at his men, and his own hand fell to the holster at his side. Bob saw the gesture, and shouted: "Put your hands up, Ferguson."

The Scotsman's reply was to jerk his .38 from its resting-place and

send a screeching piece of lead toward his attackers. Bob's own weapon hurled a vicious answer toward the enemy, but the gloom of the corridor ruined his aim.

At that moment Ferguson's *Nagas*, who had retreated to the room for a moment, reappeared with their spears, Mac grasped Bob's arm in a tense grip and pulled him up against the wall.

"Stay here," he yelled. "Don't let anyone get behind you. Now give it to them."

Three revolvers—Bob's, Mac's and Ferguson's rent the still gloomy air with their savage repercussions. Steel sang as it ricocheted off the stone of the floor. A whistling arrow from a *Naga* bow hurtled over Bob's head and broke its metal point on the wall.

THE corridor was so dark that thus far the whining slugs from the whitemen's pistols had taken no toll. Ferguson yelled to his men, rallying them. Their dark intrepid figures approached closer. Mac's gun spoke twice, and with a horrible cry one of the blacks fell to the floor, his blood running dark and ominous in the shadows.

Desperately Bob took careful aim and pressed the hammer down on his last round. Ferguson's scream of agony was music to his ears. He heard Mac shout in his ear above the din of battle: "Nice one, old man."

Then suddenly back at the entrance to the corridor, seven dark figures took form. At last, Rheko had arrived with the reinforcements. Actually the struggle had only consumed a few minutes, but to Bob it had seemed as if their own men would never arrive.

The spear of the rhinoceros hunter whistled through the air and stopped halfway through a *Naga* throat. That was enough for the tribesmen. They turned tail and ran through one of

the many doorways which lined the passage leaving their white leader there alone to face the enemy.

Bob approached the overseer.

"Put your hands up, Ferguson," he said. He knew quite well that his weapon was now empty, and, apparently so did Ferguson.

With a shout of rage, the Scotsman charged upon him. The revolver in his hand flamed and spewed as he came. But ere he could fire the second shot, another reverberation had rung out. Ferguson charged a full three feet after the slug from Mac's pistol had eaten its way into his heart. Then he fell flat on his face, wallowing in his own blood.

BOB stood over the body of the overseer, breathless and panting as Mac rushed up and bent down over the prone body. He rose after a cursory examination.

"Dead," he announced gravely.

Bob turned to him and extended his hand.

"Thanks," he said simply. "You saved my life."

Mac took his hand. "Don't worry," he said half humorously. "You'll probably get plenty of chances to save mine before this adventure is over."

They returned to the chest which was still lying on the floor where the Nagas had dropped it. Mac ordered the natives to return to their positions. Then he reopened the chest and withdrew the papers.

"Bob," he said seriously as he scanned the yellow documents in his hand. "I've come to a rather startling conclusion. I believe that your kidnapped sister may still be alive, a captive of the northern tribes. Perhaps, that is why the Nagas have attempted your life."

Bob's brow wrinkled in thought. "But how does that tie up. Why should they try to kill me?"

"I can't answer that now. But I know there is an answer somewhere, and I believe Ferguson knew it, too. He tried hard enough to kill you himself just now, and I think that his interests were the same as those of the tribe."

"Well, then," said Bob. "If there's even a chance of your theory being correct, there's only one thing I can do."

"It's never been done," warned Mac.

"You know what I mean then?"

"Yes. You mean to cross the jungle in search of your sister."

Bob nodded. "Can I do less?" he asked.

"Well," said Mac. "If you must, you must, and I must also. If your sister still lives it would explain the mysterious *her* that the old woman mentioned. It would, in fact, explain a lot of things. Speaking frankly and objectively, I think it's a good hundred to one shot that we never return, but if you want to go, we'll go."

"One will return, Sahib."

THEY both started, turned and reached for their weapons. Then they paused, for, standing there, looking for all the world like some emissary from a supernatural world, stood the Mishmi magic man.

"How—how did you get here? How did you get past our guards?"

"The Mishmi magicians knows great magic," said the savage, speaking English with difficulty. "I have made magic."

"Then," said Mac, quite seriously. "You know our plan?"

The magic man nodded.

"I know your plan. I know you will succeed." He broke off abruptly and talked to Mac in rapid-fire dialect. Then abruptly he finished, turned and stalked from the building, leaving Mac standing wide-eyed and

utterly amazed. Bob waited impatiently for the translation of the Mishmi's words, but all the Irishman said was: "The Lake of Flaming Death! My God! So it does exist after all."

"What is it?" asked Bob, eagerly.

MAC gazed at him soberly. "Something I always thought was a legend seems to have come true. The Mishmi has predicted that you will meet success. We must cross the Brahmaputra, far to the north. We must guard against the poisoned arrows, and at the Lake of Flaming Death we will find *her!*"

"What's the Lake of Flaming Death?"

"It's something they speak of in awed tones from Singapore to Saigon. I've heard it whispered on the plain before the Emerald Temple at Mandalay; I've heard it breathed religiously in the Forest of Shillong; I've heard it deified in Bangkok, but I never believed it till now."

"But what is it? Where is it?"

"It's reputed to be a lake of fire, a lake through which a man must pass to be purified ere he can reach the Gods."

"And you think my sister's there?"

Mac nodded gravely.

"Well, then we shall go."

Mac seemed to hesitate for a long moment. At last he said: "Yes. We shall go."

"But the magic man said there was no danger."

Mac shook his head and a wry smile distorted his lips.

"He didn't quite say that. He said that you would succeed."

"And you?"

"He said," said Mac with a terrible gravity, "that I would live to witness

your triumph, but that I would never return. He said that it was written I should die in the Lake of Flaming Death."

"Then," cried Bob. "You mustn't come. You shall stay behind."

"No," said MacGraw. "I shall go. For that is written, too."

Beset by a terrifying apprehension Bob walked out into the sunlight once more with his friend who had just predicted his own death. A trip hammer seemed to pound inside his brain. He was faced with the awful decision of either admitting that the Mishmi could conjure up some supernatural power, or of knowing that he himself was mad. There was no possible way that the magic man could have known of their plans unless he had eavesdropped. And if that was the explanation it was impossible for him to have passed Rheko and the other boys without being observed.

Then this last prediction of Mac's death, and of his own success in finding his lost sister at the Lake of Flaming Death!

Outside he approached Rheko eagerly.

"Have you or your boys seen anyone enter after Sahib Ferguson?" he asked quietly.

Rheko stared at him, innocence mirrored in his wide black eyes. He shook his head.

"No one," he said in clipped English. "Does the Sahib—"

"It's all right," Bob cut him short. "It doesn't matter."

But it did matter a great deal. Perhaps, as Mac had already told him, weird and terrible things that civilization never dreamed of, were grim realities in that hell upon earth that was Assam.

Don't fail to read about the perilous journey to the Lake of Flaming Death—beset with dangers and difficulties—in the third and final thrilling instalment of "The Lake of Flaming Death," in next month's issue of THRILLING ADVENTURES

Second of a New Series of Stories of an American Adventurer in the Orient Who Becomes a Symbol of Power and the Answer to a Prophecy



Captain Trouble

WHERE TERROR LURKED

By PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

Author of "The Leopard Man," "White Tigers," "The Whispering Chorus," etc.

I

SHAMBALLAH!"

It was a whisper that Shattuck had heard a thousand times, always with some hint of mystery and dread about it, ever since Michmander, the Afghan, had first led him into forbidden territory.

Here on the face of the desert it was absolutely dark. All that could be seen of the earth was the floating

blackness of the surrounding dunes. Yet the stars shone—they shone with a sort of blinding light. They dazzled the eyes. The earth absorbed this light like black velvet. No wonder that the desert people gave this whole country the go-by.

"Shamballah!"

That was Juma's whisper now.

Shattuck also had seen that quavering shaft of green light over the contour of the nearest dune. He put

out his hand in the darkness and touched Juma to let him know that he had heard and seen. He needed no such contact to let him know that Champela, his only other companion on this crazy adventure, had also seen and heard.

So far, in his intimate acquaintance with Champela—that mystical John Day, half American, half Tibetan—Shattuck had never seen any evidence at all that Champela ever slept. Champela would sit motionless with his eyes closed. He might even lie down with his eyes closed—in the “tiger attitude,” as it was called, on his right side and a hand under his face to serve as a pillow. But that was as far as he ever went, it seemed, so far as sleep was concerned.

DAY or night, that finely organized brain of Champela’s resembled some delicate machine, ever ready to respond to the slightest vibration.

It must have been like that now. From Champela also had come a whispered breath:

“*Shamballah!*”

The three friends lay there in silence staring off into the blackness toward the thing that had attracted them.

The mystery of the desert lay thick about them. For days they had been traveling through a part of the Western Gobi, shunned even by the nomad Mongols.

Back in the hills they came from, the tribesmen sometimes talked of Shamballah about their campfires. There were records of Shamballah in the secret books of that Lamasery of the Soaring Meditation where Champela had been serving his initiate at the time he and Shattuck had found each other.

Two Americans—one of them a mystic, sworn to peace, the other a

fighting fool, Captain Trouble—brought together in the heart of Asia, members, without knowing it, of some secret fraternity set up by Fate! One, the future fighting captain of the world, the other his prime minister! They’d talked of these things together as some men talk of whisky and cards.

Champela on one side, Juma on the other, Shattuck lay there in the black sands of the Gobi and stared at the wavering light. It was a ghostly beacon leading him on to he knew not what strange shore.

They were like mariners, the three of them, in an uncharted and haunted sea. But their ships were those beasts that poets had called “ships of the desert.” As silent as ships the camels lay in the near dark. They also would be staring, perhaps—wondering, dreaming.

NOT for many days now had Shattuck and his two friends seen a living soul; yet there had always been that feeling of a presence, a lurking danger. Others had entered these wastes. None had returned.

Juma, the old robber chief, crept a little closer to Shattuck, making no more noise in doing so than a sand-adder. Juma was a Kirghiz—he had the sense of ghostly things like all wild nomads. His bearded lips were within an inch of Shattuck’s ear.

“I go?” A pause. “I scout ahead.”

It was a plea.

It stirred Shattuck to hear a plea of any kind from old Juma. Rajas, kings, governors of any kind—these had always been merely so much ornamental vermin in Juma’s free life. But here was the old mountain hawk acknowledging the leadership of Shadak Khan, Captain Trouble.

“Guard the camels,” Shattuck-con-

veyed in a husky breath. "I go myself."

And a moment later he was creeping forward into the blackness.

He and his two companions had been on the trail now for almost a month. A month ago the three of them had left that Little Valley of the Soaring Meditation back there in the Hou-Shan—the Country Beyond the Mountains, as the Gobi people called it—where Pelham Rutledge Shattuck, sometimes of the U. S. A., had become Shadak Khan, Captain Trouble.

But even before that—long before, so it seemed to Captain Trouble now in the sudden solitude and dark isolation as he pulled himself forward through the sand—that earlier Shattuck that was himself had died. All that had remained of that earlier self was a nickname—the title of honor that Michmander, the Afghan, had conferred on him, that title of a Fighting Fool.

Now Michmander was dead, as that earlier Shattuck was dead.

SHADAK KHAN—that had become Shattuck's name. The name meant Captain Trouble. Shattuck, Shadak—Chinese for "Trouble." He was Captain Trouble—that's who he was: Captain Trouble—Shadak Khan, just like Kubla Khan, whose sword he'd come by.

Captain Trouble, the Fighting Fool, thought of these things as he crept through the sand. His thoughts went up to the brilliant stars and back, swept over the length and breadth of Asia, but not for a single instant did any part of his fighting self forget the necessity for silence.

The silence was like something immense and yet immensely fragile. It was like a bubble of silence, blown up and now enclosing in suspense

all this part of the world. They'd been feeling the spell of it for days and nights. Even the camels had felt it. The camels had gone as silent as camel-ghosts, perpetually on the alert for other camel-ghosts.

"*Shamballah!*"

Ask anyone who knew, from Roun (Constantinople) to Urga, on the northern rim of the Gobi, and he'd tell you that Shamballah was the land of ghosts.

Maybe it was, at that. Over the rim of blackness that formed the skyline not more than fifty yards ahead there had again appeared that weird apparition of faint green light. It was a wavering shaft such as might come from an open door. In any other direction it might have passed for a trick of moonrise.

BUT tonight there was no moon. And the light lay in the north—the Quarter of the Dark Warrior, as the Chinese call it. Would there be some warrior there now, Captain Trouble silently asked himself, to defend the entrance to the fabled gates of Shamballah?

This was that country of the Black Hills—the Kara Kerugen, as the Mongols called it. Somewhere in the heart of the Kara Kerugen was a Kara Koto—the Black City, the City of Night.

Kara Koto guarded the one known entrance to that lost empire of Shamballah about which everyone had heard and which no one had ever seen—and lived.

Shattuck was drawing himself up the yielding slope of the last dune—he was doing this as slowly and silently as a death-stricken lizard—when he saw the figure of a man stealthily appear directly ahead of him. The figure, now standing there on the crest of the dune and silhouetted against the faint green light

back of him, was that of a gigantic warrior.

It was that of a warrior dressed in some barbaric costume such as Shattuck had never seen before among any of the desert or mountain tribesmen he had thus far known. There was something of the Cossack about him—something of the Turki. All that Shattuck could make out—and that dimly—was a headdress suggesting a tall helmet or turban, a long cloak belted at the waist; and then that the man was armed, aroused and ready for trouble.

THE man stood with feet wide apart. Across his lower body, from hand to hand, he carried a sword of great length.

Shattuck's thoughts were racing.

His action was almost as swift—and as silent. He was on his feet. He had his own sword bared and ready as he came to his feet.

"Stand!" he said in English.

He had no idea that he would be understood. But experience had taught him that a strange word often carries more power than a familiar one. The figure stood—it made no more response in word or movement than if it had been an image of stone or an unsubstantial shadow.

It was this that might have added to the fearfulness of it to anyone less schooled than Shattuck happened to be just then in the mysteries of this heart of Asia. But Shattuck, after what he'd been through, was feeling that he himself was something of a ghost—at least, there was some sort of ghostly blessing on him.

Saving his energy—saving his breath—for some sort of ordeal he knew instinctively was now at hand, he slowly advanced up the slope of the dune.

II

TWO could play at this game of silence, Shattuck decided. He'd quartered a little. He'd come to the top of the dune half a dozen sword-lengths from that shadowy sentinel. The crest was but a yielding ridge—one of the traveling dunes of the Great Sands. He could feel it crawling beneath his feet as he stood there now—certainly no place for a stand-up fight, if it came to that.

But, at least, he could now see where the green light came from.

Somewhere off in the middle-distance—how near or far he couldn't tell—he saw a shimmering green half-disk. It might have been the mouth of an illuminated well, for all he could judge by the appearance of it.

He gave it but a passing glance, for he was afraid to dazzle his eyes as the stars had dazzled them when he looked at them too long, back there in the dense blackness of the desert where Juma and Champela lay.

Hereabouts, for uncounted miles, all the earth was black—black sands piled into black hills, the Kara Kerugen. There even was a Kara Nor—according to the Mongols; a Black Lake on which the black city of Kara Koto reared its dark towers. And according to Mongols, the citizens of Kara Koto sang—or they sometimes howled—but they never spoke.

Secretly, these tales had always made Shattuck smile, even while he'd listen to them with interest. For back of most of these stories, however wild, he suspected that there was a basis of truth. Just now, though, there came to him a disturbing sense that the tales might have been truer than even he had been willing to concede.

"Who are you, friend?" he asked

softly, in the Kirghiz dialect that Juma had taught him.

There was no answer.

That tall shadow of a man he could make out had faced him. There was an air of tenseness about him—an impression felt rather than seen.

Shattuck approached him.

A TALL, tall man with a wolfish face dimly seen; and there was something more than wolfish in that tense silence of his. He looked like a man who, sure enough, might never speak but—howl! He'd released the tip of his sword with his left hand and he'd raised the blade, still parallel with the ground, to a peculiar "guard" on a level with his shoulders.

Spoken or not, it was a challenge.

Shattuck advanced his own blade slowly until the point of it rested on the stranger's weapon. He pressed it down.

This was the devil of a place for a fight. Shattuck had not the slightest desire to fight. But to flinch at the prospect of a fight might be the surest way of starting one.

"Who are you?" he repeated in Kirghiz. "What are you?"

There was a dangerous lull.

Through that straining silence there came to Shattuck the sound of rushing feet, padded in the sand. They were coming in his direction—
• from back of him and all around.

But he didn't turn. He couldn't turn.

Quick as light he'd twisted down the blade of the human specter in front of him and closed in with his shoulder as a buffer. Curiously, the thing that struck him most as he closed with the giant was an odor of incense—a sort of peppery musk.

It was a smell that carried his memory back to some great cave

he'd known—but whether in dream or waking, he couldn't tell. It was a sort of dream memory set to a clang of ghostly gongs, of dim lamps burning at the feet of great stone gods.

Out of that memory had come a name:

"Mi-leh-fuh!"

He'd panted it aloud almost at the moment of the clash.

From the position he was in, Shattuck could have killed his man with a single slash. He'd kept his sword hand free. But he knew that this part of the battle was over from the moment he'd uttered that potent name.

"Mi-leh-fuh!"

It was the name of the Buddha of the Future—Maitreya as he was also called.

The effect was instantaneous.

The warrior with whom Shattuck had grappled now gave a whining yelp. It was half bark, half howl. It was answered by others. He who had uttered the first howl stood still and limp.

ONLY when Shattuck released him did the gaunt wolf of a man make any further move at all, and then it was to slink away. As he did so, other black shapes were appearing out of the darkness. They formed a circle there. They were wolflike even in that. Shattuck had seen wolves like that in a circle around some cornered ram.

But all of them were gaunt and tall, so far as he could see. That they were armed as that howling companion of theirs was armed he could only guess—not only armed, but with a shirt of mail under their long cloaks. That also was something he had guessed, from the moment his shoulder had butted into his recent adversary.

Shattuck spoke softly. He spoke

in the Mandarin dialect, so-called—the "Kuan-hua" that his own Chinese amah had taught him as a child.

"I, like you," he said to the silent pack, "am a servant of Mi-leh-fuh."

Even now a breath of that peppery musk was reaching him. He remembered. Once, long ago, he had been in a great battle. It was in that battle where Michmander, the Afghan, had been killed with a long-handled hatchet and he himself had been nearly killed. After that he'd been cared for in a great cave-temple. That was where he'd smelled an incense like this and where he'd heard the name of Mi-leh-fuh.

"And what way is this," he added, "to treat a servant of Maitreya?"

To this a strange voice unexpectedly answered. It came exceedingly soft and seemingly remote, as if the whole desert had become a whispering gallery. And the language, while clearly Chinese—clearly enough, at any rate, for Shattuck to understand it—the accent and cast of it was such as he had never heard before.

It said:

"And what is this servant of Maitreya doing in these Black Hills?"

THE voice had come from somewhere back of him, but Shattuck didn't turn. He kept his eyes on that shadowy half-circle of black shapes in front of him. And he was thinking of Juma and Champela, his companions. He knew that they must have responded to the alarm and would be drawing near.

"I look for the Black City in these Black Hills," he replied. And he shouted in English: "And you, Champela, keep Juma quiet, whatever happens."

The same strange voice answered, without haste but without delay:

"Your companions are already in our hands."

III

SHATTUCK heard that announcement as he might have received a knock-out blow. It staggered him—body, mind and soul. Juma, the old robber chief, had become a father to him; more than a father, a companion-in-arms, a friend. Champela was more than a brother.

"Juma! Champela!" he barked.

There was no answer. Their silence gave Shattuck an added shock of horror and rage—not hot but cold—that brought him back to fighting trim as a dash of cold water might have done.

"Ma-lai!"

"Out of the way!"—and he'd sprung toward that lurking dark circle with his sword playing left and right. The shadowy pack fell away.

The way was down hill. Even in the dark the slope gave Shattuck his direction. He'd have to find his friends again. He knew he couldn't be so widely out. . . .

He couldn't even locate the camels—four of them. Nor their packs. He called softly. He groped about wildly, blindly, in the sand.

All the time he was doing this he was remembering a thousand graces of that old robber, Juma. It was Juma who'd taken him in and cared for him when he was lost and out of his head, and as one condemned to death as a result of that battle in the Afghan hills.

Even more poignant were his thoughts of Champela—the mystic, the American lama, John Day.

Juma, at least, could fight. To die fighting, that would have been an end as natural to Juma as flight to an eagle. But Champela's courage was of a different sort. To save a friend's—or even a stranger's—life, Champela would brave anything. He'd already proven that. But to

save his own life he'd strike never a blow.

SHATTUCK came up at last breathless, baffled, blinking at the stars.

They were gone, both Juma and Champela.

As he stood there in the absorbent blackness staring up at the sky, he was conscious—as if by some other sense than those of sight and hearing—that the enemy pack had again drawn a cordon about him.

Should he fight.

Again he heard that quiet voice calling out in its strange Chinese. It was such Chinese, he figured it, as might have been spoken a thousand years ago.

It was a phrase that China had been repeating for many times a thousand years, no doubt—that old, old formula of China's resignation:

"Mei yu fatzu!"

It meant: "There is no way out!"

"There is a way out," he shouted back. "There is a way of the sword. Give me word of my friends or I'll start to kill!"

"Hold!"

"How long?"

"As long as you hope to see your friends alive again!"

Shattuck went limp. There was no answer to that but to yield.

A feeling closed in upon him that he'd felt before. He was up against the Gobi—that great desert that stretched its length and breadth throughout the heart of Asia. The Gobi was the abyss of Asia. It had swallowed cities, empires. Could one man stand up against the Gobi, even when armed with the sword of Kubla Khan?

"He might," came the breath of a thought, "if he's fated to do so!"

Shattuck spoke aloud:

"Listen, you, O child of the Dragon!"

"I'm listening, you friend of Maitreya who yet would kill!"

"Show me my friends alive and I'll barter with you."

Shattuck had been getting back his breath. At each exchange with that invisible spokesman he'd drifted closer to the point from which the voice came. He could tell by the sound of it that the unseen owner of the voice was about on a level with where he stood. The voice was coming to him through the trough between two dunes. He was ready for one last desperate play.

There was this one sure thing to guide him—the Gobi had never liked a coward.

"Barter with what?" came the challenge.

Shattuck hurled himself forward through the darkness. Between the dunes the floor of the desert had been scooped out almost down to the underlying clay. He sprinted blindly. Fingers were snatching at him like the fangs of wolves.

But he wouldn't—he couldn't—strike.

These others weren't trying to kill him. They might have done that long ago, Shattuck knew. They were trying to take him alive.

In the dark he collided with what he took to be a box.

The box went over in the midst of a din that was like that of a thousand devils let loose. He was sprawling in a tangle of wood and silk.

A GAIN memory was helping him even as he fought. This was a carrying chair. He'd seen them and he'd ridden in them, alone and with his father, during his childhood in China. There'd even been an affair something like this when the coolie porters of the chair he was in had been unset by a mob. Then also he'd

fought, with all the strength of his eleven years, as he was fighting now.

Powerful bodies had added their weight to the tangle. But even here and now he could tell that the enemy, felt but unrecognizable in the black confusion, was at a loss just how to proceed—that some mortal terror was paralyzing their attack and that this fear was not of himself.

In the midst of the tumult—it had been an affair of timeless seconds—Shattuck's free hand found a throat. The throat was small and smooth.

"You fool," he shouted in Chinese through the din; "stop them! And why didn't you tell me you were a woman?"

IV

SHE hadn't told him, perhaps, that she was a woman because she'd forgotten or had never known that she was one. She'd been treated so long as a divinity that she'd accepted the fact that such she was—a goddess—the goddess Miao Shen.

The knowledge of who she was and what sort of a situation he'd got himself into came to Shattuck by swift degrees.

There'd been no struggle. A girl! Scented! Jeweled! Here in the Gobi!

From the moment the truth flashed upon him that this was a woman's throat his hand had found, he'd released his hold and groped instead for her wrist. If he was still in doubt, the doubt was gone. He had to push a weight of bracelets aside before he found another grip. And by that time Miao Shen had confessed herself and cried a command to her people.

It was a command that stifled the din as a struck match kills darkness.

"Shadak Khan!"

Shattuck had heard that name of his pronounced by his captive even before the din was finished.

"Where'd you get that name?" he panted.

There was a faint laugh.

IN the darkness, Shattuck was trying, cautiously, to set the wretched palang to rights. But he was careful not to lose contact with his mysterious captive. As for that, he was on his guard against the possible prick of a dagger.

He was on his guard against a thousand perils, defined and undefined. He'd reached the outer gates of that mysterious Shamballah he'd heard so much about. Of that he was certain. The mere thought of that brought a riot of elation to his straining nerves. At the same time over his racing thoughts brooded that other—none who'd seen Shamballah had ever returned—except perhaps as a wandering lunatic.

"Only Shadak Khan," came the soft voice, "would dare lay hands on Miao Shen."

"Miao Shen is the Goddess of Mercy."

"I am Miao Shen!"

There were living gods in and about the Gobi. One of the greatest—the greatest of all—was said to live in Shamballah. If living gods, why not goddesses?

"Miao Shen, I and my men were on a peaceful embassy to Shamballah," said Shattuck. "We come from the Lamasery of the Soaring Meditation."

The incarnation of Miao Shen had a laugh in her voice.

"You tell me old news, Shadak Khan. I ran away from Shamballah to find you. I have looked at your face."

Shattuck was dazed by the unre-

ality of all this, but he clung to reason.

"Let me see yours," he said briefly.

SHATTUCK lit a match. By the light of it he looked at her, seated there in the wreck of her palang. The palang, or palanquin, was itself like a throne—but a throne that was wrecked: a lacework of carved and gilded wood, a cloud of richly embroidered silks. And, in the midst of this, Miao Shen herself.

She was not very large. She was so painted and decorated in other ways, with silks and jewels—she was so still—that she might have been, in fact, a goddess of ivory and jade.

Only her eyes were alive—brilliant, limpid.

"Too much light," she said.

And Shattuck tossed the match away.

He was filled with wonder. In the swift darkness, which had left himself blind again, he'd knelt in the sand and again taken her by the wrist. He wasn't sure, even yet, that this was a real person and not one of those curious spirits—sometimes incarnate and sometimes not—with which a thousand stories, older than time, people the Gobi.

These were the Black Hills, the Kara Kerugen; the home place of the Black City on the Black Lake; gateway to Shamballah, the earth-bound ghost of an empire.

In that rush of thought that followed the going-out of his match, a swift flood of ideas swept over Shattuck's mind—things he had heard, dreamed of, thought out for himself, patched together. Shamballah itself was a ghost. But, like the ghost of a man, this ghost of an empire might be getting ready—it was ready—to be born again.

Then, the name of this creature he had seen, whose wrist he held:

Miao Shen! She was the Chinese Goddess of Mercy. Out of Shamballah—when that ghostly empire again came back to rule the earth—would come the prophet of mercy, Mi-leh-fuh, Maitreya.

OUT of this tidal wave of imagination, Shattuck was snatched by a fresh excitement. It came first like the moan of a rising storm—a hooting boom, not very loud, but ominous.

"What is it?" he asked Miao Shen.

A movement of her thin round wrist had brought him closer.

"Kuan Yu!"—there was a note of terror in her voice.

"Who's he?"

"My guardian! He comes with his warriors."

"You fear him?"

"On your account!"

The answer was so unexpected that Shattuck was silent, trying to reason it out.

In the interval, the booming grew louder. He recognized the sound as that of gongs. Gongs were the voice of Asia. There were times he remembered from his childhood when the gongs had roared for weeks at a time—never stopping, booming to a crash, resuming again, whanging and moaning to another peal like that of heavy cannon.

Gongs again at midnight in Buddhist temples:

"Om—om—om—om mani pehme hum!"

But this was no temple chant about the jewel in the sacred lotus!

The gongs suddenly broke into a booming bellow like that of a typhoon. Around a black slope of sand there appeared what looked like the beginning of a torchlight parade.

But instead of torches there were paper lanterns.

Suddenly Shattuck noticed that he and Miao Shen were alone.

"Where are your men?" he asked.

"They've gone back into the dark," she gasped. "They also fear Kuan Yu."

A VISION of those gaunt giants who'd harried him in the darkness returned to Shattuck. If they feared the guardian called Kuan Yu, then what sort of a man was Kuan Yu?

Shattuck had but little time to wait.

In the light of the bobbing lanterns he saw approach a whale of a man seated on a horse. He didn't have to be told. This was Kuan Yu—the image of an old-time Manchu war-lord come back to life.

Kuan Yu must have weighed as much as that horse he rode, a Mongol pony, small but tough. And there was nothing of sagging fatness about Kuan Yu, either.

Even the voluminous cloak he wore—his *terlik* of quilted satin—couldn't disguise the lithe and heavy bulk of him or the proud way he held himself.

He was surrounded by a score of bodyguards with antique helmets on their heads and sickle halberds in their hands.

All this was revealed in prismatic flashes—a flashing moving picture on the dense black screen of the desert, set to the overwhelming music of the gongs.

"Run!" cried Miao Shen.

Feet apart, his left hand holding the hand of Miao Shen, the sword of Kubla Khan—his own sword now, the sword of Shadak Khan, Captain Trouble—in his right hand, Shattuck stood his ground.

V

LATER he was to find out that those first warriors he'd encountered—those men who could run in the dark and who howled instead of talked—were called wolves by the people of Shamballah themselves.

They were the Lang, the Wolves. They lived in the black desert of the Kara Kerugen. For days they had been spying on Shattuck and his two companions.

The reports they'd brought back to the Black City had troubled both Miao Shen and that ferocious guardian of hers, Kuan Yu.

Back—far back in the very Holy of Holies of Shamballah—lived also one who knew all things, who could see all things, and to whom a thousand years were but as a day. Long ago he'd reported the coming of a new war-lord to the troubled world. Trouble would be his name: Shadak!—Scourge of God—the Flail of the Five-Clawed Dragon!—Shadak Khan!—Captain Trouble! And Kuan Yu had sensed the advent of a rival. Shattuck didn't know this.

All he knew, or thought, or felt, as he stood there watching that ambulating menace bear down upon him was that he and Kuan Yu were enemies. It was as if a fiery dragon approached him out of the black night.

The spectacle looked like that with all its glitter and shine of lanterns and arms.

Nor was this dragon the Heavenly Dragon, either. This was the Deep Earth Dragon—the terrible Fu Tsang Lung, guardian of buried treasure—and Kuan Yu was its head.

The thought persisted in Shattuck's mind all the time that the glitter and din drew closer. The din was now shaking the sand. After

the intense darkness the light was like that of a house afire.

Suddenly the din had stopped—stopped as if by a stroke of magic. It was a shock of silence, as shaking as the explosion of a bomb.

In this silence the first voice heard was that of Miao Shen.

Shattuck heard her voice. He wondered now how he'd ever believed it to have been the voice of a man. But many Chinese women have that voice of a strong and low-pitched vibration. Shattuck could understand what she said:

"He is here!"

Also he could understand something of that growling roar that came back from her guardian, the man on the horse. Instantly the bodyguard had begun to deploy, with their sickle-halberds ready to stab or cut.

"Stop!" Shattuck called. "I didn't come here to fight!"

"Who are you, then, and what are you doing here?" Kuan Yu growled.

It was Miao Shen herself who replied. Perhaps she was afraid of some wrong answer that Shattuck might make.

"He's the new war-lord foretold by the Living Buddha," she cried.

Kuan Yu's answer to this was a snarl of contempt, a coughing command, and the bodyguard began to close in on the point where Shattuck stood with Miao Shen.

SHATTUCK couldn't stand his ground. To have done so would be to endanger the girl. He couldn't retreat. Back of him lay darkness and—those lurking wolves. He'd heard that declaration of Miao Shen's—it was still singing in his brain like a strange, intoxicating portent.

There was to be a new war-lord in the world. His coming had been

told by a Living Buddha—the Living Buddha of Shamballah—the greatest of all Living Buddhas.

"I am he," Shattuck cried aloud. "I am here. Behold, I am Shadak Khan!"

He said this partly to the intent of the warriors with the halberds. He wanted to stave off a mass attack. In a mass attack he'd go down before a mob like this and never a chance. But the words were addressed principally to Kuan Yu.

At the same moment he'd started toward Kuan Yu.

Kuan Yu stared in rage and surprise. He was in such a sudden fury—mingled perhaps with some swift poison of a premonition, a superstitious fear—that his normally growling voice broke into falsetto.

He squeaked his command:

"Cut me this dog down!"

WATCHING his chance, Shattuck ran forward. There'd been a half-dozen flashes of halberds in his direction, but the bodyguard was half-hearted. They were in the presence of Miao Shen. For all they knew, they were in the presence of a being even greater, the new war-lord foretold by the Living Buddha.

Great also was Kuan Yu, it was true, but mortal—they'd had proof of that: a man of wine and women!

Before they could come to rights Shattuck was at Kuan Yu's side.

"You question who I am?" Shattuck asked.

What followed came so fast that not even Shattuck himself could have told at once how it came about. Only a little later could he tell.

But Kuan Yu had leaned toward Shattuck with a gesture for him to approach. One would have said that the great man wanted to say something privately to Shattuck.

Then, those watching saw Kuan

Yu make a grab at Shattuck with one hand, while in his other a long poniard flashed. But before the poniard could strike, they saw the point of Shattuck's sword slip out of sight under Kuan Yu's ear.

VI

THE affair had happened so swiftly that the pony Kuan Yu rode was pawing the air before the big man's bodyguard rushed in to save their chief.

Kuan Yu slumped and fell, dragging the pony to a stand by the dead hand that still clutched the rein. The tough little animal, sheeted to its fetlocks with trappings of heavy silk, was as good as a wall at Shattuck's back as he whirled to defend himself.

The advantage was with him at first, even if he was one against a score. The long pikes with their sickle blades that the guardsmen carried were not meant for such close fighting. There were too many of them. They were getting in each other's way.

But Shattuck knew that his advantage couldn't be for long. A pikestaff caught him across the left shoulder. He opened the cheek of the man who'd struck him. He was fighting hands, arms, faces—not hearts. This was no time to kill unless he had to.

The pony itself was helping him. He felt it lunge.

He had just time to turn and catch it by the mane as it jerked loose from the dead hand that was holding it. He scrambled to its back and raised his sword.

"Way for Kuan Yu's master!" he shouted. "Way for Shadak Khan!"

The old intoxication of battle was on him.

It was a queer, exalted sort of

drunken joy—keen as the wind, always with some tincture of prophecy in it that outran common sense. The animal between his knees seemed to have caught something of this—as animals will, in contact with men.

The pony had whirled and was rearing again, striking out at the nearest warriors with its small sharp hoofs.

The thing was so nearly related to a miracle that confusion was turning to panic.

There was other aid on the way.

The Lang—those human wolves—who'd been the escort of Miao Shen, were coming back. They were like sure-enough wolves closing in at the smell of blood. They were no longer afraid, now that Kuan Yu was dead.

In the midst of the tumult Shattuck found Miao Shen.

She would have protested, but he caught her hand and drew her up before him onto the pony's back.

"Where are my men?" he panted.

"In the Black City," she told him, while the pony plunged.

"Show me the way."

He was holding her close. He had to, while he fought the pony's fright. It gave Shattuck a little shot of un-earthliness to think that he was here in the middle of the Gobi at night with a captured goddess in his arms.

"I don't want to go back there," she answered.

"Show me the way," Shattuck roared. "I want my men."

SHATTUCK KHAN, carry me away. I came out to find you. The Lang—they brought in reports of you. They would have killed you if I hadn't kept them from it—"

"Where are my men?"

The pony, still fighting the strange rider and its double load, had reared and circled off into the shadows away from the battleground. Over

there, where Kuan Yu had fallen, the wolves were fighting—they were fighting Kuan Yu's men, they were fighting among themselves. There was a scattering of lanterns. Above the clash and howls there was the occasional boom and clamor of a struck gong.

Then, suddenly, the pony had bolted.

Shattuck had been forced to drop the rein he held as Miao Shen turned and caressed his face in some ultimate plea that he carry her off.

The pony bolted.

Straight through that whirling tumult of fighters, swords and halberds, gongs and lanterns, it went. It went like a small black hurricane—first through that riot of color and noise—then into a zone of dark with a shimmering green light ahead.

From where Shattuck had first seen that green half-moon it looked like the opening of a well. Such are the illusions of the desert night.

Before him Shattuck saw that the opening was the long, low archway of a gate in a vast old wall. The wall, he saw even then, must have been the wall of one of the lost cities of the Gobi.

Like this, after all, he'd come to the Black City—Kara Koto, outpost of that haunted empire of Shamballah that he'd come to find.

VII

THROUGH that same archway—as Miao Shen had indicated—old Juma, the Kirghiz robber chief, and Champela, the mystic lama, had already passed. Scarcely had Shattuck left them, back there in the black desert, when the green light had begun to shine, before they were set upon by a ghostly army. So it had seemed—an army silent and invisible.

Of such stuff are the legends of the Gobi made—based on fact, yet with enough of the weird in the actual happening to make anything seem real.

The Lang—those human wolves of the Black Hills—had stifled and paralyzed Juma and Champela before either of them had been able to utter a sound, or make a movement in self-defense. And that might have been the end of them if the Lang hadn't received their orders from the little Goddess of Mercy, Miao Shen, who'd always shown mercy to them. . . .

Shattuck found both of them, together with his camels, just inside the archway. His two friends looked like corpses in the green light. The green light was smoking up, coldly, from a pool of phosphorus. It was some secret of cold fire that had been preserved over from the time when Shamballah had been a kingdom of the living and not of the dead.

IN that green light the population of the Black City—such as it was—came streaming out like the dead on the day of the Great Resurrection. Like dead they seemed to emerge from their graves. The whole great city of Kara Koto itself had been buried for long ages. These people who lived there still were tenants of the buried houses and temples.

And now it was the great portent of the presence of gods that was bringing them out.

First, Miao Shen—the living incarnation of the Goddess of Mercy. They'd heard of her. They'd known that she was living somewhere near them. Yet not in the swarm of men, women, children, now milling about in the weird green light, was there one who had ever seen her.

Greater than she was that other—

was the Lord of Tumult, Shadak Khan, Captain Trouble.

Hadn't it been foretold that he'd come with Mercy in one hand and a sword in the other?

The wild pony had come to a halt by that pool of green fire.

Shattuck had recovered the rein. He still held Miao Shen in the hollow of his bridle-arm. She was his hostage—and making strangely light of it, anyone would have said. And Shattuck was keeping his sword-arm free—still too raw from slaughter to believe that peace was near.

"Juma!" he shouted. "Champela!"

They raised a shout of their own at sight of him. But they couldn't move. They were trussed up like living flies in a spider-web. They'd been waiting their fate. Their fate was to have been decided when Kuan Yu came back. Shattuck they'd believed to have been already dead.

NOW it was Kuan Yu who was dead, and Shattuck—Shadak Khan—that Fighting Fool of a Captain Trouble who was there, after all, instead.

The people of Kara Koto were humming like a swarm of bees.

Something of wonder arose from that humming. More and more it was like that day of final judgment when the dead shall rise from their tombs. The green light flared. It rose in tides of ghostly radiance and fell again. The humming murmur rose and fell.

At that first shout of recognition that had passed between Shattuck and his friends, a hundred green hands had begun to pluck at the silk strands with which Champela and Juma were bound. The old chief

and the young lama were free and stumbling toward Shattuck before he could bring his pony around.

"Lo," old Juma chanted above that infernal humming, "you've brought us even to Gehenna. See, these people are like the long-time buried. God send them vultures!"

Champela raised his eyes of a mystic to Shattuck.

"Who is the girl?"

IT was the prime minister of Shadak Khan who spoke.

"Don't worry, John Day," Shattuck answered, calling Champela by his American name. "She tempted me out there in the desert. But what's any woman—even a goddess—when a man has work to do!"

He came to his decision swiftly—that remark of John Day, prime minister to Shadak, helping him no doubt. There might still be fighting out there in the desert. Where fighting was, there he belonged.

He consigned Miao Shen to the keeping of his friends. He knew that so long as she was with them they'd be safe. And if he didn't come back, he told them, they could go on to Shamballah and await him there.

"Ai, ya!" old Juma moaned. "I'd rather see you this side of Shamballah!"

"I have a feeling that you will," Shattuck consoled him. "Isn't it written that Captain Trouble will rule the world?"

The last they saw of him—this night, at any rate—was as he rode away, back through that tunneled gateway, into the black mystery of the desert where there might be more fighting to do.

Another "Captain Trouble" Story Next Month

The Eye of Bel-Ra-Anu



*From New York to Central Africa and Back
Again Roeding Pursues His Quest
of Temple Treasure*

By WAYNE ROGERS

Author of "Yellow Treasure," "Too Much Gold," etc.

ROEDING uttered a stifled exclamation of disgust, and his face contorted until it lost its human semblance. It became the likeness of some horrid monstrosity; purpling lips drawn back from yellow fangs, bloodshot eyes squinting inward, rugged furrows searing the curved forehead.

"Gone!" he said venomously. "Damn the lying hound who told me it was here! Damn him!"

His passion shook him so that further speech was impossible. For a

little while he crouched in the unclean niche where he had been concealed for weary hours, waiting until the guardians of the hidden temple in the mountains had ceased their solemn orgies of devotion.

Then, with another snarl, he extinguished the electric torch he carried, and clambered down a column of curiously wrought brass-work, until he stood on the temple floor.

He listened intently. Beyond the distant drip of water and the vague suggestions of a weird, unnatural

In Stark Terror She Watched Them Bid Madly for Her!

EXQUISITELY beautiful she stood on the auction block, shrinking back fearfully as the swarthy Barbary pirates pressed forward eagerly to gaze upon her pink and white loveliness. Here, indeed, was a woman to grace the harem of the richest Mohammedan in Algiers!

There were three who grimly set themselves against each other to bid for this prize—Tsamanni, the agent of the rich Basha; Ayoub, the eunuch, and Sakr-el-Bahr, renegade Christian and idol of the multitude. Each had his own reasons for wanting her and was determined to outbid all.

What conflicting plots and counterplots lay behind this thrilling drama in an Algerian slave market? What chain of strange happenings thrust this favorite of Queen Elizabeth's court into the merciless hands of Barbary pirates? What was to be her fate?

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melody, caused by the wind's whining through illimitable corridors, there was no sound.

"I'll give him another chance," he whispered. "One more, but if he's lied to me—God help him!"

He shook his fist into the darkness and, with a furtive, backward glance, switched the torch on again. Its light shone steadily on the face and figure of an idol: a hideous creation.

But Roeding had no eyes for the god Bel-Ra-Anu as a god. He caught at one of the monster's pendant fingers, placed his foot in a niche that the devout kisses of generations had worn in the flint-hard stone, and hauled himself to the effigy's knees. Roeding was a giant physically, and the effort did not quicken his even breathing.

The first time he had made the ascent his zeal had outrun his discretion, and hardly had the secret receptacle been laid bare than a sound of approaching footsteps had sent him scurrying back to concealment. Now he knew the way.

THE pupil of the right eye of the idol protruded infinitesimally from the ball itself. It, like all the statue, was of stone.

Roeding, standing in the crook of the right elbow, pressed on that protruding pupil firmly. A fragment of hope still survived within him; his former examination had been cursory, hasty, insufficient.

The treasure he sought might conceivably have escaped his notice, and still be lying in some dusty corner of the great coffer. He licked his lips and pressed again, slightly to the right as the pupil gave to his touch.

Beneath him opened a vast cavity; the knees of the god slid smoothly aside, actuated by some unrevealed and marvelous mechanism. Roeding

breathed unevenly; then cast the ray from the torch downward, and looked into the cavity.

Save for the dust of unheeded ages it was empty. The clear light brought out the uttermost confines of the place; it was absolutely empty!

"It's gone!" he said thickly.

Feverishly he sought to know the worst. He lay extended on the rough stone, and groped in remote corners, bringing nothing to light but handfuls of powdery dust.

His fingers scraped over the center of the pit. Suddenly he grew tense; he lifted something gingerly. The torch showed it to be a fragment of iron-rust, and he gave a wild laugh that rang mockingly among the pillars of the temple.

"Too late!" he cried. "Too late!"

He rose upright and, with the knowledge that discovery of his sacrilege meant pursuit that could only result in hideous death, closed the rifled chamber and descended.

As he mounted again to the niche he had previously occupied he gave short grunts of ugly laughter, and his face worked.

"And I did murder to find—that!"

ANOTHER laugh followed the exclamation. The darkness shut down upon that mirthless sound. Roeding shuffled painfully along a narrow passage, formed by some softer stratum in the stone being washed away by springs that had dried up centuries ago, and a hot rage rose within him.

"I'll make that damn priest pay for that!" he vowed. "The swine! He's double-crossed me—he knew it was gone. Shouldn't be surprised if he knew all the time. Probably he's shown the others the way. I'll pay him his price."

Long traveling by tortuous paths brought him eventually to where the

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wind rustled in scant vegetation on a bleak hillside. To approach the temple by any other way was to court death by sacrifice, for the worshipers were jealous for the honor of their sanctuary, and Roeding had a high regard for his life.

He crouched behind a screening boulder, cast alert, menacing glances everywhere, but beyond the rustling of the tree-tops beneath him there was no movement or sound. He fumbled with the flap of his holster and gripped the butt of a pistol. Then he whistled peculiarly, a faint weird call, that merged into the mystery of the night.

"I am here, High-born."

It was hardly more than a whisper, but it reached the watcher's nerve-quicken ears. Roeding snarled as a shadowy figure detached itself from the shadows and bowed deeply.

"Ah! You're there, are you?"

"Yes, High-born."

THERE was something of dignity in the tone of the speaker. He rose upright, to reveal himself as a tall, lithe North African, with a cunning monkish face, and a narrow head almost covered by a cowl of some heavy cloth. His eyes were full of an avaricious light; the moon's gleams gave them an unholy fire.

"The Eye—the High-born has it—No?"

"You've overshot the mark this time, Telah-Beni. The High-born hasn't got the Eye. What's more, the High-born doesn't believe there ever was an Eye at all. It's a trumped-up farce from beginning to end—you've double-crossed me; you set out to double-cross me."

He might have known that his blustering accusations were false, had he but looked at his companion's face. Consternation, fear, quivering terror held the priest rooted in his

place. Through dry lips he whispered:

"There is no Eye? But—it is there. I have seen the casket that contains it; a great casket, big—like so." He spread his sinewy arms to indicate an object of considerable dimensions.

"The place was empty—as empty as your filthy heart is of truth," growled Roeding. "I've done murder for this—"

"But the Eye—it cannot have gone," gasped Telah-Beni. "I have seen it—with these eyes. A great stone, as clear as the day, shining with a fire—the fire of hell, High-born. It lighted the earth about it—it was like a sun of evil. The word came down from those who have gone before, that a strange metal lived in the earth whence the Eye came—a metal that shone like the sun; that burned and was never destroyed."

"Radium!" grunted Roeding.

He looked at the priest, and the knowledge of his failure drove common sense from him.

"You've tricked me!" he foamed, and his finger tightened on the pistol-trigger. "You lying hound! I was a fool to think I could buy a priest, even at that price. You thought you'd use me to gratify your private vengeance, did you? You wanted that old man dead—out of your way! So you tricked me with a tale about the key he carried, and—God! I can hear his cry now, when the knife went home!"

"High-born, it is a mistake; the stone is still there; a diamond worth the ransoms of ten kings. Let me go; I will risk the curse of the god—I will prove I am an honorable man."

HE made a violent effort, and moved from the spot. Roeding caught him by the wrist in a grip that ground the bones.



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"Stay here—we'll settle the thing now."

Telah-Beni struggled, sweat on his brow, but the explorer only tightened his hold. The priest lifted his free hand and struck venomously; Roeding staggered a little and flung his own right hand upward.

THE murmur of the trees was momentarily overborne by a louder, barking sound. There was a low choking cry, and Roeding heard the thud of a falling body.

"Damn my luck!" he muttered. "I didn't mean—I wasn't—" And he knew he lied. He had intended to kill the lying priest where he stood.

"Telah-Beni!" he cried, dropping on his knees.

There was no response. His groping fingers touched bare, still flesh, and he shuddered.

"Dead!" he said weakly. "Well, he deserved it—damn him! I'm glad he's dead—I'm glad!"

The fear that had sent him for a moment to grovel beside his victim vanished when he reached the truth. Roeding had counted heavily on the success of this venture, which had its birth in a little office in New York where he had listened to the story of the Eye of Bel-Ra-Anu as it came slowly from the lips of the man who had seen it with his own eyes.

That he had deliberately stolen the map—a curious document, the work of some old, long-forgotten priest of this obscure religious sect, with additions written here and there in the firm forceful handwriting of a man of action—did not trouble him.

He had trodden many devious ways to reach this goal; he had overcome many obstacles before laying his hand on the carved eye of the idol—the secret guardian of that other Eye whose possession would make him a millionaire.

THERE had been money to be spent; for the temple lay in a remote section of Central Africa, and the priest, Telah-Beni, was not brought into line without a struggle.

Standing there, gazing away into the darkness, Roeding thought of these things, and black curses flowed soundlessly from his lips.

There was a stirring of the undergrowth; in an instant he backed behind a boulder, pistol leveled.

"Only a wildcat," he said presently, as the sound was not repeated. "But it might have been—" He drew his hand across his forehead and found it wet.

"Queer, that. Didn't used to be scared so easily. Must be the influence of this cursed place—wasn't there something about the justice of the god or something like that? What was it that the old priest said when the knife went in? '—will take vengeance!' Bunk—a thing of stone couldn't—it's sheer superstition."

But an uncomfortable shudder shook him nevertheless.

"I'll be clearing out of this now," went on his thoughts. "Wouldn't do to be found with this here."

As he turned, stepping cautiously, his disappointment welled up afresh and convulsed him with angry spite.

"I've you to thank for this!" he said, and kicked at the prostrate form.

He went down the hillside, moving cautiously and without haste. His line of retreat was practically clear; he had taken all precautions that an experienced traveler could take.

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natives. He shook off the baneful influence as the jungle closed behind him, and forced a harsh laugh.

"So much for Bel-Ra-Anu," he said bitterly, and went down-river.

Behind him, in the secret temple, that had echoed through the centuries to the shrieks of suffering victims, Bel-Ra-Anu stared sightlessly into the gloom. Among the boulders that concealed the entrance something moved, drew itself upright weakly; finally gained its feet, and shook a trembling hand to the East.

THE curse of Bel-Ra-Anu on thee, white coward! I die—yes, but the words are unspoken, and Bel-Ra-Anu will have his price now."

He slid slowly downward again, and lay still. A modern automatic pistol does not always kill outright, even at close range.

But the day crept up to show a grey, expressionless face staring at a merciless sky.

* * *

"Two men like you ought to know each other," was Jeff Townsend's brisk introduction. "Mr. Peters—let me introduce Mr. Roeding, the famous explorer."

Roeding bowed, and looked impassively into an honest, bronzed face that showed no particular intelligence, and was remarkable chiefly for indomitable courage.

"Been back long?" he asked.

"Oh, six months or so." George Peters laughed. "Funny your saying that—did you know I'd been away?"

"No, saw the signs, that's all. I'm only back three months myself. Can't we get out of this mob, and have a drink somewhere in a quiet corner?"

Peters shouldered a patient way through chattering humanity, and found the desired haven.

"I like my own brand," he said, pouring a drink from a pocket flask. "You'll—oh, prefer it straight, eh?"

Roeding gulped down a liberal helping without diluting.

"Yes—got a touch of fever out Bahr El Ghazal way; it's left me with the shivers."

AH, that's bad. Nasty things, those African fevers. Kept clear of 'em myself, thank the Lord!"

"Oh, so you've been to Africa?"

"Yes, some; not doing much, you know. Started out originally with the intention of bagging big game; got off the beaten track a bit, and eventually rounded up not a thousand miles from Bahr-El-Ghazal."

"Any fighting?" Roeding asked.

"A bit; not much. We had a scrap with the Beonutos; I lost my best man there. Got in front of me and took a spear that would have settled my hash, in his own heart."

Men and women came and went, and at every rustle Roeding started slightly. It had been so with him ever since that night on a distant hillside.

"You know Bahr El Ghazal," said Peters suddenly. "I'd like to have a real talk with you, where we can compare notes properly. Wonder if you'd care to come up to my country place and endure bachelor quarters for a few days?"

"Not married, eh?"

"No; I'm not married—yet," said Peters, and his manner grew somewhat confused. He was looking straight across a sea of heads toward a red-headed athletic girl whose face was wreathed in a radiant smile.

"Won't invite his pals up to bachelor quarters much longer," thought Roeding. "I'll be delighted to visit you. When will it be convenient?"

"Whenever you like; why not at once? I may have engagements later on—one never knows. Yes, come up tomorrow."

"Thanks. Where is it?"

(Continued on page 120)

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22x8.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x8.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x9.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x9.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x10.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x10.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x11.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x11.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x12.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x12.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x13.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x13.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x14.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x14.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x15.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x15.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x16.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x16.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x17.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x17.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x18.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x18.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x19.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x19.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x20.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x20.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x21.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x21.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x22.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x22.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
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22x23.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x24.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x24.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x25.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x25.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x26.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x26.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x27.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x27.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x28.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x28.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x29.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x29.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x30.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x30.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x31.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x31.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x32.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x32.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x33.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x33.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x34.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x34.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x35.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x35.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x36.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x36.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x37.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x37.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x38.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x38.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x39.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x39.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x40.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x40.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x41.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x41.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x42.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x42.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x43.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x43.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x44.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x44.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x45.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x45.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x46.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x46.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x47.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x47.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x48.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x48.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x49.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x49.50	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
22x50.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70

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30	27.50

Next Month:

THE DEVIL FROM DEVIL'S ISLAND

By George Allan Moffatt

"Oh, didn't I say? Shady Glen—an old place up the Hudson near Bear Mountain. I'll stop for you and we'll drive up."

For a few moments more they talked, ratifying the date; then Peters, unable longer to resist the invitation of that fair face, offered an apology and disappeared.

"I wonder where I've seen him before!" muttered Roeding. "There's something familiar in his face—either I've seen him or some one very much like him."

I'VE invited a man up to stay a few days, Ellen," said Peters to the girl he had extricated from the crowd. "I don't know why unless it was that the poor chap looked so lonely. Roeding, they call him. He's made a trip to Bahr El Ghazal, too."

"I don't like him," said the girl firmly.

"Oh, nonsense. You don't know him, do you?"

"No, but—well, I've heard of him. Can't you cancel the invitation, George?"

He stared at her in surprise.

"Cancel the invitation! Why should I do that? Look here, are you sure these rooms aren't too hot for you?"

"No, I'm all right. I don't trust Mr. Roeding, somehow. And it makes me very uneasy to think of you up there alone with him."

He laughed carelessly, shrugging his shoulders. "There's no need to be afraid," he said. "I can look after myself."

Peters led the way from the narrow bridge spanning the torrent that rushed through the glen and gave the estate its name. Roeding did not immediately follow, but stood studying the view.

The moon shone placidly down into a gorge of living green, lined at the bottom with a swirling medley of

rushing, crashing water, where the river raced and roared like a giant aroused from sleep.

"Don't lean your weight on that rail!" came Peters' voice. "It's rotten. I'll have it fixed tomorrow. Come on, Roeding. Let's go in and talk."

ROEDING was quite willing. Two hours before he had dined excellently; he was as much at peace with his world as it was possible for him to be.

"Bring some highballs to my study," Peters directed the butler as they entered the house. "I thought we'd go there," he explained to his guest. "It's quiet and no chance of being disturbed."

He waited until the drinks were served and the door closed before speaking again.

"I didn't go to Bahr El Ghazal after big game alone," he said abruptly. He seemed in the mood for confidences. Roeding lit a cigar before replying.

"No; I didn't expect you went for that only. There's something in the sheer love of the thing—"

"No; it wasn't that altogether. Look here, Roeding, you've been in the same kind of places I have; I like you. I think we understand one another, too. I had another reason for inviting you up here. Ever heard of the Eye of Bel-Ra-Anu?"

Roeding suppressed a start.

"The Eye of—what? Bel-Ra-Anu? No; I've never heard of such a thing. Is it a mountain?"

Peters laughed.

"To tell the truth I don't know what it is. And yet—I've got it in there—behind that paneling." And he pointed to the farther wall of the room.

"Then it can't be a mountain." Roeding forced the words to come naturally, and wondered—wondered.

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The Eye of Bel-Ra-Anu, that he had sought through half a continent, lying in this peaceful house! The idea was ridiculous.

"It's rather a long story. My uncle, Thomas Russell—did you know him?"

"No," said Roeding shortly, and drank whisky to hide his momentary confusion.

WELL, he knew something about this Eye, which was supposed to be the biggest diamond in the world. Wouldn't tell how he got to know. He naturally wanted to get it for himself. But it wasn't possible even to get into the country until lately, and then he was too old to go in person.

"There was a man he'd half thought of entrusting with the mission—I never knew his name. He showed this man the plan, and told him a little about the business; but the fellow bolted the same night, and took the plan with him."

Roeding gulped another drink.

"My uncle had made an absolutely correct copy of the plan," continued Peters. "In one respect, it was better than the original, for when he sent for me he remembered something he'd been told by his informant, and wrote it down. He sent for me as soon as he discovered the theft.

"My uncle told me all about everything, and offered to finance an expedition to find this Eye. Wanted me to take charge. I jumped at the offer, for I'd never had a chance to see that part of Africa. So off I went. The Eye was said to be priceless, and I hardly expected to find it lying loose. As a matter of fact, it was enclosed in a big coffer made of some metal a good deal tougher than steel. Hope this doesn't bore you."

"No; on the contrary, I'm interested. Go on."

"That's what I did. I went on. I started off for Bahr El Ghazal, got men and guides there; went up-country, carefully following the plan, and ultimately reached the resting place of the Eye. It was in an ancient temple, an unholy sort of place. Full of the spirits of martyred victims, I thought.

"I watched my chance; got into the place in disguise, hid until it was deserted, and then explored around. I found the coffer all right."

"And the Eye—the Eye?"

"Oh; you're interested? Well, I guess the Eye's in that coffer still. I tried to open it, but I couldn't. There was a keyhole, but no key.

"But as my uncle had sent me for the Eye I couldn't come away without it, so I just annexed the coffer—it was pretty heavy, too—and carted it away.

"I got the coffer down to the coast—made a trusty man build an ordinary case around it. Then, as I didn't want to be questioned—because, I suppose, I stole the thing in a way—I just shipped the case home as it stood, addressed to my uncle; had a bit of hunting, and worked home by easy stages."

ROEDING felt mad hate boil within his soul. He had killed two men in cold blood to obtain possession of the coffer Peters spoke of so casually! Little by little, seated there, staring into a small fire, an idea formulated in his mind. It would be comparatively simple to execute, too.

"My uncle died after the thing got through Customs but before it reached him," said Peters. "And the case was simply stuck in a corner and forgotten—I'd made it look like something of no importance—and it wasn't until I got down here that I

(Continued on page 124)

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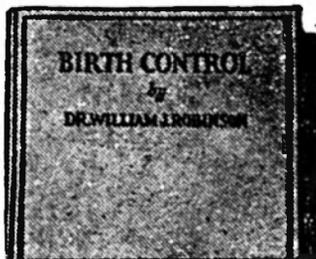
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saw it again. Uncle left me this place, and some of his cash."

"Come in," called Peters, in answer to a discreet knock on the door.

"Anything further, sir?" It was the butler.

"No, nothing. You can go to bed. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

The door closed noiselessly, leaving Roeding breathing a little quicker than usual.

"And there the coffer is," said Peters, waving his hand again toward the farther wall. "I thought my uncle would have a key since he knew so much about it, but it seems he didn't."

The key, a large piece of curiously shaped iron, was reposing in Roeding's pocket. He had never parted with it from the time he snatched it from a dead man's hand.

"But I'll take a crack at opening it presently," said Peters.

"Why not now, tonight?" suggested his guest. "Two heads are better than one."

"Not a bad idea." It never entered the younger man's mind to doubt his companion. "Yes; we'll try it."

PETERS walked across the room. Roeding followed at a little distance. As Peters stooped to apply a key to the keyhole of what was apparently a semi-secret door, Roeding reached up and took down a short, thick club, one of many varied weapons that hung in the room—a man's room and a sportsman's. This club he held behind his back as he followed his host.

"There's the thing; not pretty, but damned strong," said Peters.

The coffer, or chest, stood in the middle of the floor. It was somewhat cumbersome; of a quaint design. Roeding wondered for a moment at the strength which had enabled Peters to carry it from its hid-

ing-place. It stood high, on strange claw-footed legs.

"See? Here's the keyhole—but no key. And there's hardly a crack to show where the lid joins." Peters was stooping over the box.

"Doesn't seem very hopeful," said Roeding, and he brought the club down with all his strength. Peters gave no outcry as he sank to his knees and rolled slowly to the floor.

Roeding looked around; he could have sworn he had heard a faint rustling sound, but nothing was to be seen. He felt for the key—it was there, but with his fingers on it he hesitated. If someone should come upon him how could he explain that still form lying there?

He made his preparations methodically. He hung the club back in its place; walked across the study and opened a low window. The cool breeze blew into his face.

"That's better," he muttered.

To a man of his strength it was no great difficulty to carry the inanimate form. He even had presence of mind to open the door leading to the hall, and find his hat. If he were seen returning he would say he had been for a stroll.

The moon had set as he carried his burden across a dark lawn, through the shrubbery, toward the river.

Roeding dragged his victim to the middle of the bridge and thrust him through the rails. It was all too easy.

ROEDING listened; the splash was drowned in the rush of the water and the distant thunder of the near-by falls. Swiftly he thrust outward at the treacherous rail; it gave with the dull crash of rotten wood, and a portion followed the body.

"They won't be able to prove much—once the fall's got him," he gloated. "Accidental death, of course. I won't go away until they've found

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him. Tell them I went to bed when Peters started off for a stroll. Can't prove anything different—if his head's broken it will be blamed on the river."

He was walking composedly back to the house as he spoke. But when he entered the room his manner changed. Alertly he slipped across the floor, entered the secret apartment, and shut the door.

HE took out the key, feeling for the keyhole with fluttering fingers. What if he had failed at the last!

But the key fitted; little by little it turned—the lid sprang up an inch. "I've won!" he gasped, and raised it.

A bright light shone upward from the chest; a light that was almost dazzling in its intensity.

A huge diamond lay imbedded in something that glowed and glittered like living fire. He remembered the words of Telah-Beni:

"Shining with a fire—the fire of hell. It was like a sun of evil."

He made a quick clutch at the peerless gem. It was attached in some strange fashion to the bottom of the coffer, although the fastening was invisible.

Something rustled near at hand; he turned swiftly, still keeping his hold. The tug he gave set hidden mechanism to work. With a crash the lid dropped; sharp spikes shot out from its edge. They pierced through his arm and he felt the hot blood rush over his hand.

For a moment he was stunned at the happening; the next he was tearing at the imprisoned arm, white as death, shaking with fear. But release would not come.

He tried to take the matter coolly, but could only spurt out weak, futile curses. The lid would not move

when he tore at it with his free hand. With a desperate idea of dragging the fiendish coffer with him through the door, into the study, where, perhaps some tools might be found, he tried to lift it.

But it remained immovable. The same mechanism that had closed the lid had driven curved spikes into the floor through the claw-feet.

He fought on—but his struggles grew weaker as the lacerated artery drained his body. He would not call aloud while strength remained; later the strength had gone, and he could only gasp faintly.

FIFTEEN minutes later a dripping figure ran panting up to the front door and aroused the butler and gardener with her calling and pounding.

"Mr. Peters—down by the river—he's hurt—I can't carry him!" gasped Ellen.

"It was that fiend Roeding," she explained as they hurried back with her to the glen. "Something told me that George was in danger. I had to come. I had just reached the glen when that fiend threw him into the river. I managed to get him to shore before he reached the falls—but he's unconscious and I couldn't carry him."

On the shore of the river they found Peters, semi-conscious, fighting to gain his feet. Together they carried him back to the house—to his study, as he demanded.

And there they found Roeding lying, a drained shell. As they stood aghast at the sight, a single withered leaf fluttered softly in the draught from the door.

* * *

Telah-Beni had not warned him of this deadly peril—but Roeding's own gun had closed the priest's lips. Bel-Ra-Anu had claimed his price.

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LIEUTENANT JOHN HOPPER'S great adventure story, **VOODOO MAGIC**, was overwhelmingly voted first in quality among all the stories in the May number of **THRILLING ADVENTURES**.

Second in the "Reader's Choice Contest" ballots was Joseph Ivers Lawrence's costume story, **HIGH CARNIVAL**. We're glad to know that you like this type of historical fiction. We have many other stories on tap which have the same enthralling power as **HIGH CARNIVAL**. In this issue, you'll find **THE TERROR COMES TO CHATIGNY**, a story of France in the days when the guillotine held sway.

THE LEOPARD MAN, Perley Poore Sheehan's unusual story of Africa with all its mysticism, magic and superstition, held its own in the May balloting, too. The large number of votes for this story, and the many readers' comments, indicate that **THRILLING ADVENTURES** readers respond favorably to stories of this type.

This month we give you **KWA OF THE JUNGLE** as a complete book-length novel and want you to write us—please!—and tell us whether it appeals to you. This is your magazine and we want to give you the kind of fiction that you like best. Suggestions, praise and criticism are all equally welcome.

The stories in the May issue were ranked by **THRILLING ADVENTURES** readers, as follows:

- 1st—**VOODOO MAGIC**
by Lieutenant John Hopper
- 2nd—**HIGH CARNIVAL**
by Joseph Ivers Lawrence

- 3rd—**RETRIBUTION**
by Jack Blackburn
- 4th—**THE LEOPARD MAN**
by Perley Poore Sheehan
- 5th—**YELLOW TREASURE**
by Wayne Rogers
- 6th—**THE STUMP OF MAHAKAN**
by Ace Williams

First prize was won by Mrs. Ola Kinney, Tampa, Fla., whose list was the above.

Second prize went to Art Hale, Struthers, Ohio.

Third money was won by Edwin L. Baker, Buffalo, N. Y.

Six fourth prizes were awarded to the following successful contestants:

J. W. Tidwell, Pulaski, Tenn.; Ernest R. Schroeder, Rock Island, Ill.; Morris Rosenfeld, Milford, Mass.; P. H. Pollard, Amarillo, Tex.; Jerry Fodor, Toledo, O.; Oliver Heartberg, N. Y. C.

June results next month—watch for them!

* * *

Globe Trotters! Next month you'll read an astonishing story—a tale of the French prisoner's colony at Devil's Island that will thrill you from the first word to the last.

This complete book-length novel will be but one of the many exceptional features in our next issue.

It is called **THE DEVIL FROM DEVIL'S ISLAND** and is by that master story-teller, George Allan Moffat.

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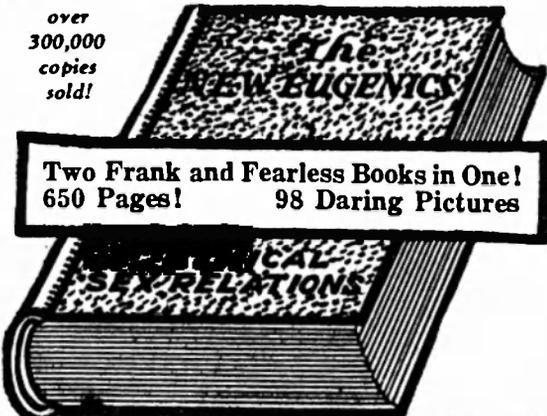
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