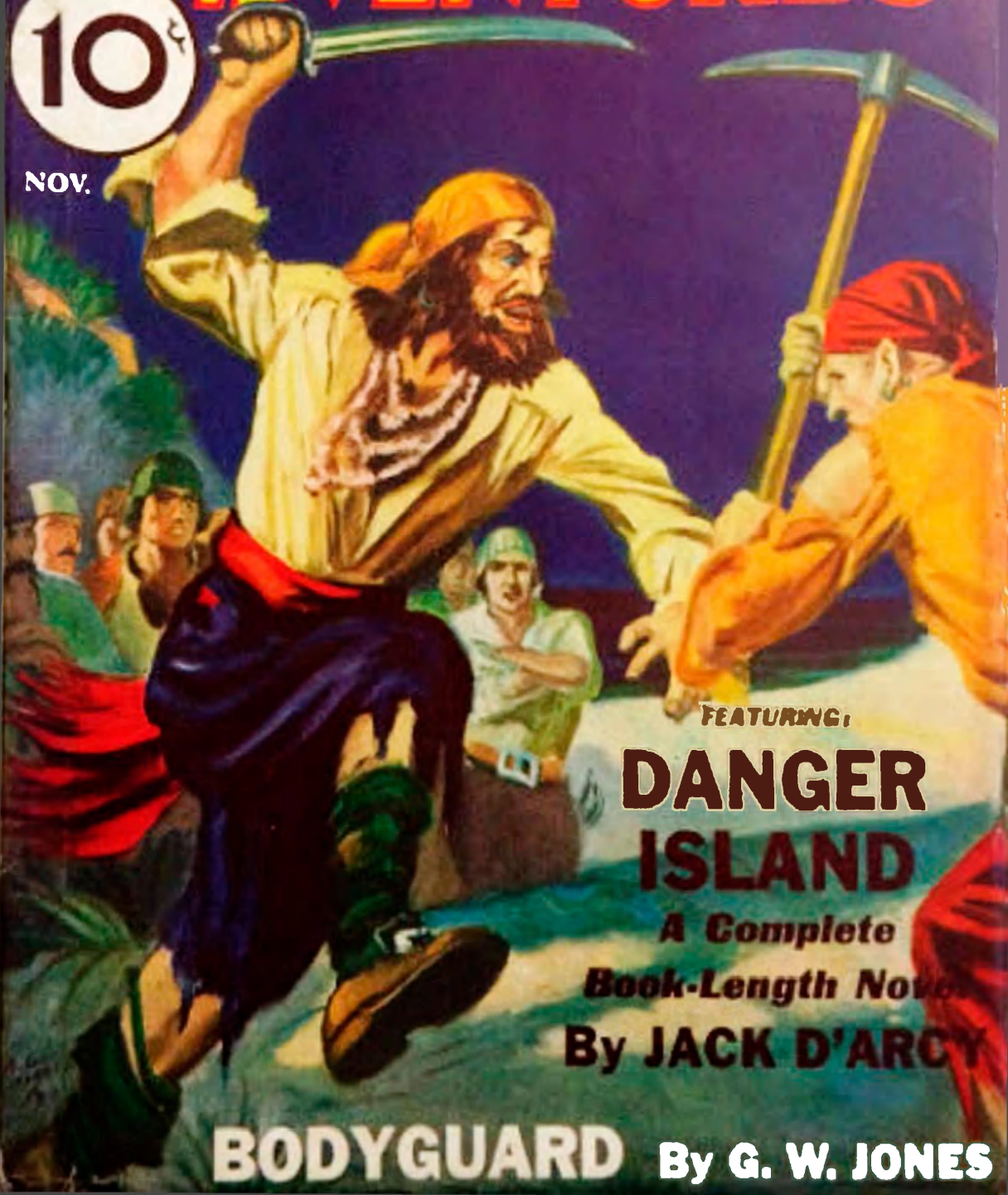


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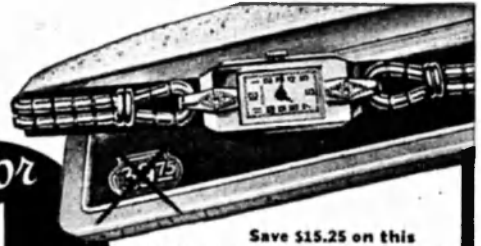
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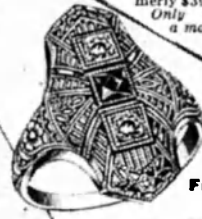
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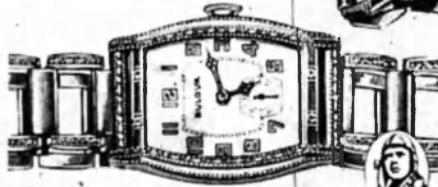
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J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

November, 1932

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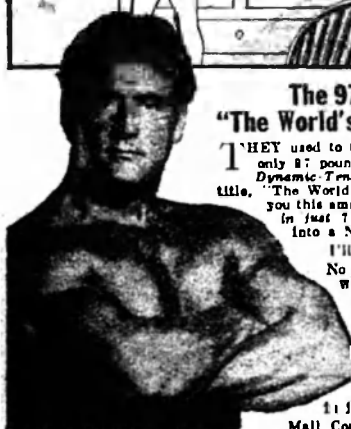
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Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet

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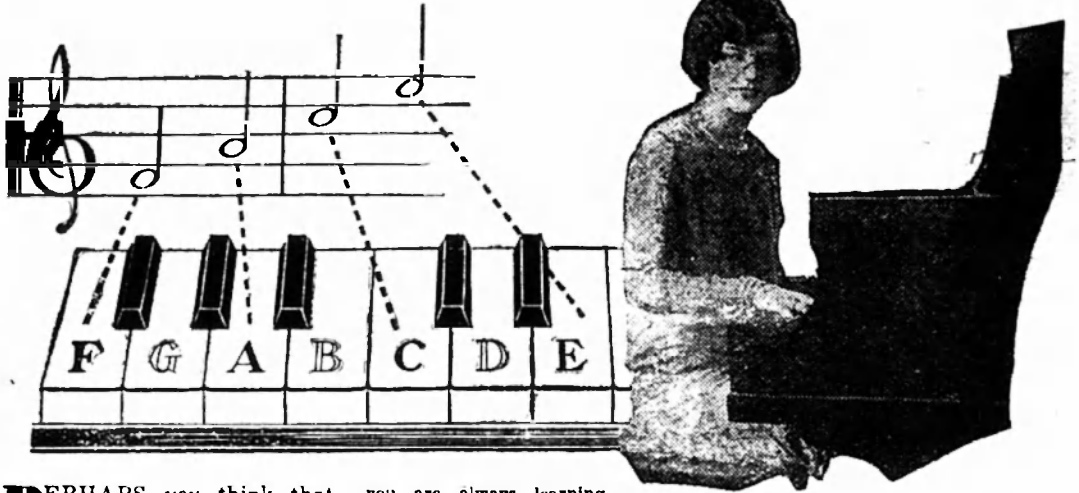
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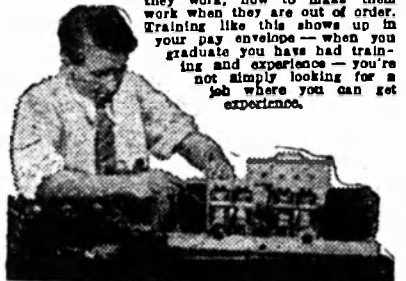
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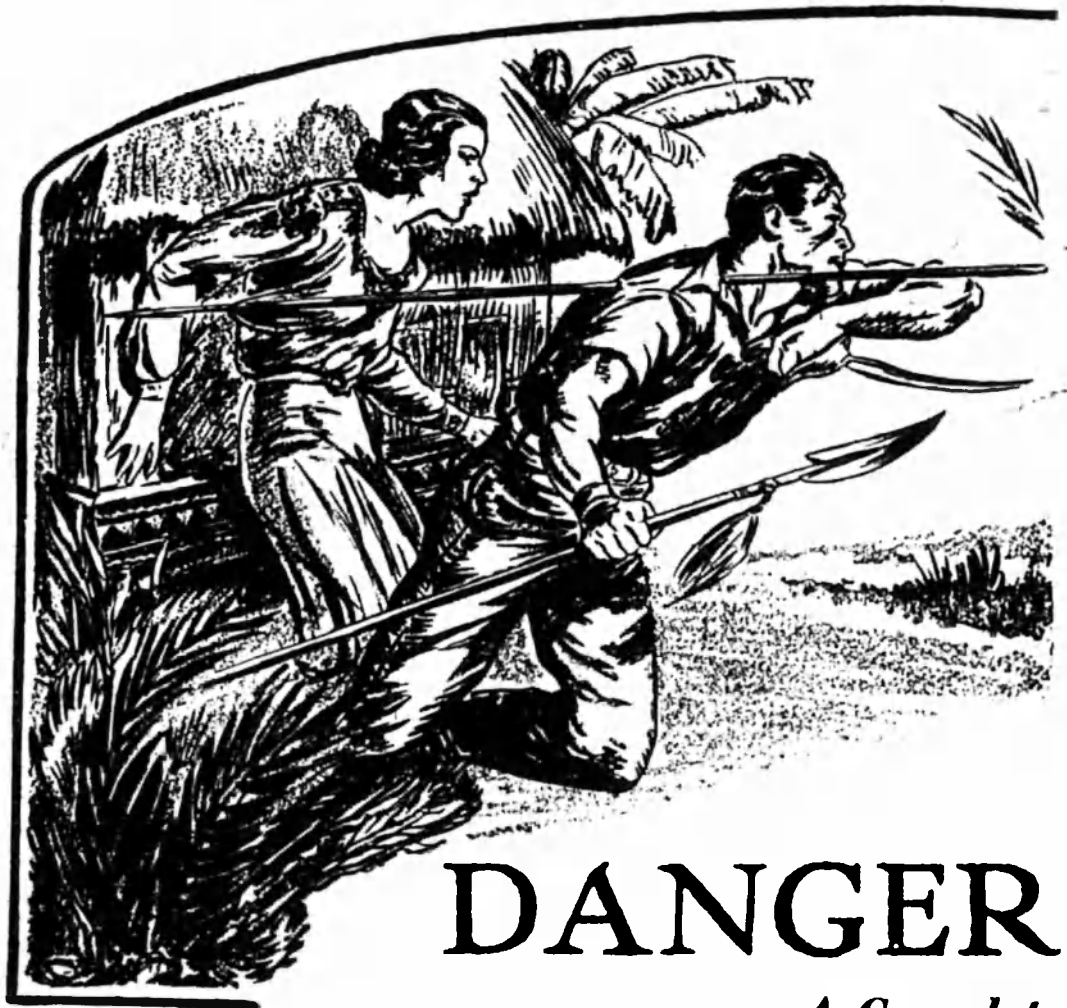
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CHAPTER I

The Moon Place

LARRY TRACY waved aside the bottle of gin which the Chinaman offered him, and with characteristic directness, reverted to the matter which had brought him to Yan Lee's office.

"It's a fair price, Yan Lee," he said. "In fact, it's more than fair. There's no reason for haggling."

The Chinaman shrugged his shoulders and looked up at the bronzed white man with inscrutable eyes.

"Bargaining is the pleasure of business," he said softly. "In the Orient we do not conclude a deal in a single day. Indeed, a trivial purchase may consume the greater part of a week."

"This isn't the Orient," said Larry impatiently. "It's the very unromantic island of Vitu Levu in the Fijis, and I'm offering you a sweet price for a shack in the hills

Breathless Adventure in the Fiji Islands



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that's in a terrible state of repair. Now will you take it or leave it?"

"Haste," quoted Yan Lee in a sing-song voice, "is the thief of wisdom. Let me deliberate a day as befits an old man."

"Deliberation," rejoined Larry Tracy testily, "may be the thief of three thousand dollars in silver if you don't accept my proposition at once."

For a full minute the old Chinese spoke no word. He sat in replete silence, staring blankly at the paintless wall of his office. Larry watched him with a puzzled frown playing across his brow. Even allowing for the Oriental love of prolonging a business deal, it seemed absurd that the Chinaman should hesitate to make his decision in this case, where he was clearly the gainer.

At last the slant eyes lifted themselves from their profitless contemplation of the wall and fixed themselves on Larry.

"Very well," he said. "I shall sell

on the Trail of a Castle of Pearls

the Moon place. We shall go at once to Mr. Oldham. He shall make out the necessary papers. You shall give me the cash—and may Confucius grant that neither of us regret the deal.”

EXULTANT at having concluded his business, Larry paid scant attention to these strange words. Though, had he been more alert, he would have noticed an odd apprehensive flicker cross the Oriental's usually impassive face as he rose from his desk and shuffled at Larry's side toward the door.

After Oldham, who had a smattering of law, had drawn up the bill of sale and Larry had handed the money over to Yan Lee, he returned to his own bungalow with the air of a man who has just concluded a most satisfactory piece of business.

In the five years that he had spent in the islands, Larry had amassed a comfortable fortune trading with the natives; enough, in fact, to permit him to return to the States and live in comfort for the rest of his life. But although that had been his original intention, he found now, that the magic spell of the South Seas, that inexplicable glamor, that garish beauty, had done something to him.

He knew now that if he was to retire, he would do so in this very spot where he had made his money. Because of this he had purchased the Moon House. Uninhabited for three years, since the death of old man Moon who had rented the place from the Chinaman, the cabin stood far inland in the foothills.

It lay in the midst of a glorious unfrequented beauty spot, and it was there that Larry had decided to build a veritable island mansion for himself—a castle in the midst of a tropical fairyland.

In his own bungalow, his boy had

just cleared away the dishes of the evening meal, and Larry sat over his coffee, sketching with a deft pencil the Moon House as he remembered it, planning and drawing the improvements he intended making.

A staccato rap on the outer door caused him to look up.

“Come in!” he called.

A frown crossed his brow as he recognized his visitor, but it vanished immediately, for the white man's law of hospitality in the islands is rigidly kept without regard for the host's opinion of his visitor.

“Hello, Simmons,” he said cordially. “Sit down. Smoke? Drink?”

Simmons, a tall, dark, taciturn individual, declined both invitations curtly. Larry gazed at him curiously and wondered what had brought the man to his bungalow.

Simmons was not popular among the white men of the island. His trading was shady. His name had been connected more than once with business that hovered on the border line of the law. Heretofore, Larry's acquaintance with the man had been limited to polite greetings when they passed each other.

But if Larry wondered at the other's visit now, he wondered still more when he heard Simmons' first words. The latter came to the point at once.

“I hear you've bought the Moon,” he said abruptly.

LARRY dissembled his surprise. “Yes,” he said. “I got it from Yan Lee this afternoon. I paid him a ridiculously good price for it, too.”

“So I heard,” said Simmons. “What do you want for it—cash?”

“It's not for sale,” said Larry in a tone that matched the other's. His resentment of the visitor's manner became more apparent now.

“Of course, it's for sale,” said Simmons testily. “I don't mean to

offer you ten percent on your investment or anything like that. I'll offer you real money. Say three times what you paid for it. Is that fair enough?"

"Too fair," said Larry. "Too fair entirely not to arouse my suspicions."

"Suspicious of what?" There was a defensive challenge in the tall man's tone.

LARRY shrugged. "I don't know," he replied. "But in any event, it's not for sale, Simmons. Not at any price. That's final."

Larry was utterly unprepared for the scene that followed. Simmons, with a murderous rage in his eyes, leaped from his chair and, rushing across the room, seized Larry's shoulders in his hands.

"Listen," he said tensely, his voice vibrant with emotion. "You've got to sell. You've got to sell that place to me. You *must*. If you won't, I'll not be responsible for your life. You hear me?"

Larry came slowly to his feet. He removed the clutching hands from his shoulders. Then he spoke coldly.

"I'll thank you to leave this house, Simmons. I have no idea what your threats mean, but I refuse to be threatened by any man. Now get out!"

Simmons walked slowly to the door. He was under control now, but his eyes still blazed with a vehement hatred. He turned for a moment on the threshold

"You'll hear some more of this," he snarled. Then the door slammed behind him and he was gone, leaving an angry and bewildered young man staring through the window into the purple tropical twilight.

And in less than an hour, Larry realized the truth of Simmons' parting words.

Yan Lee stood impassively before

him. A moment before the Chinaman had come silently through the night to Larry's bungalow, the second strange caller of the evening. Larry offered him a drink, then sat back expectantly awaiting to hear the object of the Oriental's call.

Yan Lee cleared his throat softly, then spoke in his sing-song drawl.

"Only the fool has a single thought. The wise man may change his mind."

"Which little gem of philosophy leads up to what?" asked Larry ironically.

But Yan Lee was not to be hurried.

"The wise man may think twice," he continued. "Then he may conclude that his second thought contains more wisdom than his first."

A sudden thought struck Larry. He remembered the object of his first visitor of the evening. He tried a stab in the dark.

"By that," he said coolly, "I take it that you want to buy back the Moon House which you sold to me this afternoon?"

AN almost imperceptible flicker crossed the Chinaman's face, but Larry knew that his shot had hit home. He pressed his advantage.

"Listen, Yan Lee," he said in a grim hard tone. "Now what's it all about? What's all this fuss about the Moon House for? Simmons was here a while ago and he offered me too much money for it, now you've come to buy it back. I suppose you'll offer more than I paid for it, too."

"I offer you ten thousand dollars for it," said the Chinese undisturbed by Larry's tirade.

"Why?"

Yan Lee smiled blandly. "For the sake of both our lives," he said quietly.

"Hooley," said Larry disdainfully. "You talk like Simmons. What have

our lives to do with it? Why should anyone want to kill for that old shack?"

"Does it matter why?" asked Yan Lee. "I warn you it will happen. If I leave here without the deed to the Moon place neither of us will live very long."

IT was then that Larry Tracy completely lost his temper. Normally, his disposition was even enough. But at the present moment he was thoroughly tired of the Chinaman's evasions, of all this wild talk about death and the Moon House.

"Get out, Yan Lee," he said angrily. "You can tell whoever sent you here that I'll never sell the Moon House. That's definite. Now get out!"

Yan Lee turned to the door with all the impassiveness of his race. As he was about to cross the threshold into the night, he inclined his head slightly and uttered four simple words with so much sincerity in his tone, that despite himself Larry Tracy felt a shiver of apprehension tingling down his spine.

"We shall die tonight," said Yan Lee softly. His slippers shuffled huskily on the veranda. And he was gone.

Larry kicked an unoffending chair savagely, reached for a cigarette and contemplated the peculiar events of the evening. But rack his brain as he would, but one salient fact stood clearly in the maze of that night's occurrences.

Quite obviously some mystery had its source at the Moon House. What it was, and how Simmons and Yan Lee were interested in it was beyond him. However, he decided to hit the trail for the old cabin as soon as possible. Perhaps he would find the key to the mystery there.

For a long time he sat there smoking in silent meditation. It was al-

most midnight when his third and most unpleasant visitor of the evening came a-calling. This time it was without the formality of a knock at the door, without the interchange of a social greeting before the intruder made his business known.

Larry, intent on his own thoughts, his eyes staring at the drawing of the Moon House on his table, essaying to unravel the mystery of the jungle cabin, neither saw nor heard the lithe brown figure which softly, silently appeared at the window.

With such consummate skill that the woodwork never creaked, that the netting across the window made no sound as his knife bit a deep gash in it, the brown figure slowly drew itself over the sill.

Without, a splendid silver moon threw its platinum rays down upon a gleaming world. The Southern Cross stood proudly in the sky—and in the brown man's hand something glittered silver in the reflection of the heavens.

Two barefeet struck the floor of the bungalow noiselessly.

CHAPTER II

The Castle of Pearls

IT WAS not sound which caused Larry to whirl suddenly in his seat. It was rather that sixth sense which is acquired by men who have faced death a number of times; that psychic warning which their nerves give, that peril is at hand.

In the flickering light of the oil lamp, he saw an evil-faced Fiji, his black hair piled up on top of his head, moving swiftly toward him. A vicious curved knife, grasped firmly by a brown hand swung through the air.

Larry moved with the speed of a cobra. His knee knocked over the table as he rose. A single swift step to the side took him out of the path

of that swishing piece of steel.

For a second the native was bent forward, off balance, and in that second Larry closed in. His left hand grasped the wrist that had wielded the knife, his right swung hard toward the other's jaw.

THE Fijian, knowing well the fighting methods of the white man, threw his head back and took the blow on the side of his neck. Then swinging his free arm about Larry's neck, he clinched.

For a long moment they grappled there, the advantage going to neither. True, Larry was young, strong and accustomed to battle. But the Fiji seemed no less powerful. With Larry's neck in the crook of his arm, he squeezed with all his strength, applying a veritable strangle hold to the white man.

Larry's left was useless. He dared not release the hand that held that murderous knife. Inasmuch as the native was on his left side his right hand was practically useless. Yet he swung it frantically toward the other as he tried with all his strength to break the grip of that brown arm about his throat.

He found that these maneuvers were of no avail. They simply served to exhaust him. It was then that he staked every ounce of energy on one desperate move. With a tremendous jerk he threw his whole body forward and to the right.

The Fiji, never losing his hold, went with him. The native's feet came clear of the floor and for a moment his whole weight rested on Larry's neck.

Sweat dripped down the white's man's forehead, as he twisted his body further. Then seizing the other's left wrist he twisted it cruelly. The sudden pain and the jerk opened the Fijian's arm. His body went hurtling over Larry's head. It

hit the floor ahead with a dull thud. The knife clattered on the boards.

Larry paused for a second to breathe, but the Fijian, realizing that his chance had flown, rose immediately and, running with all the speed and grace of his race, flung open the door and raced like a madman out into the night.

Larry ran to the open door, then stopped on the threshold. He realized the futility of attempting to pursue the native through the brush. Slowly he turned back into the room. He picked up the knife from the floor and examined it closely.

He stared at the bright blade for a moment in mingled horror and alarm. For the tip of it was red—gory red. He touched it lightly with his finger, then examined it more closely. The deed verified his first suspicion. It was blood—and it was still wet!

He lighted a fresh cigarette. His eyes narrowed. First Simmons, then Yan Lee—and now this, the death that Yan Lee had prophesied so short a time ago. Well, he had won the first scrimmage, but what now? What was the next move in this grim drama of the tropics, this strange mystery of the Moon House to which he had no clue?

The answer came almost immediately. Through his window he noticed the little valley outside was alive with moving lights. Despite the lateness of the hour, a single house below reflected yellow squares of illumination from every window. The moving lights traveled toward the house.

HE crossed the room and looked more closely. The house with all the lamps was undoubtedly Oldham's. The moving lights were torches evidently carried by men coming toward the bungalow. He waited just long enough to drop a

.38 into his pocket, then he raced down the hill toward the gathering below.

WHEN he entered Oldham's bungalow he saw every white man of importance on the island was present. Oldham, himself, a ruddy-faced individual of about forty, sat with his head bowed in his hands in a corner of the room.

Every eye in the room looked up as Larry entered.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Norwich, the skipper of a trading schooner, gave him the answer curtly.

"Ruth. Oldham's daughter. She's missing."

"Missing?" Larry was so startled that he could say nothing else. Oldham's daughter had lived with him for six years. Being the only young white woman on the island, she was a prime favorite with the men. To hear that she had disappeared was a shock which transcended even the other things which had happened to Larry that evening.

"But how?" he asked the seamen. "Where could she be?"

Norwich shrugged. "Who knows?" he said. "She was here a hour or so ago. Oldham left her sitting on the veranda. He suddenly heard a scream—her scream. But by the time he rushed out of the house there was no sign of her. We've searched the whole vicinity thoroughly."

Larry's brow clouded. Perhaps, this somehow might tie up with some of the other mysterious events of the evening. He went over to the grief-stricken father.

Oldham raised his head as the younger man approached.

"I'm taking it pretty hard, Larry," he said. "But she's the only thing I've got in the world. For God's sake help me find her."

"I'll do all I can," said Larry

gravely. "Do you suspect anyone? Have you any idea?"

Oldham shook his head. "None at all," he replied. "It's been a tragic night. First Yan Lee, then this."

Larry's nostrils quivered. His pulse picked up a beat.

"Yan Lee?" he repeated trying to keep the excitement from his voice. "What about Yan Lee?"

"Haven't you heard?" asked Oldham. "He was found dead an hour ago. Knifed. Murdered."

It was then that Larry's vague hunch of a few moments ago crystallized in his brain. True, there was no logical reason for attributing the disappearance of Ruth Oldham with the other odd events of the evening, but nevertheless, Larry was positive that they all tied up somehow. He was equally positive that the answer to all the mystery could be found at the Moon House.

HE laid a friendly hand on the older man's shoulder.

"I think perhaps, I can help you," he said. "I don't know. Anyway, I'm not sure enough to take anyone into my confidence. But I'm going to see what I can do at once. I'll return some time tomorrow. In the meantime, don't give up hope."

Oldham looked up at him eagerly. "You mean you know something? You know where Ruth is?"

Larry shook his head. "It's only a hunch, Mr. Oldham," he said. "But it's the strongest one I ever had in my life, and I'm going to play it through."

Shaking the other's hand he turned and walked from the bungalow, but an observant eye would have noticed that he did not go in the direction of his own cabin. Instead he walked along the edge of the jungle to a spot where a faint trail crawled into the foliage. There he hesitated for a moment, thrust his hand into his

pocket, felt the reassuring butt of his revolver, then plunged into the brush where growth and the night conspired to make him invisible.

For three hours he walked steadily through the tropical forest. He picked his way with the uncanny accuracy of a native. The night was cool and tranquil and a strange eeriness seemed to envelop the jungle.

HE realized full well that in all probability he was heading toward peril and danger. It would have been easier had he known what to expect when he arrived at his destination, but as it was he had not the slightest idea what to expect at the Moon House—if indeed anything at all.

It was dawn when he arrived. The small frame cabin stood at the foot of a range of hills whose tops were jagged silhouettes against the morning sky. He approached cautiously. The house showed no sign of life and yet, deep within him he sensed imminent danger.

It came—and abruptly. As he mounted the steps of the veranda, the door of the house was suddenly flung open. Before he had a chance to reach for his revolver he found himself gazing into the implacable of a rifle. Behind the rifle stood Simmons.

"You didn't obey my warning, Tracy," he said in a hard voice. "Now you must answer for the consequences."

The hardness in Larry's eyes matched the other's tone. Despite the rifle that drew a bead on his heart, his voice was calm.

"I think it is you who must do the answering," he said. "I am the owner of this house. I'd like to know what you're doing in it. I'm entitled to an explanation."

"You're entitled to a bullet in the guts," said Simmons harshly. "And when I'm ready, I'll give it to you.

Until that time you'll obey my orders implicitly. Now, come inside."

Larry had little choice but to obey. Checking his anger he entered the cabin, hoping that chance would provide him with an opportunity to turn the tables on his captor.

His heart gave a sudden bound and in that instant he realized that his hunch had been correct. For the first person he saw in the room was Ruth Oldham. A man stood on each side of her holding her wrists. Larry recognized them as two of the beach-combing gentry named Somers and Roche. He spoke to the girl coolly, as though meeting her were the most natural thing in the world.

"I am glad to see you," he said. "I rather thought you'd be here." He turned abruptly to Simmons. "I think this has gone far enough," he said angrily. "You must release this girl at once, and then leave my house. I shall—"

"You shall obey my orders," said Simmons. "You don't seem to realize how close to death you are."

"I was closer to death last night," said Larry, watching the other keenly. But if he expected Simmons to be taken aback he was disappointed.

"I don't know how you escaped last night," said Simmons coolly. "I expected you were dead by now. But I can promise you I'll do a better job next time. Now, sit down and shut up. I have some work to do."

LARRY sat down. Simmons, without moving his rifle from Larry's direction, spoke to the girl.

"Now, Miss Oldham," he said. "It's your turn. Shall you tell me the whereabouts of the Castle of Pearls of your own volition or shall I force the information from you?"

The girl returned his gaze steadily. Her little chin was held high and she wore an imperious air.

"I've already told you that I don't

know, and if I did I should never betray my father."

Simmons leaned over the table and glared at her.

"I give you warning," he said. "You must know. The British Resident Commissioner for the Fiji Islands knows; your father knows—in fact, he has a map. It is impossible that you have never heard him mention it. Now you shall tell me or I shall torture the information out of you. I know how to make you talk."

"Perhaps," she said quietly. "Any way you can try."

SIMMONS swore a vile oath. He turned to his men. "Somers, Roche. Grab her. Let her have it easy at first. Then we'll try the hot irons."

The two men advanced upon the girl. Each seized an arm and roughly twisted it behind her back. She made no outcry, though Larry could see her little white teeth sinking deep into her lower lip. Perspiration stood on her forehead.

"Now," said Simmons. "Will you talk?"

She did not dare to trust her voice. But she shook her head emphatically.

"All right," said Simmons. "Harder, boys."

Somers and Roche twisted the frail arms viciously. A streak of blood showed as her teeth bit into the skin of her lip. A blind red rage swept over Larry Tracy.

Like a tiger springing to the kill he leaped across the room in a single bound. Before the two torturers knew what was happening he was upon them. His swinging right fist caught Somers full on the point of the jaw. With a cry of pain he went down. Roche half turned as Larry attempted his second knockout blow. His knuckles rapped across the other's forehead, tearing the skin.

With a roar of rage, Roche released the girl and clinched. For a

moment it was anybody's battle. Simmons stood behind the table shouting futile orders, his automatic in his hand. Yet he dared not shoot for fear of wounding his own men.

For a moment, Larry felt his right arm free. With all his waning strength he swung. Roche reeled back. Larry followed up swiftly. His right hand drew back. His eye gauged the distance. The blow started on its knockout journey. But it never landed.

At last Simmons had overcome his rage and excitement enough to take an active part in the battle. Swiftly he crossed the room, and at precisely the moment Larry prepared to deliver the coup de grace, he swung the barrel of his weapon through the air. It landed with a sickening thud on Larry's temple. His knees buckled and without a sound he fell to the floor, prostrate across the body of Somers which was just beginning to stir into regained consciousness.

The girl came to her feet, her eyes snapping.

"You cowards! You curs. How—"

"Shut up," snapped Simmons. "All right, Roche. Drag him in the bedroom. Take her in with him. Lock 'em in. I've got a better idea than trying to get it out of her anyway."

Roche, with the assistance to Somers, who by now had come to his feet, dragged Larry into the next room. The girl was pushed in also. The door closed, and the key turned. Simmons voice came faintly through the panel as he divulged to his associates the new idea which had come to him.

IT was midnight, when Larry Tracy opened his eyes. Mysterious nocturnal sounds from the jungle sounded through the night. A golden moon flung its iridescence upon the earth. Lunar light streamed through the window.

Larry found himself lying upon his own bed looking up into a concerned feminine face. For a moment he thought that this, too, was a drunken dream. Then, in an instant, memory flooded his brain. He tried to sit up, but the thundering ache in his head was too much for him. He relaxed again, then spoke.

"Are you all right?"

SHE nodded. "I'm all right. But what about you?"

"A headache from that smack Simmons gave me. Otherwise okay. And now that we have a minute alone, I'd like to ask you what this is all about. All I've gathered is that Simmons seems vitally concerned in something called the Castle of Pearls."

"That's true," she said. "There's an uncharted island somewhere about here, peopled by pure Maoris. Thus far they're untouched by civilization and are most warlike. They used to prey on the boats that came near their island. They had no wish to know the white man. The British Government interfered, and guaranteed them isolation in exchange for their promise that they would leave shipping alone and refrain from attacking the peaceful natives on the neighboring islands which are under British control.

"In order to keep their bargain, the Government has kept the island unchartered. My father and the British Commissioner are the only white men that have ever seen the place. It was they who made the treaty for England. The island is reputed to be very wealthy, and upon it their Maori ruler lives in a castle made of huge pearls. Of course, those pearls are worth untold wealth. That's what Simmons is interested in."

Larry nodded his head slowly.

"But," he said questioningly, "where do you come in?"

"Of course I have heard my father speak of the place occasionally. But I have never seen the chart. However, Simmons believes that I have, and he is bent on forcing information from me."

Larry considered this for a silent moment. "There's trouble ahead," he said slowly, "and plenty of it. I judge that Simmons has planned this thing thoroughly. He'll let nothing stand in his way now."

"You're right there," she told him. "Since I've been here, I've noticed boxes of ammunition, machine guns and other arms. Simmons has staked a lot this time, and it's not going to be easy to stop him."

Larry nodded. "Well," he said, "it's a tough spot."

Before they could discuss it further, a key rasped in the lock and the door was flung open. Simmons' voice rang harshly through the room.

"Come out, you Tracy. Leave the girl there."

CHAPTER III

A Message for Oldham

LARRY'S head pounded as he stood on his feet and walked from the room. The door was closed and locked behind him. He noted as he approached the table where Simmons still sat that the automatic was in his hand.

"You're lucky, Tracy," were Simmons' first words. "You're damned lucky."

Larry's eyes narrowed. "Why?" "You're lucky because you happen to be of more value to me alive than dead. Now listen carefully to me. Starting very shortly, you're going to trek back to the settlement. Your going to see Oldham and give him a message from me. Listen carefully to that message. On it depend a num-

ber of lives, including that of the lady you so gallantly tried to rescue a little while ago."

"All right, let's have it. I'm listening."

YOU will go to Oldham. You will travel swiftly, for time is an important element and a lot depends on it. I will allow four hours for you to get there and four hours for Oldham's messenger to get back. You will tell him that I have his daughter in my possession. You will tell him further to send to me by messenger that he can trust, a map of Pearl Island. He'll know what I mean. Tell him I mean to go there. When I return, I shall return his daughter. I'm holding her as hostage to prevent him from getting a warship to prevent me from landing on Pearl Island."

"If he attempts to trick me, I shall kill the girl. If his messenger is not here within eight hours I shall kill the girl. If he attempts to attack me here with a picked-up force, I shall kill the girl and slaughter his force. For, before morning, I will have been reinforced by fifty of my own men, and I warn you they're the bloodiest gang of cut-throats in the South Seas. Now, repeat my message."

In a quiet voice Larry repeated the salient points of the message. Simmons nodded his head and stared steadily at the younger man. There was a terrible sincerity in his voice as he spoke.

"All right, but before you go let me tell you that I am ruthless and relentless. I have gone too far to turn back now. I killed Yan Lee for his greed. I paid him a decent rent on this place but he was tempted too much by your offer. If you hadn't been lucky last night you would have been killed for your obstinance. I still don't know how

you escaped. I hold the whip hand as long as I have the girl. You know that and Oldham knows it. I will show her no mercy unless I am obeyed implicitly. Now, get going!"

He drew a revolver from his holster and held it in a steady hand as Larry walked from the door, back into the jungle. He hit the trail through the luxuriant underbrush and set off toward Oldham's with his message.

He well realized that Simmons had spoken the truth. He *did* hold the whip hand, and Larry had no doubt that he would carry out all his threats if his fantastic scheme was threatened. The preparation for Simmons' coup had undoubtedly consumed both time and money, and he would certainly not let a human life more or less stand in his way.

Larry plunged on through the jungle. He forgot that he was tired, hungry and thirsty as his mind clicked on all cylinders, essaying to evolve a scheme which would prove the undoing of the unholy three back at the Moon house.

To organize a posse in the settlement was out of the question if Simmons had spoken the truth regarding his fifty cut-throats. There were less than thirty men in the settlement and at least a third of them were too perennially drunk to bear arms, and it would take more time than he dared to wait to summon aid from the naval authorities.

HE arrived breathless and weary at the settlement in Vitu Levu. Dirty and disheveled he made his way to Oldham's bungalow. A weary voice called "come in" as he knocked at the door. Oldham rose eagerly to greet his visitor. His face was drawn and white. His eyes were haggard with worry.

"What news, boy," he said, hoarse-

ly and Larry noticed that his hands trembled. "Tell me, for God's sake, have you found her?"

Larry put his hands on the distraught man's shoulder and gently pushed him back into his chair.

"Yes," he said quietly. "I have found her. But the battle is far from won yet."

OLDHAM'S palsied fingers clutched his sleeve. "Tell me. Tell me quickly?" His voice was vibrant with excitement and apprehension. "Is she safe?"

"Your daughter," said Larry gravely, "is at the present time, safe. Whether or not she remains so is up to you—and me."

Oldham frowned. His eyes flashed dangerously. He said harshly: "What does that mean? Blackmail?"

"Of a sort. The price of your daughter's freedom is the chart locating Pearl Island, sent by special and trusted messenger to the Moon house at once."

Oldham's eyes widened. For a moment a terrible righteous wrath overcame his parental anxiety.

"Pearl Island? What do you know of Pearl Island? What does any man know? What has that to do with my daughter?"

"Everything," said Larry grimly. "I have just come from the men who are holding Ruth and that is what they demand of you."

"Who are they?"

"Simmons and two other worthies, Somers and Roche. If you'll calm yourself for a moment, I'll give you all the details."

"Go ahead," Oldham said huskily.

Briefly, Larry told him the whole story of the day's occurrences at the cabin. When he finished his recital, Oldham picked up his glass with trembling hands, tossed down another drink and groaned.

"God!" he said, and his voice was

an agonized supplication. "What shall I do? I must betray either my country or my daughter. I must be an unworthy father or else an unworthy citizen. If we send for help immediately, heaven knows what they'll do to Ruth. If we don't I must send them the chart and be called traitor."

Larry's eyes filled with sympathy as he gazed at the old man.

"I have something of an idea," he said. "It's incomplete and I can't guarantee that it'll work. First, though you must decide for yourself. Do you want to send them the map? Not that I counsel it. You must remember that even if you do, you're gambling, for they intend to hold your daughter as a guarantee against your tipping off the government until they've pilfered Pearl Island. And I don't trust Simmons. After he's got what he wants we've no guarantee that he'll return her."

"You're right there. He's an unscrupulous customer. But suppose I don't comply with his demands?"

"Tell me about Pearl Island," said Larry. "Let me commit the chart to memory. Let me lead them there. They won't dare touch your daughter or myself when they know that I have the knowledge they want. At least they won't touch us till they're at the island itself. In the meantime, I shall keep my eyes open. Perhaps, I can find a way to frustrate them before they consummate their plans."

CHAPTER IV

An Army of Thieves

FOR a long time Oldham sat in silence considering this proposal. Finally, he sighed and nodded his head.

"Very well," he said at last. "As you say, the plan is quite incom-

plete. But you leave me no alternative. I can do nothing else. I shall show you the map. After that, I am in your hands."

HE rose and, going to a safe in the corner of the room, disinterred a chart from it. He spread it out on the table and Larry studied it keenly for a few minutes.

"Okay," he said at last. "I've got it. I'll return at once to Simmons and tell him that I'm to lead him. Then, it's up to me. But I assure you that I'll do everything in my power to rescue your daughter and prevent Simmons from getting to the island."

"But," objected Oldham. "Suppose you fail? Suppose he loots Pearl Island, suppose something happens to Ruth?"

Larry considered this gravely for a moment.

"Of course," he said at last, "I can guarantee nothing. However, give me a week. If you haven't heard from me by then, inform the Resident Commissioner. Get a man o' war over there right away. By that time it'll probably be too late for anything but direct action."

Oldham nodded and came towards the other with an outstretched hand.

"Shake," he said, a new courage in his tone. Then he turned, and, closing the door behind him, set out for the trail which led to his enemies.

And if his brain had been wracking for ideas on the trip in, it was forced to work overtime on the return journey. He realized full well that most of his reassurances to Oldham were optimistic rather than practical. Simmons undoubtedly held the upper hand, and it was going to be no mean feat to evolve a scheme that would overcome the well-laid plans of the men who meant to loot Pearl Island.

Dawn screamed across the tropical sky in a half-dozen garish colors. Larry Tracy plodded onward, weary, hungry and thirsty, yet impervious to all physical hardship, as his fatigued mind grappled with his problem. So intent was he upon his own thoughts that he failed to see a number of figures silhouetted in the dawn, down on the trail ahead.

A sharp challenge brought him out of his reverie.

"Halt! Who are you?"

He looked up quickly and found himself gazing into the implacable muzzle of a Springfield rifle. Back of the rifle stood a man, a Kanaka, and behind the Kanaka stood half a dozen of his fellows. They regarded Larry with frank suspicion.

"I have a message for your master," he said. "Take me to him at once."

THE natives jabbered for a moment in their own dialect, then beckoned to him to approach. Larry advanced down the trail. They surrounded him and gave him a full escort for the last mile's walk to the Moon House.

Arrived once more into the clearing before the house that he had called his own only a day ago, he was astounded to see the force that Simmons had collected. There were fully fifty armed men lounging before the little cabin.

Simmons had spoken truly when he had characterized his army as the bloodiest gang of cut-throats in the South Seas. They undoubtedly were. Kanakas, Samoans, and filthy renegade whites sat in little groups and chatted idly. A pile of empty bottles was in evidence and the high spirits of the men attested to the fact that they had been emptied quickly.

At the door of the cabin, Larry's escort stood aside to permit him to

enter. Simmons sat in the center of the room, apparently in close conference with Somers and Roche. A shadow of amazement crossed his face as he looked up and saw who the messenger was.

"What the hell—" he began abruptly. "What are you doing here? Are you sucker enough to come back after I gave you a chance for your life?"

LARRY smiled faintly. "I'm less afraid of you now, Simmons, than I was before," he said calmly.

Simmons snarled and his automatic was suddenly in his hand.

"I told you once before," he said. "that I'd kill you when I didn't need you. Well, I don't need you now. Get ready!"

The weapon jerked in his hand and his finger constricted on the trigger.

"You're wrong," said Larry softly. "You're wrong, Simmons. You need me more than ever now."

A vague suspicion shone from Simmons' eyes. "Why?"

"Because," said Larry, more softly than ever. "I am the only man who can guide you to Pearl Island. I know where it is."

Simmons stared at him. Slowly he replaced the revolver in its holster, then his eyes narrowed.

"Explain that," he said. "I'm listening."

"You'd better listen," said Larry. "Oldham has told me where Pearl Island is. I've seen the map. I'm to take you there, and once you land, you're to send his daughter any myself back. It'll take a couple of days which should give you plenty of time to loot the place and make a get-away before a man o' war ends your career."

Simmons listened to him in a reflective silence. A puzzled frown

crawled over his brow when Larry stopped talking.

"But you?" he queried. "Why did you come back? You were well out of it."

"I came back," said Larry deliberately. "For two reasons. First, I want to see that your gang of thugs don't mistreat that girl, and second, to kill you, when and if the opportunity presents itself."

Simmons stared at him with a rage-distorted face and a vile oath passed his lips.

"All right," he said at last. "You are safe now, and you know it. You are safe because you know the way to Pearl Island. But I advise you to be careful. That mob outside'd tear you apart for the sheer joy of it. Now you better go in and get some sleep, we're leaving here in two hours. And I want my guide to have a clear head."

Larry Tracy awakened to the sound of staccato voices outside his window. He raised himself on an elbow and peered out into the blinding light of the tropical day.

There, lined up like an army at the side of the house, was the ragged unkempt army that Simmons had recruited to loot Pearl Island. Aye, ragged and unkempt they were, but, nevertheless, they responded to Simmons' commands with alacrity. Evidently they knew the value of discipline. Larry listened to Simmons' voice as it floated through the window.

NOW, men, we start today. I've promised each one of you more money than you've ever had in your lives before. In return for that I expect absolute obedience. We probably will have to fight. To that end I have armed you. We shall be outnumbered, but those Lewis guns should equalize any odds that we find against us. From now on it's

all for one and one for all. That's all. You may stand at ease. But be ready to march in half an hour."

He swung sharply on his heel and Larry heard his footsteps coming up the veranda. He swung himself from the bed and met Simmons entering the front room as he came out. Simmons nodded his head approvingly as he saw him.

"Good," he said. "You're up. We're leaving shortly. You'll march up front with me. If you behave yourself you might make some money. If not, you'll die."

"May I have something to eat before you kill me?" asked Larry with a grin.

SIMMONS scowled. "You'll lose your sense of humor before I'm through with you," he threatened. "There's a cook wagon at the back of the house."

Larry walked around the cabin and was amazed by the consummate preparation that Simmons had made. The men were well-armed. In the rear of the building a roaring fire was being attended by three men, clad in cooks' aprons. Evidently the army had already been fed.

Larry was given food and, retiring to a shaded spot, partook of it with zest. As he ate he wondered what had become of Ruth. He had not seen her since his return from Oldham. He resolved that he would question Simmons about her before he essayed to lead the army to the Island of Pearls.

Simmons was waiting impatiently on the veranda when he came up.

"All right, Tracy," he said testily. "I've been waiting for you. We're ready to go. I'll lead the way to the boats I have waiting. After that, it's up to you to pilot us."

"There's one thing before we leave, though," said Larry.

"And that is?"

"Ruth Oldham. Where is she?"

"What the hell's that to you?"

"Plenty," said Larry coolly. "One of the reasons I'm here is to insure her safety. I must be assured that she's all right at this moment before I start. I haven't seen her since I returned."

Simmons cursed, then yielded. He bellowed stentoriantly for Roche.

"Get the girl out of the cellar," he said when his lieutenant had answered his summons. "She marches in the rear with the cooks and the supplies."

They waited in silence as Roche disappeared through the trap that had caused Larry so much consternation on the day before. A moment later he reappeared with Ruth Oldham. She seemed surprised and relieved when she saw Larry. She smiled at him bravely and offered her hand.

Larry took it. "Are you all right?" he asked.

She shot a venomous glance at Simmons. "As well as I can be while associating with vermin," she said in a tone of quiet contempt.

Simmons stung by words turned to Larry.

"Well," he demanded. "Are you satisfied that she's all right? If so, we'll start."

Larry nodded. And ten minutes later the army was under way marching through the dense foliage of the jungle where few white men had ever trod. For two long days Larry plodded along at Simmons' side, his head bowed and his back bent from the unaccustomed physical strain.

IT was Simmons' shout of triumph which halted the little party and caused Larry to look up for the first time in hours. There some hundred yards before them glittered the azure

blue water of Oceania. Still and rip-
pleless, like a smooth infinite turquoise
the Pacific, true to its name, stretch-
ed before them.

Yet despite the beauty and tran-
quillity of the scene Larry was aware
of a dull sinking sensation in his
heart, as he gazed upon it. For there
close to the beach were six schooners
tugging at their anchors, their jibs
billowing impatiently as they awaited
the arrival of Simmons' army.

CHAPTER V

The Marked Map

THE first impression that reg-
istered on Larry's mind when
he saw the boats was the
enormous cost all this preparation
must have stood Simmons. The men,
the arms, and now this miniature navy
must have caused an expenditure of
at least fifty thousand dollars. Per-
haps, he had underrated Simmons
when he had gambled his life on the
single chance of being able to come
upon a scheme which would outwit
the renegades.

It seemed that Simmons had care-
fully planned every detail, and that
he had invested a considerable sum
of money, which he was determined
to get back ten fold when his plans
had been executed.

The little army marched cheerfully
down to the beach. Simmons
walked on ahead and held a brief con-
versation with a barefooted white in
a sailor's cap who met him on the
shore. Six dories were pulled up on
the beach.

With military dispatch, Simmons
assigned the men to the dories and
in a few moments they were being
rowed out to the anchored schooners
in the bay.

Larry found himself seated in the
stern of one of the smaller boats,
Simmons at his side.

He realized that if he was to pre-

vent this outfit from reaching Pearl
Island, it was now that he must do
something. This thought was cor-
roborated by Simmons a moment
later.

"The girl is coming on the same
ship as us. She's coming out in the
next load. When we get to the
schooner, you'll go on the bridge
with the skipper. You'll show him
where Pearl Island is on the chart.
And you'll stay at his side until we
get there. Understand?"

Larry nodded absently. His
thoughts were in a turmoil. It was
now twenty-four hours since he had
left Oldham. When he had told the
girl's father to allow a week before
sending aid, it had been his inten-
tion merely to fall back on that as a
last resort.

BUT now he began to realize that
perhaps the help which Oldham
was to send was the only way out of
the mess.

He stood upon the small bridge of
the schooner and watched the shore
with narrowed eyes. The last boat
was already heading out toward him.
In it sat Somers, the girl and the
crew at the oars. When they should
arrive, Simmons would most certainly
give the order to put out to sea,
and it was up to Larry Tracy to act
as pilot.

Then suddenly an idea came to
him. He had told Oldham to give
him a week. Perhaps, he could stall
that long. None of them had any idea
where the island was. He could pre-
tend that it was quite some distance
off, pilot them in circles for a time,
then bring them up to the island in
time to meet the British ship which
Oldham was to send.

As the dory pulled up alongside,
and Ruth came aboard he decided
that his last idea was his only hope.
He turned to see Simmons and the
skipper, a hard-faced, unshaven Irish-

man, named Conners, thump up the companionway to the bridge.

"Okay," said Simmons gruffly. "Anchors aweigh, Captain. Here's your pilot. Mark the spot on the chart, Tracy. Which way do we head?"

"Well," said Larry tentatively, putting his scheme into subtle execution. "It's quite some distance, you know."

"How far?"

LARRY considered this for a moment. "Say ten days with good weather. More if we run into storms."

Simmons eyed him suspiciously. Conners laughed aloud.

"Yeah?" he said. "I can make Sydney in ten days, and I'm damned sure it's not that far."

Simmons' gaze became even more suspicious. Larry cursed his lack of geographical knowledge, but said nothing. The three of them stood in silence for a moment. Then Simmons gave vent to an unpleasant chuckle.

"Maybe," he said. "Maybe it is ten days, Tracy. But until we get there neither you nor that girl eat or drink. Furthermore, you will mark the island on the chart now. If I find, after we arrive at the designated spot you've marked it falsely, I'll kill the girl and let my kanaks put you to death. They have some original ideas in that regard."

Larry admitted defeat. Once more Simmons had out-thought him. To stall was to endanger the girl's life and his own. True, he could die with the secret of Pearl Island locked in his own brain, but to keep that secret was not his sole motive.

No. He wanted to return Ruth Oldham to her father, and more than anything else he wanted to even up his score with Simmons.

This time he would yield again to Simmons, motivated by the hope that as long as he kept alive, the opportunity to outwit the looters might present itself.

"Give me the chart," he said in a dull voice.

With an ill-concealed grin of triumph, Conners handed him the map. Larry bent over it with a pencil and drew a small circle some hundred odd miles to the southwest of the bay in which they were anchored.

"A day's run," said Conners.

"And a day's fighting, and a day's loot," added Simmons. "Another day to return and our fortunes are made. Shove off!"

Conners bellowed a gruff command to his crew below. Willing hands pulled up the anchor. The other vessels following the example of what apparently was the flagship, proceeded to get under way.

Slowly the six schooners sailed through the glassy waters of the bay toward the open sea. Passing the cliffs that landlocked the indentation, a brisk breeze hurled itself into the sails, and the pirate fleet sped gracefully over the waves in the direction of the island which had never known the white man's influence.

For the remainder of the trip Larry was left pretty much to himself. Simmons, convinced that he had marked the map truly, permitted him to leave the bridge and wander freely about the ship. He paced the decks hoping that perhaps he would catch a glimpse of Ruth, perhaps even gain an opportunity to have a word with her.

LARRY TRACY stood in the bow of the schooner watching the golden South Sea sun dipping slowly toward the western horizon. The trip had been uneventful, as placid as the seas through which they sailed.

A sudden shout by one of the crew startled him, and as he turned inquiringly, that single shout was taken up by a score of throats. It echoed and re-echoed as the remainder of the fleet took it up. Larry turned his gaze in the direction in which every other man on the ship was looking. Then suddenly he gasped with the splendor of the sight that met his eyes.

THERE, off the port bow, some five miles away, rose to heaven a tremendous gleaming tower. A tower of iridescence which reflected the golden rays of the waning sun. A miracle of opalescent beauty blinded the eyes of the onlookers.

A rapt silence enveloped them as they were confronted with a sublime sight that even reached the hearts of such Godless men as these. Then came Simmons' voice hoarse with triumph and avidity.

"The Castle of Pearls! It's there, men! A fortune for us all!"

Larry stared at the distant spectacle for a moment, then his keen eyes perceived a number of small floating objects putting out from the shore of the green island which towered out of the sea before them.

The others were too intent on the magnificent spectacle which rose up from the center of the island to take notice of the laden canoes which were shoving out from the shore.

For a moment Larry stood hesitant, wondering if he should give warning. But before he could come to a decision, the alert eyes of Simmons had seen them also. His voice rang out from the bridge.

"Stand by for action! Man the guns!"

The crew and the cut-throat members of Simmons' army broke suddenly from the trance which was upon them. Men rushed to and fro. A number of Lewis guns were hur-

riedly brought from the cabin and set up on their tripods by the port and starboard gunwales.

Rifles appeared miraculously in men's hands. Boxes of ammunition were dumped on the deck. Eager fingers loaded the drums of the machine-guns. The click of magazine springs was deafening. Larry saw that the same warlike activity was in progress on the remainder of their vessels.

Now despite the fact that he had little sympathy for these invaders of Pearl Island, Larry was of no mind to stand supinely on deck and permit the oncoming Maoris to hurl spears at him. True, he was being forced into this battle, but the natives would make no distinction between him and the rest of them.

All that they would be aware of was the fact that white men were coming to their island in defiance of the treaty which protected them. Knowing something of the Maoris, Larry had little doubt that they would fight to the bitter end, even though the superior arms of Simmons' men would more than equalize their numbers.

He approached Simmons as the latter came from the bridge to inspect his men who were already lined up in battle array at the bulwarks.

"Do I get a rifle," he asked. "Or are you afraid I would turn it on you?"

Simmons glared at him.

"If you turned it on me," he said harshly, "my men would tear you apart. Yet we can use all the man power we've got. Pick up one of those and post yourself at the port bow. There's ammunition lying all over the deck."

LARRY helped himself to one of the indicated rifles eagerly. He jammed ten rounds in the magazine

and marched forward again. Back in his mind there persisted some apprehension about the girl.

Since they had set sail he had not seen her. He was morally certain that she was imprisoned in the poop cabin, but though he had strolled past the closed port three times he had seen no sign of her.

At the bow he insinuated himself up against the rail between a tall well-built Samoan and a derelict white man. The obvious differences between the pair of them made him ashamed of his race. The white man grunted as Larry placed his rifle over the rail.

"Mph," he said. "You the mug that's got the chart. Ain't you?"

Larry nodded. He was in no mood for conversation. Already the laden canoes from the shore were within firing distance. The blue water was dotted with them. He tried to take count, but there were too many for him. He estimated conservatively that there were at least two hundred of them.

CHAPTER VI

Hand-to-Hand

THEY were advancing in compact array when suddenly a number of them parted from the main body and moved out on the flanks. Evidently the plan was to surround the invading fleet.

Spears and shields gleamed in the fading sun, and Larry noticed that some of the war canoes were occupied solely by archers.

They were close now. Larry wondered why Simmons did not give the order to fire. The battle was bound to be a massacre anyway. Those Lewis guns would mow the canoes down like so much paper. Still Simmons gave no word. His motive, Larry reflected bitterly, was to lure the canoes in so close that his with-

ering fire would permit no survivors.

Then suddenly one of the canoes containing the archers shot out in front of the others as though it was a live thing. Half a dozen superbly-bodied natives rose to their feet. Six arrows were fitted to as many bows.

A single twang sounded through the air. Six hurtling arrows shot forward. One aimed at the bridge of each of the invading vessels. Larry heard a scream of agony above him. He glanced about and saw Connors on his knees frantically essaying to jerk a bloody arrow from his shoulder. Simmons ran to the side of the bridge, ignoring the other's plight.

"Fire!" he yelled "Give it to them. Don't let a man escape alive!"

A crazy saddistic gleam came into his eyes as he issued the command, and his last words were lost in the terrific reverberations of the machine-guns.

Larry squinted along the barrel of his rifle, but as yet made no move to fire. He had decided some time ago only to use his weapon as a means of self-defense. There was little point in furthering Simmons' ambitions by destroying his enemies for him.

The tranquillity of the late afternoon was suddenly shattered by the thundering of machine-guns. A score of rifles took up a crackling obligato. It seemed impossible that anything could live through that withering fire.

WITH the enemy armed with the most primitive weapons, arrows, spears and shields, the white man must overwhelm them with their machine-guns and their rifles.

But the Maori is an intelligent being. Despite the terrific havoc being wrought among their craft with

those devastating threads of fire from the invading fleet, the native leaders hastily essayed to cope with the situation.

The canoes were paddled swiftly straight for the six schooners. Their casualties were heavy. The water was alive with black and red struggling figures. Yet one canoe in five made its objective and came to a halt close up against the side of the schooner for which it was aimed.

THIS maneuver rendered the machine-guns ineffective. Their long aluminum-covered barrels could not be directed at such an angle. Like cats, the natives gripped hold of the ship's sides and commenced to board.

Simmons shouted an alarmed warning as he divined the purpose of the Maoris. True, seventy percent of their canoes were overturned by now, seventy percent of their men were incapacitated. But yet there were the remainder alive to attack in a grim, desperate hand-to-hand encounter.

Larry who had not fired his weapon yet, drew himself up and prepared to give battle. The schooner trembled violently as the gallant brown men swarmed up her sides.

A spear hurtled through the air from nowhere. Its blade embedded itself in the throat of the white man at Larry's side. With a horrible gurgle he fell forward, slumped on the rail. Blood mingled with clear salt water ran crazily down the scuppers.

Then, when there was no other alternative, Larry sprang into the fray. A tremendous brown-skinned giant leaped like a tiger from the rail toward him. A spear gleamed in his powerful hands. Larry's fingers constricted on the trigger. A single staccato report sounded.

The brown man gasped suddenly, his neck pitched forward in midair.

When he completed his jump he was dead. He fell to the deck, his figure lying prostrate across that of the white man that his comrades had slain a minute before.

The deck was a swirling mass of struggling humanity. The flagship seemed to be the focal point of the natives' attack. A hasty glance about showed Larry that the other five boats were dealing with but a handful of boarders.

Simmons, who to give the devil his due, possessed the quality of courage. He stood upon the bridge shouting orders. The remainder of the fleet was closing in in an attempt to give aid to the flagship, but they withheld their fire, afraid of wounding their own men.

Larry Tracy found himself suddenly in the embrace of a huge native. A knife gleamed above him. With a tremendous effort he broke the steel grip which held him and, swinging his rifle butt, crashed it on the point of the other's jaw.

The natives were putting up a desperate but losing fight. For every white man that lay with a spear through his heart, three Maoris were prone with bullets eating their very life-blood from them.

Then, of a sudden, Larry heard a shrill scream which set his spine to tingling. He turned swiftly in time to see one of the huge Maoris leaping from the poop cabin with the figure of a struggling girl clasped to his breast.

IN a single bound he sprang to the rail and dropped like a plummet into the sea. his act appeared to be the signal to the natives to cease hostilities. As though by some preconceived signal they turned and following the example of the kidnaper, leaped from the rail into the placid water beneath.

Simmons' army, seeing victory at

last, ran to the rail, their rifles poised to deliver the death blow to the fleeing natives. In the midst of the brown bobbing heads which swam toward the shore, Larry saw the golden hair of Ruth Oldham. His voice rang commandingly.

"Stop! Don't fire!"

There was something in his tone which stopped them. The huge native who had snatched Ruth from the cabin was swimming steadily some distance behind the others.

CHAPTER VII

A Shark!

LARRY'S emotions were drenched with despair as he watched the girl he had promised to guard being borne away from him. He stood there for a moment, undecided. Then he heard Simmons' bellowing laugh from the bridge.

"That's a good one!" he roared. "They're taking the girl to hold as hostage. They'll get a surprise when they find out that we don't give a damn what happens to her!"

These mocking words spurred Larry to action. He knew full well that there was no chance of Simmons sending his men to rescue the girl. Each powerful stroke of her captor took her nearer to the shore. Larry realized that once the brown man gained the land there would be little chance of Oldham ever seeing his daughter again. He saw but one gambling chance—and he took it.

His eyes swept the bloody deck. Lying there near him was a glittering knife that had been the weapon of a Maori. Swiftly he stooped down and seized it, then, kicking off his shoes, he ran lightly to the rail. For a moment he poised there, a slim graceful figure, then putting the knife between his teeth, he achieved a perfect dive into the water.

Putting every ounce of energy into his strokes, he swam strongly in pursuit of the kidnaper and his fair burden.

He clenched his teeth grimly, forgetting for a moment the weapon he carried in his mouth. His reward was a trickle of blood that ran down his face as the sharp steel bit into his lip. After that he was more careful.

Gradually he was gaining on the moving black figure who pushed the girl along before him. His muscles ached and his breath came fast, but he did not lessen the terrific pace he was setting. Once the Maori reached the shore, the gamble he had taken was hopeless and his own life would hang in the balance.

He thrust his head out of the water for a moment to see how much he had gained, then to his utter horror he saw a sight that caused the blood to run cold in his veins.

Some twenty yards ahead of him a streaking silver triangle cut sharply through the water. It bore down swiftly on the Maori in front. For a moment Larry stopped and trod water. Then he raised his head and gave vent to a shout of alarm.

The native turned his head and his eyes followed Larry's outstretched finger. He turned again and struck out for the shore with redoubled effort. For a moment Larry's eyes followed the silver wake that the shark was making in transfixed horror. At the rate the big fish was traveling it was evident that he would overtake the native and the girl ere they reached the shore. Larry Tracy took a deep breath and made a momentous decision.

LIKE a porpoise he rose in the water, lashed out and swam frantically toward that silver fin. By now it was a scant ten yards from

the Maori who, swim as he would, was handicapped by his burden. Larry trod water again. He yelled loudly and splashed the sea with his hands. His heart stood still for a moment as he watched the shark. Would he succeed in attracting its attention, in drawing it away from a certain prey?

Slowly the silver dorsal fin described a semi-circle. It paused there a moment, then moved rapidly toward Larry. A strange mingled emotion of relief and fear swept over him. Relief that the girl was temporarily safe, and fear as he thought of what the outcome of this weird nautical battle would be.

He saw the native turn his head and shout something unintelligible at him, and his brown hand waved some sort of signal. But Larry was too intent on that approaching silver flash to pay him much attention.

HE realized under what a terrific handicap he was laboring. Even a native would have no better than an even chance tackling a shark in the water with no weapon save a knife. And despite the fact that he was a first-rate swimmer, Larry had had no close experience with these man-eaters of the deep, and he was none too adept in the manipulation of his weapon.

However, he kept his head. The greater the odds the cooler one must be. He trod water steadily and waited for the monster to charge. He remembered having read that in order to bite, a shark must turn over on its back. He resolved to wait until the beast started its turn, then to plunge.

Through the clear water he could see the ugly fish quite clearly now. Its sinister face reminded him oddly of a vicious, chinless moron. As

it neared him the protruding fin seemed to move more slowly through the water.

He knew that in a second now he must plunge his knife in deep and hard; that in the next instant his life must be staked. He shot a swift glance over his shoulder toward the boats of Simmons. He expected no help from that quarter, but yet a vague hope sprang in his breast.

The six vessels were becalmed in exactly the same spot that he had left them. The decks were lined with interested spectators to this weird battle between man and voracious fish.

The dorsal fin slowly sank beneath the water. The frontal came to view. Through the crystal sea, Larry saw that evil mouth open. Yellow teeth showed horribly in the beast's mouth. Swiftly the shark moved toward his kicking legs.

Then with a silent prayer to heaven, Larry Tracy made his move. With a tremendous effort that took every ounce of his fast waning strength, he kicked his feet straight out behind him. His hand snatched the knife from his teeth, and as the upper part of his body came forward his arm shot out with all the power he could command behind it.

And in that single eternal instant his life hung in the balance. He felt the blade strike something soft. It traveled further, up to the haft, until his fingers gripping the handle felt something soft and yielding at their tips.

THEN and only then did he glance down. His aim had been true enough. He jerked the knife swiftly from the animal's snout where it had entered, and hastily throwing himself on his back floated a few yards away. His wary eyes never left the wounded beast.

That silver fin had disappeared for

a moment, but now it came to the surface again. Again it came slowly toward Larry but this time its former speed was lacking. Laboriously it moved through the water. As Larry came once more into an upright position he saw the horrible gaping wound in the shark's snout.

This time he did not wait for the attack, instead he carried it to the stricken fish. This time the knife ripped its way across the man-eater's belly as he half turned at the approach of his enemy. Hastily Larry withdrew again to watch the result of the damage he had inflicted.

FOR a long time the fin remained out of sight. Then it slowly came to the surface, but for an instant only. It moved over to the right and a moment later the man-eater floated belly up on top of the water.

Larry Tracy, weary and spent, took a final look at his deceased enemy, then slowly and with the air of a man expending his last strength, he swam back to the flagship of Simmons' fleet.

As he slowly neared the ship it occurred to him that his welcome was a most uncertain thing. Simmons had rid himself of Ruth and here was an excellent chance to lose Larry. Now that he had gained the island there was no further need for the man who had brought him here.

Ten yards from the ship he was amazed to hear a reverberating cheer split the dusk. With an effort he raised his head. Simmons' cut-throats were crowded about the rail and madly cheering—him! Their master's enemy.

For, despite their caste, despite to what depths men have sunk, those who have often faced death are bound together by the virtue of courage. It mattered little to these hard-faced men who Larry was, what he was or what he stood for.

It mattered little at the moment whether he was friend or enemy. But what did matter a great deal was the fact that he had just overcome a common enemy of all mankind, and they were but giving him his due.

His clutching hand reached the Jacob's Ladder which had been dropped over the side, and, panting and spent, he climbed slowly to the top. As he gained the rail friendly hands pulled him on deck and a score of congratulatory palms slapped his back. He lay back on the deck exhausted, surrounded by an admiring group.

Simmons pushed his way abruptly through the crowd and for a moment regarded the prostrate figure of the man he had threatened to kill.

"You've got guts, Tracy," he said impassively. "A lot of guts. Maybe I can find further use for you. I'll talk to you later."

Larry Tracy made no answer for two excellent reasons. First, he had nothing to say, and second he had not the breath to say it, had he so desired.

Night descended swiftly over Pearl Island. The moon had not yet risen and a deathly quiet pervaded the atmosphere. There was no sound save the monotonous lapping of the waves against the wooden hulls of the ships.

Larry lay where he was, the rest and relaxation slowly restoring the energy which he had burned up in the past few hours. Occasionally he heard an order shouted from the bridge. He was conscious of a gradual movement of the vessel. Apparently, Simmons was about to land his men.

AFTER a while he heard the rattling of the anchor chains and the creaking of the stern davits as the dory was lowered. Men's voices

and the trample of men's feet told him that the army was landing.

His muscles protested achingly as he came to his feet and made his way to the stern of the vessel. Simmons stood against the rail and watched him approach.

"Get in this boat load," he said. "And see me after we land. I want to talk to you."

Larry nodded and took his place in the dory. The crew rowed them swiftly to the shore.

MOST of them had already landed when Larry walked up the white beach from the dory. Already a tremendous fire was roaring and the cooks were preparing the evening meal for the men. This latter observation made him realize that he was hungry.

Making his way toward the fire he stood at the end of a hastily-formed line and gratefully received his rations from the cooks. He was eating alone under a palm tree when Simmons approached with a steaming bowl of soup in his hand. Without waiting for an invitation he seated himself next to Larry and proceeded to open a casual conversation in the manner of a man who has suddenly come across a crony in his private club.

"Nice scrap you put up this afternoon," he said pleasantly.

Larry looked at him quizzically. A strange smile flitted across his lips.

"Yes," he said in a tone that matched the other's, though it contained a subtle bantering quality. "You did a nice job against those natives yourself."

"What the hell," said Simmons. "That was easy. I'm talking about the job you did on that shark."

Larry shrugged, and then said what was in his mind.

CHAPTER VIII

A Proposition

YOU didn't care a damn which one of us won that battle," he said grimly. "And I know it's hardly your idea of a good time to come over and engage me in a little social chat. Now what's the game, Simmons? What's on your mind this time?"

Simmons smiled without resentment.

"Of course, you're right," he said coolly. "This chat isn't entirely social as you have suspected. Now look here, Tracy, I'm willing to admit that I misjudged you originally."

"That's more than I'm willing to admit about you," retorted Larry. "I put you down as a scoundrel the moment I laid eyes on you and nothing has happened yet to make me revise that opinion."

Simmons scowled for a moment, then forced a smile. He looked very much like a man who has resolved to keep his temper at any cost.

"We'll let that go for the moment," he said.

Their eyes met for a moment. Simmons tried to read his man before he continued further, but Larry's gaze was impenetrable, unreadable.

"Well," he continued. "Here's what I'm driving at. There's over a million dollars' worth of pearls in that castle alone. God knows how much we'll knock off altogether. I've promised everybody a decent share, but of course I'm taking the bulk of it. I'm afraid, though, that when this ragged crew of mine sees how much there really is, there may be something of a revolution. They may want more than I've promised. You can see what sort of hell would break loose if they started scrapping among themselves, and they may do it."

"They undoubtedly will," said Larry with unconcealed satisfaction in

his voice. "They'll raise all sorts of hell before you're through. That's one thing you didn't plan, Simmons."

Simmons nodded. "You're right, there," he said. "Now that's where you come in."

"Yes," said Larry, and the sceptical significance he put into the word gave the other a moment's pause.

After a silent moment Simmons continued. "Two or three men with guts can easily dominate this rabble. Somers is a good man. I'm not so sure of Roche. But if you'll join me, come in on my side in case of trouble I'll guarantee you a minimum share of twenty thousand; more if the looting's good. Now what do you say?"

LARRY TRACY sighed wearily. "No," he said calmly.

Simmons sighed exasperatedly. "Don't be a fool," he said. "You were sore at me, and rightly, I admit that. But don't let it stand in the way of an alliance which can net you twenty thousand dollars."

"I don't want twenty thousand dollars," said Larry Tracy.

"You fool. You think I'm lying to you. I'll guarantee you the money. I'll give you the first share of the loot. I'll—"

"Wait a minute," said Larry. "What's the largest amount of money you've ever had in your life that was all your own. Not borrowed and not owed. Now how much?"

Simmons considered for a moment. "About fifty thousand," he said at last.

"All right," said Larry. "I'm worth four times that much and I made it all myself. Now are you beginning to understand why I'm not interested in your twenty thousand?"

Simmons gave up. He rose to his feet and stared down at the placid Larry.

"All right," he said. "You've had

your chance. But fortunately money doesn't mean so little to most of us. To prove my point, I'm going to offer twenty silver dollars to the man whose knife is found in your ribs in the morning. Something tells me there'll be plenty of takers."

He turned abruptly and walked away in the direction of the waning campfire.

Larry lay at full length beneath the palm tree and meditated. The situation, it seemed was hopeless. He had bungled it horribly. First, the girl was gone, and it seemed that after Simmons made his generous offer to the Kanakas he would be gone, too.

A faint but penetrating noise from the jungle thudded into his consciousness. He stirred uneasily, paying no attention to it, but eventually it disturbed his train of thought so thoroughly that he lifted himself on one elbow and listened intently.

Rhythmically and softly from afar came the sound of the native tom tom sending its monotonous cry through the night. The moon had appeared over the fringe of the palm trees, and the eerie jungle night spread itself over the beach.

THE Maoris were evidently embarked on an important pow-wow to discuss ways and means of grappling with the powerful enemy that had raided their shores. Larry listened intently to the distant drums. Somewhere the Maoris were planning, just as Simmons and his councilors were doing out on the beach beyond.

And somewhere, with the Maoris was Ruth Oldham. An utterly crazy idea crossed Larry's mind, an idea so ridiculous, so desperate that all common sense dictated its immediate dismissal. But after all this was a desperate case.

Larry was certain that Simmons' last words had been more than an

idle threat. The men had undoubtedly meant what he had said. And should Larry Tracy remain here to sleep, there were a dozen Kanakas who would fight for the privilege of earning the twenty silver dollars that Simmons would offer his murderer.

Stealthily he rose to his feet and cast a swift glance around the beach. Luck was with him. He saw little groups of men sitting some distance away, but none of them paid any attention to Larry. Cautiously he stole behind the palm tree and a moment later he had disappeared into the dark unfriendly cover of the thick foliage which bordered the white beach.

CHAPTER IX

Captured!

HE SET out slowly, guided solely by the treacherous sound of the drums. Time and again he would find that the sound grew fainter, that he was walking away from them. Then he would resolutely retrace his steps and head cautiously back.

He had still with him the revolver that Simmons had given him when he had been sent to Oldham. In addition the knife with which he had bested the shark was stuck in his belt. Somehow the possession of these gave him confidence.

Through the darkness he made his way. Now the sound of those maddening tom toms grew louder—and louder. They beat upon his eardrums with damning persistency.

Through the lush growth he caught sight of a pin point of flickering light. He slackened his pace and approached even more cautiously than before.

The pin point of light grew to a flaming fire which danced sinisterly between the drooping palm fronds. Larry fell flat on his stomach and

crawled slowly through the underbrush.

To his civilized ear it seemed that he was making no noise. He could hear a rattling jargon in some unintelligible tongue somewhere ahead, though he could see none of the natives. So intent was he on the enemy that he forgot that primitive ears can hear what the white man is unaware of.

The first intimation he had that he was being observed was an inarticulate guttural comment behind him. He turned swiftly and leaped to his feet, but too late!

A brown arm gripped his throat like steel. He gasped for breath and groped in his belt for the knife. He whipped it out and his hand shot forward, but his captor was versed in such tactics. His throat was suddenly released and the brown man danced back out of range.

He stopped for a moment, then advanced, and gleaming coldly and relentlessly in his hand was a wicked looking curved blade. Larry thought of his revolver, but resolved not to use it unless it was absolutely necessary. A single shot would arouse the whole tribe. He stood still and silent, his knife held grimly, awaiting the attack.

THE brown man moved in with a swift sudden rush, his blade held before him. For the second time that day Larry offered up a prayer to heaven to help him in a situation of which he was by no means confident of his ability to handle.

And for the second time it seemed that his prayers were answered. When the Maori was almost upon him, when the wicked curved blade was within six inches of his heart, a loose root became the white man's unexpected ally.

The Maori's advancing foot struck it. For a moment the man fought

to regain his balance, then he fell. Larry charged forward to throw himself on his enemy before he could regain his advantage. But at that moment the fallen native threw back his head and utter a piercing cry.

The underbrush rattled violently and the sound of many pattering feet came through the jungle. Larry hurled himself upon the prostrate savage, knife in hand, but before he could deliver a blow reinforcements were upon him.

Strong brown hands dragged him from his victim. The knife was wrenched from his hand. Roughly he was dragged through the palms toward the roaring camp fire. Behind the flames he saw something glitter and sparkle magnificently in the dancing light as the sublime castle of pearls towered up from its solid base.

BUT little time was left him for admiration. A hundred natives thronged eagerly around his captors, and though he could understand no word of their guttural mutterings he realized full well that the menacing glares of the savages boded him little good.

Hastily he was led toward the tremendous gleaming portals of the castle of pearls. His captors escorted him through a long corridor, through two more doors, and eventually into a room whose walls glittered with inlaid pearls of a size Larry had never dreamed existed.

Down a long teak floor they took him, to halt abruptly before an opalescent dais at the far end of the room. Seated upon the Carrara throne was the most perfect physical specimen Larry had ever seen. Standing behind him, in a group, were a number of warriors.

Larry's captors bowed low before the dais, making signs of fealty and homage. Their chief, for such it ob-

viously was, waved them away and, glaring at Larry through relentless eyes, spoke rapidly in a dialect which the white man could not understand.

Larry shrugged his shoulders and in none too lucid pantomime essayed to convey the impression that he was a friend. The chief, however, enraged by the wanton attack made upon his men, was in no mood for parley.

He turned his head, spoke rapidly to one of the warriors behind him. A live brown figure sprang gracefully out of the group, spear in hand, and aimed the weapon directly at Larry's heart.

LARRY breathed deeply, and fixing his potential executioner with a steady gaze resolved to die courageously. His hands were clenched tightly at his side. His head was held erect, and his glance did not waver as he stared steadily at the weapon which was about to end his life. The native drew his wiry arm back. The spear gleamed dully in his hand. His muscles flexed. Larry Tracy stared eye to eye with death.

Suddenly there was a wild commotion behind the throne. An excited voice jabbered in Maori jargon. A figure detached itself from the chief's warriors and a powerful brown hand wrenched the spear from the executioner's grasp. A wail of shocked surprise went up from the warriors at this lese majesty. The chief rose to his feet and, with stark rage distorting his features, delivered a verbal barrage at the man who had dared to impede the execution of his orders.

Larry Tracy was no less amazed by this sudden turn of events than were the Maori chief and his counsels. The huge brown man who had literally snatched death away from Larry Tracy, fell to one knee and

spoke humbly and at great length to his master.

LARRY watched the chief's face anxiously for a clue to this unexpected occurrence. As the native spoke, the chief's face seemed to lose its expression of anger, and his eyes held an understanding light. Eventually Larry's savior stopped talking and rose to his feet. As he stood up Larry, for the first time, obtained a good look at his face. Then he understood.

For the man who had intervened and saved his life was the man who had kidnaped Ruth; the man who Larry had saved from that sinister silver fin of the man-eating shark.

At the conclusion of his speech, the huge Maori turned to Larry and, coming close to him, put both hands on his shoulders, bent his face forward and proceeded to rub his brown nose against Larry's sunburned one—the Maori gesture of fraternity and friendship. Larry realized that the savage was demonstrating his gratitude and he hoped that this native stood high enough in the chief's counsel to command enough influence to save him.

Evidently he had. The chief barked a staccato order and Larry's original captors, who had been standing at the rear of the room, returned, and seizing him, led him from the audience chamber.

He was led through interminable corridors of the Castle of Pearls. They halted before a door at which stood a warrior on guard. After a short verbal interchange the door was opened and Larry was flung into a dimly lit chamber. The door slammed behind him. Before he could take stock of his new situation, he heard a voice which set his pulse to pounding.

"Thank God!" Mr. Tracy! But how did you get here?"

He looked up to find the blue eyes of Ruth Oldham staring at him in mingled relief and surprise. Hastily he crossed the room and took her hand.

"Thank God!" he echoed. "I have found you."

"But how—? Why—?" She seemed bewildered.

Larry, speaking in a low voice, told her everything that had occurred since she had been taken from the boat. She gave a little shudder when she heard the story of the shark.

"I must have fainted when that native broke into the cabin," she said. "I'm glad I did now. I'm glad I knew nothing about the shark."

"At the time," said Larry gravely, "I never thought I would live to thank God for that great white shark. But if it had not been for him, I most certainly would have been killed a few moments ago."

"What does Simmons plan to do now?" she asked.

Larry shrugged his shoulders. "He'll probably attack as soon as the sun comes up. The Maoris probably figure that with us held as hostages, the others will parley for our release before they do anything else. However, no one knows better than you and I what a mistake that is."

"Yes," she said soberly. "I hadn't thought of that. The Maoris undoubtedly think that they can hold Simmons off while they have us as captives. That would also work in Simmons' favor."

"He gets all the breaks," said Larry bitterly. "Everything I do seems to work out well for Simmons."

FOR a moment they sat in silence, then the girl spoke abruptly. "Listen," she said. "You're exhausted. There's nothing we can do now. Perhaps when dawn comes and Simmons with it, we may be able to plan something. But, whatever happens, there's

hardship and strain ahead and we must be rested and fresh to face the future. Let us sleep."

Larry saw the common sense of her words. They stretched themselves out upon the fragrant pallet of palm fronds in the corner, and hand in hand, like the babes in the woods, they slept—peacefully and quietly in the midst of peril, jeopardy—and death.

CHAPTER X

A Desperate Attempt

LARRY TRACY was awakened by a faint rattling noise. In his semi-conscious waking period his mind failed to recognize the sound for what it was, but instinct, which never sleeps, sent a vague tremor of apprehension to his heart.

He sat up and blinked. The rattling sound grew louder. Excited voices rang through the castle. Larry seized Ruth's shoulder and shook her gently to wakefulness.

"Machine guns," he said hoarsely. "Simmons is attacking."

She sat up, fully awake and alert. When she spoke her voice held a vibrant, excited tremor.

"Whatever we do," she said, "we must do quickly. If Simmons captures this place, and undoubtedly he will, we can expect little mercy."

Larry's brow was corrugated as he concentrated on the perilous problem which confronted them. He turned to her suddenly.

"They'll probably bring us food shortly," he said. "It is then that we must gamble. It's dangerous, but we must take a chance on their being too busy with Simmons' gang to notice our getaway."

"And if we get away," she asked, "what then?"

"If we get away," said Larry, grimly. "I have a plan which will finish

Simmons. It may finish us, too, but it's our only chance."

They sat there in a tense silence, awaiting their chance. Without, the din of battle grew louder. The staccato stuttering of the machine-guns grew to a crescendo roar and the clatter of the rifles sang a devastating obligato. Evidently the Maoris were being forced back from their first line of defense.

A slither of naked feet in the corridor outside brought the first ray of hope. The door of their prison moved slightly as someone fumbled with the lock outside. Slowly the heavy portal swung inward and a native entered bearing a dish filled with an unappetizing gray concoction.

The native was armed with a spear and a curved blade was thrust in his loin cloth. He set the dish down before them, and as he bent over, Larry, summoning all of his strength to his weary muscles, sprang.

HIS right hand caught the native on the side of the ear, slightly above the vulnerable point. The Maori staggered back. Before he could make an outcry, Larry was upon him again. His left hand grasped the spear and once again he swung viciously with his right.

This time his aim was true. The spear came free in his hand and the brown man fell silently on his back. Larry bent down and plucked the knife from the other's girdle. He turned to Ruth.

"Quick now," he said. "The first part of it's done, but there's still plenty of trouble ahead."

She joined him in the doorway and after a hasty glance which disclosed no sign of the Maoris, they tiptoed down the pearl-inlaid corridor. Larry Tracy was by no means sure in which direction an exit from the castle could be found.

By good fortune they met no one.

In the distance the noise of rifle fire and the battle cry of the Maoris came harsh and discordant to their ears. Suddenly, ahead a shaft of daylight permeated the darkness of the corridor. Larry squeezed Ruth's hand in warning and they proceeded more cautiously than before.

Ten feet ahead of them was a doorway. Larry could see that it was not the main portal through which he had been conducted some hours before. Holding the shaft of his spear tightly in his hand, he approached the adit on tiptoe. A cursory glance reassured him that no one was on guard at this door.

"Quick," he whispered hoarsely. "We must run for it."

Hand in hand they sprang across the threshold and ran madly across the twenty-foot clearing toward the friendly cover of the jungle. They had almost gained their objective when Larry heard a wild cry at his side.

TURNING, he saw a warrior, shield across his breast and spear poised for the kill, charging upon him at right angle. He did not decrease his pace. Carefully he gauged the point of intersection.

Gaining that point, he stopped short. The Maori was almost upon him. His shield covered his breast. His spear plunged forward at Larry's throat. Swift as lightning Larry ducked and plunged his own spear upward under the shield. The Maori's weapon hurtled harmlessly over his head, while his own ripped its way into the brown man's vitals.

With a terrific jerk, he wrenched his spear clear of the falling body and then, grasping the girl again by the hand, resumed his interrupted race toward the thick foliage which would give him cover.

Gaining the jungle, they paused for a moment to regain their breath.

Larry gazed at the girl admiringly. She was standing up marvelously under the terrific strain to which she had been subjected. But he knew full well that safety was not yet in sight.

Before he could put the next part of his plan into execution he must make his way unseen through the Maoris and Simmons' battle line. The jungle was a bedlam of discord.

THE devastating fire of Simmons' army, the wild cries of the natives, the agonized wails of the wounded and the roar and chatter of the fear-crazed animals of the forest conspired to create a hellish symphony. Cautiously they moved forward.

They spent the next hour in hell. Daring to move no more than a yard at a time, they made their way carefully through the Maori flank. Once, as they crouched trembling in a leafy cover, a trio of warriors almost stepped upon them as they ran swiftly through the forest.

And their danger was not from man alone. Twice Larry's spear transfixes a snake as it was about to strike. Once they crept silently upon a single warrior who died with a knife in his back without even seeing his slayer.

Fortunately the battle was being fought in open order; each side taking the fullest advantage of the ubiquitous cover. Larry realized that Simmons would spread his machine-guns far apart in order to cover the greatest area. Slipping through there should not be as difficult as piercing the natives' lines.

He felt the hardest part of his task was over when he caught a glimpse of Roche changing the magazine on a Lewis gun through the trees. They crept some fifty feet away from Simmons' lieutenant and then continued their forward march.

Some distance ahead they could see the white of the beach gleaming through the foliage.

And yet, when it seemed that nothing remained between them and their objective a bush suddenly rustled and the ugly face of Connors appeared, staring at them with less than six feet between them.

The surprise on the sailor's face quickly gave way to an expression of cunning triumph. Abruptly the muzzle of his rifle emerged from the bush and trained itself on Larry's heart.

WITH a swift flashing movement, Larry snatched the knife from his belt and hurled it. At the same moment he ducked, pushing the girl down with him. A bullet whizzed harmlessly over their heads, and Connors lurched forward, his blood splattering the vernal bush which had concealed him. Hastily Larry retrieved his knife and they continued on.

At the edge of the jungle they paused and peered through the foliage toward the scene of Simmons' base. Two of the cooks tended a fire on the beach and made preparations for the victory feast. Larry turned to Ruth.

"Take this spear," he said, pressing it upon her. "Don't hesitate to use it if necessary. I will rely upon the knife. Those two men are all that stand between us and the frustration of Simmons' plans."

She took the spear with a steady hand and looked at him inquiringly.

"We're going to burn the boats," he explained. "They started that cook fire with kerosene. I remember them bringing it ashore. We'll take that and a brand with us. I'll row, and you are to pour kerosene on the hulls, then light it. That will be the end of Simmons. He'll be marooned here until help comes."

"It may also be the end of us," she said gravely, but with no hint of fear in her voice.

"It may be," said Larry, in a tone that matched her own. "And if it is, before we go I'd like to shake your hand and say that you're the bravest woman in the world."

"And you," she said, simply, "are the bravest man."

She ignored his outstretched hand, and leaning forward, kissed him full on the lips. For an eternal instant each of them took what he could from what might prove to be the last moment of life.

Simmons' two cut-throat cooks died without ever knowing precisely what had happened to them. The pounding of running feet on the sand caused them to turn simultaneously. They beheld the terrifying spectacle of a fierce, unkempt, unshaven man charging upon them, a wicked, glinting blade in his hand; a relentless, blonde Amazon, hair streaming in the wind, and a spear held firmly and purposefully in her hand.

Before either of the victims could reach for a weapon, before he could utter a cry for help, their murderous nemeses were upon them. Larry's knife described a short glittering arc, then bit deep into the nearest man's heart. The spear, flung with amazing strength, pierced the other's jugular.

They fell together by the crackling fire they had been left to guard. The stench of burning flesh crackled into Larry's nostrils.

HASTILY he lifted a five-gallon can of kerosene which stood near-by and, pouring a liberal portion on the end of a club-like log, plunged it into the fire. It ignited and, holding the brand overhead, he raced for the nearest dory.

Ruth was already seated in the stern when he arrived. Handing her

the arsonist torch, he dropped the can to the bottom of the boat and, seizing the oars, rowed like a madman to the nearest schooner.

For once luck was with him. He had feared that Simmons might have left a guard upon the boats, but evidently the renegade desirous of flinging his full strength in the battle, had considered that unnecessary. After all, it was impossible for the Maoris to pierce his battle line and gain the camp, and from whom else could he possibly fear attack?

The dory came alongside the nearest vessel. With steady hands Ruth tossed a liberal dose of kerosene on the hull, then touched it with the flaming torch. The wood roared to flame.

ROWING like a madman Larry skillfully maneuvered the small boat from hull to hull, until at last the six schooners that comprised Simmons' navy, the backbone of his costly and desperate venture, were alive with angry, crackling flames.

Then, and only then, satisfied that at no matter what risk to come, he had effectively brought Simmons' evil green castles crashing about his ears, he turned the dory once more toward the beach.

Already he heard shouts of alarm from the jungle as Simmons' men, observing the black smoke in the heavens, became apprehensive as to its portent. Even as he and Ruth beached the dory and alighted, he saw half a dozen men burst from the jungle and emerge upon the beach. With them stood Simmons, black rage and murder written on his face. Larry waited to see no more. The pair of them ran madly up the beach away from the camp.

Simmons' angry bellow came to them, followed by a burst of rifle fire. Angry steel buried itself into the sand behind them. Something

bit into Larry's shoulder. Blood trickled crazily down his shirt.

He was spent and exhausted as they gained the palm trees. He sank to one knee, but the girl pulled him to his feet again.

"We must go on," she said.

And on they went. Despite the heat, the hunger, the weariness, the pain—on they went, and behind them, as relentless, as merciless as a wolf pack in full cry, came Simmons and his cut-throats.

It was high noon when they stopped. For the past hour the sounds of pursuit had grown fainter, and now, at least temporarily, they had shaken off the hue and cry. A rippling brook flowed past their halting place. Larry, weak from loss of blood, lay flat on his back and breathed heavily. Ruth bathed his wound with a piece of cloth torn from her dress and bandaged it carefully.

NO word was spoken between them. First, theirs was now a friendship which transcended speech, and the fear that they would be overheard by Simmons' men stilled them.

The sun descended from its zenith and swept off towards the west. The purling brook slaked their thirsts, but the pangs of hunger assailed them. At dusk Larry slept a little and awakened to find Ruth had gleaned a meal of overripe bananas and cocoanuts which had fallen from the tall palms.

How they lived through the next six days of hell, neither of them ever knew. Larry fought the biting pain in his shoulder with all the courage and fortitude he could summon. They subsisted solely on what fruits they could glean from the jungle floor. The breadfruit, nauseous as it tastes to the whites, proved a veritable staff of life in this wilderness.

TIME and again, they heard the trample of feet in the underbrush. Time and again they heard the harsh, cursing voices of Simmons' army as they cowered together in the dark shadows of the jungle and prayed for their safety.

Early on the morning of the seventh day an alien sound rammed itself into Larry's consciousness—a dull thudding sound that was unlike any jungle noise to which he had become accustomed. He raised himself on one elbow and stared with burning eyes at Ruth's wan face.

"Listen," he croaked hoarsely. "What's that?"

They listened intently for a moment. "It sounds like a gun," she said. "A big gun." She spoke in such a low tone he had to watch her lips to understand a word.

"It must be your father," he said. "It's help, thank God! Let us go to the beach."

Slowly they stood up. Their aching muscles agonizedly protested each move they made. Their arms about each other for mutual support, they made their way pitifully and painfully toward the beach.

Out there at anchor in the bay stood the solid gray hull of a British man-of-war. On the beach the blue jackets had already done their work. Disarmed and dispirited, Simmons' ragged army stood lined up before a file of sailors. Dimly, as though through a hazy screen, Larry saw two men running toward them.

His senses were so numb that he did not recognize Oldham until he saw Ruth sobbing in her father's arms. The other man threw a strong, friendly arm about his shoulders and helped him across the sand toward the sailors. As he came up to them he found himself looking into the face of Simmons.

It seemed that the last six days had ravaged the man almost as much as they had Larry. The relentless ambitious light in his eyes had changed to sullen despair.

Suddenly he moved. Like a hawk he bent forward and whipped a revolver from the holster of a young ensign who stood beside him. Before the man could move, he glared at Larry.

"You dog," he snarled. "I'll hang for this, but before I do I'll know that I've killed you. You! who've robbed me of millions."

His finger constricted on the trigger. Larry, summoning an incredible strength, a strength he did not at that moment possess, a strength inspired, engendered by his bitter hatred of the man confronting him, whipped the knife from his belt and sprang even as Simmons fired. He felt the bullet hot on his cheek. He felt his knife meeting something soft and yielding. He felt an inert bloody figure beneath him as he lay gasping and prone upon the body of the man who had caused him to face death so often.

Friendly hands lifted him up. As though in a mirage he saw Ruth smiling tremulously at him. Oldham was tendering him a flask.

"Better have a shot," he said. "You need it."

LARRY took the flask with a trembling hand and raised it to his lips.

"I guess I need it," he said huskily. "I'm awfully sorry, but I think—I'm going—to—faint."

He drank deeply. And then Larry Tracy, who had always prided himself on his strength and virility, collapsed, an inert heap upon the sand.

But he was never more of a man than at that moment.

The Fame of Albert Muggins



*An Undersized British Private in Hong-Kong
Suddenly Asserts Himself—With
Strange Results*

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

Author of "Fire and Sword," "The Scourge of Islam," etc.

AS HE crouched there behind the garbage cans there was nothing in his appearance which could have justified the minute's excitement which echoed through the barracks and courtyard above his head.

Muggins, Private Albert Muggins of His Majesty's Bedfordshire Regi-

ment, had never been a particularly prepossessing figure, being somewhat ratlike with a pinched face and narrow, close-set eyes, the kind of man that naturally and instinctively finds himself in the bad graces of the sergeant.

But above stairs, Muggins crouched behind his barrel of garbage, heard

much shouting and hurrying to and fro and it filled him with a certain amount of savage joy, a joy which rose above the fear which gripped him.

Lor, blimey, but 'e 'ad made 'em stand about proper and no mistake. There was Sergeant Hughes who had ridden him week after week and month after month, dirty kit, unmilitary bearing, boots unshined, hair uncut, all the thousand and one things that a pestiferous sergeant can find wrong with an under-sized private, had Sergeant Hughes found wrong with him.

And at last, Muggins had exploded. Seized with a blind and squeaking rage he had lifted his gun butt and bashed it full in the face of Sergeant Hughes. The horrified porter guard had gaped in amazement, but not so the officer, Lieutenant Newsome, the young fellow just out of Sandhurst.

It was his hard luck to have stepped forward just as Muggins went Berserker.

And he in turn received a blow from the gun butt that must have cracked a couple of his ribs.

MUGGINS, crouched in the darkness, grinned as he thought of those two good blows, the first he had ever rendered in his short life. And he grinned again as he thought of the horrified looks on the faces of the other men, seeing that unheard of thing, a soldier raising his hand to an officer.

It was certain that Muggins had attracted some attention, and his starved soul expanded from the memory of that ecstatic moment in the limelight. No longer was the ratty little private a subject for ridicule and for heavy-handed barrack horseplay. He flattered himself that they had seen the real Muggins, the implacable and fiercely combative individual who bore such an

outward mask of mediocre insufficiency.

That moment when all eyes were turned upon him in startled astonishment was the greatest moment in Muggins' life, and he rolled the savor of it under the tongue of his memory as he crouched there in the darkness.

For even now, as he well knew, the name of Muggins was on everyone's lips, the whole battalion was speaking of him in that half derogatory, half admiring way in which soldiers discuss the sudden and public outbreak of any one of their comrades.

PUNISHMENT was swift and certain, which made the deed more noteworthy. And Muggins had no illusions as to what would happen to him. He could in his mind's eye see the charges being read off, with himself standing beside a stern Sergeant Major, and stern officers judging him for that most heinous of military crimes, the striking of a superior.

To have struck his sergeant was bad enough, but Muggins had gone the whole length and committed the unforgivable crime of raising his hand against his officer.

In Muggins' slow working mental processes there was no very definite plan for escape. Like a rat he had buried his teeth and squealed and fought. And like a rat he had scuttered for shelter. His rush took him out of the courtyard towards the kitchen. He had collided into the portly paunch of a stout cook and from thence had fled down a corridor and dropped into a convenient stairway going to the cellar.

The hue and cry above continued. The search was leading from barrack room to barrack room. It would be only a matter of time until the

questing guard made thorough search of the cellar.

Crouching there, his ears strained for the slightest sound, he drew back in fright as an iron door swung open to his rear. The sing song notes of Chinese voices fell on his ears and he stopped trembling with almost a sob of relief as he saw that it was only the squad of Chinese coolies making their daily rounds to collect the garbage.

The foremost ones had now seized the galvanized iron cans nearest the door. A sudden wild plan came to Muggins. Rising out of the gloom he betook himself to the boss Chino.

BY DINT of pidgin English, many gestures and the display of a few copper cash, he soon secured the co-operation of the Chinese. They were accustomed to queer doings from these queer white soldiers in Hong-Kong and needed little persuasion to permit this particular specimen of a white man to climb into one of the half empty barrels and to cover him with odds and ends of filthy burlap.

He was hauled out and placed aboard the cart just as the advance guard of his pursuers entered the cellar at the other end.

There followed a day and a night of close contact with stinking garbage in a yard and then a cautious survey, late at night, and a careful progress towards the docks.

The coal passers were at work, handing up rattan bags of dusty coal and it was no trick to join them. Blackened by coal dust and unrecognizable from the garbage that had adhered to his person it was a simple matter to work himself up the ramp and on board the ship, where he passed out through a coal hole and found cargo space. Here among bales and boxes, redolent of Oriental produce, he hid himself and hoped

to sustain life for days with various hunks of moldy bread retrieved from the garbage and secreted about his person.

The ship hummed with coaling activities. An occasional sailor went through the cargo hold in which he was stowed away and he gathered from their language that they were Spanish. That the police would be searching the cargo for him was a foregone conclusion and he listened and waited anxiously for the approach of his pursuers.

The night wore through and he dozed, occasionally waking up with a start, instantly alert as any unexpected sound fell on his ears. It was after daylight, as near as he could determine, when the coaling ceased and he heard the welcome sounds that betokened preparations for sailing.

HIS hopes were dashed when there came to his ears the disturbing tramp of armed men. They were in the cargo hold next his own and he quickly ascertained that there were two Sikh policemen, tall, thin-legged, turbaned men with great curling beards in charge of a white police officer.

To a certain extent he had prepared for this eventuality, had shifted bales and boxes to make himself a tiny cubby hole and into this he crawled as the measured tread of the policemen entered his cargo hold.

The beam of an electric torch flashed hither and yon stabbing the darkness with a finger of light. An errant ray penetrated through his haven and he cowered to the bottom of his shelter, certain that he was discovered and expecting every second to feel the stern hand of the law on his shoulder.

There were some words exchanged between the policemen and what was evidently some ship's officer and the

search went on past. The nearness of that peril left him sweating with fright and he sat back listening in dread for a return of his searchers.

At last the welcome sound of preparations for departure brought a gleam of hope and soon the ship was in motion.

His sanctuary was none too secure, even when he felt the heave and pitch of the ship nosing into the open sea. The problem of water remained still to be faced. His work on the coal passing had made him thirsty and the problem became more and more vital in that stuffy cargo hold.

Then with dread he heard a new sound from near-by, the sound of a gang of sailors busily restowing cargo and putting things in shape for the voyage.

It was only a matter of half an hour until he was discovered and yanked out of his hiding place by a burly boatswain's mate. The fellow spoke no English, but made himself very clear as to his intentions by kicking the diminutive stowaway halfway across the cargo hold.

THE sailors laughed with a great display of white teeth in dusky faces and laughed some more as the culprit was incontinently heaved and hauled above decks where he was confronted by an irate captain, a tall, thin Spaniard with great, drooping mustaches.

The captain promptly kicked him down to the cook's galley where a particularly saturnine and evil-looking Calabrian officiated in greasy apron and dingy white coat. This individual promptly threatened him with a meat cleaver and upon Muggins' abject motion of surrender led him firmly and none too gently by the ear and pointed out a great pile of pots and pans.

Thankful at least that he was not to be murdered outright, Muggins set to,

sniffing occasionally at the intoxicating odor of the bubbling stew which the cook was engaged in concocting.

After all, the situation was not so bad. At least he would be fed and be given a place to sleep and he was away and moving farther away every turn of the screw from that Hong-Kong where the stern British Military Law waited to exact its meed of punishment. These cheerful reflections were not destined to continue very long.

AFTER a gruelling day in the heat of the galley, fighting a paralyzing sea sickness and dodging the toe of the cook's boot he was hailed again to the bridge where the tall captain stared down at him in high distaste.

"So-o-o you have been escaping from the *ejercito*—from the army iss it not? Verree good. But I will coom in mooch trouble if you escape on my ship. Therefore," the captain waved an admonitory forefinger at him, "when we coom to Manila you will be put in irons and back here you will coom with us when we return. Yes? You understand that."

Muggins, as the import of this message dawned on him understood it only too well. All his efforts to escape was to be frustrated and brought to naught. Standing with lowered head before the captain, Muggins, one time private in His Majesty's battalion of Bedfordshires, made up his mind then and there that he would escape from that unlucky ship at the first opportunity.

"Oh-ho," grinned the captain amiably, "you think you will break away, is it not? No, *amigo*, you will not break away for you will be in irons at every place we stop."

And with this comforting assurance Muggins returned to his galley and his implacably indignant cook who kicked him back to his table with scant ceremony and set him to

work polishing knives. And the captain's threat was no idle persiflage, for at their first port of call which happened to be Macao, the burly boatswain mate yanked him out of the galley, dragged him down to the hold, clamped a set of cumbersome irons on to his wrists and locked him into an evil smelling dark cubby hole, as the ship entered the harbor.

Thereafter he was released when they were in the open sea once more, but had a few days surcease from confinement. At times when the cook's cruelty became almost unbearable he found himself looking back with a certain amount of wistfulness on those quiet hours in the dark of the cubby hole.

After several days they began to pass small islands from which floated vaguely inviting tropical odors. Although he knew it not, the ship was passing close by the Tawi-Tawi group of the southernmost Philippine Islands.

THE cook was growing steadily worse. The fat Calabrian kept his huge meat cleaver in constant reach and threatened the perspiring stowaway at thirty-minute intervals, varying this procedure by reinforcing the numerous commands with the toe of his ever ready boot.

Bruised and battered, broken in spirit and gloomy as to the future, Muggins was slowly being driven to that same type of outburst which had resulted in his sudden disappearance from the active rolls of the British Army.

It was one night after supper that the cook in a special outburst of temper flung a sauce pan full of hot water at his assistant. Stung with the pain, Muggins suddenly went Berserker again.

The nearest weapon was a butcher knife and with this in hand he leaped at the startled cook and drove

once and again at the fellow's stout form. The cook went down with a bellow of a wounded ox. There was a rush of feet along the deck.

Muggins jumped out of the galley door and stood facing five or six sailors, the light of madness in his eyes and the bloody butcher knife in his hand.

THE startled sailors came to a halt and drew back a little from this vengeful apparition. Their hesitancy and evident fear was as wine to the soul of the aroused Muggins. He tasted it to the full until he saw the tall form of the captain hurrying aft, revolver in hand.

And then Muggins became alive to his danger and leaped for the rail, slashing at the fastening of a life preserver hanging there.

There was the bark of a shot and a bullet spat into the deck, just as he flung himself overboard, his arm through the life preserver and his right hand still clinging to the knife.

Man and life preserver hit the water with a resounding smack, and Muggins clung frantically to both objects which he carried. A shout went up from the ship behind him and there was another bark of a revolver, and another as the ship went by.

In a few minutes he was far astern, but across the water he could hear sounds as of the engine being stopped and the shouts of men lowering away a boat. Impelled by this new danger he struck out blindly, pushing and paddling, kicking like some puppy dog.

A current set in here which aided his progress and after awhile he saw the lights of the ship diminish in the distance as the unsuccessful search was discontinued. As the tiny light faded out a cold fear settled down upon him and he found himself alone on the face of the waters.

Again, however, came that surge of exultation as he recalled the startled, frightened air of those sailors as he had bounded out among them. Truly, they would remember Muggins on that ship. There was no doubt in his mind that he had killed the cook and that now he was a marked man, an outlaw soon to be sought for by the combined efforts of several nations.

Thinking these things, Muggins found some comfort therein. His starved soul warmed to the thought of the sudden importance of which he had invested himself in these last few days. The smell of land came out to gladden his nostrils and he heard the distant sound of surf breaking upon a beach. A great tropic moon rose benignly as though to light his progress and he made out the low, dim bulk of massed trees to his front.

It was after the swift tropical daylight had flushed the sea with molten gold that he fought his way through the mild surf and dragged himself up on to the warm sand of a beach.

Fronting him was a thick, lush green of heavy jungle growth. A land crab scuttered away at sight of his tattered form. Two or three monkeys swung down a palm tree and stared at him, chattering and gesticulating.

A BRILLIANTLY plumaged bird swooped from the upper tree-tops and sped like a flash of scarlet across his field of vision. Tendrils and climbing vines, great heavy lidded flowers and flashing birds made an unforgettable picture, a veritable fountain of color, a scene, however, which left Muggins unmoved.

He was thinking of food and of water and of danger from savages. There was something foreboding about that jungle with all its riot of color, something cold and sinister that warned him to move carefully.

A little recovered from his battle with the surf, he raised himself and stared about him. The beach extended for several hundred yards on either side, only to lose itself around jutting headlands.

THERE was no doubt in his mind that he had marooned himself on a small island, but where he was, or how far from civilization he did not know. For weapons he had naught but his butcher knife and this he hugged close to him, glaring at the jungle indomitably, a personification of puny man daring the forces of nature.

The monkeys continued to jabber and chatter at him and he found their ribald comment suddenly insubordinate to his newly acquired dignity as a man among men. Cursing angrily he reached down and seized a smooth piece of heavy driftwood and hurled it at the offending monkeys.

"Tkye that, ye narsty little helians!" he screamed up at them.

There was an immediate and surprising response. The monkeys chattered angrily, leaping up and down in the palm tree, two of them swung themselves up among the leaves and suddenly some dark brown object sailed out into the air and dropped with a thud into the sand, rolling almost to Muggins' feet.

It was followed by another and another, the dull thud of their dropping punctuating the shrill chattering of the monkeys and the wash of the waves from behind him.

"Cokernuts, s'help me!" he breathed.

His rancor against the monkey was forgotten as he gathered up two or three of the rough coated objects, carrying them to a convenient rock where he proceeded to smash them, allowing most of the milk to escape on his first attempts, but greedily carving out the fresh white meat and eating it. At least he wouldn't starve,

he reasoned and, caching the remaining cocoanuts he set about to explore the place.

Moving warily down the beach he rounded the headland and continued along the edge of the jungle for nearly a mile until at last he came again to his starting place, having completely circled the small island.

Fearful of meeting savages and filled with the dread of some chance encounter he yet found himself returning to his starting point with something very akin to disappointment. Subconsciously he had hoped to meet some human being, some fellow creature who would understand his lingo and to whom he could say:

"Who am I? Matey, Hi'm h'Albert Muggins! You'll be 'carin' that there nyme one 'er these yere diys an' no bloody fear maybe." For it was thus that he would have announced himself, hinting at his lurid past, but not disclosing the whole truth.

He sat there dejected for a space, for it came over him that the glory of his name in the outer world was but an empty thing in this deserted island, for what good is glory unless there are present those who will do homage. His thoughts drifted back to a certain barmaid in a certain bar off the India dock. Millie, her name was, and she had seen fit to sniff at Private Albert Muggins as he drank his glass of half and half.

"Hi syc!" she had commented, "will ye look at wot they're mykin' into soldiers now-a-dyes!"

AND she had pointed a finger of scorn at Albert Muggins. Now, if he could only see that barmaid again, what he wouldn't tell her! A runt, she had called him. He'd soon tell her what a runt could do, and his shoulders straightened out and a far-away look came into his eyes as he thought of the effect his return

would have upon her and the awed whispers around the bar as men pointed him out.

"That's h'Albert Muggins," they'd whisper, "'m wot knocked out the sergeant an' bashed the orficer an' knifed a Spaniard! 'Es a fair desperate character, that's wot 'e is!"

THEY would shake their heads and gaze at him in respect. Muggins breathed deeply, his chest expanding at the thought of that reception. Then his eye came back again to his immediate surroundings and he looked about him, shaking his head with a faint sigh.

But shelter must be sought and water must be found and for the moment these practical considerations effaced his dreams and his regrets and he set about to establish some sort of a domicile.

It was no easy task penetrating the outer fringe of jungle, but once through that he came into the outer holdings of a great banyan tree which covered a quarter of an acre in extent, for the tendrils let down from its huge limbs had taken root and sent out further limbs until the whole thing was like a great tent supported by innumerable columns.

It looked like a shelter of sorts against the fury of tropical storms and continued to look so until Muggins had penetrated farther into its depths when a huge, slowly flowing scaly thing slid away into the dusk and he decided promptly against this place as a permanent home.

There were snakes to be feared on this island and his outward progress became even more wary and cautious. The silence of the place was its most disturbing feature for there was no sound of beast nor bird, nor whir of insect life to lend some comforting note. It was this silence that redoubled the gloominess of Muggins' thoughts and increased his

sense of danger by its uncanniness.

As yet he did not know that tropical flowers are rarely perfumed and that brilliant tropical birds are rarely gifted with song, all that he knew was that the silence pressed upon him like a weight as he continued to move toward the center of the island.

He soon hit rising ground and came to a hill at the foot of which he found a spring around which many birds strutted and preened. He sought above this and came at last to a small hole in the hillside, torn out by the fall of a great tree uprooted in some tropical typhoon. With little work a rough sort of cave could be made and this he set about, using his butcher knife to loosen the soil.

When he had at last sufficiently enlarged it his loneliness returned upon him, brought back again by his cessation of activity and the slight weariness induced by the unaccustomed labor in the tropical sun. To occupy himself he returned to the beach and salvaged the halves of the cocoanut shells. Hollowing them out he made a pair of very fair containers for water and gazed at the cave with its sole furnishing of two cocoanut shells and wondered how he was going to live in that deserted spot.

But live he did, his hunger impelling him to test and try various fruits. One of these he found was especially palatable, a sort of melon which grew on a small tree. Its orange-colored flesh was faintly sweet and pleasing to the taste, nor did he know that he was eating the famous papaya melon and enriching his system by much pepsin thereby. Other fruits he found, some edible, and some so rank that they shrieked poison at him before he ever tasted them.

BUT three or four days of fruit and cocoanuts left a faint, gnawing hunger in him, the hunger of the

meat-eating animal for flesh. A species of mussels only temporarily assauged this and he cast about for other game, gazing enviously at the wild pigeons which flew about in graceful carelessness.

In his boyhood days he had made bows and arrows and after some crude but effective work with the butcher knife he constructed a bow. For bow string he had nothing, but sought and found a creeper which, when scraped, rolled and pounded, yielded a sort of tough fibre which served the purpose. Arrows he made of reeds, tipped with pieces of shell and with feathers found after the feast of some night animal.

With this crude outfit he stalked his game, finally bringing down a pigeon after shooting away some six arrows.

AND then came the need of fire. Somewhere he had heard or seen a fire being made by friction and evolved a crude fireboard of a piece of drift wood, using his bow to hold a smaller stake. He drilled away at this, adjusting his equipment until at last the thing began to smoke and he fed it up with dry moss and shredded leaves until he had a tiny blaze going in front of his cave.

His first essay at cooking was not a huge success for his crude spit on which he turned the bird, caught fire and his first taste of meat for many weeks was spoiled by wood ashes and charred flesh. But he persevered, nevertheless, and grew more adept.

One day in walking along the beach several huge sea turtles scrambled into the water and he stumbled over a partially filled hole which contained many eggs. These formed a welcome addition to his diet as did the fish.

His first fish he caught in his bare hands, red fish that had been land locked in a small pool by the out-

going tide. Later he devised a spear out of a bamboo shaft and sharpened fish bones and grew expert at spearing his prey.

The days were long and uneventful. The jungle continued in its vast silence. The sea lapped ceaselessly against the beaches, making a dull, monotonous undertone sounding in his ears day and night.

The occasional harsh cry of a bird would break the silence or the mournful notes of a gecko lizard would beat through a hot afternoon, unvarying and unchanging, a monotonous repetition of the same full throated note hour after hour, until he went forth half maddened, fully intending to slay and of course could not even succeed in locating it.

Loneliness weighted upon him more heavily and he began to talk aloud to himself as he paced bare-headed and full bearded about his little kingdom. Once he saw a faint smudge of smoke on the horizon and hastily put together a beacon, piling on green stuff until a cloud of smoke went aloft, but the faint smudge on the horizon dissolved and he saw nothing again but the unvarying monotony of sea and sky and a faint low lying shadow on the far horizon that betokened another island.

Bitterness grew in his soul as he thought of that notoriety that was his in the outer world, thought of his name on men's lips and the vast forces of several governments moving to apprehend him.

THERE beyond that far horizon he was an important personage and here on this little island was no one to whom he could talk, nor no one who would give him the meed of awe which he felt was his rightful due. He dreamed wistful dreams of returning to London, his picture featured on the front pages of the illustrated dailies and the vast respect

that would be paid him as a great criminal.

Undoubtedly he would be imprisoned, but as time went on and loneliness increased that had long since ceased to worry him. For even in prison there is the sound of human voices, and even in prison there is respect to be had from the lesser criminals for the greater.

Albert Muggins visualized himself bowing and nodding affably to the common criminals and of being the object of a special care on the part of wardens.

"A desperate character!" they'd whisper, pointing at him, "a very desperate character who'll take a lot of watching!"

HE closed his eyes and dreamed of these things, for there was little else to do, now that one or two hours' work would provide him with food.

The nights were especially long, and he saw no beauty in those splendid tropical evenings with the great moon flooding the jungle with molten silver, variegated by shadows of solid ebony, the velvety dusk of twilight and the smashing splendor of dawn held no charms for him. The cloying scent of ylang-ylang brought no surcease to his melancholy.

He had proven himself a man in a world of men and here was naught but sea and sky, fluttering pigeon and chattering monkey to be impressed by that fact. He would have traded the whole South Seas with his hopes of paradise to boot for a single evening in a steamy "pub" among his own kind, even did he have to pay for that one evening by spending the rest of his life in jail.

One morning he awoke at dawn, a strange throbbing in his ears and rose up startled, wondering what the sound might be. It seemed to come from the sea and it was toward the

beach that he made his way, listening to the steady note pulsing across the waters.

At first it sounded like the beat of his own heart, but even ears long accustomed to silence could make out that the sound was human in its origin for there was a steady, metallic persistence about it that argued naught but human agency.

He crashed through the jungle fringe in time to see six or eight great *praus* moving along abreast, far out on the waves. Great gayly colored sails carried them forward gently, sweeping them past the island as he watched.

From their decks came a flash of sun on steel and the glow of scarlet cloth. The throbbing note of tom-tom beats across the face of the waters and men danced, brown-skinned men in gay sarongs as the *praus* slowly passed on their way.

That these craft were filled with savages Muggins well knew. That these savages might be cannibals or any bloodthirsty species of aborigines he felt was almost a foregone conclusion. Yet so great was his hunger for human kind that he ripped off the remnants of his shirt and waved it madly, screaming and dancing on the sandy beach to attract the attention of the natives.

AS their craft eased off into the distance he became more frantic and waded out into the water continuing to leap and shout and wave his ragged shirt. Whether the keen eyes of the Moros actually saw him or whether, seeing that wild figure dancing crazily alone at the water's edge, they feared to investigate is something that cannot be determined.

It was sufficient of evil to Muggins that they passed on, and faded away into the distance without the slightest indication that they even knew of his existence.

It was a bitter blow. Muggins dragged himself up to his cave in dispirited fashion, feeling that the last hope of contact with his own kind had faded away. He had no doubt that the whole world was wondering what had become of Albert Muggins, but the world would never know that he perished miserably on a desert island, unknown and unhonored.

He chewed the cud of bitter reflection, realizing that it would be only a matter of time until his very name faded into oblivion and there would be none to remember his great courage and his great daring.

Days passed in which he found himself with scarcely enough energy to find food, he had lost his grip. Hope had departed from his life. More weeks passed.

IN the outer world beyond his ken things had been moving without the presence of Albert Muggins. A certain determined Serbian student had shot a certain rather plump and none too brilliant arch duke at a place called Saravejo.

Thereafter things had moved swiftly to their pointed ends. Millions of men were massed in Russia and in Germany and in France. Great fleets of warships scoured the Seven Seas. German raiders reported in the Pacific and lithe, lean British cruisers hurried forth to apprehend them with instructions to search sea and bay, inlet and island until the enemy should be found.

Thus it was that a boat crew from H. M. S. Watersprite pulled ashore on a certain small island close to Borneo and stared in amazement as a bearded white man, clad in rags, advanced yelling upon them.

They drew back in amazement as the fellow stopped before them, waving his arms and shouting something incomprehensible.

"Who might you be?" asked the petty officer, and opened his eyes as the dilapidated beach comber drew himself up in strange dignity.

"Who might I be?" returned the apparition, "Gor blimey, h'I'm the man that you're lookin' for," and the weird-looking beachcomber drew himself up to his full five feet four inches, "h'I'm the man you're alookin' for."

He waited until silence fell upon the little group of men before him, waited, purposely withholding his smashing climax, purposely delaying the announcement of his name so that he might taste to the full the savor of that awe and respect for which he had waited so long.

"Mates," he announced at last, "h'I am h'Albert Muggins!"

The ruddy-faced sailors blinked at him and waited. A little note of doubt crept into Muggins' voice as he repeated:

"H'I'm h'Albert Muggins wot deserted from the Bedfordshires at Hong-Kong!" and he waited for this shot to hit home.

The sailors continued to blink at him in owlish fashion. Finally the petty officer cleared his throat.

"That's all past and done with, my man," he said in kindly fashion, "the King's amnesty pardons all deserters and offenders against military law."

Muggins stared at the ring of curious faces about him. Still he did not comprehend and there was something pathetic as he tried to convince these men of his innate depravity.

"But h'I'm tellin' ye, h'T'm h'Albert Muggins, 'im wot deserted from the Bedfordshires at Hong-Kong h'after a-bashin' Sergeant Hughes with a gun butt and pastin' an orficer in the ribs!" and he gazed about apprehensively, waiting for that dawning recognition for which he hoped.

Again there was a silence and again the petty officer cleared his throat.

"Never heard tell of you," responded that individual, "and besides all that is past and done with. The King's amnesty pardons all military offenders."

"But, h'I—h'I—knifed a cook aboard a Spanish ship," pled Muggins almost tearfully.

The petty officer laughed.

"Let the Spanish worry about that," he grunted, "meantime you better come aboard and find a suit of slacks and get a good solid meal into your gizzard. . . ."

"'Strewth A'mighty," mumbled Albert Muggins and collapsed like a deflated balloon.

"And the funny thing, sir," explained the petty officer to a spruce naval lieutenant who commanded the ship, "this here bird looks at us like a dyin' calf. All of a sudden he gives a kind of a bleat and turns around and streaks it back into the brush and that's the last of him we see. Queer way for a man to act I says, Sir."

"Very queer," echoed the lieutenant and promptly forgot Albert Muggins.

*Watch for More Stories by Malcolm
Wheeler-Nicholson*

"FOUNDER OF THE
BRITISH EMPIRE
IN INDIA"

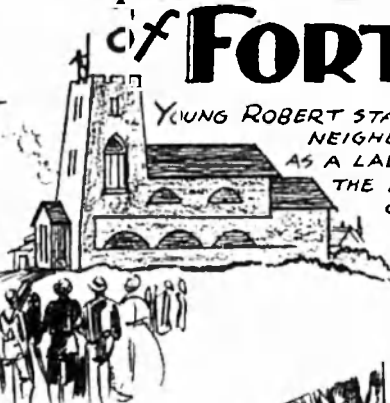
Famous SOLDIERS of FORTUNE



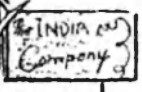
**LORD
CLIVE**

BORN SEPT. 29,
1725, AT MARKET-
DRAYTON, IN SHROPSHIRE.
AS A CHILD HE WAS REST-
LESS, OF STRONG WILL AND
FIERY TEMPER, MAKING
LITTLE PROGRESS IN HIS
STUDIES.

YOUNG ROBERT STARTLED THE
NEIGHBORS WHEN
AS A LAD HE CLIMBED
THE LOFTY TOWER
OF MARKET-
DRAYTON.



LATER
HE FORMED
AN ARMY OF
IDLE LADS
TO PROTECT SHOP-KEEPERS'
WINDOWS — COLLECTING
A TRIBUTE OF APPLES
AND HALF PENCE
FOR HIS GUARANTEE
OF SECURITY.



AT EIGHTEEN HE
ACCEPTED A WRIT-
ERSHIP WITH THE EAST
INDIA COMPANY.

CLIVE BECAME
A PRISONER OF THE
FRENCH AT MADRAS
BUT ESCAPED TO
FORT ST. DAVID, WHERE AT 21
HE ENTERED THE MILITARY SER-
VICE. FROM THE FIRST HE
SHOWED HIS PERSONAL COURAGE.

HE VANQUISHED THE BULLY
OF THE FORT IN A DESPERATE DUEL
AND BECAME BOTH CONSPICUOUS AND POPULAR.



This is the Original Illustrated Adventure



AT 25 CAME HIS DREAM OF EMPIRE. MAKE A BOLD STROKE THE YOUNG CAPTAIN TOLD THE BRITISH OFFICIALS, TO KEEP INDIA FROM THE HANDS OF FRANCE. AT THE HEAD OF 200 BRITISH SOLDIERS AND 300 NATIVES HE PUSHED THROUGH A FIERCE STORM TO ARCOT THE FRENCH STRONG-HOLD AND CAPTURED IT.



HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT - LONDON.

HE CAME BACK TO ENGLAND BUT FAILED FINANCIALLY AND POLITICALLY, BEING REJECTED BY PARLIAMENT.

CLIVE WAS SOON APPOINTED THE GOVERNOR AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF BENGAL. BACK IN INDIA AGAIN HIS BRILLIANT METHODS OF FIGHTING LED TO MANY VICTORIES.

WHEN NATIVES CHARGED WITH HORDES OF ELEPHANTS TO BATTER DOWN FORTS, CLIVE DIRECTED THE FIRING AT THE BEASTS INSTEAD OF AT THE MEN. THIS CREATED PANDEMONIUM.

HIS NAME STANDS HIGH IN THE ROLL OF CONQUERERS. RETURNING HOME AGAIN HE WAS IDOLIZED BY THE PEOPLE AND RAISED TO A PEERAGE BY THE KING OF ENGLAND.



STATUE OF LORD CLIVE

ERECTED OPPOSITE THE INDIA OFFICE - LONDON



Feature—the First to Appear in Any Magazine

BODYGUARD



*An Action-Loving Soldier of Fortune Finds Thrills
and Excitement in an Undertaking
Which Promised None*

A Complete Novelette

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Author of "Alias Mr. Death," "The House of Hooded Death," etc.

WALDON PRESTON looked at Bristol coldly from a great easy chair before the fire in his study. He remained seated; didn't ask Bristol to sit down, but appraised him with narrowed smoky eyes.

Bristol drew himself erect, tall and lean and wirey, automatically coming to attention. His steel gray eyes met Preston's steadily.

The millionaire extended his hand, not in greeting but with palm upturned. Bristol proffered his credentials.

Preston singled out a letter from the mutual acquaintance who had brought them together; nodded.

"I'm satisfied," he said, as if that settled the matter. "I'll pay you four hundred dollars a month and expenses. You'll live in the house.

That's all. If you'll ring for Cummings, he'll show you to your rooms."

"You mean," said Bristol, "that you'll tell me later what I'm supposed to do? Why not tell me now so that I can start right in with an understanding—"

"The first thing you want to understand," said Preston incisively, "is that you are not to ask questions. If that isn't agreeable—" He motioned toward the door.

"Anything is agreeable to me," said Bristol, mindful of the four-hundred-a-month-plus, "—anything short of murder."

The millionaire glanced at him quickly, sardonically.

"All you need know at present is that you are being paid to guard my life. Are you armed now?"

Bristol's hand flicked under his coat and out again holding an automatic.

Preston nodded approvingly. He returned to his book with a curt "Good night."

Bristol's "good-night" was just as short. He wasn't favorably impressed by his new boss, but that didn't matter. He wasn't expected to fall in love with the man.

The butler conducted him to a suite on the third floor which made his eyes pop. He sighed. He seemed to have fallen into a remarkably soft spot—too good to last.

THE Great War had left him at loose ends with only a craving for further action to guide his steps. Since then he had been through half a dozen South American revolutions. Had dipped here and there into the endless warfare in China—a soldier of fortune. Till, weary of all that, he had come to find himself still a loose end; a man-at-arms adrift in the humdrum life of the city without trade or profession to which he could anchor.

A soldier of fortune surfeited with strife, but forced by circumstances to take a job as a glorified gunman!

And soft it was. As the days grew into weeks he leaned more and more to the conclusion that the necessity for a bodyguard existed only in Preston's mind.

Nothing happened; no hint of menace. He accompanied Preston to private libraries and sales of rare books; to clubs; to dinner here and there; to the theatre and the opera. Preston treated him all right, civil in his overbearing way; more as a guest than an employee.

An easy life, luxurious, with everything he wanted to be had for the asking, but it began to bore him. The change was too sudden from his years of campaigning in petty wars; like jumping straight from a flophouse and slum to a feather bed and caviar.

IF anything was going to happen he wished to heaven it would hurry up. And he wanted to know what danger threatened Preston—if any.

To that end he enticed Preston's secretary into a mild drinking bout and tried to pump him.

"Is book collecting Mr. Preston's only occupation?" he asked off-handedly when Moore seemed mellow.

"Book collectin'?" Moore winked slyly. "Ummm. Books an' manuscript's. That's it, sure. Sure"—he winked again—"but the ol' boy's deep, see? That's it, deep. T'ell with him."

"What's Preston leery of? persisted Bristol. "Who's after him?"

The secretary winked again, owlishly.

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you? Sure, you would. And maybe I would, too." He laughed, tossed off another drink, mumbled: "I tell

you what—" He stopped, shook his head.

Bristol gave up, largely convinced that the secretary knew no more than he did himself.

They moved presently to Preston's estate in Westchester.

Time hung more heavily on Bristol's hands. He motored, rode horseback, walked, among the rolling hills; played lonesome golf on the private links.

But there came an evening when Preston rushed into the house breathless, obviously frightened. He pointed a trembling finger at the hat he held crushed in his hand. A bullet had penetrated its crown.

Snapping out his gun, Bristol stepped quickly toward the door.

"No, no!" Preston caught him by the shoulder, drew him back. "It's nothing! I'm not hurt!"

Bristol looked at him with amazement.

"True," said Bristol dryly, "you're not hurt, but I wouldn't give anybody any credit for that. If that bullet had been a couple of inches lower you wouldn't have anything more to worry over."

"I'm not worrying," said Preston coldly, his poise returning. "I shouldn't have gone out alone, that's all."

He turned and walked away.

Moore came softly forward.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Bristol.

"No?" The secretary winked knowingly, grinned. "Oh, no, not a thing except that somebody took a shot at the old man. Who was it?"

BRISTOL'S eyes bored into him. There was a shiftiness about Moore which he didn't like.

"How do you know somebody shot at him?"

"I heard you say so. Who was it?"

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you?" said Bristol. "That's what you told me a while ago when I asked you for information."

Things settled down again to dull routine. So dull that Bristol entertained a suspicion that Preston had himself fired the bullet through his hat.

Why? Oh, just to steam up the idea that his life was in danger. The whole business looked like bunk—but Bristol couldn't bring himself to the point of quarreling with such a soft job.

Then reality stepped in most unmistakably.

They were returning from the city at dusk. Preston was driving his fast open car. As they whirled up the driveway to the house he stopped with a jarring suddenness which left the brakes smoking and almost threw Bristol through the windshield. -

CLOSE!" said Preston through tight lips. "Close! Another few yards and—"

Bristol saw it then. Drawn taut across the road at a height with their heads, a wire was stretched from tree to tree!

More than that he saw. Among the trees not twenty yards away a figure was darting down the path to a bridge across Preston's trout stream.

Gun in hand, he dashed in pursuit. The trees and the darkness were against a clear shot. He held his fire and put on all his speed to overtake the fugitive.

Preston shouted for him to return but he paid no heed.

Anger lent wings to his feet. He gained steadily. The bridge was only a few paces distant when he gathered himself for the final effort. As he leaped his arms flew out and wrapped about his prisoner.

"Got you!" he puffed—and Imme-

diately was made aware that he had taken on a lively handful.

Blows rained on his face and head but the fists delivering them were small and lacked strength. He knew that victory was his, provided the other did not bring a weapon into play.

Because of that possibility, he raised his gun to end the conflict with a blow. It was descending when his brain registered that his prisoner was slim and soft—as a girl! He dropped the gun and proceeded to pinion the slender flailing arms.

Back and forth they reeled on the narrow bridge, his captive fighting desperately to escape. A wild surge carried Bristol against the railing. Hearing it crack, he heaved unavailingly to regain his balance. The railing gave way and sent them both into the stream.

Promptly he became engaged in another battle—this time to free himself from the panicky hold which threatened to drown them both. He was being dragged under when the strangling arms about his neck went limp.

HALF-DROWNED himself, he paddled ashore with his apparently unconscious burden.

"I ought to smack you," he was saying breathlessly when the fact was forced upon him that his captive was indeed a girl.

"I'll be damned!" he muttered, turning her over and starting to shake the water out of her, "damned and double-damned! What the—"

"Please!" she gasped. "Please! You're shaking me—all apart! I'm all right—if you'll let me—catch my breath!"

Recollection of the deadly wire stretched across the road hardened him. He gripped her shoulder.

"What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Let me go home," she said. "I'm tired!"

Bristol laughed derisively.

"You can't get away as easy as that. You've got some explaining to do. You're going to Waldon Preston's house. After that—we'll see."

"No!" She shrank from him. "I'm not going there! I won't!"

"Oh, yes, you are!" He cursed to himself. Now that he was able to get a true picture of her, to realize how slight and frail she was, and how alluring, he found it difficult to be hard-boiled. "You're going with me," he said, "right now. You're going to explain why you tried to cut off my head and Preston's. You strung that wire, didn't you?"

She nodded wearily.

WHAT did you do it for?" he demanded harshly. "Who helped you?"

"Nobody," she replied more firmly. "I didn't mean to hurt anybody. I only wanted to frighten Waldon Preston—that was all. I thought the windshield would break the wire. I didn't mean—"

"Tell it to Preston." Bristol grasped her arm and lifted her to her feet. "Are you going to walk or have I got to carry you?"

Her chin rose defiantly.

"I'll walk."

Keeping hold of her arm, he took her back up the path to the driveway, expecting to find Preston there. But Preston had removed the obstruction and gone on.

It occurred then to Bristol to hear what she had to say before turning her over to his employer. Preston probably would exclude him from the interview. So why not learn what he could from her? He was entitled to know the reason for the attack since his own life had been endangered.

"I'm going to give you a break,"

he said. "If you can show me any good reason for trying to behead Preston I'll let you go. What do you say to that?"

"I didn't try to behead him," she replied evenly, "but if that had happened he would have deserved it."

"Make good on that," said Bristol, "and you can go on your way. But we'll have to go to the house. You must be cold. I know I am and I've no hankering for pneumonia."

"My car is down the road, not far away," she countered. "We can talk there."

"You've got to have dry clothes."

Amusement kindled in her eyes.

"Why be so concerned about me if you think I tried to kill you?"

"I'll be damned if I know," said Bristol bluntly; "but—never mind. I'm giving you my word, understand, that if your story sounds good to me you can walk out without seeing Preston. I'll tell him I fell in the creek and that you got away."

"I'll take your word," she nodded, "as you'll have to take mine for what I'm going to tell you."

"Okay," he said, "let's go."

Circling the house, they entered by a side door, went up a rear stairway and reached his rooms on the second floor without seeing anyone.

Locking the door to his sitting-room, he pointed to the bedroom.

"You'll find clothes in there," he said. "The key is in the lock if you feel nervous."

A FRIENDLY glint came again to her big blue eyes.

"How about yourself?" she said. "You're wet, too."

"I'm tough," he grinned, frankly admiring her. "Go ahead and be sensible."

Without further objection she went in to change.

Taking a drink, he frowned, chiding himself for fraternizing with the

enemy. Yes—and there wasn't a thing to prevent her walking out on him! His windows overlooked the roof of the veranda. She could scramble to the ground—

But she didn't. Within a couple of minutes she emerged, bundled in his bathrobe and shuffling in his slippers. He chuckled. Looking herself over, she laughed softly.

"You're next," she said. "I won't say a word until you get into dry clothes. Not a word!"

"I'm glad," he blurted, "that you didn't run away. Out the window, I mean."

"But why?" she asked. "You said you'll believe me. Why should I run away?"

SHAKING his head, absurdly embarrassed, he retired to change his clothes.

Away from her he swore, reminding himself that she was a potential murderer. With that fixed thought he returned to her.

"What's your name?" he demanded brusquely.

She smiled uncertainly, noticing his changed tone.

"Mary Wilson."

"Does Preston know you?"

Her eyes snapped: "He does."

"And why did you try to kill him?"

"I didn't. I told you I only meant—"

"What about the shot you took at him a week or so ago? Was that just another little joke?"

"It wasn't exactly a joke—no."

"You admit shooting at him?"

"Not at him," she corrected. "I admit it, of course, because you asked me to tell you the truth."

"But, good Lord!" He stared at her, speechless.

"I didn't shoot at him," she said. "The bullet didn't go anywhere near him. I only wanted—"

"Nowhere near him!" Bristol laughed. "It went so near that you came nearer to a murder charge than you did tonight. It went through his hat!"

HER dismay was so genuine that he couldn't doubt it.

"How about yourself?" she said at him levelly. "I want you to listen to me before we go any further. I'm going to believe that you'll believe all I'm going to say."

Bristol nodded uncomfortably.

"My sister," she went on, the red of anger coming and going in her cheeks, "thought she was in love with Waldon Preston a long time ago. She's been paying for that mistake—she's paying now. When she broke with him she fell really in love with the man she married.

"And she would be happy, tremendously happy, but for Preston—that monster who is driving her insane!"

"But," said Bristol as she paused, "I don't see how Preston can hurt her if she doesn't care for him and never did."

"There are letters that Jean wrote Preston. He won't give them back."

"What of it? Your sister's husband isn't going to get excited about some old love letters, is he?"

"You still don't understand," said the girl. "These letters are undated. Any one of them might have been written only yesterday!"

"All right," said Bristol, "but I still don't see any justification for murder."

"I haven't attempted murder yet, but"—her small teeth gritted—"I will if he doesn't give them up. Jean has begged him on her knees to give them back, to stop persecuting her.

"There isn't enough money in the world to buy them from Preston. He laughs at her and gives them back one by one—on his own terms. He's

taking a vicious psychological revenge, humiliating her, torturing her on the rack of hideous suspense."

It was still far from being clear to Bristol, but he nodded sympathetically. She was so passionately earnest.

"How do you mean?"

"This way! Whenever Ben is away, Preston knows it. Then he gets in touch with Jean and makes her meet him at some notorious roadhouse. Don't misunderstand me, please. He never puts even a finger on her. That isn't Preston's way. It is her peace of mind that he wants to hurt. He wants to have her constantly in fear that Ben will find out she has been out with him.

"She doesn't dare refuse to go. He holds her letters over her head. Under the bargain he drove with her, she gets one letter back each time they meet. For that she has to endure dinner with him and sit with him in a public place at risk of being seen by someone who will tell her husband.

DO you understand now why I have gone to extremes to help her? There are only six more letters and he has hinted that before the last of them is delivered to her his price—will increase!"

"I get the idea." Bristol frowned: "The only payment that he has asked so far is that she dine with him, but before he gets through—um. He is a rotter, isn't he?"

"A fiend! For even if he—if he never actually raises his price, there is always the threat—a double threat—bearing down on Jean. It is unbearable!"

"Yes," said Bristol thoughtfully, "yes. But you aren't accomplishing anything. You haven't succeeded in scaring him into giving up. I doubt that you can. If you ask me, I'd

say you're only heading yourself up the prison road."

"I don't care! Suppose Preston should put a date on one of these letters—date it today!—and send it to Ben Carson! There would be murder then! As it is, my sister's happiness and health are being ruined—and that's bad enough.

I WANT you to believe me," she finished quietly, "and I want you especially to believe that I never intended to kill Preston—or anyone else. I only wanted to scare him so that he would stop—"

"He almost stopped breathing a couple of times," said Bristol sternly, recalling that it was his job to protect Preston. "Your scares come too close to reality. No more of them. You've got to make me a promise."

"What is that?"

"To let Preston alone. If I let you go now without seeing him, will you promise that?"

Her glance drooped and she nodded.

"I promise," she said. "I guess I haven't any choice."

"That's the girl," applauded Bristol. "Let nature take its course for a while and maybe things will work out all right. Maybe we can think of something. Right now, the trick is to get you out of the house. I'll dig up something for you to wear."

The golf suit he provided was miles too big for her. They laughed together over it; and, safely away from the house, they parted laughing—anything but enemies.

Bristol went frowning to his employer to report failure—and move for a showdown.

"So," said Preston with his dry smile that was a bit awry, "you didn't catch the joker. I didn't think you would."

"It was no joke," said Bristol.

"Somebody's got it in for you good and plenty. There's a woman in it. I saw her footprints."

Preston gave him a quick look, assumed an air of frankness.

"You're only partly right," he said. "There are two women. An old flame of mine and her sister—with a husband to back them up. It's an old story. I should have told you about it, I suppose, but a man hates to admit his own foolishness. That much being out," he smiled wryly, "I might as well tell you the rest. But first let me show you something."

HE took a letter from his desk and handed it to Bristol. It was dated years ago and Preston grinned as he read the inane outpourings. Addressed to "Jean Darling," it was signed "Your Ever Adoring Waldon."

"I have quite a package of these letters," said Preston, "and every one of them cost me five thousand dollars. You can imagine how such mush would look in the tabloids! Yes, I think they are worth five thousand apiece."

Observing the bewilderment on Bristol's face and not knowing exactly what to make of it, he added: "I can show you the cancelled checks, if you like."

Bristol shook his head.

"I'm not permitted to ask questions, of course, but since you've raised the subject, I'll chance one. You say the woman is now married. Was she married when you wrote the letters?"

"No," said Preston, watching him. "Why do you ask?"

"Because, that being the case, how could the letters get into the tabloids? How could she get them printed? She couldn't sue you for breach of promise at this late date.

Her husband couldn't sue you for alienation. What then?"

"You don't even begin to cover the possibilities," replied Preston. "It's very simple to file a suit that has no merit just to get publicity for a lot of slush like this or other scurrilous matter. She might, for example, claim the existence of a maintenance contract and say that I agreed to keep her for life. That, in fact, has been suggested to me whenever any of the letters have been offered — at five thousand apiece."

"It there any such contract?"

"There isn't and never was. But documents can be forged. So, as I remarked, I figured the letters cheap at the price. I did, that is, until a couple of months ago, when I decided not to buy the last six letters."

SIX letters," said Bristol, involuntarily.

"Six," said Preston, eyeing him keenly. "You seem surprised. What's surprising about it?"

"Why, nothing," said Bristol, recovering his wits. "It simply struck me as odd that you should balk on the last few letters after buying so many of them."

"A man can be pressed too far," returned Preston, "but we won't go into that. The point is that the attacks on my life started soon after I refused to pay any more. Thinking they would stop if I were constantly guarded, I employed you. Still they continue." He sighed. "Ultimately, I suppose, I'll have to buy the remaining letters."

He took up the book he had been reading, signifying that the conversation was at an end.

Bristol, his loyalty divided, was on the verge of repeating what Mary Wilson had told him, but held his tongue. He didn't know what to believe—but he did know that Pres-

ton's recital left him cold. There seemed to be something lacking in it—the ring of truth, perhaps.

GOING to his rooms, Bristol seemed to see the girl sitting there with his faded old bathrobe huddled about her. Her eyes—deep, earnest, azure, bewilderingly beautiful—seemed to plead again with him for belief.

Against their appeal he placed the evidence which Preston had offered. He set it up and at once knocked it down with the fact that Preston had shown him only an old love letter which Jean Carson might voluntarily have returned to him when their affair ended. Preston might have been bluffing when he offered to show cancelled checks in corroboration of his statement.

Cursing himself for a sentimental fool, Bristol decided to sit down with his pipe and a book and forget it all.

Making himself comfortable, he got into his bathrobe. Something weighty caused a pocket to sag.

He swore again as his exploring hand closed on an automatic—Mary Wilson's!

"But," he argued in her favor, "why didn't she use it? Why didn't she stick me up and get away? I'll be damned if I can figure it out. To hell with it!"

But he couldn't forget. Particularly, he couldn't erase Mary Wilson from his memory. He found himself increasingly prejudiced in her behalf; and in direct ratio he liked Preston the less. He wanted to meet Mary Wilson again.

"I'm quitting," he told Preston next day.

"Indeed?" Preston regarded him searchingly. "Why?"

"I'm fed up. I'm sick of the job; that's all."

"There are cures for all kinds of

sickness," said Preston. "Money is very effective in certain cases. Am I wrong in surmising that you have gone over to the enemy?"

"You are," retorted Bristol. "Just whom do you mean by the enemy?"

Preston laughed. "You're not allowed to ask questions."

"But there's nothing to prevent my telling you something. You don't need a bodyguard any more than I do. That's the plain truth."

"How do you know?"

"I know," said Bristol, putting faith in the promise the girl had given him. "You couldn't be any safer in a bank vault."

"Perhaps. How much have you been offered to leave my service?"

Bristol flushed angrily, moved a step nearer.

"Listen, Preston—"

"I'll take that back," smiled Preston. "We'll put it another way. Will you remain with me for the next two months for ten thousand dollars? That's a simple question requiring only a simple answer. And it's my top figure."

Bristol considered him speculatively.

Ten thousand dollars was worth having in any kind of money. There was the question, of course, as to what he would have to do to earn the money but that could be met when it arose.

"You've bought something," said Bristol. "I'll stick."

BUT not even the thought of ten thousand dollars could quiet his dissatisfaction. He spent a restless evening trying to reconcile the irreconcilable—Mary Wilson's and Preston's versions of the six love letters. At midnight he started out to take a walk.

Halfway down the stairs he saw Preston and Moore in the lower hall.

Moore's voice was loud but his words were slurred and incomprehensible to Bristol.

Catching sight of Bristol, Preston shook Moore and spoke sharply to him. Moore subsided, mumbling. He was drunk.

"Come and give me a hand, Bristol," Preston called. "Put him to bed, will you?"

With difficulty, Bristol did so. Moore kept muttering, apparently under the impression that he was talking to Preston.

"Thish th' lasht call, see," he said repeatedly. "Sa ultimatum, see. Lasht call, I'm tellin' you, see."

Bristol was about to go when the secretary recognized him.

"Oh," grinned Moore, rising precariously on an elbow, "so's you, ol' gun-toter. 'At's funny—funnier'n'ell! Whatcha doin' here, huh?"

"Helping you to bed," said Bristol. "Can I get you anything before I go—ice-water or something?"

Moore lay back, laughing boisterously.

"Always puttin' somebody to bed," he gurgled, "ain't you! Shmart guy, huh! But not shmart as Moore. Uh-huh! Don't know walls got ears, huh! Don't know windows got ears, huh! Shmart guy, huh, but not shmart as Moore!"

Bristol's brows clouded. Taken in conjunction with the fact that his own windows looked out on the veranda roof, the assertion that windows have ears and eyes was significant.

"I don't get you," he said, disarmingly mild. "Tell me what you mean."

MOOORE raised himself on his elbow again, snickered.

"Foxy ol' gun-toter, huh! Shmart, huh! Not shmart enough to know Moore was on v'randa roof when you had girlie here! Uh-huh! Not shmart

enough"—he winked and chuckled obscenely—"to know Moore got an eyeful of girlie when she—"

Bristol slapped him on the mouth and ran from the room to avoid committing further violence. He couldn't thrash a man so helplessly drunk.

Assuming that Moore had informed Preston of the girl's visit, Bristol had something more to puzzle over. Why, in that event, had Preston retained him in his employ? Why had Preston raised his pay from four hundred to five thousand dollars a month? Bristol couldn't figure it out although he kept at it till his head ached.

He fell asleep at last with the determination to shake the truth out of Moore, to beat him within an inch of his life for having peeped at Mary Wilson. But morning brought calmer counsel. He did nothing, waiting for affairs to shape themselves.

Moore, with a swollen lip to remind him that his tongue had wagged, kept out of his way. In the afternoon the secretary left for New York on an errand.

"I'm dining out," said Preston that evening, "with the lady we spoke about the other night. I want you to stand by in case there's any trouble. We'll leave at seven."

THE rendezvous was an inn on the Sawmill River Road, a place known for its riotousness and the looseness of its frequenters.

As they drew up at their destination Bristol received his instructions.

"I want you to remain in the entrance hall. I'll arrange that with the manager. If a certain young woman appears—you know who I mean—keep her from entering. I don't care how you do it, but keep her out."

"So Moore told you," said Bristol.

"Yes." Preston smiled crookedly; "Moore told me. If you're wonder-

ing why I didn't fire you, I'll tell you. From my viewpoint, your usefulness to me was immensely increased through your meeting with her. From what Moore said, I gathered that you have—shall we say—considerable influence over her. I'm counting on that—"

"Hold on a minute," said Bristol brittlely. "I don't like that crack. What did that skunk Moore say?"

"Why go into details," smiled Preston. "The fact that she spent some time in your rooms and that she stripped—"

"That'll be all of that," flared Preston. "Moore knows damned well why she stripped. If you don't happen to know, I'm telling you now that she and I both fell into the creek. And listen here—as soon as I get within reach of Moore you're going to need a new secretary. I'll break his back. As for you Preston—"

"I apologize," said Preston smoothly. "If you wish I'll make further apology later. I have to go now. There's my charming dinner partner."

LEAVING Bristol raging, he stepped forward to meet the woman who had just driven up alone in a coupe. There was mockery in his apparent gallantry as he bowed her out of her machine and into the inn.

Through the mask of her smile, in the cringing of her flesh as she walked beside her tormenter, Bristol saw stark fear and tragedy. He knew then who had told the truth, on which side he belonged.

Taking his post in the doorway, he nodded grimly. For Mary Wilson's own sake, and her sister's, he would keep her out of the inn but not on Preston's account. To hell with Preston and his ten thousand dollars!

A car swung recklessly in from the highway. It scraped a concrete

pillar, careened across the lawn, side-swiped a parked car. While it skidded to a stop, Mary Wilson abandoned the wheel and jumped out.

Bristol intercepted her as she set foot on the veranda.

"You!" she flung at him contemptuously. "Out of my way! You can't stop me!"

He caught her by the arms when she tried to push past him; held her firmly.

"Help me!" She appealed to the only person in sight, the doorman. Under orders not to interfere with Bristol, he remained passive.

"I'll scream!"

"That won't get you in," said Bristol, "and if you do I'll carry you away. Listen to me a moment. Your sister is in there with Preston. If you start anything what good is it going to do her? Don't lose your head entirely, girl. If you attack Preston here, God Almighty himself couldn't keep it out of the papers."

She stopped her futile struggling.

"I'm not going to attack him. Let me in!"

"Listen," he begged, "I'm doing what is best for everybody. I'm not working for Preston. I'm working with you."

"With me?" she said wonderingly.

RIGHT!" He started to maneuver her down the steps. "Let's get into your car and—"

"But I've got to get in there!" she cried, resisting. "Oh, won't you understand! I've got to get in! Ben is coming here—my sister's husband! Somebody sent him word that she would be with Preston tonight. He got home an hour ago. He's on his way here now! Let me go!"

Bristol's grip on her tightened.

"Is this the truth?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" Her words tumbled one on another: "A man was waiting

for Ben—the man who told him. Ben was raging, fearfully angry, cursing him. The man wanted ten thousand dollars before he'd tell where to find her. Ben was giving him a check when I ran out.

"Let me in!" Her voice rose hysterically. "Ben has a gun! The man gave it to him. She's got to get away from here before Ben arrives or he'll murder her!"

"Come on," said Bristol, "we'll both go in. Let me handle Preston."

JEAN CARSON wilted with despair when she saw Mary approaching. She laid her head on her arms, sobbed, foreseeing that finis was about to be written to all she cherished. Mary bent over her, comforting, whispering.

Preston got to his feet, seething, heedless of the attention he attracted.

"Hold it," said Bristol—and told it all pithily.

"I suppose," said Preston with one eye on the door, "I've got that helion to thank for this. If—" his lips pursed skeptically—"it isn't a trick of some sort. How do I know—"

"You've got her to thank for saving your life," cut in Bristol. "It's on the level, Preston. You can take my word for it—and that word is costing me ten thousand dollars. I'm through with you, of course."

"I'm inclined to believe you," said Preston calmly. "A man doesn't throw away ten thousand dollars for nothing. Come, Jean. This seems to be our exit cue. I'll run you into town—"

She gave him a look of hatred.

"I'd rather stay and be killed than go a step with you!"

"You're going," said Mary emphatically. "When Ben arrives he's going to find me and Mr. Preston. Take her home, please, Mr. Bristol—and please come back for me."

"That's real inspiration," said Bristol.

"It may be," said Preston, "but I'm afraid you'll have to get along without me. I'm going."

BRISTOL gripped the gun in his coat pocket. He moved close. Preston felt the weapon prodding.

"I'm afraid," said Bristol icily, "you haven't much to say about it. If you can't see things our way, Preston, so help me heaven, I'll kill you myself! Sit down!"

"I've always believed," remarked Preston as he obeyed, "that every man has his price. This young hell-cat seems to have found yours."

"We'll debate that later," said Bristol. "Right now there's another matter to be adjusted and time is short. You have some letters belonging to Mrs. Carson. Hand them over. Quick!"

"I'll be damned if I will!"

"You'll be dead if you don't!"

Prodded by the gun, Preston surrendered.

"Once more, Bristol, I'm inclined to believe you. I have one letter with me. The others are in my safe. If you in turn are willing to believe me, I'll give them to you when you get home tonight."

"And in the meantime," Bristol stipulated, "Miss Wilson will get from you a signed statement making clear when these letters were written. That will wind up the whole affair regardless of whether you give up the other letters. Are you ready, Mrs. Carson?"

New life in her face, now flushed with gratitude, she got up to go with him.

Mary looked at him with fascination, awe. He grinned at her.

"I'll be back for you faster than the law allows!"

Preston's glance followed them to the door. He made a droll face.

"Wouldn't it be unfortunate if they were to walk into the embattled husband! The chivalrous Bristol would more than earn his pay, but I doubt that he'd live to enjoy it."

Mary regarded him distastefully across the table.

Preston laughed, albeit his gaze ranged a trifle nervously to the door. He ordered food; and a drink, which the girl declined.

Without being urged, he had the waiter bring a plain sheet of stationery on which he wrote the statement demanded by Bristol regarding the antiquity of Jean Carson's love-letters.

Mary read it and tucked it away.

"You're a spunky little devil," said Preston amiably.

HE looked up inquiringly as the head waiter stopped beside him.

The waiter had his lines all pat. Having witnessed the conference which resulted in the substitution of Mary Wilson for her sister, he was able to draw a pertinent conclusion.

"A gentleman, sir," he related confidentially, "was here a moment ago asking for you. I—er—was on the lookout for him, having noticed, you understand—"

"Make it short," said Preston.

"Yes, sir. I told him you weren't here but he insisted upon looking in. When he first saw the young lady he started to pull a gun. I—uh—we try to be as diplomatic as possible, you understand, sir.

"I persuaded him not to be too hasty and when he got a better look at the young lady, he said something about making a mistake and went out. He got back into his taxi and headed for New York."

Preston handed him a fifty-dollar-bill and waved him away.

"I think," said Mary, her nerves relaxing, "I'll go and sit in my car. It will be a shade sweeter out there."

"Sorry," said Preston, a queer little smile turning the corners of his mouth. "You're going to wait for Bristol?" She nodded.

"Tell him he still has a bed at my house. Tell him to come and get the letters even if he doesn't care to stay. They haven't much flavor for me now."

He took her out to her car; got into his own and rolled away. In every way he found the evening unsatisfactory. Most of all, he regretted Mary Wilson's refusal to dine with him. A spunky little devil . . .

* * *

HAVING broken several speed records in getting Jean Carson home to the city in her coupe, Bristol subsidized a taxi driver to break several more in getting him back to the inn.

"We'll go to Preston's now and get the letters," he said to Mary. "You give them to your sister tonight and take the last of the load off her mind. What do you think?"

"I think it would be wonderful," said she—which was more than just an answer to his question.

Their acquaintance ripened rapidly. Long before they entered the Preston estate they had been friends for a thousand years and more!

Not far from the house they encountered Moore. He was slouching along, head bent, steps unsteady; outward bound.

Within ten feet of him Bristol stopped; swung the headlights on him. Moore looked up, halted, his expression ugly.

"That's the man," cried Mary, "who got ten thousand dollars from Ben for telling where Jean was!"

Moore mouthed a curse. He had a check for ten thousand dollars—a worthless scrap of paper on which payment would be stopped.

"That's the man I want to see," said Bristol.

He gently removed her detaining hands and got out.

Moore spat an oath.

"Talk while you can," said Bristol, "because when I get through with you your throat will be so full of teeth you won't be able to talk. Drunk or sober, Moore, you're going to get it now!"

Moore snatched a gun from his pocket. Bristol sprang forward, stumbled as Moore fired. The top of his head seemed to have been ripped off but he kept going.

Blinking in the glare of the headlights, Moore fired wildly. The windshield shattered.

The girl screamed. She tried to get out of the car to help Bristol but her legs wouldn't carry her.

Bristol, his consciousness fading, tottered another step, reached blindly, fell. Panic whelmed Moore. Sobered, fearful that he had killed both Bristol and the girl, he threw down his gun and fled.

* * *

BRISTOL recovered consciousness in his room in Preston's house. Bright sunshine beat against the drawn shades. His head thumped abominably. He raised his hand to feel the bandages. A nurse smiled at him.

He moved dry lips. She gave him water. He closed his eyes, cleared his memory.

Afraid to put the question direct, he asked it obliquely:

"Did anyone else—get shot?"

"Only you," said the nurse, "and you'll be on your feet pretty soon. Do you know who shot you?"

He thought it over, considering what was best for all concerned.

"No. How long have I been out?"

"Three days. You'll have to be quiet now. See if you can sleep."

"Sleep!" he protested. "After three days of it! I'm all right—only groggy. Can't I sit up?"

"You certainly can't." The nurse exerted pressure: "The girl who was with you will be here shortly. I had to send her away to get some sleep. If you won't rest I won't let you see her."

"I'll rest," he said docilely.

Mary Wilson came in so quietly that he didn't know she was there until she laid her hand caressingly on his.

THE nurse left them together.

"Did you tell," he asked, "who shot me?"

"No, I didn't," she said slowly, uncertain as to how he would receive it. "I didn't want him to be caught and involve everybody. Waldon Preston thought that was best, too.

"He heard the shooting and came right away. He had just discharged Moore. We said it was a holdup. But—but if you want him captured and punished—"

"Let him go." Bristol grinned: "I could have told him he was only wasting lead. This isn't the first time I've been shot. It never takes."

"Thank God for that," said Mary.

"Poor devil," said Bristol. "I suppose he blamed me for his scheme going wrong."

"Yes. He heard us talking that night and tried to blackmail Preston, threatening to tell my sister's husband. Moore knew he was going to meet Jean and sent word to her husband, expecting that Ben would shoot Preston. And, of course, if that had happened Moore would have collected Ben's check for ten thousand dollars."

"Ten thousand dollars," murmured Bristol. He looked at her regretfully, snapped out of his dream. But for Moore, he would have earned ten thousand dollars and—

The nurse came in with a sealed envelope.

"Mr. Preston left this for you. I

guess you're strong enough to read it now."

He asked Mary to read it to him. He had no great interest in anything Preston might have to say. He liked to hear her voice.

"You can take my word for it, Bristol," she read, "'that revenge may be sweet—but in the end it will do ravaging things to you.

"I am, however enclosing for you some slight reward for your service in making me see the error of my ways. Part is your salary, of course.

"I want you to get this immediately you come to. It should make you feel a lot better if you are giving—"

She stopped reading, said "Oh!" and flushed a rosy red.

"What's the matter?" asked Bristol. "Have you run into some language?"

Shaking her head, she drew a deep breath and went on:

"—if you are giving as much thought as I suspect to that delightful little hellion, Mary Wilson. Believe it or not, I once loved her sister—and I am not sure that I don't love her now."

Bristol chuckled but couldn't catch her eye.

SHE held the check in front of him.

"Twenty thousand dollars!" he exclaimed, again trying to get her eye. "What in the world will I do with it?"

She looked demurely away.

"I think Mr. Preston is a little insane," she said, "but doesn't he make a suggestion?"

Bristol reached for her. The nurse held him down.

So Mary Wilson bent over and kissed him—not solely because he couldn't get up to kiss her but also because she thought it a most delightful thing to do.

Luck of the Road



*A Story of Eighteenth Century England —
and the Revenge of Gentleman Dick*

By **WAYNE ROGERS**

Author of "The Rolling Road," "The Winding Trail," "Long Odds," etc.

THE long, low, diamond-paned windows had been left bare and uncurtained, and from the corner where he sat, with his chair tilted back against the wall, O'Toole could see the huge bulk of the mail coach drawn up at the door; could distinguish the figures of the holsters, and once the burly yellow-coated guard of the mail.

And far away in the distance he idly traced the long, straight, unending London Road, lying in the silver moonlight like a white scar

between the dark stretches of field and common.

The inn parlor was deserted except for a couple of farmers, tired by the day's work and lulled by the warm comfort of the fire, now all but asleep in either corner of the wide bench. Except, also, for a little group of three travelers who had come by the mail and were going on by it to London, when the horses had been changed and the guard and driver were sufficiently refreshed.

O'Toole's lazy eyes took in all the scene, and his thin mouth smiled as he observed the smug satisfaction on the travelers' faces. Idly he wondered with what degree of rapidity that same smugness and satisfaction would turn to abject fear if they knew who he was, or if they glanced at the face, and then from his face to that likeness of it so boldly done in black chalk and adorning the center of a printed notice hanging on the wall at the far end of the room. The lettering—at least all that part of it which O'Toole could read from where he sat—ran:

One Hundred Guineas Reward!
Dead or Alive!
 RICHARD O'TOOLE
 (Gentleman Dick)

"A hundred guineas!" he muttered, thrusting his hands deeper into his breeches' pockets and tilting his chair to and fro on its hind legs. "Faith, a hundred guineas would be divilish good company for a man tonight. I'd do much for such a sum with such an empty stomach as I've the honor to possess this moment! What cursed misfortune was it, at all, overtook me that night last month on Richmond Common? "If ever a man was the butt of fate I was that one."

HIS mouth twisted into a wry smile as he remembered with grim bitterness that night. It was a month back, and the moon then had been at the full, but the night was dark and stormy. All that was desirable for gentlemen of his profession. He had set out on his nightly adventure in merry mood.

On the best authority he had heard that a king's messenger was a traveler by the London mail, and that he carried with him a box described

as old and brown and deeply carved in grotesque African fashion, and possessing a false bottom, beneath which were secreted three of the largest, finest diamonds the eye of man had ever beheld.

As only one man in England beside his Majesty was known to have any knowledge of the precious consignment, it was thought unnecessary for the messenger to ride under escort. The only precaution taken was doubling the guard.

TRULY it would have been a goodly haul! But in the very moment of success—the guards turned cowards, the passengers abject with fear, and nothing left for O'Toole to do but reap the reward of victory—Fate gave a sudden turn to fortune's wheel and poor O'Toole was nearly broken on it.

Fate was disguised as a king's messenger, who had the temerity to hazard a couple of shots from his reserve pistol with such good aim that one found a lodging in O'Toole's arm and the other in the heart of his beautiful chestnut mare; but that only had the effect of adding insult to injury in O'Toole's eyes, and roused undying, passionate hate in his tempestuous soul.

"May I meet him again one day, that's all! Meet him and master him and make him crawl stomach to earth as I did! . . . I'd know his ugly, port-soddened face again if 'twas a hundred years hence, bad luck and curses on him!"

He was a small man, and his three-caped coat looked almost absurdly imposing on his little body. His high cheek-bones were covered with tightly stretched, sun-tanned skin, and the bushy eyebrows shaded eyes one never forgot, once having looked into them.

Those eyes! Were they blue or black or brown? No two persons

ever agreed. They were hidden by lids that scarcely ever opened wide, and shrouded in the blackest lashes eyes ever possessed. The man had a way of being but vaguely seen and vaguely remembered—unless he permitted one to look into his eyes, full of a strange power; and then one never forgot!

Now he tipped his chair down on to its four legs and rose to his feet, straightening his cravat and tilting his beaver to a more comfortable angle.

A little smothered sound had arrested his attention, and he turned on his heel like lightning, his fingers flying to his holster. Then he laughed softly to himself, for the cause of his sudden alarm was a woman, and a very young woman at that, though, to be sure he could not see her very plainly because of the long, gray cloak enveloping her from head to foot. The sound which had reached his sharp ear was the echo of a sob.

She had seated herself at a little table directly facing the notice which proclaimed that an injured and indignant government would be pleased to pay one hundred guineas for information concerning his humble self.

O'TOOLE stood stock still, debating whether he should offer her assistance and perhaps earn the price of a meal, yet fearing that proximity might bring recognition. Feminine eyes were always inconveniently sharp and discerning, and woman had such an uncomfortable habit of jumping to conclusions which were generally within an ace of the truth.

But he was Irish and chivalrous, and the wound of a woman's tears ever appealed to him—even though occasionally they did not deter him from gently offering her the choice of money or her life. The sight of

the slender little figure in the gray cloak vastly touched his susceptible heart, and he found himself walking down the room toward her before he quite realized his intention, though he knew that should she recognize him she might scream out and denounce him.

He came upon her so quietly that he stood beside her for a full minute, looking at her, before she turned her eyes and saw him.

SHE was very young and her blue eyes were full of tears as she looked up at him from beneath the frill of the gray hood which all but hid her face.

"You are in trouble, madam?" he asked in the voice which had won for him so many friends and the title of "Gentleman Dick" among his brothers of the road.

"Oh!" she murmured, drawing away from him and yet attracted to him by the marvelous sweetness of his voice. "Oh! who are you?" she asked.

O'Toole shrugged his shoulders as he answered her.

"A passer-by, madam; nothing more. But I chanced to overhear yer distress and, thinks I, seeing ye unattended, 'tis a busy man I'd be if I could not find time to offer ye me poor services."

"I came to meet a friend here, but he has not arrived—he is not here, and I do not know what to do! Oh, I was afraid of this. I might have known—I might have guessed he would be too cowardly to come! I might have known it, and yet I hoped! I hoped!"

She spoke the words aloud, though possibly unaware of the fact. She had forgotten the stranger beside her, too distraught to be conscious of him. She flung back the gray hood and leaned her elbows on the table, sinking her chin in her hands.

Her eyes, misty with tears, looked straight in front of her.

AND straight in front of her was the king's proclamation which so intimately concerned O'Toole.

Suddenly she smote her little hands together, and with bitter scorn in her voice she pointed to the notice on the wall.

"Oh, for a man with a courage such as *he* must have!" she cried. "For a man with a heart of steel such as *his* must be! A brave, brave man! And the King values him at one hundred guineas! Why, for such a man—for such a man—"

"Yes, madam? For such a man—what?" O'Toole's voice vibrated in spite of himself.

"For such a man I'd give twice one hundred guineas—ney! Twice that sum again!" she answered earnestly.

"What if I were to tell you that *he*—that such a man as *he*, aye, madam, a man with just such a heart of steel as *he* ye speak of, and with his courage—what if I were to be after telling ye that such a man as *he* was here at yer elbow, ready an' all to do yer bidding? What then, faith?"

"You?" she asked, turning to gaze at him. "You?"

"Sure, madam, an' who else? I've a mind to earn that sum ye spoke of just now—four times one hundred guineas, to be precise."

"But what do I know of you? How do I know I can trust you? There is danger, perhaps very great danger, in the thing I want done. How do I know I can trust you? You are a stranger to me, sir, and not—not—"

She broke off, looking at him in embarrassment.

"Yet 'tis but a minute since ye were extolling me to the skies!"

"I was? . . . You? What do you

mean? . . . Oh!—" And she gave a quick glance at the picture on the wall.

"At your service, madam."

The girl stared at him long and wonderingly. Then, pulling her cloak around her and shading her face with her hood, she stood and looked at O'Toole.

"Follow me," she said, and led the way out of the inn.

A narrow lane ran behind the inn, connecting with the high road, and as O'Toole and his guide entered it from the inn yard they saw the yellow lamps of a carriage gleaming pale in the white moonlight.

"It waits for us," said the girl, walking toward the carriage. "We have three miles to drive."

The first part of the journey was traversed in silence. O'Toole sat in one corner, gazing out upon the moonlit country through half-shut eyes, apparently almost asleep, but in reality noting every turn of the road, picking up landmarks and registering them in his nimble brain.

The lady in the opposite corner was silent, too; white-faced and agitated, her hands clenched in her lap and a score of emotions expressed in her face. O'Toole could read the doubt and indecision lurking in the blue depths of her eyes, and a vague, pitying irritation swept over him. He turned to her suddenly with a gesture of impatience.

IF I may make so bold as to remind you, madam, I think it is time ye should tell me all I should know. If I am but a soldier of fortune, I am a man of honor, and ye can trust me with your commission as well or better than ye could have trusted that other whom ye came to the inn this night to meet, an' that's the truth!"

"Patience, patience, sir! I ought

to know my brother's mind before I tell you all that is in my own! . . . And yet time presses, and it is essential that you start on your journey tonight!"

"A journey?"

"Yes, to London. You must be away by twelve of the clock. With a good horse, how soon do you think you could reach Whitehall? At eight?"

AT seven, madam, the saints with me! For a wager I would put the hour at six, and with a price on me head and the enemy at me tail, sure I'd dare swear to be having an audience with his most gracious majesty at five! 'Tis all but a matter of circumstances. A month back I would have staked my life and clattered into Whitehall at four! But that was a month ago and 'twas I possessed the finest horse in the world then—poor Mavrone!"

"Where is she now? Could you—"

"She is dead, madam, dead. Murdered by a black-hearted villain a month ago! Shot through the heart that was beat for beat in time with mine! Dead and the best of the bad blood in me went with her; shot through the heart as I hope one day to serve him, please Heaven!"

"I'm living but for the hour in which he'll feel the hand of him he so cruelly injured smite him as sorely, the dirty blackguard. . . . Oh! your pardon, madam! Faith, in airing me own woes I have forgotten yours! But command me now!"

The girl looked at him across the flickering, wavering dimness of the coach, a searching question in her anxious eyes, a telltale quivering on her pale lips, but with a new gentleness for him sounding in her voice.

"You ask me to command you, when to command you means to trust you with something which

means a woman's honor and a man's life! Oh, shall I do right to so trust you? You, a man whom I have never set eyes on before an hour ago, a cut-throat—for that is how they style you!—a highway thief, a man whose printed description hangs in every hostelry and is nailed on every gibbet at every crossroad in England—am I to trust such a man?"

O'Toole, a red flush staining his cheeks, leaned out from the shadows of his corner so that the light of the moon fell full on his face. His eyes, with the heavy lids wide open, were level with her own—and afterwards it seemed to her that for the space of a long, long moment she remembered nothing—until his voice, speaking to her, aroused her.

"Your description of me is so true, madam, that it alarms me! And one day this poor body of mine may flutter from one of those same gibbets, who knows? But there is one other qualification I possess that you—forgot to mention."

"And that?" the girl asked, but half aware that the question had passed her lips.

"A heart of steel!"

The girl's flower-blue eyes were filled suddenly with quick tears, and her voice was a whisper of gentleness and remorse when she spoke.

"And that heart is at my service for tonight?" she asked humbly, laying a soft little hand on his lean brown one.

"Faith, little lady, 'tis yours for tonight and for all nights for ever and ever till it beats no more!"

HE spoke in the voice that brought the atmosphere of a royal Court into the lumbering, jolting carriage, and with the grace of a king he bowed over the snow-white fingers.

"Oh, how can I thank you?" cried the girl, a wave of relief sweeping

over her at the strong confidence of his tone. "How can I thank you?"

"Faith, madam, you forget the four hundred guineas! 'Tis them will be all the reward I'm needing!" said he, a glint of laughter underlying the words. "And now, if I am to make Whitehall by cockcrow—"

"You are right. Listen. I went to the inn tonight to meet my cousin to whom I had sent a message imploring him to come. But in my heart I must have realized he would be too cowardly to undertake that which I would have had him do.

"Still I hoped against hope until I saw the last passenger descend from the mail and knew that he had failed us! I was in despair. Then it was that you offered your services and I, like a drowning man clutching at straws, felt that Heaven must have sent you at a moment when I was so distraught as to be almost out of my wits. That much you know.

"The rest—all that part of it which will concern you—is this: my brother met with an accident this afternoon which has rendered him incapable of carrying out a mission which honor and friendship compelled him to undertake. He was to have ridden to London tonight with a message—a letter—for a great lady, a very great lady indeed, sir—the greatest lady in the land—"

"Her Majesty?" asked O'Toole, his voice instinctively dropping to a whisper.

AND in a whisper, as though fearful lest the shadows lurking round the coach windows should overhear, the lady answered him:

"Yes, the Queen. The letter means her honor and a man's life if it be not delivered to my Lord Hampden tomorrow morning before the clocks tell the hour of nine! And into his hands alone! Let no one persuade you, no matter how fair they speak.

Always remember that you hold a man's life in that letter—the life of a man I love."

Her voice sank to the veriest breath of a whisper and the tears welled again in her eyes.

"I will permit nothing to delay the delivery of that letter, dear lady. I'll take me oath on it," he said gently.

"Oh, I thank you for that promise! But be ever on your guard, for there are those who will try and intercept that precious missive, and they will stop at nothing.

I SAID just now that my brother had met with an accident? It was no accident! It was attempted murder, and but for a chance, they would have succeeded in their villainy, and two hearts—the great lady's and a young girl's—would have died under the same blow!"

"Faith, madam, but I begin to think you could not have found a man better fitted to the part than myself! The venture has a spice in it, and I was ever fond of spice!—Ha! 'tis here your brother is?"

The coach had stopped before a long, low house, and the hall lights shed a yellow brilliancy into the night.

Upstairs a man swathed in blood-stained bandages, his eyes strained with anxiety, driven almost into delirium by his helplessness, lay tossing on a bed.

He looked at O'Toole long and earnestly.

"You swear to succeed if it's in the power of man to do so?" he questioned, a nervous agony making his voice ring metallically.

"Faith I do, sir," replied O'Toole cheerfully. "'Tis a lump of lead in me heart here 'twill be the only thing that'll be stopping me. I'm the villain to go when once I get started, and the sooner that start begins the

better, I think, if I may make so bold?"

"Yes, yes. Betsy, do you go and get Blade to saddle Black Patrick and send Hawkins here to me. Tell him to bring my riding clothes and jackboots with him. Mr. O'Toole, my sister and I are placing our very lives in your hands, and also the life's peace of another who must not be named too freely in a place where even the walls seem to have ears. My sister has told you nearly all. It but now remains for you to dress yourself in clothes befitting a visit to Whitehall.

"There's not so much difference between your size and mine that it will be noticeable. That black wig of mine yonder will be an excellent disguise in case you should happen upon any of the gentlemen who have been reluctantly generous to you in the past—and I think also that this hat of mine, and this cloak, have a more aristocratic appearance than your own, so accept them with my regards.

A RING or two I think would be suitable to adorn your hands after you have scoured them well, and you'll find a purse a convenience, I dare swear? The four hundred guineas I will lodge with a friend, Sir Fordyce Hollington, at Brook House, Richmond, where you will call for them at a time suitable to yourself after nine o'clock tomorrow morning.

"You see, I'm trusting you absolutely, as I could not trust any of the white-livered cowards here who call themselves my friends!

"Now I think I've told you everything. Remember, you have naught to do save deliver this packet into the hands of Lord Hampden before nine o'clock tomorrow morning.

"There will be no answer, no recognitions whatever, but I shall know within the day of either your success

or failure. And ride, man! Ride as though all the hounds of Hades were after you, and remember that danger lurks behind each shadow, that the country is full of spies waiting and watching to trap the messenger who carries this little packet!

"Do not count yourself safe until you are within the palace, and even then be on your guard! To gain an entry and an audience say that you come from Henri Deschamps—do not forget the name. Now go."

TWELVE was just striking from the clock over the stables when O'Toole rode out of the yard, mounted on the huge Black Patrick, and dressed as a gentleman of fashion, booted and spurred and gloved like any dandy. A modish gold-laced hat perched rakishly on the curled, full-bottomed wig.

For the first time in four weeks he felt in love with all the world. He had had an excellent dinner, the adventure was well to his liking, and last, but not least, he was once more astride as fine a horse as the heart of man could desire.

"'Tis I would be the happy man tonight if I could but have had me own old coat with its convenient pockets! Faith, an' 'tis me mother, too, would be the proud woman could she see me this minute!

"And the colleens—sure they'd look at me, now—Arrah! Ye divil, ye! Ye're beginning as early as this, are ye? Ho, ho, they told me to count every shadow as a man; but, faith, I didn't expect to have to reckon on the very gate-stone as a dirty scoundrel!"

For out of the darkness of a tree the black, quivering shadow of a man's head was projected flatly on the white earth. The sight sent a thrill of pure joy through O'Toole, and he licked his lips with fervent

pleasure as he steadied his pistol in deliberate aim.

As the rest of the man's body followed the reflected head, he fired sure and, he hoped, straight. Then he dug his spurs into his horse and was safe round the curve in the road before the spy's belated bullet came singing after him.

Once was always enough for O'Toole, and the by-ways and the woods were after all more familiar to him than the open road, and vastly more to his liking when there happened to be a hundred guineas on his head! He realized, too, that the carrier of the secret letter would be looked for on the open London Road and in the approaches to Whitehall.

They would not dream of his passage through the woods and dales, swimming the intervening rivers, scaling the chalky Wiltshire hills and galloping at break-neck speed over the trackless downs!

They were allowing for a hot-headed youth, ignorant of intrigues, riding straight for the goal with a fine loyalty in his heart and an Englishman's scorn for shirking danger swelling his head. They could not know that when they succeeded in disabling one messenger his place would be taken by one who lived in the backwaters; a man who could interpret the twittering of the leaves and the rustling of the grasses in the thickest forest as easily as the traveler reads the milestones on the open highway, and to whom a tuft of rushes in the swamps was as sure a landmark as a signpost at a cross-roads.

SO once clear of the avenue, he headed his colossal steed for the high thorn hedge. He cleared it like a swallow skimming water and O'Toole's heart swelled with pride. Then away, tearing like the wind in a break for the open downs.

On—on—the speed ever increasing, the light fading as the morning waned, the sense of danger ever increasing, London ever drawing nearer and nearer. On—on—the speed a steady gallop now, the little modish hat long since lost, the gloves long since in ribbons.

On—on—a township sighted in the distance, then its night-watchman shuffling out of the way of those ringing hoofs. On—on—the speed failing a little in spite of the spurs.

On—on—till the night melted into dawn, till the foam flying from Black Patrick's massive jaws was flecked with red, till the golden splendor of the eastern sky faded to sober gray. Then far away on the horizon a cloud no bigger than a man's hand hung low in the heavens, and under that cloud O'Toole knew that London slept.

MY Lord of Hampden rang his bell for the fortieth time within an hour.

"The messenger—" he asked the servant who answered the summons—"is there no sign of him yet? Have you sent to meet him? Why do you not bring me—Hark! What was that? A shot?"

"The guards, my lord, have not sighted any messenger, as yet, but they are posted. Aye, my lord, that surely was a shot! And there's another! Shall I—"

"Haste, haste and learn what they mean! S'death! But they can mean but one thing! God ha' mercy if they've got him—Oh!"

He broke off suddenly at the sound of rushing feet upon the oaken stair, and his face, naturally bloated and coarse, went white as paper. He had spent the night pacing up and down his room and the strain was beginning to tell upon him. As he listened to the noise without, his

eyes blazed and alternate hope and fear swelled in his brain.

The steps on the stairs came rapidly near. There was a sound of a heavy body being flung out of the way, the sound of labored breathing. Then the door opened with scant ceremony, and O'Toole flung into the room.

HE was haggard and spent with his seven hours' ride, bespattered with red clay, shrouded in white dust and bleeding profusely from a wound in the ear, where a ball from an enemy's blunderbuss had caught him in the very moment of his triumphant dash down White-hall.

"I am the messenger from Henri Deschamps, my Lord Hampden. I have the letter safe. I have the great good fortune to hand it to yer honor!"

He held out the little packet—decorated now with two or three significant crimson stains—and Hampden sprang forward to take it.

"In the name of the State I thank you!" he said, with more reverence in his voice than one would have believed possible to look at his coarse face. "If ever there comes a time in your life when you need a friend, then turn you to Lord Hampden and he will help you, though every law forbids! Gad! You've ridden hard, sir! And wounded, too? Badly?"

It was then, as he stepped out of a patch of shadow into the streaming morning sunshine, that O'Toole recognized him! Recognized the man whom he had sworn never to forget! The man he had been hungering to meet.

The man who had killed his beloved mare! He was face to face with the man whom he had vowed he would make crawl as he had crawled that night on Richmond Common a month before.

Weak and hysterical, the wound in his arm like a hot iron searing the flesh, he lunged at his enemy, his fingers twitching to be at Hampden's neck, an inarticulate cry sobbing in his throat.

Mistaking his excitement for illness, Hampden turned quickly to the side table and poured some brandy into a glass, then brought it to the messenger's side and held it to his lips.

The spirit, trickling down his throat, revived O'Toole and the red anger in his excited brain gave way to his usual cunning. He realized suddenly his weakness and laughed bitterly at himself. What match was he for even the most puny of enemies in his present enfeebled state—with the blood still flowing from his wounded arm? There were a dozen lackeys beyond the door, ready to rush to their master's assistance at the faintest call! No, no—cunning! Cunning was always the weakest dog's best suite! Craft!

One of the lackeys had already been summoned. He was directed to bring water and bandages, and Hampden bared O'Toole's wounded arm with his own jewel-covered fingers. All the while O'Toole was torn with desire to bury his thick white teeth in the noble's bull-neck and hang on like a ferret till one or the other of them conquered! But his increasing faintness warned him to be meek, and he lay back in his chair, an apparently exhausted man, with eyes almost closed and teeth all but meeting in the under lip.

BUT the eyes from under the heavy, lowered lids were sweeping the room, imprinting each detail of it in the wonderful, retentive mind; storing it all up on the chance that some day in the future it might prove useful.

Then suddenly the eyelids quivered and the roving eyes grew fixed.

A small writing table stood almost beneath the window and the sun was shining on it in all its brilliancy, marking out everything on it with startling exactness.

It was upon this table that O'Toole's eyes had fallen.

For there, with the sunshine rioting around it, lay a little brown box, strangely carved in foreign grotesqueness, and O'Toole's memory leaped as he saw it. It was the box in which the diamonds had been brought from Hull to London a month ago. The box which he had tried to capture by holding up the mail on Richmond Common, and which had so nearly caused his death at the hands of that velvet-coated aristocrat who was so assiduously dosing him with brandy.

HIS quick brain worked rapidly. Ten to one the diamonds were still in the box, else what did it do gracing a lord's table in his private chamber? It was a dirty, inelegant box, and there were scores of better carved boxes in London to be had if one fancied such curiosities. Ten to one the diamonds were still hidden in the secret drawer.

He lay quite still in the chair, planning, planning, in that cunning brain. Oh! 'twould be a sweet revenge! 'Twas almost as good as squeezing the life out of his lordship's fat throat, as putting a ball through the villain's heart, black with the stain of his mare's murder! Almost as good? Nay, 'twere better, for 'twould last longer!

A sweet revenge! He sucked his breath in through his teeth in his tense excitement, and Hampden interpreted the action as a sign of pain.

"The man is in much pain," he said to his lackey. "Go and fetch

Mr. Townley, and see also that there is a bed got ready for him immediately. He is too weak to leave the palace."

It was the moment O'Toole had been praying might be given to him!

The instant he was alone with his enemy, O'Toole sprang to his feet.

"My Lord Hampden," he said slowly and softly, with his strange eyes bent on the man before him, "I am a man who once swore to have the honor of killing ye. Ye once murdered something I loved and I've sworn to be avenged. But 'tis not with blood I'll soil me hands, 'tis with something far and away more precious, I'm thinking, and something I've been wanting for a month past."

All the while he had been speaking O'Toole had kept his eyes wide open and fixed on Hampden with an intensity that made the latter's mind drift in spite of his struggle to prevent it. The strange mesmeric power of the messenger's eyes was unhuman, and the noble had an idea he had met that look before—where, when? He tried to think, but was conscious only of a pair of eyes staring wildly into his through a mist, and he lost himself in a dream, a trance.

NO one stopped the messenger as he walked out of the palace yard into Whitehall, and no one noticed the bulk of the carved box under the capes of his coat.

It was exactly six hours later that his lordship remembered with a sudden flash of inspiration where and when he had met the messenger from Henri Deschamps before and where those strange eyes had looked into his—and then the flash of inspiration was only brought about by the discovery that the carved box, with the diamonds still concealed in its secret drawer, was missing!

Continue this Exciting New Serial of

FROZEN FACE

A Three-Part Serial

By ANTHONY M. RUD

Author of "The Shadow on the Reef," etc.

PART TWO

SYNOPSIS

Joe Bardeen, crazed with jealousy, prepares to blow up a gold prospect owned by Kerry Lassiter, his successful rival for the hand of Belle Bennett. But accident, in the guise of a snooping gray pack rat, sends the dynamite off too soon and Joe Bardeen is deformed for life.

After surgical treatment he assumes various names, finally calling himself Rufe Anderson.

Kerry hears of the accident at the mine, but bravely looks elsewhere for what he can find; and returning once from a three-week prospecting trip, finds his wife, Belle, gone, the elder Bennetts stabbed in bed. All that is left is his three-year old, frail son, Jimmy.

Five years later he goes with Jimmy—and Jimmy's uncle Ding—to the Armargosa desert. Here he meets Rufe Anderson, who is starving. They feed him and make him a partner in a new prospecting venture, not connecting him in the least with Joe Bardeen. The thirst for revenge is alive in Rufe Anderson, but he waits patiently. . . .

Years later Jimmy, who is a mechanically inclined student, is working in Illinois on a new model automobile. One day he finds his model and tools dynamited, and



connects the calamity with several mysterious messages he has received.

He shows these messages to his friend, Corns Kemble, whose life he saved during the World War.

They read: Poverty, Disillusionment, Failure, Death. Each message is mailed from a different place and in each another word is ringed.

Jimmy tells Corns all he knows of his past history and that of his father. He shows a letter from Uncle Ding about the disappearance of Rufe Anderson, whom they call Frozen Face. The letter also says that Kerry has left the mine and cannot be traced.

As Corns Kemble and Jimmy speak about all this, at the boarding house where Jimmy lives and plan to get to the bottom of it, a bomb suddenly comes into the window. Jimmy luckily catches it and flings it away. The downstairs windows of the house are shattered to fragments.

Corns and Jimmy take guns and start out—

"Let's get him!" shouts Jimmy.

Now Go On with the Story.

Breath-Taking Adventure Among Outlaws



CHAPTER V

Billed Through

THERE was no need of pursuit. But there on the little patch of lawn in front of the old rooming house, lay a groaning, half-unconscious figure—a heavy-set man wearing beard and mustache, whose clothes fitted him crudely, as if they had been bought from a mail-order catalogue.

He was terribly mutilated—one leg blown off at the knee, and with evident internal injuries. Men had come running from other houses. The landlady was staring, wringing her hands.

"Quick! Ambulance! Phone the Garfield Park Hospital!" cried Jimmy, dropping to one knee. Instantly he saw the spurting blood, and began to rip off his shoes. From the laces and the barrel of his .45

six-shooter, he fashioned a rude but effective tourniquet.

"Must have thrown the egg too quick—and then waited to hear it go off," commented Corns Kemble, without sympathy.

Later he repeated this to the police, who were harshly inquisitive and suspicious at first—deeming it likely that this returned officer himself had brought and thrown the grenade.

Still later, in spite of the fact that the would-be assassin died at the hospital without regaining consciousness, Corns and Jimmy were cleared. The dead man carried a gun, without a permit such as Jimmy had.

And the bomb-thrower hailed from a part of town just then beginning to attain notoriety—Cicero. He was known as an ex-bouncer, a strong-arm man, with convictions for as-

sault on his record, not to mention one acquittal for robbery. . . .

Five days later, with some reluctance, the comrades were allowed to take the Overland Limited from the Northwestern Station. They were bound back to Nevada, where Corns asserted the truth of all these puzzles must lie.

"That Cicero tough guy couldn't be the brains of the bunch that's been after your happy family," he stated with conviction. "Nope. We'll find *him* out somewhere near the sugar."

"Eh?" Jimmy was settling himself in the club car, pouring out ginger ale with a suspicious brownish fluid he had brought in a flask.

"That gold mine's the crux of it all!" stated Corns flatly—and was entirely wrong in the surmise. But then he had been used to the wickedness of sane men, and could hardly be blamed.

DURING ensuing hours the two talked over various aspects of the singular puzzle, without arriving at any definite conclusions. Out of all the talk came just a firmer friendship—and one item which made Kemble arch his brows but say nothing.

"Why did your folks call that mine the Yellow Eye? Sounds more like a mysterious diamond, rather than gold," Corns asked.

That led to a fuller description of the missing Frozen Face, as Jimmy had seen him that first time out in the gulch of the Belted Range. Corns was thoughtful for a while thereafter.

There might be some connection between a Yellow Eye mine, a partner with yellow eyes, and this yellow ink on the correspondence cards: but for life of him it seemed like stretching coincidence to the breaking point.

"I'll bet there aren't more'n a hundred bottles of yellow ink sold a year," he said after a time. "Reckon I'll look into that one of these days. It might give us a clue."

There was a rush in the club car for a time that evening, and then later it became almost deserted again. Jimmy and Corns had been out to the diner, back to their Pullman, and then returned to the club car for a drink and smoke before retiring.

THEY found the end seats, those arranged with tables, unoccupied on one side. Across the aisle was a single individual, a man dressed quietly, almost funereally in black. He might have been a Protestant minister, viewed from the rear.

But as he glanced up at the two, Corns realized that if this man ever had been a minister, he had been unfrocked ages ago. He was busy with a deck of cards which he had arranged before him in clock solitaire; and both the shoulder hunch and the manner in which agile fingers handled the pasteboards bespoke the habitual—if not professional—gambler.

Corns, who had spent most of his years in wide-open Nevada, knew the type. Another glance revealed long, carefully-tended fingernails, a cold, flytrap mouth, and a diamond little-finger ring of exactly the type often used by cruder professionals to camouflage a tiny palm mirror.

The ex-captain set the stranger down as one of those cold-blooded harpies which infest club cars and steamship smoking rooms, making a sordid living from unsuspecting travelers.

Right there for the second time in a short interval, Kemble's judgment was in error. The stranger once had been the house man behind a

faro layout in Goldfield, it was true. But he had risen in the world.

For several years now he had acted as the first lieutenant to a very rich criminal—a man who planned and carried out operations through much of the west and south-west, occasionally branching out still further.

FROZEN FACE RUFÉ ANDERSON, during his numerous periods of absence from the Yellow Eye Mine, had started and was carrying on a great organization doing business far more to his liking—since it almost inevitably called for murder, and sometimes torture as well. His specialty was abduction, ransom, torture—and then the final double-cross, usually of the distressed family who had paid the ransom.

Once a ransom was paid, it was much better simply to kill a prisoner and dispose of the body. That minimized risk, and also appealed strongly to the basic instincts of Frozen Face—lust for killing which he possessed even back in the days when he rode as express guard with Cussemout Crandall.

Jimmy no doubt was a more receptive and sensitive person than his hard-boiled ex-captain comrade. His glances at the man across left him restless. He took a long time over his nightcap drink, trying to discover if he had ever seen that black-garbed individual before.

Years in the army are apt to leave any man with confused impressions of familiarity where any conceivable cast of human countenance is concerned, however. Jimmy reluctantly decided that this must be the case here.

At this moment the card-player swept up his solitaire layout. He turned once, flashing a strange, leering smile that seemed caustic, biting. Then he got up and stalked down

the aisle to the writing desk at the other end of the car. There he sat down, a pad of yellow Western Union blanks in front of him.

A few minutes later he rang for the porter, gave him a message and a bill. Then he arose, and walked out of the club car.

Jimmy felt a queer hunch stir.

"Wait a second, Corns!" he whispered.

Then he arose, and went to the writing desk. After a single searching glance he tore off the top blank and came back. Then for several minutes he bent down close, tracing carefully with a pencil the slight indentations in the paper.

"Looks like he used a hard pencil," proffered Corns, who had become interested.

"Uh-huh," agreed Jimmy in an absent tone. "Sa-ay, what the hell d'you s'pose *this* means?" he went on, looking up with a scowl. "I—well, I sorta felt that we—that this message might—" He broke off, scratching his chin. "Take a look at it!" He held out the paper.

This is what Kemble read:

Bildad Claeys
Ajo, Nevada

Guinea pig and salty razorback delivery Thursday four. C & O & D inconvenient for packing.

GRANT.

KEMBLE no more than looked at it when he started to laugh, changed his mind, and held it down to a snort. "Good Lord, you sure had a hunch—*guinea pig!*" he chuckled. "Oh, don't you see, Jimmy? *I'm the razorback!* The letter C. O. and D. mean Chicago, Omaha and Denver! We change at Denver—and I'll bet our obvipus train to Ajo is one that gets there Thursday at four P. M!"

"Oh, the damn—" Jimmy red-

dened and began to sputter. He had been insulted lots of times because of his stature, but being likened to a guinea pig was the unkindest cut of all. "I'll work over that guy till he knows he's—"

"Sh-h, mind!" cautioned Corns, serious again. "He didn't know you like I do, little man. But d'you get the rest of this message? Packing—that means killing and hiding our bodies, I suppose—inconvenient at those places. They failed in Chicago, so they'll probably try to do it in Ajo!"

"Well, that means we can sleep in peace a couple of nights, anyhow. I'm glad to know that much. No, we won't go after that gambolier. He's a friend of Bildad Claeys, the slimiest critter in Southern Nevada. You know, he used to hang out near Clear Creek Valley, where my family has its ranch. I remember Claeys. I'll be mighty glad for a legitimate chance to break his neck!"

CHAPTER VI

Headquarters in Hell!

THE crust of southeastern Nevada—through the Belted Range, the Desert Range, Emigrant Valley, and even Indian Spring Valley—is so ash-dry that even the carrion crow avoids it. Yet all over this immense land there is water available within less than a mile. Except where freak mountain formations produce a narrow, isolated oasis of fertility, like Clear Creek Valley, however, the water flowing generally south and east to the Colorado River, or its tributary, the Virgin, lies deep underground.

Some of the deep caves on the eastern side of the Belted Range have access to it: and it is in the bowels of one of these immense basalt and granite caverns that Frozen Face Rufe Anderson had

headquarters wherein many of his important captives had been confined in times past.

But never had he enjoyed the custody of men he hated as terribly as those who now shivered in the dank gloom of his natural dungeon!

Four hundred feet below the high granite arch that supported a shell of rock and desert alkali above, lay chambers and corridors worn smooth in dim, past eons, by the bare feet of men who vanished long ages before a Star shone over Bethlehem, leaving no record of themselves or their civilization. It was in one of these silent vaults of black—

FOR hours at a time there had been no sound save the monotonous *st-st-st* of water seepage from the high walls. But now in the solid darkness sounded the clank of a dragging chain.

It came from what once probably had been a buried niche in this vast catacomb, for there were other niches just like it all along the wall—rounded bays, each with a sort of dais chiseled from the solid rock.

There was a muttering, tired voice. Then a low, hopeless groan.

"Are you awake, Ding?"

The hoarse voice boomed in the vault, but its resonance deadened as it reached the further immensities of the cavern. One sensed it was no more than the involuntary protest of a strong man who long since had given up hope, yet who could not die till the last vestige of strength had been sapped from his great body.

He was Kerry Lassiter, who at that very moment was being sought by his son and Corns Kemble.

There was no reply for half a minute. That in itself was an appalling thing to one who ever had known the swift smile, snappy

comebacks, and general jollity of the other man there in the dungeon.

"Oh, yeah, I s'pose I am," came the moody reply at last. "I ain't even able to sleep, Kerry. Good God, that devil's gone plumb loco, ain't he, Kerry?"

The last was a sort of explosion, as the incredible horror of it all burst once again through the deadened shell of Ding's apathy.

Now there was no answer at all, except a muffled sigh. That was worse than if the other denizen of the darkness had burst forth with the vilest invective.

"Oh, Christ, Kerry!" came a sudden terror-stricken wail. "Say something, old man! Anything! I got to hear a voice! I been here eight days—tell it by my luminous watch, and that grub they bring us. I'm—"

"And I've been here since—the Monday following that cowboy shooting out at Clear Creek Valley!" came the solemn answer. Again there sounded the ominous clank of shifting chains.

"Oh-h—"

THE voice of Ding faded in utter horror. His brother had been chained here for nearly seven months! To him it was inconceivable.

"But even at that I—oh, Kerry," he began again incoherently. "Don't think I don't guess what *you've* been through! But—but I s'pose sometimes when we were all out there, and only wondering what them cards that come to us in the mail really meant, you thought a lot about what I—I was doing. Eh, Kerry?"

There was no answer. Probably the elder brother did not grasp words any more, unless he was shocked into giving them especial attention.

Ding started again. He found it hard to explain, this secret he had kept from his brother-partner. But

the truth was that for a long time there had been a gathering load of dread on Ding's mind.

He had not known what it was he feared; but that only made it worse. Then when those anonymous cards had started to come, promising him and Kerry CHAINS, TORTURE, DEATH—well, Ding had made his arrangements for living under a different name.

IN brief, while away from the mine, as he had been much of the time now for three years, he had married—under another name than Lassiter. There was nothing criminal or even wrong about the deception. If something awful was going to happen to Kerry and himself—and Frozen Face, who admitted also getting the queer warnings—why Ding meant to shield the girl he married. Now—

"Lord above, the doctor must be with her now, Kerry, old man!" he breathed in mental agony. "I sent to Rosewell for him a week ago yesterday—no, day before yesterday."

A sigh was all the sound from the other.

"Kerry, what in God's name did we ever do to *him*?"

There was still no answer. The two prisoners had been over this ground of conjecture many times. In all truth, Kerry himself had a suspicion now, though it was not grounded in knowledge at all—merely a sort of dead reckoning of elimination.

In all the world he knew of only *one* man who might wish him harm! And that one was the creature who already had done him the worst injury a man can do another of his kind.

If the partner they knew as Frozen Face really *were* that fiend, then Kerry Lassiter simply had to live long enough to close the terrible

account! The thought was all that had sustained him through the grim, lonely hours.

Ding spoke again.

"There—there's an empty place between us!" he said, with a catch in his voice. "D'you s'pose he's keeping that for Jimmy?"

THAT goaded the invisible man, who choked out a curse that trailed despairingly. But then Kerry seemed to catch hold of himself.

"I wish you'd sing, old-timer," he said. "I—I used to lay here and wish—" The rest of the sentence was left unfinished.

Ding was game. He cleared his throat, and then launched into an old vaudeville song.

"I just received a cable 'spatch
From my ancestral home.
It tells me I'm the great Gazoo,
Successor to the throne!
My throne will be a bungalow,
Away up in the trees,
Where I'll be ruling mon.—"

A dull crash from far up a corridor interrupted him. Both prisoners knew that this was caused by the lifting away of a wooden door—hingeless. It was not time for food.

They waited, tense, hoping that it might mean something, anything! Death even would be welcome as a period to their suffering!

They both should have known better. Frozen Face was coming, but not to relieve suffering. This was part of his program of refined cruelty, the vengeance against a whole family which his twisted brain deemed necessary.

It was emblematic of his particular obsession, too, that he wished to have all three members of the hated Lassiters present when he started the final screaming horror of torture and death.

One member still walked free. But

the last message which had come through from Bildad Claeys at Ajo said that the boy was on his way west. Oh, he would walk nicely into the web of the spider!

Slow, measured footfalls sounded. They approached. No glimmer of light showed. But unconsciously the two chained men straightened, staring into the blackness, expecting they knew not what. This was some new horror prepared for them by their diabolical captor, both knew with chilling certainty.

The steps ceased. Of a sudden the blinding glare of a powerful electric torch illuminated the two niches where the prisoners were chained, and the empty space between, which waited for Jimmy Lassiter. Neither of the two men who strained to see past that blinding light caught a glimpse now of their captor, however. He remained motionless, voiceless.

"Anderson!" cried out Kerry, his voice hoarse with agony and the strain his enfeebled body had put against the unyielding chains.

No answer. The unseen man regarded his new prisoner without any particular interest, then looked at the unkempt, pitiful figure of Kerry.

It would have been hard to discern a trace of the superb physical being who had been one of the partners in the Yellow Eye Mine. Wasted, dirty, white of hair and beard, clothes rotted away, and his figure no more than a caricature of manhood now, Kerry Lassiter sank back, understanding full well that there could be no mercy from this pitiless fiend.

WHEN came the horrid climax.

The great searchlight blinked out. Instantly Kerry and Ding found their voices, clamoring for mercy. There was no immediate answer.

Neither of the prisoners was sure, after all that noise, that Anderson had not silently departed, leaving them to scream at the blankness of the cavern. It seemed so, at any rate. After a time they subsided, Ding groaning, his head between his manacled hands.

"Heh-heh-heh!"

A grisly chuckle came from where Anderson must have stood. But now a small light flashed on. It illuminated only the head and shoulders of the insane scoundrel, and it stayed on no more than five minutes.

But those were long seconds of crawling repulsion! This was *not* Frozen Face Anderson! Or if it was he, something more gruesome even than the scars had happened to his countenance!

The face there in the light was vermilion of lips, chalk white of cheeks, hairless, appalling in some unearthly fashion which neither prisoner could guess.

The light disappeared, leaving them screaming with a momentary madness which well might become chronic. That awful face!

In actuality this was an ingenious mask, made of chalk-white vici kid. It fitted the scarred face of Anderson as closely as a fine dress glove.

But he knew, as he went back with slow, measured tread the same way he had come, that neither of the victims chained there in the darkness would know, or even guess with surety. He chuckled gloatingly.

CHAPTER VII

A Desert Skeleton

SOMETIME during that first night on the train, Corns Kemble and Jimmy Lassiter lost their gambler-shadow, the man who had signed his name to the telegram concerning, a guinea pig and a razor-back hog.

Grant, as he had signed himself, left the train and caught another bound back to Chicago. Everything had not gone perfectly smoothly. But he consoled himself with the last message from the chief.

Frozen Face had changed his mind. He was glad to have them coming back to Nevada, where he could deal with Jimmy Lassiter in person.

SO, uncertain whether or not they had another watcher, the comrades came to the last stage of their journey back to southern Nevada, acting as if they had suspected nothing.

"We'll fool 'em now," said Corns grimly. "They expect us in Ajo. Well, we'll go there—but by a back-door route. Next station, guinea pig!"

He chuckled. For some reason the total inappropriateness of this name, where Jimmy was concerned, tickled an obscure sense of humor.

"You said something about Clear Creek Valley?" asked Jimmy, reddening at the nickname, but ignoring it.

"Yeah. My home stamping grounds. We'll pass through. Get your blueprints and your toothbrush. We're dropping off sight unseen. Hope we can get mules or hosses. It's one hell of a long tramp."

Taking advantage of his knowledge of how the railway made a big loop here, Corns planned to visit his home for a night before pushing on unexpectedly to Ajo—and the Yellow Eye Mine which lay in the Belted Range beyond.

According to anything they could tell, they succeeded in descending from the train unseen. It was a tank station named Beatrice; and the engine filled up with water.

When it started to pull away from the station they dropped off with the two bags. The trunk belonging to Corns would be put off at Ajo, and

would have to take care of itself for the time being.

Corns departed, leaving Jimmy Lassiter alone on the platform. The smell of hot sage was in his nostrils, and his face looked oddly pale. Back again in the land which had judged him undersized and unlikely! But this was his country, just the same. *Somehow* he'd win through, this time!

THE ex-captain did a little shopping, and put across a dicker for mules. He returned bearing a package, and with two broad-brimmed hats, one on top of the other, on his head. They were straw sombreros, cheap but well ventilated and comfortable. He rode one mule, and led two others. The third animal would carry their bags, and also the extra gallon canteens.

"Don't suppose there's much gun-toting any more," said Corns, undoing the package and bringing forth two filled cartridge belts, with holsters for the weapons they had carried concealed. "But where we're bound nobody's apt to do much questioning."

Both strapped on the belts. Jimmy tried the sombrero, and found that it fitted fairly well. He had no use for the chin strap, so cut it off.

Corns watched the little man from the corner of his eye. What he saw evidently pleased, for he was grinning to himself as they started the mules, riding the mules first to the water tank to fill their canteens, then starting the animals westward into the sage and glimmering playas.

In the far distance the barren peaks of the Belted Range showed above the broken hills and smaller ranges nearer to hand.

In one of these ranges, totally surrounded by desert, lay Clear Creek Valley, practically the only cattle

range in this sector of the state.

On and on. Corns said nothing, but through the afternoon, instead of steering directly for his home, he kept a little to the north, winding in and out among valleys and below ridges which kept the full glare of the sun, much of the time, from the skin of them both.

It would take days in the open before the first menace of the sun was overcome; and Corns recalled Jimmy's early trouble with nausea, sun-induced.

There was no sign of it now. Jimmy's blue eyes were shining, but he was very thoughtful when they came to a sheltered spot behind a butte and made night camp. Corns had brought rations for supper and breakfast only. He said that with any luck they would reach Clear Creek Valley in time for noon dinner next day.

Next morning they were in the foothills of the Snake Range. Half an hour after the start, Corns, leading, came to a stop at the foot of a crumbling cliff. He pointed downward grimly, then dismounted.

"Some poor devil's cashed in all alone out here," he said as Jimmy reined his mule. There was a jumble of ill-assorted bones there, buzzard-picked, with some fragments of leather and cloth. Among the bones lay a jawless human skull, with some tufts of yellowish hair still adhering to the dried scalp.

ANY mystery of the desert such as this, nowadays devolves a duty upon travelers in this region. Time was when life was cheap, and the desert could have her dead unquestioned. But that has changed.

"A horse, too," commented Jimmy laconically, dismounting to squat on his heels and lift away parts of the grisly exhibit.

Corns nodded, his serious expres-

sion deepening. A horse meant that this stranger, probably dead no more than a week or thereabouts, had been of the range rather than the desert—a cowman, perhaps. And except for the fifty-by-ten mile grass in Clear Creek Valley, there was no other cow country for many a league!

SHOT!" suddenly ejaculated Corns. He poked a finger through a hole in the frontal bone. He shook the skull, and it rattled. After a moment he succeeded in retrieving a battered lump of lead, when it fell out of an eye-socket.

"A .38, or maybe a .45, judging by the weight," he said, hefting the shapeless bullet.

"Do you s'pose he was murdered?" asked Jimmy, frowning.

"Huh, cowpokes don't commit suicide. They ain't got enough sense to be that foolish," answered Corns dryly. "Those shotgun chaps look kinda funny, though. Prob'ly a stranger, because there ain't enough thick brush in this country to make 'em anything but a nuisance."

Two hours later, carrying only a nondescript pocket knife and three silver dollars as the possessions of the unknown dead man, they came to the pass into Clear Creek Valley, the way through which cattle had to be driven across the desert miles to the railroad. Here Corns drew up short, with a hissed warning.

"Horsemen!" he said. In the back of his mind all along had been a suspicion of the ease with which they had seemed to slip the watchers who had followed them at least part of the way from Chicago.

But then he grunted reassurance. These were cowboys from the valley. They came forward, shifting direction, and trotting their horses. Carbines were carried unsheathed across their saddles, and it was plain that

they were on stern business, ready to be suspicious of strangers.

Shouts of recognition followed. Corns Kemble knew three of the riders, and they remembered him well. General handshaking ensued, with Jimmy getting vociferous welcomes—along with considerable good-natured joshing in respect to their mounts. (While mules were far better than horses for any distance across the real desert, there never was a cowpuncher who would admit the fact.)

Greetings finished, there was a speedy return to a former grimness of manner. A tall rider with a twisted mouth, answering to the name of Harkins, revealed himself as the leader of the party.

A week before this, Bert Long, one of the three well-to-do ranch owners of the closed valley, had ridden away with only one of his own tophands—a new man known as Arizony—and had not returned.

"Long got a note one night, settin' down t' supper," explained Harkins, rolling himself a wheatstraw smoke as he talked. "He got Arizony an' rid away, not takin' nothin'—not saying nothin'. He ain't showed since."

An exclamation came from Corns Kemble. "What!" he said. "Who brought the note? Anyone you knew?"

"Nope. A Mex on a mule. He rode off—didn't stay even the night."

"And this hombre you call Arizony," continued Corns. "Did he wear chaps?"

"Yeah, the durned fool! Was used to 'em, he said, 'an' felt nakid ef he didn't—"

SHOTGUN chaps? And is this his knife?" Corns held out the pocket knife he had salvaged from the pile of bones.

A chorus of assent came. There

could be no doubt whatever about the circumstantial identification. Corns pointed out that there had been only one skull in the heap, however. He told them all about the discovery he and Jimmy had made. To verify it, all they would have to do would be back-trail the mules about five miles.

"H'm," said Harkins. "Well, Long didn't shoot Arizony. Long's sorta new, but he's a good fella down to the roots. He goes an' comes—got business outside. But we know darn well he wouldn't be goin' away now. His wife's sorta expectin'. An' then, too, Long didn't take as much as a blanket. He's a kinda sporty cuss, when it comes to clo'es. No, he wasn't aimin' to be away right now. Shucks, he's got the doc in f'um Rosewell, stayin' with Miz Long.

"Yore kid sister's stayin' there, Corns, sorta helpin' out. Well, reckon we'll be foggin' along. On account of things, don't let Miz Long know we got this sorta clue. It mebbe ain't bad with Bert, so we don't want the lady worryin' jest yet."

"I'm glad you told us," said Corns. "We'll see she isn't bothered. So long!" And with waves of the hands, the riders—nearly the whole force of men from Clear Creek Valley, where cowboys led an easy life—went on their way.

Though neither Jimmy nor Corns suspected, their errand was to link up almost immediately and in peculiar fashion, with Jimmy's guest.

CHAPTER VIII

Banjo-mandolin

NOW take yourself a deep breath, fella!" bade Corns Kemble. "This here's the ridge of the pass. Now you're going to look down into a part of Nevada I'll bet you've never seen!"

Grinning, the ex-captain snatched

off his straw sombrero, whooped, and dug his heels into the flank of his mule. That creature, astonished, broke into a next-to-vertical gallop, a gait really slower than its side-kinder trot.

But at the drop-off of the trail, Corns reined sharply. "There—look at that, fella!" he waved his arm. A trifle of the dramatic effect was spoiled by the fact that his mule, feeling outraged, nearly unseated him.

JIMMY Lassiter had seen, and grinned in sympathetic appreciation. The valley was green and beautiful. Between widening bulwarks of striped yellow, gray and red rock, a watered valley widened as it opened into the far horizon.

Through it all flowed a small river. Clear Creek, a stream that came from one subterranean channel fifty miles to the west, and disappeared into another just below and to the north of the pass. On its slow course through the almost level valley, however, it created a luxuriance of verdure subtropical in character.

"I don't wonder you wanted to come home!" said Jimmy. "It's—well, it looks like home! Are those red and white animals down there, your cows?"

Corns shook his head. "Maybe some of 'em," he answered. "The whole valley is owned, you know, and it's a common range for Dad, Apache Tupper, and Bert Long. They let their herds range wherever, seeing as the cows can't get out unless they sprout wings. Right below here the land is owned by Long, the fella who's turned up missing. He's new, so to speak—just came in this last year, buying out old John Rhodes. I haven't met Long, though I know his wife. She used to be Kate Sommers."

They descended, neither speaking till they reached the level floor of

the valley. Then Corns grinned, shaking his head.

"I'll have to take Luce back home," he remarked. "Luce is my kid sister. She's a long-legged, freckle-faced tomboy; but still and all, I can't figure how Dad come to let her stay with Kate a time like this. . . ."

"Oh, girls are pretty educated nowadays," said Jimmy with a wry grimace at the past. "How old is Luce?"

"Seven—hell no, she must be *nineteen* now! I'm forgetting how the time flies. Yeah, nearly twenty. I reckon. Maybe she won't be turning somersaults in the yard, after all. Wouldn't s'prise me if she had her hair up. . . ."

HE straightened, and then a cry of recognition came from Kemble's lips. Two horsemen had ridden out from the corrals of the Long ranch. Corns galloped forward, reined his mule and leaped off, running forward to seize the hands of the chunkier of the two horsemen. This was Stan Kemble, father of Corns, a man who was still a little stiff in the saddle owing to an injury of the previous year.

His companion was a famous character of the Southwest, Apache Tupper—scout, Indian fighter, sheriff, marshal, gunman; come to comparative peace and quiet in the twilight of his years. He owned the middle ranch in the valley. He had very few cows, but that did not matter. Here were companions after his own heart.

"It's good to see yuh, boy! Now I can quit cussin', an' get a night's sleep!" boomed Stan Kemble in a sonorous voice. "Yuh—"

"I heard about Long, and about Luce being here," said Corns hastily. "Dad, I want to make you used to Jimmy Lassiter. I wrote you once about him . . . he picked me off the

wire and carried me back to a dressing station, once. . . ."

"Jimmy, shake with Stan Kemble. And now, meet the toughest old buzzard-cheater in Nevada, this-hyar specimen, Apache Tupper. He's human, though he don't look it!"

Jimmy grinned. He knew at once that he would idolize these two old-timers; and hoped with all his heart they would not prejudge him adversely because of his lack of height.

He needed not have worried about Stan Kemble. Any man who had saved the life of his only son, could have carried the Seven Plagues of Egypt in his bosom, and been welcome.

As for Apache Tupper, he was only five feet six himself, though he looked taller in the saddle. And he knew, too, that there is a lot more kick in a nine-inch stick of dynamite than in the biggest bologna sausage ever stuffed. . . .

Speedily the news, or lack of news, rather, concerning Bert Long, was related. Under promise of secrecy, Corns told about the bones in the desert—probably those of the puncher called Arizona.

Nothing more was said just at the moment. A girl in a white frock appeared in the doorway of the ranch-house. She was tall, bobbed of hair, hazel-eyed, smiling. . . .

"Corny!" she cried with gladness, and came running to throw her arms about her brother.

LUCE! Good gracious how you've grown! Why—let's look at you! Oh, I forgot! Luce—"Corns looked about, and grabbed Jimmy unceremoniously. "Here's the Big Little Man I wrote you about, Jimmy Lassiter! Shake—and I hope you don't make faces at him, Sis, because he's really my best friend."

"Shush, Corny!" she stopped him, coming straight to Jimmy with a

smile, and holding out her hand. "I feel as though I've known you a long time, Jimmy. If you can stand freckles and a snub nose, we'll be friends, y'betcha!"

Still smiling, but with a glint of meaning in her hazel eyes—a real acceptance without criticism, of the man to whom she owed her brother's return—Luce Kemble did an astonishing thing. She kissed Jimmy squarely on the lips!

"Wow!" said the astonished Apache Tupper. He and Stan looked at each other, then down across the necks of their horses. A horned toad sat there. It was evident from the attitude of these old-timers that neither of them before had ever set eyes upon this notable and extremely rare curiosity. . . .

AS for that jilted and confirmed misogynist, Jimmy Lassiter—a youth who would have consigned women and all their wiles to some far-distant planet, only ten minutes before—well, he found that his brain had started to stammer, as well as his tongue!

He blushed as sweetly as a maiden of thirteen, or whatever age it is at which modern girls still do blush. And of course his burning cheeks made him begin to be angry with himself, down inside.

But luckily Luce was not trying to plague him. Not right then, anyhow. She talked to her brother, giving Jimmy a chance. And he took it—an eyeful of the girl. Long-legged? We-e-l-l, yes, perhaps. But not too long. Freckled? Surely; but what darned wholesome aids to beauty freckles were! He had never thought of that before. Snub nose? Decidedly not! Her nose did tilt just the teeniest bit, just enough to be perfect!

Somehow or other, leaving two old

men to chuckle and wag their heads about the inexplicable ways of young people, Luce, Corns and Jimmy entered the ranch-house.

They came direct into a pleasant living room of the old Nevada sort, a room meant to hold all the guests who wished to come. It was over forty feet long, and more than half that wide, furnished with homely solidity rather than beauty—though there were many costly pieces, too.

"Don't mind if we leave you a sec," said Corns. "I want to see Kate."

Jimmy nodded. He turned away, examining the bear pelts, deer skins and heads, and other trophies of the outdoors which formed a major part of the decorations. Over in one corner was a gigantic rosewood piano of the old-fashioned box shape. Bringing this thousand pounds of wood and wire and ivory across the desert surely must have taxed the ingenuity of some pioneer.

Jimmy touched a key, but did not make it sound. His eyes had fallen upon something which looked oddly familiar to him. It was a battered old banjo-mandolin, lying on top of the piano. He reached over and picked it up.

"Why, this—" he began aloud, stepping back toward the better light. There was an almost scared look in his blue eyes.

BREATHING a little faster, he looked at the frets, at the scratched metal—and a pent breath escaped in a thrilled exclamation. There, where the black frets were the widest, he read a monogram in mother-of-pearl, *one that he remembered!*

B. D. L.

Bert Dingley Lassiter—*his uncle, Ding Lassiter!*

How had this come here? Could Ding be this missing ranchman, known as Bert Long? The initials were the same. . . .

With a lump of excitement in his throat Jimmy held the instrument in position. With one preliminary chord to test the tune of the instrument—which was nearly perfect—he played.

AND as he played the accompaniment of a song he remembered Ding Lassiter liked, Jimmy sang. His slightly husky, not unpleasant baritone filled the room.

"Good-by my Bluebell,
Farewell to you!
One last fond look into
Your eyes of blue.
Mid camp-fires burning,
Mid shot and shell—
I will be dreaming of
My own Bluebell!"

At the first words of the song a young woman in the adjoining chamber looked up, startled. She sat up in bed, waving a long white arm for silence.

Then a choked, half-hysterical cry came from her lips.

"Bert! Oh, Bert! He's back!"
She tried to get out of bed; but a doctor who was putting in what amounted to a fortnight's vacation, came hurrying in and prevented her. Corns ran out, scowling. "Say, what the hell!" he whispered harshly. But behind him a girl whose hazel eyes were round, was staring at Jimmy, who still clutched the banjo-mandolin.

"Wait, Corny!" she bade. "There's something — funny — here! That piece—"

Jimmy Lassiter was pale.

"Yes, it looks funny. I, too, want to know!" he said simply. "You see, that instrument belongs to my uncle, Ding Lassiter!"

"Oh, then—"

THEN it seems that Ding is here, using another name!" he finished. "I can guess why—and the reason is nothing at all against him. But if it's true, then he was captured like my father! We'll—"

"H'm!" said Corns, interrupting. "Bet you're right, at that! Fella, we start right now!" His black eyes flashed.

Do Corns and Jimmy Find Kerry and Ding in Time to Save Them From the Clutches of Frozen Face? Is the Inhuman Fiend Captured? A Thrill on Every Page in the Third and Last Exciting Installation of "Frozen Face." Read it in Next Month's
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SPIDER TONG



*In Which Kubla's Sword, the Scepter of the
Grand Mogul, Falls into Unholy
Hands*

Another Captain Trouble Story

By PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

Author of "The Leopard Man," "Three Sevens," etc.

I

IT WAS while he was still far back in the Gorge of the Grasping Fist—one of the old passes leading from China into Tibet—that Captain Trouble first heard of the Spider Tong.

The man who told him about it was a Chinese gentleman named Mr. Wang. An elderly gentleman dressed

in a long coat of gray silk, with purple-black silk trousers neatly tied at the ankles over spotless white socks. Then the long cue, and a mandarin cap.

"A *tsung-ping*," the captain remarked to himself—meaning a "red button." It took nerve on the part of a Chinaman nowadays to wear the regalia of the old empire, no matter where he was. And Mr. Wang not

only wore the mandarin cap with the red button on it; there was a ceremonial fan sticking from the back of his neck.

He himself, Captain Trouble, in such a presence, felt like a tramp. He was just returning from the wild Hou-Shan—"the Country Back of the Mountains," meaning this end of Tibet, where, as successor to Kubla Khan, he was establishing another capital. It had been rough going—and fighting—more or less all the way. He was dressed in nondescript riding clothes.

EXCEPT to bathe and shave, which he did every morning, hot or cold, safe or not safe, he'd hardly been out of his boots for a month.

Captain Trouble, Shadak Khan, the Fighting Fool; otherwise, Pelham Rutledge Shattuck, of the U. S. A., the rising war-lord of China and perhaps the world.

Except for the long clean sword across his knees, there was no sign of royalty about him at all. Mr. Wang kept looking at the sword—first at Shattuck, then at the sword.

Kubla's sword! Scepter of the Grand Mogul! All Asia was beginning to whisper and sing about it.

"You risk your life to save mine," said Shattuck. "Why?"

"The Spider Tong has already bereft me of family and fortune," Mr. Wang explained.

They were speaking the Mandarin dialect, rich in various compliments unnecessary to report.

"There was a Spider Tong I knew of as a boy," said Shattuck. "The members of it put up bamboo scaffolding when my father was building his warehouses at Shanghai."

Mr. Wang's face gave the hint of a smile. It was like a face carved from old ivory; and some of its tone, Shattuck guessed, had been given it by opium.

"These Spiders," said Mr. Wang, "are different. They also build. But a web. In which they catch all who are not spiders. And drain their victims to an empty husk."

The interview was taking place near the entrance of the Fur Girl Cave, a vast grotto containing, among other wonders, a boiling spring. The place, largely on account of that flow of hot water, was becoming more and more like home to Shattuck. A home that was huge and still, remote from the filth and blood of battle; and also with secret roads in the Seven Directions—East and West, North and South, Down and Up, and Nowhere, the direction you take when you die.

Shattuck was sitting crosslegged on a pile of saddle-blankets.

From where he sat he could look out of the opening of the cave—as high and wide as a triumphal arch—to a filmy waterfall beyond the gorge, less than a quarter of a mile away. Only when he listened could he hear the murmur of the falling water. It was like the hum of a great wheel. Long before the water reached the bottom of the gorge it had turned to mist.

To the left and right of the waterfall, wherever there was footing, there were dancing sheets of green where vines and ferns were swinging in the breeze.

CHINA, hard hit in a thousand places, was still beautiful. This after all, was his second Fatherland. He loved it.

"Now they are talking of forming the One Great Tong," said Mr. Wang. "The Tong of the Spiders, who will web the Empire back into a single fabric again. If that should come to pass, he who rules the Spider Tong may rule the world."

Shattuck, seated on his throne of saddle blankets, didn't know whether

he should dismiss the old gentleman or let him go on with his talk. He was so tired he could scarcely keep himself awake. Yet he had to be tireless. Discipline had made him nearly so. Discipline and something else.

There were times when he felt as a ship might feel, with all sails set and a favoring wind, bound for some port still beyond the horizon—a city of shining domes and minarets—a new capital in a new world—ruled by the Maitreya.

HE looked at Mr. Wang and saw that the old gentleman was again looking at the sword that lay across his knees.

"No one will rule the world except with this for a scepter," Shattuck said.

"The sword of Kubla," said Mr. Wang. "Is it the real one?"

Shattuck stared. "It is." The old man was foolish.

While he was still back in the Blue Lake country—country of the Kokonor—whispers had reached Shattuck in various ways that fresh trouble was brewing in Minchow.

A wandering lama of the Red Cult, they who are magicians to a man, had cast a handful of finger-bones into the air one night at the side of the campfire, then informed him that "the Cloudy Garden," as the wide Minchow Valley was called before the Great Sorrow hit it, was again fast becoming "Feng-ti-Yu," which is to say, the Valley of Hell.

To that Captain Trouble, Khan Shadak, had replied, that most of China was a Valley of Hell and that Tibet was even worse. There'd been work to do in Tibet. There were ten thousand men up there now working to restore the ancient capital of Kubla Khan.

The dream of empire was taking on reality.

But as soon as he could, he'd started back again for Minchow, leaving Juma, the old Kirghiz bandit, who was to be his Minister of War, in the new dispensation, and Champela, the half-American Tibetan mystic, who was to be Minister of Peace, when there would be peace, to see that the work went along and that the workers were fed.

Shattuck had a hundred Arghati with him.

The Arghati themselves were magicians to some extent. Their long life of seclusion in the depths of the Gobi had made them so. Dwellers in the dark, as they'd called themselves. Developing in themselves, or keeping alive at any rate, the faculties that all men had when the world began but which now most of the world had forgotten.

The world, the Arghati said, was swinging around to another dawn—another cycle; and he who carried the sword of Kubla Khan would use that sword to smooth the way for the new King of the World, the King of Peace. The Maitreya! Mi Leh Fu, as the Chinese called Him. In Tibetan Rigden-nyepo.

Shattuck brought his attention back to the fine old Chinese gentleman in front of him.

It occurred to him that the Arghati had warned him to be careful about one who would appear before him in the guise of a friend during the third phase of the moon.

BUT Shattuck had lost track of time. He had too much else to think about, too much to do. When he did take note of time, it was generally in terms of split seconds—everything happening so fast.

He was thinking about that mysterious scientific magic of the Arghati. They had a way of saying that there was no future and no past. Not in the usual sense of the

word. Past and Future were "part of the same landscape"—a sort of East and West of time, so to speak—and you could see in one direction as easily as you could in another.

There were not many Arghati in the world. Strange how that prophecy of theirs about the Maitreya had spread through the world. The coming Buddha!

Something like that.

And Shattuck motioned the nice old Mr. Wang to come near and make himself comfortable.

Mr. Wang, he had been informed, had been carried up into the Gorge of the Grasping Fist in an elegant sedan chair. There were a dozen bearers who spelled each other, six on and six off, because the climb was steep.

Besides the chair-porters, there had been about twenty other coolies; altogether a good deal of style for a man who claimed that he'd been ruined.

But all millionaires, Shattuck reflected, were like that—claiming that they were paupers if they had only one million left.

MR. WANG had a light step for a man of his apparent age.

Shattuck vaguely reflected that he would have been more comfortable if he'd kept a bodyguard near him. But his men were tired, after traveling all night. He'd ordered them into another part of the cave where they could sleep in peace.

"Ai-ya!" breathed Mr. Wang. "The Spider Tong. The new one. Has not my lord, Shadak Khan, heard that the world is in for a fresh deal of some sort?"

He tittered a little, and drew the ceremonial fan from the back of his neck. As Mr. Wang opened the fan, with a graceful and ceremonial movement, it seemed to Shattuck that he saw a glint of bright steel.

II

THE thing was impossible, and he dismissed it from his mind. He'd been mixed up in so much fighting for the past many months that he was seeing death and the threat of death every way he looked. Besides, he was tired. He felt as if he could go to sleep and sleep for a month.

Mr. Wang had remained standing. He appeared to have a doubt in his mind as to how he should act in the presence of this great one. The great one was not only a foreigner, a man with pale eyes. He was a great war lord.

There were very few in China, now, even among the educated classes, who hadn't heard that Kubla Khan was back on earth in the person of a white man.

"The Spiders," Mr. Wang murmured, apologetically, "declare that even my lord, the successor of Kubla Khan, is back of their movement."

"Hell's in their belly, and they're belching lies," said Shattuck.

"So I was certain," Mr. Wang declared. "Else why should they be taking council to have you murdered before you get back to Minchow? They have entered Minchow. They are worse than the bandit known as General Jade—Yu, the Green Shiver—he whom you killed. The Spiders say, 'Why should anyone go hungry when there is so much meat walking about?'"

"You mean—"

Mr. Wang nodded, with his ivory smile.

"Women and children," he murmured. "To each lodge of the Spider Tong a feast every night. And in these times of want, the Tong grows swiftly."

As Shattuck listened, with a growing rage and horror, to the story

that Mr. Wang was telling him, a number of the Arghati came ghosting into the far part of the cave.

The soft voice of one of them came to Shattuck.

"Pardon, Great One; but we have a feeling that you are running into danger."

"Be at peace," said Shattuck. "I have just been warned."

IT was queer that these people should have got word of the murder plot against him. But he was accustomed to the mysteries of the Arghati by this time. He'd given them but a glance. He'd given them a gesture of dismissal.

For a time they still lingered there, lean and dark. They looked like neither Mongols nor Chinese. They might have belonged to some early Aryan tribe—the noble race, as they were called in India; fore-runners of all the white people in the world.

"How'd you know where to find me?" Shattuck asked Mr. Wang.

He'd been keeping his movements secret to some extent. There were enough enemies on his trail, without advertising for more. Russians, Japanese, Chinese Communists, the Nationalists also; then any number of independent bandit chiefs who knew that they were doomed unless Shadak Khan met his own doom first.

"Prince," said Mr. Wang, "I may be merely old-fashioned and a little crazy. But I went daily to the Sublime Mount and there questioned the Goddess of the Wind."

"Go on," said Shattuck. "But suppose the Spiders did the same. Then they would know that I was on my way. As no doubt they do, if they're planning to kill me."

"May the Lord of the Sky protect you."

The Arghati, Shattuck reflected,

could foresee a man's fate; but not even they could prevent that fate being carried out.

Mr. Wang was kneeling now, comfortably enough, on another saddle-blanket just in front of him.

"By what sign," Shattuck asked, "are these Spiders known?"

"By the sign of the Bite," said Mr. Wang. "But many of us have taken the Bite merely to save our lives. May I show you what it looks like, O Lord of the World?"

And the fine old Chinese gentleman drew back the overhang of one of his silk gray sleeves exposing an ivory wrist. The wrist was encircled with a bracelet of pure green jade, so tight that it must have been put there while the slender hand was smaller yet. Then, just above the bracelet, three curious red marks.

Mr. Wang leaned forward. So did Shattuck.

As Shattuck did so, it was as if he'd been struck at by a striking snake. And the snake was Mr. Wang. Then, with the sting of fangs still in his shoulder, Shattuck felt as if the snake had thrown a coil about his neck.

Nowhere! Meaning Death! That also was one of the directions of the roads leading off from the Fur Girl Cave—a tradition so old that the place had been left deserted practically since the original Kubla Khan had passed this way.

INSTEAD of being the fine old gentleman he'd appeared to be, Mr. Wang was showing himself to be a first-class demon. He wasn't ivory any more. He was red-hot steel.

He'd aimed a blow with a razor at Shattuck's jugular. Missing that by inches, he'd slipped his arm about Shattuck's throat and was trying to sever his windpipe.

At the same moment, a clamor

had filled the cavern—multiplied by ten thousand echoes. Shattuck thought of the hundred faithful who were his only escort when he'd reached this place. He'd led them—and himself—into an ambush. Were they also being murdered?

III

EVEN as Shattuck struggled, with that sense of a nearness of death upon him, his fighting mind was telling him pretty clearly what had happened.

The Red Sect lama who'd thrown the finger-bones for him across the divide in Tibet was a part of the plot, putting into his mind the thought that he was needed back in Minchow. The plotters would have guessed that he would leave the bulk of his growing army at Kokonor, there where he planned to make his headquarters for the conquest of Tibet.

Minchow was to have been another center. From Minchow as a capital, he'd bring this wild province of Kansu into line. He'd organize the untamed brigands into the best soldiers in the world, make their country—with its piled-up mountains and fertile valleys—into another Switzerland.

With Kansu and Tibet back of him, he'd be ready to overrun Mongolia and free Manchuria. . . .

All this while he was fighting—fighting to free his sword arm, fighting to keep that razor from his throat, fighting for air.

At the same time, his ears were bringing him evidence of what was happening elsewhere. The corridor into the inner cave, where the Arghati had established their quarters, must have been blocked. Above and below the main entrance to the cave, through which he had looked just now, there had been sentinels posted.

They must have been ambushed immediately following the arrival of their chief. Mr. Wang was their chief. His arrival in state, his old-fashioned manner, had been a blind. Room in the cave to have concealed a thousand—or ten thousand—men.

Now at their bloody work of slaughter.

The Arghati had warned him. They would be dying now on his account.

Whether they were or not, their strength came thrilling into him. Up from the sword in his hand there came a shock of mysterious electricity at high tension. He had freed himself.

Bleeding! He knew the feel. There was still a riot of noise and echoes about him as if the cave were filled with thunders trying to escape.

"You die anyway," shrilled a voice. "The bite of the Spider is poisoned."

And there stood the enemy who'd passed himself off as the fine old Mr. Wang. The mandarin cap and the cue of long hair were gone—the polished head looked like a skull. Gone also the gray silk coat, revealing a sinewy torso and wiry slim arms.

On the breast of the fellow Shattuck saw a repetition of those red marks he'd seen on the wrist—magnified now, and recognizable; a skull and bones, tattooed in red.

"Tzuren!"

The word meant "poison-doctor." "One of the greatest," came the sneering reply. "Head of the Spider Tong!"

AND the Spider Chief made a sliding jump to one side, swift as a shadow, when Shattuck lunged. Swift as a hunting spider. He'd bitten—as he himself would have said; he had only to wait for the poison to take effect.

Shattuck's knees went limp. With an obvious effort to right himself he went into a reeling fall. This time the Spider Chief was taken off his guard. The sword of Kubla flashed and the poison knife went spinning, taking a hand along.

At the loss of his hand, the Poison Chief went into a sort of delirium—cursing, dancing, staring.

Shattuck felt no slightest touch of pity.

"Ai-yal" he shrilled softly, in imitation of one of the cries the tzuren had uttered.

And with his left hand he snatched at the amputated wrist and gave it a twist that brought the poison doctor to the floor of the cave. It was a twist of pa-shih, the old Chinese system from which the Japanese took their jiu-jitsu.

The man was on his back and Shattuck was read to flay his breast of that poison brand.

"Quick," said Shattuck. "Death—or stop the action of your men!"

"I lack the breath," said the poison doctor.

"Then tell me the word!"

And it was like that that Shattuck came into knowledge of the password and various other gems of wisdom concerning the Spider Tong.

IV

SHATTUCK had shouted "Dzukl"—a camel-word, really used by camel-drivers when they want their beasts to lie down. A hiss and a click that carried as no other word might have carried; and he was conscious that it had been heard and understood.

He'd dragged his victim next to the stream that flowed away from the hot spring. The water was hot, all right; but it wasn't boiling. And there were salts in it worth a fortune to a man with an open wound

and in danger of bleeding to death.

He threw the Spider Chief face down and knelt on him. He laved his own wound. The shock of that hot and salt-impregnated water was like a fresh stab—only worse—as it struck his open wound. Sometimes—often—pain was good.

He jerked the bleeding wrist of the Spider Man forward and thrust it into the healing stream.

He listened. There was less noise. From his own shirt he ripped a linen strip and made a tourniquet for his enemy's severed wrist.

KILLING an enemy in a fight was one thing; leaving him to bleed to death was another.

But the act of mercy was one of those that cause some men to forswear good actions for the rest of their lives. As he turned from his task of tightening the makeshift bandage, he discovered that his precious sword was gone—the sword of Kubla Khan—the hope of Asia—the hope of the world!

But if someone had been bold enough, and deft enough, to steal the weapon from his side during the minute or so that his back was turned, laving his own wound and that of the Spider Chief, why hadn't the thief killed him with it?

He'd been unarmed. He'd been kneeling as if predestined to execution.

He guessed the answer—all this in the racing time of thought. The man who'd taken the sword had believed that he and the Spider Chief had struck up an understanding. The man hadn't dared kill them both, nor yet kill one without the other.

There'd been that cry to cease action. Yet here the thief had seen the head of the Spider Tong, the enemy, and the sword of Kubla Khan.

He had taken the sword and fled.

For a reeling second, while the nightmare truth of this flared in his brain, Shattuck longed for death. Then in a frenzy of action, he was his fighting self again. He'd scrambled toward the pile of blankets where he'd eased himself of his belt and holster when preparing to rest.

BEFORE he could cover a tenth of the distance, he saw a dozen strangers lurch into the cave through the arched entrance. Blind instinct was all that could have made him stoop and seize the thing that lay on the floor of the cave at his feet—a dead hand still gripping the razor-edged knife with his own blood on the blade.

"Dzuk! Dzuk!" he howled at them. "Kneel, you camel spawn!"

And as he howled this at them he rushed at them with that ghastly weapon raised.

They were bandits of the sort now swarming over China, especially in wild Kansu—two or three of them almost naked, here and there a uniform, a general flutter of rags, all sorts, but all of them armed with rifles, even a bayonet or two in place. And all of them quick of eye, as with animals long used to hunt or starve.

There was a clatter and a falling back as they saw what must have appeared a devil bearing down on them with a dead man's hand as a weapon, and that hand armed.

"Dzuk!" Shattuck howled. "I'm your new chief! I'm the Dragon Spider!"

There was one who doubted this—a thick-set man, pock-marked and military. He uttered something incoherent. He lifted his rifle with its fixed bayonet and made a lunge. As he did so, Shattuck flung hand and knife into his face.

The man let out a stifled yelp and tilted back.

On the instant, Shattuck was on him and had his rifle. With a side-swipe he knocked the fellow the rest of the way.

But that show of resistance on the part of their leader had been enough, brief and weak as it had been, to set the others in action. There was a shot that went wild.

Shattuck stabbed the man who fired, and the bayonet held. There was no time now for parley. A moment more and he would have been surrounded, unarmed. He was almost surrounded as it was, but his fighting eye had shown him a possible hole—a recruit just to the side of him, still so goggle-eyed at what he had seen—was seeing still—that he'd forgotten what his gun was for.

Shattuck jumped sideways, as he had seen the Spider Chief leap, and brought the recruit a jolt with his shoulder.

They went down together; but of the two of them Shattuck alone knowing what it was all about.

Before either the recruit he'd bowled over or anyone else divined his purpose, he'd scrambled to the pile of blankets and thrown himself behind it.

Safe harbor, this was. In another fraction of time he'd jerked out his gun.

V

THIS part of the battle was over. In quick succession, Shattuck fired three shots. The pock-marked man had come up with a screaming curse—practically from the moment he'd touched the floor, events had been racing so fast. He was the first to drop. There'd come an echo of the screaming curse from the far side of the cave, and there was the Spider Chief frothing

forward telling his men to kill this foreign devil—this yang-kwei-tzu, with trimmings about the foreign devil's mother. He was the next to drop. Then a third, who made the mistake of taking too much time to aim his rifle.

"Chiu ming!"

And that was a cry from the recruit Shattuck had bowled over, asking Shattuck to save his life. It was no more than the chirp of a sparrow in the blood and thunder of this hole in the hills, but Shattuck heard it.

"So be it!" he called.

IT looked like more war as a dozen more bandits came stampeding into the cave from the outer trail. But they were on the run and brought panic with them.

Shattuck caught the message they were trying to tell even before their comrades did. The Arghati were coming.

Coming they were, in fact, from two directions—from the outer trail and from the back of the cave.

That cry Shattuck had let out a while ago—the one he'd bled from the Spider Chief—had done its work, after all. It had checked the rush of the Spiders, given a chance the Arghati needed to get away by an inner passage and come to Shattuck's relief from another direction.

Shattuck took his chance. He clambered from cover, with his automatic ready for action.

"Down guns and up hands!" he said.

There was a herding backward, and Shattuck followed up. But guns began to drop and hands went up. There were three dead men on the floor, each with a bullet through the center of his forehead.

That wasn't a detail to escape these hunter-eyed bandits either. Brave as starving tigers in their way. But superstitious.

The Arghati came in. They looked like an army, although a dozen of them had been killed or wounded in their first attempt to rush the corridor that separated them from Shattuck—Shadak Khan to them, the Trouble Khan, heir of Kubla.

Shattuck singled out the recruit who'd asked for quarter.

"What's your name?" he asked, while the Arghati troops were rounding the bandits up against the wall.

"They call me," the boy answered, "the One-Eyed Cat."

One eye was missing.

But he had a "do" name also. Some fond mother had suggested it probably in a past that now must have seemed remote. The name was Meisun, the only possible translation of which was Sweet Gentleness.

"Meisun," Shattuck asked, "are you a Spider?"

There was fright in the boy's eye as he showed the marks of the "bite" on his arm.

Shattuck clapped him lightly on the shoulder. "You belong to me," he said, and he had the melancholy comfort of seeing the fright fade from Meisun's single eye.

VI

IT was what the people of Kansu called the Season of Greater Heat, about the middle of July. But the night was cool enough as Shattuck and the boy, Meisun, found their way down the dark gorge to a cove where the bandits had herded their ponies.

Luck was with them. An attempt had been made to stampede the herd—what was left after the bulk of the Spiders had made their getaway. Four ponies were left in the dark. Shattuck and Meisun were mounted and each with a pony to spare for the long gallop across the plain to Minchow.

Shattuck knew why the Spiders had left. It wasn't because they'd been routed. It was because they'd got what they'd come for. His own life also would have been acceptable to them. Perhaps they would have liked to use him at one of their "feasts." He might have furnished them amusement, at any rate, as he squirmed under torture.

BUT the real object of their ambush had been the sword of Kubla Khan.

Shattuck tried to master his melancholy, his despair. He was bereft. Something had been taken from his life—the purpose of his life—all his dreams. Life had stopped. Not stopped but had gone blind and crazy, like a rudderless ship in a gale.

He must regain the treasure else he die.

The Big Dipper was low in the sky—the "Bushel" it was called, here in China: the Tou. The North Star was a goddess: Tou Mu.

Good enough to pray to, anyway—that star he'd looked at as a kid, here in China, over there in the United States. Tou Mou was on their left. They were headed East, the Blue Dragon direction.

It was very late. The plain was dark.

Shattuck had given orders. To Paspas, his Arghati captain, he had explained what he intended to do. And Paspas, at least, had made no objection. There was a grain of hope in that.

Meisun, the One-Eyed Cat, was going to be useful. The gallop, the night, and perhaps some animal or juvenile intuition for Shattuck's friendliness, was helping the boy to talk.

Wang was the real name of the Spider Chief—Wang Chung, as one might almost say Mr. Faithful King.

But in the Dragon Tong, of course, he'd always been known as the Number One Dragon Spider.

The Wangs lived in a large house in the Tung Ma Lou, otherwise East Horse Street. And Meisun knew the house well and could get Shadak Khan into it—if they weren't shot before they could pass the city gates—because Meisun had a sister who was a "forked-head" working in the place.

"What's that, a forked-head?" Shattuck asked.

It was, Meisun explained, another word for a servant girl, because servant girls wore their hair in two cues instead of one.

The thing that interested Shattuck most was that the Spider Chief had left an heir, a youth named Kienchang, who would be the nominal head of the Spider Tong, now that his father was dead, until a new Dragon, or chief, should be elected.

Shattuck hadn't changed his clothes nor made any attempt to disguise himself. This was a desperate adventure on which he was engaged. He was staking his life on it. If he failed, he might as well die anyway.

And he cast another look at the goddess Tou Mu as she began to fade from sight in the early dawn.

Early dawn, and already such market people of the Cloudy Valley as hadn't been frightened to death by bandits or otherwise killed, were making their fatalistic way to Minchow to sell what they had to sell.

Shattuck bought a melon and split it with Meisun.

IN the dawnlight, he led the way, still mounted, and Meisun following close with the two lead ponies, under the high walls of the ancient city and into the crowded slime of the main gateway. Here a couple of tax-collectors were for stopping them. But Shattuck gave them a

glare and whispered a Spider word that turned them polite and almost white.

The same thing happened when they came to the large black gateway of the big house in East Horse Street. When a sleepy major-domo finally opened.

Shattuck, followed by the now thoroughly frightened Meisun, slanged the fellow and pushed on in.

"I would see the master of the house," said Shattuck.

"He is not here," the steward answered.

"Are you sure you know to whom I refer?" Shattuck asked.

"My lord Wang Chung."

"Wrong," said Shattuck. "The old man is flying now with the Yellow Stork. I would see your new master, Kienchang."

VII

THE big house was coming visibly to life as Shattuck followed the steward through court after court. Servants everywhere, men and women, and all of them, even the women, looking as if they'd be quick to murder if they got the signal.

But this was no ordinary Foreign Devil. Devil, maybe. He had killed a bandit king. Was he bent on another killing now? Shadak Khan. Captain Trouble. King Trouble. They knew him. But evidently in league with the Spiders.

The word had gone round. Shadak Khan had sent in a word by the steward that had caused a reply to be sent back at once that the visitor be admitted.

Kienchang was the young master's name. It was also a word that meant "luxuriant." Shattuck recalled this as he surveyed the man he'd come to see.

Kienchang hadn't left his couch.

He was dressed in white silk. There was a bright red kerchief about his head, also silk; and the front of this was drawn into a turban effect by an emerald the size of a pigeon's egg.

Shattuck walked straight toward him.

Kienchang quailed and made a movement to protest, to express a sense of outrage. Shattuck stopped him, speaking softly.

"Keep quiet. Don't move. Life may still be sweet for you."

They were about of an age, Shattuck surmised. There were two ways of looking at this thing called luck; it flashed upon him. To be born lucky—rich and handsome, for example—might not be so good.

"Send the steward away," Shattuck ordered. "Tell him to see that my man and horses are fed."

There was a heartbreaking mirth in that. Shadak Khan, he who was to be the fighting lord of the new dispensation, reduced to a one-eyed boy and four stolen Mongol ponies.

In any case he had the whip-hand over the master of this palace—all gilt and lacquer, mirrors and carved blackwood.

"What if I refuse," Kienchang proposed without much spirit.

Shattuck's eyes danced.

"Then," he said, "I'll be forced to kill you as I have just killed your father."

Kienchang paled.

"You killed my father?"

BECAUSE he almost killed me first. Because he came to me disguised and struck me unawares. You see this surgical dressing about my neck. Yet I would have spared him. Even while I was taking care of him, one of his men—one of your men now—since you are the Dragon—stole my sword."

Kienchang gave a start.

"Hold on," said Shattuck. "I see

that you are happy, that this was something that you counted on. Are you your father's only son?"

"Yes!"

"Then, that accounts for it. The sword was meant for you. And I am justified in what I intend to do."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Kill you at the setting of the sun unless the sword is in my hand."

There was a long pause. Then Kienchang found breath and courage to ask: "And in the meantime?"

"I hold you hostage."

"Where?"

"Here in your own house. In this room."

"Where do you get the authority for this?"

"I carry it with me," Shattuck said, putting the flat of his hand on his holster.

"I'll have to send out word," said Kienchang.

"As many as you wish," said Shattuck. "I'm in as great a hurry to leave you as you are to have me go."

He knew when he said this—he could read it through the shallow transparency of Kienchang's face—that the heir of Wang would use this means to have him killed. It merely made him smile—gave him a feeling of exaltation. There is an exaltation in daring, when heart and soul are in charge, that thrills like music.

VIII

KIENCHANG, with a hand that shook, struck a gong that hung near the head of his couch with a metal hammer. The steward appeared.

Kienchang ordered three things: Breakfast, writing materials, and his opium.

Shattuck let him do the ordering. But his ears and eyes were alert. So far there was nothing wrong. He

studied the room. From now on he would see that Kienchang would be between himself and any possible sniper. That wouldn't be so hard. The couch was set in a deep niche. He himself would lie down and rest, in a little while, with the heir of Wang in front of him.

Not much after dawn, and the day was going to be long. He'd have to watch himself as well as this prisoner of his. The earlier fatigue that had plagued him in the Cave of the Fur Girl had left him. All his nerves were taut, as if he would never sleep again.

THE steward returned with a wide tray. On the tray were tea and rice, fruit and sweetmeats, seeded cakes and pao-tzu—steamed tarts, these were filled with chopped meat and vegetables.

Manifestly, there was no famine in the house of Wang.

But Shattuck would neither drink nor eat. He'd had his half a melon. That would have to do him until the sun went down, if the vigil had to last that long.

His last day on earth, perhaps. There were better men whose death-hour was striking now. Around the world, the souls of the known and the unknown would be going up like morning mist. Then it would be the turn of Shadak—

Before he could complete the thought, there was a muffled explosion, a shattering of glass, and a bullet whined sharply as it passed his ear. He'd been fired at through a mirror.

There were many Chinese mirrors arranged like that, arranged for the convenience of an unseen watcher.

Before the whine of the bullet was silent, it seemed, Shattuck had shot out a hand and drawn Kienchang toward him, a hand on his collar. Kienchang must have thought that this

was death, for he let out a sharp high cry, then, with an unexpected savagery had flung himself at Shattuck and was fighting.

Kienchang wasn't fighting like a man. He was fighting like a wildcat, clawing, trying to bite. His dark eyes seemed to have taken a greenish tinge.

Shattuck gasped with disgust. Would he have to kill this fool, too, as he'd killed the elder Wang? For now, with a ferocity and cunning generally attributed only to the insane, Kienchang was clawing at the bandages about Shattuck's neck and shoulders.

ANOTHER shot banged through—very wild this time. It wasn't likely that the marksman, whoever he was, would take a chance of wounding the new master of the house.

But neither was Shattuck willing to take a chance. He tilted an arm under Kienchang's chin and nearly broke his neck.

Now Kienchang was trying to speak. But when he did speak, it was a squeaking command to the hidden marksman to fire!—fire!

A bullet came in from another direction. Another mirror had been shattered. Then another!

Still the marksmen were wild. But this couldn't go on very long. If they killed the son of Wang it would be as bad for Shattuck as if he himself stopped the bullet.

Shattuck could have wept. He could have cursed. If he could only fight!—fight for what he wanted!—like a man!—against men, whatever the odds!—if he could only have the great sword again in his hand!—the sword of Kubla Khan!

He was panting to control the human wildcat in his arms—this Spider Man. Even as he did so, his thought

shot out and upward to the North Star goddess.

He brought his prisoner over with him onto the couch where Kienchang had been lying at the moment of his arrival. Kienchang was fighting still.

A satin coverlet was scuffed aside, and there, before his eyes, Shattuck saw the sword of Kubla. His sword! The world-saver!

IX

EVEN so, the discovery was almost the end of him. He was dazed, stricken. He let out a shout. In an instant he had released his hold on the squirming, cursing, punishing heir of Wang and seized this heirloom of the great Kubla instead. He was thrilled through by a pang of gratitude that was almost an ache, an ache to drive his soul from his body, give it wings.

But freed, Kienchang had seized the teapot and hurled it at him. Shattuck didn't know until later that he'd been scalded on the hand.

Having hurled the teapot, Kienchang, screaming orders all but incoherent, made a dash to leave the room. For a moment, Shattuck stood exposed to fire from all directions. From all directions, it seemed, came the fire. At pointblank range, it must have been.

Yet the hurry and the confusion must have gone to the heads of the marksman. That, or fear.

Suddenly Shattuck had jerked his gun and fired—twice, right and left. In each direction he'd seen a gust of smoke,

He caught Kienchang still fumbling at the door, and kicked him aside.

"You're lucky," said Shattuck. "I'm not wasting a bullet on you—yet!"

There was a sling on the sword,

like that on a polo mallet, and he slipped this over his arm. His arm would be cut off, as he'd amputated Wang, before he lost that sword again. Or arm and sword would go together.

He seized Kienchang and made him lead the way, holding him, meantime, by his white silk collar.

From an inner court a little serving maid ran out. There was an expression in her face. She had two pigtailed instead of one. "Fork Head!" The boy Meisun's sister.

She ignored her master. She made a signal to Shattuck. He followed her. She led him through mean ways of the big house, and, finally, through a small heavily timbered door, that opened on a public alley.

MEISUN was there with the four ponies, excitement shining in his single eye.

"Meisun," said Shattuck. "suppose you stay here. I'm headed for stormy weather."

"Duke," said Meisun, "you said that I was your man."

"You are," Shattuck decided. "Can you handle an automatic?"

"Yes."

"Then take it," said Shattuck, "and get away with the ponies through the gate. If they try to stop you, abandon two of the ponies. If they try to stop you after that, shoot. But not unless you have to. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Then meet me outside the wall where the big ginkgo tree leans over. Know where?"

"Yes."

"There's a mob assembling. They're looking for me, not you. Good luck. So-long."

They exchanged a swift handshake. Meisun was on his way, taking his four ponies along.

All this time he'd been holding

the son of Wang by the collar. Suddenly Kienchang slipped out of his upper garment and started to run. He ran like a hare. As he ran he screeched, and Shattuck heard him calling on the members of the Spider Tong. This was the new leader of the Spider Tong. His word was law.

"Kill! Kill!" he shouted. "Kill! Kill!"

Shattuck wouldn't have followed him, but there was no other way to go. He'd have to move quickly, else he was trapped.

Other voices were taking up the cry. The excitement at the Wang house had already assembled a mob in front of the house. Around an angle of the compound men began to appear, some with knives, some with clubs.

There was a responsive shout. There were words of the Spider Tong that reached Shattuck as he ran. He appeared to be running to certain death.

But now he had the sword in his hand. The crowd fell back. But a club came hurtling through the air, then a stone.

Kienchang, stripped to the waist and screaming his call for murder, turned, shouting for his men to kill. On his breast Shattuck saw the red skull and bones that had been on the breast of the elder Wang.

Someone passed Kienchang a heavy chopping knife. He whirled this up to throw it at Shattuck's breast. It was a movement never completed.

X

SHATTUCK had lashed in with a backhanded stroke, and Kienchang's head rocked as if jumped from its body. The body remained there curved, but upright for

what seemed like a long moment, a fountain of blood, before it collapsed.

At sight of the blood, the mob surged and rocked like a single being, drunk on its own excitement.

With a swift movement, Shattuck stooped and picked up the head by the hair, and hurled it into the thick of the mob. "There'll be no more Spider Tong," he roared.

He saw his chance, where a cart was placed against the interior of the wall. He wasn't far now from the leaning gingko that he'd counted on to escalate the wall. This was better. He leaped to the cart. In a moment he had vaulted to the top of the wall.

The mob roared and surged closer—such a surf of sound as no man can ever hear and forget.

A broken old wall, with crevices and loose rocks sagging at a treacherous pitch, where he had to watch his footing every step he took.

BUT it looked like death now in one way or other.

The mob was bolder, growing larger with every passing second. Rocks and clubs were coming over in a steady, deadly flight.

Shattuck was struck. Once or twice he staggered. At each blow that struck him, the gale of mob-voices went an octave higher.

Meisun hadn't appeared. Would he ever appear.

Others had divined his purpose and were now running ahead and fighting for a chance to scale the wall by means of the gingko tree.

There wasn't much chance now even should he drop to the plain outside. The mob would follow him.

He stopped for a moment or so and threw rocks that he loosened from the wall. This helped a little.

There were two shots fired at him

in quick succession. But this didn't suit the crowd so well. Who would try to spoil the sport by killing the quarry outright.

Now, all at once, as if the mob had a single brain as it had but a single voice, a dozen ladders were being raised against the wall. And the more courageous members of the mob, or the better armed, ex-soldiers among them—or soldiers of the tong, with bayonets on their rifles—were pushing up to stop him, maim him.

Swiftly as this occurred, there had come to Shattuck another thrill that was the joy of life. After all, he'd always been a Fighting Fool. Another Fighting Fool had told him so, another day of battle, in far Afghanistan. He charged the nearest enemy swinging his sword.

He fought with perfect nerve, perfect precision.

He was bleeding, bruised. But he had the sword of the great Kubla in his hand.

Just as he was beginning to be conscious that he was at the end of his powers, that at any moment now, some chance blow might send him into oblivion and allow the sword of Kubla to fall once more into unholy hands, he heard a shout behind him, and there was that One Eyed Cat, Meisun, with the four ponies below. Not only that, but Meisun had the automatic in his hand, and in his side of the wall the field was clear.

SHATTUCK spat at the crowd, and his voice rose even above that terrific surf of a mob bent on murder.

"I'll see you again," he said. "I'll be coming back."

He put a hand to the coping and dropped to the freedom of the plain.

He was headed for the Gorge of the Grasping Fist, for the Fur Girl Cave, where there was work to do.

A Face in the Fog



Wartime Buddies Meet Again in the Midst of Stirring London Adventure

By JOHN EASTERLY

Author of "The Devil Dancers," "Shen of the Seven Seas," etc.

DONNIE CORBETT cursed himself for a sentimental fool as he plodded and stumbled over the deep depressions and large bumps of the crooked, narrow, cobbled street. He was telling himself that only an imaginative kid or a lunatic would have started out on such a quest.

He cursed the London fog which, laden with soot and smoke, was as heavy to breathe as the dust of a desert storm. Finally, he stopped in uncertainty, looking about him and trying to hear sounds which would identify for him his location.

Only faint, distant, ghost-like footsteps and the faint halo surrounding a yellow street light rewarded his search. An occasional voice, heard as though through a door, merely served to accentuate the ghost-like character of the place.

He cursed himself again for going out on this impossible quest. He had seen a face, a face as dimly seen as though it had come out of the dim memories of the past. So fleetingly had he seen the face, so faintly, that he was not at this moment certain that it had *not* come out as a vision of the past.

Donnie was in London on his semi-annual visit for his firm in Philadelphia. He had met on board ship a young woman who was going abroad for the first time. Because acquaintance ripens quickly on board ship, he soon learned that the young woman was going to London and Paris on the same business that brought him there.

He had chivalrously offered to show her the sights of London and Paris, which he prided himself he knew quite well. On their first night in the British capital after a satisfactory dinner in one of those sequestered little, intimate places that he knew so well, he offered to show her London's Chinatown and the waterfront.

SHE was thrilled with this offer, recalling romantic tales which a personal visit would enable her to recapture. Besides, it would give her something to talk about when she got home, something that was out of the ken of the average tourist and occasional visitor.

It had been an extremely interesting and satisfactory jaunt. The young woman had shivered appropriately in the right places and had given Donnie's vanity plenty of material to feed upon, making him feel like a veritable Galahad, when he imagined what he would do if some Chink or London thug would try to molest this young woman.

It was as they were homeward bound in the rickety taxi that Donnie had seen the face, a face that recalled vividly a hectic, vivid past.

The face was seen in a window above a pub as he passed. There was no light in the room behind the face, but the glaring light that illuminated the entrance and sign of the pub brought out all the details of the features so seen as clearly as a cameo.

At the first glance the face had not registered on Donnie's mind. It was only after they had traveled several blocks that the face came back to him with the vivid scenes of the past.

As his taxi bumped its way toward the part of London with which tourists are more familiar, the face seen in the window came back to him as does the meaning of words that one hears without understanding, when one is in an absent-minded mood.

So suddenly did it come back to him that the features seen in that window above the pub were bound up with his intimate past, that he straightened up with a jerk, eliciting from the young woman by his side a startled exclamation.

He was on the point of ordering the chauffeur to drive back but he changed his mind. He could not bring this young woman into contact with that part of his past of which he no longer spoke.

Out of a crowded memory there came back the scene vividly. He was high up in the air on observation, when he met two German fighting planes, part of a circus that had gained fame during the war. He felt that his time was up. His slow observation plane stood no chance against those two hawks.

MORE by luck than skill he had brought one of them down. But the other was on his tail and he considered himself gone. He tried a desperate maneuver which would enable him to ram the other and bring him to earth with him but it had failed: he was no match for the speedy adversary.

He had almost resigned himself to his fate, steeling himself against the shock of the tracer bullets, when something happened that changed the complexion of the fight.

There came roaring from the

clouds; with everything wide open, a plane of one of his British allies. The fight was over in a few minutes, but not before Donnie had almost paid the price. His German adversary had begun shooting just as help came.

Donnie had felt the impact of the bullet in his shoulder. It was more by instinct that he had managed to land his plane safely behind the German lines.

But the other plane followed him. It was the work of a moment to land and drag the wounded Donnie out of his own plane and into the other. With bullets whistling about their ears and archies exploding near them later when they had reached sufficient height, his British comrade had succeeded in bringing him back safely to their own territory.

THEY were later invalided together and both sent on the same transport to London, where Donnie completed his convalescence at the home of his rescuer.

It was the face of this rescuer that Donnie had seen in the window above the pub. But what a change there had come over those features!

He remembered him as a representative of the best of his type. Fine Nordic features, cool gray eyes that could smile engagingly even in the face of great danger, or turn to frosty ice, when their owner was angered, the best type of the British sportsman.

But the face that Donnie saw in the window above the pub was merely a caricature of the features he remembered so clearly. It seemed as though all the elements that had gone to make something fine had been removed.

Donnie had marked mentally the place where he had seen the face of his comrade, Eugene Nelson, and he was now determined to find him.

Now, as Donnie stood there uncertainly straining his ears and his eyes, he began to doubt that it was his comrade in arms that he had seen. After all it was merely a fleeting glimpse; he had not seen Nelson for thirteen years; the face was—perhaps it was merely his imagination.

He bent his head toward his cupped palms trying to light a cigarette, when a new sound obtruded itself on his consciousness.

There was a choking gasping sound, as of a person in acute agony a few feet to Donnie's right. He dropped his match and stared in that direction. He could not see anything, so thick was the fog although he was certain from the sounds that it was very close to him. When the sound was repeated, he took a few wary strides in that direction.

He hastened his steps when he made out what seemed like a struggling mass, only dimly seen. At the sound of his footsteps the mass resolved itself into three persons. Two of them made off quickly leaving one on the ground.

As he stooped over the figure, it stirred and a pair of bleary eyes were staring up at him.

"'Elp me guv'nor, 'elp me, I think they done me in. But fer 'eavin's syke don' tyke me in there!"

His head jerked weakly in the direction of a ramshackle building near which he was lying.

DONNIE glanced at the building the other indicated. Once more he saw under the flaring yellow light the name, "The Rabbit," which was the name of the pub above which he had seen the face of Eugene Nelson.

At this moment there came a new sound. A Chinaman loomed out of the fog, his steps sounding like the pads of an animal. He stopped before the two, looking with inscrutable eyes at Donnie and his companion.

Donnie could see new alarm spring into the eyes of the man who had asked him for help. He tried to get up as if to flee, but he seemed frozen in his posture, paralyzed, incapable of action.

The Chinaman looked at Donnie, saying:

"You Melican? Melican man betteh not botteh with lat like him."

He turned a malevolent glare on the cockney who was now writhing in fear. Donnie shivered. He was unpleasantly affected by the yellow nicker in the almond-shaped, slanting eyes of the Oriental.

ALTHOUGH there was nothing living of which Donnie was afraid, he could understand that he too might feel uneasy if that feral glare were turned on him.

He stood there hesitating, wondering what to do, when the decision for action was taken from him. The door of the pub flew open. Out of it there came a lithe figure he remembered so well.

He had no time to see the face, before the young man, who came out of the pub, was at the Cockney prone on the pavement. He had him by the throat and was shaking him like a rat.

This had taken place so quickly that Donnie stood rooted there for a moment, too surprised to think or act.

Finally he came to himself. Years of training and environment impelled action. He moved forward and touched the other on the arm:

"Oh, I say now, the chap's hurt pretty bad, hardly the sporting thing to do."

He had fallen unconsciously into the idiom and even the inflection of his English cousins. He was not certain for a moment that this wild man who was assaulting a wounded man, incapable of helping or defend-

ing himself, was Nelson. But he had no time to think of this.

He saw out of the corner of his eye the flicker of light on steel. He moved aside just in time to avoid the deadly thrust aimed at him by the Chinaman.

Donnie's reflexes worked with the speed of light. As the Oriental's squat body shot forward after his lunging dagger, Donnie's hard fist shot out and landed on the side of his head.

If Donnie had been armed then, the Chinaman would have gone to the permanent resting place of his ancestors, but Donnie had come out on a peaceful mission.

But the Chinaman was not out of the fight, far from it. He was sent staggering with the blow but he returned to the encounter. He came toward Donnie, with a sliding, side-long motion, not raising his eyes from Donnie's shoes, his gleaming dagger held in readiness.

Donnie was stepping back warily looking for a chance to disarm the other, when the Oriental's threatening advance was stopped, by a welcomed interruption.

There was a sharp word from Nelson at which the threatening figure with the dagger halted, the Chinaman meanwhile not taking his eyes from Donnie's feet. Then there were a few sharp words in a language that Donnie did not know.

He judged they were spoken in a Chinese dialect although they did not sound like the Chinese spoken by the Oriental.

THE Chinaman, with a muttered monosyllabic reply, turned his back and was swallowed up in the fog. Donnie was surprised to see that during the minute or so that he had been engaged with the Chinaman, the man who had asked him for his help had vanished.

Now for the first time Donnie had a good look at the features that had come back to him like a vision out of the past. The young American was surprised, shocked at what he saw.

Whereas the young man who had saved his life behind the German lines at risk of his own, thirteen years before, was a fine, clean, wholesome fun loving young Englishman of the very best type, the person whom Donnie now confronted was a different person altogether.

He would have doubted his senses, if Nelson had not by a perfunctory nod shown his recognition. There was no effusive greeting. The other merely stared at him, saying:

"Corbett, isn't it?"

Donnie had put his hand out in glad greeting, but he dropped his arm to his side. He stared wonderingly at Nelson. There was something bleak, hard about the other that Donnie had never seen in the days he remembered so well.

NELSON, by a slight nod in the direction of the pub, turned his back. Corbett flushed in a mixed emotion made up of half anger, half of a peculiar kind of embarrassment. But he followed.

Donnie was certain he saw a significant look exchanged between Nelson and a big beefy man behind the bar. They walked into a sitting room curtained off from the bar where they found themselves alone.

Here without a word being uttered, a bottle of rye and one of soda was brought with glasses and put on the table between them. Nelson sat for a long time staring in fixed silence at the floor. Finally he looked up; his eyes were hard:

"After you have your drink, Corbett, better get out of here. No decent person should be here at this time of night or any time for that matter."

Once more Donnie flushed with that strange mixture of embarrassment and anger. He slopped whisky into his tumbler and he drank it off at a gulp, without diluting it or following it with a chaser. He said:

"Having saved my life, you can talk that way, *Captain Nelson*. Otherwise—"

A SLOW flush crept under the other's skin. His eyes left the floor and looked at his former friend. His eyes were bleak, bitter, hard. A retort was on his lips, but he closed his fist in effort at self-restraint.

Donnie could see the white of his knuckles. He purposely pretended to misunderstand the gesture:

"If you think of trying on me what you did on that poor devil out there, go ahead and damned to you. But I'm not a cripple."

Donnie went on whipping his anger. He was determined to make the other talk, say something that would furnish a clue to his strange behavior.

"This is a hell of a show of hospitality a man's buddy gets in a strange land. Is this a new brand of English hospitality or—"

"See here, Corbett. Don't carry this too far. I'll stand a lot from you but—"

"Betcher life you'll stand a lot from me—and like it. I see you in a window up here the other night. When I come back to hunt you up this is the reception I get."

"You came back here to look me up—in friendship?"

"Yes, I did, and what do I find? You, a man I thought of as a sportsman of the finest type, attacking a little rat of a Cockney who was unable to defend himself and then apparently in cahoots with a Chink. And then you treat me as though I were a beggar or something—"

Donnie stopped. The bleak eyes in

front of him became less hard. There was even a note of appeal in them. Donnie felt an irresistible urge to grasp the hand of the other, but he restrained himself.

HE had to find out the reason for this strange behavior. The other spoke. At first the words came slowly, haltingly, then they came with a rush.

"If it were anyone but you, Corbett, talking to me that way, I'd send you out to the river there, feet first but—"

He paused drawing his forefinger around the ring of moisture left on the dark wood of the table by the glass. Then he looked up once more.

"When the war ended and I came home, I was a hero, you know, there were several million heroes then. When we came marching home we were acclaimed, there were demonstrations, banquets, speeches. I never liked that sort of thing much as you know. I didn't feel I ought to be paid that way for what I had done 'over there.'

"Then I tried to get my old job back; it had been promised when I enlisted; I was one of the early volunteers you know. But I couldn't get it back. Someone was filling the job at two thirds of what I was willing to take; and I couldn't get it back anyway.

"I looked for other jobs, without success. A feeling had spread abroad that the men who had enlisted were not fit for much other than fighting. My father and older brother were dead. My father had died while I was abroad and my brother in the trenches. There was just I and a little sister with nothing to live on.

"Then I heard a speech by a man on the demoralizing effect on the young men of the war. This was a man who had grown rich in making and selling war material. He said

that he was willing to give any ex-service man a job and pay him in accordance with his deserts.

"I took him at his word and went to his office on the following day. I waited four hours before I could see him. When I finally saw him, he gave me a lecture on thrift and asked me what I could do and what I was willing to do. You know, I was an expert motor mechanic before the war. He finally offered me a job at wages that would not keep a Chinese coolie alive. He was very severe with me for not accepting it. Then he had the effrontery to offer me a crown.

"My sister and I had not eaten for two days then. I left him, but that night, I met him not far from his home, changed his face considerably and took what money he had on him. And since then—"

"And your sister," broke in Donnie.

"My sister? I carried on collecting money that way for five years until her education was completed. When I saw her safely installed in a job as a teacher, I stopped seeing her. Then I went in for it on a bigger scale and I'm now collecting what the world owes me.

"And—" he made an expressive gesture with his hands. "That's that." He twisted his features into a smile that contorted it into a sneering caricature of his former self.

DONNIE nodded. There was no indecision in his demeanor now. He leaned forward across the table, the lines of his jaw clearly defined.

"So that's that, eh? Well, that's not that by a long shot. I don't know whether the man whose life is saved owes his savior something or the other way about. But I'm going to pay my debt by talking right out in plain English.

"You say you enlisted, that's right, isn't it. Well, if you enlisted be-

cause of what you expected to get out of it you're not the man I remember. You enlisted because you thought it was your duty to your country and because you were a kid and the excitement appealed to you.

"And then when you came back and a couple of bloated war profiteers made a few speeches and things didn't go the way you liked you just lay down on the job like a slacker and quit, didn't you?"

"See here, Corbett—" The other leaned forward and the two men with their eyes close together looked like a couple of jungle cats.

"That's right, isn't it?" insisted Donnie.

"You're talking like a bally ass or a profiteer," said the other weakly.

"That's better," nodded Donnie with satisfaction. "That's the way my old friend Nelson used to talk. Is it less your patriotic duty now to be a good citizen and help your country rid itself of all the post-war evils than it was in 1914 to go over there? If you don't think it is, then I will be justified in saying that in 1914 it wasn't patriotism, but just plain personal desire for excitement that took you to the recruiting office."

Donnie, through shielded lids watched keenly for the effect of these words on his old friend and comrade.

He went on more calmly.

"There is the obligations of citizenship, which a man like you, or the man I used to know does not hold lightly. There is the obligation of honor. There is the obligation of family—how about your sister? You used to love her."

THE other answered slowly, the light in his eyes being what Donnie used to know.

"You don't know what you're talking about, Corbett—"

"I'm Donnie to my friends."

"Donnie," the other said it with some difficulty, gulpingly.

"You don't know what you're talking about. You didn't go through what I did. And then if I wanted to quit, I couldn't. Once you tie yourself up with this kind of—kind of—"

"You mean, that men like that Chink out there are going to dictate to Gene Nelson what he should do, how he should live for the rest of his life?"

"Yes, Cor—Donnie, I mean just that. Once you get into this kind of thing, you're in it, there's no out."

"And if you decide to quit?"

"Then my life isn't worth a ha'penny."

"Well, I don't know about that. We're pals, aren't we, we were over there. We got the best of the best the Heinies could send against us and if we can't do the same to a couple of Cockney—"

AT this moment there was an interruption. A big, beefy, red-faced individual slid into the alcove hidden from the bar by a screen. He might have been taken for a replica of the person Donnie had seen behind the bar.

He was dressed in nondescript clothes, in this respect forming a contrast to Nelson who had retained from his old life his passion for cleanliness and good clothes. The intruder stood at the entrance, with his thumbs hooked into the belt girdling his enormous girth.

"Ho," he sneered, "you'll tell 'im wot to. A bleedin' Yankee comes hover 'ere to tell hus wot to do, hus wot—" he stopped in speechless wrath.

He went on:

"Lissen young feller, me lad. Go orn 'ome w'ere ye b'longs an' don't tell yer betters wot to do. Or Gor Blime if Hi don't tyke yer neck in

me two fingers and squeeze yer bleedin' gizzard hout. Hif Hi gits me—"

Nelson spoke up:

"That's enough, Tad. I'm here talkin' with a friend."

"With a friend his hit? An' don't Hi 'ear with me hown 'ears wot this nice friend hadvizes yer about quittin' hus wot 'ave gave—"

A dull red suffused his features, as Nelson stood up to end this painful interview. His eyes were now the color of cloudy ice.

He was going to say something, but Donnie interrupted. He also stood up. There was a smile on his face, which just barely reached the eyes. His eyes now had a glint that his friends knew presaged trouble for someone.

He spoke softly, pressing Nelson down in his seat:

"Just a minute, Gene. This is *my* party; I started and I always finish what I start. We were talking about doing something. This is as good a place to begin as any. This gentleman seems to object to my—"

"Yas," the beefy individual said with broad sarcasm, "this gentleman certainly hobjects to a bleedin' Yankee—"

He was advancing during this speech but he did not go far. Donnie met him half way. Nelson had stood up again, but a violent push from Donnie sent him spinning into a corner while Donnie went into action.

HE neatly sidestepped a broad, swinging, ham-like fist at the end of a beefy arm, at the same time dodging into the other's guard and planting both fists solidly above the other's belt buckle.

At this point Donnie was due for a surprise. What he thought would be soft yielding flesh, he found to be hard, sold muscle. His fists met the firm, hard flesh of the trained athlete.

He later learned that this man was a trained professional wrestler.

He learned this fact quickly. He did not get away fast enough and he found himself in a vice-like grip that only a trained wrestler could know how to apply.

It took all his strength and skill to tear himself away from this dangerous, damaging hold. He quickly recast his opinion of his adversary. What he thought was a big, beefy fat individual he found to be an extremely dangerous opponent.

He heard Nelson call out but he was too busy to pay attention. Keeping at a distance, he tried, unsuccessfully for a time, to confuse the other with long swift jabs.

HE received one or two blows in exchange that added to his respect for the big man. They did no special damage even though they rocked him slightly.

Finally he saw his opening. With a quick shift he planted his fist solidly into the other's plexus. The man did not go down as would the ordinary man from such a punch, but he dropped his guard.

With the speed of light, Donnie straightened up and let the man have it, a long swinging hook on the side of the neck.

The man dropped his guard completely and then Donnie risked a broken hand by landing square on the other's jaw. The bruiser went down like a poled ox.

Donnie turned to his friend, who had stood in the corner with a sardonic smile, watching the conflict. Nelson did not say anything but there was a dancing light in his eyes with which Donnie was familiar.

Donnie staggered to his chair, and dropped into it. He blew on his bruised knuckles and was about to reach for his drink, when the man he had knocked out stirred.

(Continued on page 116)

JACK "PUTS ONE OVER" ON HIS BOY FRIEND!



BILL: Say, Jack, look at that he-man's physique that Bob has! He makes us look like a couple of scarecrows!
JACK: I wonder how he did it? Six months ago he was just my size. He sure has made a hit with Helen.



HELEN: Hello, Skippy! How are you? Did you see Bob since he took the George Jowett course?
JACK: Oh! So that's how he did it!



JACK: Yes, Bill, I took Helen's tip and sent for Jowett's course, two weeks ago. Look what it has done for me already!
BILL: Well you have to show me!



(Two Months Later)
HELEN: Why Jack! I wouldn't know you. You certainly are a new man!
JACK: Don't forget our date tonight



BILL: Gosh, Jack, you don't mean to tell me George Jowett did this for you?
JACK: Yes, sir! He added three inches to my chest and two inches to my biceps!



BILL: Well, here goes the coupon. What George Jowett can do for others be certainly can do for me!

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The big beefy man sat up and stared with glazed eyes at the young American. He rose. Standing there swaying and reeling, he brushed his hand across his eyes, to clear them of the haze, then he made a rush toward Donnie.

Donnie was just in time to slip sideways out of his chair to prevent being caught at a disadvantage. He knew that the man was doubly dangerous now; he was like a wounded animal of the jungle. That this mere stripling of a Yankee should upset him, the pride of Limehouse, was a hurt to vanity that only severe punishment would wipe out.

Donnie saw that the other had just enough boxing skill to guard his vulnerable jaw. Donnie had realized the futility of trying to stop the other by body blows. Donnie was not in condition now to penetrate with his punches, the iron muscles that lined the other's stomach.

Disregarding Donnie's long range jabs, the Englishman made a determined effort to get Donnie within reach of his mighty arms. Donnie saw this; he knew that once clasped in those gorilla-like arms it would be fnis for him.

For the first time in the fight and perhaps for the first time in his life, he felt real apprehension. It did not occur to him for a moment to look for help from his old comrade in arms. Nelson was an unknown quantity to him and he did not know what he would do.

The narrow confines of the room, with its tables and chairs did not permit the footwork of which Donnie was capable, even in his present untrained condition.

A SMASHING staggering blow from the huge ham-like fist caught Donnie high up on the temple and sent him spinning into a corner. His adversary followed him up and

Donnie was now in the bear-like embrace of the other.

Donnie let himself go limp, in the hope that his adversary would relax his hold, but the wrestler was not to be caught that way. His hold merely tightened and Donnie knew himself to be in a tough spot. Slowly the other's grip was shifting.

Donnie knew that the old wrestler was seeking a damaging, crippling hold with which he would leave the young American writhing helpless on the floor.

DONNIE felt himself tiring without being conscious of a lessening of vigor on the part of the beefy man. Both stood there straining and panting. Donnie put forth one last desperate effort and the fates were kind to him.

In the lunge which sent them both out of the corner, his adversary's leg caught on a chair and he stumbled backward with Donnie on top.

There was a sickening crunch as the big man's head struck the stone corner of the wide open fire-place. Donnie heard a groan and the vice-like grasp which was squeezing his breath from his body was released.

He stood up panting, a wild, gory spectacle. He crouched, panting, ready for action if the other moved. But the fight was over. A broadening scarlet stain spread over the bare floor from the big man's head.

The soft drawl of the cultured Englishman, which must not be confused with the speech of the Cockney, brought Donnie to himself. His friend was standing there with a glint of amusement and admiration in his eyes.

"A bally good fight; well done. A swell scrap as you Yankees would say, but what now?"

"What—" Donnie stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"Yes," the other nodded. His eyes



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were once more hard, bleak, with the joy of life washed from them.

Nelson continued in a weary voice:

TO return to the thing we were discussing, when Tad there interrupted. Even were your powers of persuasion sufficient to make me give up the life I've chosen for myself, I couldn't give it up if I wanted to. In the first place, I like the life I've chosen.

"But what is more important, he," jerking his head in the direction of the prone figure, "and several hundred like him would object to my giving this up. You put up a fine fight, but this is only against one man. What could you and I do against a gang, the most dangerous gang in England?"

Just then a fact that had been disturbing Donnie, became crystallized in his mind. He gave it voice:

"Say, how comes that with all this racket in here, no one came in here to see what was going on?"

Nelson waved a thin aristocratic hand negligently:

"They don't bother me in here. No one comes in here unless he—or she is called. Tad, there, is one of the trusted lieutenants and hearing what you had to say, he felt called on to—"

At this moment there was an interruption to contradict what he was saying. The screen was edged aside and gave entrance to a young woman who stood on the threshold with hands on hips surveying the scene with faintly curling lips. Her skin was in vivid contrast to her jet-black hair. Only her brightly rouged lips and heavily shaded deep black eyes relieved the startling whiteness of her skin.

She looked slowly at the figure on the floor, then at Donnie Corbett and last at Eugene Nelson. She was an arresting figure as she stood there.

Then she spoke, in a slow, supercilious drawl. Donnie was at once conscious that she spoke with an American accent. While he was uncertain of her nationality he was certain that she had learned her English on the western side of the Atlantic.

"So an old buddy comes along and preaches that this ain't the life for a decent citizen like Gene Nelson? And this mamma's boy hero tells how he's goin' to get his old buddy out of it. An' he's a reg'lar honest to Gawd hero too. He knocks out Tad there an'—"

She dropped her air of lightness and turned flaming eyes on the young Englishman.

"You got a lot of us in this thing. Think we're goin' to stand seein' you run out and leavin' us flat? You're mistaken if you think we are. Speakin' for myself, I ain't goin' to take it layin' down if you quit us."

Then she continued in a quieter tone.

"The gang meets tomorrow night as you know. If you want to quit, you can put it up to them then—if you've got the nerve. And your boy friend here," she turned a sneering face toward Donnie, "can come along with you to the meeting if he likes and explain to the gang that it is your duty as a good Englishman to leave us and lead a decent life."

WITH another scornful glance that took in everything in the room she turned with a cat-like movement and left the room.

Nelson looked grim.

"See, Donnie? You've heard from two of 'em, and they're not the vorst. Would you like to hear from the gang, from the executive members of the gang?"

"You mean the meeting she spoke of?"

"Yes."

(Continued on page 120)

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"Betcher life I would."
"Have you got the nerve, Donnie?"
Donnie looked at him without answering. The other spoke hastily.
"Yes, I know you've got the nerve."
He paused in indecision. Then he looked up. Once more his eyes were bleak, grim.
"All right, our meeting is tomorrow night. Come here if you wish."
Donnie asked:
"What was the little scrap outside?"
"That little rat was what you Americans call a stool-pigeon. He—"
"Oh, I understand. And Gene Nelson, the eagle of the air, the Ace, attacks a little rat like that who is nearly dead and can't help himself—"
Once more the slow red suffused the features of the Englishman. Donnie stopped. He stood up abruptly.
"Be seen' you tomorrow night."
Donnie rose early the following morning and spent a very busy day. He began to fear toward nightfall that he would not get what he was seeking, but late in the afternoon he found it. He also visited the American consulate.

At that place they tried to dissuade him from what he proposed to do, without success.

(Continued on page 122)

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"If I am not back at my hotel in
(Continued on page 124)

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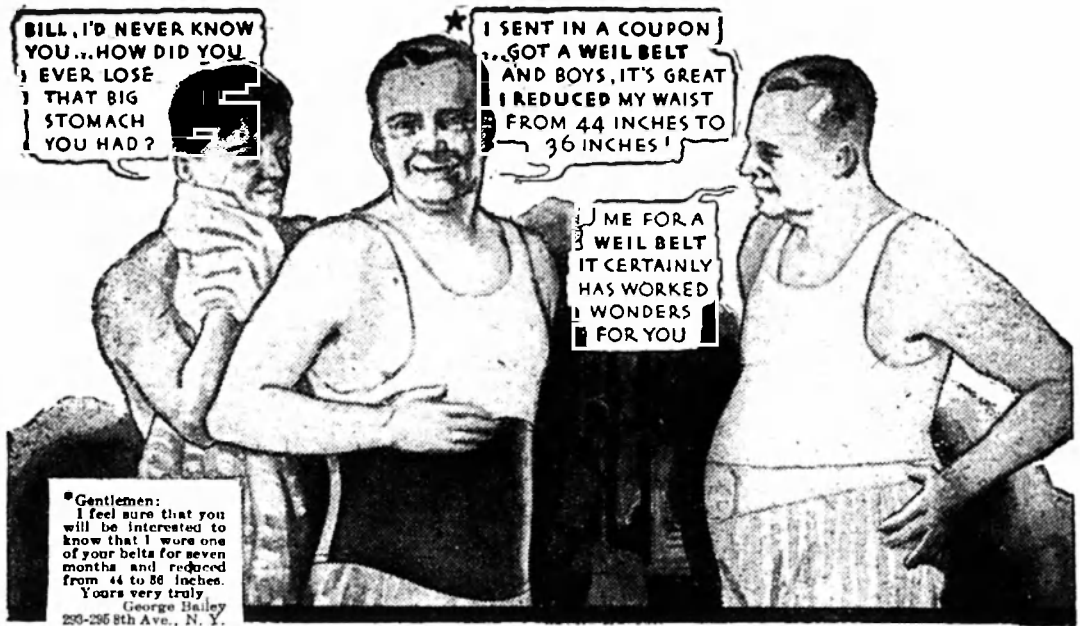
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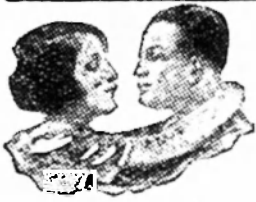
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Nelson was out of the door and did not hear the rest of this sentence.

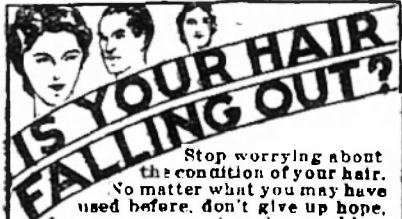
Twenty minutes later, after the tensest, most dramatic twenty minutes in his career, Donnie backed warily out of the door. Two blocks from the "Rabbit" a smaller shadow separated itself from the larger shadow of the building and advanced toward Donnie.

"You damn fool!" Both men said this simultaneously. They gripped hands and a friendship sealed in blood on Flanders field thirteen years before was re-cemented.

"What now?" asked Nelson.

"Now? We'll now look up that nice sister of yours and in a short time you'll both be darn good American citizens. I've attended to all the legal formalities about passports and so forth."

Once more the hand of the Englishman clasped that of Donnie, with a painful grip. Once more Nelson uttered fervently: "You damn fool!"



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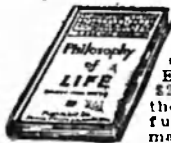
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