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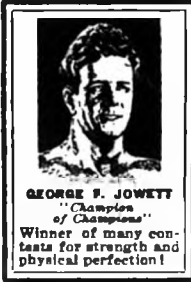
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Vol. XI, No. 2

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

October, 1934

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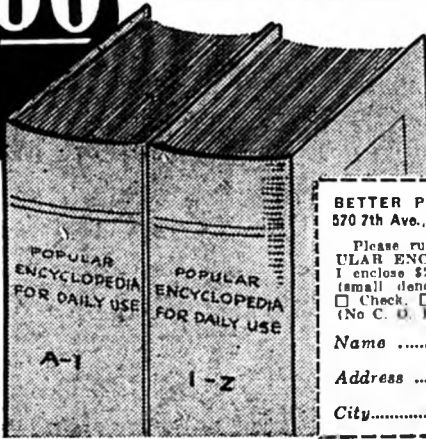
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*Matson snapped the weapon from the murderous hand*





*She struggled against the knife-wielder as his blade swept backward*

# Drums of Ebony

*Carter Matson, Daring American, Braves the Terrors of Haitian Voodoo in this Breath-Taking Novel of Mysterious Zombie Rites and Savage Warfare*

*A Complete Book-Length Novel*

By **ARTHUR J. BURKS**

*Author of "The Fighting Leatherneck," "Bare Fists," etc.*

## CHAPTER I

### *The Vanished Ones*

**N**EARING the crest of the hill toward Limbè, Carter Matson turned and looked back at Cap Haitien. Knowing this black land as he did, he wondered

whether he would ever return to his room in the Hotel Sturenberg. There had been queer things at the hotel, things one couldn't give a name to, things which gave Matson pause for thought—again because he knew this land and its people so well.

He had served ten years at Ouna-



Carter Matson

minthe with the Gendarmerie Du Haiti. There wasn't a foot of this country, from Cap Haitien to Jacmel and Petit Goave, that he didn't know. He even knew what few white men knew—the dim trails of the Baiae Terrible. And he was back here on a queer, a fearful mission.

It had to do with disappearing young people. They had vanished from the streets of a dozen Atlantic Coast cities. They had vanished almost without trace.

Department of Justice agents had advanced the theory that they had somehow been spirited out of the country. There were whispers of queer black craft in little known inlets, of boats which ran without lights, which touched the shores lightly for the briefest of stays—and then were gone again, out to sea, into the black night.

And the Government had given the job of running the thing down to Carter Matson, because of his knowledge of Latin-America. He had poked around in Venezuela, in Brazil, in Colombia, without getting a trace of them.

He had, at first, thought of the night clubs of Latin-America, but had finally abandoned that idea. Something even more terrible had happened to the vanishers. And almost half of the vanished ones had been young men, which did away with the obvious theory.

Matson's heart had constricted with nameless terror, there in the hotel, when, traversing the dimly lighted hallways, he had found the black bellboys whispering among themselves. They always broke up their groups when he approached, and whispered, careful that he should not hear, the name by which the natives of Baiae Terrible had known Carter Matson—*Loup-garou*.

The natives had good cause to remember that name. It was one to make them afraid, and the native boys were afraid. And native boys afraid were wont to make queer contacts with their friends of the hills and the jungles.

Matson usually worked alone, not trusting the good judgment of others. He believed himself amply able to handle any situation where the natives were concerned.

**T**HERE on the edge of the mountains which the great Christophe had made famous, all the five years Matson had spent away from Haiti seemed to drop from him, and he was once more the implacable caco hunter, the avenger of wrongs, the Nemesis of the followers of the Great Green Serpent. On their part, he knew, they would destroy him without trace, if they could. Their lives depended on it.

He hitched his automatics in his belt under his coat, bringing their ugly butts under his hands. His eyes were alight with determination. For up here he could hear what he had only sensed back at the hotel—the barbaric wailing of drums.

They seemed to come from every-

where, from alow and aloft, from all sides, even out of the ground. No white man had ever learned the meaning of the drums. He knew that here and now, had he had a companion, that companion would not have heard the drums.

They were muted as though masked by distance and many thick walls. One had to know about them to hear them. They were an emanation, beating like tiny wings against the eardrums, against the very soul of who-soever listened.

He knew that, even as he listened, scores and hundreds of black faces were being lifted to the night, broad nostrils were quivering, as *cacos* throughout the Baiae Terrible harkened to the music of the drums and prepared to obey their mandate. Queer things were done with the drums. The *zombies* labored by the beating of the drums, as though the drums did service for their dead hearts.

Matson didn't disbelieve in the *zombies*—he had seen them laboring in the moonlight on pineapple plantations. He knew that there were many queer things, inexplicable things, in the very heart of Black Haiti. He stretched his six feet of wiry bone and muscle, thankful that he had kept in condition, knowing that a man not in condition hadn't a chance in this hot land, even at night. His whole body was drenched with perspiration.

HE flirted the sweat away with an impatient hand, and set his tanned face to the climb. The lights of Cap Haitien faded out behind him, like fireflies doused with darkness. The thrumming against his eardrums came louder and louder.

He was now able to trace the sound. Probably not another white man in Haiti would have been able to tell whence came the measured beat. But now Matson knew. He



*Dr. Despard*

softly whispered a name to himself. "The citadel!"

He referred to the stronghold of Christophe, which the all-powerful black ruler of Haiti, had erected to hold back the armies of Napoleon. Today it stood, silent and empty, the nesting place of countless bats, to awe the western world which had the temerity to visit the place—a pile of mighty rocks which engineers of today could not have placed as Christophe had placed them.

Matson knew that fortress as he knew the palm of his hand. He entered it from a direction whence none would expect an intruder. He went up over the face of the cliff over which, according to one Christophe legend, the black commander had once marched an entire company of soldiers to prove to Boyer, a visiting "emperor" from Port-au-Prince, that his discipline was ironbound.

Matson went up quickly, hand over hand, risking death on the climb, and entered the citadel.

Out of the citadel came the throbbing, venomous, savage, nerve-crawling beat of the drums. Matson knew





*Mamaloï*

that those drums were made of wood—except for their heads, which were of the skin of human beings, the black skin of Haitians who had offended the *papaloï* or *mamaloï*, the high priest or priestess of voodoo.

The throbbing of the drums meant that the voodoo devotees were preparing, calling in other followers, to participate in some ghastly ceremony in the heart of Baiae Terrible.

Matson moved toward a rectangle of light, taking care that the way behind him was clear, so that he could retreat if need be; so that he wouldn't be surprised from behind. Rounding a turn in a stone-ramparted hallway whose lofty roof was invisible in the gloom above, Matson gazed upon a sight which even he had never seen before.

Fully a hundred blacks were cavorting to the beating of the drums. They were dressed in strange garments, in tattered rags, in faded blue denim, in flour sacks cut into baggy trousers, in every conceivable kind of outlandish dress. But their heads were invisible—because each wore, where a head should have been, the

head of a crocodile from Etang Sumatre. The odor of the heads was noisome. The great jaws opened and closed as the dancers pranced. From the mouths came weird chanting, once heard, never forgotten of men.

The dancers swayed, went through the strangest sort of antics. They flashed past the drums, kicking up the guano with their bare feet which were broad and splayed. Behind the drums other men with crocodile heads kneaded the black heads of the drums.

Through their crocodile masks Matson could see the red glowing of their eyes. But that was an illusion, he knew. The red glowing was the glowing light of strange red stones out of Baiae Terrible, which the blacks had set into the eyeholes of the Masks of Set. Actually they looked out at the ceremony through the gaping jaws of the crocodile masks.

Matson considered. The chanting of the blacks rose to a shrill crescendo. "*AI, ai! AI, ai! AI, ai!*"

It was a rising and falling of sound that never varied, that, in time, drove even the black listeners mad. As they danced bottles of white clarine passed from black hand to black hand. The leader of the dancers was a huge man, dressed in the skin of a bull, wearing the horned head, while the tail dragged in the guano.

**M**ATSON knew that he watched the crazy wild antics of the *papaloï* of Limbé, second in power only to the *papaloï* of Baiae Terrible, who was head of all the *papaloï*, and so of the whole cult of voodoo in this land which almost danced to its drums on the doorstep of New York City.

What did the ceremony mean? Did it have anything to do with the disappearances which so concerned the United States? Matson's job was to find out. He could see only one woman—the haglike *mamaloï*, who danced beside her master.

And it was the *mamaloï* who paused

in the midst of the dance to cry a warning in the *patois* of Haiti, that strange dialect which is neither French nor the language which these people's forebears had brought to Haiti from the Congo. Their *patois* was a queer mixture of French and the Congo dialects.

"Word has come to us," said the *mamaloï*, "that the *Loup-garou* has returned to our land. The slayer is back among us. We do not know why he comes. But the tale is brought to us from his hotel of strange papers, bearing pictures of people with white skins—"

The *papaloï* hissed at her. She subsided. One could never tell when alien ears might be listening, and the priest and priestess did not trust their apelike followers to a very great extent.

"We must move swiftly," said the hag. "We must go to the meeting place without pause, to do there that which is bidden of the Great Green Serpent. If *Loup-garou* is here to prevent, we must hurry. It is enough that the message has gone forth. We must act before the *Loup-garou* can ferret out our secrets. And harken, children of the Great Green Serpent! If this man leaves the lights of Cap Haitien he must not return to them alive! If he does, we shall die!"

THE dancers had fallen silent, had become motionless, to hear the sacred words of their high priestess. Only the black drums continued, beating a low accompaniment to her words. Now she paused, sniffing the air. Matson tensed, suspecting what was coming. A slight breeze had come from his back, bearing down toward the dancers.

"He is here!" the priestess shrieked suddenly. "My nostrils bring the odor of white man! He is behind us in the solemn halls of our emperor's citadel! Scatter and bring the man to us alive!"



Sergeant Herriman

Carter Matson whirled and ran. He hadn't a chance against so many black people, though he knew that in the end he would outwit them all. He had nothing but the deepest contempt for the Haitian—"that animal nearest resembling man."

And he didn't mind that they knew he was back in Haiti.

He knew the potency of his name, had carefully fostered it during his years in the ebon island. Now he ran swiftly, shucking off his white duck coat as he ran, a plan of escape already mapped out.

It should be simple to fool these people.

At the lip of the almost sheer precipice over which legend stated that Christophe had ordered his obedient troops, Carter Matson whirled. He knew that the Haitians would not have firearms. This close to Cap Haitien the sound of them would bring both the marines and the *gendarmes* on the run.

Matson wasn't yet ready for that himself, and he had no intention of firing on the Haitians. If the Haitians were forced into a corner they might

kill their prisoners—providing they had the prisoners whom Matson sought.

## CHAPTER II

### *Massing of Forces*



MATSON looked down the face of the cliff. Ten feet below a tree stuck out from the walls. He had noted it on the way up. It had provided him with a stepping stone to the top. It would have supported the weight of a Mack truck. Matson whirled on his pursuers as the crocodile-headed folk came pouring out onto the plateau. Then he flung his arms high as though in despair, turned when sure that all eyes had marked him, and plunged straight over the cliff.

For one sickening moment he allowed himself to think of the ghastly consequences of a slip of hand or foot. He would be dashed to pieces on the rocks below, so far down they were invisible.

As he fell the wind was against him like a wall. His hands clawed for the limb of the tree, caught, held.

Quickly he swung down under the tree, drew himself onto a limb, so that the boll of the tree masked what he did, and calmly hurled his coat down the face of the cliff. Balled up, it fell almost as swiftly as a body would have fallen. The difference in speed would not be noticed.

The black men, their crocodile heads horrible in the moonlight which crept over the plateau, reached the lip of the precipice just as the bundle struck the rocks below and bounced down the shale. Matson had grabbed the limbs near him, trying to still their weaving, so that none would guess he had dropped into

the tree. Nobody appeared to have noticed. The natives were too steeped in the fiery hell of raw clarine.

The men of the crocodile heads, egged on by the high priestess, began to hurl boulders down upon the white bundle which showed up so plainly on the rocks below. They had all seen him plunge over the rim. To their savage minds the white bundle was the man who had plunged to his death to escape them.

"Now," shrieked the priestess, "there is nothing to prevent what we must do! The *Loup-garou* has died to escape our clutches. Hurl the rocks faster, lest he rise again. Make sure that your aim is true. Smash his body to a pulp on the sacred stones which knew the broken flesh of our ancestors."

THERE was a horrible ritual to it. The boulders crashed down against other boulders, struck with ringing sound, and then bounced on down the face of the shale to crash among the trees which touched the base of the talus slope. Many of them struck the white bundle of Matson's coat—and he shuddered a little, visualizing what would have happened to his body had he fallen to the rocks.

Of course he would have been dead, but even a dead body was not immune to horror. There, in that white coat, but for the gift of strength and surety of muscles, lay Carter Matson himself. His eyes narrowed as he looked up at the dancing Masks of Set on the rim, weird in profile against the moon.

"Those white people are in the hands of the voodoo priests!" said Matson to himself. "And they'll hold them, too."

Only Matson, and the blacks themselves, knew the true significance of it all if, as Matson was sure now, the vanishers had finally reached the grim fastnesses of Baiae Terrible. He thought, as he sat there, waiting for





*His hand  
leaped to the  
man's throat*

the rock-throwing blacks to sate their bloodlust, of the families whence the missing ones had come.

The young men had been, almost without fail, the sons of military families, whose heads for generations had served in the Army, Navy or Marine Corps. The women had come from families who had always been of the aristocracy, highly educated, carefully nurtured. More than Haitian intelligence had manipulated the disappearances.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, the priestess called a halt.

"Enough, O followers of the Great Green Serpent!" she yelled. "We travel now at top speed for Plais-

ance, where we shall find our own contribution to the ceremony to be held in—"

But she didn't say where. Again she was hissed to silence by the high priest. The high priest, for all his claims to supernatural powers, feared even the dead man at the base of the cliff. For, he must have reasoned, if the *Loup-garou* could creep up on the followers of voodoo, and listen to their secrets, who else might not do so?

But Matson didn't need to hear where the ceremony was to be held. He knew his Haiti.

They were heading for Plaisance, on the road to Saint Marc and Port-

au-Prince. Grimly Matson resolved to head them off and release a captive he was sure was held somewhere in the jungles near Plaisance. That there was a captive, indicated that he still had time—that the captive had not been murdered.

Fifteen men and women had disappeared. They were probably secreted in as many different places in the jungles bordering on Baiae Terrible. Obviously, one man could not check on so many. Matson's lips were set in a firm straight line as he came to a decision.

The crocodile heads vanished from the rim. Half an hour later the sound of the drums died away in the jungle to the southwestward. Matson hurriedly went down the face of the cliff and picked up his coat. It was a mass of holes; the boulders had fallen with amazing accuracy.

He went on down the shale swiftly, reached the jungles, dropped on down the mountainside.

**T**WO hours later he was closeted with the commanding officer of marines in Cap Haitien, a colonel who commanded all the northern sector of Haiti. Colonel Blythe looked at him strangely, listening to what Matson saw fit to tell of his story.

"Nonsense!" blurted the colonel. "I've been commanding here for six months, and I never heard of such a silly thing. If that many white strangers had come into Baiae Terrible, I couldn't help knowing about it."

"Pardon me," said Matson tensely. "I have spent ten years on this island, and while I wouldn't presume to contradict a colonel of marines, I state unequivocally that it is possible for fifteen white people to enter Haiti and be lost without trace."

"But what do the Haitians know of kidnaping? You've been reading too many American newspapers."

Matson leaned forward, staring

into the eyes of the colonel. He licked his dry lips with a dry tongue.

"Pardon again, sir," he said softly. "I am not talking of kidnaping. I know the Haitians would not even know the meaning of the term. When a man or woman is kidnaped, he or she is taken by force and held for ransom.

"These fifteen people have been gone for three weeks, on the average, and their families, in not one instance, have received demands for ransom. Yet the combined wealth of the families would pay Haiti's public debt three times over. No, I'm not talking of kidnaping, Colonel, but of something infinitely more ghastly and horrible."

**T**HE colonel's face was working strangely. Beads of sweat bedewed his cheeks and his upper lip. He leaned forward in his turn.

"You mean," he said, "that all fifteen people, men and women, not only were not kidnaped, but that they came into Haiti, by some means yet to be determined, of their own free will?"

Matson shook his head.

"I mean nothing of the sort, sir," he said, "though investigation might later seem to prove that they did so arrive in Haiti. But let me tell you something else: if, by some trick of legerdemain which even Haitian priests and priestesses of voodoo do not possess, every last one of the fifteen vanished ones could be transported back to wherever he was first cognizant of the 'call', he would remember nothing of what had happened since he first heeded the call. Not only that, but he would continue on with whatever he happened to be doing at the time—and it would take hours for even his best friends to convince him that he had actually lost three weeks out of his life.

"In other words, the fifteen came into Haiti, to die here, for a reason

which, when we have ferreted it out, will shock the world. But it will shock the world even more if we fail!"

"It's fantastic, absurd," said the colonel, but his voice now lacked conviction, even to himself. "I've heard of you down here. All the natives tell stories about you. I understand you even believe in the silly superstition of the *zombies*."

"I would be a fool," said Matson simply, "to say that I didn't believe. The weird and impossible have a strange way of coming to pass in Haiti. I also believe in the Great Green Serpent!"

"What's that? The Great Green Serpent is only a symbol."

"No, Colonel," said Matson, even more softly, "the Serpent isn't a mere symbol. You can't appeal to the primitive mind of a Haitian with symbols. The Great Green Serpent is very real, Colonel. I know, sir, for I have seen that, too."

The colonel laughed shakily, without mirth.

"Next thing I know you'll be telling me that it is thirty feet long, jade green, and about as big around as a man."

**M**ATSON'S face was grim as he again interrupted.

"I say it is bigger even than that, sir. But if I continue to tell you of things which only the initiate of Haiti know for certainty, you will have me confined as insane—and fifteen men and women will die horrible deaths, which will be none the less horrible in that not one of them will know that he is to die. Will you help me, sir?"

Colonel Blythe flinched the clammy sweat from his forehead. His hand was trembling.

"I don't believe any of it, Matson," he said, "but I'm afraid to refuse you. What shall I do?"

"Pick out ten of your men who

have served the longest in Haiti, who have gone into the jungle many times against the *cacos*, and send them, *unarmed*, into the jungles toward Baïac Terrible."

"Unarmed? They will be ruthlessly slaughtered."

"They will travel at night, taking advantage of all cover."

"But what will they do?" asked the colonel in exasperation.

"Wait for word from me, sir—and follow the sound of the drums. They will dress and make up as much like Haitians as is humanly possible, and those you send must know the *patois*."

**C**OLONEL BLYTHE rose and the two men left the office together. As they walked along the street a big, middle-aged man approached the marine officer.

"Hello, Colonel," he said, pausing for a moment. "I'm all set and ready to sail."

"You're fortunate," Colonel Blythe smiled at the big man. "Dr. Despard, this is Carter Matson."

"Oh, yes." Despard looked intently at Matson. "The man the natives call *Loup-garou*."

"The doctor is very lucky, Matson," said the colonel. "He's leaving for the States tomorrow."

"And I've still plenty to do," Dr. Despard waved his hand casually as he continued hurriedly on his way along the street.

"Who is he?" asked Matson thoughtfully.

"A physician who has been quite successful in curing the ills of the natives," answered Colonel Blythe. "He was quite interested in Black Magic for a time, I believe. Told me just a few days ago that he needed a vacation and was going to New York."

"He's fortunate," said Matson. "Far more so than those people who have disappeared." He frowned. "Remem-

ber—those marines must be unarmed and disguised.”

“They will be,” Colonel Blythe assured him.

### CHAPTER III

#### *Juju Call*



A GREAT inkling of what it all might mean came to Carter Matson as he found his way through the jungle into the foothills of the Baiae Terrible. There, he knew, he would die a ghastly

death by torture if he were captured. Or, worse still, he would go the way the fifteen vanished ones were to go if he failed in the strangest mission ever undertaken by man.

The black drums had been going without let-up. The sound of their playing was strange, muted, as though it came from a vast distance. But he knew that their muted sound might only mean that the drums were in caves deep underground, or in deep valleys hidden in folds of the hills. They never seemed to cease.

Even before the ten marines of his selection had left Cap Haitien, Matson knew that all the white inhabitants of the Cape were wild with a nameless fear. Already they were looking askance at their black servants, suspecting them—and with good cause, Matson knew—of consorting during the hours of darkness with their brethren of the jungles.

Deep in those same jungles, Matson knew, was the spot whence emanated “the call.” If there were some way of reaching that spot, of doing something to see that the call went forth no more, he would spare the lives of other men and women whom the brain behind this strange movement had marked for slaughter.

Matson knew very well, now, that

no Haitian mind had conceived this thing whose potential ramifications would shock the world when they were made public.

Matson’s face was a mask of agony as he hurried at top speed through the jungle, always following the sound of the drums. Colonel Blythe, at the last moment, had promised Matson that he would personally undertake a fast automobile trip to Port-au-Prince, there to see that a dozen other carefully selected marines would come into the jungle from the other direction in order to be on hand when he needed them.

That he would establish contact with them without trouble Matson knew very well—for all they were expected to do was to follow the drums, as Matson himself was doing.

He didn’t know then, though he already suspected, that on the success of his queer mission into Baiae Terrible rested the safety, and the sanity or madness of a continent, of the world itself!

THE drumbeats became louder. More insistent. Matson, to fill in the time until he should reach his destination, thought of all the queer tales he had heard of Haiti.

He thought of the statue of Des-salines, in the Champs de Mars in Port-au-Prince. When the uplifted sword of the statue—which was slowly settling westward—should point directly out into the Gulf of Gonaives, the blacks of Haiti would rise again. They would hurl the white people of their land into the sea, and again the gutters of Haiti’s cities would run red with blood.

Matson thought of the legend of the “white Haitian,” that mythical being who, born of black parents, should himself be white, and whose coming would mark a new leadership for the blacks. He would lead them to freedom and world domination!

And he thought, as he had often

thought, of the *zombies*, those resurrected bodies of the dead which were somehow miraculously endowed with ghastly life and made to work in the fields in the moonlight. The *zombies* had no souls, working only at the will of their masters—the priests of voodoo. They could not be killed—they were already dead.

Suppose the *zombies* were real? Suppose all the newly dead in Haiti could be resurrected—and turned loose on the coast towns of the United States?

Reason tottered at the very thought of it.

**B**UT suppose again, just to find some reason for the vanished ones whose disappearances had already shocked and puzzled a nation, that all these stories had been blended into a completed whole, a story that a million and a half natives would believe? Suppose that the *zombies* became black angels of destruction; that by some means the statue of Dessalines should be pushed forward until the point of the dead dictator's sword pointed out into Gonaives?

In either event the Haitians would rise to a man, to a woman, and die with fanatical fervor to make the stories come true! And Haitians were hard to kill, even when not filled with clarine and voodooism. Matson had known them, many times, to race a hundred yards with bullets in their brains. As properly directed instruments of destruction, with terror of death removed, only their annihilation would save the lives of thousands.

It was all rather nebulous, but fifteen men and women *had* disappeared—and out of the jungle now was coming the ranting, the bleating of the drums. The sound was so primitive, bestial, horrible, that it made tiny ants with hot feet race along the spine of Carter Matson, the man who so thoroughly knew his Haiti.

Deeper and deeper into the jungle he went.

He knew that he was coming closer and closer to some strange denouement. When he realized, toward the last, exactly whither his steps were taking him, his very soul crawled with horror.

Over here, in the foothills of the Baiae Terrible, the *caco* chiefs of the last two decades, together with the greatest of the dead *papaloi* and *mamaloi*, had been buried by their own people. Pierre Benoit and Charlemagne, Guillame San, Adan Tebo—all were buried in that cemetery which no white men, save only Carter Matson himself, had ever seen.

White men had slain all of those who reposed in that cemetery of the damned. And no grass was ever allowed to grow on their graves until, the people whispered among themselves, the dead had been avenged.

"Great God!" thought Carter Matson. "Suppose all those great black leaders could be resurrected and once more call their people to conflict? Or suppose the people could be convinced, regardless of the truth of the matter, that they had risen—and were shown their empty graves as proof!"

**M**ATSON almost sobbed at the thought, though he was a man without fear. His lips writhed in torment. He literally raced through the woods, determined to give his very life, and to slay and slay without mercy to prevent this ghastly thing from happening.

He had one disquieting thought as he traveled. The natives at the citadel had not investigated his body at the base of the cliff to make sure that the *Loup-garou* was really dead. He knew that they had not gone near the spot because they feared him.

But maybe they knew he still lived. Maybe they were doing nothing, not even shadowing him, secure in the



knowledge that he would follow their drums into a trap which would hold him helpless until primitive Black Haiti had been avenged on her white masters.

He shrugged the thought away. He would match wits for wits with the black men of Baiae Terrible.

A strange ululation now burst on his eardrums. It came from the southwest, and the direction caused a cold chill to race all through his body, for in that direction was the cemetery of the damned. The ululation, he knew, came from the drooling lips of another *papaloi*.

Matson knew that he was listening to the preliminary ceremonial chanting which sent forth the "call." The Haitians were sending out for fresh victims—sending their call across the waters to the United States.

He turned toward the new direction, and now both of his hands were filled, their palms sweating as they gripped with deathly intensity the butts of his automatics.

**H**ALF an hour later he reposed in the foliage of a tree directly above a clearing, and looked down on a weird ceremony. An altar stood before a fire around which men and women were squatting, swaying from right to left and back again to the endless throbbing of the black drums. The listeners, the devotees, knew nothing, saw nothing, save the *papaloi* who was chanting the words of the call.

The priest was a grotesque individual, his face hidden in the head of a great bull. The huge head swayed from side to side as he postured. His hands were uplifted to the heavens. Behind him, his shadow was weird and monstrous against the leafy walls of the jungles.

On the altar beside him were seven little figures. The altar was of black basalt, ripped from the side of some stone outcropping in the heart of

Baiae Terrible. The seven little figures were no larger than a man's hand, and they had been very rudely carved into the shapes of men and women—four men and three women.

Matson knew, while an icy hand gripped his very heart, that somewhere on the Atlantic Coast, perhaps soundly sleeping at this moment, were human beings of whom those seven little figures were ghastly effigies.

**A**ND what was the *papaloi* intoning?

"Rise! Waken! Heed and obey! Rise! Waken! Heed and obey! Whatever you are doing when you sense this call out of the void, cease whatever you do and obey. Come hither swiftly! Remember nothing, think nothing, save the words of this command.

"Recognize no friends, be led aside from the way you are commanded to take by nothing. Travel on, oh champions of our people, until you have reached the place where the downtrodden are to congregate. Let neither wind nor storm nor water deter you from abject and absolute obedience."

Those squatting natives believed that, as the high priest spoke, four men and three women, in various parts of the United States, would waken from sleep, or pause, bewildered, if they walked upon the streets or sat in night clubs, and would follow a way they did not understand, because they could not help themselves.

There would be black boats in little known inlets, whose gangplanks would be out to receive them. They would go aboard, all unknowing, while no living hand was placed upon them. The black boats would turn out to sea, and land the "passengers" on Black Haiti, where they would follow the black drums and

the "call" to a fate far worse than death could ever be.

Matson knew that it was impossible for the chanting priest actually to cast any spell over people in the United States. He realized that this was being done by the *papaloi* solely for the benefit of the superstitious natives. Later, when they were confronted by actual white captives from the States, they would believe that their *papaloi* had really forced them to come to him.

For him actually to do that was impossible. He *must* have a confederate in the United States who knew beforehand, a long time beforehand perhaps, that at exactly this time the *papaloi* would exhort these images of the white people. That accomplice would make sure that the white people obeyed!

The accomplice in the States had hypnotized the victims in advance—of course, hypnotism was a simple fact to every physician worthy of the name—and given them post-hypnotic instructions to do something at exactly a certain time. That time would coincide with the time at which this *papaloi* chanted to his images.

Thus, when the white people came, they would seem to be coming at the *papaloi's* command. Actually they went, hypnotized, aboard the waiting Haitian boats, there to be stupefied by drugs until they reached Haiti.

**M**ATSON hesitated no longer. He thrust forward his righthand automatic. He didn't need to draw a bead. He was a crack pistol shot. His automatic, before the natives could even think to cease their swaying to and fro, and while the drums did not so much as skip a beat, spat seven bullets as fast as Matson could fire.

The seven figures on the altar jumped, and were broken into bits by the bullets. He knew that the smashing of the seven images actually meant nothing, but in the minds of

the natives he had broken the spell which had supposedly been cast over seven white people somewhere in the United States. That had been his purpose.

Then Matson fired once, deliberately, with his left hand. The *papaloi* staggered, dropped his arms and began a queer parade. He circled the fire twice; he fell to his knees, rose, circled the fire again. Then he dropped close to it, and remained motionless.

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Loup-garou*



**CARTER MATSON** knew that in the minds of the natives his bullets had saved seven lives, for he understood the use of *juju* among the primitives. He also knew that when the *papaloi* had dropped to remain motionless it meant the white man had forfeited his own life.

Scores of blacks must have seen the streaks of flame his automatics had flashed from the tree. They understood automatics from their brushes with the marines. Soon they would break their stunned silence and surround the tree, and Carter Matson would be torn limb from limb.

There was a stirring among the blacks. They surrounded the form of the priest on the ground. A moment and the spot where the *papaloi* lay was no longer visible.

Matson prepared to drop from the tree and battle for his life with the six bullets left in his one automatic that was still loaded. Then he decided he had better have both guns ready. Hurriedly he refilled his right-hand automatic clip. The sound of a clip withdrawn and a clip in-

serted went plainly out into the clearing for the drink-steeped natives to hear and perfectly understand.

They were moving. The charge would begin at once.

But it halted in its very inception, and even Matson's hackles rose at the new sound which broke over the clearing. It was the wailing, long drawn out cry of a hunting wolf! And there were no wolves in Haiti.

Matson knew, of course, the meaning of the name the natives had given him—*Loup-garou*. It meant werewolf. The werewolf was a mythical creature which changed from human to wolf at will, and went forth at night questing for the blood of victims.

In Haiti there were two kinds of *loup-garou*, wind and water. The natives saw them by day in the simplest things—the rushing of tiny waves across a pond, the stirring of dust in the smallest whirlwind. To speak of the *loup-garou* was to turn the Haitian gray with fear.

And now, the ululation of a hunting wolf had just broken over the clearing.

Matson sighed his relief, understanding.

THE marines who had been following the drums knew all about *loup-garous*. They knew what the Haitians called one Carter Matson, and they were helping him to fight the fanatical fervor of the natives with the only weapon the blacks really feared—superstition.

"Beware of the *Loup-garou*!"

Just that one shout, from the edge of the jungle in the strange *patois* of Haiti, so perfectly enunciated that even Matson had difficulty in believing that the cry issued from the throat of a white man.

The blacks were too befuddled by what they had been drinking—clarinet mixed with the blood of slaughtered

cattle—to realize what was being done to them.

Matson understood perfectly the power of the weapon thus suddenly placed in his hands. He blessed the cleverness of the marine who had barked like a wolf and had shouted the warning which kept the blacks pinned to their haunches in unholy fear. He knew he must play up, and decided that absolute boldness was the best course.

HE wanted to lift that bull's head, to look into the face of that high priest. Certain suspicions were forming in his mind regarding the *papaloi*.

He slipped off his shirt and re-fastened it over his head by a single button, that which held the collar in place. This left the arms swinging free, while the ends of the khaki collar—if one's imagination were inspired by thoughts of the *Loup-garou* and the blood-thickened clarinet—might conceivably remind the watchers of the ears of a wolf.

Then Matson dropped swiftly from the branch. He felt strangely unreal as he dropped to his hands and knees at the base of the tree.

This *juju* stuff was becoming so real that he almost felt like pinching himself to make sure he wasn't actually a werewolf, changing now into his traditional form. If he could come so close to fooling himself, why couldn't he fool the natives for the little respite of time he needed?

On all fours, with a queer, side-long gait, Carter Matson, his head covered by the shirt, whose arms were flapping free, raced straight into the clearing toward the fire.

He nosed about the altar, not daring to put out his hand to touch the remnants of the little figures. Three of them still held their faces intact, and Matson fixed them in his memory as though he had actually photographed them.

Here was proof enough, if somewhere in the States people could be found whose countenances resembled these faces, that greater intelligence than that of any Haitian was behind the strange disappearances.

Matson was suddenly startled as he discovered that the high priest no longer lay on the ground. He had been sure that his bullet had badly wounded the *papaloi*—and yet the man had disappeared!

Then Matson realized that the *papaloi* could have disappeared in the crowd when the rest of the Haitians surrounded him. There was no miracle about it. The high priest had merely been shamming as he lay on the ground.

Utter silence held sway. The black drums had ceased. The natives were motionless as he had last seen them. Even, it seemed, their very breathing had ceased. He could feel their fearful, red-rimmed eyes fixed on him. He loped, trying to ape the running of a wolf.

Suddenly Matson heard a warning call in Spanish. Too late! A hand reached out as he passed the nearest of the squatting natives. It grabbed the shirt which covered him, yanked on it. Matson was whirled back on his heels. But the shirt held.

**T**HE attacker sprang onto him, and Matson instantly knew how to conduct himself. He yelled for the marines to stay back until they were sure he wouldn't be able to free himself. Then he twisted in his clothing, and grasped the attacker.

His hands went to the man's throat, and as he brought savage pressure to bear, he emitted strange sounds from his throat. They were the sounds of a wolf tearing with glistening fangs at the throat of a victim! He made queer snapping sounds with his teeth, slobbering sounds of abysmal obscenity, as he sought to put across the deception that he was

actually a werewolf destroying his prey.

His enemy fought savagely, tried to cry out, but Matson held his throat in a grip of steel. It would never do for him to seem to be losing even for a second. That would prove him less than supernatural, and the blacks would come to the aid of their comrade in force. Then the marines would have to show themselves, unarmed as they were, to protect him.

So Matson fought savagely, with all the strength at his command.

**H**E clung with his left hand, ripped and tore at his enemy's face with his right. His fingernails became clogged with the skin of the attacker, and blood came forth to dye the face so close under his own.

The man's face was contorted. His eyes bulged. Then Matson made a horrible discovery.

It was one, however, that suited him perfectly, because it fitted in with his first suspicion. He redoubled his efforts. His mouth noises, calculated to fill the blacks with unholy fear, rose to grim heights of horror.

A wild scream of terror finally burst from the lips of one of the Haitians. It was the signal for the exodus. The natives rose in a body, racing for the jungles, followed by a concerted ululation of wolfish sounds which must have made them believe that all the werewolves they could possibly imagine were at their heels.

Matson finally withdrew his hands from his victim, staring into the twisted, dead face. He flung the clammy sweat from his own face as he removed the shirt and dropped it beside him.

The man he had killed was a white man. Matson had seen something in the man's eyes which had filled him with more horror than if the man had been a black high-priest—for he

had seen a look of insane determination to destroy that had made his flesh crawl.

The white man had covered his body with soot to pass as a native. But for Matson's stunt of dragging his fingernails over the man's face he would never have known the difference, because he had given the fellow no chance to speak.

The marines would arrive at any moment. If they saw, and carried the story back to Cap Haitien and Port-au-Prince, Matson knew that every white sojourner would regard every other white with terrible suspicion. Quickly he turned the dead man over onto his stomach.

Then Matson, sure that the nearest native must be miles from the place by now, rose and walked into the jungles whence the first vulpine ululation and the shouted warning had come.

**I**NSIDE the jungle he stopped, waiting. A black man materialized beside him.

"Hello, Skipper," said the black man softly.

"Herriman!" ejaculated Matson.

"The same, sir. We soldiered together at Hinche, ten years ago. How did I do?"

"Swell, Sergeant. But we've scarcely started. Have you got a man with you who can get through to take a message to Port-au-Prince, overland, straight through Baiae Terrible?"

"Yes, sir. Private Flannigan. He knows his blacks and can run all day and all night without stopping."

"Good. Have him go to the Commanding General of Marines and get a message out to the Associated Press in the United States, asking them to investigate whether, at exactly this time tonight, something queer happened to seven people—four men and three women—in the Atlantic states. When this has been checked, and they find out—as they

will—that seven people had a strange experience, perhaps heard 'voices', they are to investigate each one, ask each one a single question—"

And Matson outlined the question which was to be put to each one of the seven people.

Sergeant Herriman whistled.

"**S**O that's the answer," he said. "I wondered how they worked their hocus-pocus with white people. I know they can sway the blacks with it, here in Haiti, but—"

"Get Flannigan started," said Matson, interrupting impatiently. "Have him back here as soon as possible with the answer. We can head off further disappearances, but we must do something about the people I am sure are already prisoners in Baiae Terrible. They are actually within the circle of power of the *papaloi* and *mamaloi*. It's too late for anybody — except ourselves — to help them."

"I get it, sir. How is Flannigan to get back? Where will he meet us?"

"Give him the same orders you had — to follow the drums. We'll be following them so closely, Herriman, that we'll probably hear them the rest of our lives!"

"Aye, aye, sir! We're on our way."

"Good! Let's see how your information and theories check with mine. Know where the drums are leading us tonight?"

"Yes, sir," said Herriman promptly. "To the cemetery where the big bugs among the *cacos* are buried. It sounds like *zombie* stuff."

"My idea exactly. If I don't see you among the *zombies*, Herriman, I'll see you somewhere in Baiae Terrible. Any news before we start?"

"Just a little, sir. Just before I left Cap Haitien behind you, sir, I got a rumor which said that the black garrison of gendarmes at Cerca-la-source had deserted and gone to the



hills in a body, taking all its firearms."

Matson stiffened.

"I expected that," he said grimly. "Herriman, unless we're mighty good, there'll be some good American lives lost here before the end."

"The marines get paid for dying, sir," said Herriman promptly. "It's better than letting those innocent fifteen get bumped off. *Adios!*"

## CHAPTER V

### *Haitian Moon*



HERRIMAN vanished into the jungle. Matson had not seen the nine men he knew to be working with Herriman. But he knew that they must be efficient, sure of themselves, else the old-timer wouldn't have brought them with him. Colonel Blythe was furnishing the fullest cooperation. Herriman didn't even need to be ordered around.

Two hours after the affair of the seven little images, Matson had the first proof of the thoroughness of Herriman and his leathernecks.

All those two hours, without even a pause for breath, Matson followed the sound of the drums, and always it led him straight toward the cemetery of the damned—where Charlemagne and Pierre Benoit were buried.

As Matson went on he had to be increasingly careful, for the Haitians were taking all sorts of precautions. As they sent forth their summonses, black men and women come from all directions to the place of the next step in the huge ceremony.

The woods were becoming increasingly packed with hurrying blacks. It was becoming almost impossibly difficult to go through the jungles without being seen.

The Haitians must work fast now. They knew that the *Loup-garou* had not died at the foot of the citadel; that he was bending every effort to prevent their ceremony. They would be depending on sheer numbers to thwart him.

How, the *papaloi* would reason, could even the *Loup-garou* penetrate the ever-thickening lines of devotees who raced through the jungle to the mandate of the drums? Matson would be seen and destroyed before he could get through.

Panting like a spent runner, Matson pushed on, zigzagging this way and that, evading discovery by inches at times. The Haitians were now posting fighting men—gendarmes from Cerca-la-source, he knew—to waylay and destroy him, along the way he must follow.

Time after time he saw these soldiers, just in time, standing in the darkness under trees, their rifles held at port, waiting for his coming. To hide his white face, Matson smeared it with dirt from the trail, but he knew that his own odor was as well defined in the nostrils of the blacks as theirs in his. He knew that he escaped time after time by the sheerest luck.

HERRIMAN was depending on Matson's ingenuity to get him past these ever thickening outposts, for no sounds of struggle came back to Matson, and he found no gendarmes along the way that Herriman and his men had been forced to kill. Flannigan would slip through these people with ease, because he was a born scout. The other nine marines could be depended on to do likewise.

How much did the blacks know about Herriman and his men? Matson surmised that they knew everything, for the walls—even those of Colonel Blythe's bedroom—had ears in Haiti.

Matson pressed on. When he

panted now he could taste his own blood in his throat, as he struggled to make headway to the front. He must, simply must, be in on the next step in the series of ceremonies leading up to the ghastly denouement that he was sure he could foresee.

It was necessary that he see everything—and now the drums were insistent, bidding the devotees of the Great Green Serpent to their best speed.

Would Matson be in time to see voodoo at its most inspired heights? Or depths? He could foresee the meaning of the gathering of the blacks at the graves of their leaders.

Would the natives really believe that these men who had been dead—some of them as long as ten years—could be resurrected? *Zombies* were always the newly dead, but if Haitians could believe in them at all, they could believe that even the long dead might arise again.

Matson hurried on.

He stumbled, almost fell, and knew that Herriman and his men had begun the next phase of their queer mission exactly on time. If they hadn't, Matson would have been dead the next minute; for the thing over which he had stumbled was the body of a black man.

**H**AD Herriman started slaying the sentinels? The next moment Matson sighed with relief.

After all, the black people of the Haitian jungles were tools in the hands of the brains which had started all this. They were not too greatly to be blamed. One couldn't just strike them dead, merely because they believed in their fanatical leaders.

Herriman had taken this into consideration. The man over whom Matson had stumbled was not dead.

He was a gendarme. He had been, patently, struck down from behind and without warning. His legs and arms were pinioned to his side so

that all he could move was his head. He had been fastened by strips of bark torn from the side of the tree under which he had been standing guard.

There were two white strips of something across his black face. Matson knelt to look, whistled softly, and congratulated himself on the ingenuity of Herriman and his men.

A strip of white adhesive tape had been pasted over the mouth of the black man. Another strip had been pasted over his eyes.

**W**HEN, sometime later, this man was released, he would be able to tell nothing of what had happened to him. Wrought up, fired to fever pitch by the drums—as all the gendarmes must have been, to have deserted their white officers, to go to the hills with their *caco* brethren—the gendarme would believe that something supernatural had struck him down, silenced and blinded him.

But whatever he thought, he'd never be able to see the *Loup-garou* who now looked down at him appreciatively. Nor would he be able to yell warnings to the guards to his right and left.

Ruthlessly, efficiently, the marines under Herriman were clearing the way for the *Loup-garou*. They were moving toward the forbidden ground in a strange species of extended military order, striking down all guards along the way, rendering them useless. Unless one were released by chance, there was no possibility of the Haitians knowing what had happened.

No ordinary natives, running into the bound men with the white patches over their noses and mouths, would think of touching them. They would believe the darkness peopled by all sorts of horrors, and would run on to tell weird tales in the forbidden ground of what they had seen.

That Haitians could be inspired to

go out at night at all was a tribute to the persuasive powers of the *papaloi* and *mamaloi*—or whoever inspired the priests and priestesses themselves.

Colonel Blythe had selected his men well. Herriman hadn't known what was best to take with him, but, expecting trouble, he had decided that adhesive tape might come in handy. Matson chuckled at the use to which he was putting it.

On went Matson. The drums were louder, more insistent. Now he could hear the chanting. There were rustling sounds all through the jungles as natives hurried to rendezvous under the pale moon that now rose over the black jungles.

Time after time Matson stepped over supine black men whose faces were marked invariably by two white patches, whose legs and arms were bound to their sides. Once he encountered such a man, rolling from side to side, trying to free himself of his bonds. This one Matson tapped on the head with the muzzle of his automatic, then went on.

NO matter how fast he traveled, the marines under Herriman were ahead, clearing the way.

Even so, the going was difficult. Time after time Matson encountered men on the trail who had slipped in behind Herriman. Each time, if he could not avoid so doing, Matson struck swiftly with his automatic muzzle, leaving his victim in the trail.

He knew that now, if he were to turn back, the chance that he would be able to get back to Cap Haitien alive was one in several thousand. Natives must be all around him, stretching in all directions, as they hurried to rendezvous at the mandate of the black drums.

"*AI, ai! AI, ai! AI, Ai!*"

The chanting was increasing its tempo. The drums were throbbing

with a faster beat. The denouement couldn't be far off. The priests were whipping devotees to a frenzy, and their chanting and drumbeats were causing those late to the rendezvous to travel faster and faster.

So much hinged on the eternal vigilance of Herriman and his men. If even one of them was caught and slain, the whole countryside might take time to seek and slay the others. The marines *must* live, and avoid detection to a man, if Matson were to reach his objective.

AND the marines were coming through.

Matson estimated that he probably had about half a mile left to go, for he could see a glow of fire against the sky. He knew that when he topped the next shoulder of the hills he would be looking down into the proscribed valley where the great outlaws of Haiti were buried.

The weird horror of it no longer gripped him. He accepted what was to come as merely part of the grim menace of Haiti. Matson had become simply the hunter of men, the unraveler of weird outlandish mysteries, the man who risked his life to bring off his missions successfully.

Louder the drumbeats. Faster the chanting.

He reached that last crest. He knew he was through the guards—on whom the priests had pinned their faith that the *Loup-garou* would either be destroyed or delayed until it was too late for him to do anything—because for the last five minutes he hadn't encountered a single bound gendarme.

Where was Herriman and his men?

He scarcely bothered to ask himself that question. Hadn't they been on hand when he had needed them before? They would be ready again, he knew, when and if he should call for help.

He started down the hillside, seek-

ing a vantage point whence he could see what was transpiring.

At last he found a place in a tree, after much maneuvering, during which he risked detection a dozen times. He would surely have been spotted for an alien if all eyes and all primitive brains had not been fastened on the figures which held the center of the forest stage, this side of the fire at the cemetery's edge.

Matson looked out upon a hellish scene in the cemetery of the damned.

At the heads of the mounded graves were simple sticks of wood, cleft at the top—and in the cleft of each was fastened the hat of the departed. In most cases these were ordinary straw hats which looked as though savage teeth had bitten pieces out of the brims.

In the midst of the graves a *mama-loi*, more like a witch than any Matson had ever seen, was screaming at the heavens—and at the dead.

"Rise, Charlemagne! Rise, Pierre Benoit! Rise, Guillame San! Rise, Cerimarie Yac! Rise, Chal David!" she exhorted. "Your followers call upon you again to lead them out of bondage, and this time they will follow you to world domination!"

Matson, fascinated in spite of reason at the grim significance of the ceremony, stared at the dry-as-dust graves with bulging eyes.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Parade of the Zombies*



NOW all the jungle had fallen silent to listen to the exhortation of the *mama-loi*. Even the drums ceased their thrumming. Matson knew that all through Haiti the people who knew that the drums had ceased, would know the meaning of their stopping — and

would wait with bated breath for them to start again.

If they started again, if their meaning then were what this *mama-loi* intended, what could stop the fanatical fury of the blacks?

But of course that could never come to pass. The graves were old. The dead had been buried so long.

Even if they had not, Matson did not expect to see the dead rise out of the soil.

SILENCE, save for the exhortation of the witch before the fire. Even the fire seemed to stop crackling and roaring to listen to her words, to await their outcome.

"God Almighty!" the words burst from Matson's lips explosively. They came out aloud. Yet no living soul in all Haiti, not even Matson himself, heard them. The natives who were witnessing what happened here could hear nothing, see nothing, save that which the old woman wished them to hear and see.

Matson's breath seemed to catch in his throat. He tried to look away to the black jungle walls, but he couldn't pull his eyes away from the fantastic horror which was growing before them.

For the nearest of the graves, the nearest and apparently the oldest, was shifting, as though underneath it were something whose sleep was troubled!

No wonder Carter Matson had spoken the name of his Creator, either as an oath or a prayer. For his eyes could not betray him so outrageously.

The mound of that grave had actually moved, had shifted a little!

The silence which had held sway had been thunderous compared to the silence which now gripped the vast assemblage. Faces, black faces with red-rimmed eyes and pearl-white teeth, stretched back in all directions as far as the eye could see.

Not one person there, perhaps, at this moment, remembered the existence of a being known as the *Loup-garou*. Not a gendarme remembered loyalty to his officers. Not a woman thought of her husband or her children. Not a person thought of anything, save that the grave had moved, shifted.

Now the *mamaloï* herself had fallen silent. She merely stood there, as though impaled against the night, her hands uplifted to heaven—for the heaven of God and the angels, blasphemous and horrible as the idea must be to civilized folks, was the very backbone of voodooism.

Matson held his breath.

Another grave shifted. The dirt of its mound rustled audibly as it slid down.

A third grave shifted. A fourth. A fifth.

Still the tableau held. No sound at all could be heard, save only the rustling—awful, terrifying—of the graves themselves. Matson stared as one bereft of his senses. He couldn't believe it, yet he must believe the evidence of his own eyes.

So much would depend on identification. He didn't know which grave was which, but in life he had several times seen the great, almost mythical Charlemagne, the brutal, murderous Pierre Benoit—both of whom the Haitians had almost deified as patriots.

ALL the graves now were moving. Dirt slid down from their mounds in a rhythmic rustling. And then, horror of horrors, at the head of the first grave to move, under the stick with the straw hat which a man long dead had worn, appeared a dark black splotch!

The end of the grave spread aside, rolled away, and the black splotch rose higher—higher. It became the head and shoulders of a black man, whose torso was hidden by faded

blue denim. The head wore no hat.

The body rose higher. It rose without sound. The face had no expression on it. It was not a fleshless skull. It was a man, the face of a man in the prime of life.

The figure rose.

Other figures were rising out of other graves. Other figures were rising to a sitting position. Other figures now leaned forward, shaking away the dirt of the grave mounds, twisting long cramped legs under rising bodies, moving to sit on knees, then to rise full length.

THE eyes of all who had risen, as they stood erect, were turned on the *mamaloï*. And out of the mouth of the first, sepulchral, as though rusted from long disuse, came a cracked, ghastly voice.

"Here am I, *Mamaloï!* Who calls on Charlemagne to arise?"

The woman did not answer. The man who had spoken turned until the moonlight struck his face. A chill of horror raced along Matson's spine. For the man who had risen, the man whose face he had never forgotten, the man whose life had covered Haiti with a trail of blood, was the great black leader—Charlemagne!

Now another voice was speaking:

"Here am I, *Mamaloï!* Who calls on Pierre Benoit to arise?"

The man next to rise showed his face for a moment to Matson—and he was, Matson would almost have sworn it, Pierre Benoit. The last time Matson had seen him, the dead body of Pierre Benoit had been a tumbling black horror, dragged along on a rope behind a running horse, the rope fastened in a noose around his black neck.

Yet now he rose from the grave with never the mark or burn of the rope on him, nor wounds of bullets; with no mark of machete or knife or bayonet. And still there was silence, save for the croaking, horrible voices



of the dead who were rising, and saying to the *mamaloï*:

"Here am I, *Mamaloï!* Who calls upon Guillaume San, Adan Tebo, Cerimarie Yac, Chal David—to arise?"

After the risen had spoken they merely stood, while Matson studied them in utter, abysmal fascination. For as they stood there was no light of life in their faces, no light of knowledge in their eyes.

IT was as though each had come forth in answer to some hypnosis. They had no souls. They were creatures of the grave. They did not know that they lived, that they had risen and had asked the *mamaloï* a fateful series of questions.

They merely stood, swaying on their feet, black statues.

Then the *mamaloï* lowered her arms, turned on each of the resurrected in turn, spoke softly.

"Stand here, side by side."

They formed in single rank before the woman who commanded them. They moved with jerky, stiffened steps, as though long unused to walking. And their eyes never stopped staring at the high priestess of the cult to which, in life, they had been so fanatically loyal.

The priestess spoke again, and all the vast assemblage—even Matson himself—held its breath to listen.

"I know you, Charlemagne. And you, Pierre Benoit. And you, Adan Tebo, and all you others. I say to you all that you shall lead us again even unto death—for death cannot touch you!"

They nodded, a horrible chorus of Jerky nods.

"It is time to go," said the priestess in a natural tone of voice, far more effective than exhortation or wild exclaiming. "Our people will follow—into Baiae Terrible."

Then the priestess added the supreme, the grisly touch. She waved

her hand, and each of the dead, as though he did the most natural thing imaginable, raised a black hand to the cleft stick which had been the marker on his grave, took down the faded, weatherbeaten straw hat and set it firmly on his head. And every hat seemed to fit.

In the midst of the eerie silence, while the flame began crackling again, and the sound of the hats being torn down died away toward the jungle, the *mamaloï* turned her evil face, now somehow calm and sure, toward the deeper, blacker fastnesses of Baiae Terrible, and started into the hills.

Behind her stalked, without command, the black automatons she had brought back from the dead.

Matson dropped out of the tree. His hand whipped to his automatic. But he remembered in time. It did not need the sudden grip of a hand on his wrist to make him remember. He whirled to face Herriman.

"No," said Matson, panting. "I thought in time. I wouldn't dare shoot one of those resurrected ones. They would then destroy their white prisoners for a certainty. I know, we've got to let the *zombies* show us the way to where they are held."

"God!" Herriman was saying, over and over again. "Who ever thought of such a thing? I'll never be able to sleep again. I'll rise out of my dreams, thinking I'm dead, being called back to life by that *mamaloï*."

THE whole assemblage was following the *mamaloï* and the hell's crew she had called forth. Not one face turned toward Matson and Herriman.

"They don't even know we're here," said Matson.

"No, though half of 'em have stumbled over us. Skipper, you could turn a machine-gun on that crowd, mow them down like ripe wheat, and not a soul would hear the guns. Not

a man or woman would know he or she stumbled over a dead one."

Matson pinched himself.

"God, Herriman," he said. "Machine-guns! Do you think they'd die if we shot 'em?"

"Maybe not; maybe they wouldn't even feel the bullets. It's something, Skipper, to control a mob like that."

"Yes," whispered Matson, "so some devil out of hell has figured out. I'd go crazy, Herriman, I'm sure, if I hadn't thought in time and had shot one of those *zombies*—and he hadn't even known I had shot him!"

"I guess I was thinking of that, too, sir, when I grabbed your wrist," said Herriman.

Matson shook himself and led the way to the graves. Other marines, their faces dead white through the dirt and grime, came out of the jungles to stand beside them.

And through the little group, their eyes fixed ahead on the black reaches of the Baiae Terrible, their feet moving without command of their dead brains, moved scores, hundreds, thousands of Haitians. They looked neither to right nor left, but only ahead—and not even an avalanche could have stopped them.

"I'm thinking," said Matson, "what it would mean to an American city if that mob started racing through its streets!"

Herriman shuddered.

"**WE'VE** got to snap out of it, sir. There's an explanation, a good one. If we could prove that these graves still hold the dead high moguls, and that the *zombies* are merely hypnotized doubles of the dead, planted there for resurrection—"

"There isn't time," said Matson. "We've got to join the parade of the *zombies*. Look, for God's sake!"

Matson pointed to three men with white patches over their mouths and eyes, who came stumbling out of the jungle to join the black concourse.

## CHAPTER VII

### *The Ebon Marchers*



THE men with the white patches over their eyes were almost the ultimate in horror to Carter Matson. What must those black men be thinking, when they could neither see nor hear? That some supernatural visitation had stricken them blind and dumb?

Was that why they followed the sound of the drums without even thinking of pulling the adhesive plaster free? As gendarmes, with constant contact with white officers and doctors, they must have known the meaning of adhesive tape.

Had the ceremony and all it meant wiped out their thin veneer of civilization, making them forget everything they had ever heard or seen while serving their white masters?

More gendarmes came out of the woods. They all wore the two white patches over eyes and mouths. They stumbled as they walked, caught themselves, walked on.

Now and again one fell on his face, because his hands were bound and he could not catch himself. But always that one rolled to his back, brought his legs under him, turned, rose to his feet, and stumbled on toward Baiae Terrible.

They didn't walk in circles.

They didn't when they fell, go back the way they had come, even though when they rose they faced rearward. They all turned, as though certain of their course, and followed the mad black concourse into the hills.

Matson flicked the dirt and sweat from his face.

Herriman laughed, and there was a touch of hysteria in his laughter. "If this is merely one of the first

acts, sir," said Herriman, "what will the grand finale be?"

"Soon," replied Matson grimly, "you won't have to ask that. You'll see and hear the end. Now what do we do?"

Herriman looked down at one of the graves. Matson understood.

"I know the dead ones who rose were phonies," he said. "Let's prod in one of the graves to see if the skeleton isn't still there. Haitians don't bury their dead deeply."

Herriman nodded. The black con-course flowed about them like an ebon river flowing uphill—uphill into the fastnesses of Baiae Terrible.

Now and again the blacks, men and women, their eyes red-rimmed, horrible, eyes fixed and staring with terrible intensity, jostled against them. But they did not seem to realize they did so, for they stepped back into their courses and plodded on, steadily on.

They seemed to reach back into infinity, as though the weird terror of all this had gripped even the countless thousands who hadn't witnessed the *mamalois*' call to the dead or seen them arise.

Herriman fought his way through the mad press to the jungle edge, whipping out a long-bladed knife as he went. He came back with a tree limb which he was quickly sharpening at one end.

**M**ATSON stood, watching the black river flow around him, feeling that valuable time was being wasted, while Herriman, an odd hesitancy in his actions, thrust the sharpened end of the stick into the first grave.

He prodded with it, prodded from one end of it to the other. He said nothing, did not even look at Matson.

He went to the next grave. He prodded. He went even faster to the third grave, where he prodded again. Now he literally rated from grave to

grave, stabbing, as though he thrust that point into the hearts of his most hated enemies.

"Steady!" snapped Matson, when low, brittle laughter came from the lips of Herriman.

The sergeant was almost hysterical. He moved like one half crazed.

"Steady!" barked Matson again.

**N**OW Herriman paused and wiped the sweat from his face. He came back to Matson, and he didn't even need to tell Matson what he had discovered.

"Empty!" The word was a shock to Matson, though he had known it was coming. "No corpses, no skeletons; just the hard soil at the bottom of the graves. I tell you, Skipper, those men rose from the dead at the command of the *mamalois*!"

And Herriman, who had seen horrors from Samar to Balangiga, from Cheefoo to Ologapo, threw back his head and laughed. Matson's teeth were on edge. Herriman was losing his grip. His sweat poured forth, dribbled down his face, across his lips, from his chin.

The pale moon looked down, unmoved, uncaring.

Suddenly Matson slapped Herriman savagely on the mouth. Herriman's head snapped back. His fists came up as he squared off. Some of the glassy look went out of his eyes. They became sane again. He rubbed his jaw with a trembling hand.

"Thanks, Skipper," he said quietly. "That never happened to me before. I'll be all right now."

"No," said Matson softly, "it never happened to you before. Nobody ever questioned your nerve—but tonight you lost it—and you know Haitians. What do you think the people of the United States, who don't know what Haitians look like, would do and think if their streets suddenly started to swarm with them?"

Herriman's face was pale.

"The whole country would go mad," he said. "I understand, sir. It's up to us. We can't get troops in here in time—but, sir, how could they land in the States? Coast Guard cutters would wipe out every boat that tried to land 'em."

"Yes? Provided, Herriman, that the Coast Guard even knew that they were enroute. Do you realize that, if we are bumped off, the first knowledge America will have of all this will be the arrival of the Haitians?"

"I never thought of that."

"Well, the brains behind all this thought of that angle—of the possibilities of loot, of holding whole cities for ransom, of everything. Even of the possibility of men like us penetrating the secrets of Baiae Terrible—and of how to see that we don't get out with our knowledge. That man I killed back there among the *juju* images, Herriman, was a white man."

Herriman gasped.

"You mean, one of the vanished ones?"

"No. I've seen pictures of them all. He was one of the tools of the brain behind all this, planted there to see that nothing went wrong. I'll bet there are renegade white men scattered all through this crazy mob, especially in Baiae Terrible and with the *papaloi* and *mamaloi*. If even one of them spots us—"

HERRIMAN'S eyes lifted to the grim ramparts of the higher hills of Baiae Terrible.

"Thanks for the lecture, sir. I won't need it again. What do we look for in Baiae Terrible?"

Matson had been waiting for this question and was ready.

"For the cage of the Great Green Serpent!" he snapped.

"But the Great Green Serpent doesn't really exist," objected Herriman.

"Neither did the people, at least

to the eyes, whose miniatures I broke in that clearing. Neither do *zombies*, yet we saw a dozen of them rise from these graves. See, Herriman?"

"These people are making the natives see things. They'll make them see the Great Green Serpent, too. Which means exactly what? That there will be a Great Green Serpent for them to see! We must reach the cage of the beast. Beat it, now, and take good care of your men."

"My men know their stuff. They can take care of themselves. *Adios!*"

Herriman stepped into the black tide. In a moment he was lost in their midst toward Baiae Terrible. And not a head turned as he mixed with the fanatical host.

MATSON himself joined the course, from which came the traditional woodsmoke odor of the Haitian black, vile smelling native tobacco, and clarine. Mingled with them was another odor which he had smelled but three or four times in all his years in Haiti—the odor of "black medicine."

Black medicine was compounded of many unmentionable things. Imbibing it, the natives became soulless, almost impossible to slay, and were capable of deeds of daring beyond the power of the bravest white men. It was brewed in black holes and caves in the hills, in secret, while the moon was dark. And while it was brewing, natives of Port-au-Prince and Cap Haitien were wont to stare out at the jungle where the fires glowed—and whisper among themselves:

"Our people make black medicine, and soon the *zombies* will be ready for their labors."

Into the jungle again went Carter Matson. He traveled faster than the Haitians, who moved like ebon robots. He elbowed them aside, afraid now only of disguised white men who might be among them. And he

did not expect to find any this far behind the leaders of the black horde.

Matson knew that no whites were here, else they would have seen and understood the meaning of the gendarmes with the white patches in pairs over their faces.

Now and again, to right and left, or ahead, he heard the explosion of a Krag rifle, as the finger of some crazed gendarme pulled the trigger of his stolen weapon. Their bullets might well strike down some of the marchers, but the rest would go on unheeding, neither hearing nor knowing what happened.

Thicker and thicker packed the people in the jungle, for all were moving toward a central focal point. It was as though a dozen streets were emptying their myriads into a single narrow street, packing it to overflowing. Matson realized that in time it would be almost impossible to move among the devotees of the Great Green Serpent.

What must he do then, before that should happen?

**T**HERE seemed but one answer. He must reach the leaders in this march, take all the chances that entailed, and be among the first to reach whatever forbidden valley the ebon marchers were headed for. Once within the circle of blacks closing on that valley, he would not be able to get back out past them.

But he would find the vanished whites and the Great Green Serpent. After that he would figure out the next move in what he had to do.

He began to run. It was like running through a tightly packed mob. He knocked down men and women with his shoulders. They rose without protest, stumbled on—and Matson kept on running, knowing that the marines were fighting their way through exactly like this.

He wished for the arms and sinews of an ape, that he might take to the

tree-tops for better speed. But now the tree-tops vanished, too, and the blacks were pouring like armies of ants across an open shoulder of Baiae Terrible. Only wings could take a man over their heads now.

Matson looked down into a precipice bordered valley—to witness a new horror. The blacks, blind as stampeding cattle, were stepping off the cliff to be smashed on the rocks below—until the talus was so covered with their soft bodies that those who came after could fall without injury!

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Strange Unmasking*



MATSON saw, away to the right, a cleft in the face of the cliff down which the *zombies* had gone, led by the *mamaloï*. But those who came after did not see the cleft, except by accident.

Far out in the middle of the valley, which was more amphitheater than valley, stalked the automatons. They were fully a mile distant, yet they were plainly outlined by the brighter light of the moon.

Matson fought his way, literally, to the entrance to the cleft. He had to use fists and skull and automatic muzzles to win his way through the blacks who were going over the cliff. He noticed that those who smashed themselves to death on the rocks below did not cry out, that there were no screams from anyone. Only the thudding, awful in its suggestion, as their bodies crashed on the rocks.

He started down the cleft, panting, battering his way through blacks who filled the cleft, packing it tightly as they tried to wedge their blind way through. He struck without mercy, knowing that he dared waste no time at all.



Finally he was out on the talus, slipping and sliding down to the valley floor. He wondered, as he fought his way through the blacks, how the marines with Herriman had fared so far.

From all sides, where there were cliffs and where there were none, the Haitians were pouring into the vast valley. He estimated that there must have been twenty thousand of them. By the time he could overtake the leaders, there would be thousands more.

He battled his way through. Sheer press of numbers had ripped the shirt and undershirt from his back. Fingernails of men who didn't even realize that they used them, had ripped and torn his torso until it was smeared with blood.

But he scarcely felt the biting of his sweat in the open wounds. His whole soul was set on reaching the leaders of this mad horde.

Over beyond, at the far rim of the valley, he had made out a black hole in the face of the opposing cliff. Out of the mouth of this cliff, as though it had been a dragon, issued tongues of flame—not orange flame, but flame that was bluish, mauve, a dull green. It was as though the cave spouted a phosphorus hell of its own.

In there, he now knew, would be found the answer to what he sought.

He pressed on, savagely fighting.

THE leaders stopped below the mouth of the flame-breathing cavern and formed a circle. Matson had reached a decision. Nothing was to be gained now by stealth. If he failed, he would die.

But he knew something the vanished ones had not known, did not know now. He knew what he was doing. He would deliberately throw away his life for his mission if he had to. It was as good as forfeited anyhow.

The river of blackness began to

back and fill, to tighten, to become more turgid. It was backing up behind the leaders like water behind a log jam or a dam. His work was tougher than it had ever been before.

But he finally got through, so that he stood in the very forefront of the first ones, outside the invisible circle which seemed to have been drawn, without a word being spoken. He stared from his coign of vantage at the *zombies*.

CHARLEMAGNE, he reasoned, could not really be Charlemagne, but the natives believed in him. It wasn't, he realized, the truth that mattered to the Haitians, but what they believed to be the truth.

Charlemagne, Pierre Benoit, all the others, too, had to be unmasked to make the natives disbelieve. If this were possible, they would begin remembering things—the tricks played upon them, the dead ones at the base of the cliff.

Matson studied the stupid faces of the black *zombies*, seeking a clue. Those faces told him nothing. The *mamaloï* was planning the next step in the ceremony. How long or how short it would be, none but the *mamaloï* could know.

Matson had reached his decision. Maybe he would be struck dead instantly, leaving his work for Herriman and the others to do. He knew by the behavior of the *mamaloï* that the marines were still at large—else there would have been wild excitement among the blacks. Much might depend on Herriman and the others; perhaps the whole success of Matson's own venture, though he was grimly resolved to see it through himself.

Matson walked boldly forward toward the *zombies*. Nobody seemed to notice him. Nobody looked at him. Silence hung over the valley, save for the thudding falls of the people who still walked blindly for-

ward over the lip of the precipice.

Matson stopped among the *zombies*, beyond whom stood the *mamaloï*, just raising her arms as she had raised them to exhort the powers to raise these people from the dead. To what dread Deity did she now send forth her prayers?

Matson touched one of the *zombies*. He touched the thing on the black hand. The hand was warm to the touch. A thrill raced through Matson, though he knew, believed now he had known from the beginning, that there was nothing supernatural about them.

These men had been buried alive, somehow in the shallow graves, with carefully concealed breathing tubes of some sort, extending through the soft soil, until called forth by the *mamaloï*. A gigantic hoax was being perpetrated on the natives.

If they could ever be convinced of that, this valley would run red with the blood of the hoaxers. But not now. They wouldn't believe anything—not after the blind march from the cemetery of the damned.

"Where are you from?" said Matson softly in English. "Saint Kitts? San Croix? Las Fleches?"

**L**AS FLECHES was a Negro settlement on Samana Peninsula, in Santo Domingo, where lived descendants of American slaves who had fled there after the Civil War. They still talked the language of the Southern ducky. The man stared at Matson, something akin to intelligence growing in his dull eyes.

"Las Fleches, Boss?" he said, mumbling and chewing his words.

Matson's heart hammered with excitement.

He had proved his point. Now to convince the blacks.

But he was to have no such opportunity. The *mamaloï* was still staring at the mouth of the cavern whence came the flames. She didn't turn.

But suddenly a group of blacks darted from the forefront of the circle of Haitians, and bore down on Matson. He whipped his automatics from his belt, but not in time.

Half a dozen of them jumped on him, while a dozen more surrounded the struggle so that the blacks in the rear should not see what was transpiring—all this apparently on the off chance that the blacks would have intelligence enough to understand what they did see.

**M**ATSON fought like a wild man. He tried to cry out, and a hand closed over his mouth. He knew that it was the hand of a white man. There was no mistaking it. They hammered at his body, battering him to insensibility.

"Fool!" one whispered in his ear. "Do you think we've gone this far, risked so much, to let one man spoil it?"

That English had never been learned in Haiti. It hinted of New York City or Chicago—though the faces which stared into Matson's were black as coal. He knew, however, the skill with which make-up could be applied.

Finally one of the men struck him a savage blow on the temple with a piece of rock kicked up by the struggle. Then they held him down, while the circle about him, shutting him off from the view of the others, remained tightly drawn. The valley whirled. The sky danced before Matson's eyes. But he did not lose consciousness.

The man who had slugged him spoke in the *patois* to the *mamaloï*. Slowly she turned her head, lowering her arms, and came to enter the group. Her face was serene, but ghastly.

There could be no hope here for Matson. He sensed in the first second when his own blurred eyes met the red-rimmed ones of the *mamaloï*

that she really believed in all this herself, as though she, too, had been hypnotized. She hesitated, then spoke.

"Let him be one with the others. He is the *Loup-garou*. His soul will be more powerful than the souls of any of the others we have taken. He can lead us with higher courage than all the others if he is with us!"

So, he was to join the vanished ones, then. He had not dared to hope for such a break of luck. The *mamaloï* brought a bottle from her dirty, smelling garments, held it to his lips. "Drink!" she commanded.

Matson drank a little, shutting his throat at the last against most of the vile mixture. He knew even as a few drops trickled down his throat that for the first time in his life he imbibed of the drink which robbed the Haitians of their very souls—black medicine, the evil drink brewed in the dark of the moon for satanic Haitian deviltry.

His body seemed all at once leaden. The pain of the blows he had taken vanished. Nothing seemed to matter. Interest in his surroundings was going. It was almost as though he were dying, though reason reasserted itself to tell him that he did not die. He turned his head aside. He had imbibed enough.

The *mamaloï* spoke again.

"Take him into the church of the Great Green Serpent!"

**T**HIS much he knew. Then he was conscious of being lifted. Black bodies masked the movement from the eyes of the Haitians. He was carried up an incline leading to the mouth of the cavern.

Savagely, with all his will power, he fought against the blurring of his intellect, tried to keep his mind on what was happening. But nothing seemed to matter, though he fought with all his soul to make it matter.

The *mamaloï*, at the last, had

spoken to him in a strange singsong, making passes over him with her hands. Some sixth sense made him pretend to fall under the spell of her jungle hypnosis.

Now as he was carried up to the cavern mouth he wasn't sure that her will didn't actually possess him—what with the deadening effect of the drops of black medicine he had imbibed.

**T**HEY paused with him in the mouth of the cavern. His eyes stared up at the tongues of flame, and he understood why the black concourse had been halted afar off. The "flames" were not flames, but a myriad of paper streamers which had been dipped in phosphorus.

They entered the place with him. For no reason at all they hammered at him with their fists as they carried him along. Lights showed here and there, burning torches, and huge candles set in sconces along the walls of the tunnel.

After they had penetrated the cavern beyond any possibility of hearing further sounds from outside, a strange effluvium came to his nostrils. The odor made him think of evil things: of a time when he helped some Tagalogs on Luzon slay a mighty python, of another time in Panama when his Panamanian guide had insisted on keeping the skin of a boa constrictor Matson had shot.

The odor was the same.

He fought to keep from tensing as he guessed what lay ahead—for if he tensed they would know that he was conscious beyond their present belief. He tried to get a better look at the faces of his captors, but the lights were too widely spaced, and he saw their faces like faces in a horrible nightmare.

They went on.

They turned right, then left. The cavern widened. The effluvium became stronger. They opened a door

in the solid rock, to reveal a room filled with moonlight from a high opening at the crest of Baiae Terrible. They dumped him in.

Matson's eyes widened with horror when they had closed the door. There were other people here—men and women with blank stares in their white faces.

They were looking at something—a vile, unearthly something, coiled in one corner of the vast room. It was painted a poisonous jade green.

## CHAPTER IX

### *The Changelings*



HERE were all the vanished ones whose pictures he had carried for weary weeks on end, though Matson had some difficulty recognizing their stupid, lacklustre, vacant faces. He

knew that each of them was steeped to abysmal forgetfulness in black medicine. They didn't know where they were or what they did; never, if the blacks carried out their plans, would they know.

Matson felt he had but a few minutes. The vast ceremony would go forward inexorably to its ghastly conclusion. Something must be done to waken these people from their deathly lethargy. But what?

Desperately he looked at the "Great Green Serpent." It was, he saw, a well-fed boa constrictor, such as none had ever seen in Haiti. At the moment it slept.

It might sleep for days. It might waken at any moment and attack the vanished ones and Matson with ferocious greed. He guessed that to keep it quiescent the natives probably fed it by force—on ghastly food!

He hesitated as to whether to attempt to slay the thing. If he did

so the *mamaloi* and *papaloi* must delay their ceremony, for they had promised their devotees sight of their god, the Great Green Serpent.

But to attack the creature, even with the aid of the vanished men, would be to start a fight which might last for hours. That would bring their captors on the run. No, such an attack must fail. He must do his work while the creature slept.

Matson decided that the thing probably had been brought here from Panama. By whom? When he had the answer to that, he would have the answer to the whole mystery—and perhaps the man who had engineered this whole ghastly hoax on the blacks of Haiti.

Matson turned his attention to the vanished ones, selecting first one of the men. He walked to the stupid-faced one, slapped him resoundingly on the cheek. There was no visible result. If only, he thought desperately, he had something which would make the captives violently ill; something that would cast off the effects of the black medicine and restore the victims to a degree of normality.

But he had nothing. Stay! No jungle-wise man ever went into the wilds of the tropics without quinine for malaria, or anti-tetanus serum for possible poisonous bites. But how was he to know that any of this would serve? All he could do was try.

HIS hands trembled as he took a little leather packet from his pocket, unrolled it, exposing two small hypos, each filled with a clear, colorless liquid. He grasped the flesh of the first man's arm, ridging it under his fingers, and pressed the plunger.

Then he raced to the next, and the next. He gave each—man and woman—a portion of the liquid.

The result was gratifying. After strange paroxysms, the first man

stirred, looked about him with amazement, plainly seeing himself in his awful surroundings for the first time. Fear showed in eyes which hitherto had shown nothing but stupidity. Matson was instantly beside the first.

"Quickly!" he snapped. "What name comes first to your mind, Blair?"

**B**LAIR was one of the vanished ones, one of the first, son of a military family.

"Where is Doctor Despard?" asked Blair.

"Thanks," said Matson, a great light dawning as he heard the name. "Now listen. They'll be coming for us soon. Pretend stupidity as before. Don't allow anyone to see that things have happened to change you—and be prepared at my signal to fight for your life, against the knife!"

"I don't understand—"

"You will! Just remember what I told you. You'll soon, if I'm not mistaken, be taking part in the grim business of exchanging of souls."

The next man in line was Max Bartell.

"Quickly!" said Matson into the face which was showing a resurgence of intelligence. "Whom did you last see?"

Max Bartell answered thickly, as though his tongue were coated with cotton.

"Doctor Black, the assistant of Doctor Despard."

"Did you ever see Doctor Despard?"

"No; Doctor Black always said that Despard was busy."

"Good!"

Each one of the male vanished ones, when questioned with machine-gun speed and intensity, mentioned the name of Doctor Black, and sometimes Despard also. In a flash Matson knew how it had been done.

Doctor Black was a hypnotist, and Despard's assistant. Black had hyp-

notized certain ones who had come to him in the States, bidding them by post-hypnotic suggestion, to do certain things at a certain time—when they should hear the "call." Drugs had played an important part in bending the wills of these people. They had all obeyed Black, and here they were.

There was no doubt in Matson's mind that Doctor Despard controlled the Haitian angle. It had been through his efforts that these people were here, his and the work of the disguised white men that Matson had discovered among the natives.

The women were frightened, hysterical, as they came out of their lethargy.

"Do you wish your soul to go into the body of a black *mamaloï*? he asked each in turn. "Into the body of a female *zombie*?"

They were frightened into obeying him without question.

"Quick!" he snapped. "Sit down as you sat before. Look as stupid as you can. Ladies, control your trembling. Stare at that boa, coiled in the corner, with hypnotic intensity. Offer no resistance to our captors until I give the word. When, outside the cavern, I shout 'Now!' act to save your lives!"

**T**HEN hands were fumbling at the door of the "church" and Matson was sitting in the midst of the vanished ones, looking as stupid as any of them.

The captives were all thorough-breds, which was why they had been selected in the first place. They played their parts to perfection, reacting to the emergency as thorough-breds should. A dozen blacks, under whose disguise Matson recognized the shapes of white men, came in. With them was a *mamaloï* of lesser rank than the last one Matson had seen.

"You will rise and follow," this

hag addressed them all. "You will see nothing, know nothing, hear nothing."

Matson himself was the first to rise, a vacant stare in his unblinking eyes. The vanished ones rose like automats, as the blacks had risen from the dead in the cemetery of the damned, and formed a grim single file of human souls, prepared to do the bidding of the *mamaloï*.

One of the made-up white men stared a long time into the eyes of Carter Matson, but he bore the scrutiny without changing the vacuity of his expression. And so the captives were conducted, with staggering, stumbling tread, out of the cavern, to a spot on the valley floor beside a stone which would serve as an altar.

Black faces stretched back to infinity in the moonlight. Silence held sway in the ghastly valley. Near the altar the *mamaloï* awaited them, and beside her were those whom she had raised from the dead. Her red-rimmed eyes were fixed on the white prisoners. A sigh went up from the assembled blacks as the vanished ones were formed in single file before the altar.

**B**EFORE each of the vanished men, one of the male *zombies* was placed so that he faced his white brother or sister. Before each of the women stood a *mamaloï* who had been raised from the dead in the cemetery of the accursed.

"Bring forth the Great Green Serpent!" intoned the *mamaloï*.

Their captors raced back into the cavern. There was a long wait, pregnant with rising horror. Matson stood so that he could see the door of the cavern, out of whose mouth fluttered the many-colored streamers.

Now their captors were coming, staggering under the weight they bore. In their arms was the Great

Green Serpent, its constricting folds rendered harmless by the fact that its captors held it at full length, as great reptiles in captivity are held for feeding. But its baleful eyes stared out at the sea of black faces, and its forked tongue darted forth venomously.

The creature was placed on the altar, while a great "Ah!" went up from the superstitious blacks. They began to move slowly from side to side, as though each devotee were a serpent's head, lifted and swaying.

**N**OW the *mamaloï* turned to her people, raised her arms and began to speak:

"Now, my children," she said, her voice beginning to rise to a shrieking crescendo, "under the eyes of the Great Green Serpent, which you have never seen, yet which all your lives you have worshiped, you will witness that which you were brought here to see. Each of these white ones possess a great soul, a martial soul or a brilliant soul.

"These dead ones who have risen possess no souls. They are *zombies*. While they lived they were great leaders. They shall be great leaders again, greater leaders than ever before, because they will possess the souls of these white ones. The white ones will show them how to lead you, my children, against their own kind—so that you shall possess as your own the great land to the north and west, and shall rule and dominate it.

"Watch carefully now, under the eyes of your god, while the transfer of souls is made. The white ones will die, and their spirits will enter the bodies of the *zombies* so that the *zombies* shall really live again and lead their people!"

The horror of it, which the befuddled vanished ones could not fully grasp, gripped Matson's very soul. The whole horrible farce of

transferring souls from white bodies to black—and those blacks merely Negroes from Las Fleches who knew less what it was all about than anyone else—shook at the very foundations of reason.

Yet the net result would be that the vanished ones would die, and that the Haitians, drunk with superstitious fervor, would follow the hellishly inspired leaders into anything. They would follow to death—anywhere.

Now a dozen men came to stand behind the vanished ones. The *mamaloï* lifted her voice again.

"The drums!" she said.

Drummers ringed themselves about the altar. They settled their drums, began to knead their black heads with blacker knuckles, while their eyes were fixed on the coiled boa on the altar.

"When the Great Green Serpent wakens from his slumbers," said the high priestess, "let the instruments of my will pierce the bodies of the white ones with knives, and let the *zombies* catch their souls in their open mouths as the white ones die!"

Matson had a hysterical, mad desire to laugh when he saw that he, the *Loup-garou*, faced the great "Charlemagne." At least he was being complimented in that he was considered of sufficient importance to give his soul to Haiti's greatest bandit chieftain!

**T**HE drums began beating, louder—louder—louder. The hellish cadence caused Matson's very soul to tremble. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the huge reptile begin to quiver, to move slightly in his sleep which had barely been interrupted by his transport here.

Over Matson's head hung the shadow of an uplifted hand and arm. A knife was gripped in the hand, ready to plunge into his heart from behind.

He held his breath as he watched the quickening into life of the serpent. The *mamaloï's* mouth was open. When she gave the word the knives would plunge home.

Would the white women be able to withstand the knives of their killers? The head of the serpent began to rise from his awful green coils. The *mamaloï's* mouth moved. She was preparing to give the word—while the drums caused the very spine to quiver.

"Now!" Matson shouted. "Turn and fight for your very lives!"

## CHAPTER X

### *The Spell Is Lifted*



THE initial surprise was complete. Each of the vanished ones whirled at Matson's command. Hands grabbed for knives.

Matson secured the knife-wrist of his own would-be executioner, snapped the knife from his hand, caught it, drove its blade into the man's heart. Then, with a quick glance at the others to see how they fared, Matson whirled.

In a trice he was standing beside the *mamaloï*, all uncaring that she was a woman, holding the knife-blade against her side.

"Tell your children to keep back, *Maman!*" he snapped. "Or I'll drive this knife clear into your gizzard."

But before the old hag could do or say anything, a strange thing happened. Disturbed by the noise of the drums, by the rising chanting of the devotees, the Great Green Serpent uncoiled its awful length and slithered down from the altar. It happened to be heading toward the center of the horde, and it slid along toward the ring of black faces.

With shrieks of terror and dismay



the black worshipers turned and fled back upon themselves, trampling on one another to escape the fury of what they believed to be their god.

A rifle cracked somewhere. Dirt was kicked up at the feet of Matson. The men vanished ones disposed of their would-be executioners at once. Manlike, they then whirled to the assistance of the white-faced women who struggled in the arms of the other knife-wielders.

**I**N a thrice the would-be killers were down, kicking their lives away.

Now the gendarmes were remembering their military training. From all sides, bullets were hammering at the prisoners. And bullets were being fired into the thick of the black mob to stay their stampede.

In the mêlée the supposed *zombies* became merely frightened darkies, eager to escape the serpent and the bullets of the gendarmes. Their amazed believers were witnessing the wild, crazed attempts of the great leaders—Charlemagne, Pierre Benoit, and the others—to flee from the wrath of their unmaskers.

Even the stupid Haitians could understand the significance of this. And loud above the rising tumult went the shouts of white men scattered among the devotees; white men who saw their whole mad scheme going up in smoke.

"Slay, gendarmes! Slay! Slay!"

The natives raced back and back as the serpent crawled toward them, seeking a way of escape.

"Into the cavern!" Matson yelled at the vanished ones.

The women were herded ahead of the men in obedience to Matson's command. Matson whirled the *mama-loi* ahead of him, facing her toward the cavern, pushing her along.

Stunned by the speed of the surprise, she had become merely a stupid Haitian Negress. She went on ahead of Matson.

Blair fell with a slug in the back of his head. Bullets hailed against the rocks from all directions, but the fugitives raced on.

The gendarmes had gone blood-mad with the results of their firing, and now they fired on friend and enemy alike. Some of the Haitians, in their mad panic, turned and hurled themselves on the nearest gendarmes, to rend and maim and slay. The valley had become a shambles.

When the fugitives gained the cavern mouth, Matson whirled the *mama-loi* behind him. He pushed her back into the valley, then led the way at a brisk run into the cavern.

Bullets came whining in, struck the rocks, bounced off, went on into the cavern. And then they came to the door of what had been the vanished ones' prison.

"Inside!" yelled Matson. "We've got to hurry. Bar the door!"

The great door swung shut. Rocks were hurriedly piled against it by the sweating men. Matson studied the prison. Great lianas hung down into the hole from ground level, as lianas hung into every such hole in the bi-country island.

"Can you women climb?" yelled Matson.

**T**HEY gasped and panted. Their eyes were big with fear, for now many hands were hammering at the door. Matson looked up at the lip of the crater-like hole.

And there he saw a face—the face of Herriman.

"They don't have to climb!" yelled Herriman. "Hang 'em on the ends of the lianas with your belts and we'll yank 'em out so fast they won't know what's happening. But you'll have to hurry before the powers-that-be think of this way to escape."

Quickly the men worked, tying the women to the lianas. Ready hands grasped the lithe lianas at the lip of the crater. Matson and the men

captives tested the fastenings by putting all their weight upon them.

"Haul away, Leathernecks!" Matson shouted.

One by one the women, their eyes lifted to the brightening light which heralded the dawn at the lip of the crater, were dragged up the side into the hands of the waiting marines. When the last had gone, and the door was ready to tumble in, the men started up, hand over hand, aided by the pulling marines.

**M**ATSON swung around as the door crashed in. In the opening stood a *papaloi*. He wore the huge head of a bull. Matson recognized that head immediately. It was the same one that had been worn by the *papaloi* he thought he had killed from the tree in the clearing after he had shot the seven images.

Matson knew that every moment he lingered now might mean his life. He could hear the blacks surging outside the door, but they seemed to be waiting for the high priest to act. Yet Matson wanted very much to see the face of that *papaloi*.

As the man turned to his followers, Matson snatched up a rock from the floor of the cavern and brought it down upon the head of the *papaloi* with all his strength. The priest staggered, despite the protection of the bull's head. Matson grabbed him, clung to the man with one arm as he fastened the *papaloi* to one of the lianas.

"Pull!" shouted Matson to the marines above, as he caught another vine and began to climb. "I want him alive!"

The natives poured in as Matson and the limp form of the *papaloi* reached the lip of the crater. The marines, of whom there were now twenty odd—marines who had been brought from Gonaives and Saint Marc and Ennery by the sound of the black drums—welcomed Matson,

grinning. At his orders they quickly bound the *papaloi*.

Matson did not remove the bull's head from the priest. That would come later—when there was more time.

The marines yanked up the lianas as their enemies started climbing out of the crater. Then, to make sure that pursuit did not come from this sector, Herriman left six marines at the top of the precipice with orders to throw rocks down on the enemy until the fugitives had managed to escape from the vicinity.

High above the screams, cries and imprecations which came out of the valley, sounded an efficient droning. Matson had sensed it even before the Great Green Serpent had started to lift his ugly head from his coils—the droning of oncoming aeroplanes.

By some miracle, then, Flannigan must have reached Port-au-Prince, doing credit to the best among marathon runners. While Herriman gathered the vanished ones together for the retreat, Matson raced to the lip of the precipice as the first D.H. went droning over the valley.

He looked down.

**T**HE Great Green Serpent was streaking across the valley floor. The D. H. dived on the creature. Bullets streamed from the aeroplane's guns. Dirt was kicked up all about the snake. It coiled on itself, its great head shooting forward, as though it snapped at the burning lead which scored its writhing green sides.

The D.H. curved over again, its pilot loosing another burst. The serpent went into a convulsive writhing. It twisted over on itself, biting, flinging its coils about. The bullets of the Marine Corps flyer were blasting it to shreds.

Matson grinned, sighed with relief. Three planes were circling over the valley now, diving, spattering the valley floor with bullets. No need to

slay the Haitians, who had merely followed their leaders. The flyers were merely putting the fear of all gods into the hearts of the devotees of voodoo.

The Haitians were giving back.

From the first plane now sounded the voice of a loudspeaker.

"You gendarmes! Throw down your arms and surrender!"

There was a hesitant pause as the terrifying voice came out of the skies. Then men broke from the circle of milling blacks, rifles in their hands, and began to drop them in the open—slowly at first, then so swiftly that the pile of Krags grew to amazing proportions.

In the center of the open space the green serpent's writhing and twisting was slowing down.

Again the loudspeaker sounded.

"You Haitians! Disperse! Go back to your homes. Gendarmes, capture the white men among you whose skins are painted black, and take them back with you to your barracks! If you do this, your mutiny may be forgiven you!"

There was a milling of blacks as the gendarmes hastened to do the bidding of the voice from the air.

"Matson! Matson!" the loudspeaker called.

**M**ATSON rose to his feet from a squatting position, yanked off his shirt, and waved it as the D.H. slid past where he stood. The pilot saw him and waved.

"Your question was put to the seven people in the States," he called down. "The answer was, 'Yes,' each of them had an appointment with a hypnotic healer within a week of their seizure. What next? Semaphore."

Matson thrilled with the miracle of it. He began to wave his arms, making the signal letters of arm- semaphore, spelling out words.

"Get word to the States to arrest

one Doctor Black, assistant of Doctor Despard, who is back of all this. Bring him to Haiti by plane. Tell him the vanished ones are to be witnesses against him."

The D.H. circled as Matson signaled. A man in the afterpit was watching Matson through binoculars, reading his message. But it was the loudspeaker which answered:

"Okay, Matson. Get your people into Port-au-Prince. You have a date with us for a round of drinks at the American Hotel! Three planes will cover your retreat through the jungles. How are we doing?"

Matson grinned at the typical message.

"Okay! Swell!" he semaphored back.

**T**HEN Matson whirled back to his "guests." He grinned at Herriman and his marines, each of whom gripped an automatic in his right hand.

"Armed, Herriman?" he said softly. "I thought I asked the colonel to send you out unarmed, so that there wouldn't be any unnecessary killing."

Herriman grinned, unabashed.

"Every good marine knows when to disobey orders," he said. "I figured we might need the gats."

The D.H. soared over the fugitives as they started through the jungle toward Port-au-Prince.

"Remember, the American Hotel," the loudspeaker spoke again. "And maybe we'll have Despard's assistant and Despard himself by the time you get in. Good traveling, Matson."

Then the D.H. was gone, while behind it the other ships held the natives virtually prisoners in the valley until their commands had been obeyed.

Matson hurried to the *papaloi*—yanked the bull-head off. As he suspected, he found himself staring into the face of the still unconscious Doctor Despard!

"So he was the *papaloi*," said Heriman, glancing at the face of the doctor. "That explains a lot of things."

"Yes," said Matson. "And we'll learn more when he revives in jail."

With four marines carrying Despard, Matson hurried his guests forward. The women stumbled, staring in amazement at the jungle through which he took them. Matson, realizing that to them this was still all a nightmare, patiently explained.

They had all, he reminded them, visited Despard's assistant, Doctor Black. Black was traveling through the Atlantic States, carefully selecting his victims, hypnotizing them when they were in his power, bidding them "harken to the call." But, by post-hypnotic suggestion, he had ordered them to forget everything about it when they regained consciousness, if they did. Matson told them nothing of the dope they had been fed. He spared them that horror.

They understood, finally, and horror blanched their faces. From the United States to Haiti they had been transported in their hypnosis—and the time it had lasted had been an utter blank to them. But for Matson they would have died without ever knowing what ghastly use their "souls" were to be put to.

Matson had saved the United States from a visitation which would have been worse than a horde of mad wolves turned loose upon people.

THREE days later, torn, bleeding from the scratches of thorns, red from mosquito bites, but happy enough, the vanished ones walked into Port-au-Prince. Despard had regained consciousness upon the first day, but had sullenly refused to talk.

In Port-au-Prince Matson reported to the Commanding General of Marines, who informed him that since Despard had been placed in jail, he had changed his mind and wanted

to talk to Matson. A message had been received from the United States stating that Dr. Black had been found dead in his office—a revolver clutched in his hand and a bullet through his brain. It had been this news that made Despard willing to talk.

A FEW minutes later Matson again looked into the face of a big, middle-aged man who certainly did not look like a killer, a fake, or a criminal—except for red fires that burned deep down in his eyes. Despard rose, advanced to face Matson.

"I refused to talk until I had stood face to face once more with the man who had beaten me," he said, and his voice made Matson's flesh crawl. "It's plain that you have me. Yes, I brought the snake into Haiti. I made a pact with the chief *papaloi* and *mamaloi*."

"Led by black leaders, whom their people would believe to be *zombies* with the souls of white people—those whites furnished by me, through the aid of Doctor Black, and selected for their abilities from the best of American families—the unkillable Haitians were to flood the cities of the Eastern coast of the United States. They would ravish and slay at command of their leaders. Men and women would flee in terror from such an onslaught, especially if it came as a complete surprise."

"But why, Despard? Why?" asked Matson, his whole being shuddering at the ghastly picture Despard had conjured up. "Were you experimenting with mankind? Trying to work out a theory of some kind—the behavior of men when frightened out of their wits?"

"No," interrupted Despard, his lips drawn back as though he snarled, "I wanted money—power. It is easy to get both from men and women who flee in terror for their very lives."

"But why take this method of se-

curing power and money? Why not merely rob banks, or kidnap people, or hold up trains?"

For answer Despard did a strange thing. He leaned forward, pulling aside the throat of his shirt for Matson to see. There was no mistaking the markings on his skin. The man was piebald.

"YOU are a Haitian!" whispered Matson. "A white Haitian! The mythical white Haitian these people some day expect will come to lead them to power!"

Despard shook his head, shrugged.

"No," he said, "just an educated Haitian who stepped out of his class—and learned a deep bitterness against all the world, for which he wished revenge. Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"I wonder if merely living on isn't

punishment enough?" asked Matson. "I suppose you know that your own people would tear you limb from limb now for your failure?"

Despard nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I know. But I would gladly submit myself to them."

"I'm sorry," said Matson; "it's impossible to turn you loose. There has been too much slaughter."

Enroute to the American Hotel, a little sick, Matson thought he heard the drums of ebony in the far hills. He shook his head, strode on.

An hour later word went to him that Despard had escaped. Three hours later native agents of the marines brought word that the severed head of Doctor Despard was being carried on a pole from village to village through the Haitian hills.

And the ebon drums kept up their rhythmic beating.



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# Flaming Freighter



*Murder and Barratry Stalk the Decks of the "Roamer" in this Gripping Story of the Sea*

By STEVE FISHER

*Author of "Entombed in Hell," "Authorized Mutiny," etc.*

**A** BLOOD red sun dipped even with the horizon, dyeing the sea its ghastly crimson. The peaks from the distant shore line threw long shadows over the water. And the coastwise freighter *Roamer* pushed her way slowly along. Green vermin hung up even with her water-line; the faded white paint on her

sides was blackened and scarred with long scraping of cargo nets and docks.

Each time the tiny twin screws that pushed the creaking and groaning hulk along, swished through the water, they seemed to say something. The incessant, throbbing engines seemed repeating the same thing over and over. The aged bow, with its

crescent on the sprit, seemed smashing out the same words as it thumped heavily over the coast swells:

"Young Tom Leland has been murdered!"

The atmosphere on the bridge was electrified, as tense as a deathly live wire stretched to the breaking point. Nelson, the yellow-haired quartermaster, stood with his lanky legs spread apart, on the port side. His long arms were folded over his chest. His cheeks were half sunken in, his lips grim and tight. His almond-shaped blue eyes stared straight ahead.

A heavy set seaman, unshaven and with black, tangled hair, gripped the helm wheel tighter than before. He watched the gyro and steered the course without so much as moving his head.

Jones, the third mate, with his blue officer's cap straight on his head, was gritting his teeth as his brown eyes scanned over wastelands of water. He was leaning on the starboard bridge wing, occasionally putting the glasses to his eyes as if searching for a point and bearings.

Words would have been dynamite. But there were no words. Captain Leland, gripped between white-hot rage and soul-crushing grief, had come on the bridge and was standing there, looking out of the pane glass and into the sea.

**H**IS deep-set blue eyes had a marble, glassy stare in them—as death-like as the stare he had reflected from his dead son's eyes just one hour before. His withered white face was drawn as tight as a drum. His colorless thin lips, etched with hard cynical lines, were clamped tightly together. He was hatless and his snow white hair lay flat on his head. His astounding grip of calmness ate into the trio.

Slowly his doubled fists went from his sides and into his pockets of his

blue coat. A sea-wearied old man ready to give his creaking old tub to his son, only to have his last blood relation, his one mark in life, murdered on his own ship! And it had happened just one short hour before. That burned, seared.

His apparently unseeing glassy eyes continued drilling through the pane glass. His face was unmoving, his blue eyes unflickering. Then the pale lips parted; cold, impartial words dropped out: "Running lights, Nelson."

**T**HE long shadows grew longer; darkness was fast ascending over the water. The ship bounced up, flinging the bow's crescent high, then crashed down in the surf. The twin screws swished on, the incessant engines continued their throbbing.

Nelson's lanky body appeared beside the captain: "Running lights—" his voice half cracked—"aye, aye, checked, on—" He returned to his station on the port side and leaned his elbows on the sill of the glass. His throat was bobbing like a buoy. His face was harder than before.

Presently the thumping of heavy feet on the bridge ladder broke the death-like reverie. A huge hulk of a man pulled himself up. He had wildly gleaming brown eyes, shreds of brown hair around a shiny bald head. His broad face was marked with a wide cheek scar. He had a large, gaping mouth that twitched cruelly.

He eyed the third mate on the bridge wing, stared at the seaman who was spinning the wheel about on another degree and nodded to Nelson, whose eyes hadn't turned away from the pane. Then he stood beside the captain. He grew impatient, rubbed the back of his hand across his smashed flat nose, and spoke:

"You sent for me, Skipper?"

Captain Leland's blue eyes turned slowly to the boatswain. For a moment he searched the broad counte-



nance of the other. His white, drawn face was still and placid. The huge boatswain shifted his brown eyes about, caught the captain's glint, then lost it.

"Yes, Lewis, I sent for you."

Lewis' lips twitched as he nodded his bald head. He seemed unusually nervous. The Asiatic stare everyone knew him by, seemed dancing in his eyes—dancing as if nothing lay behind the eyes.

The Old Man's hand gripped his shoulder. He and the boatswain had sailed every sea there was together. If Lewis was a little balmy, what of it? Lewis had made his master's papers and the captain had promised to "see about getting him a ship." And now Lewis was nervous. Lewis had liked his son, Tom. Such an ungodly, horrible murder would make any man nervous.

The captain spoke: "You—you were working near the hold?"

Lewis' brown eyes took on the old sailor-bluff of unbreakable hardness. Lines played about his huge mouth. The back of his hand rubbed across his flat nose again.

"Yeah, Skipper," he lipped, "and I saw Jim Garrett come out just a few minutes before—" He stopped suddenly as the captain's hand gripped his shoulder tighter.

THE Old Man's hand slipped to his side. "I have the hatchet locked up," he said. "The murderer's fingerprints will be on it. If Garrett came out of the hold—" He stopped and smacked his lips grimly together.

A wild light had crept into the Asiatic sailor's eyes. His mouth fell agape again. He was nodding his bald head.

"Lewis—"

"Yeah, Skipper—" he stammered, shaking his head more, his lips breaking into an insane grin. "I was thinking, that hatchet—that blood-stained hatchet—" his voice grew

louder, shrill and unpleasant, "that will hang any man!" The grin grew until it was ghastly.

"Don't take it hard, Lewis," the captain soothed. "Go to your cabin, lay down, rest your mind."

The huge boatswain was still nodding, his mouth still hanging. "Yeah, Skipper. I got to rest up." His eyes traveled over the trio on watch. "Got to rest up," he repeated dumbly.

THE heavy-set helmsman's eye caught Nelson's. Lewis had been almost this bad before and the captain had labeled: "It's the way of a sailor of the old days—" But the newer men at sea wondered. Shook their heads and wondered.

The bulky man eased himself down the ladder. He was still shaking his head. His brown eyes still roved. He kept muttering: "Fingerprints on hatchet—hang any man!"

Captain Leland stood only a moment longer in his statue-like position. Just long enough for the ship to nose heavily up, like a misbehaved horse, and then crash down in the spraying water. With the crash the *Roamer* moaned as if in agony. And the captain left the bridge.

He walked casually down the boat deck sniffing the fresh night air, tasting the tang of salt in the atmosphere. His iron nerves seemed jumping within him, but his whitened face was still calm and without visible emotion. Presently he reached the second mate's cabin. A dim light showed from its port.

The Old Man had never knocked anywhere on the ship. He braced himself a moment, holding the knob of the door as the ship repeated its scenic-railway dipping. Then he walked in.

Jim Garrett was sitting at a writing desk, his blue cap beside him. As the captain closed the door behind him and leaned back against it, he got to his feet, surveying the Old

Man critically. Then his sea-beaten bronzed face turned to sympathetic understanding.

In the dim light over his desk, he made a picture as he stood there—tall; wavy black hair; small, piercing black eyes; high cheek bones and full lips over an even, squared jaw. The crew knew his ability to navigate, respected his ability to fight.

The white face of the captain was as smooth as top sail. His blue eyes glared into Garrett's black ones.

"Garrett—you were in the hold?"

The second mate's face grew tight. His eyes narrowed a bit as he realized the captain's question led up to accusation of the murder. "Captain, I didn't kill—"

"Were you in the hold?"

Garrett braced his hands on the writing desk and leaned back a little. His head cocked to one side. Now his black eyes were defiant in their gleam. His square jaw was protruded a little.

"Yes, Captain, I went to the hold about an hour before they found Tom's body there. I went to get a flashlight for the mid watch tonight."

**T**HE Old Man's white poker-face was unmoving. His deeply set blue eyes were like magnets drawing steel as he scanned the second mate. He fought to hold his emotions within him.

"Garrett," he said, leaning up from the doorway. "Was that your way of getting even with me?"

The color mounted in the second mate's face. A blood vein streaked diagonally across his forehead, bulging out. He opened his mouth once to speak and stopped. He smashed his fist on the desk, leaned away from the support. His black eyes were kettles of boiling ink as he shook his head.

"You were fired. Getting off in Frisco because you and Tom had a

fight. Because you hated Tom, Garrett. Your sense of justice—"

Garrett's words were short, clipped: "Do you think I'd commit murder because I was fired from a lousy tub like this?"

The Old Man's white fists doubled. He moved forward a little, his blue eyes oozing hatred. His thin lips moved in and out as gritted words fell: "I believe it was you, Garrett!"

**G**ARRETT stepped face to face with the Old Man. His hands went to his sides and his fists doubled. His square jaw was pulled down in disgust. His facial muscles working down from his high cheek bones were taut. His black eyes were flaming—staring unflickering into the captain's countenance.

"Captain Leland—you're crazy!"

The captain's body was swinging back and forth. His clenched fists were trembling. But his face was still unmoving. His words came slow, distinct: "You're a dirty sneaking murderer!"

Garrett's lips twitched. If the skipper wasn't so old— No man could call him that. His finger nails dug into the palms of his hand in fever-pitched anguish. The streaking blood vein on his forehead seemed bulging more. It was scarlet.

The ship tossed up and thumped down heavily in the sea. The twin screws chugged on, pushing water, more water behind them. The engines throbbed with their ever-going *pump, pump*.

"The final testimonial of my proof," said the captain, "is on the hatchet you used. Your fingerprints will show up nicely."

Garrett didn't move.

The Old Man turned to the door, put his hand on the shiny knob. Then he faced Garrett: "But perhaps we won't need fingerprints." His face showed the first signs of changed expression. "We're having a

court tonight," he went on. "Ever hear of a Kangaroo Court, Garrett? We're having one of those on this ship." He nodded grimly, opening the door of the cabin. "And if we should decide to hang you—"

Garrett knew the rest. The report to land officials would be: "Washed overboard."

The door slammed and the Old Man was gone.

Garrett stood for a moment alone, recalling the events of the afternoon. Tom Leland had been lying up by the anchor chain when he came out of the hold. The boatswain had been mixing paint near-by. He had had the funny Asiatic stare in his eyes.

Thoughts marched like a rapidly moving army. He had to move and move fast. Captain Leland was good for his word: they'd have a Kangaroo Court and hang him. The Old Man would stop at nothing to avenge his son's murderer.

Suddenly Garrett picked up his blue officer's cap and slammed it on his head, cocking it to one side. That boatswain—that crazy boatswain who thought he'd get the ship when the Old Man retired if young Tom wasn't alive. That was the solution! Garrett had to prove it!

HE opened the door of his cabin and stepped out on deck. The ship was nosing up and crashing down harder on the night swells, which were getting larger. The old wooden sides groaned louder. A dull yellow moon reflected eerie shadows across the deck. Somewhere on the shore line the dim light of Point Montecito was flickering.

He walked briskly to the ladder that led down to the main deck. Casually his eyes went to the mast, up to the seaman who was in the crow's nest, and then to the taut steel stay that stretched from the mast top, far over the bridge. A mil-

lion flickering stars blanketed across the skies made the stay a dim black line.

Then, looking forward, his eyes fell on the little light on the bowsprit. But other jumping lights were obstructing it. He looked down. From the hold the craziest jumping reflections he had ever seen were emanating.

Immediately boatswain Lewis came to his mind. He broke into a run.

AS he leaned over the hatch top and peered down in the hold, he could hear heavy breathing and an occasional short laugh. He heard a shrill voice half whisper: "Clues . . . clues." Then a laugh. "No more clues." The crazy laugh again grew louder and more shrill.

Garrett threw a long leg over the hatch top and started down. The jumping shadows were growing stronger. A quick rustling sound met his ears—a crackling. He leaped to one landing, threw his long leg over the next downward ladder and jumped to the next deck. He had one more deck to descend. He leaped, landing squarely on his feet. A horrible sight met his eyes.

Flames were bursting from one entire side of the small hold. In another corner, lit by flames and shadowed by darkness, crouched the huge, bulky form of Lewis. His bald head glowed ghastly. His brown eyes sparkled insanely. His hands were open, his fingers spread.

"No more clues," the boatswain laughed shrilly. "They'll blame this on you now—no fingerprints on the hatchet—"

Garrett knew in an instant what it meant. The half balmy boatswain had cracked under the strain. He had murdered Tom Leland, thinking the captain would give him the ship then when he retired. But in his blunt stupidity he hadn't accounted for hatchets or fingerprints. It was

quite evident also that he did not know of Captain Leland's plans for a Kangaroo Court.

Murdering his best friend's son for a mercenary gain—then the fear of being caught, drove his already demented mind entirely mad!

This was the solution which Garrett had been seeking. To eke a confession out of Lewis would clear Garrett of all charges of guilt. Warily he stepped for the corner in which the crazed, clutching boatswain was crouched. He faced a man who would have super-strength in his madness.

Suddenly Garrett leaped. His hands groped for the huge bull-like neck of the scarred and broad-faced boatswain. Like a blast of dynamite the boatswain's two fists shot forward into Garrett's face, his elbows and shoulders swinging back and forth wildly. For a fraction of a second Garrett was a half a foot back. He was coming forward again when the huge bulky man lifted his boot and slammed it into Garrett's stomach. Huge legs scrambled over him and up the ladder.

**W**ITH intense pain in his mid-regions, Garrett struggled to his feet and grasped hold the iron ladder. His foot planked on the first rung. Then there was a large crackle behind him. The small hold was getting hotter. Garrett's head shot around and he saw the flames leaping higher and higher as if frenzied in a delight to destroy.

A cry breaking from his lips with the sudden realization of what the fire could do if it got any higher, Garrett leaped back in the hold. Here was a foe a man could not beat with fists. He looked about him wildly. A canvas tarpaulin lay rolled in one corner. Garrett grabbed it up and straightened it out.

He commenced beating it on the huge licking flames. But now they were reaching the overhead, crawl-

ing, leaping, jumping wildly about the hold.

Garrett's long arms worked in and out quickly, but his canvas extinguisher fell vainly on the fire. He wanted to give the alarm, yet he dared not leave this hold for an instant. Crazily he beat. The flames were getting closer to him. Soon they would have the whole lower hold—and if they ever got up to two decks above, where the paint locker was— He hated to think.

**S**UDDENLY he heard a loud howl from the top of the hold. Shooting his head upward he saw Captain Leland peering down, his deep blue eyes wild, his face twisted into the worst emotion of hate and anger.

"My ship, my ship," he heard the Old Man shout down hysterically. The calmness, the poker-face were shattered, nerves wrecked at this. A skipper's worst dread—fire.

Garrett knew the Old Man would never believe that he hadn't started the fire. With the accusation of the murder, this only heaped evidence higher.

Captain Leland half climbed and half fell to the bottom of the hold. His white face was drawn and agonized as he scanned the leaping flames. Then his withered and now gruesome countenance turned to Garrett. His old lips curled back in a snarl. His huge white fist smashed across Garrett's face.

The second mate grabbed the Old Man's shoulders.

"Sir, I tell you—"

"You rotten, yellow murderer," the Old Man sobbed. "You dirty, lousy scum. Murder my son and try to burn my ship!" He leaped wildly at Garrett, his arms outstretched in uncontrollable fury.

Garrett slammed him back against the iron ladder. "Sir, you've got to listen—"

The Old Man pushed him away.

"Listen?" he roared with an insane, hysterical laugh. Licks of the fire were dancing about him now. His head turned back and forth like a small boy seeing his only possession destroyed.

His fists doubled tighter and he seemed to try and take hold of himself. He didn't notice Garrett again, but picked up the canvas Garrett had used.

Again Garrett pushed the Old Man to the ladder. "Don't—" screamed the skipper, his hand groping for a dog wrench. Garrett slammed his fist across the Old Man's jaw. It stunned him long enough to drag him out of the flaming hold.

Once on deck the captain regained himself and scrambled to his feet. Garrett ran across to the bell beneath the mast and rang it wildly. Several long, screaming gongs burst on the night air, then a short gong. He repeated this twice.

At once the ship was alive with men. Half dressed seamen, coatless officers, running up and down ladders. Calls, shouts. Lockers being opened and pouring forth fire equipment. Extinguishers breaking forth. Fire blankets coming to top side. The deck hose being rigged quickly. Men running up and down deck, each to his station. Presently water spurted. Extinguishers drilled into the flames.

THE shrill horn from the bridge tooted eternally. But no ship was near these waters. It was a useless blast into the night air.

The flames had leaped three decks and were blasting from the top of the hold, coming clear out on deck. The paint locker was already soaring. Small explosions dynamited holes that led to huger flames. Thuds, crashes and the eternal leaping, jumping flames, spreading.

The fire hose seemed like a toy as the paint locker's kerosene and

other inflammable liquids churned the blaze to a frenzied height.

Trying desperately to blanket part of the flames, Garrett noticed that Boatswain Lewis, who should have been in charge of the fire party, was not present. The licking giants of fire crept higher and higher. The Old Man ran to the rail, connected pumps, slammed the hold shut. But the flames continued.

THE ship was bouncing up and down now wildly. The flames made huge streaks in the black night air. The engine room pumps suddenly stopped their throbbing, backed, stopped entirely.

The radio room was beating with the click, click, click of the S-O-S.

But the *Roamer* was old, some of the wood half rotted. Now given a chance, it soared in the fire.

Captain Leland suddenly realized the impossibility of it all. The tiny toys they had for fire prevention and extinguishing were nothing compared to these flames. He knew the rotted decks of the ship—he knew what they'd do in a fire. He had prayed long that such would never come. He realized now, and now only, that there was nothing they could do but get ashore. Then his eyes fell wildly on the tall, desperately working Garrett.

"Men," Leland screamed, and everything was suddenly still.

"Men! Garrett, Second Mate Jim Garrett, started this fire. Second Mate Jim Garrett murdered Tom Leland. Before you take to the lifeboats—*get him!*"

Taken utterly by surprise, Garrett backed quickly to the mast. He kicked out and threw his fists into a dozen men's faces. Then his fingers grasped the mast ladder.

The huge stick was swaying back and forth as he climbed. Men climbed after him.

In his mind was one goal. Lewis,

the boatswain. He *had* to find him. Had to get him. He knew there was no chance against the fire-crazed crew. He had to find Lewis and somehow get a confession. Prove to them—

He was getting near the top. The flames below were spreading fast, delighted in their newer, easier territory. The mast creaked back and forth. The wind howled around him. The ship bounced up and down, rocked crazily. The men were still coming and Garrett climbed faster.

Now he was coming to the crow's nest. A last chance, he thought grimly. If Lewis was hiding *there*—But as he scrambled into the cup-like enclosure, he found it empty. Cursing and yelling above the flames' roar were the men, close after him. Garrett looked despairingly to the taut stay that spread from the crow's nest, attached to the yard arm and stretching over to the bridge. He shook his head—no chance here.

**T**HE men were at his feet. Clawing hands grabbed at him. How easy it would be to kick them down now! But he couldn't do that. They were not his enemies.

He didn't want to kill any of them. Yet it was his life against theirs.

One man leaped up into the cup. Garrett slammed him with his fist. Then without knowing what impulse drove him to it, he found himself perched on the edge of the nest and reaching for the yard arm's taut guy line. Presently he was swinging on it, moving across the hard steel of the stay, hand over hand.

The screams and cries of the men grew louder. Curses followed him. The hard steel of the stay burned his hands. He felt his fingers slipping each time he grasped for a new hold. The wind howled louder, blowing his body back and forth.

Presently he felt a new weight on the line. Another man was following

him across! Then his head turned to his goal, the bridge. His eyes blinked as he saw the short third mate Jones standing there waiting.

Then he heard a horrible, agonizing scream. His head jerked about. He had looked in time to see the seaman who had tackled the stay hurtling, smashing, to that hard deck below. Then a dull thud and silence.

**G**ARRETT shuddered as his hands worked more swiftly across the line. The wind was playing havoc, as it swished and whirled about him. Presently he was within yards of the bridge. Would Jones shove him off now and send him hurtling, after the unfortunate seaman, to the deck below? Jones knew he couldn't stand up to Garrett in a hand-to-hand fight.

Then, quite suddenly, he saw the tall figure of Nelson, the quartermaster, join Jones.

His hands reached the bridge wing. Jones and Nelson were better men than he had supposed. They stood back until Garrett had swung his long body into the wing. Then iron hands clapped about him.

Garrett whirled, slamming a hard fist into Nelson's face. Nelson took it grinning and tried to lock Garrett's arms. Garrett's shoulder slammed into Nelson's face with a pile-driver force. Nelson groaned and for a second released his grip.

With a terrific smash Garrett plowed down Jones and, leaping across his body, ran into the bridge.

He *had* to find Lewis! He had to get the boatswain! Already he could hear the howls of the men climbing from the main deck up the bridge ladders. There was an enclosure on the back of the bridge that was very frequently visited by the men. Lewis often slept there.

He jerked around the side of the bridge. He got a fleeting glimpse of Lewis, climbing to the rail-enclosed top of the bridge!

In a leap he too was in this rail-enclosed bridge-top, where the flames were more plain and the wind howled like a thing gone mad. Lewis was waiting. He screamed an insane, woman-like scream and plunged forward, a huge marlin spike in his hands.

Garrett jerked his head only in time. He felt the spike graze his cheek, then it slammed against his shoulder. That hurt, like a ton truck hitting him! But his other arm worked up into a terrific smash against the other man's jaw.

Lewis, dropping the spike, plunged forward into Garrett with his huge arms swinging back and forth like a mechanical robot's. Garrett's fist squared back even with his shoulders, and he shot it into the bald-headed boatswain's face like a smash of iron.

Then the boatswain leaped, attempting to wrap his legs about Garrett. With a terrific shove Garrett got him away, pushed him against the low rail and slammed him harder. Left to his old trick of defense, the huge man lifted his leg once more.

**G**ARRETT grabbed it and with a quick jerk of his perfectly trained body he pulled the entire frame of the boatswain heavily up and then slammed him over the rail of the bridge top. He buckled one leg over the rail, using it as a leverage of weight.

Lewis' head and arms dangled over the sides. His horrible woman-like screams grew louder.

Then men arrived, in wild disorder. Garrett half turned. His black eyes were gleaming a wild defiance. His square jaw was set.

"If you come a step nearer, I'll drop him!" he snarled.

They hesitated.

Garrett saw Captain Leland scrambling to the bridge top. "Here's your murderer, Skipper," Garrett roared. "And also here's the fire bug."

The captain stared wild-eyed.

Garrett pulled the bulky form back up. Lewis' bald pate was scarlet with blood that had rushed to it, completely wiping out the last traces of sanity. The scar-faced man trembled in his grasp.

**G**ARRETT released him. The man stood apart, his legs spread. His huge fists were at his sides as his brown eyes leaped from face to face. His mouth was twitching crazily.

Suddenly he laughed, the wild, shrill and insane laugh. He pointed a long finger to the captain: "You promised to get me a ship," he shrieked. "You old fool, you couldn't never get a ship. I wanted this one—that's why I killed Tom Leland!" He laughed again.

The captain's white face was blank. His eyes were hard and glassy.

The insane man went on: "Then I wanted to burn the clues." Again laughter. "That bloody hatchet!"

One of the crew suddenly made for him, but the boatswain lifted his foot and slammed it into the unfortunate seaman's stomach. He turned to Garrett. He started for him, his eyes gleaming wildly. Then he turned back to the men who were closing in on him from all sides.

Then without warning he leaped high over the rail and down on the taut stay that Garrett had climbed. He worked his way across it with the ease of an old time boatswain and the strength of a maniac.

The flames roared below him. The ship rocked and dipped, nosing deeper and deeper. The boatswain kept swinging across the wire. "You'll never get me!" he howled.

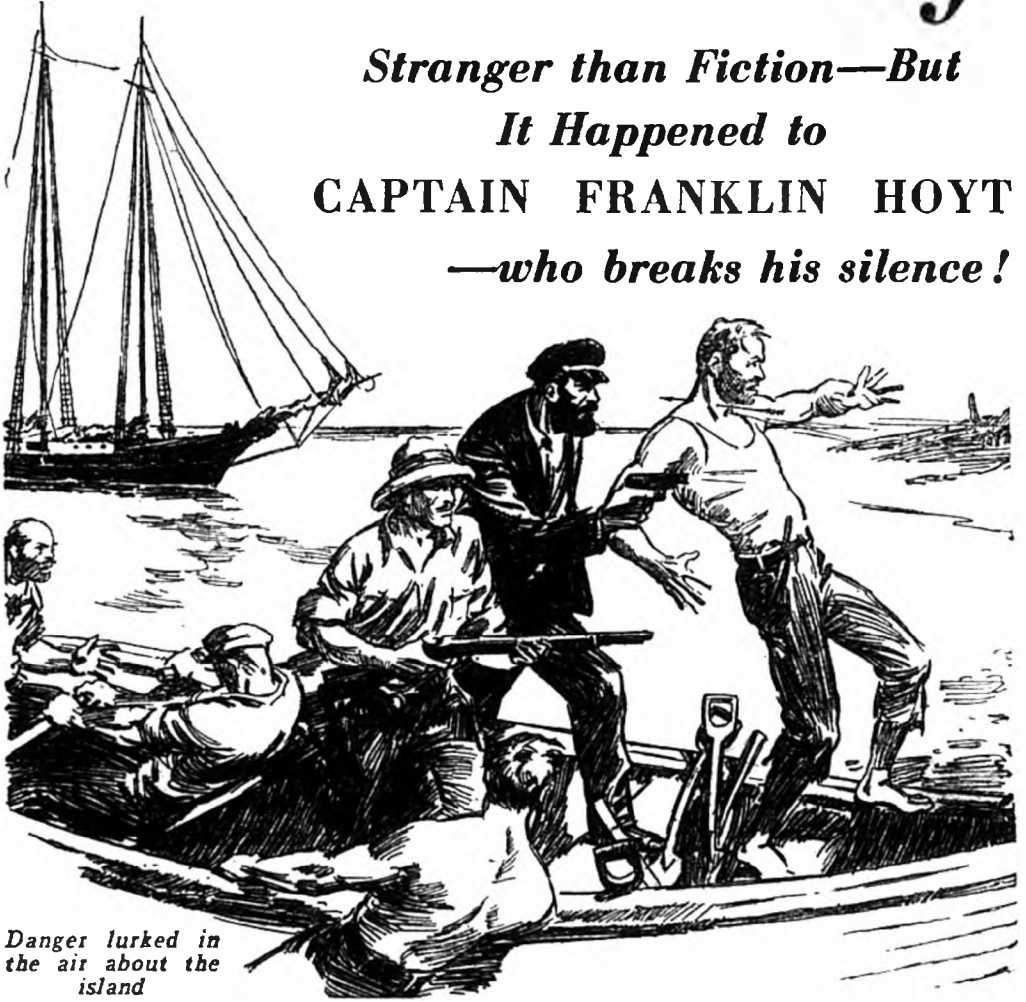
And they didn't. They had to take to the boats.

They left a crazy, screaming figure crouched in the crow's nest, waving, yelling, laughing—even as the ship exploded, split in two and disappeared into the hungry water.



# The Secret of

*Stranger than Fiction—But  
It Happened to  
CAPTAIN FRANKLIN HOYT  
—who breaks his silence!*



*Danger lurked in  
the air about the  
island*

*An Exciting, Amazing, True Experience Story!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Death Stows Away*

I STUMBLED on the whole thing by accident, as an adventurer stumbles on so many things which change the whole course of his life. I was in San Francisco at the time, poring over some old newspapers I had purchased at one of

those public sales which bring forth all sorts of oddments which have been hidden for decades in attics.

I don't doubt but that some of the things sold in this public auction came across the plains with the '49ers, who had them from a family line which may have started, in America, on the *Mayflower*. I spent five dollars on a batch of old letters and news-

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*A Fateful Expedition Strives to Penetrate*

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# Easter Island

There, before us, stood  
the great stone faces—the  
monoliths, centuries old



No peace, no rest. Perhaps it is the  
souls of those unfortunates who  
sailed with me, demanding  
that the world be told of their  
fate. Perhaps it is that inscrutable  
power which has kept the secret  
of the monoliths safe for  
thousands of years — and now  
impels me to tell my story as a  
warning to those who would seek  
to disturb that secret!

I do not know. I do know  
that the enclosed is a true  
account of the happenings which  
befell me on that mysterious  
island.

It may sound like fantasy—  
but it is true, every word  
of it springs from my own unforget-

At the left is a fac-  
simile of one page  
of the letter written  
to THRILLING AD-  
VENTURES by Cap-  
tain Franklin Hoyt  
in presenting this  
remarkable story of  
his adventurous and  
tragic experiences on  
Easter Island. You'll  
thrill to Captain  
Hoyt's unusual true  
yarn—which we be-  
lieve to be one of  
the most remarkable  
personal revelations  
that has appeared  
in years.

papers from the effects  
of a family named Tighe.

There was nothing of interest in  
the first eight or ten inches of stuff

I waded through—until I came to a yellowed newspaper clipping over

***the Age-Old Mystery of the Monoliths!***

forty years old. It read as follows:

SAN FRANCISCO: May 7, 1891. Captain Gregory Tighe sailed today for his projected explorations on Easter Island. The captain is of the opinion that all the great monoliths, shaped like human faces, which are scattered over the island, are not merely monuments, and are not anything scientists have tried to make them. He says that nobody knows anything about them, a fact which science has just about agreed to. Tighe believes simply that nobody knows how they came there, what lost people carved them, or whence came the mighty stones which the best engineering instruments of today could not budge.

That was the story. It intrigued me, because Easter Island happened to be one of the few places in the world I had not visited in many years of hunting out the strange and bizarre in all parts of the globe.

I went out with the yellowed piece of paper folded in a hand that trembled with excitement, and started through the morgues of all the newspapers, trying to find what had happened to the Tighe expedition. I knew it was useless to try to do anything with his family, his descendants, for they were all dead, else his effects would never have been sold at public auction. Well, I came up against a startling thing when I started digging.

That newspaper story I had located had been the last news ever received about Captain Gregory Tighe! He had simply sailed into the ocean and vanished. He had taken his daughter, Evelyn, a girl of seventeen, with him.

I SPENT another week checking on the *Evelyn Tighe*, his four-masted schooner. It hadn't even been sighted after it had left San Francisco. The mystery was so complete that no questions were even asked about it.

What had become of Tighe, of his daughter, and whatever crew he had taken with him? And what had been behind his belief that the great monoliths, showing faces the like of which

do not exist in the world today, guarded something? And if they did guard something, what?

I made it my business to search the libraries—and came up against a blank wall.

No scientist living or dead knew anything about those mighty stone monuments on Easter Island. One man's guess was as good as another's.

MAYBE newspaper publicity would help out. I went to the best newspaper in 'Frisco and informed a good reporter that I was going to Easter Island to find out what had happened to Tighe and, if possible, what those monoliths meant.

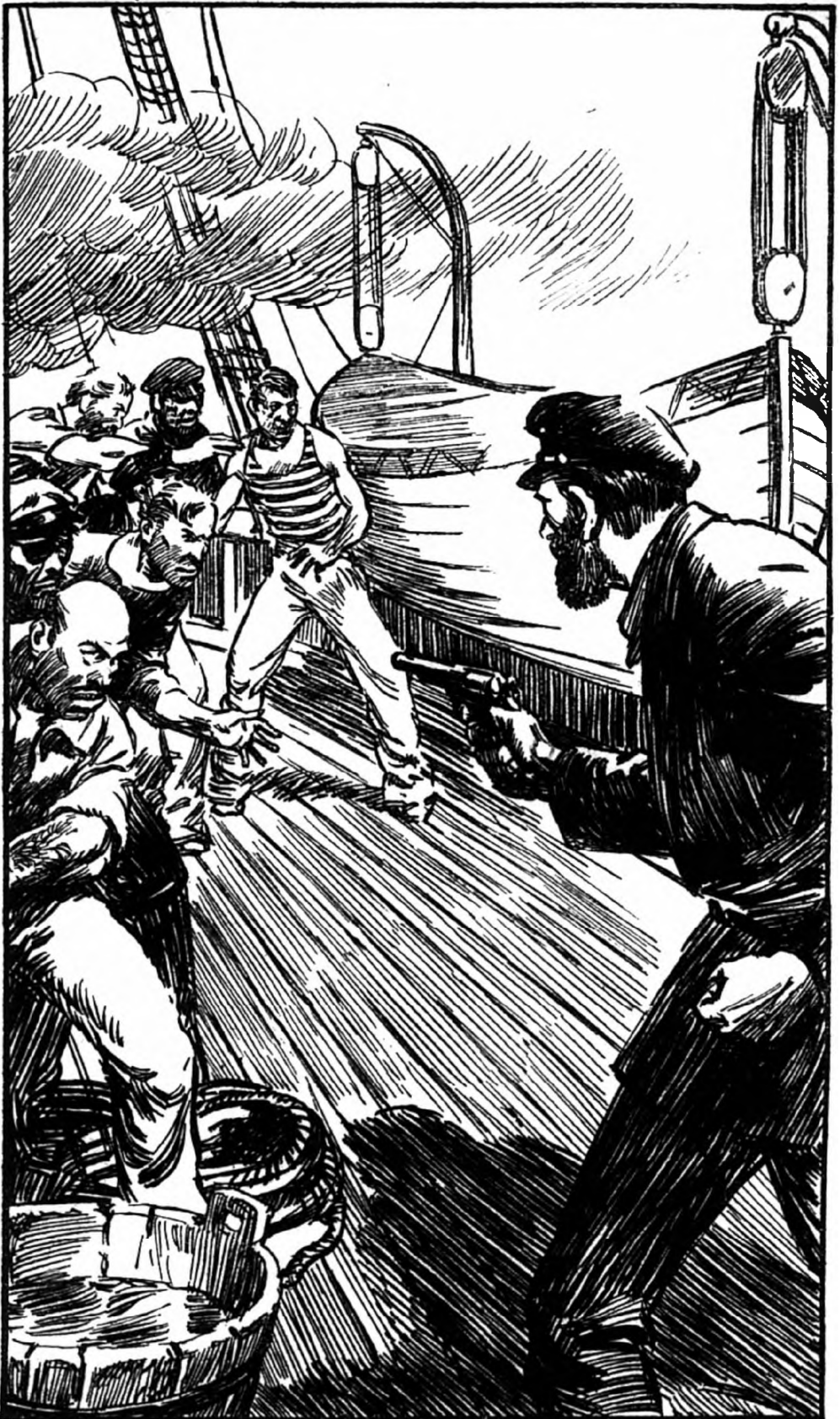
I don't think my heart ever stopped hammering with excitement. I had all sorts of fancies, in which I could indulge myself because I wasn't a dry-as-dust scientist who had to hew to the line of accepted facts. I had money enough for anything I wished to do, thanks to a fat inheritance to which I had added a few hundred thousand dollars by lucky investments.

I got the newspaper heated up. I gave out that I wanted to buy a four-masted schooner with an auxiliary motor on it and get a crew to handle same.

For the next four months I was about the busiest man in all San Francisco. I picked my captain with care. He was Jacob Stegin, one-time famous master of sail. At least that's the name under which he wished to sign on. He had papers to captain ships in any waters, of any tonnage, sail or steam.

He was quite a guy. He had a distinguished spade beard, stood six feet in his bare toes, had eyes like an eagle, was sixty years old and looked thirty-five. His cheeks were as ruddy as those of an Indian.

Well, he got that crew aboard and supplies enough to last for a long cruise. I didn't spare expense. At



*"The first man to touch the lifeboats gets a bullet through the head!"*

the very least I'd get some excitement, which I felt I needed. My one desire in life was to live dangerously.

We pulled out of San Francisco and started our long voyage. Safely out of the Golden Gate, I asked Stegin to muster the crew so I could look them over. They were a tough lot, but seemed to suit Stegin.

I was especially interested in a white man who had the features of an Indian of our own Southwest. I inquired about him. He had signed on under the prosaic name of Olaf Johnson. I knew he had about as much right to that name as I had.

I didn't like the look I caught in his deep black eyes, as ebon and obsidian as those of a snake. He had yellow hair which he wore long, almost to his shoulders. He worked with his torso bare, and the muscles under his skin were like live serpents.

In spite of his white skin, I couldn't escape the feeling that actually, in the soul of him, he wasn't white at all! But maybe I'd been thinking too much about the mystery of Easter Island. I had dreamed of the great lost continents of pre-historic times—millions of years ago for all anyone knows—known to folk of today by almost mythical names: Mu and Atlantis.

Nobody had ever definitely located them. The oceans of the world, if the continents had ever existed at all, had swallowed up their secrets and their people—unless we ourselves are descendants who somehow escaped the deluge.

**FUNNY** that Olaf Johnson made me think again of the lost continents. I had been trying somehow, in my unscientific mind, to connect them up with Easter Island, where nothing lived but birds, where the great faces of mystery stared out at the blue wastes of water as they must have

stared when Thebes was the City of a Hundred Gates.

It troubled me a little, especially when I sensed Johnson's antagonism, never verbally expressed, to me.

"Look, Stegin," I said the first day out, "where did you get Johnson?"

"Off the docks. I questioned him a little. He's done plenty of sailing. He's an excellent man. He saw the stuff in the newspapers and came to sign on. That's all, except that he seems to know best the waters of Central and South America."

"You think he's a Scandinavian?"

**S**TEGIN looked at me queerly, his eyes narrowed.

"Funny you should ask that," he said, "for the fact is that I have wondered more about him than about anyone else on board."

Stegin left me then, his face a little troubled, and I knew why. A mystery aboard a ship—especially an old hulk, about which stories must have been current for decades—might be a tough thing to handle for a captain, especially if his crew were superstitious.

I don't know whether we were overheard or not, but that night as I lay asleep, I suddenly snapped awake as though somebody had slapped my face. I had a stateroom to myself. I listened.

Outside on deck I could hear the creaking of cordage, the humming of the motor, proof that Stegin was using the engines, that we had struck a calm at sea. Nothing seemed to be amiss.

I rose, puzzled as to why I had awakened. I never thought of disregarding it, because more than once in the past my hunches had saved my life. I turned on the light, and looked all around the room.

Then I gasped. For sticking into the bulkhead, within an inch of where my throat must have been when I had slept, lying on my back, was

the handle of a knife. The blade had been driven fully two inches into the bulkhead. I went to the porthole. It was closed and locked.

From the angle at which the knife had entered the wood, I believed that it had come through the porthole. But how had anyone managed to get into position to throw it through such a small hole and with such accuracy? I realized that if the thrower had actually tried to slit my throat with a thrown knife, he could have done it. This knife, then, was probably a warning. But of what?

**I** EXTENDED my hand to it, when a deep voice of warning seemed to come right out of my soul. I hesitated, then covered my hand with several thicknesses of cloth, grasped the handle gingerly and pulled.

The knife blade was of smoothly polished stone. It was as black as ebony. It seemed to glow in the light balefully. The handle was of the shape of a snake of some kind, a snake with three eyes, one in the center of its skull, set somewhat back from the two which were properly located. I had never heard of a snake that even remotely resembled this knife haft.

I sat down under the light. I studied the knife carefully. I pressed that central snake-eye with the point of a pencil, and a queer, reptilian hiss came out of the knife, and from the narrowed mouth of the thing darted a shining length of needle, sharp as any hypodermic.

I happened to be holding a section of the cloth I had used to protect my hand, under the weapon. A dark brownish substance had come out of the snake's mouth onto the cloth.

Well, I hadn't come on this expedition without the latest in equipment and personnel. I knew exactly what to do. I dressed quickly and went to the cabin next door, occupied by Jimmy Slavin, a friend of

mine who had come along with me on the trip as a lark. He was an expert toxicologist.

I knocked on his door. There was no answer. I knocked again. The door moved slightly under my hand. Darkness seemed to flow out at me from his cabin—darkness and a subtle emanation of fear.

I pressed the button to the left of the door, entered, stepped back and closed the door when I saw what reposed on the bed. It was the body of Jimmy Slavin.

His face was blue, ghastly. His tongue protruded blackly from between his lips. His eyes stared glassily up at the ceiling. His arms and legs stood out awkwardly from his body—because that body was swollen to twice its normal proportions. I shuddered.

Good old Slavin! But there was nothing I could do for him. He would be buried at sea in the morning.

Now I had made up my mind what to do. I went for Captain Stegin. I didn't apologize for waking him. I demanded that the crew be instantly mustered on deck for a counting of noses and the asking of plenty of questions.

Stegin didn't seem surprised. I think he must have been expecting something. He had an air of fatal resignation and didn't ask so much as one question.

He ordered all hands on deck, even to the cook. We counted noses. Olaf Johnson was not among the crew anywhere. We searched the ship and could not find him!

## CHAPTER II

### *Ghost or Human?*

**W**HERE was Olaf Johnson? We had searched the ship thoroughly. We were ready to take oath that he wasn't aboard. Yet where had he gone? If Stegin

had spoken truly he was too good a seaman to have fallen overboard carelessly. I faced the mustered crew again.

"Where is Olaf Johnson—Where is Olaf Johnson?" I demanded of the men.

The crew looked at one another. Johnson had turned in when the others had. They had all seen him go to bed. Yet he wasn't there now. On the point of telling the crew what had happened, since they would know it tomorrow anyhow, I noticed a warning look in Stegin's eyes.

He knew what I did, but he wanted at least another night of peace. Besides, we were rapidly drawing out of the regular steamer lanes, beyond which it would be impossible to trans-ship the crew in case of trouble. Stegin was whole-heartedly with me on this cruise, and nothing must happen to make it fail at the very beginning.

For that reason we waited two more days and nights before having Jimmy Slavin sewed up in canvas and consigned to the deep. The crew stood around as the captain intoned the burial service.

"And his body shall be cast into the deep—"

**T**HERE was something abysmally final about it. I stood at the rail as Slavin went in, weighted at the feet with a sack of coal. His body twirled as it went down, like a pendulum gone crazy. Then the motion of the ship carried us beyond it. The captain had told me that Slavin at the moment was just five miles from land—straight down!

Nothing of especial moment happened that day, though Stegin and I noticed that the crew were unusually silent. They had made the fact of the four-master an excuse for much hilarity and the signing of chanteys, up to now; but they couldn't help knowing that Slavin

had been dead in his cabin for two days before we had buried him. And they didn't know why.

Give a sailorman something unknown to fear, and he becomes something with which to reckon. And they were wondering about Johnson, too.

**M**EANWHILE, with Stegin's help, I did the best I knew how to analyze the brown stuff which had squirted onto my piece of cloth the night when the snake's-head knife had all but cut my throat. I had no luck. Nor were there any fingerprints on the knife.

That didn't trouble me, however, for it seemed to me that Johnson's disappearance was a clear confession of guilt.

Stegin suggested another way to discover what that brown stuff was. He proposed the ship's cat, first, but a cat aboard a ship is supposed to be lucky. If the cat had died the sailors would have been sure that bad luck was to come. So we set a couple of sailors to looking for rats, and in no time at all they produced three big ones—fat, squealing fellows who didn't like to be prisoners.

Then Stegin and I locked ourselves in Slavin's room—the one in which he had been intended to preside as ship's doctor—and went to work on the rats. Stegin had a rough and ready knack for first aid and for surgery of a sort. He performed the operation. He heated a sharpened knife. We moistened the brown stuff on the cloth and managed to smear some of it on the blade of the knife, right at the point.

Then Stegin just pricked the skin of one of the rats with it. The result was amazing. The rat jumped out of our hands, ran crazily about the room for a couple of seconds, bumping into things, then curled up on the floor and swelled to twice its normal size before our eyes. Its eyes



popped out. Its tongue protruded from between its lips.

I stared at Stegin. He stared at me. Save that this was a rat, it might have been Slavin all over again.

"I've never seen anything or anybody die just like that, Skipper," I said, trying to make my voice sound natural and not succeeding. "Did you?"

He hesitated for a moment.

"Yes," he said, "there is a species of snake in Central America, below the Canal Zone near the border of Columbia, in the unknown lands back of Darien, which causes men and beasts to die like that with its bite. It has no scientific name because no scientist has ever penetrated into the heart of Darien and returned alive, and no one has succeeded in extracting the venom of the snake—and living afterward."

"And Olaf Johnson," I said musingly, "knows the waters of Central and South America. He is a white man with features of an Indian. I wonder. I suppose you've heard of the White Indians of Darien and of northern South America?"

"Yes. They're a myth. There ain't no such animal."

I shrugged, but I was willing to believe anything.

AT this point there came a rapid knocking on the door. I ran and opened it, followed slowly by Stegin. One of the sailors stood there, panting like a runner who has traveled a long race.

"I've just seen Olaf Johnson!" he said. "Down in the hold. I was looking at some stores to make sure they hadn't shifted."

"Are you sure?" demanded Stegin. "We've hunted the ship over for him. He can't be aboard."

It was an unfortunate thing to say to a common sailor. Stegin should have known better.

"Then it was his ghost I saw, sir,

come back from the sea," said the sailor. "I'm sure I saw him—or something!"

Well, we mustered the crew again, and scattered them all through the ship. They turned it upside down, but no Olaf Johnson. And all the time the sailor who claimed to have seen him, tagged us, insisting that it had been Johnson he had seen and none other.

I WAS beginning to get the willies over the whole thing to such an extent that I couldn't wonder or blame the crew if they, too, got the willies. They were silent, white-faced and afraid when we mustered them again to get their reports of failure. I knew in my own mind that Olaf Johnson was somewhere aboard the ship—but where?

Not an inch of it had been overlooked. Of course, a nimble man might hide in one place, then slip out and hide in one we had just searched; but it would take a nimble man, indeed, and one who could almost make himself invisible.

While we were talking with the crew, trying to figure out the mystery, the eyes of the men facing me suddenly widened. I saw one of them shape a word with his lips:

"Fire!"

I whirled. Smoke was pouring out of one of the hatches we had opened in our search for Johnson. Nothing is feared at sea like a fire in the hold. It may mean that the ship will go to the bottom, or burn around its captain and crew, or blow up entirely, at any minute.

Someone yelled for the lifeboats. The crew broke ranks, swarming to the davits—when there came the cold voice of Captain Stegin, who had drawn back to give himself room when he heard the first cry of fire.

"The first man to touch the lifeboats gets a bullet through the head!" he snapped in his cold, mas-

ter's voice. "I am captain of this schooner, and you will abandon ship only at my command."

They drew back, They milled. Then Captain Stegin snapped at the man who had reported having seen Olaf Johnson:

"It isn't bad, yet. Go down in the hold and see what's afire."

The fellow had courage. I know he dreaded to go down into that hold as he dreaded nothing else he could imagine. But he squared his shoulders and went.

We waited developments. In a few minutes the smoke almost ceased. Sighs of relief burst from the lips of the sailors. Their faces were sheepish as they stepped back from the lifeboats. But other minutes passed and MacKenzie, the man who had gone into the hold, hadn't returned.

"It's up to you, Hoyt," said Stegin icily. "See what happened to MacKenzie."

I went down, my heart in my mouth. I found where some waste near a pile of highly inflammable stores had been set afire, and where MacKenzie, no doubt, had extinguished it with water. An empty pail stood beside the still slightly smoking waste.

**B**UT no MacKenzie! He had vanished as though the hold had swallowed him. He hadn't come on deck, for we would have seen him.

Nor could I find him anywhere in the hold.

I went back on deck, hoping that the crew couldn't see that my face was pale.

"He's put out the fire," I said. "He'll be up in a minute or two. I gave him a little job to do down there."

Stegin dismissed the crew, ordering them back to their duties. Three of them were ordered to batten down the hatch whence the smoke was still coming. It was now so slight as to

be no indication of danger whatever. The three men started toward the hatch.

Then all at once they screamed, turned and ran back toward us. Something had been catapulted onto the deck, through that open hatch, as though shot from a gun.

No second look was needed to see that it was MacKenzie, and that he was dead. He had died as Slavin had died and as the rat had died. His face and eyes were terrible.

**A**GAIN Stegin's voice broke in harshly, as the sailors gathered once more in a compact, fearful group forward of the poop.

"There's a poisonous reptile among the stores," he said. "It's only a Central American snake, but it may get some of the rest of you. Get into the hold and be careful as you hunt for it. There may be two or more of them."

"We ain't swallowing none o' that, Cap'n," said a brawny, red-headed bruiser in the crew. "No snake of no size, not even a boa constrictor, threw MacKenzie up out of that hold. They's something else down there."

"And you're all going down to see what it is," said Stegin.

And they went, too, so potent was Stegin's personality. When they came back their white faces were streaked with sweat and grime, and they hadn't found any snakes—and, ominous circumstance, they didn't have anything to say.

Stegin looked them over for a moment, then went further than I would ever have asked him to go. He sent for an axe; and right in front of the crew, while I looked on, his revolver in my hand, Stegin smashed in the bottoms of the lifeboats so that they were useless unless repaired. Repairs would take several hours. Those hours would give would-be mutineers time to think a little. Stegin had

definitely committed every man to our venture.

There was sullen murmuring. Stegin spoke in a swift aside to me.

"No sleep until we get there, for us, Hoyt," he said. "They'll try to take over the ship any time now."

Three times that night I heard savage screams, either of pain or terror, from the heart of the hold. But no member of the crew showed himself from the forecastle, and the helmsman stood at his post as though he had been carved there when I went on deck.

What was in the hold? Why the screams? Was somebody, and that somebody Johnson, trying to frighten us away from Easter Island? If so, why?

I wondered, if he were compelled somehow to answer truthfully to every question put to him, whether questions about himself and his past would have given us the answer to the mystery.

Stark terror of the "ghost"—or the thing—in the hold held sway on the ship until we reached Easter Island and saw the first of the forbidding faces.

### CHAPTER III

#### *By What Hands?*

**H**OW does one describe the indescribable? One doesn't; but the reporter tries his best. Easter Island is a waste. Nothing lives on it except birds. Our schooner anchored just inside a submerged reef, behind which the ocean floor was as plainly visible as though there had been no water at all and we had been suspended in space.

As far as the eye could reach, and to infinity beyond that, stretched the dreary, limitless expanse of the sea. Fish swam in the depths, beautiful things. And there were waving, growing things on the ocean floor. The sea boomed mournfully across the

reef, slashed against the shore, to be heard by no man for years on end—until we came.

I got a queer tug at my heart when I saw the first of the human-faced monoliths. I couldn't help feeling that their secret was somehow wrapped up with all we had experienced on the interminable journey from San Francisco, a voyage that all of us felt would never end.

**B**UT now we were here, and what adventures faced us? The great stone faces seemed to mock us, as though they said:

"The ages have not disclosed our secrets. How then do you puny mortals dare to try?"

Stegin was all for starting right off. It was just after noon, with plenty of hours of daylight left. Birds of queer plumage cried about the masts of our schooner whose sails were secured. We were "a painted ship upon a painted ocean."

Cordage creaked, giving us a sound of the outside world that was more mournful than reassuring. It was as though the world had left us, as though we had somehow been catapulted, ship and all, back into some ancient time when these great stone faces had been new and the hands which had carved them had been the hands of living men.

Stegin left the first mate, a handsome Nordic over six feet in height, aboard when we went ashore. He had with him just one man to stand watch, because we didn't know what we might run into; we might have need of every man ashore. There were no warnings of storm, and probably no other ship within hundreds of miles, so the ship had no need of a big guard.

Leslie Morton, the first mate, leaned over the rail and grinned at us as we shoved off in one of the boats. They had been repaired after we had managed to prove to the crew

the hopelessness of any attempt to return to the steamer lanes without a navigator.

But the crew were still sullen. They seemed always to have been. Whenever a member was behind me my back always crawled; I expected a knife stab between the shoulder blades.

We were rowed ashore. Scarcely had we set foot on the place than one of the sailors cried:

"Look there! By one of the stone faces. What is it? I saw something move. It looked like a man."

At that very moment he screamed and fell, clutching his throat, from which a small arrow protruded. Almost immediately the poor fellow's body started to swell, and in minutes he was dead. The end of that arrow was stained with brown beneath the blood.

I looked around as soon as he screamed, but I didn't see anything. Maybe I looked too high up the face of the thing. When we finally left the dead sailor and, resuming our grim march, reached the face he had mentioned, we discovered that its size entirely dwarfed our party. A man, standing against it, and seen from a distance, would have seemed like a pigmy.

**T**HE party stayed back as I advanced, climbing up an incline which reached to the base of the monolith. I went to the spot where the sailor claimed to have seen something that looked like a man. I found a footprint. It was like no footprint I had ever seen.

I diagnosed a sandal of some kind. But what had caused the few drops of moisture where the creature had stood, and where was it now?

I dashed around the monolith, climbing up as fast as I could. I lost the prints immediately, but I kept on climbing. If anybody had gone this way I would certainly be

able to see him from the top of the hill on whose side the monolith stood. But when I reached the top I could see nothing.

Nothing moved in any direction I looked, save Stegin and the sailors, who were slowly advancing to the base of the great stone face. I looked down at the head of the thing, a vast expanse of stone which had been carved into the shape of a starkly simple headdress—by whose long-dead hands?

**I** PAUSED a moment in thought. What was the meaning of this monolith, and the others I could see? The one directly below me seemed to be leaning forward, as it must have been leaning for hundreds, maybe thousands, of years, as though it peered over a shoulder of the hill into a deep valley. But there was no deep valley; below was only the ocean.

Who was to say that at some time in the long vanished past, there had not been a valley into which this figure had peered? If there had been, it had vanished without trace, swallowed by the ocean. Maybe Easter Island itself was the only trace left of a mighty continent peopled—by what sort of folk?

And whence had these stones come? They hadn't been quarried on this spot, for there was no stone anywhere within sight even remotely resembling the stone of the monolith. Maybe, then, it had been carved and moved hither out of the valley into which it seemed to be looking, before the valley had become ocean.

But how had it been brought here? Thousands of people could not have dragged it here.

And if it had come from somewhere else—some other island perhaps, now lost in the sea—what sort of vessel had brought it? No vessel existed today which could have carried it, even if some miracle could have placed it aboard that vessel.

Well, I'd find the secret. Others had failed, but I wasn't accustomed to failure. I studied the other faces I could see, wondering by what mathematical process they had been erected. Did they all peer at something hidden from my eyes? Was that something to be found at the point on the ground where all their glances converged?

Could the monolith have been carved there where it stood?

There was no detritus under it which might have been residue from the mallets and chisels of the carvers!

My head whirled with the possibilities.

I went back to my associates. We had, by accident, hit upon the largest of the monoliths, at least within sight, in the beginning. I thought it as good a place as any to begin. We had brought picks and shovels, dynamite, everything we would need during the day, including sandwiches. My expedition was well equipped.

"Let's see what the thing rests on," I said tentatively. "It must have a solid foundation to stand this long."

Stegin looked at me queerly when I failed to mention having seen or not seen the figure which had killed the sailor. But he said nothing.

We set to work. The sun was a blazing ball in the sky. The air was heavy, almost ominous. The sailors looked at the mighty face which towered above them with fearful eyes. Then they looked at Stegin, whose hand rested on his revolver. It wouldn't do for these men to be afraid of the monolith.

**I** STARTED the ball rolling myself by taking a pick from one of the men and driving it deeply into the soil at the base of the great stone face. It sank in easily. I put the pick aside, grabbed a shovel, started work-

ing down from against the base of the monolith.

The sound of the shovel striking against the great pile of stone was eerie in the extreme. I'll wager no such sound had been heard on Easter Island since the last hand had dropped its tools and gone down the mountainside, its work ended in the long ago, before the dawn of recorded history.

Nothing happened to me.

**I** STEPPED back to allow the crew to get busy with the excavation, when one of the sailors suddenly burst out into strange words which had a familiar ring about them:

*"Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin!"*

I whirled on the man who had spoken. His face was white as a sheet. His eyes bulged. He swayed on his feet. He was the brawny red-head who wouldn't accept the snake story, that day when MacKenzie had been catapulted onto the deck of the *'Frisco Lass* from the hold. I instantly recognized the words—and knew at once that the redhead in all his life had probably never heard them spoken. They were the words which a hand of fire had written on the walls at the Feast of Belshazzar of Biblical fame:

"You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting!"

"What's the idea, Red?" I demanded. "What made you shout those words?"

"I'm as surprised as you are, Cap'n," he said hoarsely. "I jist felt like I hadda shout something. I opened my mouth, an' them words come out. I haven't the slightest inkle o' what they mean."

I turned to Stegin. He nodded slightly. He knew the meaning of the words. And he knew that they were somehow a warning. But how? Why? From whence?

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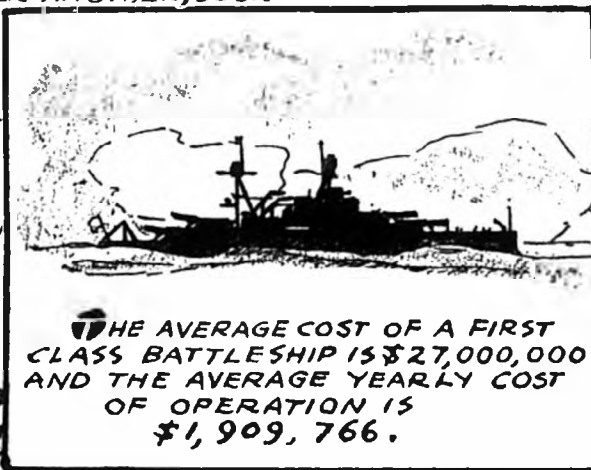




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WOUNDED AND FORCED TO RETIRE TO THE MOUNTAINS, BRUCE DIRECTED HIS SMALL ARMY SO THAT THEY WON BATTLE AFTER BATTLE.

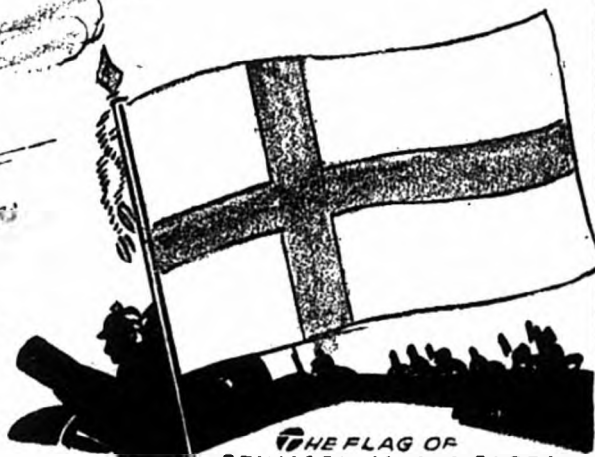
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*He slid the end of the*

## CHAPTER I

### *Unexpected Welcome*

**J**ACK BLAIR'S handsome pinto snorted loudly and leaped from the narrow desert trail. Jack's gray leather chaps scraped against thorny mesquite bushes.

He jerked up his idly-swinging reins and clamped his legs tightly about the animal. From under his wide-brimmed Stetson, with its curled front brim just above keen, blue eyes, he glanced around in surprise.

The roar of the rifle had sounded very close, and the bullet had slapped up dust from beneath the pinto's small hoofs. A less expert rider would have been thrown, and a less expert shot would have crippled the horse for life.

"Well, Buck, what do you know about *that!*" Jack ejaculated. "Looks like somebody's tellin' us tuh stop."

His gaze shot around. Behind, the hot desert stretched to dim horizon. Ahead, the opening of a big, rocky canyon with pine- and juniper-covered sides faced him. His eyes narrowed swiftly as he saw whitish smoke curling up from behind an outcropping mass of boulders fifty feet in front.

"*Bueno*, whoever yuh are," Jack called. "Don't waste no more hot lead on Buck and me; but what's the big idea?"

"Drop your guns!" came the curt reply from behind the rocks.

At sound of the voice, Jack's eyes widened, for it was a girlish one, though now curt and hard. A grin came into his bronzed young face.





barrel over the window-sill, and then he grimly took aim

He unbuckled his gun-belt and allowed it to slip down to the ground. His two .45s thudded dully in the sand.

"And now what, miss?" he inquired amusedly. "Aimin' tuh swipe my bronc and leave me afoot, away out here in this old desert?"

"Get down!" The mechanism of a Winchester clicked behind the rocks.

Jack swung to the ground, dropped his reins and lifted both hands high. His eyes were twinkling now. He'd never been held up by a girl before, and he found the situation intriguing.

"As yuh says, miss," he replied. "I'm reachin' for the clouds and waitin' yore next command, but if yo're lookin' for *dinero*, I got the laugh on yuh plum complete. I'm as broke as a outlaw hoss after a rodeo."

From behind the rocks a girl stepped, gripping a Winchester. Jack stared, for she was very lovely.

About twenty, she was wearing neatly-cut riding clothes and boots, though they were covered with dust now. Beneath her gray, wide-brimmed hat, her fair hair glinted in the bright sunlight of the Arizona day. A soft throat rose from an open-necked shirt of light blue, partly concealed by a big, polka-dotted neckerchief. Her cheeks held the rose-flush of desert winds and her blue eyes, now so stern, seemed made for joy.

"Step back, away from your horse and guns!" came her next sharp command. Her rifle did not waver the least bit.

Jack moved slowly back, one pace, two, three, four, then stopped, grinning, hands still high. The girl moved

forward cautiously until she stood over Jack's guns. Then she studied him keenly, for a long moment.

"Want I should do some more tricks?" he asked. "I'm good at singin' range songs, the boys tell me; and I can turn somersaults."

**B**UT, as he looked into the girl's eyes, he read there a strange anxiety. She studied his face. And Jack, six-feet-one, wide of shoulders and flat of waist, was good to look at.

"Who are you?" she asked firmly, her gaze meeting his fearlessly.

"Me?" Jack grinned again. "Well, last time anybody spoke my name, it was Jack Blair, of the most law abidin' fraternity on earth." He flipped back the collar of his shirt and revealed a deputy's star. He eyed her amusedly. "Yo're holdin' up the law, young lady. That's a—serious offense."

But at sight of the star, her rifle had slipped down and she suddenly became just a young woman in distress. A sob choked from her throat.

"Thank God!" she murmured. "I was afraid you might be one of Gonzales' gang. He has both white men and Mexicans, and they've been chasing us for days. An hour ago, they shot Dad, back near our shack. I was hiding in the brush.

"They rode away, after searching him and the shack. I got Dad on his bunk, but I don't know what to do. He—he's—dying, I think. So I came out here, to get help, if anyone passed; and then *you* came."

"Glad tuh serve yuh, Miss—Miss—" Jack began, feeling instant sympathy.

"Bessie Williams," she told him between sobs. "My father is George Williams, a—a prospector. We struck gold, down below, several weeks ago, and, ever since then, those Gonzales men have been following us, thinking we were carrying gold up to town."

Jack's eyes flashed oddly as she

mentioned her name and her father's. He picked up his guns and buckled them on.

"Where's yore father now?" he asked quietly.

"Back in our shack, which we thought was too hidden for anybody to see. We've been living here a couple of weeks, liding out." Suddenly she gazed at Jack anxiously again. "You—you're not after father, are you? He's innocent of robbing that bank in town. I know he is, sir!"

Jack smiled quietly. "Let's git to him, Miss Bessie," he suggested. "Maybe I can help."

In silence, she led him back into the canyon for a hundred yards, then turned into a narrower one which wound crazily back into other hills. Ten minutes later they came out into a small, well-watered little valley. At the side of a great red cliff stood an old adobe shack, its door swinging open in the light breeze.

As they entered the house, Jack's right hand slipped down and loosened his .45 in its holster and his eyes hardened slightly. He peered over her shoulder. On a crude bunk against a wall lay a large, heavily-bearded man with iron-gray hair and mustache. One look into the suffering face was enough. It was the very man whom he had been sent out into these wild hills to capture, dead or alive!

**B**ESSIE WILLIAMS dropped to her knees beside the old man and sobbed against his shoulder. Old Williams opened pain-filled eyes and breathed heavily, his hands over a ghastly wound in his chest.

A quick examination told Jack that taking his man back to Big Rock would never hold legal punishment for this old, grizzled ex-outlaw. Death was too near. Nor did Jack's moving fingers feel any concealed money.

The bank up in Big Rock had been robbed, at night, a short while before, and its cashier shot down in cold blood. The president of the bank had told one and all that he had had a gun-fight with the robber, alone in the dark alley behind the bank, and he had asserted positively that he had recognized old Williams as the thief.

"He was masked, boys," he had stated, "but he had on that old gray Stetson he always wears, and the same dark-brown chaps with the silver conchas down the legs."

OLD SHERIFF HOWARD had sent a posse scouring the hills for old Williams night and day, ever since; had himself, though rheumatic, taken out several, but old Williams had not been found.

And then Jack Blair had come riding into town hunting a job. Old Howard had instantly deputized him to lend a hand. Jack had consented and, for several days now, had been riding through the foothills, searching.

At times, he had taken a young Mexican with him—a youth named Tony Calles, one of old Howard's deputies. Tony was forever smiling, and he knew the foothills to the last inch. Howard's recommendation of Tony had been high.

"A good young Mex, Jack," Howard had said. "He's bright as a new silver dollar, and ef these young Mex *señoritas* 'll jest leave 'im alone, he's gonna make a fine deppity."

And young Tony had seemed eager to serve Jack. -

"That ol' George Williams, *señor*," he had told Jack, "ees wan *malo hombre*. He ees wan *diablo* weeth the gun."

As the days had passed, Jack became suspicious that Tony was not as eager to find old Williams as he appeared to be, and had left Tony back in Big Rock.

Old Williams, in his earlier life as outlaw, had gained a reputation for being a dead shot, and that old reputation had continued to cling to him ever since. Jack felt that Tony was scared.

But now, as Jack stood beside the weeping girl, he studied her closely, wonderingly. He had never heard that old Williams had a daughter. Suddenly she rose as hoofbeats sounded in the distance. Her expression became again one of tense anxiety, almost fright.

"They're coming back!" she cried. "Those horrible Gonzales' men!" Her hands gripped Jack's arm. "Or maybe another of those posses. Please take us away, anywhere, till father can get well. He's innocent, but they'll hang him."

Jack was hearing those thudding hoofbeats, too. Maybe the Gonzales gang, maybe old Howard's posse. If the first, a desperate fight, against great odds, was inevitable; and if the coming riders should prove to be Howard and his posse, this girl would be arrested and dragged back to Big Rock's shabby little adobe jail and subjected to every sort of Howard's overly-severe methods. The old sheriff's ideas of justice made him pitiless with prisoners and witnesses, male or female.

"PLEASE, please!" the girl begged. Her lovely face was drenched with tears, her lips quivering.

But Jack studied her curiously.

"I never heard that old Williams had a daughter," he stated. "How come—"

"I joined him down here recently," she explained swiftly, "after mother died back in El Paso. Dad has a home down in the south hills, just above the border, near his mine, which he discovered a little while ago. But those Gonzales men have learned about Dad's strike, and they've been trailing us hard, thinking we're

carrying gold-dust to town. So we've been hiding here for a week.

"Dad and I've had to go into Big Rock several times, for supplies, and everybody up there knows we're around close. Then came that bank robbery, and friends told us that Howard was out to arrest Dad for it. So we've remained here, in hiding, afraid to be seen, because of Dad's old reputation. Please, please, take us away, somewhere, until—"

**B**UT those pounding hoofbeats down the valley were sounding nearer. A man's voice shouted something. Jack leaped to an open front window and peered out. Over the crest of a ridge, a hundred yards away, appeared huge Mexican sombreroes.

"Mexicans!" Jack exclaimed. "And they're coming this way."

He kicked shut the heavy front door and jerked out his guns. The girl grabbed up her Winchester, again the steady girl who had stopped him, with that shot, back on the trail. He heard the mechanism of her rifle click as she sent a fresh cartridge into the chamber.

Back on the old bunk, her father moaned in pain, and blood from his wound dripped over the side to the floor. Suddenly he almost sat up, his eyes opened widely, and he stared around.

"Bessie, Bessie!" he coughed.

But even as she and Jack turned towards him, he fell back—dead. Bessie was beside him in an instant and on her knees beside his bunk, sobs racking her.

But she was allowed no peace with her dead.

The Mexican sombreroes over the ridge became men, and the men horsemen, and all were coming forward. Jack watched them steadily, his bronzed fingers moving back and forth over his gun-butts. His jaw squared.

"Come outa there!" a huge Mexican among the riders shouted. "Or we'll shoot you out!"

Bessie, at sound of the voice, rose swiftly and darted back beside Jack. She looked out at the Mexicans and spoke whisperingly.

"That's Gonzales, and his gang," she said.

"And they're shore got us holed up proper, Miss Bessie," Jack replied grimly. "Ten of 'em, too." He glanced at the sky in the east. "Nothin' tuh do but stick in here until dark. Won't be long. Must be about six o'clock now. Another hour and we can try tuh make a break."

"Are you comin' out, or not, *hombres?*?" the big Mexican chief shouted again. He and his men had halted about a hundred yards in front of the shack and were holding their rifles ready. "Whoever you are in there, open that door, or we fire!"

## CHAPTER II

### *Fire!*

**I**N grim silence, the two inside stood watching Gonzales and his men—a lot of sullen-faced, low-typed, heavily-armed ruffians, the scum of the border.

Jack glanced swiftly around the interior of the shack. The heavy adobe walls, though old, were solid as rock. In the rear wall was an open fireplace, now cold. The only windows were in the front wall—small ones, with heavy wooden shutters.

He closed all but the one. In one corner were prospector's picks and shovels. A table and two or three well-worn chairs were the only other things, except the cook-stove and its shelf of canned goods above it.

And then, suddenly, the Mexicans outside opened fire. Bullets thudded into the heavy front door, into the adobe walls. Several came through the window, beside which Jack and

Bessie were standing, and thudded into the rear wall. One Mexican seemed aiming especially at the lock on the big door. Splinters began flying from it.

"The more they shoot, the less cartridges they'll have," Jack grinned at Bessie. "Ain't no bullets made what'd come through these thick walls, but we gotta git the fella what's shootin' at that lock, or they could rush us."

He peeped out. The Mexicans were off their horses now and, some kneeling, some prone, were firing steadily; and he made out the one who was aiming at the lock. Jack swiftly reached back and took the Winchester from Bessie's hands. He slid the end of the barrel over the window-sill, aimed, and the room roared with the explosion.

The Mexican screamed, half rose and then slithered down in a heap. Jack's blue eyes narrowed grimly as he reloaded.

"One less," he said softly. His rifle blazed again. Another Mexican, half-concealed behind a boulder, staggered into view, slouchingly, then pitched forward and lay asprawl.

"And another," Jack said as he watched. Then he chuckled softly, for the remaining Mexicans were now scurrying away, some leading their horses, some mounting and going at a run over the ridge. Once more Jack's rifle spat flame and another Mexican fell.

THE three saddled horses of the dead outlaws came dashing toward the shack, reins and stirrups flying. When almost at the house they whirled to the left and raced past it wildly.

Jack could hear them as they went tearing down into a rocky arroyo behind the house. He looked at the ridge steadily, ready to fire again. Gonzales' head rose above the skyline. Jack's rifle roared again, and

the outlaw chief's head vanished like a flash.

"That was Gonzales himself, Miss Bessie," Jack spoke coolly. "Don't know whether I got 'im or not."

"He's the one who shot Dad," Bessie told him.

"Then let's hope he's plugged," Jack smiled. Again he glanced around. Then he handed Bessie the rifle. Keep watch while I do some explorin' in here. Maybe they's a way out. Them measly Mexicans kin hold us in here until we die o' thirst. And more of 'em may show up."

AS Bessie stationed herself beside the little window in the front wall, with her rifle, Jack went along the rear wall, kicking at the adobe with his boot-heel. But it all sounded solid.

He reached the open fireplace and looked in. The back was black from countless cook-fires, and some of the adobe was cracked flakily. He kicked at the wall with his boot. His high-heel sank into the soft adobe almost to the sole, and Jack's eyes flashed. The cook-fires of years had almost eaten through.

He grabbed up one of the prospector's picks from the corner of the room and went to work. A dozen good blows of the pick point, and he had a hole a foot square through the back of the fireplace. Another two minutes, and the hole was large enough for a man to crawl through.

He flattened on the floor and looked out through the hole. A big, deep arroyo was directly behind the shack, and a narrow footpath led from the house to the bottom, where a tiny creek went rippling over rocks. And the three saddled horses of the dead Mexicans were calmly grazing close beside the creek's bank!

Jack leaped back beside Bessie. One glance showed him that the Mexicans were still keeping hidden behind the ridge out in front. For

an instant, he caught sight of the peak of one huge sombrero, then another. And now the sunset was flooding the range and mountains with great slashes of crimson, red and blue—a glorious sight.

"We're all set, Miss Bessie," Jack whispered. "I've made a hole in the fireplace, and the hosses o' them dead fellas is grazin' down in that arroyo, saddled like they was waitin' for us tuh bust the wind."

"As soon as it's dark," Bessie whispered back.

"Right, Bessie!" Jack agreed. "Another half hour'll be about dark enough."

Together, they stood watching the ridge, keeping out of sight beside the window. Now and then a Mexican called something to his fellows.

Once, Jack thought he heard Gonzales' heavy voice. Between shack and ridge still lay those three sprawled forms.

In the tense silence, Jack and Bessie heard the nipping of grasses as the three horses down in the arroyo grazed about and stamped flies from their legs.

The minutes passed like hours. Now and then a Mexican head appeared over the ridge, only to vanish again swiftly.

"They're shore durned quiet," Jack finally remarked. "And when outlaws is that quiet, watch for anything."

**A**NOTHER ten minutes went by. Then, from a side of the old shack, with its pine-bough roof, came a crackling sound. A moment more and smoke began percolating inside, chokingly.

Jack whirled, staring around grimly. There was no mistaking the smell of burning mesquite and greasewood.

"Gee, they've set us afire!" he gritted. "Might 'a' knowed they were up tuh somethin'."

Once more shots rang out and

more bullets thudded into the walls. One ripped away one side of the window casing. Another slammed against one of the cooking-pans on the rear wall and sent it flying.

Jack and Bessie stood in one corner, close together, their guns ready and their eyes grim as they watched the edge of the roof begin to blaze.

**O**UTSIDE, dark was coming rapidly. The ridge became a dim line against the sky. Suddenly Jack squeezed Bessie's hand and leaned close to her ear.

"Come on, quick!" he said. "We've gotta make the break. This old roof'll be ablazin' all over and fallin' in, inside another two minutes."

"But—but—father, Jack?" Bessie's voice quivered and she glanced back at the body on the sagging bunk.

"I know, Bessie," Jack spoke sympathetically, "but ain't nothin' we can do for 'im now. He's—dead; and we gotta get away, or those Mexicans'll burn us alive. Come!"

He led the weeping girl to the hole through the fireplace and scrambled through, then drew her out. They slid down the narrow path behind the shack and went quietly to the three saddled horses grazing nearby.

Another moment and they were mounted and riding away northward, in the bottom of the deep arroyo, out of sight of the Mexicans out in front of the house, and keeping in the soft sand to deaden their horses' hoofbeats.

Suddenly, when they were about a hundred yards up the arroyo, they jerked to a halt, listening. Sheriff Howard's heavy voice was shouting, back near the shack, and, in the still air, they could make out his words.

"Come on, boys!" Howard was yelling. "All that firin' we been hearin' shore's over thisaway, whutever it is. Sounded like a war. Scatter out, and look good."

"The posse!" Bessie exclaimed.

Jack nodded grimly. "Yeah, and after you and yore father. Let's go! Soon's he sees them Gonzales fellas, they'll shore be a real war, and I ain't aimin' tuh see one o' them bullets hit *you*." He chuckled softly. "And Howard would grab yuh, tryin' tuh make yuh confess that yore father robbed that bank. I reckon we'll just call yuh *my* prisoner, for a while, till we can git things straightened out. Come on, quick, or they'll be all around us."

**S**UDDENLY wild shouts burst out from the vicinity of the shack, and then furious firing opened up. Jack grinned.

"Howard's met up with them Gonzales *hombres*, looks like. That gives you and me our chance. Git yore spurs a-diggin' hard."

They raced away through the falling night, side by side, heading south. Several miles farther on, they looked back. The light from the fire filled the heavens. The sounds of shooting had died away. The moon was rising, full and round, and Jack rode on again, with Bessie beside him.

"Where are we going, Jack?" Bessie asked. "You ought to take me back to Big Rock. I cannot be in any danger there, even if they do think Dad robbed their bank."

"But old Howard'd make yuh sweat blood, with all his durned questionin', Bessie. Reckon I'll do some sleuthin' myself, first." His eyes held to hers, and were very warm. "I don't aim lettin' no man hurt yuh, no way, Bessie!"

What she read in Jack's eyes made blushes leap into her cheeks. And what Jack saw in hers made him straighten in the saddle and smile at her warmly. And they rode on again, towards the Mexican line.

"I got some old friends down in Alcala," Jack stated as they neared

the border. "We'll go there first, then up to yore home in the hills where yuh says yore mine is."

He studied her keenly, for the thought had flashed into his mind that, after all, he knew nothing about her other than what she had told him.

Maybe her father *had* robbed the Big Rock bank, after all, and she might only be pretending. Old Williams had once been about the toughest outlaw along this border. But if Bessie's story of their gold mine were true, the old man would have had no need to rob *any* bank.

"Reckon when yuh shows me all that gold you and yore father's found, I can come tuh some conclusion about that robbery," he mused loud.

Bessie looked at him coldly and drew herself up.

"Why, do *you*, too, believe that Dad did that?"

"I do my thinkin' as I goes along, Bessie," Jack replied quietly, but firmly. "I ain't been able tuh git a single lead yit, even with young Tony Calles a-helpin' me. He knows these old hills like a rattler knows his hole."

"Tony Calles!" Bessie gasped, staring at him amazedly. "Why, *that* fellow is right in cahoots with the Gonzales' gang himself. Dad and I've often seen him with them, down in these hills."

**J**ACK eyed her in astonishment, then slowly shook his head.

"So that's it! I wondered why him and me never seen a single *hombre* all the time we was ridin' around together, huntin' for yore father. That kid made me believe that yore father was right in with them Gonzales' fellas hisself, and that maybe your father had gone off with 'em somewheres, till this thing blows over."

A low, curt laugh came from Bes-

sie. "Tony's sure slick, Jack. I'll certainly have to admit that, if he had you thinking those crazy thoughts."

"Why didn't yore father tip off Sheriff Howard about Tony?" Jack eyed her keenly.

"Dad was afraid to, Jack," Bessie explained. "Howard would have thought he was standing in, himself, with the Gonzales' gang." She laughed mirthlessly and spoke again: "You know the old saying—give a dog a bad name—"

Jack nodded agreement. He could easily imagine old Howard's suspicions against Williams, based on the old outlaw's previous history; and old Howard was very fond of Tony.

"Dad had to stay friends with all sides, since he quit being wanted by the law," Bessie went on. "Sometimes we've ridden into Big Rock for supplies and talked with Howard and other people there; and sometimes, down in these hills, we've met Gonzales and his gang and had to be pleasant with them, too."

### CHAPTER III

#### *Dead Man's Trail*

**J**UST as dawn was breaking, they rode into the little Mexican town of Alcala, a few miles below the line. Squat, of small adobe houses, a general store in the center of the one dusty street, a few lounging Mexicans smoking against a wall—that was Alcala.

The Mexicans watched them as they rode down the street. Their black eyes narrowed keenly. Jack allowed his right hand to rest with the thumb slung in his gun-belt, just above his gun, for the town's reputation was well-known. It was a hangout for ruffians of the border. But it had been the nearest town, and Jack had friends living here: an old couple he had known for some years.

Before their house he stopped and called. The old couple came out and greeted him warmly. Both eyed Bessie cordially. She and her father had often ridden here, for supplies.

"Bank's been robbed and the cashier killed, up in Big Rock," Jack informed them, and proceeded to tell them Bessie's story. "I've brung her down here for a while, till I can git things straightened out, folks," he concluded.

**H**E and Bessie dismounted, tossed their reins over the hitch-rack, and followed the old couple inside. Back along the street, the Mexicans watched their every move in silence.

"Glad yo're home, McGinniss," Jack said as the old couple brought out food.

But the old ranchman's face was filled with anxiety. He stepped beside a window and looked out, then stepped away quickly.

"But yuh cain't stay, Jack," he said hoarsely. "Them Mexicans in the street is all part o' Gonzales' gang, and they're all after old Williams' gold. Some's still watchin' this house, but half a dozen is ridin' outa town.

"That means they're layin' fer you and Miss Bessie when yuh leaves. Yuh gotta beat it, quick. Follow the arroyo behind this house and you can git away. It runs northeast, right intuh them hills where old Williams built hisself a home." He glanced outside again. "Moon's bright an' yuh kin see good."

"And I know a way," Bessie broke in. "We can get home without being seen."

"Then let's go," Jack said grimly.

A moment more and, mounting their horses behind the house, they rode down into the great arroyo and headed up its northeast course at a steady gallop.

"We leave the arroyo about two miles ahead," Bessie told Jack as



they raced along. "Then we follow Dead Man's Trail and go through the old tunnel. Beyond lies our home, in a deep, walled valley."

She led the way at a fast gallop. The moon was high and full and round, making the night silvery bright. Past huge, giant suhuaras, palo altos, around many a curve, over small boulders, following narrow cattle trails, they raced on, watching, listening, with every leap of their horses.

Jack's gaze held to Bessie's back, and his eyes were alight with admiration. Few girls could ride like that, through this rugged, boulder-strewn arroyo, where a horse might stumble headlong any instant.

But finally she jerked to a halt and pointed. A narrow trail led upward, not over three feet wide. She sent her horse up it without more than a second's hesitation, and Jack followed, his right leg scraping against the almost vertical side on his right.

"Dead Man's Trail," Bessie called back softly.

On their left, the trail's edge met the almost vertical canyon wall, revealing a sheer drop of a hundred feet or more, but Bessie let her horse go upward without exhibiting the least fear.

**J**ACK, behind her, looked down often. A single misstep and rider and horse would be plunged to death on the rocks below. Halfway up, they crossed dangerous, loose shale. Their horses slipped, fought forward, heads low and ears pricked rigidly.

Below them, now, was a sloping hillside, bare of any vegetation but showing where many landslides had occurred. Far down in the bottom, the waters of a tiny creek glistened, among brush, as moonlight glinted on the water. Across on the opposite side, huge masses of boulders stood out spectrally.

And then it happened! Bessie's horse slipped, clawed frenziedly, but went sliding downward. Even as Jack cried out for her to fling herself from her saddle, Bessie was flying through the air. She struck the steep slope of sand and went slithering downward, her horse rolling over and over just to her right.

Jack leaped from his saddle, sent his feet over the edge and allowed himself to slide downward at terrific speed, clawing with his hands to follow Bessie. His high-heeled boots dug into the sand with all his strength, but tore through the loose stuff at furious speed.

**H**ALFWAY down, he reached Bessie and gripped her in both arms, digging in his heels even harder. Little by little, their terrific speed stopped. A hundred feet more and they jammed against a mesquite bush and lay, side by side, breathing hard. Jack grinned at the girl in his arms.

"Hurt, Bessie?" he asked, but he knew she was not, for her eyes were looking bravely into his.

"Not a bit, Jack," she assured him. "But—you've probably saved my life. We might have started a landslide!"

They both looked upward at the trail. Their horses were standing there, reins dragging. Bessie's had managed, somehow, to get back to the trail without being injured. Jack rose and helped her up.

"Reckon there's only one way open," he said. "Come on! Up we go. We can't git no place without our broncs."

Slowly, Jack dragging her with one hand, they climbed upward, reached the trail, grabbed their reins and swung back into their saddles; but, from the opposite side, there suddenly rang out two shots, and bullets splattered into the canyon's wall above their heads!

"Go, quick, Bessie!" Jack shouted. Bessie's spurs shot home and her

horse darted up the narrow trail like a deer. Behind her, Jack thundered. Another shot roared, and a bullet clipped the peak of his wide-brimmed Stetson.

Turning in his saddle, recklessly allowing his reins to swing loosely, leaving the footing to his horse, Jack shot a swift glance across to the masses of boulders on the other side.

Several Mexicans were standing on an outcropping rock, watching them and gripping rifles. Jack jerked out his gun and sent the whole six shots blazing that way, then raced after Bessie as fast as his horse could plunge upward.

He glanced ahead. Bessie was just whirling around a ledge and disappeared even as he looked. Two more shots rang out from the men across the canyon.

Bullets cracked against rocks close to Jack. He leaned forward in his saddle, dug home his spurs and dashed around the ledge, out of sight of the Mexicans.

ONE glance ahead showed Bessie going at full speed, fifty yards in front of him, and now she was on level ground, a sort of mesa. Jack was beside her in another burst of speed.

"Old McGinniss was plumb right about them Mexicans," he shouted to her. "They shore knowed how tuh pick a nice place tuh ambush us."

"And they'll follow us now," Bessie shouted back to him as they raced along. "But our house is built for defense. We'll be there soon now, after we get through the tunnel."

Another half mile and she stopped. Before them rose a great cliff of red sandstone, glowing weirdly in the bright moonlight. And, just at its base, appeared the black opening of the tunnel, ten feet high and as wide.

Bessie headed directly for it. For the moment, Jack was behind her,

and then a rifle cracked somewhere in the dark. His horse grunted, then sank down.

Jack leaped off as the animal fell. He glared around, but could see nothing of the skulking bushwhackers. Another shot echoed through the canyon and a second bullet plowed through the shale at his feet. Bessie stopped her horse instantly.

"Up with you, Jack!" she cried. "Quick!"

IN an instant he had vaulted up on her horse, behind her, and into the blackness of the tunnel they rode. And now they were riding in awesome, Stygian darkness.

Jack could not even see Bessie's back, only inches in front of him. Bessie rode on, however, with a certainty that told Jack she had made this ride many times.

"We're following a rock-trail," she told him. "To our right there is a precipice, five feet away. I'll be making your left leg scrape the other side until we get out."

Five minutes of slow riding followed. The only sounds were those of their horse's hoofs over the rocky floor. And then they emerged into the moonlight again. Jack swept one hand over his forehead and grinned at its damp perspiration.

"Some ride, I'll tell the world!" he chuckled.

"Dad and I used this trail when going in to Alcala for supplies," Bessie explained. "We've never known anyone else to come through the tunnel. Whenever those Gonzales men have followed us from Alcala, we've headed for the tunnel and always gotten away. They've always seemed afraid to ride in."

She sent her horse ahead again. The trail was somewhat wider now, and led down into a little, rock-walled valley. In the moonlight, as they reached the bottom, Jack saw a solid adobe ranchhouse, one-storied,

standing among some big cotton-woods. Before its heavy door Bessie drew rein.

"Our home," Bessie announced. "There's only one other way out—a trail at the north end of the valley. We've used that when riding in to Big Rock with our pack-burros." As they dismounted, she gazed into Jack's face amusedly. "And now I'll show you father's cache. There was no need of his robbing any bank, thank goodness. Come!"

THEY strode inside the house and Bessie lit a lamp. Jack glanced around.

The windows in the walls were mere narrow slits and, on hinges beside each, swung heavy wooden shutters on the inside. The door was six inches thick, of heavy lumber, and with a stout, wooden bar beside it. A veritable fortress!

The big room was comfortably furnished and Jack saw many touches of a feminine hand. It was the most picturesque place he had ever seen.

"Gee, it's swell, Bessie!" Jack exclaimed.

"And attack-proof, Jack. Dad never could get over the idea of his old days—that he must always be ready for an attack. But nobody has ever come into this valley yet. Dad and two of his old pals built this place. They died and are buried up the canyon.

"Old prospectors, like himself, but they had been with him during his outlaw days and were unwilling to go outside. I'm afraid there were prices on their heads, for old crimes. Dad pitied them and kept them. Both were old and had been shot up many times in fights. But come!"

She led him to a rear room, through another, and stopped.

"The back wall, see, is the mountain itself," she explained. "Watch!"

What appeared to be a wall of vertical pine logs, each about three

inches in diameter, was, in reality, but a covering against the mountain-side itself.

Bessie lifted away several of the logs and revealed a cave going into the hill. Nobody would ever have guessed the existence of that cave. The logs were a complete concealment. Bessie, carrying the lamp, entered the cave as Jack, staring in curiosity, followed.

And inside the cave he stopped, gaping incredulously at what he saw. Along one side of the cave were piled fully fifty sacks such as prospectors use for gold-dust; and every sack was full! Several had burst open and allowed the gleaming dust to slither out.

In the lamplight, the dust glistened brightly.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Grim-Faced Horsemen*

"HOLY MIKE!" Jack exclaimed, his eyes bulging. "Why, they're all full, and gold worth thirty dollars an ounce! Gee, Bessie, yo're—rich!"

Bessie's low laugh came. "And, now, do you believe we had to rob that Big Rock bank?"

Jack's eyes twinkled. "Hardly, Bessie; but *somebody* did." Then he scowled. "And somebody's shore tried tuh frame up your father. It's our job, now, tuh find out who."

"Maybe I can help you, Jack. That banker, Jackson, has been trying to get me to marry him, threatening to do things to Dad if I didn't. Dad and I were taking our gold-dust to his bank. Jackson's reputation isn't very clean. He was devoting a lot of attention to a Mexican girl in Big Rock.

"When I told Dad, he and Jackson had a run-in one day, in Jackson's office in the bank. It ended in Dad's telling Jackson to let me alone—called him a lot of names; and Jack-

son said he'd get Dad behind the bars before long."

"But the night of the robbery, Bessie?" Jack asked. "Where was yore father, that night? Jackson's tellin' everybody that he saw him right in that alley behind the bank, and that they had a gun-fight there."

"That's only true in part, Jack. Dad was there, on his way to get his horse at the livery barn. Just as he was walking along that alley, he heard a shot inside the bank. Then a masked man came running out of the back door, wearing a gray Stetson like Dad's, and the same kind of brown chaps with those big silver conchos. The man vanished in the dark, at a run.

"Before Dad could do anything, Jackson came running from the front street, holding a gun. He rushed up to Dad and accused him of robbing the bank and killing that cashier. They had hot words. Dad jerked Jackson's gun away, knocked him down and beat it. He felt he'd have no chance explaining his presence there, being an ex-outlaw.

"He got his horse and raced back home, through the hills. A day or two later, we met friends out on the desert, and they warned us of what Jackson was saying and that Howard had posses out after us.

"**T**HEN Gonzales' men got after us again, still thinking we were carrying some of our gold-dust, and determined to force Dad to tell where our mine is. Then Gonzales shot Dad, when he wouldn't tell.

"I believe that banker, Jackson, has framed Dad, as he said he would. He probably had it all set and, when he saw Dad go into that alley, had a confederate run out of the back door that way—wearing a hat and chaps just like Dad's old ones. Dad hasn't even seen those old clothes for a long time. He'd bought new ones and thrown the others away up in town."

"It's shore a mystery," Jack admitted. "While Tony Calles and me was ridin' through these hills to find your father, Tony told me that, on the night o' that robbery, he was walkin' along the street, heard that shot in the bank, ran inside, saw the safe doors wide open and the cashier dead on the floor; that he ran to the back door, lookin' for the killer. Then he saw yore father with a gun in each hand, and stayed in, knowin' yore father was a dead shot. He told me he figured yore father had joined up with Gonzales after that and thought them outlaws was a-hidin' yore father back in the hills."

**B**ESSIE smiled grimly. "And, all the while, Tony has been one of the Gonzales gang himself! As I told you, Dad and I've seen him with them, several times, down in Alcalá; and, as I told you, Dad had no gun that night."

Jack stood studying her face, listening to her words, his cool, blue eyes holding to hers steadily. His brain was working hard, trying to find some trail that would lead him in the right direction. Had Jackson robbed his own bank, in cahoots with a confederate? The story seemed plausible, now.

"And that Mexican girl up in Big Rock, whom Jackson has been spending so much money on, is really Tony's girl, Jack," Bessie added as he stood thinking. "Dad always thought she was a sort of spy for the Gonzales crowd. Several times we saw her down in Alcalá, with Tony."

Another thought came into Jack's mind. If Jackson was playing with the Mexican girl, giving her money, then maybe she had learned the combination to those vault doors in the bank, and had passed it on to Tony and Gonzales.

But there came still another thought. Bessie had told him that Jackson had wanted her to marry

him; had threatened to have her father jailed or hung for old crimes long since wiped from the books if she didn't.

Jackson must be pretty rotten, a man likely to rob his own bank if in financial difficulties. Old Sheriff Howard had told Jack that Jackson did a lot of money-spending up in the gambling hall in Big Rock, where the Mexican girl danced. Finally, Jack shoved back his hat and scratched his thick, brown hair.

"It's all shore a heap o' twisted trails, Bessie," he grinned. "But they's always some way o' gittin' through 'em in the end. Reckon it's up tuh yuh and me.

"Let's git ridin' back tuh Big Rock. We may as well take a chance with old Howard's jailin' yuh. But with all this gold-dust yuh got down here, I reckon I kin make Howard use hoss sense."

After putting the pine logs back in place, they went outside to their horses. The moonlit night was still bright, though dawn would come within another half hour.

**THEY** rode up the north trail and out onto the wide desert, heading for town. Then they stopped with jerked up reins, for a group of riders was coming straight toward them at a swift lope, and Jack and Bessie looked with astonishment into old Sheriff Howard's grim face! Beside him, rode young Tony, his deputy's badge gleaming on his shirt.

The voice of the sheriff rang out. "Halt, you two!" old Howard roared, jerking out his six-gun and sliding to a halt ten feet in front of Jack and Bessie. "Yo're both under arrest, and ef yuh moves a finger towards yore gun, Jack Blair, I'll salivate yuh complete!"

"And what's the big idea, Howard?" Jack asked.

"I'll tell yuh what, Jack Blair!" the old sheriff roared hotly. "I asked

yuh tuh help me find old Williams, fer that bank hold-up an' killin', an' yuh said you would. I even gives yuh Tony, my best deppity, tuh help yuh.

"But yuh shipped 'im back tuh town, sayin' yuh'd work alone. I didn't like that none, so I tells Tony tuh watch yuh, an' he sees yuh go intuh that old shack up in th' hills. He slips clost an' looks inside; an' thar yuh war, hobnobbin' right with old Williams an' this yere gal."

**JACK** smiled grimly. "And so Tony was in that Gonzales gang that shot us up while we were in that shack, eh?"

"Nothin' o' th' sort!" old Howard retorted angrily. "I'd trust Tony anywheres. Why, he even has a room in my own house. We heerd a heap o' shootin' and rode over towards it, an' sees that old shack a-blazin'.

"Then Tony comes a-ridin' up an' says Gonzales an' his gang's over thar, a-shootin' an' burnin' th' place; and that *you* an' this gal an' Williams war inside.

"We gits closer, quick as we kin, and runs right into them outlaws. Hell busts loose, but Tony seen you an' this gal a-chasin' away up an arroyo.

"We kills Gonzales an' cleans up on them durned outlaws, all right, but by the time th' fight's over, you two'd skinned out complete. But Tony knowed th' way down here, an' now I'm arrestin' yuh both. Williams musta been burned up in th' shack. Yuh've shore played th' fool, Jack Blair, goin' ag'in th' law."

Jack smiled across at Bessie. "I reckon twisted trails is shore right, Bessie," he said coolly, "and they're gettin' more'n more twisted every minute." Then he faced Howard again. "Howard, now let *me* say a word. Yo're plumb off the track and talkin' like a crazy man."

And then, as Howard and his posse

listened in grim silence, Jack told his story from the time he had sent Tony back to Big Rock.

"And now you know a heap more'n you did before, Howard," he finished, "and now you know about how much to believe Tony."

"It's a lie!" the young Mexican shouted. "I nevair been in weeth those outlaws, Howard. I watch Jack Blair, an' I see heem an' these gal an' ol' Williams hole up een that shack. Then those Gonzales fellas comes ridin' up an' shoots at eet. I skeep out, fas', but I see Blair an' these gal bustin' th' wind een that arroyo. Then I come fer you, *Señor* Howard."

"Tony Calles!" Bessie's voice cut the air sharply and her blue eyes were blazing with scorn. "You are the meanest little liar on earth. You and that dancing girl from the gambling hall up in town have been down in Alcala several times with those Gonzales men. I've seen you!"

Old Howard scowled at her.

"Yeah?" he bellowed. "So that's yore story, is it? Well, I ain't takin' th' word of no outlaw's gal ag'in my deppity—no time; an' I ain't believin' nothin' ag'in Banker Jackson, neither."

"All right, Howard," Jack spoke up curtly. "But suppose you calm down and stop bellowin' at a helpless girl, and tell us what you mean to do now. I'd like one good look, face to face, into Jackson's mug. Well, are we arrested, or aren't we?"

**T**HE old sheriff scowled harder, whirled his horse abruptly toward town.

"Bring 'em along, boys!" he ordered. "I'll shore sweat 'em both, onct we gits 'em up in jail. And yuh've pulled a boneheaded play, Blair, an' I reckon it's my time, now, tuh howl. But I was trustin' yuh complete. Yo're shore lowdown!"

In high dudgeon, he led the way

back to Big Rock. Jack and Bessie, side by side and surrounded by the men of the posse, followed in silence. Tony Calles, his black eyes darting from face to face and shifting uneasily, came along with many a surly glance at Jack's back.

## CHAPTER V

### *Dance of Death*

**I**T was almost eight in the evening when the little cavalcade clattered into Big Rock's dusty street and halted before the jail.

"Howard," Jack said as they all dismounted, "I'm askin' that yuh don't lock Miss Bessie up yet. I'll give my word she won't try gettin' away."

"Nothin' doin', Blair," Howard snorted. "I wouldn't trust neither of yuh a durned foot."

As they entered the jail, Howard's old wife came from the kitchen in the rear, where she had been preparing a meal for the posse. She had a kindly face below graying hair, and was of ample proportions.

Her quiet eyes flashed as she saw Bessie, then she smiled at her and put an arm about the girl's slender waist. She had met Bessie a number of times, when Bessie had been in town, and was fond of her.

"And just why are yuh lockin' this girl up, in one o' yore dirty cells, Jed Howard?" she demanded of her husband. "It ain't fittin' fer nobody but greasers an' criminals."

"Duty, Ma," old Howard explained. "She's gotta be—"

"Jed Howard," his wife broke in disgustedly, "go along with yore crazy notions about duty, and you handle the men. I'll take charge o' Bessie."

Old Howard grunted, but gave in.

"Wall, all right, Ma," he consented grouchily, "but keep 'er clost. She's an outlaw's gal, an's been tryin' tuh make her gitaway."

Mrs. Howard led Bessie away to her own home down the street. As the two went inside, the curious townspeople watched and whispered. Down at the other end of the street, loud cowboy shouts were issuing from one of the gambling halls, and old Howard scowled that way.

"More hell," he growled. "Payday allers brings it. Reckon Jackson's in thar, a-makin' that Mex gal dance again fer them ten-dollar bills he's allers flingin' at her toes."

"Well, are you lockin' me up or not, Howard?" Jack asked quietly. "Just don't overlook the fact that yo're makin' a fool play, old-timer, for I'm as much a law officer as you are. I still wear my star, and *you* gave it to me."

The sheriff's first burst of anger was rapidly leaving him, and now he was feeling uncertain and a little foolish. Jack Blair had been an outstanding rider of the cow country and a top-hand for two years. He had done splendid work. And Jack's story, as well as his present disgusted and quiet attitude, was causing the sheriff an anxious doubt.

"**W**ALL, reckon I won't keep yuh here, Blair," he finally grunted. But don't try leavin' town. I'll git this durned mess cleaned up, right *pronto*. Law's law, an' yuh've violated it, no matter what yore reasons.

"Traipsin' away with an old outlaw an' his gal ain't no peace officer's custom." He spat disgustedly. "An' I reckon all that stolen money war burned up with old Williams, in that durned shack. Yuh didn't even git *that* back, like yuh'd oughta."

"It wasn't burned up, Howard. I was right there before those outlaws attacked us. He was wearin' nothin' but his shirt, his pants an' boots. He didn't have any money on 'im, certainly no big roll like that. I'd 'a' felt it, when I examined him, if he had.

"Besides, I've told you of all that gold-dust I saw down at his home in the hills." The noise was still coming from the gambling hall and Jack glanced that way. "Well, if you're not lockin' me up, suppose we take a squint in there. I'd like a good look at Jackson."

"Won't do yuh no good, Blair. Jackson's a fine fella, even ef he does blow a heap o' *dinero* on gamblin' an' on that dancin' gal down thar."

They walked down the street, side by side, in silence.

**A**S Jack and Howard entered, a mixed crowd, inside the gambling hall, was yelling and watching a young Mexican girl dance, half-naked, in the center of the floor.

Pretty, lithe, laughing from flashing black eyes, the girl whirled here and there, kicking off the big cowboy hats as men flung coin and bills at her feet. A tall, well-dressed man of about forty was leaning against the bar and watching her possessively.

"Who's the boiled-shirt fella?" Jack asked Howard.

"Jackson," Howard muttered as he watched the scene. "And they's a heap o' his Mexicans in yere tonight, from his ranch below the line. Gal's name is Conchita. Jackson's been plumb actin' foolish about 'er—givin' her money an' all that.

"She's slick, an's playin' 'im fer all he's worth. But yuh better not make no break in yere, Blair, whatever yuh may think. Them Mexicans'd fill yuh full o' lead in a second, ef yuh tried anything ag'in Jackson."

In a final whirl of flimsy draperies, the dance ended. The crowd shouted approval and scattered back to their card tables. Flushed and laughing, the girl pirouetted to the banker. Jackson patted her on the shoulder and led her into a room behind the bar. The door closed.

Suddenly Jack tensed as one of the Mexicans strolled past him, heading

for the room in which Jackson and the girl has disappeared. The man sent a sidelong glance at Jack and went on, passed into the rear room and closed the door softly.

"Who's that *hombre*, Howard?" Jack whispered. "He's one of the gang that held us up in the shack."

"Yo're crazy, Blair," Howard growled. "That's Jackson's foreman, down on his Mexican ranch near Alcala."

Young Tony came sauntering up. Howard ordered him to keep watch around the room. Tony strolled away, nodding understanding, and vanished in the crowd. Jack watched him go, an odd look in his eyes, but he refrained from again saying anything about the young Mexican to Howard. What was the use?

The door of the room behind the bar opened and the Mexican man came back. He crossed the gambling hall to the group of Mexicans and spoke whisperingly. Jack saw a couple of them glance his way and then look quickly elsewhere. Into Jack's eyes came a slight glitter.

"I'm guessin' them Mexicans is gettin' all set for somethin', Howard," he murmured quietly. "And the showdown might as well come now as any time. Come on. I'm lookin' Jackson in the face, *pronto*."

**B**EFORE Howard could reply, Jack strode across the room to the door behind the bar. His hand turned the knob. It was locked. He raised his knee, gave a hard jab against it, and it flew open. The room beyond was wholly dark. He stepped forward, into it, hand close to his gun. Old Howard was coming up behind him.

Instantly, the Mexicans in the gambling hall jerked out their guns. The white men in the hall leaped aside, gathered into another group, and whipped out their own guns, watching the Mexicans anxiously.

And then, as Jack disappeared into

the dark room, several shots from among the Mexicans crashed out and the two big pendant lamps in the gambling hall fell, plunging the hall into instant blackness.

In the dark, men shouted, spitting flames cut the darkness in streaks as six-guns roared. Bullets whined past Jack's head. He leaped inside the back room and slammed its heavy door, his own gun now out.

**B**EYOND, in the dense dark, he heard the sounds of somebody struggling on the floor. He stepped nearer, cautiously, ready.

Back in the dark gambling hall voices yelled and shots roared, as the white men battled against the surging Mexicans. Above all, rose old Howard's voice.

"Git 'em all outside, fellas!" he was yelling. "They're gangin' up on Jack Blair."

But Jack was not listening to that outside noise. Almost at his feet, now, the sounds of someone struggling on the floor was drawing him closer and closer, warily. And then his boot-toe touched a form. Instantly came a voice:

"It's me—Jackson. Don't shoot! That damned Tony and Conchita, they've—done for—me." The voice was husky with pain.

Jack struck a match. Banker Jackson was lying before him, a terrible wound in his chest and covered with blood. Life was ebbing fast.

"They're getting—away!" he muttered hoarsely. "They got me. I'm passing out, Blair. Yes, I know who you are. Tony told me. He was in my pay—go-between for Gonzales and me, in cattle deals." His hands pressed against his wound.

"I took that money from the bank, Blair, and gave—it—to Tony. He had something on me and was threatening to—tell. I gave the money to—him. Then I put the blame on old Williams—easiest—way out. But



Tony just came in here and demanded more. I refused—and he shot me—like a—dog.”

A hand touched Jack's arm and he whirled, but it was old Howard, holding a lighted lantern. He was holding a gun in his other hand and, as he looked at Jack, he appeared wan and crestfallen.

“I heerd all he's said, Jack,” he said. “I've shore been a durned old fool, doubtin' yuh.”

Out in the gambling hall, the fighting had passed away as the white cowboys and the Mexicans reached the street outside. Through the night came the sounds of rushing hoofs as the Mexicans went racing away for the border line.

Before Jack could speak, Bessie and old Mrs. Howard came running in, excitedly. Bessie gripped Jack's arm tensely.

“Quick, Jack!” she cried. “Tony and that girl, Conchita! Tony came running into Mrs. Howard's house, went back to his own room, and we heard him pulling up some boards. We went to see why.

“He ran outside, carrying one of those big bank bags. Conchita was holding their horses, ready. They headed south, at a run; and we found father's old gray Stetson and his brown chaps, right in Tony's room!”

## CHAPTER VI

### *Trail's End*

**W**ITH sudden speed Jack dashed outside, old Howard following. The street lay in bright moonlight now, almost as clear as day. At a hitch-rack, Jack flung himself into a saddle and raced away southward at break-neck speed.

As he did so, he was conscious that Howard and some other men were also running for their horses and shouting to get started.

If Tony and the girl were heading for the Mexican line, they would

have to follow the road or be delayed among the canyons to right and left. And, ahead, he caught the faint clatter of horses over the rocky soil. He fairly lifted his rushing horse into the air.

**A** MILE, another, and suddenly he jerked to a sliding halt. He was facing a canyon, and, almost at his horse's feet, lay a horse with a broken foreleg.

From a twenty-foot, rocky cliff just ahead, in the canyon's mouth, a shot ripped out loudly and Jack felt a hot, searing bullet graze his left shoulder, cutting the flesh painfully.

He flung from his saddle and flattened behind a boulder, gun in hand. From the cliff's top came a mocking laugh and another shot.

Tony Calles' swarthy face, topped by his big, black sombrero, appeared, and, beside it, over the edge of the cliff, the muzzle of a rifle.

“Go back, or I keel you, Blair!” the young Mexican shouted down.

His rifle rose for another shot. And then Jack's six-gun belched flame into the moonlit night. Tony staggered to his feet, stood swaying on the edge of the cliff. His rifle went clattering downward over the rocks. And then he pitched headlong, a tumbling mass, almost at Jack's feet. Jack leaped beside him and looked down. Tony was dead.

Jack clambered up toward the top of the cliff, for the sound of a horse's hoofs had sounded up there. He reached the top and saw that the cliff became a mesa, extending away southward; and Conchita, gripping the bank bag, was struggling with the excited horse and trying to mount. A second more and Jack had her gripped in his arms and the bank bag was in his hand.

Conchita struggled with remarkable strength. Her black eyes were flashing her Mexican fury.

Suddenly she tore one hand loose

and jerked out a knife from her shirtwaist, but Jack's fingers caught her wrist, twisted, and the knife clattered away.

Then she abruptly ceased her struggles and stood still. As Jack looked into her pretty face, she smiled. Then she shrugged her shoulders nonchalantly.

"An' what for you hol' *me*, *Señor* Blair?" she asked calmly. "I do notheeng."

Old Howard and other men came clambering up from below, their guns ready. As Jack released Conchita, she stood watching the sheriff and his men amusedly, the calmest of all. Jack handed the bank bag to Howard and grinned.

"Reckon yuh'll like tuh see this, Howard," he remarked. "Goin' tuh arrest me again, now, seein' me with this bag?"

"Holy smoke, Jack!" the old sheriff shouted gleefully as he opened the bag and looked inside. "It's all that money from the bank." He looked sheepishly at Jack. "I wa'n't really ever meanin' tuh arrest yuh, son. Reckon I war jest rattled. "He waved one hand at his men. "Boys, grab Conchita!"

CONCHITA tossed up her pretty chin and shrugged her shoulders. "I ain't do notheeng," she said. "Tony, he tal to me to come 'long weeth heem an' we marry up." Again she shrugged her shoulders. "But ees no mattair. Planty more fellas."

"So Tony framed a getaway, eh?" Howard growled. "That kid shore had me fooled plumb scandalous."

"Sure!" said Conchita, her white teeth again glistening as she smiled coolly. "He help Jackson frame ol' Williams, too. But, why not? Williams, he ver' ol' mans, no good no more, an' Jackson, he want hees gal, an' Tony, he want me."

Howard spat disgustedly. "Take 'er away, boys," he ordered.

Before the gambling hall in the town, old Howard led the little procession that carried Tony's body inside and laid it on one of the billiard tables, near another one on which lay all that was left of Jackson. Conchita, still smiling, was led away to the jail.

JACK, standing in the street, watched as the little group passed inside. Then his gaze went about the street. The townspeople were again gathering rapidly, excitedly, listening as men told the story. But, from the crowd, Bessie came running.

"Jack, Jack, thank God!" she cried as she reached him. "I was afraid—" Then she saw his bleeding shoulder and began opening his shirt anxiously. The flesh had been torn by Tony's bullet, and blood was smearing his arm. "Oh, you're wounded, Jack! Come. The doctor is close."

They walked down the street, side by side. He looked down at her quizzically, his eyes twinkling.

"And now yuh'll be goin' down tuh yore home in the hills, Bessie, eh? It'll be safe now, and yuh got all that gold—"

But a rush of warm blood came into her face and she squeezed his arm.

"Yes," she told him, her eyes shining up into his, "but I've got my rifle, also, Mister Jack Blair. And I'll shoot again, if you even try to let me go down there alone—and you could never get through that old tunnel down there, without me." She met his gaze steadily and smiled. "Isn't this—leap year, Jack?"

However, they were on the doctor's vine-covered porch, in the dark, by then, and the staring crowd in the street could not see them. But, when the doctor opened the door, a few moments later, he gazed into the two most rapt faces he had ever seen, and wondered which was the patient, if either.

# Stolen Plans



*Locked together, the two panted and sweated, in their mad struggle*

*Deadly Peril Lurks in the Wake of Subtle International  
Intrigue Beneath the Deceptive Tropical  
Quiet of the Panama Canal Zone*

**By LIEUT. JOHN HOPPER**

*Author of "Dangerous Heritage," "Voodoo Magic," etc.*

**S**UDDENLY one of them struck a match. Its reddish glare flared up without flickering in the stillness of the tropic night. Lieut. Bill Edwards, U. S. Army, saw the three, close together, peering around them, with their knives in their hands. He recognized them for Panaman cutthroats, half-breeds, small ragged, brown-skinned men, with dark brown eyes glittering murderously.

Edwards knew that he was

trapped; one unarmed man against three killers. He tensed himself against the high brick wall of the courtyard. The match went out, leaving the courtyard in darkness. But they had seen him, and now they were coming at him.

Edwards went down almost to his heels and surged forward to meet them. The blade of one knife ripped down the length of his coat. He heard another ring out against the wall as it gashed brick. There were

muffled curses as the four of them went down together in a mad, scrambling heap.

Edwards lashed out in the darkness with everything he had in him, using his fists, elbows, feet, and knees. Once his fist drove into a man's stomach, wrist deep. Again his knee caught another on the chin, smashing teeth, and cutting a tongue almost in half. Then this Panaman had enough. He crawled out of the conflict.

This enabled Edwards to fling off the other two for an instant and regain his feet. Barely in time to get back to the wall before they came at him again, their sharp, deadly knives hungry for his blood. He caught an uplifted fist sending a knife driving down at him, and hung on. His foot lashed out to plant a kick in the stomach of the second assassin, who suddenly doubled over in agony.

Now, for the moment, Edwards had but one man to deal with. Hope suddenly flared up within him. If he could shake this last man off, escape was there, by means of the narrow, stinking alley that led out of the courtyard into the teeming streets of Cocoa Grove, the sink hole of Panama City, the Port Said of the Americas.

**B**UT the last man hung on desperately. Locked together, the two panted, sweated, and grunted, in their mad struggle for the knife. Edwards couldn't shake the little, brown devil from him. The Panaman clung like a leech.

The fellow Edwards had kicked in the stomach was stifling his groans and straightening up. Now he clutched his knife more firmly and approached the swirling, struggling pair like a wary cat.

He waited, almost on his tiptoes, for an opportunity. Now the two combatants swung around again. The

army officer's back made a broad, excellent target. The Panaman lifted his knife high, directly above Edwards' shoulder blades.

At that instant, a doorway opened in the back of the building, and a shaft of yellow light fell into the courtyard, onto the group.

"What's this?" a man's voice roared in Spanish, a tongue with which Edwards was familiar. "You, Pedro!"

**P**EDRO, who had been about to bury his knife to the hilt in Edwards' defenseless back, whirled to face the newcomer. The man pushed Pedro aside, drew a pistol from his waist-band, and cocked it.

"Stop!" he whipped at the two struggling men.

Edwards glimpsed the pistol leveled at his face, and sullenly let go. With his breath whistling between his drawn lips, his opponent stepped back.

Edwards knew that he was facing Panama Joe, the big mulatto whose word was law in the tropic underworld beside the Panama Canal.

"What is the trouble?" Panama Joe demanded, turning to Pedro again.

"He came in here from the street, spying," Pedro spat viciously. "We were watching, and saw him."

Panama Joe narrowed his eyes on Edwards.

"Who are you?" he demanded harshly, in English. "What do you want?"

Edwards was wearing civilian clothes. He searched his brain frantically for some plausible reason for his presence in the rear of Panama Joe's place at one o'clock in the morning. Suddenly he remembered that Panama Joe had the reputation for helping soldiers deserting from the American army to escape from the country.

"I was coming," Edwards said boldly, "to see you, when these gorillas jumped on me. I just deserted.

I want you to help me get out of the country."

The mulatto studied him narrowly.

"But you," he finally said softly, "are an officer!"

Edwards' heart chilled. The mulatto's shrewd cunning had told him that here was no buck private. Enlisted men might desert; but officers, seldom.

"Yes," he finally admitted, "I was an officer. I was Post Exchange Officer at Quarry Heights until this morning, when a shortage was found in my accounts. I'm not going to Leavenworth Prison for it," he said bitterly. "I took the money, it's gone now. What I want is to get out of the country. This morning, as soon as I saw that the game was up, I beat it, before they had a chance to put me in the guard-house. I've been hiding all day. I was afraid the M. P.s would be watching for me."

Part of what Edwards said was true. He was Post Exchange Officer of Quarry Heights, but there was nothing wrong with his accounts.

**U**NDER heavy lids, Panama Joe studied him.

"I have heard of such theengs before," he admitted. "Thee Government pay very leetle, an' thee young officer, he steal, theenkeeng he weel make eet up at thee dog race, thee games, or thee lottery, before anywan find out. That's eet, hey?"

"That's it," Edwards agreed.

"How much you pay, eh?"

Edwards had only a few dollars with him.

"I haven't any money now," he replied, "but I'll cable for it to the States. I have friends who will send me money to get me out of this. Hide me for a couple of days. The money'll be here by then."

"How much?" demanded the mulatto.

"How much do you want?"

"One thousand dollars—gold."

"I'll get it," Edwards promised. "It'll be here in a couple of days."

"Tomorrow," said the mulatto.

"But—but—I may not be able to get it by then!"

Panama Joe shrugged his thick, sloping shoulders indifferently.

"Tomorrow," he insisted. "I cannot keep you any longer. Eet ces too reesky. Eef thee money do not come by then—"

He left his sentence unfinished, but his eyes glittered.

**P**ANAMA JOE was still suspicious, primarily because Edwards was an officer. But he would give his prisoner the benefit of the doubt for one day. If the money came, all would be well. If it didn't come, Panama Joe would consider him a spy, and a spy's reward would be meted out to him swiftly.

Edwards had less than twenty-four hours reprieve!

Panama Joe lowered his pistol at last and ordered one of his men to take Edwards to a room in the house.

It was a dirty room, containing only a small, iron cot with filthy blankets. A harsh light was cast by an unshaded electric light bulb in a wall bracket. There were no windows, and ventilation was furnished by a small hole covered with an iron screen high in the wall. The door was kept locked from the outside.

Panama Joe had come into the room once, for the address of Edwards' friends. Edwards had given him the first likely sounding address that had come to his mind. By the time the report came back from the cable company that there was no such person and address, the time allotted to him would already be up anyway.

Now the army officer was alone in the room, sitting on the cot. He was a prisoner here, and Jack Delaney was a prisoner in the guard-house at Quarry Heights. Disgrace and per-

haps a penitentiary sentence awaited Jack, but death stared Bill Edwards in the face.

Only two days ago, Lieut. Jack Delaney had been aide to the Commanding General of the Panama Canal Department, U. S. Army. Now he was in the guard-house, accused of giving aid and information to an enemy, a foreign power. Plans of the fortifications of the Panama Canal had been stolen from the Headquarters Building at Quarry Heights. Delaney had protested his innocence, but no one had believed him except his best friend and classmate, Bill Edwards.

**I**T was on account of a woman that Delaney had been arrested. No one realized, until after the plans had disappeared and the Secret Service men had gone to work, that the beautiful woman Lieut. Delaney had been seen with recently at all the fashionable clubs, was Leta Banya, a woman spy who had, heretofore, confined her operations to Europe. This was her first appearance in the Americas.

In vain Delaney had protested that she had obtained no information from him. Two things damned him in the eyes of his worried superior officer. First, he had been frequently in Leta Banya's company; second, as aide to the commanding general, he knew more about the secrets of the Panama Canal than most officers.

Leta Banya had vanished. Her testimony, if she would give it, would be about the only thing to save Delaney. Bill Edwards knew her almost as well as Jack Delaney did. They had made up many gay parties together, and Leta Banya seemed to like Bill as much as Jack.

She had even gone so far as to make covert advances to Edwards, but he had always ignored them. She was beautiful, most attractive—but she was Jack's girl.

Then had come the theft of the plans, and Delaney's subsequent arrest. Not for an instant did Bill believe Jack guilty of the charges against him. But how to prove Jack innocent? Find the woman, Leta Banya.

That was why Edwards went spying around Panama Joe's headquarters. It was said that all criminal activity in the Republic of Panama could be traced to Panama Joe. No one could pull off anything without him.

Now, Edwards realized, he had put his neck inside death's noose. And he had learned nothing.

There in the silence, Edwards suddenly became aware of a murmur of voices in the room beyond his door. His heart began to race. One of the voices was a woman's, and as it grew more distinct, he recognized it as Leta Banya's!

A key grated in the lock, and the door swung back to reveal Leta and a male companion. Panama Joe, his pasty gray face incurious but watchful, stood behind them.

Leta was small and blonde, utterly lovely, and as innocent-looking as a young convent girl. She was clad all in black, with a heavy black veil which could be lowered to cover her entire face.

The mourning clothes provided an effective, impenetrable disguise for her.

**H**ER companion was burly, with the stiff, upstanding hair of a Teuton; dark instead of blond. His pig-gish blue eyes stared at Edwards as cold as twin pieces of ice. He wore a mustache on his square, brutal face. He was clad in a suit of tropical linen, and carried a heavy cane.

Edwards had risen from the bed. He was a tall, broad-shoulder athlete, with smooth, reddish hair and direct blue eyes.

Leta Banya came forward with outstretched hand.

"Hello, Bill!" she greeted, in a throaty, thrilling voice. "I heard about your—your trouble. Panama Joe told me."

Edwards met her eyes searching his. He had thought before that the woman was fond of him, and now, with Jack Delaney out of the way, she took less pains to conceal it.

"Leta!" he cried, trying to look astonished. "What are you doing here?"

A significant glance passed between Leta's companion and Panama Joe. The woman saw it, and turned to speak sharply in some tongue which Edwards was not able to understand.

Her companion glared, but finally shook his massive shoulders. He turned away, leaving Panama Joe to close the door.

Leta sat down on the bed and Edwards followed her.

"I've been away," she began. "On a little yachting trip down the coast with Pakko. He follows me all over the world in that yacht of his. He wants me to marry him." She made a grimace of disgust. He's immensely wealthy, a title, but—" She shrugged her shoulders distastefully.

"Pakko, is he the one—"

"Yes. You just saw him. He brought me here tonight to see this Panama Joe about you."

EDWARDS knew that she was lying, with her curious, almond-shaped eyes upon him. Undoubtedly Pakko was a confederate. And they both were here because Panama Joe was necessary to them.

"But tell me what has happened to Jack?" she demanded. "I just heard about it this afternoon. I can't imagine Jack doing anything like that!"

Bill Edwards looked at her grimly. "Neither can I," he said.

He thought he saw her eyes flicker a trifle. She was estimating how

much he knew, how much he guessed, how much he believed.

"But does it matter?" she finally said softly.

Edwards knew what she meant. She knew that he had been Post Exchange Officer at Quarry Heights, and it was evident that she believed him a deserter. She saw him now as a man without a country. And she, being a woman without a country, serving whatever government paid the highest price for her services, expected him to feel much as she did.

IN Edwards' mind a struggle was going on. He could act as a man who had thrown over his country, and, by so doing, trick her. But he would have to capitalize upon the fact that she was in love with him, and make her believe that he reciprocated.

He winced mentally at the thought.

Then he remembered what was at stake. Not merely the good name of his best friend, but also the safety of the United States. If those plans were delivered into the hands of a foreign power intending to make war on the United States, it might mean hundreds of thousands of lives lost, heartaches and sorrow in every state of the Union.

He was the only man who had a chance to prevent those plans from getting away. He was in a desperate position. No matter what he had to do, he must do it for his country.

The woman who sat beside him on the cot was as deadly and as dangerous as a beautiful tropical snake. She was fascinated by him. Yet, Edwards knew, she would doublecross him, serve him as she had served Jack Delaney and all others, if she suspected that he was not a thief fleeing from justice.

He looked at her steadily.

"No," he said softly, "it doesn't matter."

Suddenly, she was in his arms.

As abruptly as she had kissed him,

she gently pushed him away, and rose to her feet.

"Come on!" she cried gayly. "You're not going to stay here!"

"I have to," he halted her. "I'm a hunted man. The M. P.s would pick me up."

"You come with us," she told him. "Wait, I'll see Pakko."

With pounding heart, Edwards waited for her to return. If he went with them, it meant that he would go to their headquarters, where, undoubtedly, the plans he sought were hidden.

Also, it would give him a chance to make his escape, and return with American Secret Service men to arrest the spies.

But Leta returned raging.

"They say you must stay here!" she cried furiously. "Pakko will not have you aboard the boat. He says it will be too dangerous. Poof!" she snapped angrily. "He does not know you!"

Although disappointed by Leta's failure, Edwards had learned two things: their headquarters was a boat, and Leta was not the head spy. Apparently she was acting under Pakko's orders.

"It makes no difference," she pouted finally. "Your money will be here tomorrow, and by that time I shall find a way to make Pakko take you with us."

**E**DWARDS watched her narrowly. He wondered how far he could trust her. Stifling his qualms, he told her quietly:

"I'm afraid the money will not come. My friends," he shrugged, "are not rich. These people are suspicious of me. If there is no answer to the cable tonight, they will not believe it is because my friends haven't the money."

"Yes. Yes, I see," said Leta thoughtfully.

Edwards began to grow fearful.

She was a woman in the grip of fascination, yet she was no fool. Was she beginning to doubt him? If she were to go into the next room with Edwards' confession that he did not expect an answer to the cablegram, his life was as good as finished. He had to think of some way to win her over to him again.

"I'm afraid," he smiled wryly, "Panama Joe plans to do something drastic if that cablegram fails to arrive from the States."

**H**E saw the color drain swiftly from her face.

"You mean," she almost whispered, "kill you?"

Edwards shrugged again.

"Panama Joe can't take any chances," he reminded her.

He saw that Leta was thinking swiftly. Finally she smiled reassuringly.

"He won't do that," she promised.

Suddenly standing on tiptoe, she kissed him lightly on the cheek. Then she left him.

The hours of the night passed on leaden feet. Edwards spent his time sitting on the bed with his head in his hands, or else pacing the floor agitatedly.

His one hope lay in Leta, and he hadn't the faintest idea what she intended to do. All she had said was that Panama Joe would not have him murdered.

What, actually could she do? It was apparent that she took orders from Pakko, and Pakko was no fool. Like Panama Joe, he would take no chances.

Besides, it was quite possible that Leta would decide to leave him to his fate instead of taking needless risks.

Edwards gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. Something must happen; there must be some way out. There was too much at stake.

Dawn brought a cold sensation to



the pit of Edwards' stomach. Soon the cable office would open, and any time after that, word would come to Panama Joe that there was no such address as the one to which he had directed the cablegram. Then the jig would be up.

The hour hand of his wrist watch slowly crept around the dial. Nine o'clock—ten o'clock—eleven o'clock. It couldn't possibly be much longer now. Any minute the door would open, and Panama Joe's killers would appear.

Then his heart gave a great thump, and seemed to stand still. A key was turning in the door lock. Tensing his muscles, Edwards prepared to spring.

But when the door finally swung back, Leta Banya stood there. Beyond, through the doorway, Edwards could see a guard, apparently asleep in a chair.

"Good morning," she greeted evenly. Her attitude toward him had undergone a subtle change. "I see you're in the morning papers."

She opened a Panama City newspaper which she had been carrying under her arm.

Edwards' eyes bulged at the headline. He took the paper from her, and with furrowed brows read the lead story.

#### SPY PLOT REVEALED IN ARMY OFFICER'S DISAPPEARANCE

HE, Lieut. William Edwards, was the officer! His name and that of Lieut. John S. Delaney were linked together. Bosom friends, both of them had known the female spy, Leta Banya. U. S. Army headquarters suspected them both. Lieut. Delaney was in custody, but Lieut. Edwards had made his escape. The M. P.s the Canal Zone Police, the Panama City Police were searching for him. Outgoing ships were being watched.

Edwards slowly returned the paper

to Leta Banya, his eyes staring at her.

"You said," she told him, watching closely, "that it was Post Exchange funds."

Edwards made a futile gesture.

"It is!" he cried hoarsely. "And now they are blaming this on me, too!"

THE spy looked at him for a long minute.

"You're going with us," she told him finally. "The yacht is sailing at noon."

Edwards looked through the doorway at the guard, who was still sleeping.

"He won't interfere," Leta said contemptuously. She displayed a flask from her purse. "Doped rum. I gave him a drink just before I came in. He's dead to the world. Panama Joe is asleep. He is awake all night, and always sleeps in the mornings. There's nobody else around."

She displayed something else in her purse, the muzzle of a short-nosed automatic.

"Bill," she said frankly, "I don't quite know what to make of you, so let there be no—accidents."

Bill Edwards understood her. She would take him away from Panama Joe, but she was no fool. He was still a prisoner, and she would answer a false move in the same way as would Panama Joe or Pakko, with death.

"Let's go," she said, snapping shut her purse.

"I can't get away from here!" he cried. "You have your veil. But I won't be able to go a half mile before I'll be nabbed."

"Don't worry, darling," she replied thinly. "I have everything arranged."

Edwards followed Leta Banya to the street. Few people were abroad in the blinding tropical sunshine. The *cantinas*, the rhumba joints, and the shuttered doors of Cocoa Grove

looked drab in the morning light. Like Panama Joe, Cocoa Grove stays up all night and sleeps in the morning.

A few doors down, there was another alley, wider than the one leading to the rear of Panama Joe's place. Leta Banya turned into this, and soon they came upon a dilapidated truck, in which stood a large trunk.

"I hired this truck," she smiled, "to bring a trunk down to the docks. It will be taken out to the yacht and brought to my stateroom. You will be in it, and no one will know that you are aboard until too late to do anything about it."

Edwards silently admired the resourcefulness of the woman.

"Get in," she directed. "Hurry. I gave the truckman a dollar for a drink. They'll be back any minute. It is better that they do not know you are in the trunk."

Edwards climbed into the car and opened the lid of the empty trunk. It was barely large enough to hold him. A few nail holes had been punched in the sides to give him air. He squeezed himself inside quickly, and lowered the lid.

With an uncomfortable feeling he heard the lock being snapped on the outside. Now he was a cramped, helpless prisoner in a stout trunk. Leta was taking no chances.

**W**HEN Leta gave the two Panama truck drivers a dollar in order to get them out of the way while she hid Edwards, she didn't dream that they would get drunk. They came back from the corner *cantina* weaving on their feet. Leta bit her lip in vexation. This only increased the danger. But there was no time to get another truck. The yacht was sailing at noon, which was only a few minutes away. So, after cautioning the two men to have care with the trunk and to arrive with it at the Balboa docks on

time, she hailed a taxi, and ordered herself driven there.

Balboa, the Canal Zone ship basin on the Pacific side, is about three miles from Panama City. Rattling and banging along in their ancient truck, the two happy Panamans arrived shortly on the blistering docks. Leta Banya had arrived some minutes before them.

From a trim, speedy-looking, white yacht out in the basin, a small boat was chugging its way to shore for the spy and her trunk.

**T**HE Panamans, anxious to please the lady, who was impatiently tapping her small foot on the cement dock, hurried to lift out the big trunk. It was heavy, and the movements of the two men were none too sure.

Suddenly it slipped through their hands, and landed with a terrific smash on the cement. It struck squarely on a corner. There was a grinding of metal. The hinges snapped and the cover flew open.

Edward, considerably shaken by the crash, leaped to his feet and blinked in the white hot sunshine. The two Panamans stood in their truck regarding him with amazement. On the dock a few feet away, Leta Banya, her veil down on her face, was standing like a frozen woman.

Edwards whirled in the direction in which she was looking, and understood the reason for her immobility. Two M. P.s had been leaning against a dock shed several yards away. They had looked up at the sound of the crash. Now they were hastening forward to investigate.

Suddenly one of them recognized Lieut. William Edwards. The order had gone out that morning that the officer must be apprehended, dead or alive.

Immediately the M. P. drew his pistol. Shouting to his comrade, he charged forward.

Lightning thoughts flashed through Edwards' brain. If he allowed the M. P.s to capture him, they would not listen to his story. They would take him to Quarry Heights.

By that time, the yacht would be gone. Looking across the water, Edwards saw that the small boat had already ceased its forward motion, and was waiting to see what the M. P.s would do.

The stolen plans were on that yacht, and they must not be allowed to escape. The yacht must be stopped!

If he were to make his escape to it, whether or not he was killed the second he boarded it, suspicion would be definitely fixed upon the craft, and the hue and cry would go up after it.

Word would flash to France Field, and bombers would take to the skies. The big coast defence guns would send screaming shells after the yacht. That slim destroyer, now lying at anchor only a few lengths from the yacht, would set off in pursuit.

But all that took time. Minutes, even seconds, were valuable. He could not afford to be taken prisoner and brought to Quarry Heights to wait for some officer to decide whether or not he was lying. Action was imperative now!

The nearest M. P. reached out to grab him. Edwards whirled and raced the length of the dock.

"Halt!" shouted the M. P.s, racing after him. "Halt! Halt, or I fire!"

**A**FTER the third command to halt, the M. P.s opened fire. He heard the sharp reports of their .45s behind him, and urged his feet faster. The deadly lead slugs sang past his ears.

At the end of the dock, he halted in consternation. It was high tide. About fifteen feet below the dock level, several rows of piles had been driven into the bottom of the basin to act as a buffer and landing step

for small boats. These piles were barely awash now, their tops slippery with harbor slime.

Edwards had intended to jump down to them, and from thence into the water. Now, such a jump could only result in broken legs. It would be impossible for him to land on the slimy tops of the piles and still keep his feet.

Beyond the piles, the green water of the basin glittered in a million diamond points in the tropical sunlight. Could he dive that far?

**I**T looked utterly hopeless, beyond human capability, to clear the piles and land in the water.

Edwards' desperate eyes saw that the small boat had turned back toward the yacht, its engine pounding furiously. Pakko was leaving Leta Banya to her fate. Glancing behind him, Edwards saw that the M. P.s were close.

He waited no longer. He ran back a few steps, turned, gathered speed, and took off from the dock in a high, graceful, wide dive. The absolute daring of it kept the M. P.s from shooting for the moment. Breathlessly they watched. The man would surely split his head open on the piles. No one could dive that far!

But Edwards did. By the merest fraction of an inch, he escaped the farthest row of piles. He remained under water, swimming. He knew that the instant his head reappeared, it would be a target.

Finally he had to come up for air. Even during the brief interval he was at the surface, his bursting lungs gasping for air, small geysers of water splashed up around him.

The small boat was almost to the yacht. He would have to swim desperately to reach the vessel before she slipped out of the basin.

The surface of the basin closed over him again as he struck out mightily under water. Forced up for

air again, and then down, still unhit. The next time he was fairly out of accurate pistol range, and stayed at the surface.

Exhausted, he neared the yacht. The anchor was going up, and so was the side ladder. Smoke was pouring from the funnels. The yacht was moving.

He reached out of the water just in time to catch hold of a rope dangling from the ladder. Edwards was too exhausted to climb the rope. He could only hang on, and that he knew he couldn't do for long.

A voice roared above his head. He looked up to see Pakko. Then, hanging on grimly to the rope, Edwards was pulled aboard the yacht. Sailors pulled him over the side like a great, gasping fish. He collapsed in a wet heap at Pakko's feet.

"Get up!" the big man roared, kicking him cruelly.

Edwards staggered to his feet, to stand tottering and swaying. He was dimly aware of the shores of the Canal slipping by, as the trim, speedy yacht picked up its heels.

"So it's you, eh?" sneered Pakko, speaking English with a guttural, harsh accent. His big, hairy fist held an automatic leveled at Edwards' chest.

"So Leta played the fool?" Pakko went on contemptuously. "Well, she got left behind!" Then his eyes narrowed. "But," he snarled, "you are here!"

**E**DWARDS' strength was returning to him. He knew that his life was worth less than nothing, yet he was filled with exultation. The M. P.s had seen him pulled aboard the yacht. By now the news of his escape was flashing over the Canal Zone. Gunners were being tumbled out of barracks to go to man the big guns; pilots were donning leather helmets while greaseballs were wheeling bombers and pursuit ships to the

line; the 16th Naval District was wigwagging orders to the destroyer to go after the yacht.

Pakko seized Edwards roughly by the shoulder and pushed him ahead of him.

"We'll go to the cabin," the big man said. "You will answer a few questions, my friend, to pay for your passage. There are some things about the fortifications which you can explain to me."

**A** HALF hour later, Pakko looked grimly across his desk at the defiant officer sitting in a chair on the other side.

"You do not wish to talk?" he frowned. "Very well. There are ways." He stood up and went to the door to summon assistance.

Spread out on the desk were the stolen plans. The spy had been trying to make Edwards give information on a number of obscure points.

Edwards knew what was coming next. Torture, to force him to talk. He tightened his lips and stared through a porthole. They were out on the Pacific, with land sinking lower and lower behind them. There was a gnawing fear in his breast. The yacht was fast, faster than anything he had ever seen before in ships.

Edwards knew that it took time to get the men to the big guns. The navy destroyer would be useless against the speed of the yacht. But the airplanes should be droning above by now.

Pakko opened the door, his cruel face threatening. And then, suddenly both men heard the high-pitched scream of a big-gun shell. Edwards' heart leaped, while the spy's face went a shade paler. Then Pakko sneered.

"They'll never hit us. We're too small and we move too fast. Besides, in another few minutes we'll be out of range."

Edwards knew that this was true.

The shore batteries had little time to get in a telling shot. More shells screamed by, a few dropping into the water within vision, throwing great white geysers into the air.

Then, suddenly they heard the steady, ominous drone of aeroplane motors. Edwards rushed to a porthole. Behind the yacht, but gaining at every second, a formation of bombers rode low in the air. They were heavy with demolition bombs to drop on the yacht.

Machine-guns!" Pakko screamed.

**S**AILORS spewed across the deck, tore canvas covers from machine-guns, and trained them upon the approaching bombers. A chattering inferno burst loose. Edwards saw one of the bombers suddenly crumple in a burst of flame and gaseous smoke. But the rest came on, inexorably.

They began to let loose their bombs. The water for a half mile around the ship churned with concussions, not only of the air bombs, but also of the high explosive shells from the shore batteries. Still the yacht was unscathed. The planes wheeled, climbed back, in order to turn again and drop another round of bombs at the slim white target.

"They won't touch us!" Pakko mocked from the doorway. "A big ammunition dump is one thing, but a little ship like us, traveling so fast, is another."

Edwards feared that Pakko was right. Staring through the porthole, he saw a gray smudge behind them. It was the destroyer, black smoke belching from its funnels in its futile effort to catch up.

Suddenly a desperate, wild plan flashed across Edwards' brain. He would try to halt the yacht!

Pakko saw him coming, and fired at him point-blank. Edwards felt as though a fist had punched him savagely in the right shoulder. But nothing now would stop him.

Before Pakko could fire again, Edwards had his gun wrist. And in that cabin began a deadly struggle, with bedlam going on outside.

Edwards concentrated on that wrist until the gun fell from Pakko's hand. Then the struggle became a matter of physical strength. Edwards was wounded, and Pakko was the bigger man. But Edwards forgot the searing pain in his shoulder. He forgot everything, save that he was fighting for his country, for Jack Delaney's honor, and his own.

The two men smashed at each other without mercy. Chairs and the desk were overturned; blood spattered over everything.

Pakko got Edwards by the throat, and squeezed his windpipe. The American sobbed for breath. The world began to spin dizzily, and grew darker and darker. Edwards knew that he was going out.

**I**N a last, desperate surge of strength, he brought up his knee with terrific force, catching Pakko squarely in the midriff. The spy staggered backward with an agonized grunt, loosening his strangling hold. Edwards gave him no chance to recover, but rushed him like a madman. A left to the jaw, another on the nose, a third to the jaw.

Like a tiger, Edwards kept at him, until the spy was stretched out on the floor. Edwards drew a deep breath and looked around him. Nobody had heard the battle, there had been too much other noise.

Spying Pakko's gun, Edwards crossed the room and snatched it up. Then he returned to the big man and unmercifully slapped him back to consciousness. The spy sat up, groaning. He looked into the gun muzzle held unwaveringly in front of his face, and his piggish eyes showed fear.

"Get up!" Edwards commanded  
(Concluded on page 147)

# Three Crooks



*Peter felt the heat of the poker on his face*

*Peter McHugh, Heading for Quebec with a Necklace  
of Rubies, Smacks Up Against Vile, Desperate  
Cutthroats of the Far North!*

By **WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE**

*Author of "Partners," "The Underling," etc.*

**W**ITH the lighting of the oil lamps an ominous hush fell upon the little inn that was kept by "Black Pascal" Lanchance for men coming out of the bush—for

such men as were sufficiently evil or foolish to sleep under his roof.

Less of the dirt showed in the yellow glow that fought the shadows back; and more was revealed, per-

haps, of the devil in Black Pascal, who sat humped like a great baboon on a bench by the fire.

Nothing less than absolute necessity would have induced Peter McHugh to stop here for the night. A snowshoe had broken unaccountably during the day and it must be mended. He had no intention of sleeping. If he had not known Lachance by reputation, a look at the man would have been enough.

McHugh sat alone, well back from the fireplace. His great, iron-hard body was relaxed, but his attention was given wholly to Black Pascal and the two companions who huddled with him, growling and mumbling in some long-winded argument.

Of these two one was a long, raw-boned man with mean little eyes who had been addressed as Jake Malloy. The other, a stoop-shouldered, pint-size oldster with the face of a frightened rabbit, appeared to be the cook for the makeshift hostelry. His name was Ovide.

What could they know of him, McHugh wondered, and of the errand that was taking him from the Gulf, along the coast of the St. Lawrence, and to Quebec city? Nothing, he hoped.

**Y**ET that half-whispered, growling conference had been going on at intervals ever since his arrival. Maybe they were planning to rob him. McHugh wondered how it would do to ask them. For he would cheerfully have given them all the money in his wallet, and let them think he was afraid, rather than to have his pockets searched.

Suddenly, as though some decision had been reached, Lachance and Malloy rose and went out of the room together. Old Ovide, with a sidelong glance at the guest, stirred a great kettle of soup that hung over the fire. He moved a long iron spoon in slow circles, thoughtfully.

Ovide licked off the spoon and set it down on the hearth. Then, with a fearful look at the door through which the others had gone, he slid across the floor and stood in front of McHugh. His nose twitched with nervousness.

"*Monsieur!*" he whispered, in a hoarse voice. "You got something worth money? Get heem out of sight afore Pascal is come back!"

That was all. Ovide flitted like a shadow into the shadows, and a door closed behind him. McHugh had no more than time to take his pipe out of his mouth before the cook vanished.

**H**E WAS left alone, with the slow murmur of the fire and the teasing aroma of the soup. He got up and walked to the fireplace. It was pea soup, and he was hungry. He took the spoon and tasted it, and hoped they would have supper soon. Then he stood in front of the fire with his hands clasped behind him while he considered the situation.

It was useless to think of going on immediately. The rawhide lacings of a snowshoe had parted from the rim all along one side. Lachance had said that he did not have a pair to sell, so there was nothing to be done short of taking some snowshoes by force.

McHugh's rifle and his pack were in the cold and barren little cubicle that Black Pascal had shown him when he asked for a place where he could sleep by himself. The others probably bunked in the loft.

If Pascal intended to rob him, they must be even now taking care of his rifle. The way outside and into the bush was still open, but a man without snowshoes might as well stay here and die as to wallow in four feet of snow until he was run down.

Lachance and Malloy came back, and Malloy held McHugh's rifle across his arm. Little Ovide entered

behind them and trotted to his kettle of soup. Malloy sat down with his finger inside the trigger guard. Pascal walked slowly up to the motionless McHugh, who was back in his chair once more, and stood in front of him.

"I know you," he said. "'Big Pete,' they call you in Rimouski. You are friend of the rich old man, Henri Lavallée!"

"And what of that?" asked McHugh.

"Something pretty good for me!" Black Pascal's dingy teeth showed in a grin that made him look more than ever like a baboon. Hair grew out of his ears and along the backs of hands that hung down to his knees. "You know Théophile Labombard, *hein?*"

"Yes," admitted McHugh, slowly, glimpsing light on this conversation. "He worked for *Monsieur* Lavallée until a week ago."

"He give Labombard the sack, yes? All right, Big Pete! Labombard stop here! He talk too much for hees own good, but fine for me! You take some little red stones to Quebec to sell for that Henri Lavallée, *hein?*"

NOW McHugh understood. Labombard, discharged for thieving and lying, had known the affairs of the household. Peter McHugh's hand involuntarily pressed against the pocket where a little leather, velvet lined case was concealed.

He had been intrusted with a necklace of rubies, last of the heirlooms in the family Lavallée. The necklace had come down through generations, from the time of the French régime and now it was to be sold in order that the only living Lavallée might end his days in comfort.

Pascal had seen the gesture toward that pocket. His grin grew broader.

"I think Théophile Labombard do me big favor, *hein?*"

"Where is he now?" asked McHugh, sparring for time. The barrel of his own rifle, in the hands of Malloy, pointed at his stomach.

"That Labombard?" Lachance opened his cavern of a mouth and laughed. "The wolves know more as I do where he is! I don't want no witness to say I hear about the red stones from Henri Lavallée!"

"So you killed him?" exclaimed McHugh. He was seasoned to hard living but a little chill went through him. "And you think you're going to kill me and take the rubies?"

"For sure!"

"Say when, Pascal!" growled Malloy. "You better not monkey with that bird!"

THE rifle lifted a little. Peter McHugh's life was a wisp of smoke, to be dissipated at a word from Black Pascal.

"So you think you'll get the stones if you kill me?" McHugh asked.

"Say, Pascal!" cried Malloy, suddenly. "Mebbe you better find out if he hid them rubies somewhere!"

Black Pascal turned and stared at Jake. It was hard for him, but he did a little thinking.

"*Sacré!* It's firs' class you think of that!"

"If he ain't got 'em on him you can't make a dead man tell nothing!"

"Look here, Big Pete!" said Lachance. "Do you want to be dead when we put you out for the wolves, or do you want to be just a little bit dead? You give me those red stones and we make quick work, Jake and me!"

"Much obliged," replied McHugh, "but I don't want to trade. The rubies are where you won't find 'em, whether you kill me or not!"

Lachance snarled and his thick arms curved.

"Wait a minute!" snapped Malloy. "Tell him a few things and he'll trade! We got to know. He might



of cached 'em out in the bush when he saw he'd got to stop here!"

"I tell him something!" roared Pascal. "Look, Big Pete! We mean business! Jake, he is go out along the trail to meet you las' night. He fix your snowshoe after you sleep so she go bust today and you got to stop on my house! We don't fool with you! If you don't want hot poker in the eyes, you better tell where you got those red stones from Henri Lavallée!"

PETER McHUGH had been balancing on his chair. By comparison he was at ease again; there had been a few unpleasant seconds through which he had expected to catch a bullet with his stomach. Now the rifle was lowered. This was the moment to fight it out.

McHugh's legs curled back until he got a good grip on the floor with his moccasins. He rose, but not to hand over the leather case. He came up like a steel spring uncoiling and launched the hardest blow he had ever struck.

With his momentum and two hundred pounds weight behind it, his fist struck the prognathous jaw of Black Pascal. The sound was that of an axe against living oak. The blockhouse of a man did not go down but he turned half around and stumbled dazedly, knocked out on his feet.

McHugh recovered just in time to dodge the swinging rifle in the hands of Malloy. He sidestepped and struck, one, two, and Malloy crashed down against his bench and lay there. He was merely an ordinary man, and he had no business to mix in that fight.

Peter turned again, and thrilled to a strange emotion as he found the arms of Black Pascal reaching for him. Lachance was like some inhuman monster. Paralyzing his brain did not stop him. He was no more

than half conscious, but he could fight.

McHugh could have stood off and beaten Pascal to a pulp but he wanted to end it quickly. This was no time for fancy work. He had to take command of that house of evil or it would take command of him, and destroy him.

He was known in the Gulf villages as the man who could lift a horse, and all of that great strength was needed now. The arms of Black Pascal were like steel cables. Peter beat them down, away from his eyes and throat. Then, standing close, he drove vicious uppercuts against the ape-man's chin.

He went up on his toes as he struck, lifting with each blow, and the cannonball head of Lachance rolled on his shoulders. The life that had begun to come back into his eyes left them. He would go down in a moment more.

But in the very instant of victory Peter McHugh felt his own breath leaving him. The room went black before his eyes. Too late he realized that something was cutting into his neck with a fiery strength that seemed about to take his head from his body. He clawed at the thing but power left his fingers, his arms. They fell. He sagged against that band of torture around his throat. He was being hanged.

WHEN Peter McHugh opened his eyes he stared up at the time-darkened rafters of the room where he had lost consciousness. The suffocating pain had gone from his neck. He could breathe once more. The tantalizing smell of the soup came to him, and raucous, disputing voices filled his ears.

He was lying on the floor, on his back, and the pressure of cords told him that he was bound hand and foot. It was possible to raise his head, and he looked toward the fire-

place. The argument there lulled, and Ovide began to dish out soup.

"You are good for something in a fight, Ovide," said Pascal, speaking French. "If you hadn't got that rope over a rafter and around his neck, he'd have had me down! He knocked my head loose!"

"Look!" exclaimed Malloy, suddenly. "He's come out of it!"

**L**ACHANCE sprang up and came across the room. In one big paw he held a leather case, flapping open. The velvet padded interior was empty.

"In it there is nothing!" cried Pascal, thrusting the case at Peter. "What you done with those stones?"

"Now are you glad you didn't shoot me?" asked McHugh.

"Give me the poker!" raged Lachance. He grabbed a heavy mitten and jerked a long iron from the fire. The end glowed white hot. Tiny sparks jumped from it as Black Pascal bore it toward McHugh. Peter felt the heat on his face.

He had played the game this way to the limit. Now it was time to try something else. He stared up into the bruised, distorted mask above him and read that the end had come.

"I'll tell where the rubies are," said Peter, steadily, "if you'll untie me and set me on my feet. If I get out of here alive I'll be of more use to my friend Lavallée with eyes than without them, and I can pay him for the necklace if I live long enough!"

Lachance hesitated. The quicker thinking Malloy spoke.

"Take him up on that!" he cried. He snatched the rifle and ran to set his back against the outer door. Pascal hurled the poker at the fireplace and drew his knife. A moment later McHugh was able to get painfully to his feet.

The cook, Ovide, stood shrunk against the chimney with the spoon wagging helplessly in his hand and

his rabbit eyes rolling. He made false starts away from the fire but some strange fascination held him there.

"Now you talk!" commanded Pascal.

Malloy would shoot, of course, as soon as the rubies were found; but in that moment there might be another chance to fight. This time Peter promised himself to take account of the treacherous little cook.

"Lachance," he said, slowly, "when you and Malloy went out to get my rifle, I stood by the fire and dropped the necklace into the soup kettle!"

Black Pascal gaped at him. Malloy ripped out an oath, half of admiration.

"Take the spoon and fish for 'em, Pascal!" he shouted. "If we'd rubbed him out they'd have stayed there all winter, for that damned Ovide never washes the pot!"

**W**ITH a cry, Lachance ripped the spoon from the nerveless grasp of the cook, brushed the little man back with a sweep of his arm, and began to poke about in the kettle. Suddenly, with a yell of rage, he swung it from the fire and turned it over on the floor. The simmering flood poured out. Pascal dropped to his knees and fished with his hands among the dregs. Then he sprang up and stood poised to hurl himself at McHugh.

"Liar!" he roared.

"Wait a minute!" came in a cold voice from the watchful Malloy. He walked slowly toward Lachance. "This here is mighty tricky somewhere! It wouldn't do McHugh no good to stall this way, and he knows it! You'd just get mad and use the poker on him for lying!"

"What you say?" demanded Pascal. "Tricky? I guess so, me! You was the one that take him down so he don't choke to death! While I sit on bench and can't see nothing!"

"Sure I was," agreed Malloy. "And you was here alone while I went out for the jug so we could have a drink after the fight! What's more, you had a good chance to pocket them rubies while you was pawing around on the floor just now! And then say you didn't find 'em!"

**T**HEY glanced at each other, like two challenging dogs, but Malloy did not forget to stand so that he could keep Peter covered. Unnoticed by anyone except McHugh, the cook was slinking along the wall. He reached a corner and began to work toward the door. Peter, looking at him, received a message as clearly as though it had been shouted at him.

"I told you where I put the necklace," he said, "and now I can tell you who got it out of the kettle!"

A faint squeak came from Ovide, but it was drowned in the bellow of Black Pascal.

"If Malloy got them stones, I take him all apart!"

"Ovide warned me to hide my money, if I had any," said Peter, "and he must have watched me through the crack of the door when I went to the fireplace. That's why he tried to choke me to death—so no one but him would know where the necklace was!"

The little cook had not been quite bold enough on his journey. He had another ten feet to go, and it might as well have been ten miles. Pascal rushed like a charging bull. Ovide

squealed, and a knife flashed into his hand.

McHugh, on his toes, saw the blade brush the matted hair of Lachance. It gleamed in the air, and found the neck of Jake Malloy. Even as Malloy choked and flung up a hand, Peter was on him. He wrenched the rifle out of his grasp, and struck. Malloy fell the width of the room and slammed against the wall.

In the corner Black Pascal had Ovide by the ears. He twisted with iron fingers, and the shrieks of the cook filled the room. Lachance shook him so that he flapped like a rag.

"Where you hide 'em?" he thundered. "I pull your ears off!"

"In the ashes under the fire shovel!" screamed Ovide.

**P**ASCAL turned, dragging his limp prisoner, and looked into the muzzle of McHugh's rifle. He froze, snarling, and his fingers set deeper into the throat of the cook.

"Lachance," said Peter, grimly, "get over there beside Malloy and take Ovide with you! If one of you moves while I'm leaving here, I'll give him a bullet where it'll do the most good!"

McHugh backed to the fireplace and reached down into the ashes under the fire shovel. He slipped the necklace into his pocket and straightened up. Then he sighed, with relief and regret. All that good soup was on the floor and he had a long night's march ahead of him!

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# SOLDIERS



*They swarmed into the village, a tattered band of*

## CHAPTER I

### *One Chance In a Hundred*

**C**APTAIN RAOUL DUPRIEST, commanding an unhappy band of ghosts no longer identifiable as the once-proud Company C, was not quite sane. He admitted this privately to himself. After six months of hell in Mindanao he had reached the breaking point—with no relief in sight.

A tide of unrest was sweeping through the southern Philippine jungles like a forest fire through dry pines. The Tirurayes, Bilaans and Bogobos were armed and hostile;

men of magic were at work among the Manobos; the Bukidnons were committing atrocities throughout the grass country beyond the Mulita River; the Moros, always ready to die for Alahuta'Ala—God the Exalted—were merely waiting for the pagan tribes to start the fireworks.

To make it worse, long overdue replacements had been switched to field duty on the turbulent Island of Jolo. Captain DuPriest and his ailing company had been forgotten and left to rot on the muddy banks of the Rio Grande de Mindanao.

Dipping a spoon into a wide-mouthed blue bottle, DuPriest fed

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*Lank Jones, Kentucky Mountaineer, Was a*

# Are BORN

By CARL N.

TAYLOR

Author of "Seven Days' Death," etc.



*sick soldiers bounding into the jaws of death*

himself an enormous dose of quinine and washed it down with a draught of Scotch. Wearily, he resumed his scrutiny of a mildewed map which was studded with glass-headed pins, each marking the location of a village seething with revolt.

Suddenly there came from the direction of the cook tent the sound of a lugubrious human voice raised in song.

"The ole time reelijun  
The ole time reelijun  
She's good enough fer me."

A frown appeared on DuPriest's waxy countenance. Pushing back his chair, he crossed the wooden

floor of his tent, noting as he did so that it must soon be raised to keep the water out. Opening the tent fly, he looked out upon a forlorn semicircle of sagging, soggy, disconsolate tents, nearly every one of which sheltered at least one sick man.

His ears were assailed by two monotonous sounds: the slow, weepy dripping of rain and that dolefully, chanting voice.

"The ole time relijun,  
The ole time relijun."

"Sergeant Cooley!"

"Here, sir."

A slickered figure came slogging

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*Misfit in the Army—But How He Could Fight!*

out of the nearest water-soaked tent.

"I say, Sergeant," DuPriest snapped testily, "can't you do something about that songbird? He's been at it since reveille."

"It's that guy Jones, sir—Kentucky's gift to the Army," the sergeant explained hopelessly. "I been ridin' him all day. I've done everything except muzzle him."

"Capital idea, Sergeant. Go and muzzle him at once!"

Letting the tent fly fall back, DuPriest returned to his work table. Having selected another pin, he jabbed it into the map and leaned back in his chair, frowning.

"Mona-Mona," he muttered. "Datu Abong is king-bee in that hornet's nest. Got to find out what he's up to—somehow."

He smiled bitterly. Within the last fortnight he had sent out a dozen native spies to scout the Bogobo country. None of those spies had returned. Their heads, neatly wrapped in banana leaves, had been tossed into the parade ground at night, however, with the result that no native of Cotabato would now undertake a mission into the Bogobo domain.

AT length DuPriest again called for Sergeant Cooley.

"Send Andy Kaysmith in," he instructed. "Better send his son, too."

Reseating himself, he resumed study of his maps while he waited for the men to appear.

Andrew Jackson Kaysmith and William Tecumseh Sherman Kaysmith were father and son. Born soldiers, they were the kind of men army officers pray for and seldom get. Old Andy had drummed charges at Shiloh and marched with General Sherman to the sea. By special dispensation he had been kept off the retired list, justifying that favor by winning citation after citation in the Moro campaign.

Now DuPriest was about to ask him to risk his life and his son's life to save Company C from annihilation. While he waited, the captain fortified himself with another drink.

PRESENTLY the Kaysmiths entered the tent and saluted. Of that rugged, rawhide American type which seems able to withstand anything and everything in the way of hardship, their faces showed no traces of weariness, illness, or mental strain; even in their patched, jungle-stained uniforms they had managed to retain the appearance of soldiers.

"Sit down," DuPriest said briefly.

He shuffled the maps and cleared his throat.

"You have campaigned in the Bogobo country—to the slopes of Mt. Apo and beyond?" The question was directed at Andy Kaysmith.

"Yes, sir. Under Captain Pershing."

"You have been in Mona-Mona?"

"Yes, sir."

DuPriest cleared his throat again.

"The whole upper river country is in a state of unrest," he explained presently. "I gather that Datu Abong is the prime trouble-maker—but a number of other powerful chiefs are ready to back him up." He drummed the tabletop with his fingertips. "Unless I can find out exactly what is in the air—and squelch it—the Island of Mindanao will blow wide open."

He paused and looked searchingly at the two soldiers. Father and son met his gaze with steady looks.

"Someone will have to lead a reconnaissance party up-river," DuPriest went on. "It would be suicide for Sergeant Cooley to attempt it. He doesn't know the country well enough."

Old Andy and his son snapped to attention.

"I guess I speak for Sherman as well as myself, Captain," Andy said. "Far's I'm concerned, I'm thankin' you for givin' us th' chance."

"Whatever Dad says is okay with me," Sherman agreed.

"I can only give you three men," DuPriest said gravely.

"That's all right," Andy replied. "Three's enough on a scoutin' trip. If more went, they'd be in th' way."

**T**HE five men departed under cover of darkness. Everything possible was done to keep their going a secret; yet none knew better than Captain DuPriest that the jungle telegraph would soon be throbbing the news to wily jungle madmen.

Four days later Sherman Kay-smith, almost unconscious, came floating down the river in a canoe. DuPriest's worst fears were realized the moment the youngster spoke. There had been an ambush. The boy's father was a prisoner, doomed to a horrible death. Sherman himself was desperately wounded. The other three were dead.

"They've got Dad—in Mona-Mona—going to sacrifice him—at full moon!"

The rest of Sherman Kay-smith's story was lost in delirious ravings; but he had told all that was necessary.

Captain DuPriest spoke briefly to the contract surgeon.

"It's up to you to save that boy's life!"

To Lieutenant Osborne, who was sick in bed, he had more to say.

"Five days until full moon, and a hundred miles of jungle between the lower Pulangi and Mona-Mona! Not one chance in a hundred that we can get there in time. But I'm going. And if we don't bring Andy Kay-smith back alive, by the jumping Judas, we'll at least avenge him!"

The captain poured himself a tumbler of whiskey and downed it.

"Never heard of human sacrifice in the Philippines, eh? Well, the Bogobos do it. It's their usual prelude to a spree of blood-letting. All the more reason why we've got to prevent it, d'ye see? Usually the victim is a native, but this time they've got a white man—old Andy.

"We can't let it happen! It can't happen—not while one of my men is able to carry a gun!"

The camp hummed with activity. Somehow, among the sick crew at his disposal, Captain DuPriest had picked enough able-bodied men to form a punitive detachment. These were now preparing to hit the trail, and the captain was being driven to distraction by sick but proficient liars who were bent upon persuading him that the fate of the expedition would depend upon their presence in it. With one man yet to be selected, he finally turned every applicant away.

Out of the confines of the cook tent a human voice brayed with soul-curdling loneliness.

"Up yonduh

Up yond-u-u-u-h

Sun allus shine—up-p-p-p yond-u-u-h-h-h."

**A**S the sounds struck Captain DuPriest's ears, his face brightened with an expression that might have been inspiration. The singer was his pet abomination, the pet abomination, in fact, of every man in Company C. Lank Jones was his name: birthplace, Breathitt County, Kentucky; peace-time occupation, moon-shiner; age, indefinite; education, nil; reason for being in the Army, accidental.

A quirk of fate had been responsible for the presence of Lank Jones in the American Army of Occupation in the Philippines. He was soldiering for the compelling reason that one of his distant cousins had shot a McCallum in the ecstasy of a Kentucky election, after which

event many of the Joneses of Breathitt County had died violently.

Some, including Lank, had found it expedient to see the world. Thus fate had sent him into the Army; but neither fate nor Sergeant Cooley had been able to make a soldier out of him.

His body hung together as though loosely tied with strings; his shoulders had a droop that no drill sergeant could correct. He walked like an Indian, lifting his feet high and setting them down cautiously. He couldn't keep step with the Army, and no army that ever existed could have kept step with him. By his own confession he "jist wa'n't cut out fer th' Army nohow." To which the Army agreed.

Today, as usual, Lank Jones was doing K. P. duty, doing it sadly. Not because he minded the onerous work—he was used to that—but because he had heard of Andy Kay-smith's plight. Which may or may not have been the reason that the song he had selected this morning as vehicle to his sorrow was one of his own composition.

"Up yonduh, up yond-u-u-h  
Sun allus shines up yonduh  
Plenty of likker  
Plenty o' money  
Up yondu-u-u-h  
Sun allus shines up yonduh."

**I**N THE midst of this monotonous chorus Sergeant Cooley entered the cook tent. A six-foot Vermonter imbued with a Yankee's inborn aversion for anyone south of the Mason-Dixon Line, Cooley's dislike was intensified in Jones's case a thousandfold.

"Skipper wants to see you," Cooley jerked an expressive thumb toward the captain's tent.

"Gosh," Lank groaned. "What've Ah done naow?"

"Lord only knows. Go and see!"

In his excitement at being summoned into the presence of his cap-

tain, Lank forgot to remove his flour-sack apron.

Sergeant Cooley watched him go, his granite face twisted in an expression of supreme disgust.

"God help us if th' Old Man takes that muttonhead along," he remarked to the cook.

"Maybe he'll git kilt," Greaseball hazarded.

"I hope so," Cooley snapped over his shoulder as he splashed out into the rain.

**C**APTAIN DuPRIEST was occupied with his maps when Lank stumbled into his tent, announcing his presence by upsetting a camp chair. As DuPriest looked up, his thin, waxen face darkening with a frown, Lank essayed a brisk salute with his left hand. Deciding that he had done it wrong, he tried with his right, the result being that he had both hands slanting above his eyes at the same time.

He had stiffened into a semblance of attention. Now, transfixed by DuPriest's rapier glance, he began to move his feet, first sidewise, then forward, then backward. Suddenly remembering that he was not supposed to chew tobacco in the presence of his superiors, he swallowed the quid that reposed in his left cheek. Tears came into his naturally watery eyes.

DuPriest, being human, could not maintain the icy stare. He laughed, and that sound struck fresh terror into the palpitating heart of Lank Jones. Still holding his hands clamped to his brow, he wriggled like a puppy caught sucking eggs.

"Take those hands down!"

Lank gulped and obeyed.

"You're a hell of a soldier," DuPriest commented, freezing again. "What are you in this man's Army for?"

"Ah cain't rightly say," Lank replied with a bashful grin. "Ah



reckon Ah jist didn't know what Ah was gittin' into."

Smiling grimly, the captain poured himself a drink of whiskey. He then broke all military precedents by filling another glass for Lank.

"I like truthfulness," he said. "Have a drink."

LANK lifted the glass and poured the liquor into his mouth. His Adam's apple skipped up and down his throat; he batted his eyes and wiped his lips. Then, with simple honesty, he expressed his appreciation.

"That's right good drinkin' likker," he said.

DuPriest jerked his head toward the overturned chair.

"Pick up that chair and sit down." He added: "Before you fall down."

When Lank had successfully executed this command, DuPriest continued:

"Have you heard about the Kay-smiths?"

"Yep," Lank replied. "Ah'm right sorry."

"So are we all," DuPriest replied dryly. "Why do you suppose I called you in here, Jones? Think hard."

Three long furrows appeared on Lank's brow. He gazed at the ground and placed the heel of one shoe upon the toe of the other.

"Ah thought maybe Ad'd done somethin' agin th' rules," he replied at last, "but danged if'n Ah kin think of anything Ah've done wrong." His face brightened. "Maybe y'all jist wanted to give me a drink o' likker."

"Wrong," DuPriest snapped sternly. "Listen, Jones, try to understand this, because it's important. I'm going to lead a detachment to rescue Andy Kaysmith. There aren't twenty men in the company who are fit for field service. At least ten of those must stay here to de-

fend the camp. Hitherto you've been peeling spuds while other men were doing the fighting, for the simple reason that you've been too dumb, or too uninterested, to learn a soldier's duties.

"We're going to change that—not because you've shown any recent signs of intelligence, but because you're strong as an ox. This job calls for tough men. So you're going to volunteer. Now beat it. Get your gun and pack, and ask Sergeant Cooley for a hundred rounds of ammunition. You're in the Army now!"

Lank's face brightened; his colorless eyes sparkled.

"Ah'm shore much obliged," he said with as much ecstasy as his drawly voice was capable of expressing. "Ah was afeerd ye wouldn't let me go."

## CHAPTER II

### *Lightning Attack*

THEY were in the jungle hacking at vines, slogging through bogs, fighting insects and cursing the heat—Captain DuPriest and nine men. They had buried Stephanopoulos, the Greek, yesterday. The first casualty, he had stepped upon a thin sliver of bamboo, scarcely larger than a darning needle, which had gone clean through his water-soaked shoe and halfway through his foot.

Poisoned, of course, with *upas sap*. The Greek had died twenty minutes later, in awful agony.

Now Private Lank Jones, being the strongest man in the party, was carrying the rifle of his dead marching mate in addition to his own. DuPriest's orders. On the trail ahead, an extra rifle might mean the difference between success and failure.

During most of the day they had sweltered amid steamy dampness;

now, as night came on, they were freezing in a dripping rain that would soon replace fever with chills. Finally, at the end of that miserable day, darkness wrapped the misty mountains like an all-enveloping cloak.

The hacking, slogging and swearing ceased. Captain DuPriest's voice rang sharply. Outposts were tailed off and sent to strategic positions. Shelter halves were rigged up in the optimistic hope that they might keep off some of the rain.

With one exception, the men knew what to do and did it efficiently, without orders. The exception was Lank Jones; he was mostly occupied in keeping out of the way of the others.

Finally, seizing an opportune moment, he sidled up to DuPriest.

"Shore is chilly, Cap'n," he began apologetically. "Ah've been thinkin'."

"Thinking again?" The fever in DuPriest's bones made his temper edgy. "Don't do it, Jones. You'll wear out that keen intellect of yours." He turned away, but Lank Jones, his mind buzzing with an idea, was like a leech.

"IF y'all don't keer, Ah'd kinda like to contrive a mite o' fiah an' maybe cook some coffee."

"Jones, you've quite evidently missed the fact that it has been raining for two weeks," DuPriest remarked gently. "The devil himself couldn't make this wet wood burn."

"If'n y'all don't keer," Lank persisted, "Ah think Ah could contrive a fiah."

"Then go ahead—perhaps you'll earn a medal. At least, it will keep you from thinking." The captain sat down and rested his aching head against a tree root.

Lank ambled off into the gloom. When he returned he was staggering

under an enormous load of soggy wood—and mournfully singing. He went back into the darkness again and again, apparently untroubled by the absence of light. On his last trip he brought back his campaign hat filled with what appeared to be pieces of weathered limestone. Having carefully deposited this load beside the pile of wet logs, he squatted and began to arrange the smaller sticks, one upon another.

SERGEANT COOLEY saw what he was doing and came to scoff.

"Say, whattaya think this is—a picnic? Steve's shelter half and yours is supposed to make a tent. Where's it at?" Steve was short for Stephanopoulos, who had been Lank's marching mate.

Lank looked up with a start. He was wholesomely afraid of Sergeant Cooley.

"Gosh," he apologized, "Ah reckon Ah plumb fergot."

"Yeah—you fergot! You'd fergit your feet if they wasn't fastened on. Whattaya think you're doin' now, huh?"

"Ah was aimin' to make a fiah," Lank replied in a chastened voice.

"You would think of something brilliant. Git busy then—and stay on th' job till you git a fire—see? That's fer fergittin' to put up your tent. Either make a fire or stay at it all night—git me?" Cooley's grin of satisfaction was concealed in the darkness.

"Bet he won't be singin' hymns at daylight," thought the sergeant pleasantly.

Lank reached for his hat and carefully selected one of the knotty lumps it contained.

"Say," Cooley's curiosity overcame him, "whattaya goin' to do with them rocks?"

"Hit ain't rocks," Lank drawled informatively. "Hit's some kind o' gum. Hit grows on trees."

He struck a match and held it to the hunk of gum, which immediately burst into a hot flame.

"Hit grows on trees an' hit's called massigy, er somethin' like that. Shore burns purty, don't hit?"

He placed the burning gum underneath the slivers and twigs and banked other pieces around it. Presently the whole heap was burning; then some of the sticks flickered into flame.

"**N**AOW," Lank drawled, his voice untinted by any note of triumph, "Ah reckon Ah'll fix up that pup tent afore Ah fergits hit again."

Sergeant Cooley grunted his disgust and expectorated spitefully into the cheery fire.

Out of the darkness came a laugh from DuPriest that was to Sergeant Cooley like salt to a wound.

He was presently to have his satisfaction, for Lank met his Waterloo when he tried to set up the pup tent. Completely baffled, he floundered in the mud for an hour before he finally got the thing set up—wrong side out and hind part before. At last the sergeant snatched away the muddy canvas and roughly shoved Lank aside.

"I'll do it—I'll do it," he proclaimed loudly. "I won't ask you to watch, because you're too dumb to learn. Go and see if you can boil some coffee without burnin' it. Put some of your K. P. maneuvers into practice!"

Again Lank faced a task he could do. His coffee was a triumph. Some of the less grudging of his comrades almost forgave his former trespasses and even Cooley thawed a little under the influence of his fourth pannikin. Then, from the apologetic shelter of his pup tent, Captain DuPriest called out a compliment and a command.

"That's mighty fine coffee, Jones. Bring the pot over here—I believe

it's whipping these infernal chills."

Lank's face broke into a sunny smile. He bent over the fire. He picked up the coffee pot. He walked toward DuPriest's tent. He was half-way to his objective when a section of climbing rattan, coiled like a steel spring, betrayed him. He fell the rest of the way, and the coffee that missed DuPriest splashed into his blankets.

"Gosh," Lank's voice was vibrant with horror. "Ah didn't aim to do that! Honest Ah didn't!"

"If I thought you had," DuPriest barked, "I'd have you shot! You blundering son of a jackass! Can't you even bring a man a pot of coffee without half scalding him to death?"

"Ah'm right sorry," Lank managed to say.

"Sorry—hell! I'll make you sorry, you half-witted terrapin! Tomorrow you'll carry five hundred rounds of spare ammunition. Not that I think you'll profit by the lesson—you won't."

**I**F THE first day had been unpleasant, the next was well-nigh intolerable. The thin, voracious leeches of Mindanao came out of the gluey mud by the millions; they were coiled on every dead leaf and stick. They crawled through eyelets of shoes, insinuated themselves underneath leggings, even worked their needle-shaped bodies through khaki trousers; and wherever they came in contact with flesh they attached themselves and began to swell with blood.

Sergeant Cooley was the worst sufferer. All through the day he marched in blood-filled shoes, and by mid-afternoon he was in a temper.

The detachment halted for a rest at three o'clock. Dropping upon the ground, the sergeant took off shoes and leggings and began removing his collection of bloodsuckers by touching a cigarette to their tails.

With his usual genius for doing

the unfortunate thing, Lank seated himself on a near-by log to watch the procedure.

"Sho!" he exclaimed, his eyes bulging. "Ye hain't got *that many* leeches. They hain't that many leeches in th' world!"

"Damn you!" Cooley roared. "Shut up!"

**A** LOOK of pain crossed Lank's homely features. He fumbled for a piece of tobacco, took a huge bite, and slowly masticated it.

"Sho!" he presently remarked in a tone of abject apology. "Ah didn't aim t' rile ye, Sarjint. Honest—"

Cooley's basilisk eyes glittered.

"One more crack outa you," he remarked with slow emphasis, "and it'll be too bad."

One after another the leeches dropped off under the cigarette treatment. With fascinated eyes, Lank watched them as they fell. The sergeant's anger increased, his features slowly assuming the color of a turkey gobbler's wattles. In the midst of it Private Bagshaw, who was a Limey and a wag, touched Lank's shoulder.

"Hi never seen nothin' like hit, bless me hif I did," he remarked solemnly.

"Ah, was jist goin' to say," Lank replied innocently, "they must be a powerful bother if'n ye git plumb covered with 'em."

The sergeant clenched his fists.

"Naow, me," Lank went on, "Ah done put a hex on mine with green terbaccer." He removed one of his leggings, disclosing a bony shank neatly wrapped in green tobacco leaves. "Ye jist wrop hit around your laigs. Them leeches cain't abide th' taste of hit."

"Huh?" Cooley's grunt was one of blank amazement.

"Nope," reiterated Lank. "They jist cain't abide hit. Hit seems to disagree on their stummicks."

"How'd you find that out?" Cooley demanded.

"One o' them Moros that helps me peel 'taters done tole me afore we started."

Cooley snorted.

"Where'd you git that tobacco?"

"Found hit back yonduh." Lank jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "If'n ye recall that cl'arin' we-all passed back yonduh—that's whar Ah found hit."

"And you just helped yourself?" Cooley's voice grated like pieces of broken iron. "Just went in and got some, huh? Without gittin' leave, huh? And now you've got th' cock-eyed nerve to set there and brag about it! Why the devil didn't you tell the rest of us?"

An expression of poignant regret crossed Lank's face.

"Gosh," he sighed, "Ah reckon Ah plumb fergot to mention hit."

"I'll make you fergit!" Cooley glanced around to make sure that DuPriest was not within hearing. "You're goin' back and fetch us all some tobacco. Maybe that'll help your memory. Git goin'—and make it snappy!"

Obediently, Lank picked up his two rifles, his pack and his extra burden of ammunition, draped them over his round shoulders, and sloshed back down the trail, sadly humming a pious song.

"Hope to hell he's ambushed," Cooley growled venomously.

**F**IVE minutes later Captain DuPriest blew his whistle. As the men fell in he noticed Lank's absence and turned a questioning look in Cooley's direction.

"Where's Jones?"

"Oh, him?" The sergeant shrugged with elaborate unconcern. "I sent him back a ways to git some green tobacco to keep off leeches."

"No more of that, Sergeant. I won't have you overstepping your

authority. You know the danger of ambush. If he doesn't come back, I'll hold you responsible."

"Go ahead and bust me," Cooley muttered under his breath. "If that son of a billygoat don't come back, it'll be worth it."

THEY were climbing up into the hills now, where the jungle was not so thick. Presently they struck a native trail, muddy and slippery, but decent by comparison with the track they had been following. The rain ceased. The clouds broke long enough for them to glimpse the sun, and they stepped along more briskly. Irresponsible Private Bagshaw, unaware that he was thus expending the last few breaths of his life, broke into a snatch of bawdy song.

The jungle gave forth no sound. No leaf stirred. No bird or animal moved. Yet paralleling the trail, and never more than fifty yards from the marching soldiers, there was hostile life. Through those vine-laced trees stalked a group of Bogobo warriors armed with bows and arrows and throwing spears, invisible as death in that dense growth.

The attack came with lightning suddenness as the soldiers entered an abandoned clearing on a hilltop. There were no yells, nor did any native show himself. But out of that wall of green, and from three sides, spears and arrows came whizzing.

One of the javelins struck Bagshaw in the breast, going through his body and into his pack. With a loud cough, he straightened, clawing at the wooden shaft, then pitched forward. After that—silence.

DuPriest rapped out a terse order.

"To the center of the clearing! Prone firing position—in a circle!"

The command was executed without hurry or confusion. DuPriest expected the usual wild rush to follow that first flight of arrows and spears. He therefore placed his men

so that it could be met from all sides. But no rush came.

"How about givin' 'em a volley?" Cooley suggested.

"Not unless you see something to shoot at. Can't afford to waste ammunition."

The men began to squirm as the minutes dragged by. Three long furrows appeared on DuPriest's brow. Sergeant Cooley fruitlessly searched the surrounding leafy wall for a target.

"Strange," DuPriest muttered. "I wish they'd attack and get it over with." To himself he added: "God help us if they put it off until after dark."

"Bunk," Cooley growled. "They're gone. What's th' use of layin' here?"

He had his answer before the words were out of his mouth. A long slender arrow with a fiendishly barbed head whanged out of a clump of wild banana and struck the ground within an inch of his chin.

"The devil! I seen where that came from!"

He blazed away and the bullet clipped off a leaf where a native should have been. A derisive yell told that he had missed. Cooley swore and fired twice more; he only wasted ammunition. There was nothing visible to shoot at.

FOR the better part of an hour those spears and arrows came hurtling out of the undergrowth. Most of them struck dangerously near their marks.

It was nearly dark when DuPriest gave utterance to his troublesome thoughts.

"They probably mean to wear us down and rush us just before dawn. We'll be in a tight corner. There's only one thing for it—wait, keep awake, and give them hell when they do show themselves.

"We could use Jones now." He

avored Cooley with a meaning glance. "But Jones has very likely gone the way of Bagshaw."

The sergeant was forming a reply when the shattering report of a Krag-Jorgensen broke the stuffy silence. The shot was followed by a wild yell."

"By Judas!" DuPriest exclaimed. "That must have been Jones. He's right down among them!"

Cooley's eyes sparkled.

"More'n likely he'll git bumped off, too."

There was a moment of silence; then the rifle crashed again. After that the reports came with monotonous regularity, each one a little farther away than the last.

"Sounds like he's chasing them home," DuPriest said. "Jones may have the makings of a soldier in him after all."

"Not a chance," Cooley muttered under his breath.

**T**HE rush of tropic darkness came soon afterwards, and DuPriest gave orders to bivouac in the clearing. In the business of making camp, Lank Jones was almost forgotten. But not for long. He came stumbling out of the darkness and stepped into a mess tin full of goldfish. The mess tin of Sergeant Cooley.

"What have you been doing, Jones?" DuPriest demanded.

"Ah didn't aim to take so long," Lank apologized. "But they was twelve on 'em, an' hit done took a right smart o' trailin' to git 'em all. Last one nearly got away." Lank's voice was mournful. "Ah had to shoot twice at him."

"Where's that tobacco you was goin' to bring fer them leeches?" demanded one of his mates. "Me, I got a million leeches between my knees and my feet."

"Gosh!" Lank removed his hat and thoughtfully scratched his head. "Ah done fotched some, but Ah

drapped hit while Ah was follerin' after them wild uns. Reckon Ah plumb fergot to pick hit up when Ah was a-comin' back."

### CHAPTER III

#### *Lank Sins Again*

**C**OMPANY C's detachment had been four days on the trail.

They were ragged, bearded and dirty, their bodies covered with insect bites. Alternately parched by fever and shaken by chills, they did not complain. There was still a day to spare before the night of the full moon—and less than a dozen kilometers to go.

At the noon halt DuPriest explained his plan.

"We'll camp near the village. Some time tonight Sergeant Cooley and I will ascertain whether Kay-smith is still alive. If they know we're coming, they may have killed him. I don't consider that very likely, however, thanks to Jones' excellent work in wiping out the party that ambushed us."

Lank blushed and squirmed under the compliment. Cooley disguised a snort by loudly blowing his nose.

DuPriest was a fair-minded man. Despite Lank's hopelessness as a routine soldier, he had—acting on his own initiative—accomplished one fine piece of work. By no means blind to Cooley's bulldozing, DuPriest had several times mentioned his appreciation. Before nightfall, however, it was to be the rookie's misfortune to fall again into bad grace.

Again his sin was his marvelous awkwardness. An hour before dusk the detachment had come to a deep stream which flowed swiftly over a bed of huge boulders slippery with water moss. Each man having been given a share of food supplies, medical equipment, or ammunition to

carry across, they plunged into the water. It was Lank's misfortune to carry a wicker hamper which contained, among other things, all of their precious supply of cigarettes.

Halfway to the bank, he slipped on a glassy boulder and lunged wildly for the next rock. He almost made it. Arms gyrating, he stood for a moment in an excellent, if animated, representation of the leaning tower of Pisa.

"Hey!" Cooley yelled. "Hey, you — look out!"

"Don't douse them cigarettes!" This was not advice; it was a soldier's prayer.

UNTIL the sergeant shouted, Lank had been making strenuous efforts to postpone the inevitable. Now his jaw dropped. A stunned look overspread his features as, clawing the air, he met Cooley's unforgiving stare.

*Splosh!*

Lank disappeared beneath a blossoming fountain of spray. There was an instant when his number twelve marching shoes were seen protruding from the water; then they disappeared until his body broke the surface, like the leisurely rising of a submerged water buffalo. He still gripped his rifle, but the hamper was floating off into the swirling rapids.

"Gosh!" Lank bleated. "Hit wasn't my fault—"

"The cigarettes!" yelled Private "Bowery" Smith tragically. "You mug! Youse has lost 'em!"

Lank looked at his empty hands with dumb amazement. Slowly he waggled his head.

"Sho! Ah reckon Ah lett'n 'em go when Ah hit bottom."

"You — you — leper!" Cooley shouted. "Blast you! I wish your enlistment was twenty years. I'd make you peel a million spuds for each one o' them cigarettes!"

Lank hardly heard Cooley's voice. He was gazing spellbound into the accusing eyes of Captain DuPriest. The captain's jaw was thrust out; his lips a thin line across his bearded face; his brows drawn forebodingly together.

"Jones, you've not only lost our cigarettes—that hamper contained my last bottle of whiskey!"

"Ah didn't aim—"

"You didn't aim! You never aim! You blundered into this world, the Lord knows why or how, and you've been blundering ever since. You're a nuisance to the Army, a disgrace to Company C, and an abomination to me. The articles of war permit punishment before the firing squad for certain offenses; yet for men like you we have nothing worse than the guardhouse or kitchen police. It isn't fair!"

For the remainder of the day no one spoke to Lank; no one except Sergeant Cooley. He had plenty to say. Scathing though his abuse was, however, it was to Lank as nothing in comparison with the devastating silence of DuPriest.

"A H'M right sorry, Cap'n," he said humbly when he could bear the damning silence no longer. "Ah must sorta slipped. Ah didn't aim to drap your likker."

DuPriest, needing a drink in the worst way, drew himself up and subjected Lank to long and thoughtful scrutiny. He studied him as an entomologist might study some rare insect. Under that condemning stare Lank felt himself shriveling to infinitesimal proportions. He wished, almost audibly, for a worm hole to crawl into.

"Jones," DuPriest clipped at last, "if you possessed the virtue of never committing the same offense twice, you would now be on the threshold of perfection. You've committed every military crime in the curricu-

lum, short of high treason or desertion. You sorta slipped, eh? Bah!" Turning on his heel, DuPriest marched away, stiffly erect.

Under cover of gathering dusk, the detachment approached almost to the edge of Mona-Mona. The village was larger than most hill settlements; the elevated houses of grass and bamboo stood in orderly rows, filling a small valley and overflowing upon the flanks of surrounding hills.

**T**ONIGHT a huge fire was burning under a thatched shed in the plaza. In the light of the flames a dark mass of warriors seethed back and forth. DuPriest studied the angry scene for a long time, then motioned Cooley to his side.

"How many fighting men do you suppose there are in that plaza, Sergeant?"

Cooley gazed at the mob through slitted eyes. A long minute passed before he answered.

"Two hundred—maybe more."

"And there are nine of us."

"Eight," Cooley corrected. "That guy Jones don't count."

DuPriest appeared not to hear this comment.

"One thing seems certain," he remarked. "Kaysmith is still alive. Those men don't all belong in Mona-Mona. Too many of them. The agitators have probably invited all their allies in to see the sport. We'll hit 'em at daylight—a little before. With the advantage of surprise, we may—possibly—carry the thing off."

"Suppose we do git Andy out?" Cooley asked. "What then? How'll we git back to Cotabato? Them babies will eat us up, soon's they find out we ain't an army."

"We'll need a lot of luck," DuPriest admitted.

As darkness rushed over the jungle every man was detailed to sen-

try duty. Shortly after midnight DuPriest and Cooley inspected the outposts. The captain and sergeant then crawled off on a mission of reconnaissance. An hour later they rejoined the detachment, and DuPriest pointed out the house where Kaysmith was being kept a prisoner.

To each man in turn he explained the essence of his brief plan.

"It will have to be bluff—pure bluff. Shoot and yell like devils when the time comes. Make them think we're a whole division. Set a few houses afire if possible. Everything depends upon making this an absolute surprise."

To Jones he repeated these instructions three times in simplified form and made Lank say them over.

"Don't move—don't make a sound—don't shoot until you're told—then raise hell."

"Don't move," Lank parroted obediently, "don't make no noise, don't shoot until Ah'm told to—then raise perticular hell."

## CHAPTER IV

### *Cat and Mouse*

**D**AWN, feeble and gray. A cold white fog hanging over the valley. The sharp tang of smoke from dying fires in the heavy, moist air. Nine shivering men prone on the ground, hugging their rifles and waiting; among them Private Lank Jones, guilty of the most heinous military offense. Lank Jones was asleep at his post.

His sleep could have been more serene, for the toe of one shoe was resting in an ant hill. The ants had begun to investigate, and Lank was dreaming of an attack by a great host of bloodthirsty Bogobos armed with red-hot darning needles.

Presently a fat, black ant, something over an inch long, reached the back of his hairy neck. Selecting a tender spot at the base of a mole,



the ant made a neat incision, discharged a mouthful of venom into it, and scampered away.

Lank sat up with a frenzied yell. As his sleep-laden eyes flew open he saw a long line of dark forms creeping through the mist. Waiting for no command, he grabbed his rifle and blazed away.

*Crash! Crash! Crash! Crash!*

"Danged if'n Ah didn't miss every one on' em," he muttered in blank amazement.

Wild yells broke out in the village. Lank was frenziedly reloading when a heavy hand fell on his shoulder. Jerked roughly to his feet, he confronted DuPriest. The captain's eyes were blazing, his face working with fury.

"You blasted fool! What are you shooting at?"

"Theah was a whole gang of 'em, a-comin' on their hands and knees," Lank replied. "Look—ye kin see 'em yourself." He stretched a long arm toward the village, where by this time the yells of the natives had become pandemonium.

"Reckon somethin' must be wrong with my gun, Cap'n. Ah sighted careful, but Ah missed'em all."

"You're crazy! There are no men coming this way!"

"Theah—right daown theah," Lank insisted, pointing.

AS HE spoke, a fat black ant fell from the brim of his hat. Rolling his eyes upward, he uttered an exclamation of fervent surprise.

"Well, dang my hide! That shore beats me. Ah reckon Ah must've drapped off to sleep. Theah was a passel o' ants on my hat rim when Ah waked up. Wan't no men a-tall—jist ants on my hat rim. But they shore looked a heap like men a-crawlin'."

"Asleep, eh? Shooting at ants, eh?" DuPriest's voice was cataclysmic. "I'll have you court-martialed

for this if we ever get back alive!" He barked an order. "Come on! This ass has roused the village. The rest of you cover Cooley and me—we're going after Kaysmith!"

They burst out of the grass shrieking like madmen. They loped down the hillside, firing as they ran. They swarmed into the village, a tattered band of sick soldiers bounding into the jaws of death.

COOLEY and Captain DuPriest were almost to the elevated structure that served as Andy Kaysmith's prison, and the rest of the men were darting in and out among the nearest houses, snatching smoldering brands from the fires and thrusting them into thatched roofs. Suddenly, DuPriest stopped.

"I'll be eternal damned!" he said fervently. "Look! Tell me what you make of that, Sergeant!"

Except for a few grim-eyed old men, the plaza was deserted. The host of warriors who had filled it last night were going out on the opposite side of the village in a mad, panicky scramble.

"Looks like we bluffed 'em in spite of that idiot," Cooley grunted.

"Um—yes, it does. Come on—let's get Kaysmith before they start coming back."

Although hardly more than a dozen warriors remained in the village, these were tough old men who meant fight. They were lined up in front of Andy Kaysmith's bamboo prison, armed with spears and bolos. Three of them crumpled under the blasts of DuPriest's automatic. Cooley, clubbing his rifle, barged into the midst of them. Then the situation was suddenly reversed.

DuPriest was fighting four wiry old men, his pistol jammed and useless, the result of prolonged exposure to jungle dampness. Cooley was on his hands and knees, stunned by a blow across the back of his

neck, and a grim-eyed chief was raising his bolo for the death stroke.

Into that tableau of death a weird figure came charging; a yelling, wild-eyed apparition in tattered garments who swung his rifle as a woodman swings an axe. Lank Jones!

The man who had been about to kill Cooley was the first to fall. Then Lank waded into the others. He danced, side-stepped, and pirouetted like a fighting cock. He went around that group of warriors like a mad cooper hooping barrels. He yelled like a Comanche, and the defending warriors melted before him.

As DuPriest bent to cut the withes that bound Andy Kaysmith's arms and legs, Lank found himself face to face with Cooley.

"Ah reckon we've done larruped 'em," he said with a friendly grin.

"Yeah," Cooley growled, "and I owe my life to you, you half-hatched buzzard!"

Inside the house, Andy Kaysmith, veteran of a hundred surprise attacks, spoke to his captain as one soldier to another.

"I'd call that th' prettiest early mornin' skirmishin' I've seen since I fit th' rebels in Georgia. You worked it jest right, Captain. That first wild yell and that sudden burst of shots was what rattled 'em. You couldn't have figgered it out better."

"Um," said Captain DuPriest.

**I**N THE next two days they were reduced to six men.

Bowery Smith had died when he stepped in the way of a spring gun that shot a poisoned arrow into his leg. Another soldier had been chopped down by a man who leaped, catlike, from concealment to strike his one deadly blow before he was bayoneted. Two more had been killed by javelins. The rest of them, sleepless, haggard and weary—reduced to the necessity of eating *ubod*,

watery shoots of young rattan—were wearing down under the strain of ceaseless vigilance.

The brief advantage they had gained by surprise had not been sufficient to overbalance their weakness in numbers. Although the pursuit had been cautious, the hillmen were hanging on their heels like wolves on the trail of wounded prey.

**L**A TE in the afternoon of the third day they came to a narrow canyon through which a swollen stream poured. The canyon was spanned by a bamboo suspension bridge, beneath which the river flowed smooth as oil, to become a wild cataract a hundred yards below.

The jungle seemed to have swallowed the pursuing natives. A brooding quiet, intensified rather than broken by the shattering noise of the waterfall, hung over the forest. Instinctively, the men glanced behind them. Frayed nerves were keyed to highest tension. Rusty rifles were tightly clutched in sweaty hands. Mosquitoes wheeling about swollen faces sang spitefully and loud.

The detachment halted a few yards from the bridge.

"Kaysmith and I will go forward to scout the bridge," DuPriest announced. "Sergeant Cooley, you will remain with the rest of the men until we return."

Five minutes later Kaysmith and the captain came back.

"No indication of any trap," DuPriest said briefly. "We'd better get across."

They reached the bridge. DuPriest tested it with his foot and walked across. When he had reached the farther bank, Cooley followed; Kaysmith came next; then Privates Swartz and Jenkins, with Lank bringing up the rear.

Suddenly a brown form moved among the tree ferns ten yards up-

stream. A muscular arm reached out to grasp a hidden rope. The rope snapped taut, and two of the bridge's bamboo supports were jerked away. The bridge dropped, swayed and broke, dropping the men, plummet-like, into the water.

ANDY KAYSMITH was first to reach the bank. Swartz, a giant German, splashed clumsily ashore a moment later. Neither Cooley nor Jenkins could swim, and both were being swept toward the brink of the falls. Desperately beating the water, Jenkins was caught in the current's grip and whirled over the cataract.

Cooley, however, had better luck. A rapidly vibrating tree-branch protruded above the water in the middle of the stream, and he was carried near enough to grab it.

Lank saw him catch the branch and started paddling downstream.

"I can't hang on!" Cooley shouted. "I've got a cramp!"

"Don't let go," Lank responded. "Ah'm a-comin'."

"Git back, you idiot!" Cooley screamed above the roar of the water. "This limb won't hold us both!"

"You can't do it, Jones," DuPriest shouted. "Strike for the shore. I'll toss him a vine."

"If'n he's got a cramp, Ah don't reckon he kin wait fer y'all to cut no vine," Lank replied with innocent *lese majeste*.

Cooley's fingers were slipping when Lank seized his hair. Catching the released branch with his free hand, he managed to keep free of Cooley's arms, but only for an instant.

True to Cooley's prediction, the branch snapped off. Lank felt the racing current lay hold of him. Cooley, stubbornly brave in battle, now went panicky. From the bank Andy Kaysmith shouted a terse warning.

"Look out! If he gits his arms

around your neck, you're both goners!"

Lank appeared to heave his body out of the water. He swung his bony fist like a war club, and Cooley's head went back. A second blow in the same spot stopped his struggles. Five minutes later Lank dragged the sergeant ashore. As Cooley sat up and began to expel water from his lungs, his savior said fervently:

"Ah'm right sorry. Ah didn't aim—"

"Aw, tell it to the marines," Cooley gasped.

Off somewhere in the hills a bamboo drum began to throb. Old Andy cocked his head and listened with a thoughtful expression. Frowning, he discharged a stream of tobacco juice into the river.

"They've got a village up there somewheres," he remarked. "Place called Batu-Indangan. She's a right pizenous community."

"That makes it pleasant," DuPriest commented. "I sec you still have your rifle—that helps. What else do we have in the way of arms?"

THE weapons were not hard to count. Besides DuPriest's pistol, Cooley still had his automatic, although he had lost his rifle. Swartz had lost both rifle and pistol. Lank had been carrying three rifles; they were all at the bottom of the river—with his pistol.

"Ah'm right sorry," Lank stammered.

"This time it wasn't your fault, Jones," DuPriest said kindly. "Anyway, you'll soon have something worse to worry about."

Lank gave a visible start.

"Huh? What've Ah done naow?"

"Nothing, Jones, absolutely nothing. Your past blunders are no longer of any importance, and the future will doubtless be very short for all of us. Here we are in the

midst of the jungle—five sick men with one rifle and three pistols among us—and the woods full of enemies. They'll rush us as soon as they learn how few guns we have."

"Sho!" Lank said sadly. "Ah guess Ah hadn't thought o' that."

"What a mind!" Cooley observed to no one in particular. "As if git-tin' butchered wasn't any more important than peelin' spuds."

"If all soldiers felt that way, wars might not last so long," DuPriest commented. Turning to Kaysmith, he asked a pointed question:

"I want your advice. What do you consider our best chance of saving our lives?"

"I been tryin' to figger out th' lay of th' land. Seems to me, this crick must run into th' Pulangi. If we follered it down, maybe we could rig up a raft. 'Course," he spat meditatively, "they'd more'n likely nip us off with arrows from th' banks, but they couldn't rush us."

"That strikes me as a good suggestion," DuPriest said. "How far do you make it to the Pulangi?"

"Tomorrer some time, if we walked. But if this river is th' one I think it is, we can make our raft soon's we git past these rapids and float right down. Smooth, deep water all th' way. But she'll be right narrow till we hit th' Pulangi. Snipin' will be good from both banks."

"We'll risk that!" DuPriest's voice was crisp with new hope.

**S**IGNAL drums started again as they clambered down into the gorge below the waterfall. Thenceforward, the pounding never stopped, although there were times when the rush of white water muted all sounds.

Down in the gorge the soldiers were necessarily strung out in single file, each man finding his own way through the tangled vines and over piles of driftwood and boulders. Racing against darkness, they

crawled, stumbled, or ran, according to the nature of the terrain.

When they finally reached still water, it seemed almost as though a miracle had happened. Weak and completely vulnerable, they had come through the river trap alive; and such is the human capacity for hope that they discounted the dangers ahead.

**J**UST below the last frothy rapid the banks leveled off to form a large sandbar, almost ideal in their present need. Here they could make a convincing show of defense, and here, ready at hand, was the best of all raft material—fine, straight bamboo.

"Cooley, you will take Kaysmith and Swartz with you to cut bamboo," DuPriest instructed. "While you're gone, Jones and I will build a rock barricade." He broke off suddenly. "Where the devil is Jones?"

"Ain't seen him since we started," Cooley answered. "He was laggin' behind then, as usual."

DuPriest cupped his hands and shouted.

"Jones—Jo-o-o-ones!"

There was no answer. Lank Jones was missing.

"Ambushed, doubtless," DuPriest remarked. "Poor devil!"

"He ain't much loss," Cooley muttered. "He'd probably upset the raft."

"He saved your life twice," DuPriest reminded sharply.

"Yeah, I'm not fergittin' that, either. But that don't make him a soldier—and if somebody had to git bumped off, I'm not cryin' because it was him instead of me."

With that, discussion of Lank Jones, his failings and his probable fate, gave way to the life and death proposition of cutting bamboo and building a raft. It was slow work. Bamboo is hard to cut, and they had no better implements than their bay-

onets. Under Andy's supervision the materials were assembled.

This much was accomplished before darkness forced them to stop. Then, since they had no means of making a light, they had to knock off till morning. At dawn the bamboos were hacked into uniform lengths and lashed together.

**D**ESPITE acute physical misery, the men's spirits grew lighter. The expected attack had not come. The drumming of last evening had stopped. The jungle lay quiet, gripped in the silence of ages.

At a word from DuPriest, they picked up the raft and carried it to the water's edge. It was then the first wild yells rose from the forest and the first flight of spears and arrows came flying!

As a cat will play with a mouse, watching until the victim tries to get away before pouncing upon it, so had the ambush party waited. Lying in leafy coverts, they had watched the building of the raft. A hundred times they could have let fly their arrows. But that was not the Bogobo way. They preferred to wait and watch, let hope spring up and then destroy that hope.

A long barbed arrow struck Swartz in the stomach. With a bubbling cry he sank down into the water.

"Back!" DuPriest shouted. "Get behind the barricade!"

The rocks he had piled up offered poor shelter for three men. Arrows were coming thick and fast, their iron points striking sparks from the river boulders.

Biting off a chew of tobacco, Andy squinted at the fringe of bushes and raised his rifle. Twice he lifted the gun and lowered it. At last he squeezed the trigger, and then he spat over the barricade.

"Got that 'un," he announced. "He doddled his head like a rooster, but I reckon I got him between th'

eyes." He spat again. "I usually do."

"I don't see why we broke our backs buildin' these breastworks," Cooley grumbled. "They'll clean us out, barricade or no barricade."

"You're probably right," DuPriest said grimly. "But I mean for it to cost them something."

Soon afterwards DuPriest shot a young warrior whose discretion did not match his courage. Andy added two more to his tally. Cooley saw a movement among some rushes, exposed his body to get a shot, and was skewered through the arm by an arrow with a razor-edged bamboo blade. Yelling blasphemy, he stood up and emptied his pistol.

This brought a retaliatory flight of arrows, followed by a rush. Some twenty men came bounding across the sandbar with bolos lifted high. The three within the barricade emptied their guns at point-blank range. With the leaders down, and a young dandy screaming out his life on Andy's bayonet, the rush collapsed. Another blast of fire sent them back to cover.

Five of the twenty lay dead. Three were dragging themselves toward shelter, leaving trails of red behind them.

"That will hold them for a while," DuPriest remarked.

"Yep," Andy replied, "it'll hold 'em fer about thirty minutes. Next time they come out, they'll be right mad."

## CHAPTER V

### *"For Conspicuous Gallantry"*

**L**ANK JONES had little capacity for bitterness. Generally he took life as it came, the good with the bad, without gloating over the good or worrying much about the bad. Today, however, he was prey to searing thoughts.

"Purty near everything Ah've done

on this yere trip was wrong," he soliloquized. Ah knowed Ah couldn't walk like a soldier, er dress like one, er shoot craps like one. Naow, danged it'n hit don't look like Ah cain't even fight like one!"

He was thinking of his fiasco at Mona-Mona, mistaking those ants on his hat-brim for crawling enemy figures.

"Seems like," he mused, "Ah'm jist natcherly no-'count."

With this dark thought sticking in his mind like a burr, he followed his mates down the river. He didn't like his predicament. No gun. That was bad. He had felt pretty safe as long as he carried his rifle. Without it, he began to have doubts and fears.

The jungle, which until now had been nothing to him but a big wet stretch of woods, suddenly took on a sinister aspect. He heard furtive sounds that he had not noticed before. He imagined things, and imagination was a strange and terrifying thing to him. It was not a good place to be, the jungle—without a gun.

Suddenly he stopped stock-still in his tracks.

"Sho!" he muttered. "Why not?"

**H**HEAD down, arms swinging, he went clambering over rocks and logs, intent upon catching up with DuPriest and telling him something. Then another idea struck him and he stopped again. His lips moved, a blank look came over his face, and he slowly shook his head.

"Nope," he muttered. "Cap'n, he mought not cotton to hit."

Turning around, he started back upstream, sublimely unconscious that he was being guilty of desertion as that crime is interpreted in time of war.

It was nearly dark when he reached the broken bridge. Dropping down on a rock, he began to take off his clothing. At approxi-

mately the spot where he had hit the water when the bridge broke, he presently dived. Rising, he drew a few deep breaths and dived again. He dived many times. At last, exhausted, he swam to the bank.

"Hit ain't whar Ah thought hit would be," he mused sadly.

**H**E went back into the water. Once more—a dozen times—he dived and came up empty-handed. He searched back and forth among slippery boulders on the bottom of the stream; rested, went in again, and returned to the bank a third time.

"Ah've jist got ter find hit," he muttered stubbornly. "Hit ain't up near th' bridge. So Ah reckon Ah'd better hunt funder down."

Dangerous work, this diving a few yards above the cataract. There were savage currents near the bottom. They seized him, pulled him this way and that. Nearer and nearer to that indefinable line where death lurked, he swam and dived. He was getting weary. His arms and legs ached. With each successive dive the current swept him farther down.

"Ah've jist got ter find hit," he sobbed as he came up the last time, yards below where that wildly gyrating snag had saved Sergeant Cooley.

He took a deep breath. He lowered his head and kicked up his heels. Bracing himself against stones and sunken logs, he searched back and forth along the bottom until his lungs were bursting; then at last his fingers touched something that thrilled him like the handclasp of a long-lost friend. A rifle. A good old dependable Krag-Jorgensen.

Kicking feebly with benumbed legs, he came to the surface. Desperately struggling, he fought toward the bank. It had been an easy thing, comparatively, to drag Sergeant Cooley ashore here; but now the trees and rocks were moving

upstream, and the roar of the waterfall was growing much louder.

With a despairing groan, he clawed at the water. No use. He couldn't make it. His mouth fell open and his eyes rolled upward.

"Lordy!"

He was too tired to feel much fear. Still instinctively striving to keep his head above water, he let his feet down.

**A**FTER vainly fighting the current almost to the brink of the waterfall, he had dropped his feet to find himself standing on a shelf of rock in water barely waist deep.

Dressed again, his circulation partially restored, he ripped a piece of cloth from his shirt, took the gun apart, wiped it thoroughly, blew the water out of the barrel, and reassembled it.

"Naow, Ah wonder," he muttered, "if'n them shells will shoot."

Removing one from his belt, he slipped it into the rifle and found that they would.

"Gittin' late," he observed. "Reckon Ah'd better be hustlin' along afore they-all git scared about me."

He was humming the refrain of "Jordan River" as he started picking his way down into the gorge. It was midnight when he reached the bottom. After twice falling into the river, once nearly losing his rifle, he calmly faced the inevitable. He would have to wait for daylight.

"Sho cold," he chattered. "Guess Ah'll make me a fiah."

He hunted about among the trees until he found a supply of inflammable gum for kindling; then, digging into a pile of driftwood, he nested the gun among dry sticks. Matches he had in a bottle. With coaxing, he produced a blaze.

Having warmed himself and partially dried his clothing, he leaned against a log and closed his eyes. Wild men might be all about. His

fire might bring them creeping upon him. These dangers bothered Lank Jones not at all. He was asleep.

The sound of rapid firing woke him. He sat up, fumbling for his rifle, and listened a moment. There was still very little light in the river gorge, but as he listened he heard an outburst of pealing yells, followed by another flurry of shots. He waited no longer.

Thirty minutes later he was creeping from tree to tree, an almost invisible shape of a man, two hundred yards above the sandbar where his comrades were at bay. A few yards away, at the water's edge, the body of Swartz lay staring at the sky.

Lank was now playing a game that he knew. A soldier he might not be, but he knew how man-hunting is done in the Kentucky hills. As he slid from one bit of cover to the next, his body had lost its appearance of awkwardness and assumed a certain lithe grace that had never been apparent since the day he had first put on the uniform.

Presently he saw a dark body assume form against the grayness of a buttressed tree. The Bogobo did not see him. The Bogobo was bent on other things. Having worked himself into a position whence he could safely discharge his arrows upon the unprotected flank of the enemy, he was about to make himself a hero. With an expression of triumph he bent his bow.

**A**T that moment Lank did a strange thing. He said "Boo" loudly.

The startled native looked around, and Lank shot him in the left eye.

A deathly quiet settled over the forest. The three astonished men on the sandbar stopped shooting.

Lank lay very still.

A tall Bogobo came creeping up the bank and found the body of his comrade. For several minutes he stood beside the dead man, a javelin

gripped in his hand, peering this way and that. He was an ugly-looking customer with a few long hairs growing on his chin; a cruel gash of a mouth reddened by betel-nut; low beetling brows. A fierce figure of savagery, he stood there intently searching the bushes, yet looking everywhere but toward Lank.

"Boo!"

The warrior jumped. Looking around quickly, he saw Lank and raised his spear. He died half a second later, with his left eye shot out.

This shot brought two more warriors to investigate. Lank practiced the same strategy on them. He did not see a third man who was cautiously stalking him. This one let fly an arrow which struck Lank in the calf of the leg.

The marksman died in the midst of his triumph. Not, it is true, from a bullet in the left eye; Lank was in the fight now for blood, not sport. He shot this one through the stomach. Lank groaned as he pulled the arrow from his leg. Flinging it away, he went ramping down the river bank, yelling like a maniac. He shot one Bogobo and clubbed another to death with his rifle butt.

Yells broke forth all around him; yells of fear, not triumph. Those warriors had seen a devil materialize out of the morning mists. No ordinary devil—something special. An *Asuong!* Ghost of one of the slain invaders. A devil who plucked arrows from his body and hurled them in the faces of his enemies.

**W**HO can stand against a devil at six o'clock in the morning? Not the Bogobos. They ran, and Lank was in full pursuit of the hindmost when he heard DuPriest shouting at him.

"Jones—come back here!"

Lank stopped in his tracks. A look of confusion swept over his face. He cast one hungry look at the fleeing warrior and slowly turned

around. He was wriggling with embarrassment when he limped across the sandbar to face DuPriest.

"Gosh," he started to apologize, "Ah didn't aim—"

He meant to say that he hadn't intended to be absent all night, but DuPriest cut him short.

"Oh, yes, you did," DuPriest barked. "You aimed to chase them right back to Mona-Mona and take the town!"

**C**OMPANY C—what was left of it—was luxuriating in Fort Keithly on the shore of Lake Lanao. Under the stimulating influence of the winey air of that mountain valley they had changed from ghosts to men again.

The citation of Lank Jones for conspicuous gallantry had been duly confirmed, but there had been some delay in the arrival of his medal, which had to be sent out from Washington. When it finally reached Fort Keithly, the company was preparing to leave for field service.

Captain DuPriest called Sergeant Cooley into his tent.

"Cooley, I want you to find Lank Jones and groom him up a bit. His decoration has just arrived. I want him to look like a soldier when we pin it on him at inspection."

Cooley grinned.

"He's peelin' spuds again."

"What?" DuPriest's face darkened. "I thought I told you not to ride him for minor infractions."

"I didn't can him," Cooley hastened to explain. "It was the new rifle instructor they sent up from Zambo. He says he can't teach Jones how to hold a rifle!"

From the direction of the cook tent there came the sound of a doleful voice raised in song.

"Up yonduh, up yond-u-u-h  
Sun allus shines up yonduh  
Plenty o' likker  
Plenty o' money  
Up yond-u-u-h-h-h."



# The TATTOO



*Without warning Max struck hard from the rear, with a dagger*

*A Treacherous Stab in the Back! And Then—a Trail of Vengeance that Stretches Endlessly!*

**By G. BISHOP HATHAWAY**

*Author of "Jack of Clubs," "Undercover," etc.*

**O**N the New Jersey side of the Hudson River two seafaring men, evidently just ashore, crept cautiously along the Weehawken waterfront. They were under the Palisades, the perpendicular cliffs that tower precipitously over the river and dish out a great natural bowl at that point along the water's edge.

The first one, somewhat flashily dressed, was Charles Wax. He

seemed to be the leader of the pair. Tony Religio, a swart, silent man, plodded along, sullenly, a few feet in the rear.

As they groped silently through the undergrowth and over huge slabs of rock, Religio seemed on the point of open rebellion.

"Where ya got it hid?" he demanded. "Ya said a mile from the Weehawken ferry. We come more'n a mile already. I don't believe ya

got any gold hid! In this forsaken hole—”

“Just a step now,” soothed the crafty Wax, assuming a suavity he did not possess. “Just a step—”

“You been saying that for the last half hour!” exploded Religio. “You owe me money! You said you was going to pay it, when you dug it up where you got it hid—”

“Only a step now. Only a step—” repeated Wax, mechanically.

**W**ATCHING his surly companion from the tail of a hard, bold eye, he maneuvered deftly on among the great boulders flung down on all sides from primeval, beetling cliffs. Suddenly he stopped.

“There!” he pointed sharply. “That’s the place. I can tell by this,” touching a huge flat shale that had tumbled from above in some previous age and now blocked further progress.

“That’s it. That’s the very place I hid it.” His voice drooped to a confiding wheedle. “See there, Tony?” Behind the barrier he pointed mysteriously.

Then, as his unwary companion pressed forward to examine more closely what was being pointed out, without warning Wax struck hard from the rear with a dagger, once, and Religio spread gently out upon the path they had been following. Without a sound he sprawled, face down, and lay still.

“There!” Wax told the prostrate form, dropping all pretense now. “Guess that’ll hold yer yap!”

Cautiously he peered along the path and up the sides of the cliff. He thrust one hand over the victim’s heart. There was no answering throb. Then he rolled over on its back what but a moment before had been his friend and shipmate through storm and stress, and examined it again, more thoroughly this time.

“Ya crazy-headed fool!” he mut-

tered thickly, with a vicious kick in the ribs. “Yer too stupid to live anyway. Believe anything yer told—”

He went on, mumbling to himself: “When ya was shanghaied in the Marquesas Islands a month ago and shipped out on a tramp—well, it was me had that done.” He gave the body another kick. “I done that little trick. Me, Charles Wax!” puffing out his chest like a pouter pigeon.

“ ’Cause why? ’Cause I needed the money. ’At’s why. An’ did ya git wise to anything? Not you. Not Tony. Nothing to git wise with, in that head o’ yours.”

As he spoke, he slowly unbuttoned the victim’s jacket, shirt and under-clothing, till he came to a small red leather belt, richly adorned, down next to the skin. He seemed already familiar with its location. This he unbuttoned and slipped gently from around the body.

“There. That won’t bother ya no more.”

**A**T this he laughed outright. Some Quixotic note in the situation appealed to his twisted sense of humor. It was a harsh, grating laugh that frightened the birds in the bushes.

“Wanted to be a tattooer!” Again he laughed, on a peculiar note. “Wouldn’t it cork ya? Cripes!” His glee knew no bounds. “Going to buy a place in South Street—” His maniacal, weird laugh echoed for a moment through the silent gorges, ending as abruptly as it began. “Well, not with *my* money,” sliding it gently into his own pocket. “Need it myself.”

He arose, his expression set in a crafty leer. Cautiously he picked out an obscure footpath, deeply rutted by wandering goats, that wound crookedly to the top of the ragged wall. Up through the concealing shrubbery, pierced here and there by crags of living rock, he padded soft-

ly, with many a glance behind, leaving the night and its lurking shadows with the lonely figure below.

**B**EHIND the Jersey hills the sun went down in a red glare that filled the Western sky like some portent of impending doom. Long-fingered shadows crept down the Palisades and filled with gloom the gorge below. Night birds chirped sleepily, but the figure at the base of the cliff stirred not.

Out across the Hudson River, the lights of a great city winked wickedly at the things they knew. Rain fell. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

After an eternity, the solitary figure twitched. Painfully, it twitched again. After repeated lapses into unconsciousness, what had been the remains of Tony Religio moved and tried to sit up.

With a groan he sank back again. He touched his coat and found it wet with blood. That brought the quick flash of memory he had just before going down under the blow of Wax.

With a spasmodic jerk he reached for his money belt. Gone. . . .

Wax!

"*Sacre! Car-r-ramba! Diabolo—*" He sat up and cursed Charles Wax in all the profane tongues known to South Brooklyn. Then he repeated it in his native tongue. After that, he went back to Brooklynese and did a thorough job of it.

"I'll get that—" he swore, "if it takes the rest of my life. . . ."

Still later he lost consciousness again. Recovering at intervals, he lay still, trying to figure out, sketchily and at random, just what he really knew about the man who called himself Charles Wax.

It was in the Marquesas Islands—

Yes, that was right. Wax got along well there. He made a hit, Tony recalled, with the natives and

others of sorts around dives and dance halls, and blew his money on them. And when he had found out that Tony had some money saved up, he had become very friendly.

Even before that, Tony groped haltingly, they had been on speaking terms; had had their pictures taken together, he remembered. With Wax's dagger, in which he took great pride, enlarged and colored, the tip dripping blood, as an inset between them. It was an emblem, Wax swaggeringly averred, of their lasting faith and loyalty and the danger to any one who might try to come between them.

Absurd, of course—the whole thing—and overdone. They were never really as friendly as that. But it was Wax's way.

Even now Tony could feel, between throbs of pain from that same dagger's thrust, one of the pictures reposing in an inside pocket.

**W**AX had told him a cock-and-bull story about fighting with the revolutionists in Mexico and Central America—he had known Pancho Villa, according to his story—of plots, counterplots, ambushes, escapes, and of having amassed a fortune in gold. Spanish gold. This he claimed he had later cached in a secret place in the Weehawken Palisades, whither he had just been pretending to lead him.

Tony knew now, of course, what he had suspected all along, that Wax was merely a monumental liar. A colossal fraud. A sort of Baron Munchausen of the Seven Seas.

But if appearances counted for anything, Wax had the stamp of the sea on him. It would be hard to find a man like that. The sea was a big place. But find him he would, he took a blood oath, if it took him the rest of his life and then some. He would come back and haunt him—

And that reminded him of one

more thing he had to do. He would get well first. That was necessary, of course, and then he would attend to it. Or maybe he would do it first. South Street was the place. In a tattooing joint. There he would get it done—

He didn't feel so bad now. Just how bad he was hurt, he couldn't tell. In the pitch dark of the chasm in which he found himself, he could not see his hand before him.

**A**NYWAY, it would remind him of his vengeance.

By now the wound had stopped bleeding and he felt somewhat better. He could move about some. With frequent resting, he found he could grope his way among the boulders little by little.

The knife thrust had not gone deep, he felt sure. He was not weakened enough for that.

Evidently the assassin had missed his aim. Too much of a hurry, no doubt.

Painfully threading his way among the outlying spurs of railroad tracks that carpet the bottom of the canyon along the water's edge, Tony finally reached the Forty-second Street ferry, on the Weehawken side. From there he crossed the river to Manhattan without mishap and took a West Side "El," skirting the river to Battery Park, at the end of the island.

Here, along old South Street, amid the slop shops and ancient two-story rookeries that face the great open wharves in the East River, was the tattooing place that had lived in his dreams.

Out on the sidewalk in front were still displayed gorgeous samples of the tattooer's art.

To the man in charge, Arno Bink, he sadly communicated the fact that the proposed deal was off. He couldn't buy the place now. Something had happened that put it out

of the question. Of his injuries he said nothing. Those he would take care of in his own way.

"But there's something you can do for me," he told Bink. Rolling up his sleeves, he exposed his left arm. "Put a dagger here—like the one in this picture."

He produced one of Wax's picture cards, taken in the Marquesas Islands, with the dagger inset. "Just like that," he told him. "Blood and all. And make it strong."

After a while there stood out, on the inside of Tony Religio's left forearm, reaching from coat cuff to elbow, a murderous blue dagger, dripping crimson from the point of the blade.

"There," he told himself, as he staggered down the creaking stairs, still weak from the knife thrust—"that for Charles Wax. Just to remind me."

**H**E slept that night in Jeannette Park, just across the street from the tattooing place. After that, in the long years that followed without even a trace of his enemy, Religio often found it necessary to gaze at the reminder on his arm to keep his courage up.

From Brooklyn he shipped aboard the *Gorgon*, a tramp, one of whose farthest points was expected to be the Marquesas Islands, in the hope of finding some trace of Wax at the port where he had originally met him.

There he jumped a good job and drifted about the beach. But no Charles Wax could he find. Not even a trace.

With the same result he shipped in and out of Sydney. He was in Tahiti; he hung around the settlements at Shanghai. Drifting hopelessly in and out, he spent six months in the gambling hells of Rangoon and Singapore—the most likely places for men of Wax's type—but

not so much as a hair of the missing man could he find.

Always, however, Religio would look at the dagger on his arm, screw up his courage and plod on. On and on he wandered, without a spark of success.

**T**HEN he took to holding regular jobs, without regard to where they were and staying till they were over. In this way he began gradually to save money again. Now that he didn't care for it, the money seemed to come easy. Plenty of it was rolling in.

A little later he gave up any hope of ever finding the man he sought. He retired from the sea and with the money he had saved finally bought the tattooing establishment he had once looked forward to owning on South Street. Tony settled down.

He didn't need to work now. He had saved enough to live on, but his mind had fallen into a rut. He never got over the habit of searching people's faces.

He retained the priceless Bink, who by this time had let the place run down through drink, and took an obsessed pleasure in watching his needle expert run full-rigged ships, coiled serpents and bleeding hearts on the tender skins of customers. By the hour he would sit and watch, and wonder what motives were behind them.

And then one day it happened.

While sitting in the sun in Jeanette Park, the little esplanade directly across from Seamen's Institute, where foregather the sea venturers from the ends of the earth, he saw—

Was it possible? Could he be dreaming?

Charles Wax!

He trembled all over. After all these years, could his enemy be so near? He looked away quickly and

back again, to see if the man were still there.

Yes, there he was, as bold as life.

On one of the benches in the little park sat Wax, hunched over, dozing in the sun. Shabbier and baggier about the eyes, but Wax to the life. Scar on his left cheek and all. He could not be mistaken.

Gone was the dandy now; gone and forgotten. There remained but the dead ash of a fire that had ceased to burn.

**A**T first Religio started up, clutching the dagger that he always carried—the same one Wax in his flight had left behind on the Jersey Palisades. Then he stopped.

That was not the way. Twenty years had come and gone since that tide that had turned the whole course of his life. He was older now and calmer. He waited.

He felt very cool, sitting there, his old enemy within his grasp. He would make no mistake, after all these years. He would follow him home.

Maybe he didn't have a home?

But he would find out. That was the place to do it. Any other place was dangerous.

After an hour the shabby figure on the bench stirred. Slightly roused, the rum-sotted remnant of a once good physique stretched; he yawned and stood up.

He seemed consumed with thirst and his one desire to reach, the quickest way, the place where he had got the last one.

Out of the park he staggered, after several false starts. Along South Street, he jostled and elbowed his way through the crowds of seamen that swarm the sidewalks in front of Seamen's Institute. On up the waterfront he tilted and swayed, like a full-rigged ship, dipping and careening as he tacked from side to side.

Close behind slunk the avenging

Tony. Wax wouldn't escape him this time. He'd be paid in full. Old Malatesta would have enjoyed this, old Black Malatesta, of South Brooklyn; but it was a private matter. He himself would take care of it.

**U**NDER the giant arches of Brooklyn Bridge he saw his quarry hesitate.

He watched him sniff the four points of the compass drunkenly, then slant off nor'-nor'-west.

At darkened Chatham Square, the inebriate paused in fuddled indecision. Then into the hallway of one of its lowest dives, inhabited by rats and the riff-raff of Chinatown, he vanished.

So that was where he lived? In a rat hole. He had sunk to this!

From the Chinese laundryman on the ground floor, Tony learned that Wax had been there only a week or two and drank steadily.

Could the Chinaman get the white man drunk? Or maybe half drunk? Easy, was it?

"Well, there's something for your trouble," said Tony, as he went his way, well assured that his quarry was safe for the night.

Only the next day the avenger at last found the twenty-year-old longing of his heart fulfilled. Before him lay his enemy, helpless as a babe.

At last!

And then a very strange thing happened to Religio. Something that formed no part of his scheme, and certainly had no counterpart either in the present state of his feelings or his entire experience.

Now that it was his, he was surprised to find that the relish of revenge had lost its savor. Instead of stabbing his enemy to the heart he sat down on a broken-legged chair and stared, stared at him.

That was all—just sat there and stared. As if he had never seen him before.

What was the matter with him? Why didn't he strike? The man was guilty. He had committed murder, or tried to. It was the code.

Clutching the dagger firmly in his hand, he raised his arm to strike—to slay the assassin where he lay, besotted, unconscious. Then he lowered his arm again. Something was the matter with him.

**H**E took a turn up and down the room. Then he came softly back and tried it again. He couldn't do it! His hand went up in a gesture of despair. He couldn't do it! That was it. He simply could not strike to the heart a helpless man.

Religio's world went crashing about his ears. He was filled with an intense loathing for himself. His only shred of comfort was that no one was there to see him.

And it was lucky for him! Old Malatesta would have stabbed him to the heart with his own hands! Old Black Malatesta, of South Brooklyn, leader of the Black Ring. He had seen him do things like that. The Black One hated weaklings.

Tony Religio was an unlettered man. Of "psychology" and "reactions" he knew nothing; but he did know that he was subtly changed, that somehow something had gone out of him, leaving him ashamed and wishing to conceal it. He felt guilty.

Without his knowing it, those with whom he had come in contact in the long search that followed Wax's crime, had done things to him, shoving him farther and farther from the Sicilian standard he had known. All the old ideas, he suddenly realized, had vanished.

Then, as he stood there before his victim, hand upraised for a final effort, his eye rested for a moment on his own left forearm—Wax's dagger! Of a sudden an idea popped, full grown, into his agitated mind.

Lowering the dagger thoughtfully, he took another turn up and down the shabby little room. Then he stepped quietly out the sagging doorway into the grimy streets of Chatham Square.

Returning to the tattooing place in South Street, he hurriedly bade Bink, the artist, gather up his implements and return with him.

Upon the inebriate the artist set to work and before Wax awoke, there stood out on the inside of his left forearm an exact counterpart, in color and design, of the dagger on the picture card that he had been so anxious to have photographed as the emblem of faith and loyalty.

It was Wax's own weapon, with which he had "killed" his friend in Weehawken, returned to haunt him. There could be no doubt about it. It was identical. And to make assurance doubly sure, beneath the dagger was indelibly etched the name. "Tony Religio."

After a while, when the stupefying effects of the liquor began to wear off, the form on the hard pallet groaned and sat up.

First he sought the water tap, gurgling gallons of water down his sizzling gullet. Then he groaned again and dropped across the bed for another snooze.

SOME time later he slapped his left wrist with his right hand. There were other bites there than those of the tattoo needle. Then he absently felt of his wrist and sat up with a jerk.

He took one look at his arm and bolted for the door.

"Oh, Lord!" he yelped, running round and round, "I've got 'em again!"

Round and round he wheeled. Then, as he gradually slowed down, he felt of his arm again.

It hurt. It was *real!* A foolish grin overspread his flabby features.

He wasn't seeing things after all. But how did it get there?

A moment and he was in the throes of a still greater doubt.

It was an omen. That's what it was. It had just occurred to him. How he knew he couldn't tell, but at that moment he was certain of it. He knew of such things at sea. "The marked man never escapes." That was an old saying and a true one.

"Unless—" an idea struck him. Unless he could get it removed. That was true, too. Any sailor knew that. Why hadn't he thought of it sooner?

INTO his clothes he bumped drunkenly. On South Street was a tattooer. He'd fix that mark.

Bursting in at the door ten minutes later, he was met coolly by the inscrutable Bink, who received all customers. As the inebriate raved at random about a mark that had appeared miraculously on his arm, he listened politely—skeptically—one brow up, the other down.

But when Wax rolled up his sleeve and showed the tattooed dagger, Arno Bink's expression changed to one of horror. His eyes rolled fearfully, as he backed away.

"*N-n-n-non, monsieur!*" he held up his hand to shut out the sight. "Bad luck, *monsieur!* Bad luck!" And as he backed away, he went on repeating: "*N-n-n-non, monsieur!* Bad luck! Bad luck—"

So well was it done that the inebriate's first noisy outburst froze into sustained horror. That proved it. He was a marked man. He was ha'nted. Marked for some horrible fate. And he couldn't get it off.

Weakly he tried to brazen it out. "W'y, wassa matter, Frenchy?"

"Dagger!" pointed the tattooer, with averted gaze.

"Wassa matter with dagger?" bluffed the trembling Wax.

"Bad luck! Bad luck!" was all Bink would say, planting the germ

of fear still deeper in the heart of the "murderer."

After that, Wax brooded alone. He grew erratic, morose. He slept in Jeannette Park, conceiving a horror of closed places where he could not get out quickly. He drank more, if possible. He never went to sea anymore. He had long since become just another derelict washed up on the shores of South Street. A beach-comber. A bum.

**N**OW and then he came back to Bink with the same request, having forgotten the first one, but it was always the same:

"*N-n-n-non, monsieur! Bad luck, monsieur! Bad luck!*" with violent shakings of the head.

There was another tattoo place, the haunted man was dimly aware, somewhere in Brooklyn, or maybe it was in Newark; but his fuddled wits were never sober long enough to find out.

He quit talking to other people and began talking to himself. To Tony Religio, his former shipmate, he conversed, casually, familiarly, as if he were present—Tony, whom he knew to be dead and rotting under the Weehawken Palisades.

The body had never been found. He had watched the papers for that.

But what of it? He was a little too slick for them. They couldn't catch him.

The only thing he was afraid of was ghosts. Man or beast he had no fear of, but ghosts were out of his line.

All this while Tony Religio watched quietly, without gloating. He witnessed the gradual moral collapse of his "friend." When the would-be assassin had been punished enough, it was in his mind to reveal the hoax and give the guilty conscience a rest.

But the end was too sudden.

In Jeannette Park one day, Wax sat slumped over on a bench. As hordes of seamen filled the little park—swapping yarns and slop goods, peddling bananas, to make a few dimes ashore—Wax, who had been on a protracted bend to get away from the dagger that pursued him, was sleeping it off in the sun.

As he slept, torture-ridden, he suddenly jumped up and started to run.

"Tony! Tony!" he shouted, with a blood-curdling yell. "Go 'way! Go 'way! You're dead! I saw you lying dead with my own eyes—"

And rubbing madly at the tattoo on his arm, he yelled once more:

"Take it away! Take it away!" Then he collapsed and lay still.



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# Yellow Loot



*The automatic spat flame, but Brad's fingers closed around the other's throat*

*You'll Thrill to Brad Williams' Mad Race for Freedom  
on the Great Wall of China in this Stirring Story  
of Jeopardy in the Western Hills*

**By L. RON HUBBARD**

*Author of "The Green God," "Pearl Pirate," etc.*

**A**N ugly laugh behind them made all six white men jerk their heads towards the entrance of the tomb-like room. A Chinese voice remarked:

"It was kind of you to lead us here, for we have been trying unsuccessfully for years to discover the hiding place of that amber."

A gray unformed Chinaman strode

into the room, an ugly automatic in his yellow, dirty right hand. His left hand motioned in the direction of the jewelry one of the men had just brought out from the aged wall-safe.

"Please put up your hands," he requested.

Of the six white men, five immediately reached for the moist, dark ceiling; but the sixth did not move. Brad Williams was not the type who easily gives up.

It was only out of relationship to Jeremiah Williams, leader of the archeological expedition, that Brad Williams had consented at all to accompany these seemingly helpless scientists to the Chang tombs north of Peking. Brad had told the others of the dangers they were running, but they had laughed at him, jeered at him as being young and imaginative—and now here was the proof.

Too late, the five scientists realized that the ugly rumors which come down from the Western Hills were more than rumors.

Brad dared not guess at the fate which menaced them. Certainly it would seem that the fortune in century-old amber which they had just unearthed would be enough to occupy the mind of the bandit who stood before them, but again—one never knew just what might occur.

And Brad felt responsible for these white men. His uncle, Jeremiah Williams, seemed frail and weak in spite of the acidity of his face and temper.

**B**RAD stared at the gray-clad officer and his eyes became as chill as blue ice. As soon as the Chinaman shifted to look at the amber, Brad tensed himself. Then, like a panther, he leaped. The automatic spat flame, but Brad found the other's throat in his two hands.

The Chinaman swayed back, tried to bring up the pistol, but Brad was on top of him, hitting him with ham-

mer-like fists. The five scientists stood about, their hands still on high, and goggled at the sight, while their flashlights pointed at the wet ceiling of the underground pagoda room.

The Chinaman brought the automatic down, narrowly missing Brad's head, then grunted as the American sank savage fists into his chest and stomach. The yellow man suddenly crumpled and dropped to the floor, his gun clattering on the stone.

**B**RAD stared down for an instant; then he snatched up the pistol and whirled about. "Pick up that amber! Let's get out of here!"

Jeremiah and the other four did as they were told, their faces pale by the light of the electric torches. The amber glowed and threw off its yellow fire.

Brad sprang to the head of the passage and started down, the pistol held before him, alert, ready for instant action. And action came, in the form of a stab of flame which sent lead whining off the stone wall. Brad fired at the flash and a scream echoed through the tunnel.

Dropping down on the floor, he waited for the second shot, and when it roared in his ears he took a second toll. Behind him the scientists were cringing against the wall, too frightened to move.

"Get down!" called Brad to the others. "Get down and crawl forward to me."

Rustling and the clink of amber told him that the five were obeying. He inched along the passage, waiting tensely for another shot.

He had nearly reached the turn in the tunnel when he placed his hand in something sticky and warm. The stench of blood, hot and salty, was in his nostrils, and it suddenly came to him with a shiver that he had taken human life.

But a shot, almost in his face, brought a grim tightness to his

mouth. Calmly he raised the pistol, thrust it forward to feel it touch something yielding. His finger twitched and a shuddering body fell across his path.

The hot, sweet odor of smokeless powder was all about him as he crawled forward again. Far ahead he could see a glimmer of light, made by a hole in the floor above.

In back of him lay darkness; but ahead, between himself and the hole, he saw a shadow flicker across the passage. The pistol jumped back into his hand as it cast a round ribbon of flame down the passage. The shadow fell back and lay still.

**B**RAD was deafened by the shots in close quarters; grimly he wondered what he would find above ground, for he could hear no tramp of feet on the floor above.

The slap of leather beside him made Brad jump back. A rifle butt whistled past him and shattered itself against the stone wall, its crash echoed instantly by Brad's automatic.

Then, with the passage clear, and sending a call to the hovering men behind him, Brad ran up the passage to the dimly lighted hole. He could see nothing above it, but he jumped up and caught at the floor over his head. Something crushed at his fingers and he let go, to drop again into the tunnel.

"Drag some stones up here!" Brad commanded. "Pile them under this hole while I cover it."

The others asked no questions, did not even look at Brad who stood with his pistol pointing at the hole. The stones were brought and piled up as directed.

Brad knew that he was taking a long chance, but he also knew that it was impossible to remain here, eventually to be starved out. These bandits—as they undoubtedly were—would stop at nothing to gain the

hoard of amber which the expedition had so obligingly uncovered for them. And the loot of the Chang tombs was the one thing which stood between Jeremiah Williams and poverty. Without this amber, the entire expedition would be stranded in China, without the remotest possibility of obtaining funds.

With Brad, the circumstances were not so urgent. He was young and versatile. But with the others, who were old with their best work behind them, the amber was as vital as life itself.

The last stone was hoisted into place and Brad silently crouched on top of the unsteady pile, ready to peer up over the edge and take what toll he could before he himself was shot. He held both his own and the officer's automatic in his hands.

Slowly he raised up until he was just beneath the opening. Then he suddenly sprang upright, his eyes blazing, his entire body as taut as a bowstring.

Two soldiers crouched just above him and he had no more than glimpsed their ugly yellow faces when he fired point-blank. He whirled as a rifle spat flame at him. One of his pistols roared. The other rifle shot off his hat; and he replied with gunfire as he dodged back.

**H**E saw that the dim room around him was vacant except for the two dead bodies, and he lost no time in scrambling up. Throwing down his empty pistols, he snatched up a rifle and bandoleer.

"Come up!" he shouted into the hole. "It's clear!"

But it was not clear. Even before the last terror-stricken scientist had crawled out of the hole, rifle fire began to spit through the door, making the room tremble with the impact of hot lead.

Brad inched forward on the floor, shooting at random with the pur-

joined rifle, hoping that at least some of his shots were taking effect.

Jeremiah suddenly shrieked. "Look out! They're above us!"

Brad rolled over and looked up. Through gaping cracks in the ceiling he could see men swarming in above them. Gray figures were running down the stairs. With a gasp, Brad realized that they had climbed up from the outside.

He was up in an instant, his rifle clubbed, running toward the men at the bottom of the stairs. The roar was terrific. All attention was suddenly concentrated on Brad, for he alone was making a show of resistance.

Brad felt something sear his shoulder as he swung madly right and left with his gun. He felt the stock crashing down on bodies and heads, saw bayonets searching for him. He was surrounded and he swung the rifle in a wide arc. None of the Chinese bandits dared shoot for fear of hitting their own number. Time and again they attempted to dash in upon the lithe American, but the deadly curve of that rifle held them back.

Brad's arms were tiring from the repeated shock of his striking weapon. He saw a medley of yellow faces about him, saw gray uniforms shifting giddily before him. Something engaged his gun and he felt it leave his hands. Then with a savage cry he hurled himself upon his attackers, his fists striking out at yellow faces.

**T**HE circle was closing on him, bearing him down. Above his head he saw a rifle begin to fall, and though it was the work of an instant, Brad felt that the dropping weapon came slowly. He tried to fend it off with his arms, felt the crash of wood against his wrist, saw it slip off and come directly at his head.

Sound and light exploded in his brain and he sank senseless to the stone floor, to be swallowed up im-

mediately by the surge of Chinese above him.

**T**HE pain in his head and body was so great when he came to, that he could only stare up at the gray sky above, unable to understand the sing-song Chinese which was being shouted around him. At last he marshalled his reeling senses sufficiently to gain an inkling of what was being said.

"Search them!" a voice commanded. "They will need nothing on their walk back to Peking."

Brad struggled to move, only to find that he was tightly bound, lying flat on his back amid the dead grass of the paving. He could see the towering pagodas against the lifeless sky and he was suddenly cold in the moaning north wind. Looking to one side, he saw the five scientists standing against a grotesque statue of a helmeted guard dog, their hands high as soldiers quickly removed everything of value from their clothing. The officer Brad had knocked out in the underground room was directing the procedure, a malicious smile on his ugly, misshapen face. He dangled the car keys in his hands.

Jeremiah Williams was shivering, his face ghastly in its terror. Not once did he glance toward Brad, though the youth lay directly in his line of sight.

"You are going to make us walk to Peking?" quavered Jeremiah, striving to enunciate his Chinese properly, though failing sadly.

"It will be good for you." The officer turned and saw that Brad had regained consciousness.

"Hah! Our little friend seems to be alive. That is well!" He strode over and kicked Brad harshly in the side.

Jeremiah was speaking again. "Then you do not intend to let us keep the amber?"

And in spite of his mingled emo-

tions of pain and anger, Brad could scarcely restrain his smile at his uncle's show of misunderstanding.

"Why, of course!" replied the officer. "You have only to bring us the moon and we will gladly give them back to you." He laughed loudly and some of the soldiers smiled at their superior's wit.

It was not until then that Jeremiah gave the slightest thought to his nephew. "What are you going to do with the young man?"

The officer's smile was not nice to see. "He will remain as my guest, I am happy to say. You need not worry about ever seeing him again."

At last the search was done and the five white men were told to leave. Pointing fingers showed them the way to Peking, many miles across the hard, brown plain. They went fearfully, with never a backward glance, their legs trembling as though they felt bullets biting into their backs.

**H**ORSES were led up—square-faced Mongolian ponies, long haired and as vicious as they were small. Two men lifted Brad up into a saddle where he swayed dizzily, his blue eyes dull with pain. Ropes were passed under the horse's belly and Brad felt himself bound tightly.

The Chinese officer stepped close to him. "Now we will have a pleasant afternoon ride, and perhaps tomorrow or the next day, you will pay for the lives you have taken." He smiled cruelly. "I myself will make you pay."

Brad could think of only one Chinese word in reply. "Pig!"

But the officer only smiled. He mounted another pony to lead the way north, deep into the frowning, mysterious Western Hills where only rumors live to account for the deaths of men.

As the cavalcade trotted through the tortuous canyons of the moun-

tains, Brad lurched from side to side in the crude saddle, unable to brace himself. The wooden crosstrees bit alternately into his stomach and back, breaking the skin, and the leather cushion which was held down beneath him by a single strap seemed as sharp as broken glass.

**T**HEY had progressed many miles when dusk found them, deep in the hills. The soldiers made a hasty camp and Brad was thrown heavily to the ground, to be staked down by cruelly tight ropes.

He lay awake through the long menacing night, cramped, cold, and unable to move a muscle. When dawn came he breakfasted on a swallow of water, and was strapped again into the saddle.

Late in the afternoon they were winding through passes which were unbelievably twisted. The sharp backs of ridges jutted high above them against the gray sky, and the brown hillsides were steep and barren of vegetation.

At last, Brad saw a high wall before them which stretched east and west, following the ridges at their highest points. The wall was nearly thirty feet high and twenty feet broad. Dully, he recognized a section of the famed Great Wall of China.

But the wall was not their goal, and they had just started the ascent to it when the officer in the lead swung to the west and entered a narrow, almost hidden pass. The ground beneath the horses' feet leveled out and looked as though it were much used. Brown shrubs grew above them on the steep sides of the cut, and ahead, as brown as the vegetation, Brad saw ramparts loom against the sky. He had little time to regard the silhouetted battlements, for a postern gate swung open and the cavalcade went through.

Brad found himself in a cobble-

stone courtyard, surrounded by frowning piles of masonry which were almost medieval in their architecture. A yellow-robed Manchurian came out to them; and in the yellow gown, Brad saw the answer to his wonderings.

He was within a Lamasari of the Western Hills, one of those mysterious outposts of the Lama religion. Through Brad's mind there coursed all that he had ever heard of these monasteries and their yellow-robed monks. He had heard much of their cruelty, but he remembered with burning vividness that no white man had ever lived to visit a Lamasari in the Western Hills and return to tell about it.

Little time was given him for thought, however. Soldiers carried him across the courtyard, up a flight of steps and through a low doorway. As they carried him past an unobstructed section of the ramparts, Brad caught a glimpse of the Great Wall of China not far distant. He knew that it would thread its tortuous length down to the railroad through Nankuo Pass, countless miles to the west.

The soldiers threw him into a cell and locked the door upon him, leaving him alone for the first time. They had loosened his bonds and now he worked strenuously to free himself.

HE WAS standing up, stretching himself and feeling the ache of his whole body, when the gray-uniformed officer came to the door and stood silently regarding the American. The Chinaman ran critical eyes over the tall, lithe form and then looked into the rugged young face and laughed.

"It would be a shame," he remarked, "to allow you to die pleasantly. Tomorrow we will have a little sport. I am a very kind man. Very kind. I am about to offer you

a challenge to a duel. You accept, of course?"

Brad did not answer. He stood motionless in the center of the cell, his feet wide apart, his hands on his hips, his eyes as cold as ice. The officer laughed again and then left.

Brad paced back and forth across the cell, listening to the sound of his boots ringing on the stone. There was clearly no way out of the cell, for the floor and sides were of stone and the door of strong iron.

The idea of the duel was equally clear. It was obvious that he would have no real fighting chance against the officer.

THE night passed slowly, black and ominous. And at noon Brad found he had been right about being refused a fighting chance.

Armed guards bound his arms to his sides and made him walk out on the narrow wall. The entire monastery lay before him, a gloomy, rambling fortress of solid stone, relic of the days when Tartars were expected to sweep down across the Great Wall with the coming of each night.

Brad expected to be taken down to the courtyard below, but he found that the guards were forcing him up a flight of stairs which led to an even higher tower. A door opened before him and he found himself standing on the battlement-enclosed platform of the highest tower. Below were rocks hundreds of feet down, and the walls were almost sheer.

The Chinese officer and three men with yellow robes stood on the wind-swept tower, the cold air tugging at their clothing.

"Good afternoon," greeted the officer. "I see you are punctual in keeping engagements."

Brad had stopped, but a sharp bayonet at his back forced him on. He smiled coolly and looked about,

faintly hoping that there might be some way of escape. But though the battlements were not as high as his knees, not even a fly could hope to scale the walls of the tower. The platform was several hundred feet in diameter and the only way of escape was at his back, guarded by armed soldiers.

The officer's face was ugly as he stepped toward Brad. Cruelty made his brown eyes beads in his putty-like yellow face.

Then Brad knew what was about to happen. They would not untie his arms nor would they give him any weapon. The officer was about to force him back to the edge, whipping at him with a keen sword, cutting him horribly until at last, from sheer desperation, the American would jump over the the battlements to the waiting rocks far below.

The officer drew a sword and felt slowly of its keen edge, watching covertly to see if he had intimidated Brad. Then, playfully, the Chinaman thrust out with the keen blade and scraped Brad's chest. Involuntarily, the American stepped back, back toward the sheer wall and the embrasures.

**T**HE sword flickered out again, sending a hot pain through Brad's arm. Again he stepped back, closer to the drop. He tried to free his arms of the confining ropes, but it was impossible to move them.

The ugly yellow face in front of him smiled savagely, and light licked the keen blade. Brad took another step back, conscious of blood running down his right arm where the sword had touched. Out of the corner of his eye he saw that the Lama priests were grinning viciously.

Brad felt the battlements at his heels and knew that he could step back no further. Seeing this, the officer stepped closer. His sword became a deadly, painful flash of light

which darted relentlessly back and forth, biting into Brad's flesh.

But in his triumph, the Chinese officer failed to see that one stroke of the blade had cut the rope which bound Brad's arms to his sides. Brad felt his bonds loosen slightly, and though his chest was a hotbed of pain, he seized quickly upon a plan.

He pretended to step up on the raised embrasures, as though about to jump. Seeing this, the officer lunged forward to strike once more.

**B**RAD doubled up, the blade swishing past his ear. Before the Chinaman could recover, Brad was under him, running across the platform toward the other side. The soldiers stood motionless, certain that this was merely an extension of the torture. The monks did not move.

The officer roared and ran swiftly after Brad, his heavy shoes ringing on the stones. The American turned at right angles, running along the circular wall, glancing back to see that the officer was close upon him. Brad twisted at his bonds and felt the rope leaving him.

Suddenly he turned and dived under the upraised sword, bringing his full weight against the running Chinaman. Surprise and fear were in the officer's bellow, because he saw that he was but a few feet away from the edge of the tower.

Brad encircled the man's legs with his free arms, throwing the officer off balance, feeling them both sway toward the edge. The sword came down, but too late.

Releasing his hold just in time, Brad threw himself back. The Chinaman pitched over the side, out of sight, to hurtle down to the waiting rocks.

Screams of the yellow-robed monks and shrill cries of the three soldiers were in Brad's ears as he jerked himself to his feet and turned. The smallest monk was only a few feet

away and Brad lost no time. Not realizing the pain of his wounds, he jumped across to the Lama before the man could move.

Snatching up the Chinaman, Brad held the man's light weight off the platform and ran toward the door. The soldiers were there, bayonets ready, but somewhat amazed at the sudden turn of events. But Brad did not pause in his headlong rush toward them. The bayonets came up viciously and two of them sank deep into the body of the Lama priest. The third bayonet was thrust out, and before the soldier could recover Brad had felled him with a quick blow to the chin.

Diving through the door, he hurtled down the steps, passed the portal which led to the cell and ran further down into the tower. With cries close behind him, he swung down a long passageway which he saw led to a room.

A cluster of yellow robes were ahead of him and priests crouched tensely in the passage, waiting. But Brad, once started, knew no quarter or obstacle. With all the speed and grace of a football player, he hurtled in a flying tackle straight for the group.

**M**ONKS were bowled over like ten-pins, and without a backward glance Brad was on his feet and pounding through the monastery.

His hurrying legs finally brought him into the ceremony rooms of the rambling structure and he found himself confronted with a life-sized Mongolian idol with pious hands beneath his chin. Brad almost rushed across the dimly lighted room to give combat when he realized where he was.

A Lama monk was kneeling before the image in prayer when he felt himself snatched up, saw a fist crash into his face and dropped senseless.

Dragging the unconscious Lama

with him, Brad ran into the adjoining room. Another altar, lighted by the feeble glow of incense pots, loomed before him. The six hands of the image were variously posed, and the face was a woodenly placid mask. With his burden still in his hand, Brad stepped up before the idol.

**S**OMETHING moved to either side and he darted back. Two priests had been kneeling there. Brad's hands snatched out, caught hold of the robes and strove to batter the heads together. But, strangely, only a wooden thump met his effort. He kicked out and his boots found marks before the priests could raise a cry.

Kneeling down over the unconscious Manchurians, Brad discovered that they wore hideous carved and painted masks of tremendous size.

But the American lost no time in examinations. Feet were pounding down a near corridor and Brad quickly dragged the three Lamas into a small opening behind the hollow altar. As he passed the image a glitter, yellow as fire, caught his eye. With a gasp, he saw that the six hands were bedecked with the Chang amber which he had located at the tombs.

Cries lent him haste and he crouched down, rapidly binding and gagging his captives with strips torn from the yellow robes. One of the robes he saved, drawing it on over his own clothing, finding that it smelled of grease and sweat.

Safe momentarily in the dark niche, Brad took stock of his situation.

Though the sword cuts stung painfully beneath clotted blood, he realized he was very hungry.

Hours passed and he knew that it must be dark outside. Searching parties had passed through the room several times, but they had been



hasty and had failed to look behind the idol.

Brad started to get to his feet and felt one of the masks under his hand. He picked it up, seeing by the faint light that it was black and plumed, much larger than a human head. The face was a twisted horror. Without a second thought, Brad drew it on over his tawny hair and adjusted it until he could see through the eye holes.

Then, sedately, his yellow robes dragging about him, the mask heavy on his shoulders, he made his way out of his hiding place and stepped up to the altar. Quickly denuding the image of the glittering amber, placing the invaluable relics in a hastily constructed bag of yellow cloth, he stepped out of the room and found a stairway which seemed to lead down.

Two Lamas passed him on the stairs, gave him a puzzled glance and then nodded. Brad calmly returned the nod and swept majestically by. He knew that masks must be out of place elsewhere in the monastery, but he prayed for luck and found himself stepping through a doorway which led into the courtyard.

The hoofs of a pony rang out on the cobblestones, and by the light of a lantern hanging over the door, Brad saw a soldier riding toward him, in the direction of the postern gate. As the horseman entered the light, Brad raised himself up on the balls of his feet and prepared for a spring.

**W**ITH a startled exclamation, the soldier was hurled to the ground, and before he could rise again, Brad was up on the horse in a swirl of yellow robes. The startled pony bucked and then ran forward.

Cries of alarm split the night and lights appeared on every side. Straining his eyes through the suddenly peopled darkness, Brad saw that the postern gate was open. With his robes streaming, grotesque in his

mask, he leaned low over the horse's neck and beat his heels against the pony's flanks. A soldier was in the act of shutting the postern, but Brad swung the bag of amber over his head and smashed it into his face.

Then he was out of the Lamasari, leaving bedlam behind him. Throwing off the cumbersome mask, Brad put the horse through the cut at breakneck speed. The way he had entered would probably be blocked, so he hit upon a daring plan.

**A**T THE end of the cut he turned and forced the pony up the steep hillside to the base of the Great Wall. He knew that this broad highway might place him in Nankuo where he could catch a train for Peking, and he prayed for luck.

The Great Wall reared up above him and he raced along its side. Torches were flaring up behind him, and above the drumming of the pony's hoofs on the hard ground he could hear the shouts of his pursuers.

Then he glimpsed a spot blacker than the wall and he pulled up short, forcing the pony through a door in the mammoth structure. Dismounting, he threw off his yellow robe and quickly felt for the stairway he knew must be there. He found it and led the unwilling horse upward.

He was on top of the wall, mounting again, when a volley of shots screamed past his head as soldiers drew rein beside the door.

Even paving was under him as he raced along the twenty foot highway. Then stairs caused his horse to stop sharply. With a glance back, to see that his example had been emulated, Brad whipped the pony down a flight of steps twenty feet wide and hundreds of feet long.

The soldiers breasted the stairway and fired wildly at the dim horseman below them. Seeing that their firing had no effect, they spurred down.

The wall shot up at unexpected

angles, twisted and turned, dived steeply down. In places it was crumbled and the going was rough, but for the greater part, it was passable. Here, where the Tartars had been so long held at bay, Brad was racing with death and fortune.

**T**HE night was ominous and full of strange cries. And then suddenly as he forced the fleet pony along, Brad saw the night gape emptily before him through a watch tower, saw that the mad onrush of his horse could not be stopped!

At the risk of broken limbs, he swung off at full speed! His horse screamed as it plunged down, to land a hundred feet below.

Caught by an embrasure, Brad struggled dazedly to his feet and looked back. The soldiers were almost upon him. Looking down, he saw that the wall abruptly stopped in thin air and began again in the face of a solid cliff far down.

Praying that he had not been seen, Brad clutched his precious sack of amber and slipped into the watch tower, tensely listening to the hoofbeats rushing toward him. And the mounted soldiers did not pause in their pursuit, knowing no more of this deserted section of the wall than Brad had known. Suddenly the two in the lead saw the drop and screamed, trying vainly to halt their ponies. But above the roll of hoofs, the others had not heard the warning and they crashed into their leaders.

Brad saw the soldiers crash down into emptiness, heard the impact of writhing bodies on the rocks below.

Two men had managed to pull up in time and they stood, frozen with terror, staring over the fatal drop.

Brad, in the shadows, snapped, "Hands high! Move and I shoot!" His weaponless hands trembled as he strove to make his Chinese clear. "Drop your guns and dismount!"

Still dazed from the horror they

had just witnessed, the soldiers dismounted slowly. Their guns clattered to their feet.

"Walk toward me!" ordered Brad.

The soldiers obeyed and when they were a safe distance away from their guns, Brad leaped out of the shadows, hands clenched. He struck out, and felt the man go down.

The other soldier had seen the weaponless hands and he sprang for Brad's throat. Weaving back, Brad struck him deftly in the stomach and followed it up with a quick right to the jaw. The soldier slumped back and fell heavily.

Securing the Chinamen loosely, that they might escape later, Brad caught one of the horses and picked up a rifle. Retracing his steps along the wall, he found a stairway leading down to the China side.

**F**IVE hours later, with dawn breaking over the Western Hills, Brad arrived at Nankuo to take a train for Peking. He was a sadly bedraggled and bloody figure, fatigued and hungry, when he boarded the train.

But the service of the railroad amended most of his difficulties; and when he took a rickshaw from the station and sent the boy pattering along toward the hotel, he was somewhat rested and a little less ragged.

His uncle was in his suite with the other four men when Brad arrived. Striding into the room, Brad flung the yellow sack to the table.

Looking amusedly at the open mouths of the five men, Brad remarked, "There's your loot. I hope my delay in getting it for you didn't cause you any concern."

Jeremiah Williams gave his nephew a severe glance. "Why, of course not, Brad."

He cleared his throat noisily and snatched up some of the amber, fingering it hungrily. "Of course not, Brad. In fact, we thank you very much."



# The GLOBE-TROTTER



“A MAGAZINE is no better than the stories it contains.” That’s an old editorial proverb. And the stories, in turn, are no better than the men who write them. Which means that a magazine’s worth depends pretty much on the fellows who are behind the pens—or, these days, the typewriters.

Lots of you fellows know this and write in from time to time to give some writer a pat on the back for a particularly well-done job. Now here comes a lad who hands the palm to the whole writing gang he’s met in our pages:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I’ve just finished another copy of **THRILLING ADVENTURES**, and feel that I’ve met a fine bunch of fellows—these fellows who write your stories, I mean. They not only know what th y’re talking about, but they have the knack of taking you along with them so that you see the strange places they have been to, yourself. You get to feel that you know these fellows personally even though you’ve never seen them.

I find it very interesting to get a bit of the intimate low-down from them in your column after I’ve finished one of their

MEET THE AUTHOR



yarns. My only suggestion would be that you introduce them to us a little more personally—let them give us short talks about their own thrilling lives. How’s that for an idea?

Melvin Zimmerman.

Well, Mel, that strikes Ye Olde Globe Trotter as a mighty fine idea.

I’ll get after the typewriter brigade to come clean with us—which means you’re going to get some knockout gems of adventure biography!

## Four Aces

Yes, sir—a magazine is no better than the writers who make it. That’s why Ye Olde Globe Trotter is sitting pretty this month. I’m holding a hand you’ll have to go some to beat.

A Haitian story? Sure, here’s one by an ex-U. S. Marine, who was down



there plenty. A Navy yarn? Sure, here’s an ex-Navy man all set to give you that. A Western saga? Okay, here’s an ex-cowboy and cavalry officer all ready to hand one out. A Chinese tale? Up steps a world traveler who has stood right up on top of the great Chinese Wall, and has his own snapshots to prove it.

Four aces, I call that hand. A pretty tough fistful to beat, especially when there are as many more, just as good!

## Voodoo and Zombies

First of all, let’s get that old Leatherneck, Arthur J. Burks, up on his feet to give us the real inside dope on this voodoo and zombie business. After finishing his great yarn, “Drums of Ebony,” in this issue, I know there are lots of questions in your mind.

What’s behind it all? How much truth and how much fiction is there to

(Continued on page 150)

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 without harm, pain or inconvenience. Mrs. S. Ala., writes: "Had  
 missed two months. After a few doses it started." Mrs. W. N. Y.,  
 "Within two days I had splendid results." Don't suffer or be  
 uncertain. Send today for this amazing doctor's remedy. Full  
 strength \$2; two boxes \$3.50. Famous Triple-X Regulator, specially  
 compounded for very obstinate cases \$5. Sent same day order re-  
 ceived. Send 25c for trial size. "Intimate Talk to Women" free.  
 ROGERS REMEDIES F-33, 4303 Cottage Grove, Chicago.

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DR. W. D. SMITH  
 INVENTOR

An enlarged, inflamed or faulty Prostate  
 Gland very often causes Lamback, Fre-  
 quent Night Rising, Leg Pains, Pelvic  
 Pains, Lost Vigor, Insomnia, etc. Many  
 physicians endorse massage as a safe ef-  
 fective treatment. (See Reference Book of  
 the Medical Sciences, Vol. VII, 3rd edi-  
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 nothing. No Drugs or Electricity.

FREE BOOKLET

EXPLAINS TRIAL OFFER. ADDRESS  
 MIDWEST PRODUCTS CO., B-2800, KALAMAZOO, MICH.

(Continued from page 148)

this voodoo business? And are there  
 zombies—really? That's what I want-  
 ed to know, and that's the way I put  
 it up to Burks.

*Bango*—he comes back with a letter  
 that tries to go the novel one better  
 for gripping interest! Here it is:

### First-Hand

Dear Globe Trotter:

Are there really zombies? Well, my last  
 commanding officer in the Marine Corps,  
 Major John L. Doxey, spent several years  
 at Hinche, commanding an organization of  
 Haitian troops of the *Gendarmerie d'Haiti*.  
 I asked him about zombies.

"I don't know," he said. "I've seen  
*things* working in the fields which the na-  
 tives said were zombies. If they were  
 bodies without souls— Well, maybe. Any  
 Haitian might fit that description. The  
 Cuban calls the Haitian 'that animal near-  
 est resembling man.' They may have been  
 zombies. I spent too much time among  
 the Haitians, saw too many queer things,  
 to say I don't believe in them."

Personally, I've seen a voodoo cere-  
 mony, secretly. I frankly don't believe  
 that any other writers have—except those  
 fake ceremonies staged for tourists. I'd  
 have lost my head if I'd been caught.

I've never seen the ceremony of the  
 sacrifice of the Goat Without Horns. The  
 Marines have discouraged human sacrifices  
 and cannibalism. The latter has been prac-  
 ticed in Haiti within the last ten years.  
 Doxey, for example, doesn't like beans.  
 Why? Once he led some *gendarmes* in a  
 surprise attack on a *caco* camp. The *cacos*  
 fled, leaving a steaming meal behind them.  
 It looked good and smelled good—and  
 Doxey was for feasting—until the medico  
 with him examined the food and pronounced  
 it the flesh of *homo sapiens*. It was mixed  
 with beans—and Doxey can't eat beans to  
 this day. I don't blame him.

"Drums of Ebony" is based on the  
 dumbness of Haitians in general, and my  
 own experience when, as a second lieu-  
 tenant of Marines I was in command of a  
 detachment in Barabona, Santo Domingo,  
 and of the prison in which Haitian viola-  
 tors of the immigration laws were kept.  
 These men were forced, under Marine bay-  
 onets, to work on the roads.

Once we had a so-called voodoo practi-  
 tioner in there. His power seemed to  
 emanate from a leather band he wore  
 around his wrist. The men in the jail  
 would do anything he told them to.

Haitians are queer fruit. I've had men  
 so old they were gray as sheep tell me  
 they were five years old; kids in knee  
 pants tell me they were forty—and they  
 believed themselves. Some didn't know  
 their own parents. One man fed part of  
 his daily ration of beans and rice, relig-  
 iously, to the flies about the compound. I

gave a cot to one fellow suffering with disease. He put a quilt over it and crawled under the cot, thinking it a sort of American house.

Once I saw a Haitian in a pesthouse with all his bones broken except his right arm. He had been beaten half to death by the inhabitants of Pinon because they had found him with his mouth over an incision he had made in the neck of a young girl he had just killed. They left him tied over an anthill, where he stayed for three days until we found him—raving mad. During his last days he carefully took his rice and beans and plastered himself with them.

In the Tower of Homage, Santo Domingo City, we had two prisoners, old Haitians, who were in for cannibalism. We had to keep them separated because they always quarreled over who had eaten the



most human flesh. One had eaten his own daughter; the other somebody else's daughter.

In Barahona prison, new arrivals gave such names as Chal Yac, Divue David, Cerimarie Leontes, Adan Tebo, Luisma Llansal, Lucen Bobo, Guillame San, and the like. Ofttimes the prisoners, when it came time for them to return to Haiti, forgot the names they had given and had to stay on. How could we tell who was who? They all looked alike. We had prisoners in four months who must have stayed for two years; others in for six months who stayed six weeks because they had the gumption to answer "here" to the names other Haitians had forgotten.

Haitians die hard. One night I was called out to investigate a murder. A negro from St. Kitts had stabbed a Haitian to death. After being stabbed, the victim had turned away from his murderer, walked down five steps, and walked seventy-five paces—I stepped them off myself—to the spot where he dropped. A doctor, in my presence, ran two fingers into the hole in the dead man's heart. Yet he had walked approximately seventy-five yards—*uphill!*

What is voodoo? An outgrowth of native cults brought from the Congo by the first slaves taken into Haiti by the French in Napoleon's time.

Arthur J. Burks.

*Fire! Fire!*

A sea story with the real tank of the sea in every line—that was the order;  
(Continued on page 152)



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—Mrs. Mary Bean  
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(Continued from page 151)

so Steve Fisher, "the Navy's greatest fiction writer," stepped up and hammered out "Flaming Freighter." About his yarn, he writes:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I wonder if any other Globe Trotters were in Honolulu that fateful summer night in 1930, when suddenly the huge "palace of the Pacific," the *City of Honolulu*, a Matson Steamship liner, lying peacefully at her dock, split the night air with her shrill calls for help?

In less time than it takes to tell, the expensive ship was swept by flames, fore and aft. Fire Department apparatus clanged to the waterfront. Fireboats and Navy tugs slid heavily alongside. Men clambered over the flaming deck with tiny, toylike hoses. The leaping flames seemed to light the entire city.

It was from this awful and yet thrillingly breath-taking sight that the story of "Flaming Freighter" came. I was in the Navy's fire rescue party, and though I escaped with only slight burns during that long night's battle, the colorful spectacle of it ate into my mind.

And here's something that the police didn't even know—for there was too much wreckage for any close investigating. Through that maze of sweeping, crackling flames, a grim-faced mate stalked through the tottering holds, caving passageways and stifling compartments, looking for a man he thought had set the fire. What happened when and if he found his man, I don't know. But of this I am sure: when roster was called, one of the crew was strangely missing. And he has not been heard of since!  
Steve Fisher.

*Old-Timer*

That takes care of the Marine Corps and the Navy. Now let's hear from the Army. The order was for a good, snappy, action-packed Western novel-ette, by a man who knows his West thoroughly. Who would be best able to fill that bill? An ex-cowpuncher who knew the West from the back of a galloping cowpony, some of us thought. An ex-Army man, to whom the bugle call of "Boots and Saddles" meant action from the back of a cavalry charger, suggested others.

A combination of both would be ideal! We found just that in Wilton West, veteran of the plains and ex-cavalry colonel. He wants to say a few words about his yarn, "Dead or Alive":

Dear Globe Trotter:

Facts, experiences, observations lie be-  
(Continued on page 154)



THOUSANDS ARE *Enthusiastic* OVER THE *New 1935* MIDWEST-16



**Midwest Amazes Friends!**  
Last night I listened to LSX talk to KFZ and also New York. Then I received KFZ direct. Then I tuned back to LSX and KFZ and heard them plainly. My friends were amazed. Dr. F. C. Nassell, Davis Lake, N. D.



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My friends can hardly believe I paid so little for my Midwest 16. My best foreign stations are LSX, Buenos Aires... EAQ, Madrid... DJA, Germany... CHB, England... FRAC, Brazil... G. E. Wagner, 2102 Wooming Street, St. Louis, Mo.



**Unequaled Foreign Reception!**  
My Midwest brings in thrilling programs from England, Germany, Australia, Venezuela, Columbia, Argentina and principal world stations. My friends marvel at its tone, sensitivity, power and selectivity. La Rue Thompson, Box 524, Johnston, Pa.



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My Midwest 16 is best radio I have ever seen. It picks stations I could never get before. Foreign reception clear as locals. Secured Spain, South America, England, Cuba, etc. Also get Byrd Expedition direct. J.H. Hudson, London, Tenn.

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# Amazing NEW 1935 SUPER 16-Tube Deluxe ALL-WAVE Radio

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SPECIAL: ALL FOR \$1.00

PARIS IMPORT CO.

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(Continued from page 152)

hind each act and situation in "Dead or Alive." Truth lies behind every complication in the yarn. Fortunately, there lies behind me a lifetime of riding the cow country, as cowpuncher and later as cavalry officer—a life wherein contacts with brave men and girls and the riding of "wet" broncs have all played their part, as well as the daily use of six-guns and Winchester.

Jack Blair was a real friend of mine, and I've watched him make his pet pinto, Buck, do many clever tricks. Gonzales was a Mexican outlaw with whom I have talked many times. He was later hanged by a posse down in Old Mexico—a handsome, wild-riding devil in all truth.

Old Williams actually lived, with his daughter, in the adobe cabin near the red cliff; had lived peacefully for years and was once accused of a bank robbery in which he had no part whatever. And he actually *did* strike gold in those hills.

As Arizona has long been my stamping ground, the locale tallies with actuality. I have stood in the hidden valley home of old Williams more than once. Conchita and her Tony danced many times before us punchers—and could lie with utmost ease, and take risks, too.

Down in a cantina in Palomas, Old Mexico, many a coin was tossed at her feet. When I was running a pack-train outfit down there Tony was one of my expert packers and a top-hand, with deviltry in his soul and a smile always on his young lips.

Wilton West.

### An Opportunity!

And now for the fourth ace. I guess L. Ron Hubbard needs no introduction. From the letters you send in, his yarns are among the most popular we have published. Several of you have wondered, too, how he gets the splendid color which always characterizes his stories of the far-away places.

The answer is, he's been there, brothers. He's been, and seen, and done. And plenty of all three of them! Here's a bit of the real dope on the lawless and little known interior of China. And in his letter there is an offer that's a real opportunity!

Dear Globe Trotter:

I have a feeling that some of your sphere gallopers are going to take exception to some of the things in "Yellow Loot." Somebody—I feel it in my rheumatic bones—is going to say that you can't ride a horse down the Great Wall of China, much less a cavalry troop.

But remember this: The Great Wall is  
(Continued on page 156)

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by H. B. CROSS



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CANVASSING**  
**NO EXPENSIVE  
EQUIPMENT**  
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until you have sold yourself on the possibilities. Then you can start with \$8.25 investment, put back the profits, building up without another cent investment if you wish! Send for full information and

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SEA-BREEZE NOVELTY HOUSE  
P. O. Box 1458, New Haven, Conn. Dept. Q35-8-TC

(Continued from page 154)

twenty feet wide, thirty feet high, and fifteen hundred miles long. In places it is steep, but there may have been built steps, each six inches above the last. You could drive three cars abreast on it. Where the Great Wall goes through the mysterious Western Hills, it resembles a roller-coaster at Coney Island.

When the Great Wall was built, the emperors of China weren't in any way limited for labor. They could do such things. One of them, in the Fourth Century, A.D., built a section ten miles long in ten days. He took a million—and I mean a million—despised workmen and criminals and told them to work until they dropped. Six hundred thousand of them died and their bodies were entombed in the wall itself.

The way the thing twists and turns, it appears that there are dozens of walls instead of one. To prove that, and to give you an idea of the engineering feat, I am offering to send you earth-lopers a copy

BOUGHT FOR \$30 -  
WORTH  
\$250,000



of a photograph of the Great Wall twisting through the hills. It's a good picture. I took it myself, and I've been offered real money for the negative. If you want a copy, write to me in care of the Globe Trotter, enclosing a self-addressed, stamped envelope, and I'll send one just as long as my supply lasts.

Just a few words about the loot taken out of the Ming Tombs a few years ago. It's still floating around the world and occasionally pieces of it have been picked up for a song. The head of the British Secret Service in China at that time was pretty up in the air about the loot. He told me that it might pop up anywhere. And, boy, did I haunt the Thieves' Market!

One of the pieces was a seventy-five pound elephant of number one jade. An American inadvertently bought it for about thirty dollars gold, and it was worth close to a quarter of a million bucks!

The consensus of opinion in North China was that the greater part of the loot found its way into the Lama temples in the Western Hills. These are about as accessible as heaven is to a bank president, and since the Lamas were driven out of Peiping, their Western Hills temples have been a highly dangerous, tightly closed volume of mal-practice.

The Lamas? Sure, you know about them. Funny, fat priests, who cease to be funny when they raise their eyes to yours. Dressed in dirty yellow robes,

**FROM OUR SANCTUM**

- ① The October issues of our companion magazines are filled to the brim with the best novels, novelettes, stories and features to be found anywhere.
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- ① **HILLS OF ROMANCE**, by L. P. Holmes, a complete novel, is featured in **THRILLING RANCH STORIES**. A great, big 15c book chock-full of thrills!
- ① Sis and mom will love **THRILLING LOVE**—10c per copy. Bring one home for them!

—THE PUBLISHER.

heads shaved. The China outfit is a direct offshoot of Tibet and about twice as bad. Woe betide the white man who happens upon one of their Western Hills fortresses—though these are less than a day's ride from Peiping. In "Yellow Loot," the fate of the hero is really mild compared to actual cases which have been pushed into my shuddering ears by the lads who know.

L. Ron Hubbard.

There you are, Globe Trotters, if you want a copy of this excellent photograph, send along your envelopes.

#### *And if You're Not a Globe Trotter*

This is your chance to get aboard the band wagon. That's what the application blank you will find in this magazine is for. Cut it out, fill it in, and send it to me, with a stamped, self-addressed envelope, and you'll be a member of the Globe Trotters.

No, sir; it won't cost you a cent. There are no dues—no initiation fees. Just send in your application, and we will send you a handsome membership card and line you up with some of the snappiest adventurers that ever suffered from itching feet.

#### *Island of Mystery*

Speaking of Globe Trotters, here is one of our latest additions to the fold—a rolling stone who has followed the call of adventure to all parts of the globe. Followed it until it brought him to the most mystifying experience of his turbulent career.

Captain Franklin Hoyt—you've probably already read his amazing story, "The Secret of Easter Island," in this issue. Here is the letter which came with the story of his expedition:

Dear Mr. Williams:

I have had an adventure such as comes to few men—for which you others may be thankful, indeed! To see one's companions die and be helpless to save them; to be at the mercy of strange powers which laugh at one's puny struggles—that is not good for a man. For a time I tried to forget it all, tried to leave all memory of it buried forever with the age-old secret of Easter Island.

But that way there is no peace, no rest. Perhaps it is the souls of those unfortunates who sailed with me, demanding that the world be told of their fate. Perhaps it is that inscrutable power which has kept the secret of the monoliths safe for thousands of years—and now impels me to tell

*(Continued on page 158)*



**4 INCHES OF MUSCLE PUT ON YOUR ARMS**  
with the  
**GERMAN IRON SHOE MUSCLE BUILDER**

Here is the greatest exerciser ever made to build giant-like arms, wide, powerful shoulders, a brawny back and a tremendous chest! John Filippone added five inches to his arms; E. Peters added one inch to each bicep the first week! What they have done, you can do!

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P. O. Box 623, City Hall Sta., Dept. L, N. Y. C.

(Continued from page 157)

my story as a warning to those who would seek to disturb that secret.

I do not know. I do know that the attached is a true account of the happenings which befell me on that mysterious island. It may sound like fantasy—but it is true; every word of it springs from my own unforgettable experience. At last I have driven myself to put it on paper. In the readers of your magazine I hope it will find a sympathetic, understanding audience.

Sincerely yours,

Captain Franklin Hoyt.

San Francisco, California.

### A Few of Them

They're a mighty interesting crowd, these Globe Trotters—these readers of THRILLING ADVENTURES. Going through their letters, back here in the office, is a treat. Letters from all corners of the U. S. A. and the most outlandish parts of the globe.

Just as interesting a crowd as the writers are these fellows who sit waiting for the magazine each month.

For instance, this professional wrestler, who says:

Dear Globe Trotter:

Please enroll me with the gamest bunch in the world, the Globe Trotters. I've knocked around a bit myself in the last ten years. At present I'm a wrestler with an athletic show. We are in the middle

## LIST OF CHARTER MEMBERS

### The Globe Trotters' Club

(Continued)

- Frank Bray, 118 Totteridge Road, High Wycombe, Buckingham, England.  
George Eckley, 204 Beauford Avenue, Charleston, W. Va.  
Heinz Vogt, Jr., 316 Elgin Avenue, Forest Park, Illinois.  
George Umbdenstock, Tuxedo, New York.  
Robert H. De Fleur, Springfield, South Dakota.  
Stanley J. Janocz, 3143 South 49th Avenue, Cicero, Ill.  
Allan J. Lloyd, 2603 Wickham, Newport News, Va.  
Charles Feilhauer, 119 Jefferson Street, Hot Springs, Arkansas.  
John F. Mikon, 129 Walnut Avenue, Altoona, Pa.  
Earle Bennette, 182 Sea Street, Quincy, Mass.  
Wm. H. Robinson, Fort Sam Houston, Texas.  
Robert L. Parker, Central House, Leominster, Mass.  
D. Crawley, 10 Byron Street, Davenport, Notts, England.  
George Keogh, 345-50 Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.  
Ernest Chilson, P. O. Box 4268, Washington, D. C.  
George Lutz, 8416 Lambert Street, Philadelphia, Pa.  
Payton McLeakey, Box 417, Alamogordo, New Mexico.  
Monroe Charles, 323 Grove Street, North Plainfield, New Jersey.  
John Whytock, 59 Roslyn Avenue, Providence, R. I.  
L. L. Phillips, Box A, Florence, Nebraska.  
Quinten Rice, Lydia, South Carolina.  
Thorning Stanley, Freeport, Texas.  
William Payne, Freeport, Texas.  
Julia Fisher, 301 1/4 N. Hudson Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.  
L. B. Renihan, Derby Line, Vermont.  
M. Carr, Jr., 453 Houston St., N. Y. City.  
Albert Folema, 1027 Collins Street, Joliet, Ill.  
Donald Mohr, 111 S. Third Street, Olean, New York.  
Louis Addicman, 4304 Carrison Blvd., Baltimore, Md.  
Jack Austin, Eminence, Mo.

of the Ozark Mountains, and they really have some tough boys around here.

Jack Austin,  
Buckeye State Show.

Eminence, Mo.

Or this British Tommy, from far-off Burma, who writes:

Dear Globe Trotter:

Here is my application for the Globe Trotters Club.

I am twenty-five years of age, with five and a half years of service in the infantry behind me. I was in India during the Ghandi riots and went through the Burma rebellion of 1930-32. We are expecting more trouble on the Chinese frontier any day and are looking forward to being sent up there.

The stories you publish are just the right type for all adventurous-minded fellows. More luck to you!

Private W. Cock.

"A" Company, 1st Infantry,  
Maymyor, Burma.

Lots of Globe Trotters are jacks-of-all-trades, too—like this one who is at home on the ocean or in the high altitudes:

Dear Globe Trotter:

Please line me up with the Globe Trotters. I am a seaman by occupation, although at present I am quite a ways above sea-level—3,800 feet to be exact. I have been working in the gold mines all summer, but soon I am returning to my first love, the sea.

Carlo A. Pyhalnoto.

San Pedro, Calif.

*Who Said Gold?*

That's all we had to do—just men-



tion gold mining, and the treasure hunters are in again!

Here is a son of adventure who is convinced that there is plenty of treasure right in his own back yard:

Dear Globe Trotter:

You're right when you say that most of these lost treasures are hidden away in outlandish places, but there are a fine bunch of them right here in our American Southwest. Take my own back yard, for instance.

Across the line, in Juarez, Mexico, is the church of Nuestra Senora de la Guadalupe. If you stand in the tower of this church exactly at sunrise and look to the north-

east you should be able to see the black mouth of a tunnel in Franklin Mountain, Texas—the entrance to the lost Padre Mine.

The Jesuits worked that mine for years and took a great fortune out of it. When they were forced to leave the country they walled up in the mine 4,000 ingots of gold, 5,000 bars of silver, ten mule loads of jewels, and loads of other precious stuff.

Lots of treasure hunters have tried to find the mine, but the huge fortune is still there waiting to be dug up. From my back door I can look right out at old Franklin—and some day, I have a hunch, I'm going to strike that mine entrance.

I have my own theory on why the others have all met with failure. If I'm right some one of these days I'll have a real adventure tale to pass along to the Globe Trotters!

Martin Hess.

El Paso, Texas.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Globe Trotter:

I just received my membership card and I'm proud to show it to everybody.

Here is a question I wish you would answer. I am interested in Spanish and Mexican things. Where is the nearest place to my home town where I can find real Spanish or Mexican atmosphere. What is the least amount of money I would need if I roughed it out there?

If any Globe Trotters from Baltimore see this letter I wish they would get in touch with me.

Louis Addelman.

4304 Garrison Boulevard,  
Baltimore, Md.

*Answer:*

Mexican atmosphere can be found most anywhere along the southern border of the United States—in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California. There are dozens of small towns in Texas along the border that are almost as Mexican as Mexico. This is even more true of New Mexico, where many counties are predominantly Mexican—or rather are populated by people of Mexican descent, for most of them are now good U. S. citizens.

Santa Fe, New Mexico, is one of the most picturesque cities in the U. S., but the atmosphere there is rather Indian—Pueblo—and early American, than Mexican. For old Spanish atmosphere, California would be the state I'd recommend.

How much would you need to rough it? That all depends on your taste

(Concluded on page 160)

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| 31x5.50-21      | 3.40   | 32x5 1/2           | 4.85   |
| 32x5.50-22      | 3.45   | 32x5 1/2           | 5.05   |
| 33x5.50-23      | 3.55   | 32x5 1/2           | 5.25   |
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(Concluded from page 159)

and your ability; depends on how good a workman you are and how easily you can pick up a few extra dollars. Ye Old Globe Trotter would strongly recommend, Louis, that, unless you have a definite destination in mind, a comfortable stake to fall back on, and are quite sure that you can earn your keep as you go—well, that you wait until times are a bit better. The road is tough these days. Dear Globe Trotter:

I am an amateur woodsman, and in my little journeys through the snow country try to travel like the Indians and Eskimos, wearing moccasins or muk-luks as the occasion demands. But I have trouble with the soft shoes when they get wet. After drying them near the fire they get hard, and shrink considerably in size. Then when I put them on again, they crack.

Is there any preparation I can use to prevent this?

Yours very sincerely,

Belton, Montana. Ralph Lacey,

Answer:

Whenever possible, moccasins and muk-luks should be dried while still on your feet. Otherwise they will become very stiff if dried otherwise. This drying principle applies to all kinds of leather footwear. Another thing to remember is never to walk over hot ashes with wet moccasins.

Now Globe Trotters, don't miss next month's issue with its great full book-length novel of India—THE RAJAH OF JHANPUR, by Major George Fielding Eliot, who wrote THE SACRED FIRE, a yarn that drew forth mighty enthusiastic comment when it appeared several months ago. THE RAJAH OF JHANPUR is packed with color and action—just the kind of a story you can expect from Eliot! Then there'll be a Western novelette, FOOL AMERICANO, by Tom Curry, and short stories that take you all over the world by Johnston McCulley, Jacland Marmur, Wayne Rogers and others. Also, more of Captain Franklin Hoyt's unusual true experiences. A humdinger of an issue!

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I wish to be enrolled as a member of the *Globe Trotters Club*. I am interested in adventure and will endeavor to answer all questions asked me by other members regarding the places with which I am familiar.

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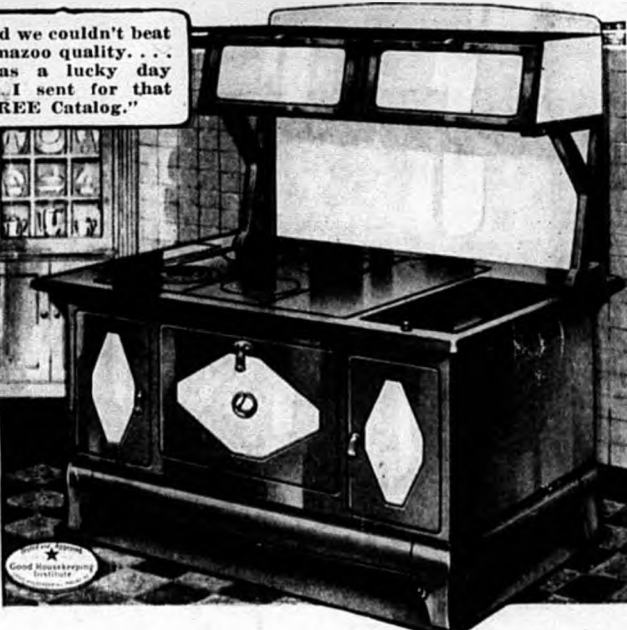
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