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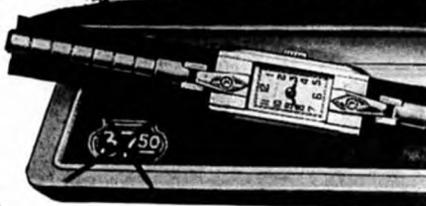
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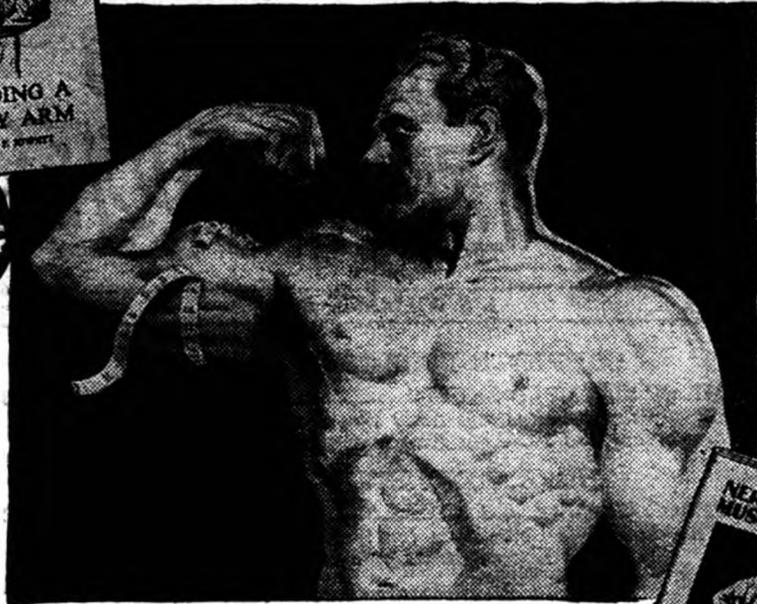
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THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. XI, No. 1

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

September, 1934.

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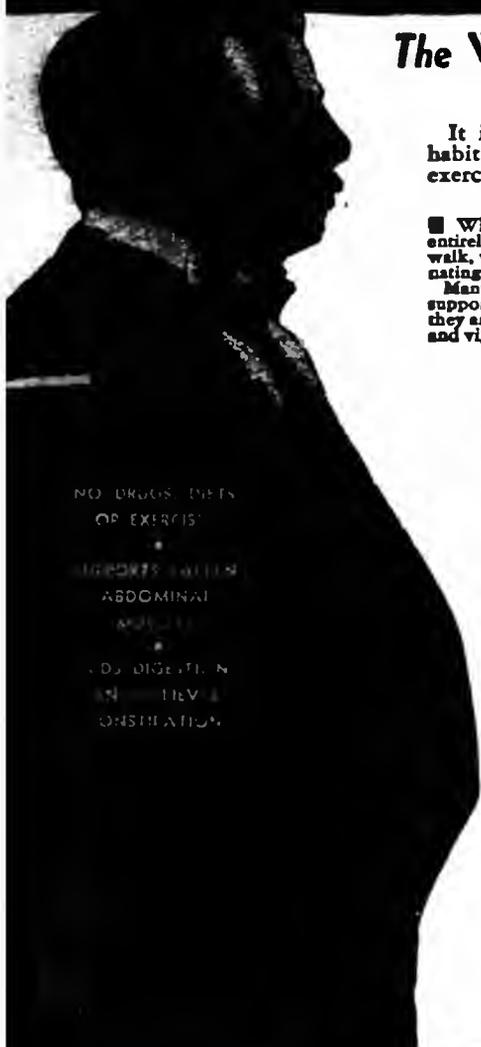
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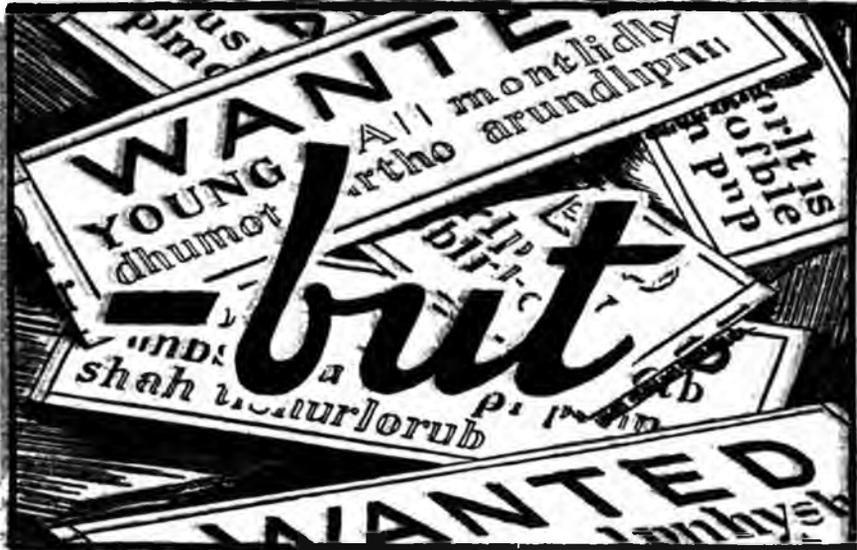
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TRAIL *of the*

PROLOGUE—1530 A.D.

A GAINST the grim ramparts of the upflung Andes, the sullen disc of the sun trembled precariously, then dipped with ecliptic majesty to the depths of the world below. Not yet resigned to darkness and brooding silence, the world of dense forest and stone and

sand grasped for a precious few moments the last rays of the sun's reflection and was bathed in a rubicund glow that was like the glow of fresh-spilled blood.

Along the sheer, dizzy grade of the mountain there wound like a ribbon a rough, rugged road that was silent and deserted—waiting, set like a stage for the forthcoming drama.

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SCOTT MORGAN

The man on the throne pointed to a horrible skull of gold



GOLD SKULLS

Then, abruptly, there appeared the first of the unwilling actors, a score of tortured, leg-weary men in whose aspect was mingled an admixture of triumph tinged with bitter defeat. They moved with many glances over their shoulders, retreating as from an enemy unseen, yet implacable and terrifying.

In their midst was a peon who

bore aloft on a makeshift pole the proud, tattered standard that was the far-flung flag of Spain. At their head strode a man who was unmistakably their leader. He was tall, dark-visaged, proud, a giant in stature and strength, a man born to command.

He was at once a combination of the best and worst of the conquista-

Savage Terrors and Flashing Knives in Peruvian Wilds!



Andy Wayne

dores who left Spain to conquer, subdue and rob a New World. He was ruthless, cruel, but incredibly brave. His enemies begrudgingly admired him; his comrades envied him.

Don Miguel y Diego y Hernandez de Almagro had made even the mighty Pizarro listen to his counsel. Now he was hurrying to meet his chief and lay before him the chart that would reveal the location of the sacred gold mines of Chitchen-Itzen, the like and wealth of which the world had never before known.

For years Pizarro had tortured natives, bullied, sworn and threatened without learning the location of the precious mines where alluvial gold was hidden. It remained for de Almagro to find them, to feast with his own eyes on the yellow metal in the bowels of the earth. And now he was returning with only a handful of men, little ammunition, but with the chart on his person, concealed beneath his breast-plate.

Don Andrea de Venero—short, squat, ugly—strode along at his leader's side. There was a slight limp to Don Andrea's walk and every step was torture, for in the upper part of his thigh was an ugly wound

made by an Inca priest. But for all that he did not falter.

"They must be aware of our ruse by now," he stated flatly. "We move slowly. They will overtake us."

De Almagro grunted disdainfully, merely increased his pace.

"If they overtake us," he said, "we will fight."

"And be killed!" spat out the other.

De Almagro shrugged. "That's as God wills. But we will take plenty of the heathens along with us for company before we go." His handsome, dark face was wreathed in a grin. "But why worry, de Venero? You have no family, no friends in Spain. Your death—"

"I was not thinking of myself," put in the squat, ugly man, with a sigh. "Rather, my thoughts were on Beatriz."

"Ah, my wife!" De Almagro laughed. "Come, come, de Venero, you have not yet forgiven me for snatching the fair Beatriz from under your very nose. You are much too ugly for her, my friend."

The squat man lowered his eyes. "I know that. I worry only that you might be killed and be unable to return to her. By the last ship you heard the news that she bore you a son. She needs you, Miguel. You—"

HE never finished that sentence. A man in the rear called out sharply: "*Commendante! Por Dios! We are overtaken!*"

De Almagro sprang to action. "*Peons! Behind rocks, get behind shelter! Musket fire at my command! We'll give the devils a taste of hell!*"

The soldiers deployed for whatever shelter was at hand. Around the bend in the road could be seen a band of Incas, lances and blow-pipes in hand.

"*Fire!*"

A straggling volley of musketry sent puffs of smoke into the air. A half dozen of the oncoming Indians clutched at their throats, tumbled to the ground, clawed and kicked and lay still.

But still the others came on, slowly, inexorably.

A second round of fire bit bigger holes in the ranks of the oncoming Incas, but that, too, did not stop them. Suddenly de Venero began to curse.

"They are coming from the other side. The devils have us pocketed. They will not let us get away alive with the chart. Their damned gold mines are sacred to their Sun God. See, they attack! My God, the poisonous darts!"



Aymara

LITTLE tufts of feathers flew unerringly through the air, flung on their mission of death through the blow-pipes. Half of the soldiers screamed, pulled at the tufts of feathers that had struck their bodies. There was a sharp-pointed end and this, entering the body, meant instant death. For it had been dipped in subtle poisons, unknown to the white man.

Proud Don Miguel de Almagro clutched at de Venero suddenly, sank to one knee, face white and drawn. From his neck he plucked the tiny, feathered dart, flung it from him.

"They got me, too Andrea. Beatriz will never see me again. My son—"

"Miguel! You must live! The chart, your son, Spain—"

The other managed a grin. "The chart, Andrea, is not for Pizarro. I have been thinking. It is for my son! The spawn of my seed, the child I have never seen! Give it to him! Keep it for him!"

The feathered darts had snuffed the resistance as suddenly as it had begun. The Spaniards lay strewn out in heaps, dead. De Venero, still

at Don Miguel's side, fumbled hurriedly, got the chart from its hiding place and slipped it into the folds of his doublet. Then he lay very still and motionless, feigning death.

In a few moments, there strode onto the stage the victorious Incas, at their head a venerable man who surveyed the carnage with a gleaming eye.

He stood over the body of Don Miguel, the *conquistadore*, and lifted his arms to the last effulgent rays of the dying sun.

"Thus perish," he intoned in a low chant, "the despoilers of the Sun God's glory. Death to all white men! Their blood shall redden the earth and soak its parched surface. I, Emperor of all the Incas, take oath to purge my unhappy land of the white invader!"

His voice was throbbing and impressive and heartfelt. "If I fail, then the Sun God is my witness, I condemn my kingly house to exile, to dwell in shame and degradation among strangers! I, Ramorez, Emperor of all the Incas, I take—"

"Dog of an infidel!"

It was Don Miguel, dying, yet pos-



Tao Ramorez

sessed of a last bit of strength. Before the horrified, wonder-struck Inca priests could intervene, he sprang up, sword in hand, and plunged its glittering steel through the heart of the emperor.

A shudder shook him violently from head to toe and a spasm of pain caused his face to twitch.

"Beatriz! My son!" he called out wildly, then fell to the ground. A split second later the body of the emperor pitched forward atop him so that the two bodies formed a cross.

Instantly, the priests fell back, muttering. "The prophecy! The prophecy! The sign was to be a cross. The Sun God is angry with his people! He will desert them in their hour of need! Ah, the bitter prophecy!"

And from afar off were heard curious, ominous rumblings like distant thunder. All eyes turned to it. Sparks could be faintly discerned leaping in wild profusion into the air.

"Mount Cuzco awakens!" one of the priests cried, and fell instantly to his hands and knees, striking his forehead to the ground. "Our people are doomed! The volcano speaks!"

The ground under their feet trembled to the shock of the volcano's eruption.

CHAPTER I

The Gold Skull

SETTLING more comfortably in his chair, Andy Wayne tapped an impatient foot. When the waiter came over, he ordered his fourth glass of Zempula, the native brandy, and then downed it at one gulp.

Outside the cool café, the streets were thronged with Lima's evening promenaders. From the opposite square came the sound of a blaring band.

At every hand could be seen the somber dark faces of the Andean Indians, suspicious, unco-operative; surly, unhappy descendants of a conquered race.

But Andy Wayne was not looking at the Indians. His eyes were seeking for the appearance of his young partner.

At last, he stood up as a tall, well-built young man entered. Their glances met and the young man instantly crossed the room and sat down at the table.

"Great news!" came instantly from his smiling lips. "I raised the money. I talked my head off to McGreer at the Anglo-Peruvian Bank and at last he agreed to advance me the money. Whew! Some job!"

Andy Wayne's wiry body tensed. He reached across the table to grip the shoulder of his partner. "You didn't tell why you wanted the money?"

And as the other hesitated, "Miguel Donahue!" he protested.

"Now, look here, Andy," interposed the other. "Don't fly off the handle! I may be young, but I'm not as foolish as you try to make me out. I told McGreer only that we

were prospecting for oil. He was satisfied with that explanation. No one in the world, save us two, knows why we're going to make this expedition."

His voice dropped, was tinged with awe at the magnitude of the prize. "The gold of the Incas. If that chart—"

Andy Wayne banged angrily on the table. "There you go again. Shut up!" He glanced about warily. "Even walls have ears. You don't know this town." Wayne's years in the tropics had steeped him in the congealed suspicion with which white men regard each other on the jungle frontier.

"There are men in this part of the world that would kill you—and eat you, too—for what you know about that chart," he said. His eyes gleamed. "By the way, where is the chart?"

The other tapped his chest significantly. "Sewn in the lining of my coat. Anyone who wants it will have to kill me first. How did you make out?" he asked, with an abrupt change of subject.

"I CONTACTED Chihua," Wayne said, relaxing a little. "He's an old Inca, pure blood. He knows those mountains like he knows his ten fingers. From what I've studied of the chart, those mountains are the ones that surround Lake Titicaca. It's a dangerous, wild country and if anyone can take us there, Chihua is the man."

"Without him?" asked the young man.

Wayne shrugged. "It would take four times as long, maybe more, to get there. I know this country, but I know very little of that part of it. No white man does. Old Chihua is our best bet. He gave me his solemn word he'd meet us here tonight at about nine.

"It's a few minutes of that now.



Mike Donahue

We'll give him final instructions, then see about getting a llama train together with supplies and make a start as soon as possible. Well, will you have a drink?"

They were oddly suited to each other, this pair. Andy Wayne was somewhat older than young Miguel Donahue, but he recognized in the broad-shouldered youth the fiery turbulence of spirit that set apart the adventurer from citizens of more sober pursuits. And it was young Miguel Donahue who had interested Wayne in the chart.

He had come to Wayne with a letter of introduction from the States. "This introduces Miguel Donahue," the letter said. "His dad was Irish and his mother Spanish. He, himself, imagines that one of his Spanish ancestors centuries ago was with Pizarro in the conquest of Peru.

"Don't try to disillusion him; it won't help. He's got a crazy idea that may appeal to you. Though christened Miguel, his friends call him Mike."

It was a mutual friend who had given this letter to Mike Donahue and he had lost no time in seeking

out Wayne. He told Wayne a story. The upshot of it was that Donahue produced an ancient parchment chart on which had been sketched crudely a map.

"Gold!" said young Donahue sharply. "And I need an experienced partner. We'll share fifty-fifty!"

"How did that map get into your hands?" asked the wide-eyed Wayne.

Donahue laughed. "It's been kicking around in the family for years. No one paid any attention to it. It's a tradition among us that the first born automatically possesses it. No one seems to have cared much about investigating its possibilities. But I do!"

Wayne solemnly shook the young man's hand. "I'm with you," he muttered.

"You know," said young Donahue, "I like you. You don't talk much but you look like you could accomplish anything. We'll get along fine."

Wayne's comment was characteristic. "I'll earn my fifty percent of the gold. You won't regret taking me as a partner."

Mike waxed eloquent. "Why, we'll be like the *conquistadores* of the Spanish invasion!"

WAYNE sniffed scoffingly. "*Conquistadores!* Bah! You're still bugs with the idea that you were named Miguel for Miguel de Almagro, who was Pizarro's lieutenant."

"I know it!" exulted young Donahue. "I feel it—I mean, it's in my blood!"

"So's fever," was Wayne's laconic comment.

So now they sat in the café in Peru's capital and awaited the arrival of Chihua, the Inca. All details of the journey had been left in Wayne's hands. He was experienced as a prospector and engineer and he knew the country.

Donahue started to say something,

then ceased abruptly, while his mouth hung slack. At last he gulped.

"Say!" he nudged Wayne. "Look at that swell bit that just walked in, will you? I never saw a prettier woman in my life."

"You and dames!" complained Wayne. "Can't keep you apart." He surveyed the newcomers, however, critically. "Not at all bad," he amended. "She's a rare beauty, all right. But I'll be damned!"

"What is it?" Donahue asked, alarmed.

WAYNE lowered his head. "Don't look that way again. That man with her, do you know who he is? He's dangerous! He's head of some crazy outfit calls itself the Society of the Gold Skull. It's a secret organization recently formed here in Lima. I don't know much about it, but a friend of mine in the government's Secret Service pointed out that chap to me.

"He said the government doesn't know much about it, either. But they think it is concerned with the extermination of all white men in Peru. Something like the Boxer conspiracy in the old days in China. The government is merely waiting to get some evidence to clap this chap in jail."

Donahue laughed. "He looks harmless enough. Cripes! Fine sort of escort for a nice girl like that. Look, she's turned her head to us!"

As if she knew she was the subject of their conversation, the dark-haired girl turned and met young Donahue's direct gaze. She flushed prettily and then at once turned back to her companion.

"Mike!" chided Wayne.

"Yes, teacher. I'll be good."

Within an hour, the girl and her dark-faced companion left the café. Mesmerized, Donahue's gaze followed her. At the door, she turned slightly and then sent a fleeting



Mike rushed in, his arms working like twin pistons

smile in his direction. At once, her companion, without turning around, muttered something sharply and the girl obediently followed after him without another glance at the glowing face of the American.

"What was the name of that man?" Donahue asked. "Did your govern-

ment friend tell you that, too?"

Wayne scowled. "He told me. His name is Tao Ramorez. He just recently arrived from Barcelona with that girl whose face you took so much trouble to memorize."

"Tao?" queried Donahue.

"That means Exile in the Inca

tongue." Wayne cast a glance at the door. "It's after ten and Chihua hasn't come yet, blast him!"

A waiter bustled over to the table. "Señor Wayne, for you." He laid a folded bit of paper on the table. Wayne smoothed it out, read:

Chihua waits in your room at the hotel.

Wayne stood up. "Who gave you this?" he barked at the startled waiter.

"Why, señor, a lowly street urchin. What is the trouble? I—"

Wayne grabbed his hat. "Come on, Mike. There's no time to lose now."

He tossed a few coins on the table in payment of the bill and hurried out, Mike Donahue close behind him. At the hotel, a few squares away, he rushed up the flight of stairs, knocked on the door of the room he and Donahue occupied. There was no response. Then he tried the knob. The door was locked.

He drew his own key from his pocket, fitted it into the lock, and turned it. As he opened the door, an exclamation came from his lips. An Inca Indian, dressed in short trousers and poncho, was sitting in one of the easy chairs. He was slouched down in the chair, his head on his chest and his feet stuck out before him. He didn't move as the partners came into the room and closed the door.

"Sleeping?" asked Donahue.

"IT'S Chihua," snapped Wayne.

"Here, wake up!" His voice changed. He gasped.

"Mike, look!"

A funny thing was protruding from the side of the man's neck just below the ear. It looked like a little tuft of chicken feathers.

"He's dead!" said Donahue. "What are those feathers?"

Wayne nodded. "The feathers? Blow-gun!" he clipped. "Poisoned dart. It's a trick handed down from

the ancient Incas. The dart is dipped in aconitine. Death in under a full minute. Good God!"

He was bending over the dead Inca's clenched hand. He gripped the man's wrist and with difficulty forced open the fingers. A tiny little object, like a ball, fell to the carpet, rolled under the table. Donahue retrieved it. He held it up.

It was a gold skull.

CHAPTER II

The Chart Is Stolen



A SHIVER coursed up and down Donahue's spine as he watched the light catch and reflect the gleaming gold of the perfectly shaped skull. It was not a shiver caused

by fear, but rather of the kind men experience as their nerves tighten in preparation for whole-limbed action.

"Somehow," said Wayne, suddenly, "the Society of the Gold Skull has fathomed our plans. Chihua was killed to prevent him from guiding us to Lake Titicaca."

"From what you said," objected Donahue, "I thought the society was to kill off white men. Why—" He broke off abruptly.

"What is it?" Wayne wanted to know.

"Do you imagine they're plotting to kill us, too?" His face made a grimace of disgust. "I'd hate to feel one of those damned darts get under my skin. Aconitine! That's one of the deadliest poisons known to man."

"They won't feel so free killing us as they did in murdering poor Chihua," Wayne stated sharply. "They probably meant this as a warning. Anyway, I'm going to call in the police. Much good they'll do,

but we must have them. You wait here. I'll be back in a jiffy."

He was out of the door in a second and Donahue was left alone with the corpse and the gold skull.

That shiver that was making his spine tingle was still with him. He looked about him. From the window he could see the bright lights of Lima's colorful cafés. Lima was a modern city, a progressive place. Yet— Blow-guns, aconitine, gold skulls!

It was something of a joke. A melodramatic, insane sort of joke, without beginning or end, rhyme or reason. And yet a man was sitting in that chair facing him—and that man was dead.

The chart? Was that why Chihua had been killed? Donahue felt of it under the lining of his coat. Its unobtrusive bulk reassured him. No one was going to get that chart from him, short of murdering him. He recalled all the times as a child he had pored over it while his soft-spoken Spanish mother repeated for him the tale of the Spanish conquest of Peru. He remembered, too, her ringing words:

"IN our family, Miguel, my child, there is a tradition, whether true or false, that our line is to be traced back to the famous Miguel de Almagro who lost his life to the ferocity of the Incas. He left a lovely wife, Beatriz by name, and a young son upon whom he never had laid eyes. He went to seek gold and lost his life.

"But the story has it that he was a brave man. This chart he is supposed to have made with his own hands and entrusted to a certain Don Andrea de Venero, who in fulfillment of a promise, delivered it to Beatriz intact. Later, Pizarro had him killed for not turning the chart over to him. It is a story I heard from my mother and she from hers."

His train of thought was suddenly interrupted by a light tap at the door. Wayne back so soon? But Wayne would not knock. He would come right in. Softly, Mike stepped to the door, grasped the knob and listened intently. Then with a sudden movement, he flung the door open.

His heart jumped to his mouth, turned a somersault and began to pound madly against his ribs. Then he made an outward effort to regain his composure. His visitor was the dark-haired, incredibly beautiful girl he had seen in the café. She was smiling, but a glimmer of anxiety showed in her eyes.

WHEN she said nothing, Donahue bowed, stepped aside. "Did you wish to see me, *señorita*?"

She nodded. "Ye-es."

His eyes slanted down at her, appraised her with immense satisfaction. She was very small, with gleaming pearl-white teeth, brown, lustrous eyes and olive satiny skin. Right now, her big eyes clouded and her lips tightened for the briefest of moments.

She looked past him into the room, saw the silent, still figure in the chair. A harassed, frightened look came quite definitely into her face.

"Won't you come in?" Donahue stepped aside.

"You have a visitor. I'm afraid—"

"Not at all. Don't be afraid. That fellow is dead. Funny thing. My partner and I—"

"Dead!" she interrupted with a rush of words tumbling to her lips. "Then I am too late! Too late!" she repeated tragically.

"For what?"

She came into the room in trepidation and Donahue closed the door. She looked with loathsome horror, yet with an immeasurable curiosity, at the figure of the dead Indian.

"I came," she said suddenly, turn-

ing on Donahue, "to warn you. You have implacable enemies. Tonight when I saw you in the café, I—I—" She could not finish. Confusion overcame her.

Donahue took her hands in his, looked searchingly, deeply into her face.

"You smiled at me in the café," he said simply. "I could not help feeling—"

A SLIGHT noise at the door interrupted him. It was a mere fumbling at the latch. A quick change transformed the girl's expression to one of fear.

"Quick!" she whispered. "I must hide. If it is they who come—Hide me! Please! You don't know them. They'd—they'd kill me!"

"In the closet! But I must say—"

Before he could say another word she had flitted across the room and slipped into the closet. The next second, Donahue flung his head about to the door. It was open.

He saw a long, deft, dark-skinned hand slip inside, fumble along the wall. He realized in a split second what that hand sought—the light switch. He sprang forward for the door with a cry on his lips just as there sounded a minute click and the room was plunged into utter darkness.

Donahue's first impulse was to check his headlong stride and seek cover. But the force of his leap carried him along despite himself. Full tilt, he banged into collision with two men. That it was two he could tell from the hoarse grunts that were elicited from them.

The next second, his arms had grasped a man's waist and he was pulling that man to him. He loosed his right hand long enough to clench it into a fist and send it upwards in a swing from the floor. Had that blow connected, it would have finished at least one of the intruders.

But the man squirmed out of Donahue's grasp and his swinging fist flailed only empty air.

Before he could recover, the other had flung himself on his back and Donahue was borne to the floor in a headlong scramble. Instantly, kicks were administered to him, catching him in the ribs, in the chest and the small of the back.

Thus far, the fight had been eerily silent on both sides, but now a hoarse, brutal oath broke from the American's lips and in the darkness his teeth bared in a snarl that looked like the grin of a fiend. He rolled clear of the worst of the kicks and got to his feet.

Dimly he saw two forms facing him. He rushed in, his arms working like twin pistons. He saw one of the forms sidestep and he saw the man's arm raise up. He ducked and tried to sidestep, too. But too late!

A heavy bludgeon descended with crushing force atop his skull. For a second a blinding flash of overbrilliant light appeared before the American's eyes. Then with a whispering sigh from his bloody lips, he slumped to the floor with a dull thud.

IT seemed hours and hours later before he opened his eyes. He smelled the pungent, acrid odor of vinegar and looked up into Andy Wayne's face. On his head was a bump the size of a fresh-laid egg. Andy was laconic, matter-of-fact.

"Some bean! Any other guy's skull would have been crushed. Yours only swelled up. What happened?"

Briefly, Donahue related the swift course of events. When he finished telling about the girl, Wayne stood up, smiled grimly. "Well," he stated flatly, "she ain't here now. She's flown." He pointed a finger. "Seems to me she acted as decoy

while the others sneaked up on you."

"That's a lie!" shouted Donahue.

"No friend of mine—"

"Take it easy," Wayne admonished.

"And look at your coat"

Donahue looked and his eyes widened, then smoldered and burned. The lining was torn, ripped open.

The chart was gone!

"AND if this isn't enough," relentlessly pursued Wayne, "read this. It was pinned to your bosom." He handed over a rough sheet of paper that Donahue eagerly grasped. It was printed in close, small characters and read:

There is no mystery in Chihua's death. We frankly and openly confess to the deed. For white men's gold he was willing to lead you to the sacred gold mines of which you possessed the map.

Possessed! For the map is no longer yours. It is now safely in the hands of the people to whom it rightfully belongs. It is ours now, the lineal descendants of those Incas who in ancient times ruled an empire that spread far beyond the confines of modern Peru.

Decade after decade for four long centuries the Empire of the Incas grew and prospered until that black, cursed day when the white man first set foot on our shores and ruthlessly, with blood and sword, destroyed what the emperors had built. What the white man has done to our people, we propose to do to him. There will come the great day when Inca's triumph will be reborn and when every white man within its confines will be put to death! That is the rallying point of our society. Perish the white man!

As for yourself and your partner—heed the well-given advice. Abandon your dream of gold! You were not killed because your death is not necessary to us. Return from whence you have come, and though blood of *conquistadores* flows in your veins, refrain from tempting Fate. The next time, there will be no warning—but only death!

THE SOCIETY OF THE GOLD SKULL.

Donahue put the closely-written sheet down and picked up a cigarette. When he got it glowing, he scowled, turned on Wayne.

"Well?"

Wayne answered his scowl with one of his own. "Well what? Do you mean what are we going to do about all this? I can answer that just one way. You, of course, can suit yourself."

Donahue's face underwent a change and the scowl became a smile. "It's all right, Andy," he said. "I know your answer without your putting it into words." He crushed the cigarette against the side of the ash-tray and began striding up and down in his great excitement.

"Did you read that line near the end about 'though blood of *conquistadores* flows in your veins'? That's me!" He hit his chest hard. "Quitting? Not on your life. Shake, Andy!"

"What's your first step?" asked Wayne, as he grasped the other's hand.

A great light seemed to shine from Donahue's eyes. He seemed to grow inches taller. "Look here, Andy! What made the old Spaniards so powerful? Guns, wasn't it? Modern weapons of that era. What's the matter with using weapons of our era against this blamed society of theirs?"

"Like what?" asked Wayne skeptically.

"Like machine-guns? Modern *conquistadores* with machine-guns and Tommy guns and gas bombs! Man, think of it!"

CHAPTER III

Branded



BIG Mike Donahue spent a restless night tossing fitfully in bed. It was dawn, with the red-gold sun peeping over the horizon, when he was rudely shaken by the shoulder. His sleep-filled eyes opened to behold a dark-skinned,

somber-faced Andean Indian at his bedside.

"*Señor! Despertarsa!*"

Instantly Mike sat up alert. The Indian was barefooted, wore the short knee-length trousers, the flat conical hat and the vivid-hued poncho of the native across his shoulders.

"What in all creation—" began Donahue.

HIS eyes quickly roved the room. Opposite him was Andy Wayne's bed. The bed-clothes were rumpled and looked as though they had been slept in, but Wayne was not there.

"Wayne?" snapped Donahue. "Where is he? What are you trying to tell me?"

The Indian's solemn face did not change expression. "*Señor Wayne vamoase!*"

Mike sprang out of the bed. "What! Gone? Where? What happened to him? You black-skinned devil, if you don't make yourself plain I'll throttle the truth out of you!"

"Don't over-excite yourself, Mike," said a calm voice. "Everything is under control!"

"Under— Andy, it's you!" Donahue grasped the shoulders of the native. "You fooled me plenty. If it weren't for your voice I couldn't have recognized you in a hundred years, you look as dark as any Peruvian Indian. What's the idea of the get-up?"

"Business," said Andy dryly. "I'm going to do a little spade work. I just wanted to try out my disguise on you before I ventured forth. Behold the result of fifteen years' living with the Andean Indian!"

"Perfect! But what do you plan to do? Can I help?"

"You can help by sitting tight and hugging this room. I'll be back before dark. Have your meals sent up and don't leave here."

"But, Andy, I can't—"

"Yes, you can, and must! From now on until I give the signal I'm running this show. Be seeing you, Mike. *Adios señor!*"

Mike watched him go with a perplexed expression on his face. Nevertheless, he heeded Andy's counsel. All that day he stayed put in his room. It was a tedious confinement, relieved only by a few magazines that barely held his interest for five minutes consecutively. It was nearing dusk when he heard a discreet tap on the door.

Before he could cross the room, the door was opened. In the half-gloom, he recognized Andy Wayne, still garbed in native costume.

Under his arm, Andy bore a compact bundle which he placed at once on the table. There was in his manner a suppressed excitement that swiftly communicated itself to the younger man.

"What luck, Andy?" Mike queried. "Where did you go?"

Silently, Andy undid the strings of the parcel and held forth a costume that was almost an exact replica of his own. "For you," he said curtly. "Come on, strip!"

QUICKLY, Mike hastened to obey. When he was naked to the waist Andy took forth a bottle and began smearing its contents over the rippling muscles of Mike's torso.

"Juice of the *cuwala* berry," said Andy. "This will stain you so that your own mother wouldn't recognize you. Now, now, no more questions until I'm through."

The imperative note in his voice was sufficient to keep Mike silent until the curious transformation was completed and he surveyed himself in the mirror. Yes, his own mother wouldn't know him, now. He looked exactly like a native. But questions began again to tumble from his lips.

Andy held up his hand. "Now, listen. I spent a busy day and I got

results. Look!" He took from under his poncho a little box which he opened. "I found a discreet goldsmith who made these for me."

Mike stared. In the box lay two little gold skulls, exact replicas of the society's dread token.

"But I still don't get it," he protested.

"You will. I did a lot of shadow work and guess what? I found a little old house in one of the worst parts of the native quarter—the headquarters of the Society of the Gold Skulls! Tonight, there's to be a meeting and we'll attend as full-fledged members!"

Mike gasped. "What an idea! Andy, words fail me!"

"Don't say it, then. It's no lark, though," he added darkly. "These chappies mean business. We'll have to be armed. Slip a gun under your poncho and remember, at all costs, *stay near me!* Don't get separated.

"Now, let's go out and mingle with the native populace. We'll see if you'll pass."

THAT Mike made the grade was evident at once. The pair entered a native dive, secured a table and were unmolested. What was more, they were unnoticed. The big cathedral chimes were booming ten o'clock when Mike rose. "*Yendo!*" he said in an undertone. And then in a whisper in English, "Our big moment!"

He led the way out of the dive through narrow, tortuous streets where the houses seemed to lean toward each other to shut out the night sky. Evil smells permeated the district and dark men flitted about softly like shadows. Occasionally a guttural voice was heard to speak, but for the most part everything was silent.

Presently, Andy stopped before a dark, tumble-down house and knocked on the door. Twice he repeated the

knock before a dim light showed under the cracks and the door opened a couple of inches. Silently, Andy stretched forth his hand and a momentary light showed what it held—the gold skull.

The next instant, the door was flung wide and the partners entered a dark, close corridor from which the air seemed to be cut off when the door was closed. A shadow of a man pattered down the corridor before them to another door, which he opened. He stood aside to let them pass.

ONCE inside this door, another dim light appeared as from nowhere. Donahue was at once aware that this room contained five or six men, all masked. A light was flashed directly into their eyes, momentarily blinding them. They had expected that this room was the meeting place but they were mistaken.

They became aware at once that it was only an anteroom where members were questioned and grilled before being admitted further. Andy had not reckoned on this, had not known beforehand what to expect. A single false move now and they were doomed. Silently, he awaited the action of the masked men.

One of them came forward and in corrupt Spanish, in which there was a good mingling of Inca words, he asked for their names, numbers and to show their brands.

Mike could scarcely suppress a gasp that rose to his lips. Brands! He knew that Andy had not the faintest notion that a brand was required. But Andy Wayne grinned coolly at the man's interrogation. He had not spent most of his life in Peru for nothing!

"Brands?" he quickly replied in the same mixed Spanish that his interrogator had used. "My comrade and myself are new recruits to the society from Quisque Province in the

south, where the gospel of revolt has already spread. We have received our skulls and we have come to this meeting for the purpose of being branded and given numbers.

"As for our names, you may call us Juan and Francisco. Lead us to the president, and waste no more of our time."

Apparently this answer was satisfactory and in order; for the man muttered something and two others came up and placed masks about the partners' heads. Another door was opened and Donahue and Wayne descended a long flight of steps into what appeared to be an underground chamber. Here lights were supplied by pitch torches set in deep pans along the wall. Black cloth covered the walls and on each square foot was painted a grinning skull in gold colors.

The large room was full of men, masked like themselves. No attention was paid them and they quickly mingled in the midst of the softly conversing groups. They waited—a moment later and all talk ceased.

A SLIT in the black hangings was opened and a tall man, masked like the others, but with his mask covering his entire head instead of merely the upper part of his face, entered and took a seat on a little dais.

He held up his right hand above his head, rose from his chair and instantly all men in the room fell to their hands and knees in attitudes of worship.

Donahue and Wayne followed suit, but raising their heads slightly, they saw the leader remove his black mask. The strong, flickering light of the pitch torches reflected the aristocratic cast of his countenance. At once, both Andy and Mike recognized him.

Tao Ramorez!

He was the same man who had

been in the company of the beautiful girl in the café, the day before.

CHAPTER IV

Sun God's Sacrifice



THE members of the secret society were not permitted to gaze upon the face of their leader, apparently, for none of them so much as moved their heads from silent obeisance on the ground.

"Brethren," began Tao Ramorez in deep, sepulchral tones, "we are gathered tonight to pay homage to the Sun God, the real god of the Incas. He is all-powerful, all-pervading. Through him, once more the empire of the Incas will be established and the cursed rule of the white man removed from our unhappy land. Gather strength and new recruits, that our society may be powerful enough to overcome the blight that has fallen upon our blessed people."

Then in language that neither Andy nor Donahue understood he started a low chant that filled the wide chamber with organ tones. Instantly, the kneeling men chanted in unison. Donahue and Wayne muttered under their breaths, following the lead of the others. Then the chant came to an abrupt end and the leader clapped his hands together.

The men stood up once more, Andy and Mike with them. They saw now that Ramorez had replaced the hood over his head.

A whispered conference took place between the leader and one of the men. Ramorez tapped lightly on a table before him.

"I have word," he stated evenly, "that two new recruits have come tonight from the South. Before we proceed with further business, these

men will be branded and numbered according to the tenets of our sacred organization." He clapped his hands again. "Prepare for the ceremony!"

"That means us," said Wayne to Donahue, out of the corner of his mouth. "Come on, let's get it over with."

They went forward to the dais and were aware of the keen scrutiny of the eyes behind that black hood. Instantly, two men appeared on either side of them. Another came forward with a brass brazier in which charcoal was glowing.

Donahue was taken first. He was stripped to the waist, although he retained the mask. The leader stood up, held forth his hand. "Repeat after me," he said. "I will give you the oath of our society." His arms went up over his head and he began.

"Ramta, God of the Sun, ruler of the heavens and of the earth, to you I pledge my life and my strength, to the task of plunging in blood the white foreigners who have brought your people to disgrace.

"I will raise up once more the glowing symbol of your godliness and pledge myself to death by torture if I reveal or otherwise betray the trust of my brethren!"

ALL this, Donahue haltingly repeated and when he had finished one of the men caught his arms tightly while the other applied a red-hot iron like a poker to his bare arm. Donahue winced, but did not pull away. There was the pungent odor of burning flesh and then the iron was taken away.

"Brother," said Tao solemnly, "you have received the mark of the gold skull on your arm. Hereafter you are one of us. The arm will swell a little and be painful for a few days, but thereafter it will be a source of pride and strength for you. Now, the other!"

Andy Wayne was taken now in

Donahue's place, and he, too, was stripped of his poncho, revealing his naked torso. But no sooner was that done when Tao drew back as though stung. Across Wayne's left shoulder were long livid scars—souvenirs of a machete fight. But those scars were famous in Lima. Everyone knew how Wayne had downed three drunken natives armed with machetes while he had had but his bare fists.

"Hold!" cried Tao, pointing a long finger at Wayne. "This man who stands before you is not one of us, nor did he ever come from Quispe Province. He is the white man—Andrew Wayne! A spy in our midst!"

WHAT happened after that was too swift for Donahue ever to remember accurately, even in retrospect. It took but a split second to recognize that the game was up. With a hoarse cry, he sprang forward and with a well-aimed kick forced the two men who held Andy prisoner to release him. Shouts and cries sprang up on every side.

Andy and Donahue sprang for their ponchos, fallen to the floor, and snatched up the guns they had concealed there. Something whizzed by Donahue's check and plunged with a quiver into the wood of the dais. It was a knife.

There was a puff of smoke, a loud, reverberating roar and Andy's gun had spoken. A second knife, that had been aimed for Donahue, clattered to the floor and its owner screamed lustily as the bullet smashed the delicate bones of his wrist.

"Murder them! Tear them to pieces!"

Donahue shot straight into the thickest part of the menacing mob. A man flung up his arms, sank to the floor and did not thereafter move. But the two Americans could not

hope to withstand the fury of this mob forever. Despite the guns in their hands they were but two against fifty, and steadily they were being forced to the wall.

In a daring sacrifice one of the members of the society flung himself forward bodily for the white men's ankles. Andy lashed out viciously with his right foot and caught the man a solid blow on the side of the head. He crumpled up at their feet like a useless sack of meal. But in the interim, the others took advantage to press forward closer.

"Look out from behind!" yelled Wayne, but the advice was useless. To turn around for an instant would mean destruction. Yet they knew that a charge was being gathered to swamp them from the rear. They managed to turn halfway about, Wayne guarding the space immediately before them while Donahue watched the rear and flanks.

But the battle could not last longer. Donahue's gun clicked hollowly. He pulled the trigger madly but the hammer fell on an empty cylinder.

"Sunk!" he muttered hoarsely.

AT the same instant, Wayne's gun, too, emptied. The cowering mob seemed to take new courage, to become aware on the instant that the guns were no longer menacing.

With harsh, guttural oaths, they closed in and for an instant both white men lost their footing and went down under the heels of the natives. But only for an instant. The next they were on their feet again, fighting like Trojans, arms pumping madly, hitting the masked faces that swarmed before and about them.

Wayne went under first. Something heavy and hard hit him on the shoulder, rendering his arms dead and useless. The next second he was hit on the head and slumped

to the floor. Donahue kept up the uneven battle a little longer.

He wondered why knives were no longer in evidence, but then he realized that the purpose of the mob was to capture him alive. As long as he could he withstood the rushes of the men, their very number telling in his favor as they got in each other's way and made it possible for him to attack one at a time.

BUT entangled with one who refused to succumb to his haymaking right, he could not forestall the others who rushed up and in an instant had his arms pinioned behind his back.

A hooded face was thrust close to his own and a voice intoned: "My white friend, you are brave, but foolish. For your bravery and foolishness you will be sacrificed to the Sun God. Your estimable friend, Wayne, will be—"

Then Mike Donahue seemed to go mad.

A sullen snarl broke from his lips and with a twisting and squirming he got his arms free. He forgot his weariness of battle; he forgot the odds he faced. The next moment his clenched fists were hammering away at the hooded face, striving to reduce it to a bloody pulp; his two fists were pitted against all the strength, the cunning of the society.

Hopeless onslaught it was! Amazed at first by the fury of the white man's charge, the members of the society had fallen back. But they remained quiescent only until their astonishment had changed to fiery blood lust. Then with wild yells they flung themselves bodily on Donahue.

Sobbing hoarsely, Donahue went down, crushed beneath the weight of the counter-attack. He struggled wildly to his feet and then was flung hurtling forward. He smashed headlong into the opposite wall, and fell

in a crumpled heap. Weakly, he fought the waves of engulfing blackness descending upon him.

Blood was on his face, his hands. His cheek was badly gashed. Where the iron brand had touched his skin there was a raging torment of pain. He made a last feeble effort to stand erect. Clawing at the black hangings on the wall, he groped halfway to his feet, whilst deep groan after groan racked his chest.

He caught a glimpse of the hooded leader in the midst of the sea of faces that swam before his eyes—and then a long gurgling sigh welled out of his tortured lips and his tormented, racked body collapsed like a limp rag.

When he regained consciousness, he was too sick to wonder why they had not killed him. He was lying on a hard, damp floor, not in the central chamber, but in a small, bare room illuminated by a single pitch torch. A strange figure was standing above him, peering down at him.

It took almost a full minute for his scattered senses to concentrate on that face, and then he gasped. It was the beautiful girl of the café.

CHAPTER V

Aymara



DONAHUE got to his feet and tottered on shaky legs. The girl instantly placed a finger on her lips.

"We must be quiet," she whispered. "The men will hear and kill us—both!"

"How did you get here?" he managed to utter quietly. "After you slipped into the closet in my room last night—"

"I slipped out when the others had completed their work. I could not help you and I was forced to think

of my own safety—and that of others," she added as an afterthought.

"I had come to warn you. I did not know they meant to strike so soon. But now you must get out of here. I have heard their talk. They mean to sacrifice you and your friend to the Sun God. Oh, it is horrible!"

Donahue snorted defiantly. "They wouldn't dare!"

SHE shook her head. "Ah, you do not know their awful schemes, their amazing power. They are fanatics, not humans. They would dare anything!" Her big eyes glowed and her chin trembled with passion and hatred.

Donahue regarded her curiously. "I don't get it," he muttered. "A nice girl like you bound up with a band of crazy cutthroats. Why? You look white, too, not Indian."

She began to tremble like a leaf at his words and Donahue's harsh tones perceptibly softened. "I don't mean it just like that, Miss—Miss— Say, I don't even know your name!"

"You may call me Aymara!" she said softly, shyly.

"Aymara! That's a pretty name. But seriously now, Aymara— Oh, I guess you know my name. Miguel Donahue. Mike, to my friends."

"I shall call you Mike, if I may."

"Gee, that's great, Aymara. But tell me. Why are you in with this Society of the Gold Skull? You seem to hate them even worse than I do!"

"I do!" The words tumbled from her lips. "They are inhuman fiends, lusting for blood! But—I can't help myself. I am bound to them—to their leader, anyway."

"Bound to their leader? You mean Ramorez? What is it? Can I help?"

She shook her head. "No, you cannot help me. To rescue me would mean to harm others and—and—" She broke off and a harried

look battled with the hatred in her eyes.

"Go on. Explain it," urged Donahue, all at sea.

She had her hand pressed against her mouth now. She looked squarely at Donahue with her wide-open eyes. She was trembling but she managed to put fire in her voice when she cried: "I cannot tell you. Not now. Besides, there is no time. You must escape from here. I don't know when they plan to begin the sacrifice, but it may be at any moment."

"All right," Donahue agreed, "we'll let it slide. But you must come with me. You cannot stay here."

"Please!" She laid a hand on his arm. "You must not urge me. I must stay here. I cannot go. But you must leave at once. Come!"

"Listen!" growled the American. "I'd be all kinds of a heel to let you down here alone in this hell-hole when I—"

"Please!" she said again. "You do not understand. Please do not urge me. It is—it is impossible!"

So complete, so final and unshakable were her words, that Donahue could do nothing but bow his head and submit. There was an aura of mystery that hung about the head of this beautiful white woman who voluntarily moved among the fanatic members of a blood-lusting secret society. But Donahue realized that this was no time to beat about the bush.

ACTION was needed if he hoped to get out of this place with a whole skin. Abruptly, he clipped: "Lead the way!"

At once she moved to the door, opened it quietly and peered out. Apparently no one was about for she turned to Donahue and beckoned him to follow her. Out in the dark passageway, she spoke in a tiny whisper.

"Straight down at the end of this

corridor is a flight of stairs. Go down it and open the door at the bottom. You will find another passageway that will wind about. Follow it straight on and you will come out into a dark street about a half mile from here. Go!"

But Donahue stayed put. "Go?" he questioned. "What about Wayne? I'm not going without him!"

"There is no time," she urged frantically. "Don't you see? You must escape while you can."

THEN it occurred to Donahue that she had rescued him and him alone not because he was a white man, but because— The thought staggered him and made his senses reel. Then he felt curiously light-headed and buoyant. But nevertheless, he stuck to his purpose.

"Aymara!" he told her softly. "You must not think of me alone. I cannot go out of here without Wayne. Don't you understand? I couldn't look myself in the face again if I abandoned him to the society. Where is he?"

She looked searchingly into his face for a moment, then pointed to a door at the further end of the passageway. "There," she said. "Hurry!"

Swiftly, Donahue traversed the narrow corridor until he came to a stout door. Two heavy iron rods were placed as barriers in slots. With a minimum of noise, he removed the rods and swung the door open. Andy Wayne, lying on the floor, crept up in the darkness and flung himself on Donahue in a wild rush. It took a second for Donahue to realize that Wayne had mistaken him for one of the society.

"Fool!" he muttered. "Get up! It's me—Mike!"

Wayne didn't believe his ears. Swiftly he scrambled to his feet and began hurriedly to apologize. Ruefully, Donahue rubbed his jaw, mut-

tered: "All right, Andy. A mistake in the dark. But, hell, you pack a mule wallop in that right of yours!"

Then quickly he acquainted Wayne with the details of the escape. "She's a white girl," he finished. "Do you get it, Andy? A white girl who is held against her will by some strange power that Tao Ramorez has over her. She's a sort of voluntary captive, see?"

"Now, listen, let's get out of here while the getting's good. I wouldn't want to see her get into trouble. No one must know she helped set us free."

"Okay by me," was Wayne's rapid comment. "But, Mike!" He paused significantly. "What about the chart? Tao has it. Shall we let him keep it?"

Donahue frowned. "To hell with that now. We must think of our skins first.

"Let's go!"

Outside in the corridor, it took but a single glance to show that Aymara had disappeared. Well and good, Donahue decided. He was glad she was out of the way. They were moving toward the opposite end of the narrow corridor with swift, noiseless steps when suddenly they stopped short, frozen in their tracks. Just ahead of them was the flickering light of a pitch torch. Instantly both men flattened themselves against the cold walls of the black vault.

AS the light came nearer they saw that there were only two men. One holding the torch and the other—Their hearts seemed to miss a beat with the painful excitement. The other was the black-hooded figure of Tao Ramorez!

No signal passed between the two white men. They had no opportunity to lay plans for concerted effort, yet each read the other's thoughts in the

dark as accurately as though each had spoken aloud. The two men approached closer and then stopped before the door behind which Donahue had been confined.

The darkness helped Donahue and Wayne to conceal the grins that slipped unbidden to their faces. At once they moved forward with noiseless tread. They saw the tall, hooded figure of the society's president slip into the room. They heard his exclamation as a quick examination revealed the room to be empty of the prisoner.

"Now!" came from between Wayne's clenched teeth.

TOGETHER they sped forward at top speed, almost abreast. The man holding the torch was halfway in the open doorway. He heard the light pat-pat of their running footsteps. He whirled about with a hoarse cry—but too late!

Up swung Wayne's fist; up came Donahue's almost simultaneously. Both landed with crushing force in the man's face. Without a sound, he careened backwards into the room, struck the wall and slumped to the floor. Before Tao Ramorez could recover from his surprise and shout or otherwise give warning, the partners were upon him. Donahue caught the man's arms and Wayne clapped a rough, but wholly adequate, hand against his mouth to prevent an outcry.

With his free hand, Wayne hurriedly searched the president's clothes. His fist came away holding a wicked looking knife that was weighted at the end of the blade. He pressed the sharp point against the hooded man's ribs.

"One sound out of you, if only a peep," he muttered, "and you get the rest of the knife through your heart!"

There was that metallic quality to his voice that left no room for doubt

about his intention to do just that, should the occasion warrant it.

"What do we do now?" queried Donahue.

"Do?" Wayne countered. "You do as you please. But as far as I am concerned, there's just one thing to do and that is to get back the chart that was stolen from you." He turned to the hooded man. "Where is the chart? Speak or get the knife!"

IT is probable that Tao Ramorez would have accepted the knife rather than capitulate to the white man had it not been that he had other plans. He hoped to lead the white men into a trap from which they couldn't escape.

Accordingly, he shrugged his shoulders and indicated with a movement of his head. "Come! I will take you there," he said.

He led the way with Wayne, directly behind him, still keeping the point of the knife against his ribs. Donahue, with many glances behind him, warily brought up the rear. Tao Ramorez walked with proud mien, not as a captive, but as might a host conducting guests to his private chambers.

He stopped before a door at the further end of the corridor and Wayne reached over him and opened it. The partners' eyes widened in astonishment.

They had expected a chamber similar to the ones in which they had been confined. But this was amazingly different. The walls were hung with rich silks and satins, the floor expensively carpeted. There was a sort of desk in the center of the room, but facing it at the opposite end of the room was a throne—carved out of pure gold!

Evidently it was Tao's private apartment or throne-room. He seemed to be at home here. But Andy Wayne was all business.

"The map!" he rasped. "Where is it?"

Tao shrugged, stepped over the threshold. "In the desk," he said slowly. "But I must warn you that you are being exceedingly foolhardy. Already my men are giving heed to my warning."

"Warning?" echoed Mike. "You haven't had a chance to open your mouth."

Tao smiled superiorly. "There are ways, my friend."

"Don't waste time, Mike," snapped Andy. "Find the map and let's go."

Mike snatched at the drawers of the desk, flung each one open. He pulled out bundles of papers and flung them impatiently aside. At last, he straightened up with a wide grin, holding the rolled chart in his fist. "Got it, Andy!" he muttered.

Andy started forward and at the same instant, Tao leaped clear of the knife's sharp point and struck at the wall with his fist. Although there appeared to be nothing but silk drapes there, a low, penetrating boom sounded as from a gigantic drum, hidden behind the drapes.

"Damn you!" burst from Andy's lips, but Tao, with the agility of a cat, dodged behind a heavy chair.

"DON'T waste time with him," urged Mike. "They'll have us cut off from the corridor in a few moments."

"But you are being foolish, my friends," grated Tao, his eyes glowing like live coals. "You do not know the way out. You will be lost in the endless passages. There is not a chance to get out alive."

Then Mike realized that Tao was not aware of the fact that Aymara had given him explicit directions for escaping and was now counting on the belief that the partners would get trapped in the corridors. He exchanged a quick glance with Andy and then silently rushed for the

exit. Andy was directly behind him as they slammed the door shut.

Footsteps were audible in the passage. They were swift, pattering steps coming ever closer. The Americans did not hesitate. They ran soundlessly to the end of the passage, passing by the doors behind which they had been confined as prisoners. At the end of the passage, there was another and smaller corridor that led off at right angles. Andy started to run down it, but Mike caught his arm.

"That way we'll get lost," he muttered sharply. "Aymara said there was a flight of stairs we must descend right here. Find it!"

The passageway was dark as a moonless night, but stretching forth his hand before him, Mike was able to feel the wall that would seem to indicate that the passage had come to an end. Andy knelt down on hands and knees and a second later a cry broke from his lips.

"Right here, Mike!" he cried. "It's a tiny hole just big enough for one man to slip through at a time, but it's so dark I can't see any flight of stairs."

"Slip through, anyway," Mike snapped. "We'll try it. This must be what Aymara meant."

ANDY went first and as his feet dangled down they encountered roughly cut steps that had been hewn out of the living rock. "Okay," he whispered. "This is it, all right. Follow down. Easy! These steps are straight up and down."

Slowly, the partners descended, a single step at a time. When they reached the bottom, they were on a sort of narrow platform. Groping in the dark, they found only walls on every side.

"There's a door somewhere," Mike said. His hand, fumbling about, finally came in contact with what appeared to be nothing but a slight

protuberance of the rock shelf, but which was in reality a cleverly fashioned sort of knob. He tugged at it and then abruptly the solid wall moved back. The partners pushed it open far enough to get through.

A maze of narrow corridors like an intricate spider web stretched before them. All were dark, all were like the spokes of a huge wheel. They chose the widest one as though by instinct, and moved down it warily, every nerve alert.

ALL was silent in this stygian darkness, silent and damp and forbidding. The passageway wound and interwound endlessly. A dozen times they were convinced they were on the wrong track and were on the point of turning back, but with grim jaws set they pushed on. After what seemed hours, they were aware of a slightly warmer breath fanning the corridor and at once they realized that the floor of the passageway was now definitely on an upgrade.

Their steps became swifter. In a few moments their heads were stuck out into the open air from what appeared to be the mouth of an old sewer. Mike jumped first and then he helped Andy up.

The two partners surveyed each other with satisfied grins. They were in an alley that was not unfamiliar to Andy.

He sucked in a deep breath of night air, then grabbed Mike's arm. "Quick! No time to lose! We must get back to the hotel before those fiends do, pack up and clear out. From now on the fight is in the open! They'll not stop at anything to prevent us from using the map!"

Mike's answer was a low growl. "Let 'em! I'd like the chance of putting my fists in that Tao Ramo- rez' face. I'd like—"

"Save it!" Andy interrupted laconically. "You'll probably have plenty of opportunity before long;

this has become more than just a search for gold!" he added with grim earnestness.

"What do you mean?"

"That Society of the Gold Skull!" said Andy slowly, emphatically. "Now that we know their avowed purpose is to wipe out all white men in Peru and most of South America, we've got to put a crimp in their plans. Do you realize it, Mike? You and I are the only white men who have definite knowledge of those fiends' plan?"

"We *must* stop 'em! Tao Ramirez is building a huge organization. These Andean Indians are ripe for revolt against the white man's rule. If the society's plans go forward," his voice dropped ominously, "this whole continent may be bathed in blood!"

CHAPTER VI

The Mountain Avalanche



MORNING found Andy and Mike Donahue ensconced in new quarters which they had taken up in the night. Posted sentries with shouldered rifles paraded

up and down before the building and within its corridors. It was the headquarters of the Peruvian police and Andy and Mike were safe in special quarters provided for the secret Intelligence officers.

In the middle of the night the partners had roused up Andy's friend in the Intelligence division; and before dawn a raiding party had descended upon that gloomy old house in the native quarter where earlier that evening the Americans had gone to learn the secrets of the Society of the Gold Skull.

But the raid uncovered nothing but an empty building, long since

vacated by the wily Tao Ramirez and his fanatical followers. The subterranean corridors were thoroughly searched without a single member of the dread secret society being found.

MIKE could not help but let his thoughts wander to lovely Ay-mara, who had risked her life to save his and Andy's. He wondered if she were safe, or whether Tao had discovered it had been she who had set the two white men free after they had already been condemned by the society to be sacrificed to the Sun God.

He wondered, too, about her enigmatical plea to be permitted to remain with Tao; about her insistence that she could not leave the leader's side. That was a mystery he could not fathom offhand, and only the passage of time might give him the key to the puzzle.

Days passed rapidly while the Secret Police used every means at their disposal to trace the movements of the society and its wary leader. But all to no avail.

Rumors floated about the city that the leader, Tao, had fled Lima and taken secret refuge in the jagged confines of the Andes, there to recruit even greater forces so as to be able to work his will. It was from persistent questioning of natives that Andy was at last able to determine Tao's mission.

It appeared that Tao Ramirez was looked upon by the natives as the lineal descendant of the ancient Inca emperors. It was on him that the mantle of royalty had fallen, together with the responsibility of raising up his people to their former great eminence among the peoples of the earth.

"However you look at it," Andy remarked to Mike, after fruitless weeks of search had unearthed this meager information, "Tao Ramirez

is the key to the uprising. Without him, there would be no society. As to his claims of being of the royal blood—they may be true or not, but these people are ready for any Messiah and they will accept anyone who comes along and preaches revolt and sedition to them.

"We'll have to change our tactics. I've been busy the last few days gathering supplies, men and llamas. We're going to kill two birds with one stone."

MIKE'S eyes gleamed. The promise of action after those weeks of idleness set his blood to racing. "How do you mean, two birds with one stone?" he queried.

"It's like this," Andy explained. "We want Tao and we also want the gold. I've been nursing the notion that Tao is where the gold is. In other words, the map that leads us to the gold leads us to Tao."

"He's dropped out of sight too completely to be anywhere near Lima. Then, by direct inference, he must be in hiding somewhere far away. What better place but where the gold mines are located? Doesn't that seem logical?"

Mike was exultant. "Bother logic!" he exclaimed. "Let's go anyway. I'm getting tired of warming a chair. Now tell me. What kind of supplies are you taking and what kind of men?"

Andy explained that the men were hand-picked adventurers all of whom he knew personally; none of them aware, however, that the search was for gold. As for supplies, he had laid in the usual stock taken for so arduous a journey, including goat-skin waterbags, dried meats and beans and cereals.

"What about guns?" insisted Mike eagerly.

"Guns? Every man will be armed," said Andy.

"But that won't be enough," Mike

pointed out, jumping up in his excitement. "Don't you see, Andy? The ancient Spanish *conquistadores* conquered the Incas because they were equipped with muskets against lances and blow-pipes. In this day and age, the Incas have guns, too.

"Don't you see my point? We've got to be better equipped than with just guns. We'll be a handful against maybe thousands."

"Then what do you propose?" asked Andy curiously.

"Not just guns, but machine-guns, gas bombs, Tommy guns, sawed-off shotguns; all the new weapons of modern warfare. That'll beat any crowd of natives!"

Andy, too, jumped up. "By God, you're right!" His fist came down forcibly on the table. "You know," he added, a sly twinkle in his eye, "maybe there's something to this crazy notion of yours of being descended from Miguel de Almagro. Maybe the blood of *conquistadores* does really flow in your veins."

Mike blushed. "I'd forgotten about that," he muttered humbly. "But sometimes, you know how it is—sometimes, I feel it's true! *I know it's true!*"

DESPITE their utmost speed it was fully a week before all preparations were complete for the journey. But with everything at length in readiness, early one night a party of about twenty inoffensive-looking natives mounted upon short-legged, rugged llamas, and accompanied by about a dozen heavily laden pack-burros, foregathered upon the open ground before the great cathedral in the center of the city and left by way of the road that leads to Landu.

Daylight found them encamped among the blue tree-covered hills that overlook the vast sweeping plains of the Crendies basin. Despite the fact that they looked and acted like native Incas, orders were

flung back and forth in English. It was at this juncture that Andy Wayne proved his worth as a half-share partner in the reckless venture.

He knew the country as well as he knew the palm of his hand. It was his object throughout the long and tedious march to avoid the main towns and—so far as it was possible—even the little villages that dotted the hills.

Though they were all dressed as natives, they could not hope to pass themselves off as such. From a distance, they would be called a straggling band of Incas right enough, but close up, many of the party who were blue-eyed, fair-haired Anglo-Saxons could never pretend to be anything else but the "foreign devils" they were proud to be.

Days passed by in endless procession, with no signs of hostility and no impediment to their line-of-march. A feeling of security, false though it might be, pervaded the camp at every resting place.

TWO weeks on the march and the last of the known villages was left far behind. Before them stretched virgin, unexplored country into which white men had rarely ventured and from which they had even more rarely returned. Andy reckoned each day's march by the parchment scroll that was in Mike's possession, but several times he confessed himself baffled as to how to proceed.

"If we had Chihua with us now," he often told Mike, "we'd get there in a few days. As it is, I'm just blind-guessing the route. Tao knew what he was about when he had Chihua murdered. That Inca would have been invaluable."

They were in a deep pocket of the Andes valley at the time, and it was only after long and earnest consultation that Andy decided to at-

tempt scaling the mountain toward which the caravan had been slowly approaching for days.

The ascent, when it was finally attempted, proved the hardest yet faced by the company. The men Andy had picked now proved the worth of his judgment. Never once did they complain, never once falter. Up, up, they struggled, through thick growths that made each step a torture.

AT night they were too tired to light fires and bolted their food raw. They threw themselves on the ground wherever they stood and slept like dead men until the following dawn.

It was the morning of the third day of the perilous ascent that the theft in camp was discovered. Every waterbag, every bit of food had disappeared! No one had heard any disturbance, yet the plain fact stared them in the face that their camp had been rifled clean as a whistle.

Fortunately, the pack-burros had been herded in a circle about which the men had slept and so their precious burden was not disturbed. But the food was irretrievably gone.

"This only proves," Andy told Mike, "that we're getting close. We seem to have blundered in some fashion onto the right trail. And now they've stolen our food as a warning. We can probably hunt enough fresh game to keep us alive for a time."

"Maybe it wasn't Tao but only a marauding band of half-wild Incas," Mike suggested.

Andy shook his head. "No, it was Tao, or at least Tao's men. A band of Incas would have tried to kill us. Tao is only playing with us, showing us how futile our attempt to capture him is in reality."

Mike slowly nodded. His jaw set grimly and a gleam of rugged determination was in his eye. "Do you

think he knows what the pack-burros are toting? Because if he does—"

Several of the men were close at that moment and Andy lowered his voice. "I don't think so. But even if he does, there'll be more than one surprise for him should we get the chance of a real fight with him at close quarters. But not a word, now. We've got to push on.

"Men! Forward!"

AND the straggling train continued its slow ascent, lightened of the weight of the food bags but a little heavy in heart and spirits. Late in the afternoon, Andy and Mike, in the vanguard, stopped short and stared. Far ahead of them in the blue, shimmering distance was a bright gleam of silver.

"Lake Titicaca!" cried Andy in overwhelming excitement. "Look! Ahead there! See it? I took a right guess when I said our quest would lead us there!"

It was a body of water, sure enough, catching the full gleam of the powerful sun and reflecting it like a beveled mirror. With renewed courage and vigor the caravan pushed on. The lake came more plainly into view, a large, sweeping body of water miraculously poised, as though disembodied, atop the world.

Some ancient crater had somehow been filled with the water and formed a mountain-top lake. But a few moments later the lake was forgotten as there came to the view of the party the unmistakable ruins of what must have been once an ancient Inca city.

The face of the mountain seemed to dip sharply at right angles to reveal the lost city. Below was a deep, narrow canyon but ahead was a road—narrow, overgrown, cut into the face of the mountain, but undeniably a road!

As they came closer they saw the city more plainly. Streets, squares, altars, dwellings, walls were all of stone and of massive, intricate masonry. Enormous blocks of the stone, some of them undoubtedly weighing more than twenty tons, were fitted together with extraordinary precision, despite the fact that no two blocks were alike in shape or size.

There it stood, a city crumbling, long since abandoned, but yet mute testimony to the ancient power and civilization of the Incas.

"What a spot for a town!" came breathlessly from Mike's lips. "They could see their enemies for—"

He did not finish his sentence. Something abruptly whizzed past his cheek, cutting short his words. It fell to the ground at their feet with a quiver and Andy quickly stooped over, and picked it up. It was an arrow. Wound and tied to its shaft was a bit of white paper. No sign or movement of life anywhere on the horizon betrayed the presence of the man who had shot it forth.

QUICKLY, Andy undid the string and released the paper. He smoothed it out in the palm of his hand and read:

"Come no further or Death awaits."

The brief message was unsigned. Andy crumpled it in his hand, swore hoarsely.

He turned to the men, planting his feet wide apart as he faced them and spoke.

"There's danger with every next step forward," he stated calmly. "Every man who turns back now will probably come to no harm and will find his way back to civilization safely. You can do as you please. My partner and I are going forward."

And without waiting for an answer, Andy turned his back and started forward, Mike trudging resolutely at his side. A few minutes

later when he turned his head again, not one man had fallen out of line. The light of courage and determination emboldened like a shining light each sun-tanned countenance and it was this sight that brought a faint grin of appreciation to Andy's weather-beaten face.

The shelf-like road grew narrower, until it was possible for only two men to walk abreast with a pack-burro between them. An hour passed by in grim, silent marching. There was something ominous and menacing in the very silence that held these Andean heights in its grip. Suddenly, Mike grabbed Andy's arm. His other arm pointed sharply upward.

"Look!" he cried sharply. "A landslide!"

Even as he uttered the words a rumbling sound like distant thunder sounded in the men's ears. From overhead came tumbling round, huge stones in bewildering profusion. The animals, as though sensing the danger, stopped short, pawed the ground and fidgeted dangerously.

The men cried out various directions to seek shelter. A stone struck down on the head of one of the burros and sent the animal hurtling over the side of the road down into the canyon that yawned below. Immediately after, one of the men was struck by the flying missiles, also lost his footing and plunged with a hoarse scream after the burro.

THE stones tumbled down in thicker clusters. One of them struck the ground, recoiled and rolled to Mike's feet.

He took a step outward and looked up. Much like a shadow boxer making a feint, he side-stepped a stone that missed his head by inches and then his single glance told him all he had to know. This was no avalanche but an attack. The stones were being hurled by a covey of

men concealed by overhanging ledges far up above their heads.

The narrow, shelf-like road had become a death trap!

CHAPTER VII

War



NO more diabolically clever scheme for halting and demolishing the caravan could have been devised. Incapable of repulsing, it was a grim joke, horrible, deadly in the

intensity of its purpose.

Mike took quick command of the situation. By barking his orders brusquely, he forced the men to flatten themselves against the side of the mountain so that the hurtling stones passed harmlessly over their heads. He realized the uselessness of taking pot shots at the enemy and thus exposing themselves, as many of the men wanted to do.

One more burro was lost in the same manner as had been the first; but the men were spared, save for the first who had fallen to a horrible death.

For fully ten more minutes, the air rained stones, jagged stones, round stones, flat stones, stones of all sizes. Then abruptly the attack ceased. From far overhead was heard the faint sound of men's voices, although no one could distinguish from that distance what was said.

For some twenty minutes more, under Mike's strict orders, the men hugged the steep mountainside. When it became finally certain that the avalanche had indeed halted, quick orders went down the line to proceed at top speed.

It was virtual suicide to remain where they were, the road being too narrow for even their guns to be effective. Desperately the partners

hoped that further ahead wider ground would be found.

No further attempt was made at this juncture to stop their progress from overhead and it was at a quick trot that the thoroughly shaken, but thoroughly aroused, caravan proceeded. Not a man but did not have foremost in his mind the bitter fact that one of their number had fallen victim to the unseen enemy's cruel strategy; not a man but did not pray for an opportunity for vengeance against their cowardly foe.

ABOUT a mile further ahead on their right they passed the impressive ruins of the ancient city of the Incas. Immediately after that, a wide sweep in the roadway around the side of the mountain revealed what seemed to be a level plain, thickly overgrown with tall, bushy clumps of succulent grass upon which the burros at once began to browse.

This was something like what the caravan wanted. Here they could turn and twist as they pleased. Here a white man could put up a fight, regardless of the odds.

That fight came sooner than they anticipated, and in a split second they realized why the hail-storm of stones had ceased, permitting them to proceed to this point. The onslaught started with yells from behind them, and, twisting hurriedly about, Mike and Andy saw that their rear had been cut off by a band of bareheaded Incas. They were armed with weapons that appeared to be something that was a cross between a long-barreled revolver and a sawed-off shotgun, but was neither.

What it was in reality they did not immediately find out. The missiles shot forth by these weapons were not bullets but small tufted wands, scarcely bigger than needles and nearly as thin.

Mike let out a yell and a groan

escaped his lips. "My God! Poisoned darts! Duck, men!"

The first volley passed harmlessly over their heads, but no sooner had they flattened down in the grass, than yells and shouts from in front of them made them aware that they had been pocketed from both sides.

Andy's jaw set a little more truculently. "Look!" he muttered grimly from between clenched teeth. "See that man directing the Incas to shelter? He's got a sort of uniform on. Even from this distance he looks white!"

"You're right! What's a white man doing with these fiends?"

"Search me!"

An ear-splitting scream sounded and one of their men rose up, clutching at a dart imbedded in his chest. It was nerve-racking to see his agony, listen to his death cries, for in a moment he sank to the ground, quivering slightly, but already past help.

Andy's face was white as chalk. But he did not lose his head. He clipped his orders with clear-cut precision. In a jiffy, the burros were rounded up and their tarpaulined burdens were unslashed.

"We'll have to get our guns working if we hope to stand the devils off!" muttered Mike. "This is war!"

WORKING as best they might, under cover, the men finally got the machine-guns off the backs of the burros—for guns was the precious cargo the burros had carried. Mike detailed half the company to the task of hastily assembling the weapons on the spot, while the other half returned the Incas' steady barrage with scattering volleys of revolver and rifle shots.

Hell broke loose in earnest on that mile-high plain within the very province of the clouds. The air became acrid with smoke, the bitter, throat-biting smoke of gunfire. For

half an hour the embattled caravan spewed lead at the Incas both front and rear and thus gave protection to the men who were setting up the guns with fumbling, feverish haste.

It was a fight against time. If the Incas could prevent the white men from putting the machine-guns into action, the battle was as good as won for them. But under Mike's lashing tongue and Andy's barked commands, the white men were fast moving to their goal. Possessed of that precious mettle that acknowledges no defeat save death, the men worked with amazing sureness and calmness, both in the matter of defense and in that of assembling.

Two separate sorties tried by the Incas were neatly thwarted at the outset. As soon as the natives' heads appeared above the tall grass and they began to rush forward, a bewildering, withering series of staccato explosions from the rifles snuffed out their attempt to close in.

Thereafter, for a short spell, the Incas had to be content with filling the air with their poisoned darts. On either side of Mike Donahue lay two men, their cheeks resting on the walnut butts of their rifles, men who would move no more. But Mike himself was untouched. He worked his rifle with deliberate coolness, leveling it and aiming carefully, putting sweat and blood and calmness in his shooting.

ANDY WAYNE worked with even greater deliberation, though cursing and snarling over the hot barrel of his rifle. He was nursing his shells along, using them only for sure shots at the blurred, moving forms of the Incas.

"How about those guns?" rasped Andy. "Don't take all day puttin' 'em together!"

The men at work on the assembling set up a quick, answering shout.

"Clear decks for action!" they cried with feeling. "Here go the stut-ter-guns!"

A ragged, heartfelt cheer swept the ranks of the white men as the machine-guns—three of them—were trundled to the front of their line, pointing their muzzles into the thick of the fray. Two were directed at the Incas in front and one was relegated to take care of the rear.

"All ready!" shouted Mike, his face contorted in a grin like a fiend. "Start her off, men, and give 'em hell!"

Chak-chak! Chak-chak-chak! Chak-chak!

ALL three machine-guns went into action simultaneously, with a weird singing of molten lead that descended upon the Incas like swift, pattering rain.

Again a cheer, exultant and lilt-ing, swept the ranks of the men. The bark of the three guns rose to a staccato roar as the fresh onslaught of screaming slugs raked down upon the Incas. The attack from the rear was instantly stilled. Screams and shouts were heard from the half-savage attackers. The venomous, whistling chorus of lead converged with deadly intentness upon the remaining Incas.

But the attack in front was merely redoubled in fury as soon as that from the rear ceased.

"It's that white man in uniform!" Mike shouted. "He knows how to handle men. Lay into 'em, boys, and give 'em all you got!"

The Incas' poisoned darts seemed to find the range better at this juncture, for in a twinkling the ranks of the white men were dotted with writhing, wounded and dying. The deadly barrage of the enemy swept them relentlessly.

With an agonized heart Mike Donahue saw his new-found comrades fall on every side of him.

"Andy!" he shouted. "This must stop! I can—"

"Shut up!" growled Andy. "Don't you think I hate to see this, too? What can we do?"

"Do?" returned Mike. "I'll fix it in a split second!"

He crawled cautiously to one burro that had still its tarpaulined pack untouched. With feverish fingers, almost sobbing with the speed of his efforts, he unlashd the ropes and tore off the tarpaulin from the frightened animal's back. A box almost tumbled to the ground but Mike caught it in his two arms and eased it down. With the butt of his rifle, he tore off the nailed-down cover.

Little red pencil-like sticks were packed tightly within a bed of cotton-waste. Underneath were brass detonator caps. Mike fitted one on and, protecting the thin red stick with his enfolding arm, he started to creep forward on his belly through the tall grass.

CHAPTER VIII

The Sacred Lake



POISONED darts whistled on all sides of Mike and miraculously missed him. It took but a fraction of a second for Andy to know Mike's purpose.

"Come back!" he shouted in a wild frenzy, "You must be loco! Good God, man, you can't make it! It's suicide!"

Mike only twisted his head about and grinned. "Is it? What the hell? I won't sit back and see 'em mowing our men down. I'm going out there and send those devils to hell if it's the last thing on earth I do!"

And slowly, steadily, he crept forward. The men instantly understood his purpose and began working

machine-guns and rifles with renewed vigor. Fusillade after fusillade poured from the hot muzzles of their weapons. The Incas, however, did not seem to be led astray by the sudden intensity of the barrage. They perceived the moving, swaying grass that told the story of Mike's progress, directed a deadly fire at him.

BUT that did not stop Mike. After a little interval, he zigzagged away, approaching closer and ever closer to the well-screened Incas.

He felt curiously light-hearted and exuberant. There was a smile about his lips as he crawled onward. The danger only made his blood beat the faster, but his nerves and hands were steady. The little red stick he nursed as though it were a baby, cradled tenderly in his arms. And he moved on grimly, sardonically.

He had gone about two hundred yards from his comrades when he decided that was far enough. Now came the most dangerous part of the mission. He had to get up and stand up straight in the line of that withering fire of darts. It was the work of only a second, but it was a second fraught with enough danger to last a dozen men a lifetime.

But his face did not lose its playful, yet grim, smile. Up he heaved with a sudden movement that started from his knees. Erect he stood, poised against the glare of the mountain-high sun. His right arm flashed up above his head, holding that thin red stick.

Dynamite!

The native darts sought him, searched for him, flew madly at him, whizzing by his body like a flock of angry bees.

His arms went way back and then forward. The stick of dynamite left his hand, described a wide, sweeping arc through the air. It was a clean, accurate throw.

The dynamite struck in the very

center of the Incas. There sounded horrible, terrified screams. Then a rumbling, detonating explosion.

The earth seemed to open up a deep hole and then vomit dirt and stones and rubble and the bodies of men.

As the noise ceased and the smoke of the explosion cleared, Mike saw the Incas who had escaped the effects of the dynamite running for their lives. And at their head was the man in uniform, now tattered and ripped in a dozen places, who appeared to be white. An instant later, Andy Wayne and the rest of the party rushed up to Mike's side.

Only for a second did Andy look full into Mike's face and then the intensity of his emotion forced him to turn his eyes away.

"Mike," he said softly. "Mike." His fumbling hand was outstretched and he clasped Mike's in his own, gripped it tightly. Nothing more was said between the pair, but that handclasp told more than words could convey. It was the salute of one brave man, acknowledging the courage and bravery of another.

"Let's chase after the devils," cried one of the men. "We'll wipe out every last one of 'em!"

THE Incas seemed to have taken a course that led to the lake ahead, where apparently they would be cut off from further retreat. Yet when the pursuing white men reached the shores of the quiet waters, the Incas had completely disappeared.

Yet for miles around the ground was perfectly flat and conical, offering no place of concealment and refuge. There was a small waterfall at the bottle-neck end of the lake, but here, too, none of the retreating Incas was found.

After beating around for a time, Andy ordered the party back to the grassy plain, where a camp would be pitched for the night.

Half the twenty men who had started on the journey were dead, victims of the Incas' fury. That night a simple burial was made; and through the deep silence of the mountain darkness, a watch was kept. Over a small bush-fire, Andy and Mike studied the parchment map, spread out upon their knees.

The map merely indicated by a cross—"gold here"—but gave no implicit directions for reaching it at this point. The lake was shown, even the bottle-neck end and the waterfall.

"We've come to the right place, right enough," Andy muttered. "That's all right as far as it goes. But before we see that gold, we'll see plenty of hell first."

BUT Mike was not listening. There was a faraway gleam in his eyes, as though some crazy plan were going through his mind. In reality, his mind was revolving the thought that his own ancestor, Miguel de Almagro, had drawn this map and drawn it with a purpose. The lake was clearly shown, the waterfall—

The waterfall! Mike recalled the mysterious disappearance of the retreating Incas, who had vanished as though they had ascended to the skies. Ascended to the skies! Why not descended into the bowels of the earth? If anything, that was much more possible; and besides, the gold was stored below the surface of the earth.

Suddenly the cry of the sentry was heard, ending in an incoherent gurgle. There had been no sound to disturb the night previous to the sentry's outcry, but now suddenly it was filled with the screams of men. Two of them rushed into the light of the camp-fire, clutching at their throats.

One look told the story. From their necks protruded a little tuft of feathers—like chicken feathers.

"The darts!" yelled Andy. Guns began to blaze as the men snatched up their weapons and shot wildly into the surrounding blackness. Mike had a sudden mental vision of wily Incas dispatching the poison-tipped messengers of death with stealth and utmost quiet. Grimly, he caught up his rifle and sent a hail of lead into the night. As abruptly as it had come, the poisoned dart attack ceased.

"Spread out, men!" yelled Andy. "Don't give 'em a target!"

But no more of the feather-tipped harbingers of sudden death appeared in the camp. The Incas had probably crept away, content with their night's work as already accomplished.

AN idea struck Mike at once. Without communicating with Andy, he crept out on hands and knees beyond the circle about which camp had been pitched; and silently he moved away.

A hundred yards from camp, he straightened up and moved more quickly, choosing a wide, circuitous route that would lead to the sacred lake. Bent and hunched over, he was no more than a dark blot, moving with incredible speed and quiet. Arrived at the lake, he flung himself down into the tall grass and waited.

A few minutes later, stealthy, cautious steps were heard and Mike held his breath. He could see blurred forms moving no more than twenty yards from where he lay. He saw them approach the shores of the lake and apparently dive into it and disappear, although no ripple betrayed their presence under water.

He waited until the last of them disappeared and then he moved, a step at a time, for the shore. The waterfall made pleasant, tinkling music in his ears. He came to the point where the Incas had apparently walked into the water.

He stood there a moment, frowning. Then a smile broke out on his face. Even in the darkness, he could discern the wide shelf made by a ledge of rock just below the waterfall. He remembered the parchment map. This ledge was indicated on it. Then—

Without a second's hesitation, he lowered himself down and crept forward on hands and knees for the tumbling sheet of water. An exclamation of triumph escaped his lips as he perceived a small opening, just big enough for a man, under the apparently solid ledge of rock. Overhead was the waterfall, but by crawling into this opening he would stand directly under it, protected from its spray by a wall of rock.

He smiled grimly as he lowered himself into the opening and slowly groped forward. The tumbling water was but a dull roar now, and he could no longer see it. He went forward, shoulders hunched. A few yards further on, the opening seemed to widen and heighten so that he could stand with shoulders erect and head held high.

Ahead of him stretched what appeared to be a corridor cut out of the living rock, its floor in some places jagged and uneven. It was dark with the utter darkness of an underground vault.

CHAPTER IX

The Skull of Torture



EXCEPT for the rapid intake of his own breath, there was no sound in the pit of gloom before him. Mike stood motionless within the barrier of stone, struggling vainly to see through the sinister wall of blackness. His right hand dropped into his pocket and remained

there, closed about the butt of his automatic .45.

Grim thoughts paraded through his mind. He took a slow step forward and then stood still again. It was certain that he was penetrating into the very depths of the dread society's lair. It would be only sensible to turn back now and summon his comrades—Andy and the others—to aid him.

But once in, Mike Donahue was loath to turn back. He determined to explore a little further and then go back to the camp. Besides, the gun in his pocket gave him a feeling of security.

The corridor seemed endless. Its ceiling seemed to rise higher and higher with each step, suggesting midnight chambers and black vaults in the upper reaches. At last he stopped abruptly before a door. He fumbled in the darkness until he found a knob and then slowly turned it. It yielded easily to his touch and with a little pressure, the door swung inward.

This second corridor was wider even than the first, and seemed to be lighter. Its walls and floor were, however, perfectly smooth and level. He moved on a step at a time, gun gripped tightly, ready for emergency. Abruptly he became aware of the source of the light. It came from around a "U" bend in the corridor and apparently from a lower level.

MIKE stood still, frozen into immobility as suddenly there came to his ears the sound of guttural voices. He waited, but nothing happened. The voices continued their low, even speech.

He crept forward on tiptoe around the corridor's turn—and an amazing sight met his eyes. His mouth almost fell open in gaping astonishment and his keen, dark eyes shone with the immensity of his discovery.

The corridor ceased abruptly and was now like a raised platform. It looked down into a wide-mouthed open pit in which half-naked men, unmistakably Incas, were working with soft-tipped pick and shovel mining alluvial gold!

There it lay in great mounds, dull-tinted gold of rare purity! Here was enough to make a man a millionaire several hundred times over! This was the great prize that the glorious Miguel de Almagro had found and put down on a parchment map!

IT took Mike Donahue's breath away and left him gasping. Now he could understand the strength of the Society of the Gold Skull. They had all the wealth they could possibly need here at their disposal, in the form of pure gold!

There was a smelting furnace in the dim, shadowy background at which the gold was refined on the spot! What a layout! Millions upon millions of dollars' worth of gold!

Satisfied that he had seen enough, dizzied with excitement, Mike turned back to retrace his steps to the ledge under the waterfall. Andy would be getting worried over his disappearance, and Mike was anxious to impart to his partner the astonishing discovery he had made. He found the same "U" turn in the corridor and then stopped short, bewildered.

Where he had noted but one corridor before there were now two, branching off at acute angles from each other. Which one to follow? Through which had he come?

He chose the one on the left and hurried down it. He had not gone more than a hundred yards when he knew he had made a mistake. Here were doors on every side and he could not remember a single door in the other passageway. Then there came to his ears the sound of voices. His heart beat more rapidly.

One of those voices was a woman's. He recognized it at once—Aymara's!

He crept up to the door from whence the talking came and listened intently. The voices were speaking English, although he could not discern what was being said. For a second he hesitated; then shrugging, he put a hand on the latch and slowly lifted it. At the same time, his hand brought forth the automatic and held it firmly before him.

AS the door swung slowly, quietly open, the voices within ceased and in a second Mike had thrown the door wide. Facing him was Aymara, eyes wide with fright and astonishment. Beside her stood a tall, white-haired man in a curious sort of uniform, the coat of which obviously did not match the close-fitting trousers. He seemed to shrink before the gun in Mike's hand, his gnarled hands working spasmodically.

Mike gave the muzzle of the gun a warning shake. "Not a sound out of you," he whispered, "or you'll get a slug in your insides!" He turned at once, closed the door behind him, and then advanced into the room.

"Aymara!" he said to the girl. "You—here!" He was a little confused, not knowing what to say next:

Her hands were clenched tightly at her sides. "How did you get in here?" she whispered, two bright spots of color in her cheeks.

"I found the secret entrance under the falls," he told her, "and so I walked in."

"Oh!" Her hands flew to her agitated lips. "Get out at once! Bring help, but don't stay here alone. I was just this moment talking with my father about slipping out of here and warning you. Tonight, before dawn, Tao means to wipe out your men!"

Mike disregarded the last part of

her outburst. "Father!" he snapped. "This man?"

She nodded her head wonderingly. "Yes, he is my father. As you suspected, I am white, not Inca."

Mike turned his gaze on the weather-beaten face of the old man. "You're the man who directed battle against my comrades. You killed white men! Renegade!" There was venom and contempt in the sting and lash of Mike's words.

The old man seemed to recoil, retire into a shell. His upper lip curled and twisted in a sardonic smile that was full of bitterness and self-mockery. In a deep, throaty voice, he said:

"You are right, young man. I am that man! I am the one they call the White Inca! But if you hate Tao Ramirez as you would a snake, I hate him more! I hate him as a man would a weird, haunting monster, a cruel—"

"Do I hear my name taken in vain?"

The door stood wide open. Just beyond the threshold stood Tao Ramirez—tall, dark-visaged, proud-miened. It was he who had spoken.

"I wouldn't raise that gun," he spoke again, as Mike's gun arm started to come up. His voice demanded obedience, seemed to take for granted that anything he said would be automatically complied with. "Look behind you!"

AGAINST his better judgment, Mike turned his head. The wall seemed to have slid back, revealing a dark aperture in which stood three men. Sticks that were hollow tubes were held in their hands as rifles would be held.

The rasping sibilant syllables from Tao's lips were heard again. "Those men carry blow-pipes, or rather gun-pipes. I have improved on the lore of my ancestors and adopted the ancient blow-pipe to suit modern needs;

it shoots, from a trigger, a poisoned dart.

"You may not know much about it, Mr. Donahue, but I'm sure Captain Walkely and his charming daughter are well aware of it. They have often seen how the dart kills men. So, Donahue, *drop that gun!*"

MIKE hesitated momentarily, caught a glimpse of those pipes pointing at him and realized he hadn't a chance to use his gun. A sixth sense shrieked at him to act while there was yet time, to hurl himself upon these men before it was too late. But cold reason told him that before the gun came up those feathered darts dipped in deadly aconitine would dispose of him.

Slowly the gun slipped from his fingers and fell with a dull thud to the floor.

At once Tao came into the chamber and from the rear came the three Incas with the gun-pipes. Tao stood with folded arms before the American, regarding him with frank curiosity. He was saying:

"I have been expecting you, Miguel Donahue, but not alone. I have been very curious about you. My priests have been delving into magic and prophecy. They have predicted that I must overcome a man who is a descendant of the Spanish *conquistadores*, lest he overcome and kill me.

"They predict a dire prophecy unless I dispose of that man, as once his ancestors disposed of my illustrious forebear. Ever since they delivered this prophecy to me, I was certain that that man was you, that indeed the blood of *conquistadores* flows in your veins.

"And so, Miguel Donahue, to repay you for attempting to pit your foolish intelligence and courage against mine, you will die in the Gold Skull. As for Captain Walkely, his usefulness to me is at an end. He will betray me first chance he

gets. Therefore, he will die with you."

The words were slow, methodical and tinged with the gloating sense of unlimited power. Mike stared up into the face of the owner of the voice and regretted at once having dropped his gun. His fists clenched at his sides.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the three Incas behind him. He saw the lovely, terrified face of Aymara and remembered that Tao had not mentioned her at all. He probably had other plans for her disposal. Now was the time to act, if at all. Where before the Incas had held the gun-pipes in instant readiness for use, they now stood to one side, ebony tubes lowered. Even without the gun, Mike figured he had a better chance now than he had had before.

Without warning, his right fist came up from the hip for Tao's head. The Inca sprang back a step with uncommon agility and stopped the blow with his shoulder. At once the three underlings pounced on Mike. Their combined weight snowed him under and down he went to the floor.

HE was aware that the old man, Captain Walkely, was striving to help him and that Tao was struggling with him. He threw off one of the Incas, rose to his knee and then suddenly the other two released him and he was free. But as he jumped up, one caught his arms from behind, planted a cruel knee in the small of his back and forced him back. The other caught his feet just below the knees and swung him off the floor.

The third rushed to Tao's assistance and the same treatment was meted out to the white-haired Captain Walkely. Thus the two white men were borne from the chamber—prisoners.

Heartfelt curses dribbled from Mike's tortured lips. As he twisted his head around, he noted that Ay-mara was gone.

"She ran away in the midst of the fight," Tao intoned, seeming to divine the reason for Mike's eyes roving the room. "But she will not get away. My men will stop her before she has gone very far. And now, my friend, we will test the prophecy of my priests and you will die in the Gold Skull!"

STRUGGLE as he might, Mike was held in a firm, relentless grip by the two Incas and carried down the length of the high-ceilinged corridor. From somewhere came three clangs of a huge gong—dull, prevailing and mysterious. Abruptly the group came to a huge door which was opened before them and they were ushered into a room.

A single glance told Mike that this was a temple. Men with shaven heads stood about in silence

The roof was painted gold with a symbol of the sun in the center pouring forth its healing rays. There was not a stone or brick or tile that was not carved or graven with a design of this same sun deity. There was an altar, topped by a gold-cloth canopy and a huge chair like a throne. But in the very center of the room stood the object that caught and held Mike's horrified gaze.

It was a skull, hideously large, made entirely of gold. This was the central symbol of the Inca society. Instead of teeth the hideous mouth was fitted with circular knives; and instead of eyelids there were smaller knives in the eye sockets.

Men instantly surrounded Mike and Captain Walkely, while Tao ascended the steps that led to the throne-like chair. He uttered a few words and instantly men came in, bearing braziers filled with live coals which they poured into the

bottom of the skull. As Tao then rose, all shuffling feet subsided and the men slightly inclined their heads.

Tao clapped his hands together sharply and two men went forward to the skull and pulled it apart so that the nose became its axis. Two others dragged Mike forward and placed him on what was like a seat. Below him burned the bright coal fire. Then the skull was pushed together again and Mike found his hands thrust through the eyes of the gold skull while his feet protruded through the horrible symbol's mouth.

And then he realized that the Gold Skull was an instrument of torture as unique and as ingenious as was possible. The purpose of the fire was not to burn him as he had at first imagined, but to set the machinery of the thing into motion. And that began soon enough.

Then he saw that the mouth and eyes, fitted with the circular knives that looked as sharp as razors, were *beginning to close!*

The mouth and eyes moved with infinitesimal slowness, but Mike saw that when they would come at last firmly together, they would snip off his arms and legs like paper!

VERY slowly, almost imperceptibly, the grinning skull mouth began to come together. Hardly a fraction of a second behind, the eyes were closing as though in sleep.

As if this were not enough in the way of all that cruel deviltry could devise, above the skull, the top of which was uncovered, there swung back and forward, pendulum-like, a sharp and circular knife that very slowly, very gradually descended. The same machinery worked that very knife as worked the mouth and eyes; and so wonderfully was the whole amazing instrument fashioned and so accurate had been the calculations of whoever had contrived it, that the knife could in-

flict no mortal wound upon the victim until the mouth and eyes had done their work!

Small wonder that Mike's teeth gritted together and from his lips was breathed a silent prayer for deliverance! He could hear the machinery, the driving-chains, the revolving, clicking cog-wheels, incessant and monotonous. It was a sound not unlike the deliberate ticking of a monster clock.

And with every second he was in greater torment, in greater agony of expectation. With every passing second he was nearer death.

CHAPTER X

A Prophecy Is Fulfilled



HOW long he sat a prisoner in the Gold Skull, watching the slow, methodical closing of the mouth and eyes, Mike Donahue had no way of knowing. The horror of

his position came home to him in a great wave of sickness and blackness that came near engulfing and sapping the last ounce of strength from his body.

Straining forward, lips bared over his teeth in a snarl, he made a desperate, mad attempt to free himself. Vicious pains stabbed through his upper arms and thighs as unyielding metal clamps, that had automatically closed with the closing of the skull, ate into his defenseless flesh.

A moan came from his opened lips as his shoulders were wrenched upward and backward by the force of his sudden lunge. And the effort itself availed him nothing, stopped nothing, merely proved to him that escape was impossible—that he was utterly powerless to halt the horrible death that lay in store for him.

And then he heard the hateful, rasping sibilants of Tao's speech. "With your death, the God of the Sun will be appeased and will shine upon his people with benevolence and good fortune. He will bring once more peace and good-will to his faithful subjects and the throne of the Incas will be a glory everlasting for—"

Suddenly, Tao's speech was cut short. Mike strained forward but could not see what was taking place in the temple. He heard rapid speech and pattering footsteps; and following that a harsh, guttural uproar of angry voices.

And then he heard Tao shout: "Slay the white devils before they set a single foot into our holy midst!"

Then came another voice, quick, full of humility: "But, sire, they have guns and dynamite!"

"Then the poisoned darts. The white devils must perish!"

Crack! Crack!

The staccato explosion of rifles sounded like reverberating thunder in the underground passages.

"The white men!" was shouted on every side. "They have come!"

IT seemed to Mike within the confines of the Gold Skull that the very air was raining sound and splintering steel. He distinguished the dry crack of automatics and the louder, flatter report of rifles in swift, overwhelming confusion. And all the time the mouth and eyes of the skull were coming slowly together and the circular knife overhead took lower dips for his head.

He became aware that the Incas had abandoned the temple and had rushed out into the passageway, leaving him behind. Then, unbelievably, he heard what seemed to be a catch in the smooth working of the machinery. There was a momentary stop in the soft click-click and then

the whirring machinery resumed again. Again it stopped like an unwound clock, and this time Mike realized that someone was trying to force the skull open and release him!

The thought made him dizzy with thankfulness. And a few seconds later, with a dull rumble and groan, the machinery stopped altogether. Slowly the huge skull was forced open and Mike felt someone fumbling at the metal clamps with hands that trembled as if from shaking palsy.

In a few seconds he was free. His rescuer helped him down off the little raised seat and supported him as his tottering feet touched the ground. It was Captain Walkely, white-faced and trembling. Mike could not speak; he only grasped the old man's hand and gave it a brief shake. Captain Walkely gripped him by the arm.

"Do as I tell you," he whispered. "There's not a moment to lose, Follow me. I know where there are guns. Come!"

OUT in the passageway, the sounds of the battle was terrific and deafening. Screams mingled with the sound of exploding guns. From a distance Mike heard a mighty bellow above the din of the affray, and he recognized the voice as belonging to Andy Wayne.

Captain Walkely sped down to a turn in the corridor, and yanked open a door that was obviously his arsenal. He shoved a revolver into Mike's eager hand and took one for himself. Together the two white men returned to the passageway and ran toward the sound of the battle, centered about the main entrance to the subterranean corridors.

As they ran forward, the Incas turned and recognized them. A quick volley flew over their heads. Mike and Captain Walkely opened

fire at once, mowing down four of the Incas between them in the first burst of screaming lead.

This sudden respite gave the attackers in front their chance, and they took it like yelling madmen. In a twinkling they had closed up the gap between them and the Incas. The fighting became too close to use weapons and the white men, wielding their fists, soon had the upper hand of the natives, forcing them back.

AS the first wave of Incas broke for cover, Mike and the white-haired captain shot down half a dozen of them, wounding some, killing the others. But when the others began to flee pell-mell, the two white men ducked for cover behind a door.

A few seconds later, Andy Wayne was at Mike's side, thumping him wildly on the back.

"I thought we wouldn't find you alive," he yelled. "But we wanted to give the fiends a taste of fighting as is fighting, before we took off."

"How did you know I was here?" Mike demanded.

"That girl, Aymara," said Andy, eyes shining with excitement. "She rushed into camp and said her father and you were to be killed in the Gold Skull. She told me that if we'd make a quick sortie we might overpower the Incas, even though they outnumbered us twenty to one. Well, here we are!"

"Where is she?" asked Captain Walkely, anxiously.

"Safe! Outside! I left an armed man with her!" Andy rallied his handful of men. "Let's push on!"

With wild cheers, the adventurers rushed into the deep passage, encountering no opposition. At the door of the temple, however, there came a withering volley of darts from the Incas. Two of the victorious party went down at once, but the others, undaunted, rushed on, and

forced through the temple's doors before a second volley could be forthcoming.

As Mike went into the temple, he saw Tao, pulling at what looked to be a bell-cord which hung from the golden ceiling. A second later a small section of the wall moved back, revealing an opening through which was another passageway. Like an arrow shot from a bow, Mike sprang at the leader.

With a snarl, vicious and cunning, Tao turned to meet him. Up shot his knee, catching Mike in the groin. In another instant he was upon the American, his fingers clutched about his adversary's throat in a murderous grip.

"I will yet defeat the prophecy," he hissed into Mike's face. "Even if I am to die, you will die with me." His strong, brown fingers tightened convulsively and the room began to grow black before Mike's eyes. He felt his consciousness fast slipping from him.

He struggled to unseat the Inca, but his efforts proved fruitless. There was a vast singing in his ears, a throbbing like a drum in his throat and then suddenly the Inca's grip loosened. His jaw dropped. He looked incredulous and his two hands fumbled at his breast.

MIKE scrambled to his feet, stared at the man. Tao coughed, blood dribbled from his mouth and he fell against Mike, slid away. Life went out of him with a wrenching gasp as his form hit the floor. He fell with a convulsive shudder. His legs straightened out tautly and his two arms flung themselves straight out as though he were crucified.

Behind Mike stood Captain Walkely, smoke still curling from his gun muzzle. The Incas, still fighting, did not realize that their chief had been slain until one of the priests bent over his form, cried out in terror,

pointing at the still form of the corpse:

"The prophecy! Tao is dead! His body has assumed the form of a cross. We are doomed! Again Mount Cuzco will awaken! Again the god's mighty anger will engulf us. Brethren, flee for your lives. We are lost!"

THE Incas seemed transfixed with horror. They stood still, numb and rigid, staring down at the form of Tao. In another instant they recovered themselves and bundled through the opening which Tao had forced open in the wall. They were like fanatics gone mad. Their eyes rolled until the whites showed and their teeth chattered.

"Doom!" they uttered. "Doom! The prophecy!"

Captain Walkely grabbed Mike's arm. "Come on," he grated. "Get your men together. It's time we got out of here, too. Listen!" It was a low dull rumble like distant thunder. The ground under their feet began to tremble slightly.

"That's Mount Cuzco, the volcano under Lake Titicaca. It's becoming active again. Get out of here before we are buried alive! Hurry!"

It didn't take much urging to speed the men back to the entrance under the falls. By that time the thunder had become ear-splitting and as they came to the open air they saw that huge spouts of water were ascending in great sheets out of the lake, exactly as though hurled from a giant's mouth. Trembling and terribly frightened, they found Aymara and one of the men waiting for them. At once, they sped across the level, grassy plain until Captain Walkely decided they were safe at last.

The lake had been transformed into a seething cauldron from which lava and hissing water ascended sky-high. Before their eyes, they saw the water gradually disappear like escaping

steam and molten, white-hot lava take its place.

"Before that volcano goes to sleep again," muttered Captain Walkely, "the entire mountain will be transformed. The lake has already disappeared and every entrance to that underground mine will be shut up.

"I heard the prophecy many years ago," he added to Mike. "It's exactly as Tao told you. When he died—the last of the Inca chieftains—then Mount Cuzco would mourn his passing. According to legend, it had happened once before when Miguel de Almagro killed Tao's ancestor. That time, the lake was created by the volcano's eruption. This time, it is demolished entirely."

Mike looked from Captain Walkely's face to that of Aymara. "I have been meaning to ask this question a long time. How is it that you became the White Inca and your daughter Tao's aide?"

A shadow passed over the old man's face. "Tao needed someone who knew how to handle weapons and train an army. He'd heard of me, knew I had a daughter. He kidnapped her and then me. Me, he had sent up here, while my daughter he kept with him. If I tried to escape, he threatened to have Aymara tortured to death. I knew him well enough to be certain he'd keep his word. Her, he threatened with my death should she attempt to escape from him.

"Thus he kept us both at his beck and call with that threat. It was not until you and your partner drove him out of Lima that he came up to the mines and thus reunited Aymara and me."

His voice broke slightly with emo-

tion. "It was a wonderful moment when I put that bullet into him. I saved a brace of revolvers for the job, had them hidden and ready, but I could not bring myself to kill him because I was afraid of what would happen to Aymara at the hands of his followers.

"I believe Tao was really descended of the ancient Inca emperors. Had he lived, he would undoubtedly have put to the sword every white person on this continent. The world is that much better off for his death!"

THE crashing thunder of Mount Cuzco's eruption seemed to have come to an end.

Wearily, Andy Wayne sank back to the ground, stared blankly at the havoc the volcano had wrought. "There goes the gold," he muttered. "We had our hands on it, but now it's lost to us. That mine has become a death trap for Tao's followers—poor devils. But it's no good to us!"

"No good!" demanded Mike, bristling. "Andy Wayne, you're crazy! Look there where the waterfall used to be. We'll come back with modern machinery and tunnel down right at that point. It will be a cinch.

"The gold is there. It's ours—by right of conquest! All we have to do is take pick and shovel and get it!"

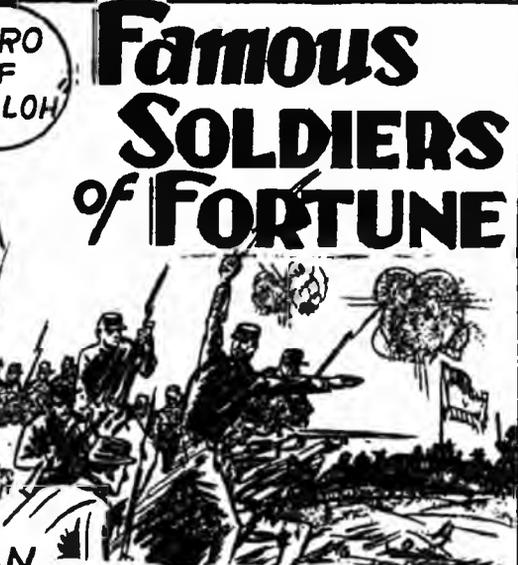
Andy sprang up, face shining with excitement. "By heaven, Mike, you're right!"

But Mike wasn't listening. Mike was gazing down into Aymara's lovely face, saying: "I thought that only finding the gold would make me happy, but I've found something far more precious than gold—if she'll have me!"

NEXT MONTH: Whirlwind Action, Stirring Conflict, and the Sinister Menace of Jungle Depths—An Exciting Complete Book-Length Novel of Haiti—DRUMS OF EBONY, by ARTHUR J. BURKS. A Real Thriller!

HERO
OF
SHILOH

Famous SOLDIERS of FORTUNE



GENERAL
WILLIAM T. SHERMAN,

WHOSE ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE CIVIL WAR
WERE CLASSED AS "THE MOST STRIKING
AND BRILLIANT OF ANY OFFICER,
FEDERAL OR CONFEDERATE."

GRADUATING FROM WEST POINT
AT THE AGE OF 20, YOUNG "BILL"
SHERMAN SOON ATTRACTED ATTEN-
TION BY HIS DARING FIGHTING
AGAINST THE SEMINOLES AND
IN THE MEXICAN WAR HE
WAS MADE A CAPTAIN.

WHILE BEST KNOWN FOR HIS
FAMOUS "MARCH TO THE SEA" IT
WAS AT THE CIVIL WAR BATTLE OF
SHILOH THAT GENERAL SHERMAN
WON HIS FIRST FAME. HE WAS
TWICE WOUNDED AND HAD THREE
HORSES SHOT FROM UNDER HIM.
HE SOON BECAME A POPULAR
HERO AND WAS OFFERED A "HIGH
PLACE IN THE WAR DEPARTMENT."



ADOLPH PEGOUD,

THE FIRST FRENCH ACE, WHO
MADE AIR HISTORY BY BEING
THE FIRST TO "LOOP THE LOOP"
AND FIRST TO JUMP IN A PARACHUTE
FROM A HEAVIER THAN AIR CRAFT,
WAS SHOT DOWN DURING THE
FIRST "DOG FIGHT" OF THE
AIR, IN AUGUST
1915.



TOMMY
ARMOUR,

- THE FAMOUS GOLF CHAMPION,
WAS DRIVING A BRITISH TANK WHEN IT WAS
OVERTURNED BY A SHELL EXPLOSION.
LATER, HE TOOK UP GOLF TO QUIET HIS
SMELL-SHOCKED NERVES.



GENERAL FRANCIS SUTTON -

THE ONE ARMED FIGHTING ENGINEER WHO HAS LIVED A LIFE OF ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE FACING PERIL AFTER PERIL.

AS A YOUNG ENGINEER IN SOUTH AMERICA SUTTON SOON FOUND HIMSELF IN THE THICK OF MANY THRILLING EXPLOITS. DURING THE WORLD WAR WHILE WITH THE ROYAL ENGINEERS HE LOST HIS RIGHT ARM BY A BOMB EXPLOSION WHILE FIGHTING TURKS AT GALLIOLI.

LATER, IN DUST OF FURTHER ADVENTURE, SUTTON VISITED MANY COUNTRIES. WHILE IN CHINA COMMANDING AN ARMY DIVISION FOR GENERAL MAUDKEL, SUTTON WON A \$50,000 SHANGHAI SWEEPSTAKES. SUTTON RETIRED TO CANADA BUT SOON RETURNED TO AID THE CHINESE AT JEHO.



CAPT. ALBERT BALL,

ENGLAND'S SCHOOLBOY ACE, WHO SCORED 44 OFFICIAL VICTORIES BEFORE HE WAS 20 YEARS OLD. IN 12 DAYS - APRIL 25TH TO MAY 6TH, 1916 - YOUNG BALL FOUGHT 26 COMBATS, DESTROYING 11 ENEMY SHIPS AND SHOOTING TWO OTHERS DOWN OUT OF CONTROL.

AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH BALL WAS CREDITED WITH 47 VICTORIES. HE HAD RECEIVED EVERY DECORATION THE BRITISH ARMY COULD GIVE AND WAS THE WORLD'S LEADING ACE.

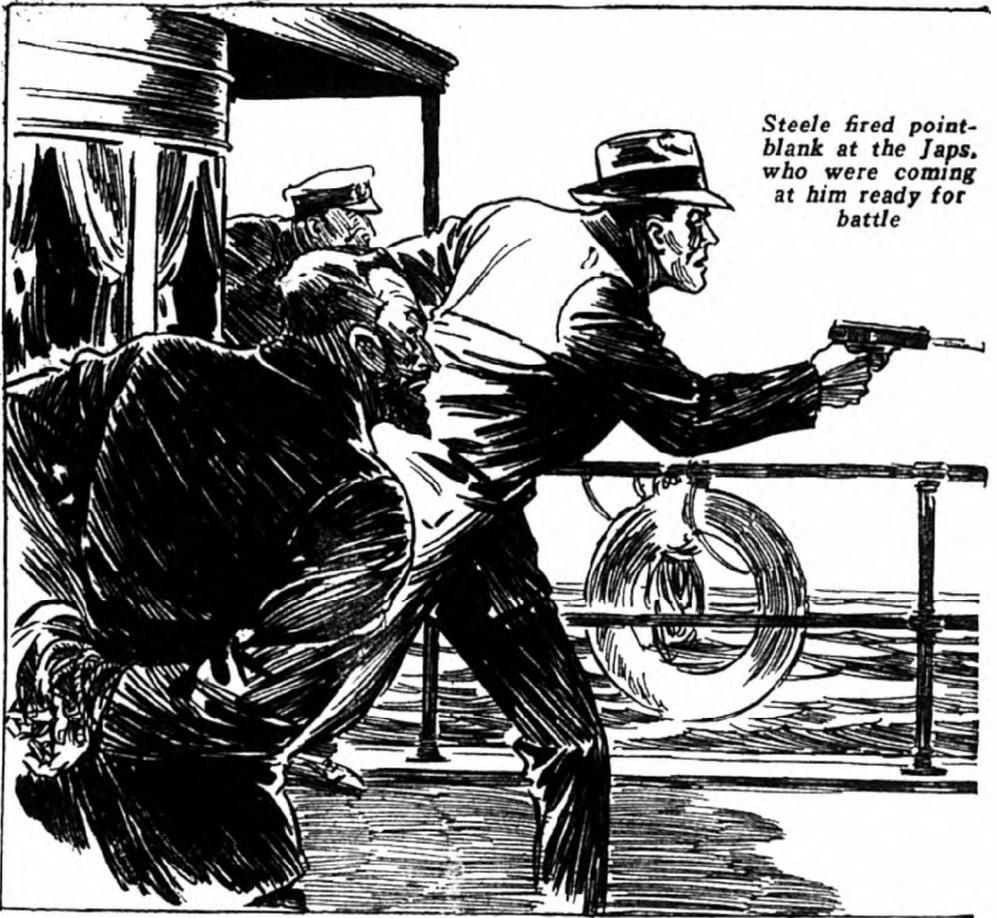


"THE TRENCH OF BAYONETS"

IS LOCATED NEAR VERDUN, FRANCE. DURING THE ATTACK ON VERDUN, THE FRENCH TROOPS, PREPARING TO CHARGE WITH BAYONETS, WERE ABOUT TO SURMOUNT THE TRENCH WHEN A GERMAN SHELL EXPLODED AND BURIED THE FRENCH UNIT, LEAVING ONLY THE TOPS OF THEIR BAYONETS SHOWING ABOVE THE MUD.

A
*Complete
Novelette*

EMPEROR



CHAPTER I

Two Hours to Live

THE prison cell was small and stifling. Batterson Steele stamped out the butt of his last cigarette, and thrust his nose between the bars of the door.

The Foreign Legionnaire on guard halted and poked his bayonet menacingly toward Steele.

"Get back!" he snarled.

"Brave *soldat*," jeered Steele. "Some day I'll catch you without

that toad-sticker and see what makes you tick."

The Legionnaire stared at him silently for a space and then burst into a roar of laughter. "Some day, say you! Hah, that is to laugh. In two hours, my cabbage, you will be quite dead."

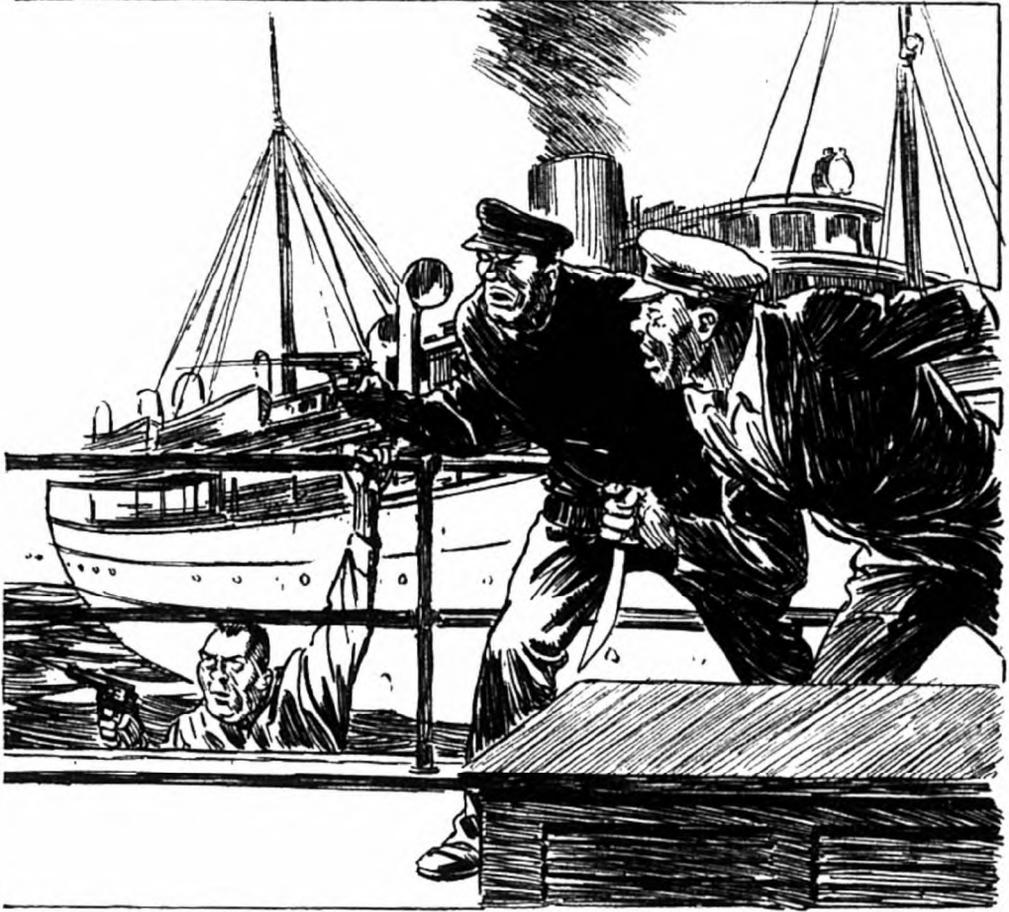
Steele's thin gray eyes did not widen, nor did his massive bulk give the slightest indication of the astonishment the soldier's words conveyed. Dead! In two hours! That was impossible. This was peace-

An Incredible Conspiracy for World Conquest

of ASIA

By **FREDERICK C. PAINTON**

Author of "Skies of Doom," etc.



time; and even the French dare not murder a secret agent. The worst that could happen to him was a long term of imprisonment which he would shorten by escape.

"In two hours they come to bring you to trial," the soldier smirked. "I follow you up the corridor, yes, and as I do I stumble—oh, so accidentally. My rifle, it explodes. You are dead. What a misfortune!" He roared again with laughter.

"How very convenient," Steele thought grimly. "I am sent by Jaff-

rey to open General Le Marche's safe and take several papers. I am trapped there by French Secret Service agents. Now I'll merely vanish."

He got up restlessly and tested the iron bars of his small window. They were sunk in concrete and immovable. Outside the street noises of Algiers came muttering into his ears.

He climbed down and cursed. Steele's young body, glowing with health and strength, craved action.

He listened for a space to the

Hatched in the Warped Brain of a Sinister Fiend

rhythmic thud of the soldier's *brodequins*. Then, suddenly he sat up alert.

New sounds came from the corridor! Footsteps. They were coming for him then. He got up and flexed his muscles. Toward him came the sounds of feet, and then the Legionnaire unlocked the heavy iron-barred cell door.

Into the room glided a woman in the habiliments of a nun. They made her bundlesome in black, but the white cloth that surrounded her face could not hide her youth and her beauty.

"God be with you," she said to the guard. "I have come because I was sent."

"It is well, sister. He meets God presently, this one, and he should have some one to make the introduction, yes." The guard grinned evilly.

He entered behind the nun. Steele stood taut, his body tensed for a spring to grab the rifle.

The next instant the nun swung with incredible swiftness. Her hand darted out of the voluminous black cloth of her habit. There came a small cracking sound, and her handkerchief pressed against the sentry's mustache. He made a feeble gasp and then staggered and fell like a struck ox.

INSTANTLY the nun swung on Steele. From under her garments she dragged a surplice, a broad-brimmed hat with a shallow crown.

"Quick!" she cried in a low, thrilling voice. "Put these on. They will be here any time now."

"Swell," Steele chuckled, and stepped into the surplice, put on the hat. His black trousers and shoes fitted the general appearance of a priest. She gave him a long rosary of black beads to string around his neck, and thick-lensed glasses that completely distorted his face.

"If any one speaks," she directed, "let me answer."

Then she reached a fourth time into the thick nun's garments and a small-calibered Luger automatic was pressed into Steele's hand. He sighed for pure joy.

The girl stepped over the senseless soldier and glided silently down the corridor. Steele followed, the gun clutched in his hand inside the surplice. They moved swiftly and encountered no one until the main door to the cobbled courtyard was reached. Here a sergeant bowed and touched his hat.

AS they made toward the huge gate that led out of the *cascerne* to Marshal Lyautey Avenue, a captain, the very man who had arrested Steele, approached. He touched his *kepi*, gave the supposed nun an appreciative glance, and then stared curiously at Steele.

"You go early, my father," he said. "There is a man you might—*sacre nom de Dieu!* What is this?" His voice rose to a roar and he leaped at Steele. "Help!" he yelled. "This is the *espion*."

Steele met the leap with a savage hook to the jaw that knocked the officer back against the steel-bound door. The girl had already passed through. The sentry raised his rifle.

"*Arretez*," he screamed, and fired from the hip.

The crash of the explosion drowned out the biting crack of the Luger automatic. Steele's slug caught the soldier in the left hip, dropped him sprawling. Then Steele was through the opening.

At the wheel of a speedy Fiat roadster sat the girl. He lunged into it, and they tore down the hill under full throttle, with Arabs leaping affrightedly from under the wheels. As she drove, the girl ripped the head veil from her face, and the

starched white headgear followed in a moment.

"Off with the surplice," she snapped. "The sight of two of us, driving a car, would arouse suspicion. We are both dead unless we clear this town in ten minutes!"

They wheeled past the Hotel Alletti and took the road that curved around the inner bay of Algiers. They ripped through streets lined with palms, and finally came to the edge of the desert that stretched away to the south like a sheen of yellow velvet.

HERE was a large square house nearly hidden by palms and bougainvillea. The girl wheeled the car into the driveway and leaped out.

"Come," she said peremptorily. "We have approximately twenty minutes before the gendarmes arrive."

As she turned toward the house, the rest of the nun's habit dropped, leaving her clad in a white sport suit that fitted her long-limbed, slender body like the sheath to a sword. Steele left his own habit and bareheaded, with white shirt torn and black trousers crumpled, strode swiftly after her.

As they approached the door it opened, and a tall, angular man with a long, gloomy face stepped aside. "Thank God, Miss Janet, you got 'im an' yerself awye. The marster is wyting anxious in the drawin' room, 'e is."

She led the way into a broad, low room where, despite the heat of the day, a blaze burned in the fireplace.

"It is done, Manon," she said simply.

Steele, pressing after her, saw a thin, bent man arise from a chair before the fire. The man wore a muffler around his neck, and a light topcoat. But his head was bare and from its top rose a thick shock of pure white hair like a mane. His



Steele's arms, perfectly co-ordinated, closed around the potentate

face was dark, his eyes large and shrewd. And below a hooked, imperious nose, was a coal-black mustache. His cheeks were sunken, his skin sallow with age, yet the outline of his face was noble, impressive.

"We may thank fortune, Batterson Steele," he said in a deep sonorous voice, "that our efforts were in time."

CHAPTER II

An Amazing Mission

THE girl sank down wearily, now that the strain was over. Steele took a chair near her, his gaze fixed curiously on this strange, bent old man.

"Your name is Batterson Steele?" the old fellow said crisply. "Operative Number One for Hugh L. Jaffrey, of the special service section of the United States Secret Service? You speak five languages, you are a

dead shot, and expert with the foils?"

"Yes, but where does this catechism get us?"

"You are a brave man, Batterson Steele," said Manon Zero, "and I have need of such. I wish to employ you. You may name your own salary and I will give you an unlimited expense account, and all the assistance you require. Do you accept?"

"I am still, while free, a Government operative," Steele reminded Manon Zero.

The old man reached into his overcoat and pulled out a letter.

Steele took it and read:

If you can pull Bat Steele from the French claws, you can have him for your great purpose.

Hugh L. Jaffrey.

Steele smiled thinly and handed it back. "Sufficient. I accept. What's to be done?"

"You would know General Le Marche anywhere, would you not?"

"Yes."

"Then you will make another try for those papers—under my auspices—and this time you should succeed."

OUTSIDE the mud wall that surrounded the estate, was an eight-passenger Breguet cabin airplane faced into the wind.

Manon Zero led the way to it, and Steele helped him into the cabin, and then placed himself next to the girl. He perceived that there were two pilots. The chief pilot came back, touching his white cap respectfully.

"You might look to the machine-guns, La Roque," said Manon Zero pleasantly. "We may have trouble. You have plenty of gasoline, have you not?"

"Yes, sir, for nearly twice the run."

The whine of the inertia starters cut through the silence. The motors roared. They began to move. Steele

looked back toward the house and saw two cars draw up with a terrific skid.

When the plane banked back at low altitude over the house, popping flashes came from four blue-uniformed men. Steele thumbed his nose. There was a military airdrome back of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Africa, but they'd have a tough time catching this ship. It flew low over the inner bay and then struck straight north across the glittering Mediterranean.

IT was dark when the Breguet began to slant down from eighteen thousand feet altitude. The twin motors were cut, the lights were off. Cloud banks had hid them from view. Silently they were sliding down to the black land, and none would hear them.

When the earth blackness threatened to engulf them, the co-pilot came back, threw three magnesium flares out of the door. They lit the ground below and the ship struck, hopped twice like a grasshopper and then coasted to a stop.

The co-pilot helped Manon Zero into a huge camel's hair overcoat and out of the plane. Steele helped the girl down. By the light of the flare now he saw a huge Renault limousine parked to one side, where a path led down through a valley in the surrounding hills. The pilots stayed behind and Steele wondered why until suddenly a gigantic flare of yellow flame gave the explanation. The Breguet ship was a mass of roaring fire.

"What's the idea?" demanded Steele. "That plane's worth forty thousand dollars."

"Planes can be traced," replied the girl shortly. "If you remain with us you will cease to think in terms of money."

Steele's eyes blinked. "Where are we?"

"Normandy, eighty kilometers from Paris," came the rejoinder. "Come."

The three of them sat in the rear of the car and the two pilots, now strangely metamorphosed into a chauffeur and a footman in uniform, climbed into the front. The limousine got swiftly under way and ploughed through the black night.

THEY arrived in Paris in precisely an hour and ten minutes. Instead of going to the Crillon or the George V, where wealthy men usually stay, the car turned finally into the Rue Pierre Cherron, to halt before the Hotel Chateau Frontenac.

"Janet, you take a taxicab to your usual place," Manon Zero directed. "I'll stay with the car." He turned to Steele. "A room has been reserved for you here. In it you will find clothing of all sorts. I hope they will fit. We did the best we could. After you have bathed and changed, you will leave at midnight."

The old man looked at his wrist-watch.

"You will enter the apartment number sixteen-bis at forty-nine Boulevard Chantilly at twelve-fifteen. On the right side of the room as you enter you will see a very splendid Gobelin tapestry. Behind it is a wall safe. The combination is V-two-e-six-d-nine. In it you will find certain papers. Bring them back here, and I will be awaiting you. That is all for now."

"That is General Le Marche's apartment?" asked Steele.

"It is, but not under that name."

Steele shook his head. "He knows me. Hadn't I better have a disguise?"

Manon Zero clucked impatiently.

"He should not be there. But then— Give him your bag, Janet. In it, Steele, you will find dyes and paraffin."

No one questioned his appearance in the small residence hotel. His

room was waiting, and as Manon Zero had said, clothing for every occasion was there, and also some new expensive luggage. Steele luxuriated in the bath, and whistled happily as he shifted to a stiff-bosomed shirt and dinner jacket. When he found a splendid little Colt .38 and shoulder holster among the effects supplied, he abandoned the Luger which he had carried since his escape.

At a quarter to midnight, he emerged from the hotel and hailed a taxicab. If he had any compunction about this burglary, it did not reveal itself in his clean-shaved face.

CHAPTER III

Midnight Intruder

THE apartment house at 49 Boulevard Chantilly was one of the larger and more modern ones that had invaded Paris after the war. The *concierge* took one look at this fashionable young man, touched his cap and stepped aside. Steele, shifting the automatic from the shoulder holster to his right-hand pocket, went up carelessly and halted before the proper door.

He tested it gently, and then skillfully picked the lock. The interior was in darkness, but the tiny flashlight instantly revealed the Gobelin tapestry. Pulling this aside, he saw the bull's-eye safe.

He twisted the dial, caught it at zero and then began to work out the combination. At the end of two minutes the little round door fell back and he saw a stack of papers, a jewel box and a heavy cardboard container which held crisp, pink thousand-franc notes and government bonds.

Steele took all the rest of the papers, and put them in his pocket. He was just turning from the safe when a sudden hiss of breath behind him made him fall sideways to the floor even as he jerked the automatic

pistol. The movement saved his life. There came a sharp *plop* and something thudded into the wall directly back of where he had been standing a second before.

Steele caught a faint glimpse of a man's figure silhouetted against the lighter wall. He saw the man's hand raise again. Steele took snap aim and pulled the trigger.

THE pistol shot roared in that confined space like a cannon explosion. The man gave a little scream, clutched at his right breast, and tumbled heavily to the floor.

Instantly Steele leaped to his feet. His flashlight cut the gloom. For a second he thought he had never seen the man before. Then, despite blackened hair and a heavy spade beard, he recognized General Le Marche, the hero of Tafilalt!

The soldier was senseless, and a dribble of bloody froth at his lips bespoke a shot through the lungs. Steele's expression grew impassive again. But his eyes grew hard. He knew the peril now. Instead of being shot, he would be guillotined for murder despite the fact that he had shot in self-defense.

He heard footsteps and voices in the hall. He sprang to a window. There was a ledge he could negotiate. Beyond that a fire-escape. With swift hands he lifted the window. As he started to go out, General Le Marche's voice came as plainly as if he had been speaking to Steele.

"Your Imperial Majesty may trust me," came the choking words. "I—you—"

Steele hesitated for a second, but no more words came. Then he darted out, skirted the ledge, hovering over disaster a dozen times. But he made the fire-escape and scurried down it. Behind him the apartment house was springing into light.

From somewhere on the street beyond the wall a whistle shrilled

sharply. A voice yelled, "*Je suis l'agent de police!*"

Steele raced to the rear wall, scaled it and cut his clothing and his hands on the broken bits of glass studded in the cement. Then he raced past a garage, over another wall and so out on a street he finally identified as the Rue de Margrave.

His clothing was torn, his hands bloody, he was a suspicious looking object.

Within a few moments he knew the hue and cry would be all over Paris for him.

Coolly he took out a handkerchief, wiped the blood from his hands, turned up his coat collar and nonchalantly strolled unhurriedly along the street.

He was in luck at the corner, for a taxicab was just passing. Steele waved it down, climbed in and said evenly, "Take a turn in the Bois de Boulogne."

IN the cab he switched on the ceiling light and began to sort the papers he had shoved into his pockets.

They were in French, typewritten for the most part, and although he read them carefully they gave him little insight into what was behind this strange adventure. The most important, he thought, read as follows:

Fifty thousand rifles landed at Valencia with one million rounds of ammunition and two hundred Maxim machine-guns with a million rounds. This should be ample for this sector.

General Le Marche.

A notation in a strange cramped handwriting read, "This for a flank north, Emperor of Asia."

Steele switched off the light and sat in silence. The Emperor of Asia. What crack-brained thing was this? A sudden thought gripped him. Manon turned around, meant no man. Could this bent, aged man be insane? Could Steele have tied him-

self up with some weird plot that would end with his own head falling into a basket?

Grimly he leaned forward and told the driver to go to the Hotel Chateau Frontenac.

"He'll talk my language from now on or I don't play," Steele told himself thinly.

He arrived at the hotel close toward one o'clock. Nor was he surprised when he saw the Renault limousine parked on the west side of the street.

Manon Zero leaned his head out as Steele approached.

"You got them?" For once he betrayed intense excitement.

"I got them," rejoined Steele grimly, "but Le Marche is dead, or nearly so." He gave a brief explanation of what had transpired and grimly shook his head. "You pulled me out of a tight hole, Zero, and I'm grateful. But I've had enough of this mystery; I'm not moving another inch with you until you tell me what this is all about."

Zero frowned, and suddenly Steele became aware of the intense power and will that lay behind this fragile ancient mask.

"In due time," the old man said harshly, "you will know everything. But not until I am ready."

FOR an instant Steele matched his will against the older man's. Suddenly he smiled and a chuckle came from his lips. "By God, take the pot."

The old man laughed. "Spoken like the man I know you to be, Steele. Now, give me the documents, quick."

Steele shook his head. "Later, when you talk."

Zero pierced him with a hard look. Then he shrugged. "Hurry and pack," he ordered.

As he packed and shifted to another suit, Steele wondered how

Zero would cover him. The police would eventually trail Steele to this hotel. Here the trail must cease.

"Probably another airplane," he thought, "and another country."

He was back in the Renault in twenty minutes, and it drove off. After a long swift trip the car pulled up a long driveway lined with poplars, and came to a stop under the ornate *porte-cochere* of a Renaissance chateau. A butler came down to the car, a German by his accent, and took Steele's luggage. Zero had none.

THEY went inside into a great salon where a huge fireplace filled with logs gave off a cheery glow and warmth. Zero swung on Steele with unconcealed eagerness.

"Now, for Le Marche's papers," he said. "Quick. We may have to act tonight."

Steele hesitated, then passed them over. "Remember, you've got to talk—plenty," he reminded grimly.

Manon Zero adjusted a heavy pair of horn-rimmed glasses to his eyes. He crouched near the blazing fire and his gaze skimmed the mass of papers. As he read he made little clucking sounds, first of expectancy and then of disappointment.

"Devil take it!" he cried at length, using the only oath that Steele ever heard from him. "The name is not here. Not here."

"The name of whom?" asked Steele.

"The name of the man who calls himself the Emperor of Asia. The man who intends to conquer the civilized world."

Manon Zero came to his feet and for an instant his flashing eyes and arrogant mien made him a terrible man of purpose.

"The man who intends to conquer the civilized world?" repeated Steele.

"Precisely," cried Manon Zero. "He may strike tomorrow, the next

day. And the one clue I had depended upon is not here. I have failed."

CHAPTER IV

The Incredible Conspiracy

STEELE slowly lit a cigarette and coolly regarded Zero.

"Suppose you start at the beginning," he suggested. "Tell me what this means. Then we'll see."

"Suppose," Zero said abruptly, "that a man of mixed blood came into possession of a billion dollars in gold, with more to be had. Suppose this man was born with the will to power. Born with such a desire to be great that he would let nothing stand in his way. Can you not fancy the world turmoil to follow?"

"Possibly," admitted Steele, "but where would such a man come by such an almost inconceivable sum of gold?"

"Too simple, indeed, my friend. On an island off Kamchatka in the Northern Pacific seas, for example, there could be a mine. A mine so rich that the gold assays twenty thousand dollars per ton. In the far-off ages when the ice came down from the North Pole, the grinding ice uncovered a deep strata of rock that was a pure vein of gold. Such things have happened many times, my friend. And fifty thousand tons of that ore would yield a billion dollars."

"Yes, gold is where you find it," Steele nodded, "but no single mine ever produced even a half-billion."

"I tell you this man who would be emperor has discovered such a vein," cried Zero passionately. "I know. I am a mining engineer."

"After the Alaskan gold discoveries that yielded many millions of dollars of the yellow metal, I conceived the idea that the farther north quartz rock could be discovered the greater would be the gold yield. I

deduced that the terrific pressure of the ice cap would dig deeper into the earth's surface and uncover these gold veins that were melted and poured when the earth was young and molten with flame."

Steele, intensely interested now, nodded.

"I engaged a crew of Eskimos and had myself taken across the Bering Strait to the northeastern shores of Siberia." Zero smiled sadly. "I stayed there three years, my friend, and that is why you see me hugging the fire, wearing overcoats. I existed like an animal, in ice caves, eating blubber raw, blubber boiled, blubber baked; and I was cold most of the time. I aged. I am not nearly so old as you think."

He got up and rubbed his thin, gnarled hands close to the fire.

"I discovered gold in stream beds that came out five hundred dollars to the pan. Gold in nuggets as big as your head. In three years I accumulated thirty million dollars' worth of gold."

STEELE blinked. Such figures meant nothing, he thought; the brain couldn't grasp them.

"I brought that gold out and sold it to the United States assay office in Dawson a bit at a time. I had the natives washing for me and the following summer I brought out five million dollars more. There was more money than any one man could spend in a lifetime.

"But I went back, not for more gold. I was eaten by the insatiable idea of finding the earth's mother lode. The place where pure gold could be carved out by the ton. My search led me to the ocean's edge, and there the trail gave out. Yet there were islands out there, islands raised by the ice pressure of the prehistoric glacial age. I was about to start my investigations there when the Russians threw me into prison."

Steele, eye glowing, nodded grimly. He had expected that.

"My Eskimos had talked, not to Russian authorities, but to this man who then went under the name of Waldemar Senk. He was a Eurasian, the half-caste spawn of a German sailor and a Chinese dancing girl at Canton. He, too, had been prospecting, and he had heard what I had done. While I was waiting for the spring thaw to go out to the islands, this half-caste went by himself."

Manon Zero's face contorted with violent hatred. "And he found the great lode I had been searching for. Because he feared I might come, he tipped the Russian secret police to my work in the Bering Sea drainage, and had me arrested. I spent twelve years in the prison at Lake Baikal, and only after the revolution did I manage to effect my escape.

"During that time Waldemar Senk mined and created his fabulous fortune. He bided his time until world unrest gave him his chance. Then he set out to create a world empire which he himself should rule over."

SWIFTLY Zero swung on Steele. "Who do you suppose financed the revolution in Spain?" he demanded harshly. "This man who calls himself Emperor of Asia! Who financed Hitler in supplying uniforms, and arms and ammunition to overthrow the German republic? The Emperor of Asia! Who is putting up the money that is enabling the Russian five-year plan to go through? The Emperor of Asia! He is backing the Japanese Fascists, and the Chinese Communists, the English revolutionists, and the American khaki shirts which are even now threatening to turn over the very base of our government."

Zero's pale face became flushed

with color; his eyes flashed, and he trembled with emotion.

"This man Senk, who styles himself Emperor of Asia, is financing his own men to take control of every government on this earth. And when they have control, when they are firmly in the saddle, then this Emperor of Asia will step out as the world dictator, the man to whom all these petty dictators will pay allegiance. Instead of soldiers such as Napoleon used, he is wielding the power of money. Colossal wealth such as no man has ever known before. He is buying the power of the earth to rank himself next to God."

STEELE felt himself begin to sweat. The very force and emotion of Manon Zero had communicated itself to him.

Yet his reason made him say, "What about the armies of the nations? Where does this Senk get his army from?"

"The armies of the nations are controlled by their dictators, who are Senk's puppets," explained Zero more calmly. "And Senk is building an army of his own. He has the money to finance a world war. If his puppets choose to rebel against him, he will fight them, not only with his own army, but with the armies of nations whose dictators have complied with his will.

"He has an organization so powerful that Waldemar Senk himself remains a mystery. None have ever seen him. I have spent thousands trying to find him. It was I who set the United States Secret Service on the trail of General Le Marche. I told Jaffrey of this and he put you to work.

"When you fight a man empowered by gold you fight a force so terrific as to be almost unbeatable. I am spending every penny I possess in fighting this monster." His teeth

clicked. "And I shall live to see him dead."

Steele whistled silently. The potency of thirty million dollars he had already seen.

"You expected to find the name he is at present going under in Le Marche's stuff?" he asked.

"Yes," nodded Zero. "Le Marche was his man. I am inclined to believe Le Marche was his chief of staff. Le Marche was a strategist, and because he had a touch of Anamese blood in him, he had Oriental cunning. You did well in killing him, my friend, because he was dangerous." He paused. "But I got no clue to the Emperor himself."

"Nothing?" asked Steele.

"There was but one name, the Rajah of Sawnpore, and that means nothing."

"Are you sure?" Steele asked quietly. "The Rajah of Sawnpore is a great man among the natives of India. Uprisings are occurring there all the time. Perhaps your emperor is financing them, too. If so, the Rajah of Sawnpore might know who his master is."

"Ah," murmured Manon Zero, "I did not guess wrongly on you, Steele. If we had the Rajah of Sawnpore in some quiet place, we could make him talk."

"IF we grab Sawnpore your Emperor of Asia will have to come out in the open to fight to get him back," Steele pressed. "Any man who fights leaves clues. The trouble with your present plan, Zero, is that you have gone around defending against this man instead of boldly attacking him."

Manon Zero again leaped to his feet with the spryness of a youth. His face shone and his eyes blazed.

"Right," he cried. "Tell me exactly how you would do this. Think not of money. My fortune is barely touched."

Steele, his mind working swiftly, began to talk, and as he did, Zero's face glowed.

CHAPTER V

Bat Steele Attends a Party

BATTERSON STEELE grinned and regarded himself in the mirror over the mantel. His hair was distinctly white. His nose was broader and more forceful, made so by paraffin injections. His color was dark, as if he had spent many months under a tropic sun. Even his eyes looked different. "You look distinguished," said Janet.

"Ah," chuckled Steele, "any wealthy American sportsman who spends most of his time big-game hunting should look distinguished or something. Are you ready?"

She stood up and let him put a wrap around her slim bare shoulders. As they went out to the door, Manon Zero came down the hall. He wore a heavy dressing gown over his evening clothes. He was again his imperturbable self, and looking at him, one could hardly believe he had been the excited old man of four days ago.

"Everything is ready," he said. "I can promise you no slip-up on this end."

"I believe you," chuckled Steele. "How you ever got this invitation to the Comtesse de la Roche's ball I can't fancy."

"Money buys anything," smiled Manon Zero. "All the men are placed as you requested. The airplane will be at La Moiree."

Steele assisted Janet into the car. The chauffeur and footman who were the pilots of his trip from Algiers climbed in and the car sped away on the first step of Steele's plan to thwart the Emperor of Asia.

When they drew up in front of the Comtesse de la Roche's magnifi-

cent mansion on the Avenue de Bois de Boulogne, liveried servants helped them off with their wraps. An announcer called their names as they entered the huge salon with its magnificent furnishings.

The comtesse herself greeted them on the receiving line. She did not know them from Adam, but since they were invited she knew she was supposed to know them.

"My dear, so glad to see you again," she said to Janet, and gave Steele her powdered hand which he carried to his lips. "Your Highness, let me present Janet Haight, an American girl of great charm, and her affianced, Satler Slane. His Royal Highness, the Rajah of Sawnpore, my guest of honor."

Steele watched the turbaned head bow over Janet's hand, then grasped the rajah's slim brown hand. The rajah was young, but dissipation had aged him. He was almost dark enough to be negroid. He spoke English with an Oxonian accent.

Steele studied the slim figure and decided he could throw this man over his shoulders and run five miles with him. He perceived that the rajah was much taken with Janet.

"Come, let us have an ice together," Sawnpore suggested, and took her off.

STEELE pulled out a cigarette case and lit a spill.

"I say, could you give me a light?" asked a voice.

Steele turned casually to face a tall, broad-shouldered Englishman. The man had blond hair and attractive blue eyes. Despite the fact that he must be close to fifty, he didn't look it.

"I'm Roderick Sampson," he introduced himself. His English was flawless and unaccented.

Steele gave his name and they went together to where a servant was dispensing *aperitifs*. While they

stood drinking, and discussing the polite nothings of such a party, a tall, dark man came up.

"Hah, Rod," he said in a strange clipped accent, "may I join you?"

The change in Roderick Sampson was instant. He became polite, almost obsequious. It was as if this dark-haired man was his chief.

"Most assuredly, Baron." He turned to Steele, then back to the tall, saturnine man. "Baron Erich von Gortz, let me present an American big-game hunter, Satler Slane."

A STRANGE quiver went through Steele as he took the firm, dark hand. Here was a man as dark almost as the Rajah of Sawnpore. He had a semi-Mongolian caste of countenance. Yet he went under the name of the Baron Erich von Gortz. Such a title and name could be bought. Was this, then, the strange half-mad man who called himself the Emperor of Asia?

Later, when he saw the baron clap the Rajah of Sawnpore familiarly on the shoulder, his suspicions were further aroused. In that gathering no ordinary German *Graf* could so treat a high ranking Indian prince. Then, to Steele's utter astonishment, this newcomer took Janet away from the rajah and led her to a corner, where he entered into animated conversation. The rajah frowned.

"There's a lot going on here that I don't get," muttered Steele, but he got no chance to be alone with Janet.

He managed to signal to her to get the rajah out into the garden by eleven-thirty.

Steele placed the capsule of chloroform inside of the handkerchief where it would crush under the pressure of his finger. Then he set himself to be agreeable to the baron.

It was the dark German who started the discussion on world unrest.

"What we need is less national-

ism," said von Gortz, his eyes gleaming. "We need not a hundred nations in the world, but one, ruled by one man who will see that the nationally selfish greed of mankind is suppressed for the general good of all."

Steele's mind flashed to Manon Zero's story. Was this dark, unquestionably half-breed man the demoniac Waldemar Senk? For an instant it came to Steele that he might end this affair once and for all by taking the Baron von Gortz as well as the rajah.

HE toyed with the idea until suddenly he caught the signal from Janet. She was bearing toward the garden, with the rajah in tow.

Steele hesitated. Then he excused himself and hurried in pursuit of Janet. He was just in time to see them vanish in the shadow of the glass flower houses. Steele shifted his own direction to appear from the other side. He was on his tiptoes now, stalking with all his skill.

Cautiously he crept to the edge of the greenhouse. He was in time to see the Indian prince suddenly grasp Janet in his arms, to hear him say, "I am mad about you. Something—"

He bent over her and Janet tamely submitted to the caress. At that second Steele sprang across the intervening space. His arms, perfectly co-ordinated, closed around the potentate. His left arm gagged against the throat to prevent an outcry. His right hand, crushing the capsule, pressed the handkerchief against the man's nose and mouth.

For one brief instant the rajah struggled like a stricken python. His body slithered and quivered. Then he went limp in Steele's arms.

Janet, who had been scrubbing her lips furiously with a handkerchief, turned and ran, a white streak, toward the side door that led directly from the garden to a lane that par-

alleled the south wall of the estate.

Steele picked up the body and heaved it over his shoulder, then started after her. He had not taken ten steps before some one cried out sharply. The next instant Steele went sprawling to the ground under a terrific attack, and the senseless body of the Indian prince landed with a thud a dozen feet away.

Steele twisted and sought to reach his gun. But his antagonist was swarming upon him. Another shadow came out from the flower house. The man struggling with Steele cried out something in an unknown language.

Steele fought with a silent, savage ferocity. But his enemy was an eel, swarming out of the grips. And then, just as Steele had brought his knee up with a thud into the other man's groin, something slipped around Steele's neck. It tightened like a flash. It sunk into the skin of his throat as if it were a razor blade trying to cut off his head.

His eyes popped; his tongue came out. He made a sweep for his gun. But even then the blackness was descending upon him. His brain was on fire and the world had ceased to be. Sparks burned and smashed before his bulging eyes.

HE knew he was dying. Then, a few seconds later, for no reason that he could discover, he was pumping long draughts of cool air into his lungs. His eyes cleared. He saw his antagonist groaning on the ground, grasping at his stomach. Janet shook him.

"Quick, the whole house is alarmed," she cried.

Steele's gun came out, just as the second antagonist sprang in—Janet's weapon for a moment being useless as Steele stood in the way. Steele dodged the knife and drove the muzzle of his gun squarely into the man's face. The man screamed horribly and grabbed at his face.

Two men in evening clothes came running up. "What—who— *Mon Dieu*—what—"

Steele backed up to where the unconscious figure of the rajah lay. Janet covered the men.

"This has a silencer on it," she said clearly, "and I can't fail to hit."

As Steele straightened with the Indian prince's body over one shoulder, he saw that one of the men was the Baron von Gortz. He was swearing in German—and Chinese.

Then with Janet covering his retreat, Steele reached the small door, hurried through and found two men there to relieve him. They took the body and heaved it into the limousine.

"Quick, the police car is on the avenue," the chauffeur called.

Steele went back to cover the door through which Janet retreated. She raced to the car.

"The first man who comes through dies," Steele warned. "Remember that."

Then he lunged for the limousine, and while he was still on the running board, it roared madly through the night.

CHAPTER VI

The Emperor Strikes

STEELE sat in the cabin of the fast Salmson airplane and wondered again at the reckless way the mysterious Manon Zero spent money. He looked across to where the white-haired old man dozed in the opposite chair, lulled to sleep by the steady drone of the twin motors. In the space of four days the man had bought this sixty-thousand dollar plane. He had purchased a yacht—a converted British patrol boat—for two hundred thousand, which yacht was at this moment lying at anchor off Cap Ferat at Nice.

He shifted his gaze to the rajah's

unconscious figure and grinned. The man would talk soon, and then the mystery would be a mystery no longer.

The Salmson did the four hundred and fifty miles from Paris to Nice in four hours flat.

Steele, awakening from a doze, saw the festoons of electric lights outlining the gigantic curve of the Bay of Angels. But the ship curved away into the dark interior, and here as before the pilots found a landing place and set down.

A MOTOR car waited. Manon Zero had prepared every last detail with an engineer's mind.

"La Roque," the old man called to the chief pilot, "equip with the amphibian pontoons and take off as soon as you have loaded the gas tanks."

"Very good, sir," said the man. "Pantellaria, sir?"

"Yes, you'll find a sheltered bay on the northeast side. Lay there until you hear from me either in person or by wireless."

They carried the inert form to the limousine. And here Zero pricked the man's flesh with a hypodermic of morphine that would keep him quiet until such a time as they had boarded the ship.

"You will have to drive, Steele," said Zero. "Go by way of the Promenade des Anglais to the point beyond Cap Martin. The *Zephyr* lies a quarter of a mile off-shore there and a small boat will be waiting."

Steele threw the car in gear. Manon Zero sat back with the Rajah of Sawnpore, and Janet was next to Steele.

The car wound down the steep escarpment from the upper Corniche road, and into the Boulevard des Etats Unis. It was midnight or more yet there were many cars returning from Monte Carlo, and many people sat along the promenade;

none paid any attention to the car and its occupants.

Steele took the road out toward Cagnes-sur-Mer, then turned to the left where a wood dock extended fifty feet or so out into the sea. Here he brought the car to a halt.

HE blinked the headlights off and on twice at Zero's command. A soft hail came out of the darkness and three men approached. One wore a cap with the gold braid of an officer. He saluted.

"Everything's ready, Mr. Zero."

"Good, Hargraves." Zero chuckled. "We have a passenger, a guest. You might give him a lift."

The two sailors at the officer's command took the body and bore it toward the end of the dock.

Steele took Janet's arm and guided her through the darkness. At the end of the dock a small launch lifted and dropped to a slight ground swell. Steele lowered the girl, gave Zero a helping hand and dropped aboard. Instantly the motor hummed and they cut a white swath through the black sea to where a ship could be dimly seen off-shore.

They came up under the flank of the two hundred-foot yacht to where a boarding companionway had been dropped to a float. The sailors took the rajah's senseless body first, then Steele escorted Janet up the weaving staircase.

As they came onto the deck, three officers, one the captain, stood there. Manon Zero came last. "You can get under way at once, Gresham," he cried cheerily, at sight of the captain.

A sailor stepped behind the old man to bar retreat down the companionway. Before Steele realized what was happening his arms were seized from behind. Sailors flooded out of the darkness of the forward deck. One dropped and grabbed Steele's legs. His hand streaked for

his gun, but was seized before he could grasp the butt. *Click! Click!* Handcuffs encircled his legs and wrists.

"Search the prisoners," cried Captain Gresham coldly.

Steele cursed and flung himself headlong into the stomach of his nearest captor.

"You're double-crossed," he yelled at Zero.

"No," rejoined a cool, even voice from the saloon, and into the light of the deckhead bulb stepped a man. "Merely, Manon Zero, I can buy what you have bought and pay a greater price."

Steele, from the deck where he was flattened by a heavy sailor sitting on his chest, looked upward at the speaker.

"Roderick Sampson!" he exclaimed in a low voice.

"That is the name I was under," admitted the yellow-haired man calmly.

"But," cried Steele, comprehension coming to him, "you are Waldemar Senk—the Emperor of Asia."

"I am the Emperor of Asia," rejoined the man. "Since you will not live long, I have no compunction about telling you."

A groan of mortal disappointment from Manon Zero was the only sound to break the sudden silence.

CHAPTER VII

Aboard the Zephyr

"BRING the prisoners into the saloon, Gresham," the man who called himself the Emperor of Asia ordered. "And get under way at once. The course is south by east full speed."

Steele was carried to the saloon and stretched on a lounge beside Manon Zero. Only Janet remained free, her hands lightly tied, her dress torn where a sailor had wrenched her automatic pistol from her.

The Emperor of Asia sat down and regarded his prisoners.

"You've been a long time coming into my hands, Manon Zero," he said, satisfiedly. "I do you the honor to think you so dangerous to my plans that I shall rid myself of you—permanently."

The ship's deck began to vibrate to the thrust of the powerful propeller. The ship nosed her prow south.

"I have been watching you since you persuaded the American Secret Service to make a try for Le Marche's papers," Senk continued. "Until then, I admit, I had no thought that you had any clue as to me or my men. You worked too swiftly for me on Le Marche. However, he did not die as a consequence of your shot, Steele," he said.

"But after checking my own knowledge of what Le Marche's papers contained, it was easy to fathom your next move, Zero. Did you ever hear of what was called during the war 'tin ears'? They are very efficacious in locating a night-flying airplane and *determining* its direction.

"I had also the little Fiat-Marchetti plane that is now reposing on the forward deck. It came in second in last year's Schneider Cup race, Zero, and it will cruise at two hundred and sixty miles an hour." He laughed in sheer enjoyment. "I was here two hours ahead of you. And in two hours, with money, I had your men and your boats."

HE leaned forward, and his eyes began to blaze fanatically.

"My destiny is marked, Manon Zero, and you nor any other man can interfere with it. Within sixty days I shall be master of Europe. Wherever you may be in the next world, remember that statement, and see what happens."

Presently Senk had them bodily carried to a large state-room aft.

After Senk had gone Steele said to Manon Zero: "Can we depend upon your organization for anything?"

Slowly Zero shook his head. "Not in time, I'm afraid. They will miss me eventually, of course. But if Senk does what I think he will do, my men will catch the trail too late."

"What do you think he will do?"

"SOUTH of the Draa River in Morocco," rejoined Zero, "is country no white man has ever set foot in. Thousands of square miles, well watered—I think Senk intends to take us there."

"But," protested Steele, "why should he take us there?"

"He is egomaniac enough to want to show us his power—his army."

"Why should he concentrate an army in Morocco?"

"My dear young man," said Manon Zero wearily, "with tanks capable of making forty miles an hour, with transport planes able to carry fifty soldiers at a time, the location of an army means nothing."

Steele licked his lips. "You mean that he will move up from Morocco, seize the North African coast for his grand base and invade Europe from the south?"

"If necessary," assented Zero. "It probably will not be. These dummy dictators merely await the signal from him to form the union he desires."

"So," murmured Steele, "the key to it all is the destruction of Senk. He has got to die."

"Yes."

A silence fell upon them. It had lasted barely a few moments when from the forward part of the yacht came a sudden shout. A pistol shot thudded. There came a scream. Then a space of silence.

Steele looked at Manon Zero, then at the girl. Before any one had time to speak another shot drummed;

then three more sounded loudly. The shouts grew louder. Feet thudded rapidly on the deck.

The next instant three men burst panting into the cabin. Guns glittered in their hands, and as a shadowy shape appeared on the deck through the glass, a pistol shot roared in the confined space. The man on the deck flung himself backward. A half-moan burst from his lips. He was not seen again.

Quickly, now, the taller of the three men turned.

"Ah, sir," he said, "the blighter nearly had you. But we'll attend to that."

Steele saw with some surprise that this panting man was Higgins, the mild valet that he had last seen in Algiers. To his further amazement, the man jerked out a set of keys.

"We got the bloody Hemperor knocked out as ever was," the valet panted. His fingers trembled as he inserted the key into the bracelets on Manon Zero's wrists.

"Ere, sir, a gun; and now for you, young man." He released Steele and slid him a Ruby six-gun.

IT all happened in the space of a minute. Zero said, "We'll seize the yacht. How many men did you see?"

"There were six, sir, and three of them is deader than bloody herrin's."

"Senk, he's the man we want." Zero was once again the cool leader. He gestured toward the other two men. "Where did you find them? How did you know something was wrong here?"

Higgins cackled. "I landed at Marseilles early tonight, sir, and not knowing just what was hexpected of me, I learned from Control Six, sir, that you was aboard this ship. I sent a radio and the signal wasn't given back. Just a lot of cock and bull. I got suspicious and decided to come and find out. Control Six supplied these men, sir, and bloody good fight-

ers they are. We come by a speed-boat."

There came no sound from outside. The yacht was sinisterly silent as Zero and Steele led the way to retake it.

IN the saloon Manon Zero eyed the bound form of the Emperor of Asia. A bullet had seared Senk's scalp along the part in his hair.

"Senk, you have reached the end of your rope," Zero spoke. "You are guilty, to my knowledge, of four murders, committed by your men. You are too dangerous to live. It is I who will act as executioner for the world which you would conquer."

Steele thought he had never seen such a disappointed expression as writhed Waldemar Senk's face. The man was boiling with fury. Yet he concealed it admirably.

"You would murder me in cold blood?" he asked.

"The task of executioner is always distasteful," said Manon Zero. "Help me lift him, Steele."

"Senk, you are eighty miles from the nearest land," Zero said when they were on deck. "God have mercy on your soul."

As they started to lift the helpless body to the rail, Higgins yelled out from the well deck forward. Steele jerked his gun and broke into a dead run.

"Look out!" Higgins screamed to the man at the wheel.

"Hard over!"

Out of the moonlit sea a dark shadow was coming—coming fast. Its prow was bearing straight on the *Zephyr's* midship section. Frantically the steersman put the wheel hard a-port. The pistol in Higgins' hand flashed three times as he aimed at the ship's bridge.

The knife-like bow just grazed the *Zephyr's* flank. With a hiss of water the bigger ship came alongside. Five men leaped from its deck to the

Zephyr. Guns spat in their hands. Steele heard the sing of bullets.

"*Banzai! Emperor!*" voices yelled.

Steele saw that the arrivals were Japanese. He fired point-blank, and saw the leading Jap grab his side, stagger back at the impact of the slug, and fall to the deck.

HIGGINS fell, and the Japs came at Steele with a rush. He felt hot iron in his thigh. Saw one of them drop as his own pistol spat flame and sparks. Steele went to the deck.

"Full speed ahead," he yelled to the bridge, and as he fought off insensibility, he heard the rising whir of the Diesel motors.

The pursuing ship was swinging around to attack again. But the steersman was avoiding the pointed prow and using all his cunning to avoid letting the other vessel come alongside and disgorge more men.

Steele crept on his hands and knees to the forward superstructure, and pulled himself upright. His left leg was numb to the knees.

He was in time to see Zero go down; see one of the men who had come with Higgins go overboard. He heard the sounds of Janet's pistol from the saloon.

Steele dragged himself up the companionway to the bridge. The steersman, the other of Higgins' men, looked around with white face.

"I'm heading straight for the African shore, sir. We can out-run them."

Steele did not answer. He got to the wireless set, opened the key. Rapidly he pounded out the call for the Pantellaria plane.

"What's the position?" he jerked.

"Roughly, eighty miles south of Nice, sir. About due east of Cape Corse in Corsica."

Steele, cursing his slowness with the key, gave the position.

"Lash the wheel," he said, "and come on with me."

He went down the companionway, lifting himself almost with his two hands. There all was chaos. Zero was down, his white hair matted with blood. Janet lay part-way across the threshold of the saloon, her white dress darkened with blood near the neck.

There was no sign of the Japs nor of Waldemar Senk.

Steele peered over the side. A rapid fog was rippling across the water. But it had not yet hidden the three or four heads far astern. Even as he watched, the pursuing boat made a swift turn, almost in her own length. A flashlight glowed on the water. Toward it the ship came, stopped with boiling white water astern.

"He got away," Steele muttered, leaning against the rail. He turned swiftly to the steersman. "Put the ship around and catch them. Hit that boat if necessary. We've got to stop Senk."

CHAPTER VIII

Pursuit

THROUGH the night the ships sped south and west. The red dawn shot like a lightning bolt across the sea. The fog cleared a bit. The escaping vessel was clearly visible now far ahead.

Steele strode to the windows and cast an anxious glance east. The sky was empty. On the couch Manon Zero lay. His eyes were closed and his breath was a moan.

"If only the Secret Service had taught me how to fly a plane." Steele gestured toward the trim airplane resting forward.

"La Roque will come," said Janet, referring to the pilot of the plane at Pantellaria.

"He'd better hurry," Steele announced grimly from one of the windows; "there's the Tripolitan coast. And Senk's got a radio on that ship;

we listened in, but he was sending in code. Probably ordering a plane."

"You can stop him," Janet said confidently. "You must."

"Where do you figure in this?" Steele asked suddenly.

"My father was manager of the China Trading Corporation's branch in Peiping. Senk robbed him, murdered him to get the money that he used to go north. I saw the murder." She paused. "I was a little girl then—but I never forgot. I swore I'd bring him to justice for it. Manon Zero found me when I was on Senk's trail. We work together. That's all."

Steele nodded, and a glint of admiration lay deep in his gaze. Then his face lit with excitement.

"Here comes the plane," he half yelled.

He raced out of the cabin and to the bridge. There he thrust on the ear phones.

Came an insistent call: "DRZ! DRZ! More information, please."

Steele acknowledged the call. "Stand by," his fingers tapped. "Follow the leading ship to shore. Senk aboard. Has ordered plane. We must follow. Throw out everything but machine-guns and bullets. We'll need those. Stand by to pick me up at closest point on shore."

"Understood," came the laconic response.

THE plane drove close, banked around the ship once and nosed down in salute. Then it headed straight for the rapidly rising shore.

The bleak coastline was upon them now. Steele went forward with the glasses. He saw, as he had expected, a plane resting on a small plateau perhaps five hundred yards from the beach.

"Full speed," he sang out to the steersman, who promptly opened the Diesel throttles. But the yacht ahead, with a sudden surge of speed, drove

headlong for the shore. Steele gasped.

He saw the ship rear as it struck a hidden reef that must have taken the bottom out of it. It slid over of its own momentum, and creased the water clear to the shore-line before it suddenly settled and came to a halt.

Steele swore. "Hold her nose straight in, full speed," he yelled.

He stripped to the waist, wearing only trousers and two guns shoved into his belt. He poised at the fore-peak. He was watching the shore leap at him.

A BLACK shadow, the reef slid to the right. They were through now, with only the shore ahead. He saw Senk swimming madly. Saw him climb the shale and start on a dead run for the plane.

Down the sky slid the big Salmson. Steele looked at it and shook his head. There would be no chance of catching that smaller ship unless he gained time here.

"Hold her in," he yelled. Then to Janet, "Stay with Zero. You've got food, and the weather looks as if it'll hold."

He stopped speaking abruptly, for the bow of the *Zephyr* had struck the rocky shale. It reared up, trembled, slowed down so swiftly that they were thrown off their feet as the hull was ripped out at the very water line.

It sagged heavily as the bottom tore away, and Steele dropped by his hands from the deck edge into the water.

A moment later he was ashore, running as swiftly as his stiff leg would let him to where the Salmson waited with churning propeller. The side door stood open. Steele went in and to the stern.

In the top of the cabin was a cockpit. Around it went the tourelle of a machine-gun mount. And a Hotch-

kiss with a belt instead of a tray of ammunition rested upon it.

Forward he saw that La Roque had mounted two Hotchkisses, synchronized to shoot through the nose propeller.

"Let her go," he said. "We're going to shoot that ship down."

The huge Salmson began to move as the twin motors roared. But the Spad was also moving. It was a single-seater, and Steele could see the knobbed head of the Emperor of Asia as the plane gathered speed and headed into the sun.

"He's got to turn," he told himself, and striding forward in the fuselage, he tapped La Roque on the left side. The man did the impossible. He took the Salmson off in an angle that made it lunge up the sky in a climbing turn.

Ahead of them lay a low line of purple highlands, rugged bare rocks that came down to the sea. But as they lifted over these there stretched before them nothing but brown desert as far as the eye could see.

Steele got a grip on the handles of the gun. The single chance was to disable the faster Spad before it got clear. It was banking around, coming like the wind.

THE distance was five hundred yards. But Steele made his gamble. He caught the nose of the Spad in his ring-sights, shifted slightly to the left, and opened fire.

Rat-tat-tat-tat!

The Hotchkiss quivered and shook on the tourelle. The powder dust came back to blacken Steele's face, and give it a grim, terrible expression. The trigger stayed down under his finger.

The tracer stormed across the distance. The molten stream of yellow fire almost hid the tiny Spad from view. Yet it kept on going, and when the last of the belt lunged into the breech, and the hammer fell with

a sickening dead click, Steele cursed to see it hold its course straight south into the desert.

As the Salmson veered in pursuit, Steele heard the forward guns chatter. He found a new belt and threaded it; but there was nothing he could do now but wait.

Chagrin gripped him. He had failed with so much depending upon him. The Spad was clear now and nothing could stop it.

The planes droned south. The Spad was a mere speck in the sky now. Below them the desert flowed past like a sheet of yellow water.

SUDDENLY Steele started abruptly. What was that? The Spad was larger. Instead of vanishing as he had expected, it was distinctly growing in size. He could make out the wings now.

"By God, I did wing it!" he yelled.

Rapidly now the Salmson gained. The Spad was flying, but the black smoke shooting from the exhaust stacks betrayed that something was wrong. Senk was desperately trying to regain full flying speed.

The forward guns of the Salmson began to hammer. A gust of flying sparks came from the Spad. It had wheeled; it was driving straight for them. Senk had chosen to fight it out.

Steele's eyes gleamed. He sighted along the barrel and his taut finger tripped the trigger. The Hotchkiss began to eat steel. Cupro-nickle slugs flew in a desperate burst. The tracer stream found the Spad. But it came on. Banked sharply. Now it was angling in for a tail position.

Steele rapidly swiveled his gun. He aimed squarely at the whorl of light that was the propeller. This time he had a stationary target, and even as the first burst came from the Spad to smash into the Salmson's tail, Steele opened fire. A slug nicked his hair. The stuffing flew from the

crash-pad around him. Sparks tinged into his face as bullets ricocheted off the tourelle. He saw a line of seams come into the rudder, the elevator. But he kept on firing. It was the single chance to get out alive.

Suddenly the bullets ceased to pour around him. He saw that the circle of light from the Spad's propeller had vanished. The all-steel prop itself rested upright. From the base of the engine smoke was pouring. A lick of flame came out.

The Spad faltered. It nosed down, and at that instant a sheet of flame spread back from the engine to swathe the whole front of the Spad.

The Spad side-slipped. It went down into a deep rocky wash, struck violently on the edge and tumbled in.

La Roque banked the Salmson over the spot where the Spad lay, burning furiously. They were directly over it when it exploded and rivulets of fire ran over the stones. The fire burned as if the solid rock had ignited.

Nowhere in that inferno was a sign of the man who had called himself the Emperor of Asia.

His wild dream was ending in a blazing pyre.

The Salmson turned her nose north, to go back to the wrecked yacht and pick up Zero and Janet. Suddenly Steele realized that he was desperately tired and worn. He stretched on the floor, and closed his eyes.

In a moment the drone of the motors soothed him to sleep.

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Bandit of Heaven



The Oriental held a wicked-looking dagger, and his arm lifted menacingly

A Smashing Story of the Perilous Pursuit of Oriental Outlaws Infesting the Chinese Border

By **JEAN FRANCIS WEBB**

Author of "Speed Queen," "Rehearsal for Murder," etc.

HANK MURRAY had been in Atuntze less than two hours, and already he was getting what he had come for—adventure.

Leaning against the bamboo wall which flanked the ladderway, he listened to voices murmuring on the other side. They were the voices of strangers, speaking in the provincial

Chinese of which Murray had picked up a smattering in the past six months; and they were eagerly discussing a plan to murder him!

There was a crack between two of the upright posts which formed the wall, and through this the guttural jerks of speech sounded distinctly. By putting his eye to the slit, Mur-

ray could even look down upon the five men whose pleasure it would soon be to sneak up the ladder to his room and unsheathe the villainous-looking knives now stuck into their twisted sashes.

They were tough looking customers, those five. All of them wore dirty black stubble on their faces; but from what he knew of the racial stocks of the district, the American sized them up as two Chinamen, two Tibetans and one Moso—and as rare a lot of cut-throats as he had ever witnessed together at one time.

The men were crouching about the wood fire which burned in the center of the floor. The room was dim with smoke and the deepening shadows of evening. Through the hole in the roof which was the only means of ventilation, their observer could glimpse the gradually brightening stars.

"It is almost time," one of the Tibetans muttered thickly, swaying on his haunches. "The American spy should be asleep now."

"A little later," mumbled the evil-faced Moso, who seemed to be the leader of the crew. "There is no hurry. Wait for the darkness—then we can make sure. The American must not live to interfere with our little trip."

THE Tibetan subsided unwillingly, his fingers moving with a restless gesture toward the ivory handle of his murderous dirk. The five assassins squatted silently, like brooding vultures, with the firelight flickering over their cruel, slant-eyed visages.

Murray smiled to himself as he drew back from peering through the hole, and worked his body into an upright position with painstaking care that the ladder should not creak with his shifting weight and betray his presence to that precious quintet.

It was a lucky chance that had

prompted him to climb down from his quarters in the native inn for a bedtime cigarette under the stars and a look at the mountains by night! Not often was a man privileged to listen in on the council planning his death—and this council had been most interesting.

NOW, abandoning his trip to the terrace which was also the roof of the courtyard, Hank climbed back silently to his own apartment. If he was to receive guests there presently, he had certain preparations to make.

It would have been simple enough to have dropped from his glassless window to the terrace, climbed from there to the narrow street, and so escaped. Or he might have closed the wooden shutters at the window, barred the door, and been reasonably sure that his unknown enemies could not reach him.

But safety was not among the young American's objects in coming to Atuntze.

Instead he left the door ajar and balanced on the top of it the hollow gourd, filled with water, with which his room had been equipped by his host—an estimable and obsequious gentleman whom Hank had recognized as one of the two Chinamen in the council of death. Then he shifted the position of his light cane-and-bamboo couch a little, so that he commanded a view of both door and window.

After these arrangements were completed, he blew out the oil lamp and lay down in the darkness to wait. At his side, he held in readiness his flashlight and the automatic which already had pulled him out of a good many jams in various odd corners of the world.

He passed the time by attempting to reason out the probable cause for the attack soon to be made on his life.

Ordinarily, he would have said robbery. The tradition that all Americans carried large sums of gold on their persons, ripe for the plucking, seemed to be almost universal. Plots of that sort had provided him with excitement in Tunis and Singapore and Bombay and other colorful spots almost too numerous to remember.

But this seemed to be something different. The Tibetan had spoken of him as a spy. And the Moso's words had indicated that Murray was expected to interfere with some activity—seemingly secret—which the five had under way. Since all of them, save the innkeeper, were total strangers, the American was puzzled.

UNLESS—the thought came to him suddenly—unless they had mistaken him for someone else. That might account for it.

But few white men came to Atuntze, daring the treacherous donkey trip of almost a month's duration along the coiling mountain trails from Yunnanfu, the nearest railroad town. Whom could they be expecting?

His reflections were interrupted by a slight sound in the darkness outside his door—the cautious step of a bare foot on the ladder. Instantly he was alert, although his long, lean body remained relaxed upon the couch.

In the narrow slit of blackness beyond the door a deeper shadow moved silently. There was the soft *pad-pad* of another pair of naked feet on the rush matting which covered the floor outside. Then, soundlessly, the door began to swing inward.

Crash!

It was the water gourd falling. It clattered to the floor, pitching its contents over the crouching figure below. The marauder, taken completely by surprise, screamed and sputtered.

His companion, casting aside the caution which had marked their previous movements, sprang into the room at the hapless leader's side. Instantly, Murray was up on his feet and his flashlight clicked. Its white beam picked out the figures of the two Tibetans swaying on the threshold.

The second man's arm was already extended above his head, and almost simultaneously with the appearance of the light there came a vicious *swish* as he flung his ugly dirk straight toward the white man.

Murray leaped aside, in the nick of time. So close had the hurtling weapon come to finding its target that the wind of its swift passage brushed cold against his cheek.

There was a thud as the sharp blade struck the wall behind the American's head, plowing into the soft wood and quivering there. Then back toward the evil pair swung the flashlight's circle.

The dripping figure of the first intruder was now straightening, and in his hand the Oriental held a wicked-looking twin to the dagger which had missed its mark. His arm lifted menacingly.

Bang!

HANK'S automatic spoke with a tongue of flame, searing the darkness. With a shriek of pain, the dirty Tibetan clutched at his shattered wrist. The knife clattered to the floor and lay there, while he reeled backward into the passageway.

Warned partly by a scarcely perceptible sound and partly by intuition, Hank swung suddenly toward the open window. Again he was just in time.

Crouching on the sill, his body silhouetted against the luminous sky beyond, was the Moso—distinguishable even in the darkness because of the outline of his peculiar headdress;

his body was tensing to spring, and a strangle-cloth was already knotted in his powerful hands.

With unerring accuracy, Hank's gun barked once more from the black interior of the room. He aimed, this time, just above the fellow's shoulder. The bullet sang past the ear of the man in the window and out into the night. But its effect was what Murray had intended.

THE Moso, with a startled cry, ducked backward, almost losing his balance. Then, with the agility of a monkey, he swung across the sill and scrambled down the ladder which had been lifted from the terrace to Murray's window. The man with the gun could hear the patter of bare feet receding rapidly.

A low snarl from the doorway brought his attention back to the room once more. The Tibetan who had first attacked had not retreated with his wounded comrade. Instead, he had possessed himself of the other's fallen knife. Now he lunged forward, the weapon glittering wickedly in his outstretched hand.

Hank had no wish to kill if he could avoid it. Shooting down a man armed with inferior weapons—even a man whose grim intent it was to wipe out his own life—went against the young American's grain. And the knifer was too uncertain a target, as he lashed forward toward the flashlight, to make shooting only to wound a safe chance.

Dropping his gun Murray ducked to one side, letting the light go out. The Tibetan, unable to check his own wild onrush, hurtled past him.

Hank's left arm shot up and brought down the butt of his torch across the top of his assailant's head.

The Oriental groaned and the shock of the blow jarred his weapon loose from his grasp. Hank heard it strike the floor and then closed in.

His arms encircled the waist of his

opponent in a vise-like grip. Although the startled intruder struggled wildly, Murray lifted him from the floor and holding him thus staggered across to the open window.

Here he held the writhing body tight for a moment, working for a better hold. Then, suddenly, he swung the man who had come to kill him clear of the sill and heaved him out into the night.

There was a long scream, followed by a crash as the Tibetan struck the terrace some twelve feet below. Hank leaned across the sill and looked down at the figure sprawled upon the moonlit roof. For an instant the man lay still, evidently stunned. Then, recovering his breath, he crawled rapidly into the protecting shadow of the building, gibbering with fear.

Murray smiled as he closed the wooden shutters and made fast his door for the remainder of the night. It had been a good fight, and he had two knives as souvenirs.

Two knives—and the enmity of five murderous desperadoes who for some reason seemed to have marked him as dangerous.

Still smiling, he went to bed.

MORNING. And Hank was up early, eager to present a letter of introduction to one of the town's leading merchants and to get his first daylight view of Atuntze.

There was no sign of his worthy host, or the other gentlemen of his nocturnal interlude, as the American scrambled down the ladder to the combination pigsty, cowbarn and stable which formed the ground floor of almost every well-run dwelling in this Chinese border province of Yunnan. Only the animals and a water-boy, with two crude pails balanced across his shoulder on opposite ends of a bamboo pole, disturbed the courtyard's solitude.

In the street beyond it was dif-

ferent. The population of Atuntze was already abroad.

Chinese merchants had removed the wooden barricades from the window counters of their one-room shops, and across the openings little knots of Tibetans were leaning, noisily bartering skins, horns and musk for tea and salt. There were a few Yunnanese and Mosos in the crowd. The street was filled with a babble of voices.

ABOVE the town the rugged mountains towered like a solid wall, with the snowy peaks of the far-away ranges glittering in the sunlight. A small caravan of mules, traveling south from the salt wells at Kakalo, was winding its leisurely way toward the Salt Gabelle to be assessed and taxed.

In such a peaceful, orderly world, his adventure of the night before seemed fantastic to Murray. He was almost able to persuade himself that he had dreamed it.

But then he caught sight of a yellow-faced loafer watching him from the group before one of the shops—a ratty-eyed man whose right hand was bandaged in rags and held close against his bright silk sash.

One of his erstwhile playmates! Death still lurked in wait for him in the streets of this isolated village!

Hank found his way to the establishment of Chang Wu, the merchant to whom a mutual friend in Tongking had given him a letter.

At the counter of the shop, a young man, who was one of Chang's sons, was heckling with an unkempt Moso over the barter of a strip of handwoven material and a sack of tea. He examined the note, greeted Murray politely and went off to the back of the store. He returned a few minutes later to inform the visitor that Chang would be honored to greet him.

"I trust the illustrious visitor will

forgive my honorable father's somewhat agitated state," the youth continued courteously. "Unfortunate news has come today from Puerh. My father is desolated, but eager to receive the illustrious visitor."

In the curtained rear section of the building, Hank found Chang Wu. The elderly merchant welcomed him ceremoniously, with quiet friendliness. But even without the son's forewarning, Murray would have guessed that something was preying on the old man's mind.

"You are come to Atuntze on business?" his host inquired, holding the letter in his parchment-yellow claw. "It is a difficult trip hither from the railroad at Yunnanfu, is it not?"

"Not business, exactly," Hank smiled. "And yet it's that in a way. I write. Like to trek off to out-of-the-way places, where I can't take along much more than my typewriter and my toothbrush. Get a kick out of seeing the spots most men miss. In Tongking, our friend Schottzman told me about Atuntze, and it sounded good. The crossroads of Heaven, Schottzman called it."

THE crossroads of Heaven! Yes, in a sense. We are the crossroads of these mountains, at least, and legend tells that some of our peaks scrape the sky. The salt from Kakalo passes through here, and the tea caravans bound from Puerh to Tibet and Lhasa, the Forbidden City. The caravans come and go, at Atuntze—unless, sometimes, they do not come."

The old man's voice had a melancholy ring as he said these words. Murray thought of the "unfortunate news" Chang's son had mentioned. Sensing something unusual, he gave his host an opening.

"You mean—sometimes they are lost?"

Chang's face was inscrutable.

"Lost? There are such things as

bandits in Herr Schottzman's Heaven, my friend. One in particular—Laang, the Moso—has made much grief in Atuntze. Only today, a runner brought me word that a hundred of my mules, bearing blocks of tea to the value of more than my entire fortune, were taken by Laang's men only a day's ride from here on the Puerh road."

HANK leaned forward eagerly, but with a sympathetic murmur for the old man's heavy losses. Hijackers in the Himalayas! This was adventure. His eyes shone with interest as his host continued.

"The band of Laang killed all my coolies, the runner reports. All the mules are gone — being herded through the back passes into Laang's country, somewhere. Even the American private detective who was accompanying the caravan to discover the bandit's whereabouts — killed. You may have heard his name, my friend. Emory Cranston, a very clever—"

"Cranston! Not from New York?"

"I believe so. He has been working on a commission for our provincial authorities, in an effort to stamp out the marauders who—"

The eagerness had drained from Murray's face, leaving it tense and grim. Emory Cranston! It had been six years since he and Emory had shared bachelor quarters in Washington Square.

Six years, but Hank still remembered Cranston as the best old guy in the world—easy going, comfortable, generous, with a streak of the dare-devil which had prompted him to tackle all sorts of dangerous jobs for the kick they gave him.

It was that love of danger that had bound them together, made their friendship different. "The Two Musketeers" New York had called them, in the old days. And now—Em dead—lying in some forsaken moun-

tain pass, with a Moso knife or a heathen bullet in his heart!

"Look here!" the American rasped. "What have you done about this?"

"Done? There is nothing to do, my friend. Our magistrate's hands are tied—the attack was made outside the line of his authority. I am ruined. What can I do?"

"Get back your caravan! Round up those cutthroats, and turn them over to the law! Make this Laang swing for what he's done! That's what we can do."

"We, my friend? But why should you—"

"Cranston was the nearest thing to a pal I had in the world, Mr. Chang. I'm going to bring in the man who caused his death. And I'm going to bring in the tea they killed him for, too. If you'll find me this runner as a guide—"

Murray was already striding toward the front of the shop, lashed by his eagerness to get into action. Chang Wu followed him, protesting feebly.

"But you do not comprehend, my friend! This bandit is a murderer. His followers are without scruple. Alone against them—"

SUDDENLY he caught the American's arm and pulled him back against the wall. A little group of men was passing the store, on the opposite side of the street. They were clearly visible through the opening above the window counter.

"There he goes, Mr. Murray! Laang himself, the bandit chief!"

Hank peered out into the narrow street and gasped in astonishment.

The swaggering Moso who walked a pace ahead of his roughly-dressed bodyguard was the same man who had led the attack on his room at the inn the night before!

Now Murray understood. Laang himself had not been with his band during the raid on Chang Wu's cara-

van. He had been at Atuntze, preparing to lead the captured train to some mountain hideout—that was the "little trip" to which he had referred. And he had mistaken Hank for Emory Cranston, whom he was expecting—Cranston, who was coming to hound him out and drag him to justice. That explained everything.

"Three!" exclaimed the American.

"What did you say, my friend?"

"Three reasons, now, to bring that Bandit of Heaven to grief—good reasons, too."

THE two mules plodded single file up the mountain trail, with surer footing than would seem possible on the narrow span between two cliffs. Often rocks dislodged by their hoofs crashed down into the valley thousands of feet below.

But the animals themselves moved steadily forward.

"The tracks on the trail are much plainer here," Hank called across his shoulder to Chang's coolie runner, who followed him on the second mule. "This is the way they came, all right."

"This only trail up from Puerh road," the coolie nodded. "Bandits attack much below. Bang-bang. Much gun. Coolies killed. White spy killed. Laang drive mules up to border."

Somewhere in the white-peaked mountains ahead of them was the frontier of Tibet. The Moso hijacker was obviously trying to get the stolen caravan beyond the reach of any authority—and in Tibet he had an excellent market for both mounts and tea.

"How long ago would you say the caravan had passed this way?" Murray asked. Unused to the soil and unfamiliar with the weight the animals were carrying, he hesitated to accept his own reading of the tracks in the trail ahead of them.

"Maybe three hour," the native answered readily. "Not hurry. Laang not think word get to Atuntze yet."

"That means we'll be catching up with 'em pretty soon. When we sight their dust, you can open trail it back home. No need of your getting killed. This isn't your fight, Chop-chop."

There was silence for a moment, broken only by the clumping of the mules' hoofs up the rocky trail. Then the coolie answered:

"Tao's brother one of caravan riders. Laang kill. Tao bring gun. He stay."

"Good boy!"

They were almost twelve hours out of Atuntze now, and had been climbing steadily since they had reached the fork of their trail from the Puerh road. The mountainous country through which they had passed was wild and desolate—and it was growing wilder with every mile as they progressed.

DEEP pink patches of primroses clung in colorful profusion to the gray-green slopes of the lower mountainside, and clusters of white buttercups looked like snowdrifts slipped down from the peaks. The scene was beautiful.

But Murray's mind was not on beauty as he stared grimly forward up the trail.

At last the two riders reached a narrow natural ravine, the walls of which were set so close together that by thrusting out his arms a man could touch one on either side. Through this crevice the path squeezed—and then plunged sharply downward into a long, rolling valley.

At the rim, Hank drew up his mount with a low cry of triumph.

"See there, Chop-chop? About a mile ahead of us!"

Down the slope to the valley, swaying along the path in single file, moved the hijacked tea caravan;

Laang's convoy rode ahead and behind it—seven men in all.

"The odds are only three-and-a-half to one," Hank murmured. "What say you, Chop-chop?"

The coolie's answer was an extended finger.

"See two."

MUCH nearer the pass, and heading toward it, two riders moved. They were obviously scouts retracing the course as lookouts against possible pursuit.

"Quick! Back to the other side before they spot us!" Murray barked.

The two mules were turned about, and back through the crevice their riders urged them. On the Atuntze side of the pass once more, the coolie and the American dismounted.

Picketing their mounts out of sight in the scrub down the slope, they returned to the neck of the ravine. On opposite sides of the trail, they crouched behind the concealing bushes. Guns drawn, they waited.

There was a long interval of silence. Then the slow clatter of hoofs climbing over stones reached their ears.

Louder it grew, and louder.

At last Hank was sure that the scouts had entered the far end of the pass. He nodded to Tao. Both tensed in readiness.

Out onto the open path rode the two knife-scarred bandits, one close behind the other. Their turbaned heads made scarlet blotches against the rock. They were talking carelessly, laughing and jesting.

"Up with your hands! Down off those donkeys!"

The order came so quickly that neither of the mounted men was able to grab for his gun or dirk. They looked down, startled, into two pairs of cold eyes and two threatening gray muzzles. Slowly, their hands reached for the sky.

"Down, I said!"

Out of their saddles they clambered. One made a swift motion toward his sash. A sharp report, a shrill cry, and he was cursing softly as he nursed a long furrow on the arm which had made the attempt.

It was a matter of moments only before two cloaked and red-turbaned figures were spurring the bandit donkeys through the ravine and down the long slope toward the slowly-moving caravan. Behind them, they left the stripped rear guard of Laang's convoy helplessly lashed to two stout trees above the pass.

"In these outfits we can at least get within shooting distance before we're spotted," Hank exulted. "Come on, Chop-chop! And when we get there you know what to do."

Down the trail they hurried, urging their mounts to greater speed. The riders below them looked back once or twice and waved in recognition, but kept moving the caravan ahead.

WHEN the two from Atuntze were within a hundred yards of the last bandit, they swung suddenly to the left and beat swiftly up the slope to a point a little above the heads of the laboring string.

The end rider, turning in his saddle, saw what they were doing. Recognition dawned in his eyes. He cried out a shrill warning to the man ahead.

The startled henchmen of the Moso looked up into the muzzles of two guns. Murray was covering the four men at the rear of the column. The coolie, spurring ahead, kept his weapon leveled steadily on the three at point.

"Up hands! Don't reach for your sashes!"

The four men who were before the American obeyed. But the three up front decided to risk it. After

all, they were seven to two—and all seven armed.

One of the trio—a pock-marked Tibetan—grabbed at the handle of his dirk.

Tao's revolver spoke with a vicious snarl. The Tibetan screamed, clawed at his chest, and slumped forward out of his saddle.

At the same instant, both of his companions went into action—in different directions.

The hand of the one nearest Murray's ally flew toward the pistol stuck in his sash.

The lead man, lying low in his saddle, spurred his mount forward down the trail. He, alone of the seven, rode a pony. Dust thundered up in a cloud behind him.

Bang!

Tao's gun had cracked again, and the man below him dropped his half-raised pistol to clutch at a bloody hole between his eyes. With a choked gasp, he pitched over and lay sprawled across the trail.

Bang! Bang!

The coolie plugged two shots after the rider who was speeding down the slope into the valley.

BUT the bandit's pony was too swift, the aim too difficult. Tao's target continued to stay in his seat, growing smaller and smaller as his mount streaked into the distance.

"Out of your saddles!" Murray ordered the four at his end.

Terrified at the fate of their companions, the rogues obeyed. The American lined them up, commanded their weapons, and bound them together hand and foot with their saddle ropes so tightly that they could not move.

"Their pal on the pony'll probably be back to unwrap 'em," he called to Tao. "But at least we'll have their toys along with us."

"He not come back for long time," the coolie answered softly. "He

ride to warn Laang. Plenty trouble still, maybe."

Hank smiled coldly.

"That's not bad news. I'd like to meet Mr. Laang again. Come on there, Chop-chop! Let's get this line of animals about-faced and trail 'em for home."

IT was the hour before dawn. All night the caravan had moved down the steep mountain trail toward Atuntze. Tao, at point, guided them carefully along the treacherous path. Hank, riding behind, kept the animals moving and guarded against the chance of any enemy reprisals.

Five hours from the town, as Murray figured it. He'd be glad to see the rows of flat, tiered roofs which seemed to climb the mountainside. He was tired—deadly tired. Two nights without sleep, the news of Cranston's death, the continued strain of excitement and activity, were telling on him.

Out of the trail moved the caravan, and onto the somewhat wider road from Puerh to Atuntze. The animals plodded forward wearily, their bulky loads swaying rhythmically as they moved along. It was getting lighter. Soon the sun would be up.

Suddenly, Tao halted the line. Hank peered ahead, surprised—then rode front to investigate.

"What's up?"

"Flash up in bushes ahead. There! Signal. Laang's men come!"

Hank's eyes flew upward toward the overhanging thicket the coolie had indicated. At first he saw nothing. Then it came again—a thrice-repeated beam from a European battery torch.

"O. K.! Close up the ranks here, Chop-chop! Make a huddle of the mules. Laang won't kill 'em, they're too valuable. We'll have to hole in and shoot it out, I guess."

Tao turned the nose of the lead

donkey and in almost no time had the orderly line doubled back on itself into a group as solid as the wider road permitted.

Hank, meanwhile, achieved the same result from the other end, massing the animals.

ALMOST on the instant there was a shout from the road ahead, and the rush of running feet. Toward them, from the direction in which they had been heading, dashed more than a dozen armed men—yelling as they came.

Murray and his companion were out of their saddles in a flash, and weaving among the mules midway of the tangle so that they were momentarily hidden from view. Under this cover, they gained the hillside overhanging the road and dashed up it toward the shelter of a boulder which was some yards above the charging pack.

A volley of shots followed them to their impromptu fortress—shots which went wild because of the dim light and the weaving of the targets. When the two stumbled to temporary safety, neither was hurt—although a bullet had seared a round hole into the American's shirt.

For a moment they lay flat behind the rock, panting from their uphill sprint. Then Hank struggled up on one elbow, and peered around the corner of the jagged boulder. There was a sharp crack from the road below, and a bullet clipped his ear. He ducked back to safety.

"They've got the drop on us, all right, Chop-chop! All over but a little shouting, eh? Well — let's shout!"

Squirming forward, close to the ground, the American sighted the road once more. He was so low that the waving grass screened him. But he could see three crouching figures advancing slowly up the steep hill, with drawn pistols.

Crack!

The foremost of the ragged bandits straightened with a scream, throwing his arms above his head. He spun halfway around and pitched forward on his face.

Instantly his two companions dropped in their tracks, and began to roll down the hill toward their fellows in the road below.

Crack! Crack!

Tao's gun spoke from around the other side of the boulder. One of the rolling figures stiffened suddenly, shuddered and lay still. The other rolled to safety in the roadside ditch.

A hoarse shout of fury rose from the bandit ranks, and the sound of running feet reached the ears of the embattled pair behind the rock.

"They're spreading out!" Hank cried. "Going to surround us and close in!"

HE had read their purpose aright. Laang's cutthroats were scattering to right and left in a long line, the ends of which were beginning to swing up the hill through the distant brush—well out of range.

"It's just a case of getting as many as we can before we go down, Chop-chop! Where's the big chief himself?"

"Laang circling to left!" Tao answered. "Have yellow turban. See?"

Hank made out the bright head-dress of the Moso, moving in the brush below. Taking careful aim, he rose suddenly and fired. Then down into the grass he crashed again.

Quick as he had been, he had not dropped soon enough. A rifle from a thicket further up the hill had picked him out. A sudden, searing pain shot through his left shoulder.

"One for them!" he muttered through his set teeth. "Did I touch Laang?"

"Not touch."

"That's that, then. Too bad. I guess—"

A SUDDEN shout from the enemy wing toward Atuntze interrupted him. At first, he thought it was a signal for attack. Then, to his amazement, he saw the men on his own side turning tail and scrambling madly down the hill.

"What the—"

"Men shout they sight Atuntze patrol. Us inside magistrate's jurisdiction. Laang try get caravan back across line."

That was what was happening. There was wild confusion on the road below as the bandits attempted to swing the muddled caravan toward Puerh once more.

"But how—at this hour?"

"Chang Wu send to meet us. He say magistrate promise convoy if we reach line."

It seemed impossible to Hank—like the last-minute escape in a movie. But the actions of Laang's men proved the truth of Tao's words. They were shouting at the mules, beating them, pulling at their gear. Slowly, the weary beasts were turning back.

"We've got to hold 'em, Chop-chop!"

Across the rock, Murray sent a shot down into the milling crowd. It winged a tall Tibetan, who howled with pain. His fellows, unnerved by the approach of the cavalry, broke and began to run down the road away from Atuntze.

The trail curved about the base of the hill where Hank and the coolie were fortified. A good deal higher up, the American was able to make the swing in much shorter time than the men below. He crouched in the shelter of a tree and waited tensely.

In a moment the first of the fleeing

desperadoes appeared beneath him, rushing headlong for the safety beyond the line.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

One of the bullets went home and a ragged coolie plunged forward to his knees, badly wounded. The other shots ripped the dust just in advance of the running men.

The bandits shouted with fear, wavered, turned tail and dashed in panic up the road again—into the face of the escort from Atuntze.

Down the trail trooped the armed riders, their fur caps and flowing cloaks clearly visible in the growing light. The first of the sun's rays glittered on the long guns in their hands. Laang's game was up.

OLD Chang Wu had ridden out with the magistrate's men, and his donkey was next to Murray's as they turned back toward Atuntze. The tea caravan and its well-guarded abductors moved up the trail ahead of them.

"Single-handed, you accomplished this, Mr. Murray! It is amazing!"

"Not at all! I had Tao. And Chop-chop is a good man in a pinch."

"He shall be well rewarded, my friend—a post of honor in Tongking, perhaps. But you—how can I thank you for saving my fortune?"

Hank gazed grimly forward at the yellow-turbaned head of the man who had ordered Emory Cranston's death—Laang, who had slipped at last by making an assault within the Atuntze magistrate's jurisdiction, and who was now on his way to a well-earned gallows.

"You might hunt me up some type-writer paper when we get in, sir," he answered. "I'd like to send a story back to the paper—Em's and mine—about how a swell guy went out fighting like he should."

In NEXT MONTH'S issue of THRILLING ADVENTURES: DEAD OR ALIVE, A Bang-Up Western Yarn, by WILTON WEST.

A MAN *Amongst* MEN

*Lloyd Bennet, Fighting
Fool, Barges into the
Scrap of His Life in
this Colorful Yarn of
the Pathan Country*

A Complete Novelette
By CHARLES GREEN

Author of "Black Docks," etc.

CHAPTER I

Stranded in Peshawar

THE girl smiled, and the fat Babu merchant leaned further over the table, his eyes devouring her behind their cushions of fat, his thick fingers interlocking with hers. Soft words came from the half-caste dancing girl's painted lips. And even as the Hindoo smirked, half-drunk, death reached out a bony claw.

A three-fingered claw it was: an Arab, whose black beard reached to his waist; Ling Woo, the Chinese proprietor, and a pock-faced Pathan. The three closed in simultaneously, and each knew precisely his share of the devilry.

It was the Pathan who struck, driving the blade of his knife beneath



Hard fists pounding,

the Babu's armpit. So swiftly did death follow, that the smirk remained fixed on the Hindoo's face. Only the girl knew, but she continued smiling, too.

For Ling Woo could say many things with a slight gesture of his right hand. The girl kept smiling, although she could feel the Babu's blood dripping on her scarlet slippers.

Tobacco smoke, like a merciful veil, hung over the incredible squalor of the native cabaret. Its sharper odor disguised the stench of unwashed bodies. It softened the depraved bestiality stamped on the faces of the riff-raff of Asia assembled there. Yellow faces, black, brown. Half-breeds, quarter-breeds; men into whose make-up went the worst characteristics of four races



he fought desperately and determinedly for his life

and a dozen nationalities. Ling Woo's slanted eyes passed over these with contemptuous indifference. They paused, narrowing, on the face of a white man in dirty ducks drinking alone at a side table. The Chinaman knew Lloyd Bennet by reputation only—a reputation which embraced three continents; and, as many others of his type, he feared the tall, brown-faced American as the jackal fears the gray wolf.

A strange man was this American. A man who knew much and spoke little. A man who visited places where another of white skin would have instantly had his throat slit. A gray-eyed, silent man whose skill with fists or a revolver, and cold-blooded courage, made campfire legends; whose fame reached the Pathan hillmen in the lofty Hindu Kush,

the Arab desert wolves on the hot sands of Morocco, or where gun-runners and slavers gathered off the Ivory Coast.

These men feared and held in reverence only the name of Allah and his Prophet; yet they pronounced with respect the name of the tall American. Lloyd Ben-Et—*ai*, a great fighter! *Ai*, a man among men! Though not a True Believer, befriend him, and you shall not regret it; cross him, and, by the Beard of the Prophet, you shall not live long enough to repent it. *Ai*, a man among men!

Not an enviable reputation, perhaps, considering the source; but it was an impressive one to Ling Woo, upon whose command a man had just been murdered for whatever he might possess in the money belt around his

paunch. Might not the American devil resent such a deed—although of what value could be the life of a Babu pig?

But the brown-faced man in dirty ducks had not looked up from his drinking. Evidently he had seen nothing. So Ling Woo's slanted eyes traveled on in their careful survey of the room. The three Afridi soldiers at a table further down were busy entertaining a corresponding number of dancing girls, in addition to being very drunk. Nothing to fear there.

And certainly there was nothing to fear from the party of English occupying the corner table. They were remote, unseeing. The young woman with them, however, Ling Woo mused vaguely, had much beauty; and his alert brain compiled rapidly the number of pieces of gold she might bring on an auction block where such transactions took place.

He sighed, for the amount was impressive, and only then did he turn his attention to the dead Babu.

"Drunk, eh?" he said in shrill Pushtu, his voice deliberately loud. "Well, take you him to a sleeping mat, where he may dream undisturbed."

THE black-bearded Arab showed his teeth in a wolfish grin. The scar-faced Pathan returned it. Both stooped over the Hindoo, and began dragging him the length of the room to the curtained doorway in the rear.

Lloyd Bennet glared at the bottle on his table. It was empty; the glass at its right still contained one drink. Bennet found, not for the first time in his life, that there is a certain bitterness that wells up to choke a man which liquor cannot drown. The square bottle on the table had held a quart. Bennet had consumed all but the little in the glass—and was dead cold sober.

It wasn't the fault of the rye. The

poison of defeat in his heart, the grim, sordid realization of failure was stronger than the alcohol which tried to dull it. His last piece of silver had purchased that bottle. He now possessed only the clothes on his back: a tattered shirt, filthy ducks, an old pair of tennis shoes.

"A hobo," Bennet told himself grimly. "A tramp, who belongs in a dive like this, or in—the gutter. A swell wind-up. Oh, the devil!"

IT hurt. The glances of the party of English across the room, out slumming for the evening in the native cabaret, hurt. Well-dressed, well-fed, they were staring at him, passing lazy comments. Bennet damned their cursed insolence. Without actually overhearing them, he knew perfectly well what the comments were. A tramp—derelict—disgusting spectacle of a white man sinking to the native's level—

A black-bearded Arab lurched into his table. The bottle crashed over, smashing the thin glass. Whisky, and bits of glass, streamed in thin rivulets on Bennet's lap. The Arab growled something unintelligible. The girl in the English party laughed.

That laugh tipped the scales, so to speak. Bennet's iron control of himself wavered. All the pent-up bitterness in his heart *demand*ed an outlet—and there was only one left. Physical action. To smash out with his fists. Drown himself in the mad frenzy of rough and tumble.

With a single jerk of his wrist, he flung the table aside. He was out of his chair like a released coiled spring. The Arab whirled. He took one look at Bennet's face, and dropped the body he was partly supporting. His right hand darted to the knife beneath his dirty burnoose.

Bennet laughed grimly. He checked himself, waited deliberately until the Arab drew his knife, then leaped in.

The eight-inch blade jerked forward viciously. It would have disembowled Bennet had it completed the arc. But steel fingers arrested it. Bennet jerked the knife wrist to the left, then downward. The Arab screamed with pain, dropping the knife.

LING WOO, at the head of the room, misinterpreted the attack. The American devil evidently meant to investigate the untimely death of the babu merchant. A friend of his, perhaps. Which might mean a disturbing police interview, with the subsequent, and even more disturbing neck stretching party.

The British had no patience with men who engineered back-stabbing affairs, even if the victim was a fat Babu fool. The punishment they dealt out for such misdeeds was swift and appallingly final.

So Ling Woo made certain significant gestures to a dozen men scattered about the room. And when Bennet, with a short uppercut, sent most of the Arab's yellow teeth down his throat, a number of men suddenly decided to take a personal interest in the affair.

Knives flashed. Lithe figures detached themselves from inconspicuous dark corners. Brown, black, yellow faces—Ling Woo's paid pack of rats, they threw themselves on Bennet. From the left, from the right. Mouths open, shrieking curses in a dozen languages and dialects.

A general riot was what Ling Woo wanted. And he got it. In thirty seconds, the cabaret was a madhouse. Bennet backed to the wall. Crouching, hard fists pounding, he fought for his life—and gloried in it. Gloried in the smooth coordination of his muscles. Perfect timing. Instant response to lightning-like brain impulses. His body was a melody of grace as he leaped in and out.

The pock-faced Pathan closed in,

a long-bladed knife driving at the American's throat. Bennet jerked his body an inch to the right. The knife passed over his shoulder, its sharp point burying in the wooden wall. Desperately, the Pathan tried to jerk it out. Bennet laughed. He crashed his fist behind and slightly below the hillman's right ear. The Pathan dropped as if he were shot.

And then, abruptly, the two huge kerosene lamps lighting the cabaret went out. Thick blackness blanketed the room. Bennet hugged the wall, crouching forward. Ugly sounds now came from the darkness. No longer able to distinguish friend from foe, the blood-maddened pack had turned on each other.

Most of them had been smoking hasheesh. Under the influence of the drug, they now became vicious beasts. The darkness was only the excuse they needed to go at each other's throats.

A man screamed near Bennet, a high-pitched, drawn-out scream of pain. Another laughed. His laughter changed to a choking gurgle as a knife found his body.

"I think," Bennet told himself wearily, "I think I'd better get out of here. It's getting nasty."

HE guessed the approximate direction of the door, lowered his head and charged into the mob milling about in the darkness. In ten seconds, he had fought his way through to the exit. The cool night air felt good after the stench within the cabaret. Bennet inhaled it deep into his lungs.

Behind him, he could still hear sounds of fighting, mounting in intensity every second. Bloodthirsty animals knifing each other in the darkness. He shrugged and stepped out into the street.

It was a long, crooked street, narrow, smelly. Other native cabarets were to the right and left, jazz

played on an ancient gramophone blaring from one. It was the native quarter in Peshawar, in northeastern India close to the Afghanistan border. Bennet wished himself anywhere upon the face of the earth but there.

He hesitated, having the choice of walking right or left. Either direction did not matter. Going right, he would reach the British army barracks; following the street to the left would bring him to the European quarters of Peshawar. In both places he was equally unwanted. He was stone broke. Bennet turned left.

He walked slowly, his feet dragging. The night was still young; he had many hours to kill. And who could tell what tomorrow might bring? He'd been stranded in worse places, and had always managed to pull out of it, somehow. What the devil! After a while, he began whistling.

An automobile came roaring down the street. Bennet stepped aside. The car came closer, closer. Glaring headlights played on him as he waited patiently, close to a stone wall, for the car to pass. Abreast of him, a curt command came from someone in the rear seat. The automobile ground to a stop.

"Come here!"

Bennet stared. Yes, the command had been addressed to him. The man in the rear waved again, now impatiently. Frowning a bit, yet curious, Bennet walked toward the car.

CHAPTER II

An Unwelcome Proposal

IT was a long tan touring car, obviously belonging to one of the commanding officers at the garrison. The chauffeur was in uniform, as well as the man beside him. The two men in the rear seat wore civilian clothes. A young woman sat between them. Bennet recognized the

trio. They were the party of English who had stared at him in the cabaret.

The man on the right—stocky, gray-haired, with cold blue eyes, bulldog jaw and a military mustache—appraised Bennet quietly for a moment.

"Your name Bennet?" he snapped.

Bennet nodded briefly. He resented the Englishman's voice and attitude.

"I am Major Downes. I've heard about you, Bennet. And I saw you in action a few minutes ago. Your skill with your fists is—commendable."

THE Englishman was not smiling as he spoke. He simply clipped off several cold facts, and did not wait for any comment.

"I don't discuss my private business with strangers—Downes," Bennet replied coldly.

The Englishman's face went a shade redder. "Damn your insolence!" he roared. "You'll address me as *Major Downes*."

"Then," Bennet said softly, "you'll address me as *Mister Bennet*—if I choose to listen to you. As a matter of fact, I'm not over-anxious. I dislike your tone of voice. Now what the devil do you want?"

Downes opened his mouth to say something, changed his mind and simply stared at the tall American. The girl stared at him. The other Englishman—a pale young man, with bulging eyes and tiny black mustache—glared at him with open hostility.

"The insolence of some of these—tramps," he remarked to the girl. "The fellow's probably drunk."

"Fortunately for *you*," Bennet drawled, "I am quite sober. Otherwise I'd certainly drag you out of that car and put you over my knee." He turned to the older man. "Well, what is it?"

Downes brought forth a package of cigarettes, lighted one. He did not offer Bennet any.

"I am sorry," he said coolly, "if I've been a bit brusque. Your past and present really don't interest me; your future—yes!"

"Really?" said Bennet.

"Yes. It may surprise you to learn that I discussed you last night with the officers at the barracks. They suggested your name when I told them I was very much in need of a man acquainted with the native dialects spoken in the part of Afghanistan where the Hindu Kush range cuts across. Also someone who is familiar with the country itself. They claimed you could fill both these qualifications."

"I can," Bennet agreed quietly.

DOWNS nodded. "Excellent. I recognized you in the cabaret from the description they gave me. Meant to speak to you there, but didn't have a chance. Now, briefly, I am heading an expedition into Afghanistan at one o'clock tomorrow afternoon. My daughter's fiancé, Mr. Brooks here, and I, intend to make some important archeological excavations in an abandoned temple one hundred and thirty miles west of Kabul.

"Our Kaffir guide is reliable, of course, but I do not wish to be wholly dependent upon him. I can offer you two hundred pounds for your services."

Bennet shook his head. "What you propose, Major," he said grimly, "is suicide. Didn't the gentlemen at the barracks also inform you that Afghanistan at present is a hotbed of rebellion? And especially the part of Afghanistan you intend to enter? The Pathan tribes throughout that district would relish the prospect of slitting some English throats.

"I advise you—and I know what I'm talking about—to give it up. For a while, anyway."

"I didn't ask you for advice," Downes said curtly. "I've heard of possible trouble with the natives, and

provided against it. The expedition shall be guarded by a strong unit from the garrison here. You'll report at the barracks at noon tomorrow. Get yourself a new outfit with this in the morning."

He thrust a fifty-rupee note on Bennet. And before the American had a chance to say anything, the automobile lurched away at a command from Downes. Bennet stood there in the middle of the narrow street, staring at the receding rear light of the long touring car. He glanced down at the banknote in his right hand.

"Well, of all the bull-headed idiots!" he exploded. "Fifty rupees!" He grinned and waved after the car. "Brother, you're an optimist. But thanks anyway."

Those fifty rupees would come in very handy. Buy him some halfway decent clothes in the morning, so that he might look up some of his old friends without shame. Would pay his transportation to Calcutta, fifteen hundred miles away across the width of India. There he could always lay his hands on a couple of hundred pounds. A new start!

And Bennet's conscience, as he proceeded cheerfully up the street, was perfectly clear, too. That Englishman could well afford the fifty rupees, or he wouldn't have been so free and easy with his money. And if he really meant to go through with that expedition, then he'd certainly not miss it—for he would never come back.

BENNET knew rather more about the Pathan tribes there than the British gentlemen in the barracks. Knew them for what they were: the fiercest gang of cutthroats upon the face of the globe. Born fighters, fearless devils, who hated the English as only the Pathan can hate.

From their lofty perches in the mountain crags they would follow

the progress of the expedition party. Follow it with the silence and patience of a stalking jungle cat. Then, in some narrow gulch, perhaps they'd swoop down. And those who escaped the first bloody massacre would die at the torture stakes. The Englishman didn't have a chance—

A NATIVE cabaret, cleaner and a bit more attractive than the others, checked Bennet. Why not have a drink? Plenty early yet, and certainly the situation called for some celebration. The major at least deserved a drink to his health out of those fifty rupees.

Bennet grinned again and entered. He ordered a drink. He ordered another. He ordered a third. Liquor is cheap in India. After a while, he began to feel fairly good. So he kept it up. And when dawn finally streaked through the bamboo slats, he was still going strong. It was a great little world.

He dozed off at the table there for a few hours, awakened when the sun was fairly high in the sky and promptly ordered another drink. He had left instructions earlier that he be notified when his bill reached the grand total of five rupees. Evidently it hadn't yet—the Hindoo proprietor carefully kept score on a little ivory-bordered slate—and Bennet saw no reason why he should curtail the celebration. He still felt great.

A half dozen soldier suddenly tramped into the cabaret, accompanied by a young lieutenant and—Major Downes! The latter was now in uniform. Bennet quietly lowered his glass. He sensed trouble.

Downes looked around the cabaret, saw Bennet and marched straight to his table, the lieutenant and the soldiers close behind him.

"I thought," he said coldly, "I ordered you to buy a new outfit and report to the barracks at noon."

"Yes, Major," Bennet murmured;

"I believe I recall your saying something to that effect."

"Why haven't you done so?"

Bennet shrugged. "Simply because I intend doing nothing of the sort."

"You admit it?" Downes snapped.

"I do," Bennet said coolly. "What gives you the impression, Major, you can order me to do *anything*? I'm not connected with the British Army."

"The British Army has nothing to do with this," Downes retorted. "Will you deny that you received fifty rupees from me as an advance against your salary for accompanying my expedition?"

Bennet quietly drummed his fingers on the table. "So that's your game, eh, Major? If I should still refuse to come along with you—"

"I'll have you arrested and tried, for obtaining money under false pretenses!"

Bennet calmly finished his drink. He saw his position clearly enough. Major Downes had him with his nose in the dust. Had him, absolutely. An airtight case. Downes would prove he'd given him fifty rupees. Possession is acceptance; and Bennet's defense that he hadn't had a chance to return the money would be waved away by the judge. A judge who'd certainly be most damnable biased, anyway.

AND the very fact that Bennet had already spent one-tenth of the money would in itself convict him. Otherwise he might have claimed that he meant to return it the following day. He looked up. "Generally get what you want, don't you, Major?"

A flicker of a smile played for a moment on Downes' thin lips.

"Yes, I generally do."

There was a short pause.

"The prison here in Peshawar is pretty nasty, I understand," Downes added coldly. "So what's your answer, Bennet?"

"You know," Bennet drawled, "the blade of a Pathan's knife is two feet long and an inch wide. They have a cute trick of jabbing it into an enemy's stomach, then giving it a twirl. The result is interesting."

"Your answer, Bennet!" Downes repeated curtly.

"All right, Major, I'll come along. I may even *enjoy* it!"

CHAPTER III

The Trap Snaps!

THE sun, a blazing ball of fire overhead, blasted fiercely on the thin column of men and animals crawling over one of the lower ranges of Hindu Kush. The heat was stifling, retained and reflected as it was by the granite walls on either side. Downes' expedition was now underway three days—and Bennet, astride a hardy mountain donkey, wiped the sweat out of his eyes and cursed automatically the man who had tricked him into coming along.

The magnificent Khyber Pass, with the grim forts which guard it, now lay many miles behind them. Behind them, too, lay the good road into Kabul. Downes, consulting with the Kaffir guide, and ignoring altogether Bennet's objections, had decided to skirt the capitol of Afghanistan, and cut straight across the mountains to their objective.

Doing so, he would save at least seventy miles; but he would also, as Bennet vainly tried to explain to him, place his head into the noose.

The American tried again, rapping his heels against the donkey's ribs and galloping toward the head of the column, where Downes rode with the Kaffir guide.

"A word with you, Major."

"What now?" Downes asked.

Bennet pointed ahead. "In a half hour, if we follow this trail, we'll be at the pass the Pathans call Himlu-

Khan. It is one of their strongholds. For centuries now, caravans have been ambushed there. I advise you, for your own good, to go around it. To do so, we've got to fork off here."

Downes frowned. "How far will it put us out of our way?"

"About twelve miles. But it's a precaution worth taking, Major."

"We're going through the pass," Downes snapped. "Twelve miles in this blasted heat!"

"But I warn you, Major—"

"That'll be enough, Bennet. You're behaving like an old woman. We have sixty fighting men. What's wrong with you, anyway?"

Bennet shrugged. "All right, have it your way. Once forced into this damn expedition, I tried to earn my salary. You ignored every one of my suggestions. I told you, for instance, to choose three squads of Afridi native soldiers — hillmen themselves. You picked the Tommy regulars."

"The British Tommy," Downes said coldly, "is the best fighting man on the face of this earth."

"Not for this sort of fighting," Bennet growled. "Your General Braddock, some one hundred and fifty years ago, landed on the eastern shore of North America with precisely the same theory. You know what happened, when he tried to fight American Indians on their own ground."

DOWNES straightened in his saddle. He said curtly, "I don't care to discuss that with you, nor anything else. I shall call you when I need you."

His tone of voice was that of a master reprimanding a servant. Bennet controlled his rising anger. He swung the head of the donkey and dropped back to the rear of the column. The girl rode there, chatting gaily with the two young lieutenants in charge of the soldiers.

She seemed amazingly cool and

composed. A good-looking kid. Golden-haired, blue-eyed. A proud tilt to her head. A thoroughbred. Bennet hadn't much to do with her in the past few days. He resented her superior, snobbish attitude, obvious in her every word and gesture.

And he sensed it now, as she turned her head when he spoke her name. Polite condescension.

"A spanking would do you good, sister," Bennet said to himself. Aloud, he said evenly, "Miss Downes, your father is a stubborn old ass!"

THE effect of the blunt statement almost placed Bennet into good humor again. The two lieutenants gaped at him, open-mouthed. The girl's face became a frozen white mask. "I beg your pardon!"

"No time for acting now," Bennet continued roughly. "My description of your father shouldn't startle you; you ought to know him by now. There are many stubborn old asses on this earth, and I seldom concern myself with them. Here, however, sixty lives are involved, including yours and my own."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. If we continue our present route, I am convinced that we'll blunder into a sweet little ambush. I tried to get your father to change it. He refused to listen to me. Perhaps you may be more successful. I suggest you see him immediately."

The girl's eyes flashed angrily.

"Your impertinence," she said evenly, "is offensive, although you probably know no better, being what you are. My father is in command of this expedition and undoubtedly knows precisely what he's doing. You will give your opinions only when they are asked—and only to him.

"Since I personally have nothing to do with you, you will kindly refrain in the future from addressing

me. I'll let you know when I wish to speak to you."

One of the lieutenants laughed loudly. "Well done, by Jove!"

"These thugs must be put in their place," she said calmly. Then, turning to Bennet again and waving her small hand imperiously, "Well, what are you waiting for? You heard what I said. Go back where you belong!"

Bennet did not trust himself to speak. His lips white, he bowed mockingly and galloped to the centre of the column. The fools now deserved all they'd get, damn 'em! He'd go through with it—straight to the devil where they were all heading. And it'd be worth it!

Just seeing the expressions on their faces when the Pathan hordes swooped down would be well worth it. Bennet didn't give a single darn what happened to him.

And so when he saw a thin column of smoke rise for a few seconds from one of the mountain crags, to be answered a couple of minutes later by another, further down, he held his peace, merely loosening the heavy .45 automatic in the holster strapped around his waist. The fools wouldn't listen to his warning anyway.

DARN shame about those Tommies, though, marching so blithely in neat military formation. Marching to their death, poor devils—

Bennet knew perfectly well what those thin columns of smoke meant. Scouts were perched high up there in the rocks, sharp Pathan eyes following their progress. The first column of smoke signaled that the party was sighted, heading for Himlu-Khan Pass. The second was merely the acknowledgment. In a few minutes, all hell would break loose.

The narrow trail swung sharply to the left around a huge boulder, then dipped. Here it joined the bed of what had at one time been a

mountain torrent—a gulch perhaps twenty feet wide, with steep walls of red shale on either side. It wound like a huge snake up, up, terminating in Himlu-Khan Pass. Bennet was certain the Pathans lay in ambush somewhere along the three miles which was the length of the gulch.

Tense in his saddle, his eyes constantly combed the shale. Few sounds disturbed the majestic silence of the great Himalayas. The hoofs of the donkeys and the soldiers' boots made little noise in the soft dust which blanketed the floor of the gulch. Here a harness would jingle, a man cough from the choking dust. It was too hot to talk.

Minutes passed. Bennet's spine tingled. His sixth sense warned him of danger; a warning he tried to stifle, for even his iron nerves began to feel the strain. The others were blindly ignorant; Bennet *knew!*

He crouched forward suddenly, his left hand checking the donkey. Then: "*Down, everybody! Down—for your lives!*"

BENNET had seen the glint of a rifle barrel on the rocks above—and acted instantly. Yelled his warning, threw himself headlong off the donkey. In the nick of time, too. For a terrific volley of rifle fire ripped the silence. Another followed it. A third. Hundreds of native rifles, pouring hot lead into the massed column of soldiers!

Men screamed and dropped, clawing the hot dust. The column melted, as if some great invisible scythe had ripped across it. One of the lieutenants galloped up and bellowed orders which no one could hear. He died a split second later, his mouth still open. The other lieutenant replaced him, standing in his stirrups, waving his arms.

"Good God!" Bennet half-shouted. "He's getting them to *form squares!* Of all the dumb fools—"

He leaped to his feet.

"Scatter!" he screamed, trying to be heard above the bedlam. "Hug the walls!"

Too late. It was a brave show—the Tommies still alive mechanically forming squares beneath that murderous rifle fire from the rocks above. Magnificent, and yet incredibly stupid. Another volley, and the square of men collapsed like a house of cards.

AND then the Pathans charged. Like an irresistible tidal wave, they swooped down. Scores of them, shrieking their shrill battle cry. No rifles now—knives! The long, murderous Pathan knives, in their hands more deadly than the bullets of any gun.

Just a flash Bennet caught of Downes, coolly emptying his automatic. Of Brooks, white-faced, sitting helplessly in the saddle, his arms limp at his sides. Of the girl, struggling furiously with the men even then dragging her off the donkey. Then a semicircle of Pathan knives closed in about him as he crouched there with his back to the mountain wall.

No time to think now. A Pathan leaped in, and died with the top of his head shot away. Bennet made a mocking gesture with the automatic, laughing grimly.

"The ivory gates of Paradise are open, and the land of milk and honey lies just beyond. Step up, ye who seek entrance!"

He spoke their own language, and the knives hesitated, poised in mid-air. Bennet waited tensely. He had many friends among the Pathans. Would some one of them recognize him? Or would the knives flash again? Only five shots were left in his automatic. Swift death would follow the last.

A burly Pathan pressed forward. Bennet raised the automatic. The

hillman gestured quickly with his left hand.

"'Tis Lloyd Ben-Et, by Allah!" he shouted.

"Aye," said Bennet, "Lloyd Ben-Et. Call thou your chieftain."

The knives still ringing him, one of the men left the semicircle. The others watched Bennet with respectful silence. Most of them had heard of his name, and the mad exploits which went with it. Yet Bennet knew perfectly well that they would not hesitate killing him at a word from their chief. It all rested with him. Bennet waited.

ONLY now he became conscious of the quiet. It was eerie, in contrast to the bedlam of a few seconds ago. The ring of Pathans blocked his view, but he had a pretty good idea of what had happened. The few men escaping the murderous rifle fire must have been butchered in a dozen seconds. Pathan knives kill quickly. He was probably the only man in the party still alive.

He and the girl. She was more valuable alive. He wasn't—and in another minute or so he would know whether he was slated to join the others.

The semicircle opened, permitting the passage of a white-bearded Pathan. In spite of his age, the hillman's carriage was that of a young man. Bennet glanced at the dark, proud face, hawk-like with its fierce eyes beneath bushy eyebrows; great beaked nose and a cruel thin mouth. He smiled and coolly shoved the automatic back into the holster at his side.

"Greetings to thee, O Hammal Khun. We meet again."

The Pathan stared at Bennet, his black eyes coldly hostile.

"Greetings to thee, Lloyd Ben-Et. But what dost thou with these men, the enemies of my country?"

Bennet knew that his life depended

on his answer. He decided on a bold stroke.

"The British knew not the country. I was their eyes."

"And know thou not, Lloyd Ben-Et," the Pathan purred, his eyes narrowing. "that he who befriends the English crosses knives with me?"

Bennet laughed. "Aye, Hammal Khun, I know it well. Why, think you, I have brought the sheep to the lair of the tiger?"

The Pathan appraised Bennet shrewdly, stroking his white beard. Now his thin lips smiled.

"Sometimes, Lloyd Ben-Et, I lack wisdom. Speak!"

"The rifles I sold you to fight the British brought a hundred pieces of gold—true," Bennet drawled. "But I have played the dice in Peshawar, and I have lost. The English approach me. Both are men of great wealth, and there is the young woman they love. Much, much gold I thought they would pay for their lives and hers." Bennet shrugged.

"Business, Hammal Khun, of great profit I have brought you. I hope the two Englishmen and the young woman still breathe."

The Pathan's black eyes glittered. "Take you me for a fool, O Lloyd Ben-Et? I have myself thought of the business you mention, when the British were still far away. They were not fired upon, and both live. And because you have brought them, I shall treat thee fairly, Lloyd Ben-Et. One-third of what the English pay shall be yours."

Bennet bowed. "It is fair, Hammal Khun."

CHAPTER IV

Gambling with Death

AND it was fair, Bennet told himself savagely as he trudged up the steep trail leading to Hammal Khun's stronghold overlooking the pass. The don-

keys that had lived through the rifle fire were rounded up, and now bore heavy loads of rifles and ammunition stripped from the dead soldiers. The two Englishmen, their arms bound behind them, marched up ahead. The girl rode behind them.

A cold fury possessed Bennet as he looked at them. Stupid, obstinate fools. The blood of sixty men was on their heads. Because they had refused to heed his warning, they were just as responsible for the death of those Tommies as if they themselves had fired the Pathan rifles. Now let the fools pay, although their money could never repay for those lost lives.

Bennet knew that only his sharp eyes and steady nerves had saved his own life, since he had been riding abreast of the soldiers at whom the rifle fire was directed. In that split second, his life had hung on a hair. Downes owed him something for that. Owed him plenty. He and that little snob daughter. They had forced him by trickery into coming along. Treated him like a scullery maid. All right, let them pay for it, darn 'em!

He would go through with the contract he had made with the Pathan. Pocket one-third of the ransom money, and curse the captives while he was doing it. They were lucky to get out of it with their lives, anyway. The money would give him a chance to get on his feet. He felt he was entitled to it. To the devil with ethics—if any were involved!

IT took them three hours to reach the Pathan village, although Bennet might have tossed a stone from there into the gulch where the massacre had taken place, three thousand feet below. It wasn't much of a village, and typical. Simply three score of goatskin tents, which could be put up in twenty minutes and removed in less. It was principally for this

reason that the Pathans could laugh at the combined might of the British Empire.

Hammal Khun wasted no time. One hundred yards from the tents stood a square building, constructed from slabs of stone. Untold centuries ago, it was probably the temple of some mountain tribe. Now it was simply a stone ruin. The Pathan ordered the captives to be taken there.

THEN he and Bennet held a brief consultation. Their plan was simple enough, and had no loopholes, for the excellent reason that no precautionary measures were necessary. Downes would write a note to his friends in Peshawar, which Bennet would deliver. In the note Downes would describe his situation and state he had been informed by the Pathans that if the bearer of the note, Bennet, was not back in ten days with five thousand pounds in gold, the three of them would die a slow and painful death.

Bennet's mouth was hard as he strode toward the stone ruin, the Pathan chief behind him. It was a message he would enjoy delivering.

It was dark, damp, within the ancient temple. The two Englishmen and the girl were now bound hand and foot, lying on the hard earthen floor. The only one to display any fear when they entered was Brooks. Downes' face was set and composed. So was the girl's.

Bennet towered over them a moment. "Well!" he said through clenched teeth. "It took the blood of sixty men to convince you I was right, didn't it?"

"You needn't rub it in, you know," Downes said quietly.

"I'd like to—with my fist!" Bennet snapped. "Have you friends in Peshawar?"

"Ransom?"

"Yes. Five thousand pounds in gold to be given to me when I pre-

sent your note. Need I inform you that you'll be lashed to torture stakes if you don't write the note immediately?"

"I don't think so," Downes said coldly. "If it weren't for my daughter, however, I'd see these devils in Hades first!"

"Oh, I say, Father!" the girl drawled. "You needn't do anything on *my*—"

"Never mind that!" Bennet cut in roughly. "You know very well you don't mean it. Save this brave young heroine business until the reporters interview you."

Her answer startled Bennet. She smiled suddenly and murmured, "You know, I think I rather like you."

Bennet glared at her. It was a devil of a time to try to be funny.

"Yeah?" he said. "Well, it isn't mutual. What's the answer, Major?" "I'll write it."

Bennet spoke to the Pathan. Hammal Khun stooped over Downes, and with two slashes of his knife freed the Englishman's arms and legs. The chief remained in that stooping position, looking past Downes now. Looking into the girl's face, as if he were seeing her now for the first time. His eyes traveled down slowly, lingering on her white throat, the curves of her supple young body. They returned to rest on her face again. Bennet now saw fear creep into her eyes.

THE Pathan straightened jerkily, turned to Bennet. His thin lips were smiling.

"The English woman—she has much beauty, has she not, Lloyd Ben-Et?"

Bennet shrugged. His face was expressionless and his voice a lazy drawl as he countered, "Why? Does Hammal Khun covet the little fool?"

"Not I. But my brother is still grieving his wife. This woman of

white skin and hair of gold might help him to forget. He comes tomorrow. I shall make him a present of her."

"The ransom money?"

"Will pay for the lives of the two men. The young woman shall remain in my brother's tent. What care you, Lloyd Ben-Et, so long as we get the gold?"

"He spoke to you about me," the girl said tersely. "I know it! What did he say?"

Bennet silenced her with a curt gesture. He shrugged to the Pathan.

"No, Hammal Khun, it matters not, if you so desire it!"

AND Bennet wished from the bottom of his heart that he had meant it. That it really didn't matter. That he could shrug his shoulders and shut his eyes, blinding himself to the fate of Downes' daughter. But in that split second he knew he could not do that. It was something which he could not control, and he cursed his own weakness.

He would fight for her, even though he hated her; he would lay down his life, if necessary, to save her. Because she was a white woman, and helpless, and facing living death in a Pathan's dirty tent. Bennet could no more help it than he could help breathing. He was that sort of man.

Hammal Khun read none of this on the American's face. Bennet knew the hillman too well, knew that remonstrance was futile. He played his hand with a poker face, though he knew the cards were stacked against him.

Downes was now writing on a leaf from his notebook.

"Don't look up as I speak to you, Major," Bennet said quietly. "Just continue writing. That's it! Now listen! I've just heard a new angle on this thing. It concerns your daughter— Continue writing, darn

you! I want to speak to you about it, but not in this old devil's presence. Your reaction might arouse his suspicion, which would be fatal.

"About thirty seconds after I finish speaking—not immediately, mind you—act as if you've suddenly changed your mind about writing that note. Act it *well!* Nod if you understand. I've spoken too long already."

Downes nodded slightly and continued writing. Bennet breathed easier. The Englishman had steady nerves. It might help. Suddenly Downes lunged forward, evidently going after Bennet's automatic.

Leaping aside, Bennet clipped him on the side of the jaw, sending him sprawling against the wall. Downes regained his balance and glared at Bennet, rubbing his jaw. Bennet picked up the piece of paper the Englishman had dropped, glanced at it, then whirled angrily to the Pathan.

"He did not write what I asked."

Hammal Khun showed his strong white teeth. "So? Perhaps he will write what you ask, Lloyd Ben-Et, when his feet feel the bite of hot iron?"

"Later, Hammal Khun," said Bennet. "Leave me alone with them a while. Sometimes words bite deeper than hot iron. In his own language I shall explain what happens to one's flesh on the torture stakes. Then he will write."

THE Pathan nodded. "Very well; there is no hurry. But make him write, Lloyd Ben-Et, or I will lose my patience. I shall return soon."

He strolled out. Bennet turned and stood silent a while, grimly stroking his lean lower jaw. He thought of many things in those few seconds, and his gray eyes were bitter.

"Since I am the one who seems to be most concerned," the girl spoke,

looking up at Bennet's set face, "may I ask what this is all about?"

"The white-bearded gentleman," Bennet said slowly, "informed me that you will grace his brother's tent tomorrow morning. You will not be permitted to leave—ever!"

"*What!*" Downes shouted hoarsely.

"You heard me! She will remain here."

"Even if I pay the ransom?"

"Yes."

AGAIN silence—heavy and tense. Downes' face was gray. Brooks looked helplessly frightened, his eyes bulging out still further. The girl's face was that of a marble statue. No fear there, though.

"Bennet," Downes whispered hoarsely, "in the name of Heaven—you *must* help us! I'll pay you—"

"Don't speak of payment now!" Bennet said savagely. "Or I'll forget that you're fifteen years older than I, and beat the daylight out of you. I *must* help you, eh? And why must I? I hate your insides. Your kid is a rank snob. You yourself are responsible for being in this mess.

"I've tried to warn you, tried to do all in my power to avoid this. But you, like the stubborn fool you are, went ahead. And so sixty men coughed out their lives in that hot dust. My conscience ought to be clear. I ought to tell the three of you to go to the devil. Why should I worry what becomes of you?"

"Bennet—"

Bennet passed his hand wearily through his hair. "I'm a fool, darn it! I'll help you—sure; but get this straight. It isn't because of anything I may get from you. Nor because of what you are. This is simply a case of a woman in a desperate position.

"A woman! Not Miss Downes! But all this is something you won't and can't, understand— All right, any suggestions?"

"You're going to Peshawar with

the ransom note, aren't you?" Downes said eagerly.

"Well?"

"Locate Commandant Mearson at the barracks. Explain the situation to him. Let him rush a company of men out here. You can lead them. Have the village surrounded, then blast those devils to hell."

"Brilliant," Bennet murmured. "Brilliant, Major! Do you think a company of soldiers can reach even within fifteen miles of here without the Pathans knowing it? And when they finally manage to blunder up here, do you think they'll find anyone?"

"Besides, your daughter will definitely be removed from here tomorrow morning when the chief's brother arrives."

Downes loosened his collar. "Very well," he said desperately; "help us to escape. During the night—"

"We'll be caught and brought back within four hours."

"But—but surely there's *something* we can do."

"May I make a suggestion?" the girl said quietly.

Bennet turned.

"Yes?"

"THIS may smack more of the brave young heroine—only it so happens that I mean it. It occurs to me that a shot from your automatic will solve my problem rather nicely. Surely, that would be far more desirable than—than—"

She shrugged.

"You know," Bennet said slowly, looking at her, "my life has been fairly hectic—considerably cockeyed, as we might say in America. More or less futile, too, and empty, and lonely. Yet I may justify it with one gesture, so to speak."

The girl stared at him, wide-eyed. "What do you mean?"

Bennet smiled crookedly. "We shall wait until the white-bearded

gentleman returns. I have a rather crazy plan. It might work."

It was a mad plan—so mad that even Bennet, whose entire career was simply a chain of mad plans, felt a leaden weight in the pit of his stomach. For he was gambling, with death watching over his shoulder. And whether he won or lost, nevertheless it was with death that he would cash his chips.

He waited, the crooked smile still lingering on his lips.

CHAPTER V

The Word of Hammal Khun

IT was that smile that greeted Hammal Khun when he reentered the temple.

"Well, Lloyd Ben-Et, he has written?"

Bennet gently shook his head. "No, Hammal Khun, he wishes not to do so; and his refusal is just. I told him the woman will enter the tent of your brother."

The Pathan frowned. "But what need was there to tell him?"

"I was angry, O Hammal Khun, and in anger one sometimes speaks too much. I thought it was not befitting for a young woman of such beauty to live in the tent of a mangy old ass. For surely if he is your brother, then his face is like your own, and his ancestors are also pigs of great filth. So—" Bennet spread out the palms of his hands.

Several seconds passed before the full meaning of Bennet's words registered in the Pathan's mind. Even so, he refused to believe them.

"Thou hast gone mad, Lloyd Ben-Et?" he said incredulously, staring at Bennet's face.

"Mad?" Bennet drawled. "But, no, Hammal Khun. Admit thou not that five thousand pounds in British gold is a more desirable sum than a paltry one-third? Why should you, who are but an old fool—"

The Pathan's right hand moved to the hilt of his knife with the speed of a striking cobra. But Bennet expected the move. His right hand whipped out, catching the Pathan behind the ear. Steel fingers wrested the knife out of his fingers. Then Bennet slapped him with the palm of his hand.

It was a sharp, hard blow, which sent the Pathan crashing against the wall. He regained his balance like a cat. Swung around, jerking up a long-barreled revolver with a smoothness that might be envied by a gunman of the old West.

He never fired it. Bennet leaped in. The edge of his hand came down sharply on the Pathan's forearm. A jiu-jitsu trick paralyzing the nerves. The Pathan dropped the revolver. And then Bennet's hands were on his throat, his grim face close to the hill-man's.

"Listen thou carefully to what I say now, Hammal Khun," he growled. "Thou wilt swear by the Prophet that I, the two Englishmen, and the young woman shall be permitted to leave unmolested. Or my fingers shall squeeze until life leaves thy body. Quick now, Hammal Khun! Wiltst thou swear?"

THE Pathan's face twitched with fury. His black eyes, as they interlocked with Bennet's, were coldly murderous.

"Fool thou art, Lloyd Ben-Et!" he said contemptuously. "Think you I will whine for my life? For what you have done, you shall die, Lloyd Ben-Et, even if I must die. And the British—they too shall die, *on the torture stakes.*"

He whistled suddenly, an incredibly shrill whistle through his teeth. Almost instantly, running feet echoed outside.

"Now you may kill, Lloyd Ben-Et, treacherous dog that thou art! But soon you will follow me."

Bennet released him. He suddenly looked frightened.

"Forgiveness can you find, O Hammal Khun, for a fool—"

"Like a son I have thought of thee," the Pathan said through clenched teeth. "I find you a treacherous dog. You shall die, Lloyd Ben-Et, and may thy life leave thee slowly on the torture stakes."

Two burly Pathans now loomed before the doorway.

"Give me but two minutes," Bennet said quickly. "For the sake of past friendship, grant me this favor, O Hammal Khun. Some things I must tell thee."

MORE Pathans were now crowded before the doorway, milling about, at a loss to understand what was happening.

Hammal Khun straightened to his full height. "Speak! But if it is to beg for your life that you wish, thou art speaking to stone, Lloyd Ben-Et."

Bennet drew his automatic. He jabbed its blunt nose into the hill-man's side.

"Quickly I can kill with this, Hammal Khun. Before thy men will enter, you shall be dead and I. But I wish it not so. The love of gold made me a fool. I have gambled and lost, because I forgot that you were a man of courage. Hence I deserve to die.

"But not so the two Englishmen, who know nothing of this, nor the girl. That would be unjust, Hammal Khun."

The Pathan looked steadily at Bennet, his face and eyes inscrutable.

"So," he purred, "what do you propose, Lloyd Ben-Et?"

"I will trade with thee. Release the two Englishmen and the girl—set them free—and I shall give myself to thee. If to torture stakes you wish to lash me, so be it, for I have been a great fool! But refuse,

Hammal Khun—and we all die! I leave the choice to thee.”

For a long minute, Hammal Khun stared into Bennet's set, grim face. Stroking gently his long white beard, he looked at the girl a while, then turned his eyes to Bennet again.

“Very well; be it as you wish!”

“Ycur word?”

“The word of Hammal Khun,” the Pathan replied with quiet dignity.

BENNET nodded curtly. Butt first, he handed the Pathan the automatic and stepped back, his arms limp at his sides. A muffled curse came behind him. He whirled. Downes stood there, his legs astride, his face savagely distorted. He had picked up the Pathan's revolver, and its long barrel was trained now on the old man's chest.

“Lost your nerve, eh?” he snarled to Bennet. “All right. But I'll take this old devil with me!”

Bennet threw himself in a long tackle. No time for explanations now. His shoulder hit Downes as he fired, deflecting the course of the bullet. Both crashed to the earthen floor. Bennet savagely wrenched the revolver out of Downes' hand, threw it at the Pathan's feet.

“Fool!” he said wearily. “You almost spoiled everything. You are free. The three of you are free.”

He pushed Downes away from him and got up off the floor. Hammal Khun's knife lay near the wall. Bennet picked it up, stooped for a few seconds over the girl, then over Brooks, slashing the leather thongs which bound their wrists and ankles.

He turned to Downes. “Take your daughter and the man who is going to marry her, and beat it!” he said curtly. “Don't stare at me; I'm not kidding you. Scram, before the old man changes his mind.

“You'll be able to follow the trail down easily enough. Then bear southeast. You're bound to hit Kabul.

There you can hire a guide back to Peshawar.”

“But what about you?” asked Downes, staring at him. “I don't understand—”

“I think I do, Father,” the girl cut in quietly. “I am not going.” She stood up and stepped close to Bennet. She looked him straight in the eyes.

“Do you suppose,” she said fiercely, “that I can go through life with the knowledge that someone deliberately sacrificed himself in order that I might live? I won't have it, you hear me?”

“Stop being a little fool!” Bennet growled. “Get out of here—while the going is good.”

The girl shook her head. “No!”

“Lloyd Ben-*Et*,” the Pathan said suddenly, “you have tricked me?”

Bennet turned slowly. “So, Hammal Khun? And how have I tricked thee?”

“You lied,” the old man said coldly. “Love of gold was not what made you do this. Fool thou art, Lloyd Ben-*Et*!”

“You shall go back on your word?” Bennet said sharply.

The Pathan nodded. “Aye, that I shall.”

THERE was a long pause. A great weariness possessed Bennet. Come what come, now. What the hell! He had tried, anyway. If there was a Supreme Judge, let Him at least consider that. He waited quietly.

“I believed thee, Lloyd Ben *Et*, when you told me you had brought the English here. But then, after I had gone, you looked too long into the eyes of the woman there. And so madness came over you, even as it came over me, many snows ago.”

Bennet was now staring at the Pathan. What was he driving at?

“With age,” Hammal Khun continued softly, “comes wisdom. I see now what thou wert doing. The

woman with the eyes as blue as the sky—she is worth dying for, you think. Thou art a fool, Lloyd Bennet, for the wisdom of the old will tell you that one has but one life, and women are many.”

The Pathan paused and chuckled deep in his throat. “But even such fool was I once. You have saved my life, when the Englishman was about to kill me. Even the old cling to life; I am grateful. My warriors have taken many rifles from the British, and for that I am grateful to you. So I shall go back on my word.

“Allah frowns at him who kills the eagle. And too few are men with brains and courage as thine. Go, my friend, and take the woman with thee, and may the blessings of Allah make easy your journey. Thou art, indeed, a man amongst men!”

AN hour later, four donkeys gingerly picked their way down the steep trail. Bennet rode in the lead. Only once the girl attempted to speak to him, when they made camp the first evening.

“You still refuse to tell me exactly what happened?”

“I do,” Bennet said curtly.

“Why?”

“It's best so!”

“But why?”

Bennet gave her a curt look. She did not bring up the subject again.

They reached Peshawar on the fourth evening. Bennet left the English with a curt good-by, registered in a small hotel and slept eighteen hours at one stretch.

WHEN he awakened and walked down the lobby, two envelopes awaited him. One was from Major Downes, containing five one-thousand-pound banknotes, with a brief memorandum — “For services rendered.” Bennet stared a while at the small fortune between his thumb and forefinger, then pocketed the money with a shrug.

The second envelope was smaller, delicately scented. On the note it enclosed was written simply, “Will you come at seven tonight? I want to see you, talk to you. Grace Downes.”

For a long time, Bennet looked at that. Then curiously enough, he found himself thinking of the South Seas. Many things doing there now. Copra, pearls. Joe Thompson would be there now, with his crazy schooner and crazier schemes. And Singapore Bob. And the rest of the boys.

“Feet,” he grinned, “you're itchin', eh? Okay!”

He glanced again, now absent-mindedly, at the note, then crumpled it in his hand. He tossed it away and walked toward the railroad station, whistling cheerfully.

NEXT MONTH: Swashbuckling, Thrill-a-Minute Adventure in a Great Novelette Packed with Action!

SOLDIERS ARE BORN

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The Fighting



The marines slammed into the Nicaraguans with bayonets and rifle butts. The Americans were determined not to stop short of victory!

WITH the entrance of Uncle Sam into the Nicaraguan situation the federals and revolutionaries scarcely knew what to do—for each side hated the Americans. The federals pretended to be friendly, of course, but there was grave suspicion that they didn't mean it; that they worked underhandedly to undermine all the work done by the forces of occupation. The work of the Americans was extremely difficult, and most of it fell on the shoulders of Major Butler, because he was the first into the turbulent land.

The very first thing he tried to do was find out who was who. He discovered the names of the prime movers of the revolt against the established government, and found out that the names of Zeledon and Luis

Mena figured largely in it. They, especially the latter, were capable of massing hundreds of natives at their back.

Zeledon was a ruthless, selfish brute. Mena was an old man, sick almost to death, who was a true patriot, fomenting revolution because he believed in the justice of his cause. He seldom got anything out of it for himself.

All Nicaragua, outside Managua, was in arms. Daily reports of new atrocities against noncombatant, peace-loving natives came to the ears of Butler. The fact of American intervention, which seemed to indicate that Uncle Sam was taking sides, spurred the opposing forces to heated efforts at retaliation. It was then that Butler received a cer-

Further Sensational and Exciting Adventures of General

Leatherneck

He Led Men Through the Very Fires of Hell—And He Made Them Like It!

By
**ARTHUR J.
BURKS**



tain message by courier. By answering that message, the major was to get a glimpse of the true capabilities of the Nicaraguans, who ran from American soldiers because of their superior armament, but fought like fiends against one another. The message from Mena said simply that the revolutionary "general" wished to see Butler privately, alone, and that he would grant him safe conduct through his lines.

Usually, to heed such a request, would have been to vanish from the face of the earth, never to be heard

Smedley D. Butler as Related by his Former Aid-de-Camp!

from again. But Butler was not afraid of vanishing. The thought of going alone into the enemy camp intrigued him, filled him with excitement.

He told the messenger that he would visit the general at the hour and place stated. The place was a certain church known as San Francisco.

"But that church is in the hands of federal troops!" said Butler.

"It won't be by the time you arrive," said the messenger grimly.

By which statement Butler knew that the revolutionaries were out to capture the church. All the more reason for excitement. He would see the battle between opposing forces of natives and find out how strong they were, what the marines might expect from either side in the event of more open hostilities.

"I'll be there," he said.

He had to go alone through a long stretch of territory where at any moment a bullet from ambush might slay him. But he didn't worry about that. He went. As he walked, or rode a mule or horse, or however he went—I only know that he made the journey—he fully expected to ride into a trap. But he knew that the Nicaraguan always temporized, gloated over his victim after capturing him if possible—and as long as he was assured of life, Butler gave no odds to any Nicaraguan in a battle of wits for his own life. He'd get in and out and away again.

HE reached Masaya, a town at the foot of Coyatepe, a cone-shaped hill, in the afternoon. The town was held strongly by federal forces. It was being infested by revolutionaries whose faces showed that they meant business. How many of them there were, nobody knew. Butler didn't even hazard a guess. But he kept his head down and remained hidden. He had no mind to stop a bullet or

interfere with festivities at this stage of the game. He merely watched.

Somewhere someone signaled, probably Mena or Zeledon. The revolutionaries rose from their positions with shrill yells of defiance and derision, and moved on the town of Masaya. From every shack, from every hut and hovel, from every store and *tienda*, slugs poured into the ranks of the attackers.

IT was a fight for the gods to witness. There was no running, no turning back on the part of the revolutionaries. They were out to take the town whether or no. Butler, in his excitement, forgot that he was supposed to be hiding, and followed the attackers into the city. In the general excitement nobody noticed the stranger or thought to ask him questions.

The din of battle was terrific. The Latin-American usually fires from the hip, or merely presses the trigger of his rifle and yells, "*Carramba!*" or "*Carrajo!*"

The last word isn't translatable, having no English equivalent. The Latin-American uses it when he wants to use the worst word possible to him.

The revolutionaries fell like flies. The besieged troops had every advantage. They were barricaded. The attacking forces were out in the open. Piles of dead, barefooted peons, straw-hatted "officers," littered the streets. Butler pressed close. Bullets spatted past his ears. He didn't stop to think that one or a dozen might hit him, maybe because he knew they weren't being fired at him!

He noticed that there were women camp-followers of the revolutionaries and wondered idly what part they would play in the attack. The city resisted stubbornly. But one by one the hovels fell to the attackers. Their defenders were dragged into the



*The heavy projectile
smashed into the
mighty door*

streets. Some of them were killed at once with slicing blows from cruelly sharp machetes. Some of them were allowed the choice of dying or joining the revolutionaries.

All a federal had to do to join the opposing forces was to switch the band on his hat. It was red on one side, blue on the other—one color for federal, the other for revolutionary. The opposite sides were thus colored because a chap never could tell when

he wanted to switch sides! And those who switched sides fought beside their new allegiance and did just as much slaughter among their erstwhile friends as though they had always been enemies!

It became plain almost at once that whoever held the city must take and hold the church, which had always been more of a fortress than a church. It was fortified heavily.

Slowly, closing on the city from

all sides, the revolutionaries approached the church, the last stronghold of the federal forces. Behind them followers looted the stores and *bodegas*, coming forth brandishing bottles of liquor, drinking to their good fortune—and often garbed garishly in women's clothing which they had snatched from the shelves. Thus the sympathizers with the revolutionary movement celebrated their victory before it had actually become a fact—knowing that when it had, the fighters would join them to rise to bacchanalian heights of celebration.

Then Butler saw the job of the women, who passed among the enemy dead—and did ghastly, unnameable things to them. It made him a little sick; made him wonder at how cruel women—mothers of men like those who had fallen—could be to their own kind. But the hysterical excitement of battle had driven them all half-crazy.

From the corner of a building, in the midst of a fight in which he really had no part to play, Butler watched the attack on the church. From every window and tower of the ancient structure which dated back to the early *padres*, the federal forces hurled lead into the attackers. Wave after wave of charging men were hurled back upon themselves, leaving piles of dead behind them.

The door leading into the church was ponderous, formidable. Not even a battering-ram would knock it down; and it must fall to give the attackers entrance to the last stronghold.

FINALLY, amid hails of lead, a field piece near-by was dragged into the square across from the church door. It was loaded. Its crew waited while the gunner sighted his piece. Then a veritable hail of lead killed every man about the gun. Their friends shouted from their places of cover, surged forward to repaint the gun at the great door.

Again the crew was slain to a man. The stench of battle possessed everything. Bullets whined past Butler's post of observation. But he couldn't have been driven away from it. He was amazed at the courage of the Nicaraguan attackers. Finally one man went forward alone. The gun muzzle had been twisted around as the crew had fallen under fire. Calmly this one man turned the gun back, squinted along the sights, while bullets glanced off the gun, kicked up dirt at his feet—and pulled the lanyard. At point-blank range the heavy projectile smashed into the mighty door.

THE door went down with a crash. Savage yells of defiance were the answer of the defenders. The one man signaled "forward" with lazy indifference. From all sides, jamming the square to overflowing—a mob which was thinned out again and again by the bullets of the defenders—the attackers rushed the door. Butler stepped out to watch.

"It sounded, after the attackers got inside, like a battle in a boiler factory," I heard Butler say many years later. "It was as though a mob of men were using hammers on big anvils. You could follow the battle by the noise. It began on the first floor. It rose to the second floor. A few federals broke free and got into the square, where they were slaughtered. The noise mounted, up and up, toward the church's high tower. There, suddenly, it ended. Federal soldiers were shot out of the tower, or thrown out, and came crashing down to the cobblestones. It was rather messy. Then the fight was over. San Francisco had changed hands. Someone laughed in the sudden embarrassing silence—and the women broke that silence as they went on with their ghastly business."

That night, after Butler had passed the time in hiding, in order not to

fall into wrong hands before the time of his appointment with Luis Mena, Butler approached the church of San Francisco. He knew that Mena would be found inside. He had watched the clearing away of the debris of battle. He had seen stores burned, had witnessed scenes of unbridled license.

But Mena had kept his word. It was up to Butler now to keep his. He was stopped at the door. Tersely he told the guards in English that he had come to keep an appointment with their general. They demurred, while he waited, a look of disdain on his face to impress the native soldiers.

The word came to pass him, and immediately darkness possessed the whole world.

"I'll never forget that scene," said Butler. "Mena was ill of some horrible disease. He was lying on a pile of straw in the heart of the church which had cost so many lives. He was breathing heavily. I can hear his rasping breath even yet. The only source of illumination was a candle with a dirty globe. It hung from a long rope whose other end reached somewhere in the darkness above.

"The rope swayed with the slightest breath. Now the white face of Mena was plainly visible, now in deepest shadow, as the lantern swung back and forth. Somehow it seemed to typify the ups and downs of this old man who was so soon to die. What did he want with me? Merely to surrender on promise that he would be given safe-conduct out of the country. His men would lay down their arms. I gave my promise. I kept it."

BUT Mena, it seemed, could not keep all of his—for, rising above the town of Masaya, was the cone-shaped hill called Coyatepe, and it was in rebel hands. It was a tradition in Nicaragua that whoever held Coyatepe ruled Nicaragua. It had never in all history been taken by direct assault.

Butler was very thoughtful as he watched Mena being carried out secretly, as Butler's first step to keep his promise to the old man. He knew already that the order would eventually be given to the marines and sailors: "Take Coyatepe!"

The sides of the hill were almost perpendicular. It required great effort merely to climb to the summit. What would it be like to charge up that bare surface in the face of murderous rifle fire? Butler knew it would be tough. He dreaded the order.

But even before he had completely kept his promise to Mena, the dreaded order came:

"Coyatepe must be taken at once!"

And it had never been done before except by treachery.

CHAPTER V

Coyatepe

SILENT and grim of purpose, the marines went into bivouac, preparing to sleep beside their rifle stacks, the night before Coyatepe. They had marched most of the day under a burning sun. There was little time for food, and what there was came dry and unappetizing from tin cans. Water was at a premium. Men had perspired even through their shoes, and dust and dirt had caked on their uniforms. Most of them looked distinctly negroid because they had had no chance to bathe.

Men who left the column to bathe at pond or stream had a habit of vanishing mysteriously.

And no commander, in enemy country, would allow his whole command to undress and go in bathing at once. It would have been too difficult and embarrassing in case of surprise attack. Of course, sentries might have been posted but — well, it simply wasn't done.

The attacking forces knew what they were up against. Two battalions

were to attack Coyatepec. The marines knew the place had never been taken by assault. They knew that before this time tomorrow night some of them would be dead.

But they were grimly resolved that the living would spend next night atop Coyatepec.

As they went into bivouac they made no special attempt to silence the noise of their equipment. The defenders knew they were present. But for the blackness of the night the attack might have started then and there, save for the fact that a man could scarcely see the man next to him; and men can't perform teamwork when they can't see the rest of the team.

After the men had flopped down and many of them—especially the veterans—had gone to sleep, Butler told his officers quietly what must be done tomorrow. Colonel Joseph Pendleton—known to all the service as "Uncle Joe"—commanded the regiment of which Butler's battalion was a part. He would signal next morning by firing off a field piece—provided that at a certain hour the garrison on Coyatepec, which had been summoned to surrender, hadn't hoisted the white flag. Butler knew in advance that no white flag would be forthcoming. The defenders knew the tradition of Coyatepec.

BUT before going to sleep himself, Butler decided to take a look at his sleeping men. However much he may have "ridden" marines during his career, in his heart they were always children to him, and he loved them as his family—let dissenting marines say what they will.

Butler, cautioning his officers to walk quietly and keep silent, started along the line of rifle stacks. An orderly carried a lantern whose glow was feeble. As the staff walked along they could hear sounds of merriment from the crest of Coyatepec, where

lights glowed through the night easily to be seen.

The major finally signaled his officers to halt. He was looking down at two young—absurdly young—marines.

"I certainly got a choking sensation in my throat when I looked at them," said Butler. "They were just kids. They couldn't have been over seventeen years of age, no matter what the records of their service said. And they had been afraid. They were brothers. They were asleep now, with their arms around each other. They had cried themselves to sleep! Their tears had made furrows down their cheeks. I felt like crying myself, but it wouldn't have done—not with the battalion staff watching me."

THIS incident gives a picture of Butler that few people know, perhaps. It reminds me, in parenthesis, of the ceremony of his retirement from active service, years after I had resigned my commission. I saw some of the ceremony in the newsreel.

Butler was called upon to say something. I, of all that audience, knew that for the first time in his life, perhaps, Butler was at a loss for words. He was quitting the life he loved above everything else in the world. His mind must have encompassed the thirty years of his career in the marines as he mentally fumbled for words. And then, what did he say? This man, who is a great, entertaining speaker, said this to the marines crowded before him in the newsreel picture:

"You never caused me a moment's loss of sleep!"

But back to Coyatepec.

Butler had no fear that the two brothers would disgrace themselves or the Corps. He had seen too many marines who had been afraid on the eve of battle. He'd been afraid himself, was afraid then. But the thing had to be gone through with; the

"show"—as he called fights—had to go on.

He went back to his quarters, a native shack, and dismissed his staff. What he thought about during the rest of the night nobody knows except Butler, and I doubt if he has ever told it to anyone. He only knew that his battalion was to lead the assault on impregnable Coyatepe.

Maybe he slept; maybe he didn't.

But next morning the man with the gimlet eyes—who could see unshined shoes, buckles and bayonets further than any officer who ever wore leather leggings—roused his men quietly and looked toward Coyatepe. There was no white flag. The natives were openly defiant. It was then that a certain ruse occurred to him. He decided to try to make the Nicaraguans believe that his force was bigger than it really was.

Campaign hats were exposed among the trees, bared heads in other places. He hoped that hats and heads would be counted double, to make the enemy believe that the force was twice its real size. Maybe, if they believed this, they would hoist the white flag before the zero hour. Whatever the enemy believed, the fact remains that the zero hour came, and still no white flag had been run up the pole at the crest of Coyatepe. The revolutionary colors still slatted gaily in the wind across the roof of the natural fortress.

BUTLER fell in with his men. Dispositions had already been decided upon. They would advance "as skirmishers." They would pause and fire, advance again.

Butler took his position. His face was hard. He did not intend to stop until he had reached the top of the hill. He dared not. To stop would be to die.

"Everybody set?" he snapped.

There was no dissent.

"All right," said Butler, "get the



His shirt ripped off, exposing the Marine Corps emblem

lead out of your pants! Here we go!"

The marines moved out in extended order, bayoneted rifles to the fore. Butler always believed in the

psychology of the bayonet. Bayonets made a brave and impressive show because they suggested so much. And their weight didn't throw off the aim of the marines too greatly. Besides, Butler's men were accustomed to bayonets.

The defenders of Coyatepe saw the marines start. Defiant yells came down from the hill. The enemy began to fire. The distance was too great. Bullets were almost spent. Butler didn't give the command to fire. The marines increased their pace. Butler knew better than to charge into hand-to-hand conflict with men too exhausted from the charge to give good accounts of themselves.

Forward!

The bullets were getting thicker now. A man started to scream, bit the words off, remembering where he was. The first casualty had occurred. The first wounded man fell out—and bellyached because he was not to be in on the attack!

Faster!

Not too much time must be spent among the growing hail of bullets. The base of Coyatepe was coming nearer and nearer. Faster! Faster! Now Butler commanded his men to pause for a breathing space, to kneel and fire two rounds.

BULLETS stormed over the crest of the hill. Probably few had any effect, due to the awkward angle of fire. Jeering shouts came down in answer to the volley. But Butler had merely wanted a breathing space. At least his volleys kept the heads of the enemy down so that they couldn't fire for a few seconds.

"Up!" snapped Butler. "Keep going!"

Faster and faster. Marines were dropping now, here and there. Several had been killed. Butler didn't look back. He knew that if he looked he would go berserk and charge too

swiftly, arriving at the crest with his men exhausted. That wouldn't do. But every death meant that Butler himself died a little.

The foot of Coyatepe. The eyes of the attackers looked up that ghastly slope whose face was an inferno of leaden hail. Butler stared a moment, then signaled with his arm, because no voice could be heard in the hell of battle.

"Up you go!"

AND the marines and sailors went! Bullets hammered down into their upturned faces. A man was struck and rolled, legs and arms limply flailing, back to the bottom of the hill, so steep was the incline. But clawing for footholds, scrambling and scrabbling, the marines went forward intent on doing the impossible because no one had told them it couldn't be done.

Right beside Butler, who led his men, marines toppled backward. Some were merely wounded, some were dead when they fell—but dead and wounded rolled together, with ever-increasing swiftness, down the steep slope to the very bottom, where they sprawled out to wait for what might come next.

Halfway up, and the marines had not faltered. Their bayonets still gleamed, still were bright and hungry for the taste of the enemy. Butler no longer signaled. The thing had become a race to see who would be first to the top. It always did become that when the Americans attacked—whether they wore the khaki of marines and soldiers, or the blue or white of the navy. They were all the same, all Americans who didn't believe that any outlanders on God's footstool could whip them.

The noise was greater than Butler had heard at San Francisco. The marines went on up—and still up. Lips were drawn back from teeth in snarls of anticipation. Weakening

legs pushed the marines forward. The crest of Coyatepe was just ahead. The dead were thick at the base of the fortress.

"Give 'em the bayonet!"

Somebody yelled it. The marines dug in, grimly determined not to stop short of victory. Up into the face of withering fire, into the keen blades of machetes, to match their steel with bayonets, went the unstoppable attackers. They reached the crest of Coyatepe which, once reached, meant that nothing could stop the marines. They slammed into the Nicaraguans with bayonets and rifle butts. The natives yelled for quarter.

The marines over-ran Coyatepe. The impregnable hill had been taken by direct assault for the first time in history. Its tradition had been smashed to bits. The marines hauled down the flag of which the Nicaraguans had been so proud, and in its place the Stars and Stripes went fluttering up the flagstaff.

CHAPTER VI

"Mr. Johnson"

ADMIRAL FLETCHER'S flagship swung at anchor in the Gulf of Campeche, off Vera Cruz. This was in 1914, two years after the Nicaraguan Campaign of 1912. Butler was aboard one of the American battle wagons, wondering what was going to happen to him and his men when, as seemed certain, landing parties were ordered ashore with bullet and bayonet.

The admiral knew that some preliminary work had to be done before objectives could effectively be decided upon for landing parties. It was generally known that during the regime of Diaz all the streets of Mexico City had been renamed. It was also known that no existing map showed the new street names. Imagine, therefore, the task of the officer

who must plan possible occupation of a huge city when no locations at all were known.

Nor did the prospective landing force know the strength of the various native garrisons, Chapultepec in particular. Admiral Fletcher decided that someone must take his life in his hands to find out details of Mexican organization, strength of forts and, if possible, proper names of Mexico City streets. It didn't take the admiral long to decide what was to be done.

He sent for Major Smedley Butler.

BETWEEN them they hatched up a scheme which was to be known only to the two of them until Butler had carried out their plan. Late that night Butler, in civilian clothing, went over the side secretly, into the admiral's own barge, where the admiral awaited him. They discussed plans until they reached shore.

Next morning Major Butler was posted—to the consternation of his superiors—as absent without leave, an unheard of thing in the career of the fiery officer, who was known to love the Marine Corps next to his family and his God.

Butler's initial plan was simple. He purchased a small photograph in Jalapa and managed to get into Mexico City during the night. He knew exactly what he intended doing with that photograph, which might have been the picture of a Negro, a Mexican, or an American or a mixture of all three. He made sure that it was not too good a photograph of anyone in particular.

The next few days were a sort of nightmare, though Butler got through them with little trouble. He was nosing around, listening to things, and especially watching—for he knew almost no Spanish, certainly a huge handicap to a spy. But he did gather that a sketch and a blueprint had been made of the streets of Mex-

ico City, showing all the street names.

Some furtive spying told him where these things were to be found. To get them—which would be theft, and probably mean the firing squad for Butler if he were caught—meant that he must take someone into his confidence.

So he left the papers for the last act in his little one-man play. He spent considerable time outside the fortress of Chapultepec, which had for so long been considered invulnerable. The marines and sailors might well be called upon to take that place by assault, so he must find out by how many men it was garrisoned, how they were armed, how well trained, and what heavy guns they had.

That meant he had to enter the fort. Obviously, he couldn't do it openly, in broad daylight.

One incident stands out during his period of planning to enter the fortress. Once the automobile of Victoriano Huerta stopped near the fort, held in check by an admiring crowd—and Butler got close enough to it to put his foot on the running board!

Whenever it became necessary for him to give his name, he was always "Mr. Johnson."

BUTLER went into Chapultepec at night, got his information and got out again. As he tells it, it is as simple as that.

There were two other important forts, some miles outside Mexico City, and within sight of each other. Butler had to get into those. He went to the first, pretending to be demented, waving his arms about his head and saying:

"*Mariposa! Mariposa! Butterflies! Butterflies!*"

It was probably the only Spanish word he knew at the time.

The sentry tried to halt him, but he used the consideration which al-

most every son of woman accords a crazy person. So Butler chased his imaginary butterflies right into the fort at a dead run, waving his arms and yelling. He circled the inside of the fort, counting guns and rifles and making an estimate of the fort's strength generally. It wasn't hard to count the fort's defenders, for every last one of them was chasing the man who was out chasing butterflies!

ABOUT this time, maybe by some sixth sense which men suddenly find they possess in times like this, Butler knew that he was being checked up on and must make an end in a hurry—with one fort still to be entered. He waited until the next day to go into the second fort.

This time he went coolly to the sallyport, ignoring the possibility of there being someone in the second fort who had seen him in the first, and said he was a police officer from the States, looking for an escaped prisoner. He asked the *commandante* to muster his men so that he, Butler, could see whether the fugitive were a member of his command.

And the *commandante* did just that before he could snap out of his daze! Butler inspected the command, carrying the Jalapa photograph in his hand. He was halfway through the inspection before he suddenly wondered what on earth he would do if he actually found in that command the counterpart of his photograph!

But he got away with it. He now knew Chapultepec and the two other major fortresses.

His next step was to get those street names.

This cost him some money with which to purchase the loyalty of a daughter of Mexico. But she needed the money as badly as "Mr. Johnson" needed the maps. So he got the maps. By this time the secret agents of Mexico were close on his trail,

and Mexico was getting too hot to hold him.

He started back for Vera Cruz, making his best time, knowing that pursuit was right on his heels; knowing what his fate would be if caught. Knowing, moreover, that he carried on his person, tattooed on his chest, a mark that would damn him the instant he was taken and searched.

That mark was a Marine Corps emblem!

They did catch Butler on the docks at Vera Cruz. In the struggle Butler's shirt was ripped off, exposing the emblem—and he went into the Gulf of Campeche to save his life, swimming out until he was picked up by a small boat belonging to the United States Navy. Fifteen minutes later he would surely have lost his life under Mexican guns.

But now he was safe. Explanations took his name off the deserter's roll, and he was something of a hero when the whole story was told.

Next day he went into Vera Cruz at the head of a landing party, and I don't know how better to tell what happened than in the words of an old retired marine, who lived in Ocean Beach, California, while I was Butler's aide. The old man, whose name was Copeland, worshiped Butler, and it is possible that he is a little prejudiced. Copeland was with Butler at Vera Cruz.

“HE formed his men in two rather ragged columns, one on either side of the street,” says Copeland. “The group on the right side was to dart from door to door and fire at snipers on the left side of the street, where they were shooting from windows. The left side group was to fire across the street at the opposite windows.

“But Butler didn't take to cover at all, and don't never let anybody tell you he hasn't got plenty of courage. He was carrying a cane that

day, and he was walking calmly along the center of the street as though he didn't have a care in the world, using those gimlet eyes of his to good effect. Bullets kicked up the dirt all around him.

“He'd spot a sniper in a window and point to him with his cane and say: ‘Do thee get that man in the window, Private Henderson!’ And Private Henderson would proceed to get the man indicated. Butler didn't get hit, though how he escaped so many bullets is a miracle. I don't think he even thought about them.”

I ASKED the general about this business of courage.

“I was always afraid under fire,” said Butler calmly, in effect. “The man who tells you he isn't, is a liar. But I couldn't let my men know that I held my breath, expecting to get killed any moment.”

Butler was recommended for the Medal of Honor for his work in Mexico. He sent it back. It was returned to him. He said he didn't believe he deserved it. Finally he was ordered to accept the medal. A good soldier obeys orders. Butler accepted the Medal of Honor.

It was merely one of the many decorations he was destined to receive. He has received every one his country can give him, and most of those of foreign powers navy regulations would allow him to accept—and he has over a score of letters from foreign powers on his military record. An enviable record, only the surface of which I have scratched.

Butler is now a retired major general, apparently with all his war days behind him.

But if war is declared within the next fifteen years, I can name on the thumb of one hand who will be the first to demand the right to command a corps!

And I hope he needs a good aide-de-camp, or maybe a chief of staff!

Singing Steel



His blade slashed downward, and one of the natives sank to the floor

Cody Farrel, American, Smacks Up Against Murderous Treachery in this Quick-Moving, Thrill-Giving Story of Desperate Combat in Guatemala

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

Author of "Bill the Conqueror," "Charmed Crates," etc.

CODY FARREL awoke to full consciousness in the way of tense, nervous men. He sat up in bed, listening, his lean face, brown to the shaded line drawn on his forehead by a wide-brimmed

sombrero, carved into rugged intentness.

Nothing broke the stillness of the drowsily-hot tropical night save the heavily pulsating chant of the *cagarras*. Yet he knew something had

startled him from sound slumber. His restless slits of blue eyes traveled around the room.

Breathing an oath, he jumped out of bed. The screen was gone from the window, and his cartridge belt and holster weren't on the chair by the window where he had left them the night before. A creaking board on the porch outside sent an electric shiver racing down his spine. Someone was on the porch—someone who had stolen his gun while he slept!

Cody's racing brain flashed over past events on the Imperial Fruit Company's *finca* of which he was overseer. Had he had trouble with any of the Guatemaltecos working on the farm? No; Iroquois farm had shipped bananas up the west coast for the three years he'd been overseer of the plantation, with not a ripple of trouble with the native workmen.

Then why was he being disarmed? Some fancied insult or imagined wrong, perhaps?

Without weapons, what could he do? Then he remembered that he'd cut open a water cocoanut to drink the juice just before retiring, and had failed to return the machete he'd used. The bright light of a full moon falling in a wide shaft across the room pointed out the gleaming, four-foot blade.

Cody leaped across the room, seizing the machete.

AT that moment, the door was swung silently open as though by spectral hands, and four men plunged through the door, shattering the silence by unearthly cries. If he'd been asleep, their cries might have paralyzed him until they could accomplish whatever grisly work they'd planned. Now it only made his sharpened senses tingle.

They fell back a little when they saw the emptied bed. Their raised machetes paused in mid-air. And the

message they told needed no explanation.

Although of American parentage, Cody Farrel had known these people and their ways since his birth in the mountains of Chivelis, where his father had owned a coffee *finca*. He interpreted something of hysteria and madness in their cries, in their white-rimmed black eyes, and he knew its source. "White-eye liquor" it was called—crude raw rum which was smuggled into Guatemala from Honduras.

ALWAYS alert to the smoldering danger lurking everywhere in the tropics, he knew it was less than useless to attempt to reason with these men in their drink-crazed condition. It was his life—or theirs.

So he bounded across the room to take them by surprise as they had attempted to take him. His blade slashed downward, and one of the natives sank to the floor, never to move again. Ducking under a blade which would have laid his head open, Cody felt his pajama sleeve tugged slightly by a blade of razor-like keenness. Something warm and damp bathed his left wrist.

His breath hung suspended as he leaped in again, parrying, thrusting, slashing with his machete. If he could only keep the three of them before him, he had some slight chance, three to one though the odds against him stood. One of the natives gave a slight gasp as steel ripped open his ragged clothing and drew a sharp line of red down his breast.

But they knew no fear; the "white-eye" had driven out any they could have known. Moreover, Cody realized that the Indians feared neither death nor wounds inflicted with guns, knives or machetes. What they did fear more than anything else was brute force or a club. Fending them off with savage thrusts of his blade that bit home time and again as he

wove in and out, in and out, slashing, tearing, gashing, he fought his way to the single chair in the room.

Grasping the back in one hand, he raised it suddenly with his left, and brought it down with sudden force in a glancing blow which must have paralyzed one of the Guatemaltecos. The man screamed, and his blade clattered to the floor.

One of the others slashed at him but Cody brought the chair upward to fend off the blow, and the blade whistled past his cheek. He thrust his own machete forward as far as his long arm would permit, and the drink-crazed native staggered backward holding his stomach, and then lay down.

Meanwhile, the man on the floor had recovered the lost machete with his left and was rushing down, only to be met by an outward thrust of the four legs of the chair which sent him reeling backward.

Cody bore down on the one man now opposing him, only to feel his own blade wrenched from his hand and tossed out of reach on the bed. A panic of terror seized him to be thus rendered weaponless through his own carelessness, and he backed away from that glittering blade, parrying the thrusts with the chair as best he could. He saw the man he'd struck with the chair rising, to grip his machete in both hands.

AND he heard the sharp stir of something on the window-sill. His heart suddenly chilled. Death came from behind; he had no way to protect himself from that antagonist climbing through the window. He tried to work his way to the wall.

Out of the corner of his eye, he glimpsed a diminutive man with ragged home-spun garments, a straw, peaked sombrero made of the hay of many seasons gone, and a bright red sash around his meager waist. In his hand, he carried a knife. The pulse

in Cody's throat throbbed, and a blindness of rage attacked him. He beat back the two machete fighters while he momentarily waited for that small native to sink his blade into his back.

THEN the unexpected happened. The small native with the bright red sash leaped lightly over the foot of the bed, and with incredible speed flashed in under a raised machete and sank in his blade. He was out of danger's way when the machete dropped from the native's hands, and his rush from the side caught the last remaining machete-fighter at a distinct disadvantage.

His knife flashed out as he leaped at the machete-wielder with no apparent care for his own life. The blade plunged in once—twice—three times—and the two of them rolled to the ground together.

The little man sprang lightly to his feet, his white teeth flashing in strong contrast to his olive-skin and his black mustache. His black eyes gleamed in the moonlight.

"*Señor Cody!*" he cried exultantly. "I told you you should not leave Pedrito behind!"

"Pedrito!" Cody choked. A shudder shook his thin body, now that danger was past.

He didn't know Pedrito's last name, though they'd played together as children in the days when Cody Farrel had been a boy on the Chivelas *finca*. Pedrito was one of those persons who, somehow, should not have a last name. In this way, the little fellow had personality. He was disdainful to the point of contempt where clothes were concerned; he considered himself well-attired so long as there was a fresh green, or yellow or red sash girdling his waist.

When old enough, Pedrito—Peter, the Little—had worked for the Farrels as had his father before him. Cody knew Pedrito would have given

his life for him without a moment's hesitation, and he guessed that the reverse was true.

"What brought you here?" Cody demanded, after a moment's pause.

The smile faded from Pedrito's face, and his black eyes seemed to cloud. He looked at the men lying on the floor, and thoughtfully turned them over with his bare foot, while he deftly rolled a cigarette with his hands. He lit the cigarette, and breathed the smoke through his nostrils.

"The men of Don Rivera Della Guardia," he said in Spanish.

Cody's rangy body stiffened. "My brother-in-law's men, Pedrito! You're—you're crazy!"

"I sometimes wish I was," said the little Guatemalteco sadly.

Cody gripped his shoulder. "Come out on the porch, away from these—things. Then tell me why these men should attempt to kill me and how you happened to be here—"

Pedrito shrugged. "It's all for the same reason, *Señor* Cody."

They walked out to the porch, sat down in comfortable chairs. Cody stared across the well-kept lawn and the dark fronds of the palms silhouetted against a moonlight-bathed sky. His eyes swept the banana grove fringing the short expanse of lawn. Moonlight turned the shadows under the great flimsy leaves a velvety black.

HE lit a cigarette with nervous fingers, inhaled deeply, and blew out a cloud of smoke, Pedrito was methodically rolling another. Cody leaned forward in his chair.

"What brings you here, Pedrito? Didn't you promise to serve my sister, Teresa, as long as she lived, and never to leave her?"

Pedrito blinked, and something damp rolled down his worn, brown cheek. "Yes, *Señor* Cody. I make you that promise."

Cody half arose from his chair, and then sat down heavily again. "You—you mean—" Words died on his lips.

The little man nodded his contrition. "Yes, *señor*. Your sister no longer need Pedrito where she go."

CODY'S lean brown hands gripped the rests of his chair until the knuckles were white. His stomach constricted. Black specks were dancing before his pain-filled eyes. He became suddenly painfully aware of the trailing, phosphorescent blue glow in the wake of the *cocuyos* darting hither and thither above the lawn; of the heavily pulsating chant of the *cigarras*.

"Why did not Don Rivera send word she had died?" Cody demanded huskily, staring fixedly with unseeing eyes at the suddenly intensified black shadows in the banana grove.

Pedrito spread his hands in an expressive gesture. "Because he was afraid *Señor* Cody might find out—" The peon faltered uneasily.

Cody's voice broke in sharply. "Find out what?"

Pedrito rubbed his cheek hastily with a trembling, work-roughened hand. "Find out that *Señorita* Teresa was poisoned." To the peon, little Teresa would always remain "*señorita*."

Cody rubbed a numb forehead. "Poisoned?" he demanded hollowly.

Pedrito amplified. "Don Rivera poisoned her so that he could marry *Señorita* Josephina Amaldo."

Cody gripped the peon's arm until the latter winced. His eyes were burning feverishly. "You're lying, Pedrito. You've been drinking. Tell me you're lying!"

Pedrito saw the threat of physical force all natives feared; he shrank back in his chair. "Only wine, *Señor* Cody. Only wine."

Cody released the peon's arm. His eyes lost their fire; became hard blue

chinks. "How do you know this, Pedrito?"

The peon fumbled in his sash, and drew forth a crumpled sheet of paper. *Señorita* Teresa gave me this when she was dying. Don Rivera learned of that, and would have killed me if I hadn't escaped. That's why he sent these men down to kill you; because he feared your vengeance when you learned the truth from me.

"That Don Rivera is a dog, *Señor* Cody. He is marrying tonight after laying your sister at rest this morning."

"What a woman he must be marrying!" muttered Cody.

He uncrumpled the message with shaking fingers. It read:

My dearest Cody—

I send you this word by Pedrito so that you will know the truth. Don Rivera, my husband, poisoned me. I want you to know this because he may tell you I poisoned myself. Since he became infatuated with Josephina Amaldo, the daughter of a neighboring *hacendado*, my life has been so wretched that I've often contemplated killing myself.

Thank God, father never lived to see this day! Please do nothing rash. With this property father left Rivera, he is rich and powerful, and you would only bring disaster down on your own head by causing trouble. It is my own doing anyway, Cody. I know you and my father did not trust Rivera, so I have only myself to blame for what's happened. My fondest love.

Teresa.

CODY sat staring off at the huge banana plants, calmed by cold fury. His mind turned back to his days on Chivelas, when Teresa was a girl. She had been a lovely thing—her mother's warm-brown skin, her father's blue eyes, wavy hair the color of ripe corn. Flashing spirit; flashing blue eyes; courageous and wilful.

Then Don Rivera had come along on a black horse. Guatemala is a hospitable country, and it never occurred to the elder Farrel that the

dark, Spanish-looking don would abuse his hospitality by making love to his daughter who was hardly more than a child where men were concerned.

But this Don Rivera did. Rich were the lands owned by the Farrels, and the coffee yield was great. Youngest son of a man who had fled from Spain for political reasons, Don Rivera saw a chance to recoup the family fortunes by marrying this beautiful daughter of the rich American *hacendado*. His tales of sword-fighting as a boy in Spain, of glamorous days overseas, must have been the bait to tempt Teresa's heart.

EVEN against the combined opposition of her father and brother, she insisted. Cody, having imbibed some of the hot-headed characteristics of the people among whom he'd always lived, was for pitching Don Rivera out unceremoniously, regardless of what political results might accrue. But the elder Farrel relented to Teresa's desires, not because his opinion of Don Rivera rose, but because he could never deny the girl anything she wanted.

There the four of them lived together, with the servants at Chevelas, until the death of Cody's father. Then Cody drifted down to the lowlands, taking a position of overseer on one of the Fruit Company farms, and giving Teresa all interest he might have shared in the estate.

He did this in preference to living in the same house with Don Rivera. The Spaniard's black, glittering eyes caused a rising animosity in Cody's breast which made him continually want to kill his sister's husband.

Now, as he sat gloomily staring at the note his sister had written him before her death, he accused himself bitterly. If he had remained on the estate, this might never have happened.

He turned to face Pedrito. "How

did you know about those men who attacked me?"

The peon's white teeth flashed beneath his black mustache. "I had followed them for many miles, *Señor* Cody. I saw them steal your pistol, and thought surely I had hidden too far from the house. What a joy to find I did not arrive too late!"

Cody nodded. "We will attend Don Rivera's wedding feast, *mi amigo*," he announced, with a dark frown.

Pedrito nodded complacently, rolling a cigarette. It did not occur to him to question. The light of his match threw his face into momentary relief, and then he blew it out with a stream of smoke. "*Si señor*," he said. "A pleasant surprise for Don Rivera, no?"

Pedrito turned his own burro loose in the corral, found saddles in the barn behind the house, and saddled and bridled the two mules. Then he went into the kitchen, and had a steaming pot of coffee ready for Cody by the time he was dressed. Cody swallowed the liquid, and then hurried out to jump on his mule.

It was a big animal, as large as a good-sized horse, and capable of great endurance. Cody started down the trail at a stiff clip, and Pedrito bounced along behind. The overseer had buckled on the holster and gun the men had stolen from him, finding them under his window. They had probably refused to use the gun because to them machetes had seemed a more certain way of killing. One always swears by his own type of weapon.

THE ride up the steep mountain trail wound almost due east—a trail at whose end lay death for either Don Rivera or himself, Cody reflected grimly. He thought of Teresa again, his strong countenance sharpening into hard, bitter lines.

That beast! Killing his sister, and

not letting her body grow cold before he married her rival! He knew these people were calloused to death. But—even so!

The trail soon led over naked rocky slopes. The mules climbed the zig-zag trail, sweating under the broiling tropical sun which blazed from a sky of fire. Cody pushed the animals relentlessly. He must reach his birthplace before the wedding ceremony. No matter what Josephina Amaldo was like, Cody could not make her a widow!

IT was evening at Chivelas. Around the broad patio flanked by adobe buildings flowed a stream of colorful guests. Strange as had seemed this whim of Don Rivera to marry on the day of his wife's death, the holding of a fiesta had seemed even stranger.

Some of the *señoras* expressed frank disapproval of his actions by wearing black *mantillas* and black dresses. Others, fearing to risk the displeasure of the powerful Don Rivera, limited this disapproval to whispering, and had bedecked themselves in white dresses, twining flowers in their hair.

The men wandered about, smoking, under the palm trees in the patio, or beside the splashing fountain at one side. Their brightly-hued costumes gave the gathering a warmly variegated appearance.

Seven men servants tuned up a gourd *marimba*. Originally from Africa, the *marimba* had become the national musical instrument of Guatemala. In appearance, save for the gourds hanging underneath to provide resonance, and the number of men required to play one of the instruments, it might have been mistaken by a casual observer for a xylophone. "Come, dance," Don Rivera shouted at a couple hesitating on the edge of the platform laid in mid-center of the patio.

Distrust and fear showed in the

eyes of the two servants thus ordered, but they obeyed, and the pulsing notes of the *marimba* throbbled over the variegated patio. The couple danced, facing each other but never quite touching—danced with the unconscious grace that entirely lacks artifice or affectation.

Don Rivera turned to a tall, slim girl clothed in a dress of the sheerest Spanish lace and with white lace *mantilla*.

"Tomorrow all this will be yours, *querida* Josephina," he said, his small, black eyes burning.

"Tonight it is mine!" she said, her hard but coldly beautiful face looking like brown marble in the light of the full moon.

At that moment, a servant came running across the patio toward Don Rivera. The don frowned his displeasure at the interruption, but the excited servant paid no heed. He said breathlessly:

"*Señor* Don Rivera, there comes a certain *Señor* Cody—"

Don Rivera's face drained of its color, and he blurted: "What! He is not dead?"

The servant's eyes widened in fear. "I gave my men orders—"

Don Rivera's face was stormy. "Silence! You blundering fool!" He turned an agitated face to his fiancée. "You will pardon me a moment—"

She nodded, turning pale.

DON RIVERA started toward the gate, and then faltered in his steps.

A long, lean figure of a man was striding toward him. He wore no gun; in his belt was thrust a knife—Pedrito's knife.

The *marimba* went dead; the players stood wide-eyed, staring at their former master, their mallets poised in mid-air. Guests sought the cause of the interruption, and some

of them started to drift toward their host.

Cody Farrel stopped before Don Rivera, his legs braced apart, his arms akimbo.

"It pains me to see you here tonight," Don Rivera said, paling. "Especially after your dear sister's death. Teresa—"

CODY'S voice cut the silence like a knife. "Don't utter her name, you lying hypocrite. Wasn't it enough that you should poison her to get her property, that you might marry this—" Words failed him, and his hand pointed to the tall girl with waxen face who was smiling a little contemptuously at him.

The Spaniard's eyes flashed like lightning in a dark sky. "What are you saying? Are you mad? I won't have you insult me before my guests! . . . Men, seize this intruder!"

Several servants stirred, but Cody motioned them back. "Your servants were my servants—and they will be again. If you want to test your authority over them against mine—"

Don Rivera scowled. "What do you mean, they will be again?"

Cody smiled with his lips. "After I have killed you, Don Rivera!"

A mutter of astonishment swept over the group. The Spaniard's face went ashen. An apoplectic spleen seemed to seize him.

"Take this madman out!" he roared. "Take him out or every one of you will be turned out!"

Before any of the servants could obey, Cody's hand shot out. The slap of his hand against Don Rivera's cheek echoed against the adobe walls, and the Spaniard, taken unawares, went sprawling. He leaped to his feet, his face livid with rage.

Cody smiled again—with his lips. His eyes were like blue icicles.

"Now you will have to fight me, Don Rivera."

"Fight you?" The Spaniard's voice was husky with scorn and anger. "I never fight anyone below me. I leave that to my servants. It is their business to deal with dogs that annoy me."

"But you will still fight me," Cody insisted doggedly. "Your marriage to my sister puts us on a par, if you want to look at it in that light. And her murder at your hands makes it necessary for me to kill you. If you don't care to defend yourself, of course—"

Cody drew Pedrito's knife from his belt, whipping it against his whipcord riding breeches.

SUDDENLY the crack of a pistol slapped deafeningly against the sides of the court. All eyes were turned to the red-tile roof, where Pedrito was sitting with a smoking pistol in his hand. His ragged straw sombrero was tilted back on his head, and he lifted it to the assemblage with the gesture of a born showman.

"I am sure you will not be bothered again, *Señor Cody*," he said, with a flash of his white teeth.

Cody looked behind himself. A man with a knife in his hand lay face downward on the cobblestones where Pedrito's bullet had stretched him. But for that lovable little scamp on the roof, Cody would have had steel planted in his back! And with the full approval of Don Rivera, who had been looking on and gave him no warning.

"That is what I would have expected of you, Don Della Guardia!" Use of a prefix and the last name constitutes the vilest insult to a Latin American, and Don Rivera's black eyes flamed. He drew a knife from his silk shirt.

"If I must kill you—" he said resignedly. "My fame as a swordsman is still unquestioned in Spain. With knives, it is little different—"

"We will move to the dancing plat-

form," said Cody. "I don't want it to be said that I killed you when you slipped on a cobblestone."

Don Rivera shrugged. "It is all the same to me where I spill your blood."

Don Rivera mounted the low platform. Cody turned toward the wide-eyed musicians.

"Play," he ordered them. "Don Della Guardia wished music tonight!"

"Play!" Pedrito shouted, when he saw them incredulously hesitating. He brandished his gun. "I'll shoot the first one who stops!"

The sticks began to dance over the boards of the *marimba*; throbbing notes pulsated through the patio. Water splashed in the fountain. Guests moved toward the platform, drawn by that thin vein of primitive savagery which attracts to the bull-ring. The full moon threw its white brilliance over the gayly bedecked guests as Cody jumped onto the platform.

Don Rivera leaped at him, his knife gleaming with a white blinding light. Cody's blade clicked against the Spaniard's. A quick movement—and Don Rivera's hand was bleeding as the American stepped back, missing the blade which slashed at his face.

THE *marimba* throbbed its primitive music as the two antagonists waited, tensely, for the other to make the first movement. Cody bore in, his knife gripped in iron fingers. Don Rivera flashed in, slashing, and out again before the American could step back. Cody continued to bore in; and Don Rivera, his dark face contorted with rage, backed away, his knife twisting back and forth, poised for a thrust.

His blood fired by the tumultuous throb of the *marimba*, Cody's greatest effort was to hold himself in. He knew Don Rivera was a swordsman;

he'd seen him fence. But he also knew that knife-play was a law unto itself, and different tactics applied. So he continued to bore in cautiously, believing the justice of his cause would sustain him until he'd dealt with this man who had killed his sister.

It flashed the American's blade to end a short rush. Up came Don Rivera's blade toward the heart. There was an almost imperceptible rip of cloth, and the Spaniard's knife point was red when Cody had stepped back. Don Rivera watched to see him fall, but the American was at him, his blade working in the air.

"Dogs die quickly!" Don Rivera laughed harshly, thinking perhaps he could drive the American to a frenzy which would prove his own undoing. "One thrust is all it takes—one thrust. And I am one of Spain's greatest swordsmen."

Each rush ended by the Spaniard's knife biting more deeply into Cody's clothing. And yet he bore in, smiling an assurance which dismayed the Spaniard. He felt certain he had landed enough blows to kill his antagonist. Yet, if he had, why didn't this mad American fall?

CODY'S arm was ripped down its length; his shirt-front was dyed red; there was an ugly gash down his cheek. But he continued to laugh each time the Spaniard thrust at him. Laughed with his mouth—not his eyes. Laughed—mockingly. He seemingly left himself wide open, and when Don Rivera fell into the trap, his knife would rip away beautiful fragments of the Spaniard's black velvet *vaquero's* jacket which was trimmed with silver.

Minutes seemed eternities. Cody left a trail of blood on the platform as he bore in on the Spaniard. But it was his uncanny silence which flustered Don Rivera. He said nothing to indicate whether his wounds

hurt him, whether he was hit, or whether he was missed.

This sphinx-like silence began to work on Della Guardia. He began to think that it was, perhaps, the hand of justice pursuing him. Why, the man should have been lying still minutes ago! He must be dying on his feet! What drove him on that way? Why didn't he drop?

DON RIVERA cursed steadily as doubts of his own infallibility began to shake him. Perspiration beaded his dark brow. He began to take the offensive, thinking that Cody must surely fall at the slightest rush. But Cody's lips only parted in a soundless laugh, and his blade came away red.

"*Blastema!*" choked Don Rivera. "Why don't you fall, fool? You can't deceive me! You're hit a score of times."

But Cody only laughed in that soundless way which made something cold course down Don Rivera's back. And he continued to pursue the Spaniard around the platform.

The water splashed in the fountain. The *marimba* cry pulsated and beat tumultuously. The spectators were glassy-eyed, saying nothing. Josephina's eyes were shining and lustrous, and her lips were parted. Hardness and cruelty shone in her face as she watched.

And up on the red-tile roof sat little Pedrito, his gun in hand, his face as stoic as an owl's, save when Cody landed a thrust which drew blood. He knew he would die if Cody lost, but it would not have occurred to him to desert. He had to protect Cody from an attack in the back.

Don Rivera began to breathe audibly and then to pant. His eyes took on a wild, desperate light. This mad *gringo* had lived too long! The don slashed and parried with desperate ferocity. And Cody, knowing he

must fight with the same ferocity to live, slashed back. Steel sang as their blades met, and then they broke away, and bore in a second later, only to send red blades clashing again.

Desperate, the Spaniard, with a hissing intake of breath, rushed at the American. "You're through now!" he cried.

His blade gleamed wickedly in the light of the full moon, that part of the blade which was not red. It came in a flashing arc toward Cody's purposely exposed left shoulder. The American stepped aside, and his knife swung up like a pendulum.

Don Rivera staggered backward, his mouth working, his eyes glazed. Then he sank down on the bloody platform, and lay still.

Cody stared down at his enemy for a moment, dropped his knife, and staggered across the cobblestones to the gate. He fell against it, but was at last able with tremendous effort to push up the bar. Standing on unsteady legs, he pointed to the outside. The guests understood, and began to depart, some returning to the guest rooms for various things left behind.

They passed in solemn procession before the wounded man. Some said, "Bravo, señor!" Others muttered angrily beneath their breath. Josephina

Amaldo drew herself up stiffly, and flashed him a glance filled with hatred and scorn. She had not lost one she loved, so there was nothing in her hard nature calling for tears. She had, however, lost what she desired—wealth, social position, beautiful clothes.

WHEN they had departed, Cody muttered thickly: "I want all you who were here under my father and me to remain. Don Rivera's servants may go. I wish the air clean!"

And they passed out, too, an ugly crew.

Pedrito's black eyes gleamed as he closed the gate. He put his arm about Cody to help him to a bed. The *marimba* players left their instrument, and silence fell over the patio. Concern shone in the grave eyes of the old retainers as they gathered around their *patron*.

Cody Farrel forced a pale smile to his lips. "Don't worry about me," he muttered huskily. "I have lost blood, but in a good cause. Tomorrow, perhaps, I shall be about."

"Ah!" said Pedrito, his white teeth flashing in a smile. "You sound like your father. You look like your father. You fight, I think, better than your father."

Which, from Pedrito, was a great compliment.



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The Whirlwind's Ready Blade

*Swashing Swords and Blazing Pistols Resound Through
San Diego de Alcala as El Torbellino Dares All
in Mortal Conflict with Desperate Foes*

A Thrilling Complete Novelette

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Author of "Alias the Whirlwind," "The Mark of Zorro," etc.

CHAPTER I

The Brothers Gonzales

FAR out the valley beyond the mission of San Diego de Alcala, certain natives had broached stolen casks of wine, had drunk deeply thereof, and, remembering their wrongs, were threatening to burn buildings and kill stock and people. So Sergeant Juan Cassara, of the presidio, had taken his troopers and ridden forth, to deal with the recalcitrant natives after his own manner, which was violent enough.

There being no guests at the inn, Lazaga, the fat landlord, had taken his fair daughter, Juanita, and gone for a visit to the house of a friend, intending to remain until nightfall. Hence Pedro Garzo, roustabout and handy man, was alone in the hostelry when the three strangers rode into the town off El Camino Real.

It was about the middle of the afternoon, and hot, the black heat waves competing with the swirls of dust and litter to make human beings uncomfortable. Pedro Garzo sat beneath a window, his back against the

wall, dozing and dreaming. There came a pounding of horses' hoofs and a babble of raucous voices, and Pedro Garzo sat up, rubbed the sleep from his eyes, and sprang to his feet to hurry to the open front door.

"What manner of men ride so in the heat of the day?" he grumbled.

Three black horses had come to a stop in front of the inn, and three men were dismounting to tether the animals to the hitch block there. Pedro Garzo, realizing that he was the landlord for the moment, straightened his shoulders and bowed low as he stood aside and motioned for the guests to enter.

"We are the Brothers Gonzales," one said, as he drew off his riding gauntlets. He was a giant of a fellow with the face of a brute. "I am Carlos. That is Felipe, and the third is Ramón."

Pedro Garzo bowed low again, and watched as they sprawled on benches around one of the tables in the semi-dark coolness of the room.

"We want wine, food, and a place to stay for the night," Carlos Gonzales announced in stentorian tones.



El Torbellino laughed tauntingly, sidestepped neatly

"But, first of all, we want the wine."

"Of the best, *señor*?" Pedro Garzo asked.

"Of the best, always! We are the Brothers Gonzales, and for us the

best is but trash. You are not the landlord here?"

"I am but his general man, *señor*," Garzo replied in humble tones.

"His general man—ha!" Carlos

Gonzales blew out the ends of his enormous mustache and glanced at the others. All three looked wise and nodded.

"It is always so," said the one who had been designated as Felipe.

"You mean," Carlos Gonzales said to Pedro Garzo, "that you are his slave. Day and night you work, no doubt. He gives you a few morsels of poor food, and wine with water in it, and allows you the luxury of sleeping on the ground. And, being a worm, you endure it!"

Pedro Garzo scarcely knew what to reply to that, so he kept silent. He did not wish to antagonize these guests by disputing with them. And the statement was far from correct. True, Lazaga howled at him often, and gave him plenty of work to do. The hours were long and the duties varied and uncertain. But Pedro Garzo had good food, and a fair grade of wine to drink, and he certainly did not sleep on the ground.

As for being a worm— Pedro Garzo almost forgot himself and smiled. How his proud and aristocratic father back in Spain, with whom he had quarreled, would flinch to hear his son called a worm!

"Yes, you are but a slave," Carlos Gonzales repeated. "But you have not the courage to strike off your irons. Fetch us wine!"

PEDRO GARZO retreated to the kitchen to get a wineskin and mugs, but through a crack in the door he watched the three guests. They bent over the table, their heads close together, and seemed to be in whispered conference.

Pedro did not like their looks. He doubted they were brothers, since no two of them had features even remotely alike. He doubted also that their name was Gonzales. They had the look of highway rogues. They wore blades attached to serviceable belts, and had knives in those belts,

and the man Carlos had a pistol also. Perhaps the other two had pistols, hidden, Pedro Garzo thought.

He carried in the wineskin, poured the wine, and placed the mugs before his guests. Carlos Gonzales tossed a coin on the table in payment, making a grand gesture as though to say money was as so much dirt to him. Pedro Garzo started to retire, but they detained him.

"**W**HERE is your landlord?" Carlos asked.

"He will return presently, and get you food."

"Nobody seems to be in the town. Is it that every person here takes the siesta?"

"There is some trouble with the natives down the valley, and the troopers have gone there, and some of the townsmen with them to see the fun," Pedro Garzo explained.

"Sit down and have wine with us," Carlos invited.

"Pardon me, *señor*, but that would not be right. You are guests, and I but the general man of the inn. *Señor* Lazaga would turn me out if I did such a thing."

"Yes, you are a slave!" Carlos said. "But I say you are good enough to sit and drink with any man. How would you like to have much money?"

"That is desirable," Pedro replied.

"Money to buy fine clothes, and trinkets for some *señorita* of your fancy! Aid us, and you shall have it."

"What would you have me do?" Pedro asked.

Carlos lowered his voice, after a furtive glance at the door. "This Lazaga, this landlord of yours, undoubtedly has much money stowed away somewhere. Money he has made by working half to death such persons as you. You have a right to a share of it. Why not get it?"

"Señor Lazaga would not give it to me," Pedro said.

"Dolt! Ass! Poor clown! Certainly he will not give it to you. Take it!" Carlos Gonzales said.

"Señor?"

"Listen, fool! We are the Brothers Gonzales, gentlemen of the highway. We have just come from the North, and intend to work our pleasure hereabouts. We have a hiding place in the hills. I tell you these things freely, knowing you will not betray us, for, did you do so, we'd slit your throat!"

"You are robbers, then?" Pedro gasped.

"Listen, clod! Show us where this Lazaga keeps his money. Make the getting of it easy for us. It can be done now, before he returns. And you'll get your share."

"But the troopers will arrest and hang me," Pedro said.

"Stupid ass! You have hereabouts a certain highwayman known as El Torbellino, The Whirlwind, have you not?"

"That is true, *señor*."

"Say that this Whirlwind came here while you were alone, and at the point of a blade made you disgorge the landlord's wealth. Then the crime will be laid upon The Whirlwind; and the silly troopers will ride here and there through the hills in search of him, while we rest snugly in our hiding place and smile. It is an easy matter, eh?"

Pedro Garzo smiled a bit. It was really amusing. For, of course, Pedro Garzo himself was The Whirlwind.

CHAPTER II

Murder and Pillage

"WELL, dolt, what of it?" Carlos Gonzales asked. "Are you with us in this enterprise? Make it easy for us, and take your share."

Pedro Garzo got no chance for a reply. In from the plaza, panting and perspiring, came Lazaga, the landlord, with his daughter Juanita at his heels. From his friend's house, Lazaga had witnessed the arrival of the three, and had come hurrying to attend to trade.

Carlos Gonzales winked at Pedro Garzo, who modestly retired. Lazaga, rubbing his hands together briskly, received an order for food, and hastened to the kitchen to prepare it. Pedro Garzo followed him there.

"I DO not like the looks of these men, *señor*," Pedro warned.

"They appear to be good customers," Lazaga replied. "It is their money interests me, not their looks."

"They may be thieves, and the troopers are down the valley."

"If you are so afraid of them, run and hide," Lazaga said. "But help me serve them first."

It was a generous repast the three despoiled, washing down meat and vegetables with mugs of rich wine. They loosened first their belts and then their garments, and at the conclusion of the feast leaned back against the wall on the benches, half asleep, like three gorged animals.

Pedro helped in the kitchen, standing beside Juanita as he washed the dishes.

"Those three in the other room—they are ones to keep in the distance," Pedro warned.

"They do look like wicked men. But looks often are deceiving," she replied. "You, for instance, appear to be a servant."

"And am I not?"

"A very good one—which does not prevent your being other things also," Juanita said.

Pedro Garzo looked at her sharply, and the little *señorita* smiled and lifted her brows.

"Be kind, and do me a favor," Pedro said. "Mention to your father

the big black horse he has in pasture, and which no man can ride. Then he will think to order me to go tonight and give the animal salt. It is time."

"They say," Juanita told him, "that The Whirlwind rides a big black horse."

THE sunset came, and then darkness crept over the land. Lights glowed in the houses, and in the big room at the inn Pedro Garzo ignited the huge torches which were stuck into the walls, so that they sent forth in equal shares light and smoke and stench.

The Brothers Gonzales came awake after their siesta, yawned and stretched and demanded more wine, which was immediately forthcoming, since they paid as they went, something not every guest did.

"Shall I care for your horses, señores?" Pedro Garzo asked. "Shall I put the saddles and bridles away, and turn the animals into the corral, and give them water and food?"

"We attend to our own horses always," Carlos told him. "Give them water, and nothing else."

That remark confirmed certain suspicions Pedro Garzo had. A wise man does not run a horse who has just stuffed his stomach. If these three intended some robbery, they would want their horses ready for the trail, for a swift dash to their hiding place in the hills.

"We take a look at the town," Carlos said.

Felipe and Ramón followed him into the plaza. They stopped a moment to watch Pedro Garzo watering the horses, and Carlos stood close to him an instant.

"Well, dolt?" he asked.

"It would be better to wait for night," Pedro whispered.

Somebody approached, so nothing more was said. Carlos led the others away. They strutted along the side

of the plaza, making remarks to the effect that San Diego de Alcala was not much of a place and never would be, kicking natives out of their path and giving elbows to white folk they passed.

Having watered the horses, and not being needed in the inn, Pedro Garzo slipped away like a shadow and took the trail. He was so close to them at times that he could understand their low talk, and at other times at a greater distance; but never did he lose sight of them.

Minutes passed, and from the house of Don Juan Sandoval, a man of wealth, arose a great outcry. Native women were screeching, and servants came rushing out into the plaza crying that their master was being murdered. Don Juan's pretty niece hurried forth and gasped and swooned prettily.

From all parts of the pueblo, men and women rushed to the scene. Don Juan, his face flushed with rage, came to the door, howling.

"Where are the soldiers? I have been robbed! El Torbellino has been here! He stripped jewels from my niece's throat!"

IN the crowd appeared the Brothers Gonzales, demanding to know the cause for the tumult, saying they were strangers but interested for all that. They howled loudly that their swords were at Don Juan's service.

But nothing was known, except that El Torbellino, The Whirlwind, according to Don Juan and his niece, had come into the living room from the patio, and had driven servants away. He had stolen, and then had disappeared.

"A consummate rogue!" Carlos Gonzales cried. "No doubt he is far from town by this time. When the soldiers return, they should pursue."

It grew quieter and the crowd dispersed, and the Brothers Gonzales

wandered on around the plaza. A drifting shadow always followed them.

Half an hour passed, and then, from a shop at the corner of the plaza, where the dealer was closing for the night, came wild cries that ended in a gurgle ominous in sound. Again, the people of the town made a wild rush.

The merchant was on the floor of his shop, his garments drenched with blood, his life ebbing swiftly. A sword had been thrust through him. He gasped out an account of what had happened.

The Whirlwind had been there. He had stolen gold, and had demanded more, saying he knew some was hidden. And when the merchant had hesitated, he had been run through. Having said which, the merchant died.

Again the Brothers Gonzales appeared, but not so soon this time. They were loud in their denunciation of this El Torbellino, who robbed as he pleased and slaughtered honest merchants. What sort of town was this San Diego de Alcalá? There should be a big reward offered, and they would strive to collect it!

A SMALL group remained at the shop, where the *magistrado* took charge of affairs, and again the throng dispersed. And in from the road came Sergeant Juan Cassara and his troopers, having punished the wild natives, to find more trouble confronting them.

In the absence of his officer, Sergeant Cassara was in charge of the presidio. He bellowed questions, and learned little. Theft and murder were facts, that was all.

"The rogue should be run down!" Carlos Gonzales howled.

"Who are you, *señor*?" Sergeant Cassara demanded.

"We are the Brothers Gonzales,

from San Francisco de Asis. We arrived this afternoon at the inn."

"So?" Cassara's eyes flamed and grew narrow. "And how am I to know you had no hand in this?"

"*Señor*!" Carlos cried. "Do we have the appearance of thieves and murderers?"

"To tell the truth, *señores*, I have seen more presentable men," Cassara replied.

"YOU have the evidence," Carlos said softly. "What did Don Juan Sandoval tell you? That El Torbellino entered his place and robbed. And what did the dying merchant say? That El Torbellino had slain him. Was anything said of three men?"

"But one of you—" Cassara began.

"*Señor*, you are beside yourself! The three of us have been wandering around looking over the town. We are strangers here, and we are looking for a place to locate a business. The town will never grow if you treat strangers so.

"All three of us will swear, *Señor el Sergeant*, that we have not been separated. How, then, could one of us play El Torbellino and enter the house and store?"

There it was—the three of them would swear they always had been together, and none could give them the lie. Don Juan had seen but one man, and the dying merchant had spoken of but one.

"This El Torbellino should be run to earth," Carlos said. "Seek him, *Señor el Sergeant*, and do not waste time accusing honest men."

The Brothers Gonzales entered the inn again, and howled for more wine. And Lazaga served them quickly.

"Landlord, the events of the evening should make you shiver," Carlos said. "No doubt you have gold stowed away in your hostelry, the profits of years."

Lazaga did not admit it in words,

but his face betrayed that Carlos spoke the truth.

"Think, *señor*, how easy it would be for this El Torbellino to catch you alone, threaten you with torture, make you disclose the hiding place of your hoard!"

"These be terrible times, turbulent times," Lazaga wailed.

"The Whirlwind is in the vicinity. He has struck twice tonight already. It is a saying that things always go in threes."

"You are frightening me," Lazaga said.

"It is evident that the soldiery cannot protect the citizens hereabouts."

"But what is a man to do, *señor*?" Lazaga asked.

"Guard your gold, *señor*. For a fee—a small one, since it is not our regular business—the Brothers Gonzales will protect your wealth tonight. Oh, let us not mention a fee, since we are friends! Give us free supper and the morning meal, and we will call it quits."

"I appreciate your offer, *señor*," Lazaga said.

"Tell us where you keep your hoard, and we'll see that no El Torbellino gets it."

BUT Lazaga, frightened, was not entirely without sense. He did not reveal the hiding place of his wealth to strangers.

"El Torbellino could not get it unless he tortured me into revealing where it is kept," the landlord declared. "If one or two of you will sleep in the patio, one eye awake, let us say, I'll be well guarded. The Whirlwind would not then be able to get at me."

"One of us, at least, shall remain awake always," Carlos assured him. "Where do you take your rest, *señor*?"

"In a little room adjoining the kitchen," Lazaga said.

CHAPTER III

The Whirlwind Acts

THE night deepened. The soldiers returned to the presidio after searching the town and finding nothing unusual. The inn was thronged for a time as men drank wine and discussed the events of the evening.

Then the company scattered, and the inn was almost deserted, save for the Brothers Gonzales drinking in a corner as they toyed with dice, and Lazaga hovering about. Pedro Garzo had been told to go to the pasture and leave salt for the big black horse Lazaga had taken on a trade, and which no man could ride.

In the kitchen, Pedro Garzo had a moment with Juanita, who was preparing food for the morning meal before she retired.

"I do not like those three men," the *señorita* said.

"They are not to be trusted. I hope your father does not trust them."

"I fear them more than I fear El Torbellino." She smiled at him as she spoke.

Pedro Garzo smiled back at her, and hurried forth into the black night. Along the edge of a coulée he traveled, until he came to the pasture far on the edge of the town. He gave a peculiar whistle, and a big black horse came trotting to him.

Pedro Garzo put the salt down. Then he did something which would have made those of San Diego de Alcala marvel, had they seen it. He gripped the animal's mane and sprang upon his back; and so guiding him with twists of the mane and with his knees, he rode the unmanageable horse slowly through the night and down into the coulée, stopping directly behind the inn.

From behind a jumble of rocks there, Pedro Garzo took a saddle and bridle and other gear, which he

put on the mount. He also brought forth a long black cloak, with which he shrouded his form, and a drooping black hat, and a mask which covered his entire face and effectually hid his features. Lastly, he strapped on a blade and stuck a loaded pistol into his belt.

Then he mounted the black horse and rode slowly along the coulée's bottom, the hoofs of his mount making soft *plop-plops* in the deep dust and sand.

DISGUSTED with life, Sergeant Juan Cassara sat on a bench in front of the presidio building. He was sick of punishing natives who got drunk and made threats. He was sick of this El Torbellino, elusive as a shadow.

The robbery of Don Juan Sandoval and the slaying of the merchant—they were things which undoubtedly would cause Sergeant Juan Cassara to be rebuked sternly by his officer when the latter returned. Cassara had about decided to quit military service and go to work for some hacienda.

He was alone in front of the barracks. His men were sleeping after their hard chase into the country. The horses had been bedded down. One man was supposed to be on guard, but Cassara supposed he was sleeping also, no doubt propped up against the wall in the corridor.

"A pest—this El Torbellino!" Juan growled. He held a mug of wine, and he quaffed deeply, and filled the mug again from a skin which had been given him by the owner of the hacienda where the rioting natives had been suppressed.

Cassara leaned back against the wall and closed his eyes, and let the cool breeze fan his hot forehead. Streaks of light that came through the door revealed him. Across those streaks a shadow passed, but Cassara did not see.

"Sergeant!" It was a mere whisper that came from the darkness near the wall.

Cassara jerked alert. He could see nothing, nobody. It was possible he had imagined the word, he thought.

"Cassara!"

No mistaking now. Cassara stood up, and peered into the blackness. "Who is it? Where are you?" he asked.

"Make no noise! Do not waken your men! Come here to the corner of the building—quickly."

Cassara strode in the direction of the voice, his hand on the hilt of his sword. Fatigue and wine had dulled his senses in a measure, else he would have held his pistol ready before him.

But it was another pistol that was ready, and Cassara felt its muzzle pressing against his stomach as he stopped abruptly at the corner of the presidio.

"Not a sound, or you die!" a soft voice said. "Walk with me to the trees down the slope."

"What—"

"Not a sound, I said! If you speak before we reach the trees, there will be a sergeant the less."

"There may be in any case," Cassara replied, forgetting he had been told not to talk.

A QUICK jab of the pistol's muzzle warned him, and he strode toward the trees silently. It was no time to make an attack, he sensed. When the small grove was reached, the sergeant saw a horse tethered to one of the trees.

"Well, *señor*?" Cassara asked. "Here we are. Now, if you'll disclose your identity—"

"I had forgotten it is so dark you cannot see me. I am El Torbellino, *señor*."

"El Torbellino? Murderer and thief!"

"Thief, perhaps, but no mur-

derer, *señor*," the masked man objected.

"This night's work shall be your last!"

"You scarce are in a position to threaten."

"Regardless of what you do to me, your end is near," Cassara declared. "One cannot overlook the slaying of an honest old merchant."

"I did not slay him. Nor have I robbed anybody tonight. I have come to get you, to prove that."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Remain with me, *señor*. Be continually at my side for a certain time. I am about to mount and ride. You will walk at my horse's head."

The Whirlwind reached out and plucked Cassara's pistol from his sash and tossed it away. He unbuckled the sergeant's belt and hung it and the blade from the pommel of his saddle. Swiftly, before Cassara realized his object, he slipped a noose over the sergeant's wrists and jerked it taut.

"I fasten you to my saddle," he explained. "That is because I cannot watch you easily in the darkness. It is a compliment that I fear your activities."

CASSARA'S mounting, swelling rage demanded expression. He expelled breath in a great gust and spoke: "El Torbellino, for this I'll run you down and run you through! The world is not large enough for the two of us."

"Save your breath—you may need it presently," The Whirlwind said. "For my deeds, I stand ready to pay, if you can catch me. But I refuse, *señor*, to be blamed for things I do not do."

"You mean you did not rob Don Juan and kill the trader? Then, who did?"

"We shall see," came the reply.

Down the slope they went, and circled the town, and finally got into

the coulée and went slowly along it, silently, churning up great clouds of dust. Directly behind the inn, The Whirlwind stopped his horse. He unfastened the rope from the saddle, but kept it on Cassara's wrists.

"Sit down, *señor*, and be as comfortable as possible," The Whirlwind said. "There is a rock behind you."

"What are we doing here?"

"Waiting," The Whirlwind said.

CHAPTER IV

Mischief at the Inn

AT the inn, the Brothers Gonzales decided that they had had enough for one day, and that they would retire. Everybody else had disappeared except Lazaga. The landlord, still frightened, hovered about, rubbing his hands, glancing frequently toward the door.

He extinguished all the torches except one, and barred the door on the inside and closed the windows. Any night traveler who wished service would have to raise a din. "Into the patio, *señores*," Lazaga suggested.

He led the Brothers Gonzales there. He pointed out his own room beside the kitchen, and the room of his daughter adjoining. He tossed down a pile of skins for bedding, and set wine handy.

"We shall be comfortable, *señor*," Carlos Gonzales said. "Do not worry about us. This El Torbellino will not be able to get at you past our bodies. If we knew where your gold is hidden, perhaps we could guard it better."

"That knowledge would have to be tortured out of me," Lazara declared. "And if El Torbellino cannot get at me to torture, both I and my gold are safe."

"Sleep well, *señor*," Carlos said.

Lazara went into his room and closed the door. He did not bar it,

for there was a large open window through which a man could enter if he wished. The Brothers Gonzales spread skins for their beds, but crouched in the darkness and spoke in whispers.

"Who shall play El Torbellino?" Felipe asked.

"It shall be my pleasure," Carlos replied. "Ramón, why did you kill that merchant?"

"He began squawking, and it made me nervous."

"What a rare jest this is," Carlos declared. "The three of us always ready to swear we were together. One goes aside and plays at being El Torbellino—"

"And profitable," Felipe put in. "The jewels and the merchant's gold are in the saddlebags. After the cry dies down tonight, we'll ride."

"We must remain long enough to fasten the crime on El Torbellino. Let each of us remember the part he is to play."

"The horses are ready," Ramón said. "We turned them into the corral, of course, but I slipped out and got them ready for the road again. They are tied just inside the gate."

THEN the three stretched themselves on the skins, and there was silence. In the sky, the clouds drifted, and the stars were seen. Silence brooded over the town. In the distance, a mocking bird was singing to his mate.

The Brothers Gonzales dozed for a time, until snores coming across the patio told Carlos that the landlord was sound asleep despite the terror he had felt. Carlos touched the others.

"It is time," he said. "Do all of you remember the parts you must enact?"

Back in the shadows, Carlos Gonzales shrouded his form in a black cloak, put on a mask and a black hat.

Pistol in hand, he crept across the patio and listened outside the window of Lazaga's room.

The landlord continued snoring. Carlos opened the door softly and stepped inside. He listened a moment, then gently prodded Lazaga in the side with the pistol.

"Awake, *señor!*" he said.

THE landlord was awake instantly, breaking off a snore in its middle. He could see nobody, but sensed the presence of another in the room. And he felt the pistol jabbing him.

"Quiet, *señor!* Do not make a sound. Speak in whispers."

"What is happening?" Lazaga asked.

"Remember—not a squawk out of you! Gather yourself together, *señor.* This is El Torbellino."

"The Whirlwind? Oh, *señor!*" Lazaga began.

"Quiet! Do you want me to blow out your brains?"

"How did—" the landlord began.

"How came I here, you mean? Those three in the patio are sleeping soundly. Were they not, I'd run them through. Now, *señor,* to business! I want your gold!"

"Gold? I—I have none."

"A lie may cost you your life! Be warned."

"I have a little here in a pouch. I am but a poor man, struggling to make a living. I am cheated and swindled on every side—"

"Enough! I know you have gold. Your gold or your life, *señor!*—and I do not intend waiting long for your decision."

Lazaga was sitting on the edge of his couch now, shaking with fear. He loved his savings, but he loved life yet more. This El Torbellino was running wild tonight. He had robbed Don Juan Sandoval, and slain a merchant. The soldiers could not catch him. There was no help!

Lazaga wondered if the Brothers

Gonzales were indeed asleep. He had trusted them to protect him. No doubt the very wine he had given them had steeped them in deep slumber. Alas!

The landlord lurched to his feet, and his assailant grasped him roughly by the arm and prodded him with the muzzle of the pistol again. They stepped to the door.

"Do not take it all," Lazaga begged.

"Quickly! Where is it?"

"The patio well—"

REELING as though from a blow, Lazaga went to the well with its low rock curb. With his tormentor standing close beside him, he reached down and removed one of the stones. In the aperture disclosed was a skin bag, and Lazaga lifted it out. He moaned a little.

"This is cruelty—it is my all—I had hoped to leave it to my daughter—"

"Be glad I do not take your daughter also!" his assailant hissed. "Is this all? Do not lie to me, *señor*, else I'll return and cut out your heart."

"It is my all!"

"Back to your room, then!"

He compelled Lazaga to return to the room, where the landlord dropped on his couch and moaned. The moans penetrated to the adjoining room, so that Juanita heard them. She already had been disturbed in her sleep.

She sprang from her cot and rushed into the patio, and to the door of her father's room. There, she collided with a masked man who thrust her back against the wall. The *Señorita* Juanita screamed.

That scream cut the night like a knife a block of cheese. It was out before she could be terrified by threats.

And it was followed by another, and a third.

She darted beneath the man's arm and rushed into her father's room, her first concern being for him. The masked man raced to the end of the patio, tearing off his cloak and hat and mask, and tossing them over the patio wall. His brothers sprang to their feet and joined him.

They rushed into the big room of the inn, where the one smoking torch cast shifting shadows. They howled and hurried to the front door, tore it open after unbarring it, rushed out into the night, creating a din. Ramón discharged a pistol into the air.

"Help! Thieves! El Torbellino!" they cried.

Lights began appearing in the buildings. Men called out into the night. The Brothers Gonzales rushed here and there—and Carlos ran to the corral, and stuffed into a saddle-bag the bag he had taken from Lazaga. Its contents clinked musically.

Down in the coulée, El Torbellino and Sergeant Juan Cassara heard the tumult.

"Here, Sergeant, take your blade," El Torbellino said. "There seems to be mischief at the inn. And remember, *señor*, that I was here with you when it happened!"

Grasping belt and blade, buckling them on as he ran, Sergeant Cassara rushed toward the inn.

CHAPTER V

The Sword Decides

FOR the third time that night, the good people of San Diego de Alcala gathered at the scene of a crime. Angry men and white-faced women, scantily clad, listened to the tale.

Lazaga, still trembling, was in the big room, Juanita supporting him. Sergeant Cassara was trying to get facts. The Brothers Gonzales were ready to talk.

"We did not see the fellow enter

the patio—perhaps we slept a moment—but we saw him come from the landlord's room. We heard Lazaga moaning," Carlos said.

"What happened then?" Cassara demanded.

"The fellow ran into the inn, and we pursued. The front door was open. He ran out into the night, and we tried to follow him. Ramón fired at him and missed. He had a horse ready, I think."

SERGEANT CASSARA swore loudly, so that the women near covered their ears with their hands and turned away.

"I regret we did not serve the landlord better," Carlos continued. "This El Torbellino is a devil!"

Cassara had sent to the presidio for his troopers, and they came rushing down the hill. But there was no trail for them to follow. The sergeant looked at those about him, and his eyes fell upon Pedro Garzo. "Where were you? What did you see?" he asked. "Do you not sleep in the big room?"

"I was not doing so tonight, *señor*," Pedro Garzo replied. "I went to the pasture for *Señor* Lazaga, to salt his black horse, and when I returned I went to sleep outside where it was cool against the wall."

Cassara waved a hand helplessly. "What can a man do?" he cried. "Like a ghost, this El Torbellino comes and goes. And these three strangers—Ha! How am I to know that—"

"You question our integrity again, *señor*?" Carlos interrupted, hotly. "We were together—all three will swear it. Did *Señor* Lazaga see more than one highwayman?"

"As a matter of form, I shall look into your personal affairs later," Cassara threatened.

Lazaga was moaning again, and saying he wished to be alone with his sorrow. Cassara chased the curi-

ous away. He sent his troopers to scatter in the outskirts of the town and see whether they could find a trail. Juanita Lazaga was trying to comfort her father. Pedro Garzo had disappeared with the crowd.

The three Brothers Gonzales were at a table, swigging more wine, lamenting the disorderly state of affairs in the district. Cassara marched back and forth along the room. And suddenly he came to an abrupt stop at the table where the three brothers were sitting.

"It may interest you to know, *señores*, that El Torbellino did not commit this crime," he said.

"What?" Lazaga jerked up his head, astounded. "He told me he was El Torbellino."

"He lied! At the time the crime was committed, El Torbellino was with me."

"With you?" Carlos Gonzales roared. "How does it happen, then, that he is not dead or a prisoner?"

The sergeant hung his head. "I was his prisoner at the moment. He had me in his power. He caught me and brought me here and bade me listen. I'd know he did not commit a crime if one occurred, he said, because he was with me at the time."

"The rogue undoubtedly has an accomplice who masqueraded as him," Carlos suggested.

BUT at that instant a cold, hard voice addressed them from the kitchen door:

"El Torbellino has no accomplice, *señores*!"

And there was El Torbellino standing before them, a blade held ready in one hand and a pistol in the other.

Cassara reeled back against the wall. The Brothers Gonzales lurched to their feet. El Torbellino advanced into the room, stopping at the end of the big fireplace.

"Careful of your moves, *señores*!" he

warned. "Sergeant, do you stand aside a moment, until I have finished with these others. For aiding you in this, I ask fair play."

"You shall have it, El Torbellino. But, the moment you are done with these, I shall be at you. There are crimes for which you must answer."

El Torbellino advanced another few feet.

"**T**HE Brothers Gonzales!" he said.

He spoke in a deep monotone always, a voice plainly disguised. "Rogues! Murderers and thieves! They robbed Sandoval, slew the merchant, stole from Lazaga—"

"What comedy is this?" Carlos cried.

"The one called Ramón has blood on the hilt of his sword—fresh blood!"

Off guard, Ramón glanced swiftly at the hilt. Then he flushed and reeled back against the wall.

"So!" Sergeant Cassara said.

"Cassara, you will find their horses tied inside the corral, but ready for the trail. Look into their saddlebags presently. You'll find the Sandoval jewels, the merchant's money, the bag they made Lazaga take from the well."

"If they are there, somebody else put them there," Carlos cried. "This is a trick of this knave, Sergeant. As I said, he must have an accomplice. To accuse honest men—"

"Let our blades decide!" El Torbellino cried. "One at a time, and fair play! If there is treachery, my pistol will bark!"

Carlos Gonzales whipped out his blade and charged forward, bellowing angrily, trying to act the honest man honestly infuriated for the benefit of the sergeant. Cassara remained against the wall, watching. He had but a blade, and El Torbellino a pistol also. And the sergeant considered that these men were aiding him with their fighting. Let them

slash one another, and the sergeant would gather the remains without risking his own skin and blood.

Carlos charged, and El Torbellino laughed tauntingly and sidestepped neatly, parrying a wild lunge. Carlos turned and was at him again. A moment they fenced.

Steel rang as they shifted about in the uncertain light thrown by the smoking torch. Juanita Lazaga, frightened, was clinging to her equally frightened father. Cassara watched closely.

Ramón Gonzales slipped slowly and softly along the wall toward the door. He had it in his mind to get to the corral and get the damaging evidence out of the saddlebags, unsaddle the horses if there was time, and so give the lie to The Whirlwind's accusations.

"Where are you going?" Cassara barked at him.

"To call some of your troopers and catch this rogue!"

"Remain!" the sergeant ordered.

But Ramón made a wild dash for the door. The pistol of El Torbellino barked even as he fought with Carlos, and Ramón reeled back against the wall, clutching at a wounded shoulder.

FELIPE GONZALES gave a roar of rage and whipped a pistol from his belt. He fired, but the shot went wild. None had a charged pistol now—it was an affair of blades.

Felipe dashed forward, whipping out his sword. The Whirlwind found himself in a corner, facing two men. His blade darted like a live thing. The light was poor, which made the affair doubly dangerous.

"Help! Help! El Torbellino is here!" Ramón cried the words through the window.

The shooting had been heard. His cries were heard also. Men began shouting around the plaza. Some of

the troopers, hearing the tumult, started riding toward the inn.

Sergeant Juan Cassara whipped out his own blade again and decided to take a hand in the fighting. To wound or capture all these men was a thing to be desired.

El Torbellino shifted along the wall, dodged a lunge by Carlos, parried a thrust by Felipe, and got free. They pursued, getting between him and Cassara. The Whirlwind turned and caught Felipe alone. The ring of steel, a thud, a gasp, and Felipe's sword clattered to the floor.

CARLOS GONZALES bellowed and rushed forward again as his brother fell. The Whirlwind stood this time.

There was a swift exchange, and the blade of Carlos was torn from his grasp and sent flying through the air.

Outside, men were rushing to the inn. The pounding of hoofs told that some of the troopers were almost there.

"Care for your rogues, Cassara," The Whirlwind cried. "Some day we'll meet again!"

"Never a better time than now," Cassara cried in answer.

He rushed and lunged. El Torbellino laughed, and pricked the sergeant in the side as he went by. And as Cassara bent and turned, The Whirlwind's blade darted forward again, and Cassara's blade rang to the floor also.

"Sergeant, *adios!*" The Whirlwind cried.

He dashed to the kitchen door, turned to look back, and darted out.

"Help here!" Cassara bellowed, as the foremost of the troopers ran into the inn. "Seize these men! Some of you follow me!"

Perhaps it was by accident that Juanita Lazaga, apparently frightened and trying to get out of the way, got into it instead. The ser-

geant lurched against her, and stopped abruptly to catch her and keep her from falling. And the man behind crashed into him. And, in that brief instant, The Whirlwind had time to get into the dark patio, dash its length and spring over the wall.

Through the shadows he ran, down into the coulée, tearing off cloak and hat and mask, and unbuckling his blade. He tossed the things in the rocks, his pistol with them. He jerked saddle and bridle off the black, and slapped the animal right smartly.

Trained so to do, the big black tore away toward his pasture, his hoofs pounding the earth.

Mounted troopers pursued, but not quickly enough. Cassara and the others afoot, thinking The Whirlwind had made his escape, turned back toward the inn. And Pedro Garzo, keeping in the darkness, followed them.

The inn was thronged once more. So Pedro Garzo crept into it and into the midst of the crowd unobserved. The Brothers Gonzales were in charge of troopers. Their horses had been found ready for the trail, and the loot in their saddlebags. Ramón's sword gave evidence of having been drenched in blood, despite the quick cleaning he had given it after slaying the merchant.

LAZAGA quickly opened his skin bag—and gave a great cry. No gold was in it, only odds and ends of worthless metal.

"My gold! My gold!" he moaned. "Make them say what they did with it!"

Carlos Gonzales, confused and suddenly afraid, made an error then.

"The bag is as you gave it to me," he said.

And that settled it.

Again the inn was quiet, except for the moaning of Lazaga. Cassara

and his men had taken the prisoners away, and the townsmen had gone also, and the inn door was closed and barred again.

"My gold—my gold!" Lazaga moaned.

The little *señorita* glanced at Pedro Garzo, who was standing near. There was a puzzled question in her glance.

"*Señor*, I did not wish to say so before the others," Pedro Garzo whispered, "but I know where your gold is. El Torbellino passed me as he was fleeing. He said to tell you he anticipated the theft, and took the gold from the bag and put that stuff in its place.

"You will find the gold in the big broken urn at the end of the patio, he said."

Lazaga gave a cry of joy and sprang to his feet, to rush toward the patio door. But he stopped and turned, and a look of amazement was in his face.

"But how—how did El Torbellino—know the gold was there—so he could make the change?" he asked in his bewilderment.

"That is a question, *señor*," Pedro Garzo said:

"You'll have to find a new hiding-place."

LAZAGA rushed on. The *señorita* smiled and dimpled as she looked at Pedro Garzo.

"I wonder how El Torbellino knew," she said. "He seems to know many things. Possibly I know many things, also."

"Do you tell what you know?" Pedro Garzo asked.

Her only answer was another smile.

"For all his trouble tonight, this El Torbellino seems to have gotten nothing," she said.

"Perhaps," Pedro Garzo replied, "he got a lot of satisfaction. That is something."



**WHIRLING,
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GUNS *and* GOLD

*Stuart Marshall, Gun
Runner, Matches Wits
With a Central
American Rebel*

By CAPTAIN LEE
FREDERICKS

Author of "Treachery in the Ranks," etc.

STUART MARSHALL ducked as the knife pinged into the wall in back of where his head had been a split second before. Instinctively his hand dropped to his right side. His automatic leaped from its holster and before the knife-thrower could flee or defend himself, Stuart sent a leaden slug crashing into his body.

The sneer that had overspread the face of Rodriguez when his follower threw the knife suddenly turned to a look of consternation. Stuart's crew, until then lined against the bar, faced about as their captain's pistol spoke. In the hand of each man rested a pugnacious looking snub-nosed automatic.

"I take it that you mean to cancel your order, eh, Rodriguez?" Stuart asked drily.

"No, señor," the Spaniard protested, watching the waving auto-



*"Please do not shoot! I have brought
the money to the señores."*

matic with fascinated eyes. "Eet is all a beeg mistake. Estaban get drunk. He—"

"Can the chatter," Stuart said harshly. "Dapper Don told me that you were a fluke, but I'm here to collect." He turned to his hard-faced crew. "No more drinks, boys. Got business to tend to." Turning to Rodriguez, "C'mon, you."

THE Spaniard paled to the color of putty as he looked round the circle of determined faces that surrounded him. He glanced from one man to the next in hopes of discovering one wavering expression. Each face was set in grim resolution.

"C'mon, you!" Stuart repeated. "The stuff's on the dock. You can check it for yourself. Then there's the matter of a little debt." He handed the Spaniard a slip of paper.

With trembling hands Rodriguez opened the sheet and read: "10 Lewis machine-guns . . . \$5,000; 400 Craig rifles . . . \$20,000; 50,000 rounds ammunition . . . \$25,000; total . . . \$50,000, payable in gold on delivery."

"Quite an item," Stuart remarked. "Of course, you have the money here?"

If it was possible for a man's face to turn greener, Rodriguez' did. For a moment he appeared to be on the verge of collapse. Then a peculiar whistle shrilled outside of the cantina. He snapped to.

"Certainly, señores. The material is being checked by my secretary. He has the portfolio. Shall we go now?"

Stuart nodded grimly. "Okay. But no funny business. One false move and—" His gesture was more eloquent than words.

"I theenk you shall have notheeng to fear from me," Rodriguez protested.

Stuart's eyes hardened to twin points of steel. "You bet we have nothing to fear from you," he said

coldly. They filed out the door and down to the beach.

Even Stuart's calm deserted him when he saw the beach. Three years of gun running in Central America had taught him many types of doublecross, but this was his first experience at being hi-jacked. The two men he had left with the shipment lay on the sand in grotesque positions. Every box had disappeared.

"'Ands up, señor!" Stuart whirled to find himself facing the business end of a machine-gun. His men automatically lifted their hands. But not Stuart. Sheathing his gun, he disdainfully lit a cigarette.

"Are you sure you know how to operate that thing?" he asked in a casual voice.

The man who a moment before had cringed in fear of his life now strutted in command. "Shoot the first gringo dog that moves," Rodriguez ordered. Then, striding over to Stuart, he leered up at him.

"Eet is fifty thousand dollars that you wish, señor." He cackled. "Rodriguez may be kind enough to let you have your life, but now—consider yourself under arrest."

LIKE a bolt out of the blue, Stuart's fist shot out and connected with the Spaniard's chin. The man wilted from the force of the blow. Marshall stooped and, picking him up like a sack of meal, started off down the beach toward where their boat was drawn up.

"Come on, men," he shouted before the stupefied revolutionists could swing their machine-gun into action. "We've got a date."

He threw the squirming Rodriguez into the boat's bottom and started to push off. His men, galvanized to action, sprang to join him. The boat slid along the sand and into the water, as the Spaniards' machine-gun began to sing its death song.

"Ah, *madre di Dios*," Rodriguez wailed. While Stuart's men were busy with the oars, he wavered drunkenly to his feet. "Alto!" he screamed at the top of his lungs. "*Madre di Dios! Alto!*" The chattering gun ceased abruptly. Rodriguez dropped to the bottom of the boat in a blue funk.

"Yellow," was Stuart's terse comment. His men nodded in agreement.

The dark outline of the *Nomad* hove into view. On the deck of the former submarine chaser Stuart could see MacArdle, his first mate and chief engineer combined.

"Let go a ladder," he bawled to the Scot. "We're coming aboard."

Without moving from his position at the rail, MacArdle repeated the order. From somewhere overhead a rope ladder snaked down at them. Stuart grasped the now completely demoralized Rodriguez by the shoulder and with a jerk heaved him to his feet. "Up, you!" he commanded.

The revolutionist scrambled up the ladder as he was bidden. Stuart followed, keeping a safe distance from the other's heels. He had seen enough of the man's treachery for one night. He didn't want his face bashed in.

"Stand by to repel boarders!" he yelled to the astonished crew on deck. "Break out fore and aft machine-guns."

THE men fairly leaped to their posts. Stuart spoke to MacArdle. "Take this rat below," he grated savagely. "There may be some bullets flying and I wouldn't want him to get hurt."

The Scot took the pipe from his mouth and looked over the Spaniard. "A weel, it would be a shame to mar his good looks, now," he said sarcastically, staring at the deep scar that ran down the Spaniard's right cheek. "An' besides, orders is orders. Will ye come or shall I—" The Scot

lifted his fist menacingly. Rodriguez went.

Stuart rushed to his cabin, rummaged through the pistol cabinet and came out on deck a few minutes later with a strange looking weapon in his hand. "Very pistol," he explained briefly to MacArdle. "We can expect 'em at any minute now."

He strode briskly to the fore of the ship and expertly inspected the machine-gun. Everything was in readiness.

"Hold your fire until I order," he instructed the men.

OUT on the water he heard the sound of a rowboat approaching. When he thought it to be within hailing distance he called out, "What do you want out there? Answer or we shoot."

"Please, do not shoot," an anxious voice cried. "It is I, Mario Gonzales, secretary to Don Rodriguez."

"Well, spill it. What do you want?"

"I have brought the money to the señores," the voice answered.

"Good! Bring it aboard. But remember, only one man!"

"*Si, señor, comprendo.*"

A slight bump as the rowboat rubbed alongside the ship, and the grubby secretary's head popped over the rail. He turned back on reaching the rail and someone in the boat evidently tossed him a bag. He dropped it to the deck. Four times more he repeated the performance, then faced Stuart.

"In those five bags are exactly feefty thousand dollars," he announced. "Does my master go free?"

"Sure. Why not?" Stuart answered. He looked at MacArdle. "Bring Rodriguez up," he said.

The Scotchman opened his mouth to protest, then as he saw Stuart's face, abruptly closed it and lumbered off after the prisoner.

Stuart picked up the bags of gold

and took them to his cabin. In a few minutes he came out smiling with satisfaction. "All okay," he announced to the secretary. Then, as the Scot hove in sight driving Rodriguez before him, "Here's your man. Get 'im off the boat before I throttle him with my bare hands."

Rodriguez shot a venomous look at Stuart and without a word disappeared over the ship's side. His secretary followed, smiling nervously. Stuart waited for them to tumble into the boat, then abruptly drew the ladder up on deck. He grinned as Rodriguez cursed fluently. The small boat pulled away in haste from the vessel's side. "Tell the second to start the engines. We're going to have some action in a minute, I think," he told MacArdle.

As though he had made a prophecy, a machine-gun's chatter broke the stillness. It sounded like a riveting machine to Stuart.

"Hold your fire," he cautioned his men. "You'll be able to see your target in a second."

He picked up the Very gun from the roof of the deckhouse and pulled the trigger. There followed a slight explosion not unlike a rocket's in sound. Then suddenly the whole water surrounding the ship was bright with a weird greenish light.

THE guns ceased their yammering. The stunned revolutionists stared, nonplussed by the light that appeared in the sky. Stuart rapidly counted twenty boats loaded to the gunwales with revolutionists. That they meant to make the *Nomad* their prize was obvious. "Let 'em have it," Stuart calmly ordered.

Marshall's word was all his men needed to make hell pop loose. With deadly accuracy the twin machine-guns went to work on the small boats. The spray of bullets ripped into the soft wood, turning the boats into sieves.

The Very light was dying out. Hastily Stuart reloaded and fired again. The bay became as brilliant as by day. At first the Rodriguez men tried to turn about and flee. The hail of lead pursued them relentlessly. They were forced to hold their distance and make futile attempts to return the fire.

FATHER NEPTUNE put the final touch to the attackers' terror. Everywhere that Stuart looked he saw triangular fins of sharks, attracted by the kill. Even to him, who dealt in violent death, the carnage was terrible.

He spotted a stricken boat with only three men in it and trained his binoculars on it. They were Rodriguez, his secretary and another. Their boat had been pierced in a dozen places and was sinking.

Water poured over the gunwales of the boat. The three men were in the water. Stuart saw a triangular fin veer for Rodriguez. The man's hands shot into the air. He disappeared.

The remaining revolutionists were trying desperately to get away from the vengeance of the *Nomad*. Now that their leader was dead, the brave patriots again became the peace-loving peons of the banana republic.

"Cease firing," Stuart ordered.

The *Nomad* had backed out of the harbor and headed for Bimini when MacArdle sidled up to Stuart. "Domn lousy shots, I calls 'em," he muttered. "Not a mon aboard even scratched."

"Not a bullet came aboard the ship, you mean," Stuart corrected. "Know Salcedo?" he asked.

"The president and dictator of this banana republic?"

"The same. Well, I collected another fifty grand from him to draw most the charge from Rodriguez' cartridges. That's doublecrossing a doublecrosser for you!"

Law of the Tundra



Rion blazed away at the approaching team

Terry Rion, Captain of a Fur-Trading Schooner, Runs a Mad Race Against Vandals of the Wastelands in this Compelling Story of Rival Traders at Exile Bay

By **CHART PITT**

Author of "The Brawn of the Bering," "The Devil of the Diomedes," etc.

THE power schooner *Anyox* came plowing her way into Exile Bay, where priceless sable skins could be bought for a pot-metal ax — and rival traders fought tooth and nail for the rich furs of the Siberian back lands.

A rifle cracked its challenge from the headland. The bullet crashed through the wheelhouse window, and

splintered its way through the wall beyond.

Terry Rion ducked as the bullet whizzed past his ear. Then he blurted an oath as he grabbed up his rifle. Poking the old caribou-gun through the shattered window, he fired at a little clump of bull pines that jutted out from the rim of the headland.

A human figure came sprawling out

of the branches. End over end it turned as it plunged downward, and splashed into the deep water at the base of the cliff.

Terry set the gun back in the corner. The ebb tide was running out to sea—and there was one bushwhacker that wouldn't be making any more trouble for him around Exile Bay.

A TRADING schooner darted out from the shadows that lay along the farther shore. Straight toward them she came. Rifles were blazing from her deck, and the bullets, buzzing like hornets about them, ripped their way through the deckhouse walls.

"It's the *Samarak*," one of the sailors blurted as he fired at the approaching boat. "Jake Brogan beat us into Exile and is trying to waylay us."

"Everybody get below, and keep under cover," Terry shouted his warning. He turned the *Anyox* hard to starboard and headed for his favorite cove over on the eastern shore.

The rifles rattled behind them. A venturesome sailor poked his head out of the companionway, and tried a few pot-shots at the rival trade ship.

They slid in behind the wooded bank and dropped anchors fore and aft, holding the *Anyox* with her nose turned toward the entrance and her hard hitting bow gun ready for action. "Break out the sand bags," Captain Rion ordered. "And pass up the high explosive shells. We're not going to waste any soft shot on Jake Brogan tonight."

The crew of the *Anyox* sprang to their work. It was a rich prize they were fighting for at Exile Bay, and every man got his share of the split. The sand bags were pitched up out of the hold, and heaved into place along the rail. A barricade was thrown up in front of the Long Tom

to protect the gunners as they worked.

The high explosive shells were brought up, and stowed away behind the protecting sand bags—and the trading schooner *Anyox* was ready for another battle.

Night settled over Exile Bay. Still there was no attack from the *Samarak*. Terry Rion was getting worried. He was willing to shoot it out with Brogan and his outfit, and let the best man win. But he didn't fancy the idea of hanging around waiting for a surprise attack. Fighting was an unpleasant business, and the sooner you got started the sooner it would be over with.

Captain Rion looked off toward the northwest, where the lifting shores of Exile Bay met the rim of the tundra, still buried deep beneath the slumping snows. And beyond that lay the hinterlands of Siberia, that vast, mysterious land of the Nomad Tribes and the priceless sable skins.

A cold wind was blowing off the upper ice fields. An hour more and the snows of the tundra would be hard enough for travel. He would have to load a sled with trade goods, and try to get through to the Muskrat Meadows where the Nomad Tribes had established a Spring trading camp. The first man in was going to be the lucky man—and this felt to him like a lucky night.

THE engineer came up on deck for a breath of fresh air. He had his lantern in his hand, and he put it down on the planking while he filled his pipe.

Over on the shore a rifle spurted its red fire in the night. A bullet smashed into the lantern, and the chimney exploded like a bursting bombshell. The light went out, and once more the deck of the *Anyox* was in darkness.

"I'm going to get that fellow!"

Rion snapped. He grabbed a rifle from the gun rack, slipped over the rail, dropped into the work boat alongside, and headed for the beach. "Keep everything dark for ten minutes—then set another lantern out on deck," he called back.

Down in the galley, Engineer Dawson stood with his watch in his hand, counting off the minutes. He motioned to the cook, and a lighted lantern was slid out on the deck—and everybody ducked for cover.

ONCE more the hidden bushwhacker opened up on the schooner. His gun flashed among the underbrush, and the lantern went out with a crash.

A moment later a startled cry came from the shore: a cry that quit in the middle, as if strangled into silence. Then there was the splash of a heavy body as it was dumped into the water of the cove—and Captain Rion came rowing back to the *Anyox*, catted it up the line, and swung himself over the rail.

The hatch was opened, and a load of trade goods passed up from the cargo hold, including a suitable present for the chief. That was one thing a man couldn't afford to forget if he wanted to stay in the trading game. In that land of the last fur Eldorado of earth, a red cap or even a ten cent mirror presented to the head man of a village was worth more than an Imperial passport from the Czar.

Those tribes from the hinterland had a sort of Merchant's Code among them. When a trader opened up his load of goods, and had succeeded in making one sale—no rival could do business until he had finished with his trading.

So it always was a free-for-all race when the ice broke up, and the trading schooners pulled out from Nome. The first ship to get across to Siberia got the cream of the crop.

It had been foggy in the Straits today, and the *Anyox* had run into a shoulder of the ice pack, losing three hours time. The *Samarak* had beat them into Exile Bay, only to find that the slumping snow fields were too soft for travel. Now the two rival boats were lying there in the bay waiting for the snow fields to harden, and it would be an overland race for the native camp.

The lucky man was going to clean up a fortune, providing he could hang on to his fur—and not get hijacked before he could get out of the bay.

There weren't any Pollyanna corpuscles in Captain Rion's blood. Fur wars meant dead men beside the snow trails, and dead men floating in the sea. The fellow who played the game had to pay the price.

He didn't have any scruples against killing a man in open battle. But on the other hand he didn't believe a white man was duty bound to cheat a native out of his eye teeth every time he met one.

LAST year he had tried to introduce the New Deal into Siberia. Instead of the usual cast iron trade ax that cost forty cents wholesale, he had stocked up with genuine tempered steel axes at one dollar and twenty cents each.

He figured those extra eighty cents weren't going to bust him up in business; but what a whale of a difference they were going to make when the natives started to chop wood with the new tool.

His parting gift to the chief had been a carborundum whetstone. He had given the old fellow a course of private instruction in the manly art of keeping an ax in chopping order. He had a hunch the chief was going to be sitting pretty with the tribe as long as that whetstone held out.

It was those same steel axes that formed the bulk of the cargo this

season. And it was mostly axes that Terry was taking with him on his trading trip tonight.

All was abustle aboard the old schooner. Dogs, sled and cargo all had to be ferried ashore in the surf boat and the outfit made up on the beach. As they were taking the last load ashore, they heard the yap of a dog far out in the snow field. The sound grew fainter in the distance, till it died away and was lost in the deeper reaches of the tundra.

CAPTAIN RION blurted an oath as he leaped ashore. With frantic haste he began loading his sled. The dogs were slapped into the harness, and stood there waiting for the word to go. The captain snapped an order to the mate.

"Keep the men at their battle stations tonight. And if Jake Brogan starts anything, *shoot to kill.*"

"But you are going to take some of the crew with you, ain't you?"

The captain shook his head.

"You'll need all the boys here, to protect the ship."

"But you are sure to run into that trading party from the *Samarak*—and you know what that means."

"It means war, and I'll have to take my chances," Terry Rion said as he snapped his whip above the team. The outfit went swinging off through the night, headed for the camp of the Nomad Tribes, ready to barter for a prime sable skin, or swap lead with the men from the *Samarak*.

He swung up the long slopes that led to Portage Pass, a narrow gap in the barrier ridges that separated the coastal slope from the inner tundras. Here he picked up Brogan's trail. He was heading toward the Nomad camp.

* * * * *

Far out in the tundras that stretch their vast spaces behind Exile Bay, a weary dog team fought its way through the thaw sogged snow fields

of Siberia. And just ahead was the camp of the Nomads.

Captain Rion was running behind his sled. He spoke words of encouragement to his team, in an effort to coax another mile of speed out of them on that dog-killing trail. He cursed aloud as some laggard dog attempted to shirk in the harness.

For the moment the captain of the *Anyox* was just another dog puncher of the snowlands. But there by the handle bars lay his rifle, and it was loaded and ready for business.

Up in the black night sky, the frost had set the stars to dancing. To the northward along the flat horizon the aurora was beginning to burn. Its wan, ghostly light spread out across the snow fields.

There was something out here besides the priceless sable skins; something besides the endless fur wars that raged along the coasts of Siberia.

It was something that belonged to this vast, naked land of the inner tundras; something that had been here since the beginning of time; something that would be to the end of time—the soul of Siberia that never would be tamed.

THE captain of the *Anyox* thrust the thought aside. Up ahead he could see the far flicker of a fire across the snow. It was the big, community trading fire of the Nomads. The men from the *Samarak* had beat him in—and he would have to fight for the fur he got tonight.

It was a yearly event in the life of the Nomads, that first load of trade goods that got through from the coast, and those dark faced gypsies of the tundra always made the most of it. It was a time when a feast was in order; a time when a fight was "unfinished business."

Rival trappers and rival lovers had old grudges to settle, and every tribe of tundra land had some feud hate

against the Nomads in the next valley. Terry heard their celebration when far out in the snow fields. The snarl of fighting wolf dogs was blended with the rumble of angry human voices. No fooling—the Nomads were putting on a regular roughhouse to-night.

THE dog team slanted down from the tundra, and swung in for the village. A throng of black-faced Nomads were gathered about the trading fire. Men, women and children, they were crowding and wrangling like folks at a country fair. There among them were the men from the *Samarak*—but they didn't seem to be doing any trading.

Captain Rion pulled up at the edge of the shadows, and stood there watching them.

He had lost out in the race, and tonight he would have to take the leavings. But it took more than one fight to make a fur war—and next time he would see to it that he wasn't playing the under dog rôle.

The wrangling voices lifted into a more angry pitch, but Terry made no attempt to take part in the dispute. It was a foolish custom, that "law of the first sled—and the first sale," but the Nomads were very jealous about their customs. If a man wanted to do business in the tundra he had to respect tundra law.

Some keen-eyed Nomad spotted Terry where he stood at the edge of the firelight, and recognized him.

"It is the man who brought the magic ax," the native shouted as he began clawing his way through the rabble that surrounded the trading fire. A riot broke loose in the camp of the Nomads. The mob surged forward. Crowding and shoving, they forced their way toward Terry's sled, and every Nomad in the village was trying to make more noise than any of his neighbors.

Snarling wolf dogs added their

chorus to the medley, and over it all rose the bull-like voice of Jake Brogan, mouthing his hate in the tundra night. Like bargain hunters, the natives swarmed about the sled.

Each man wanted a magic ax, and he had a prime sable skin to pay for it.

Jake Brogan had drawn aside, and was holding a council with his men. Terry knew he was plotting some new hellishness, but there was no time to think about that now.

Natives were dangling their choicest furs in front of his eyes and demanding to be waited on. The trading was fast and furious, and almost before he knew it, Terry had swapped his load of steel axes for a sled load of fur that was worth a small fortune.

BUT his brain had been working as fast as his hands. He knew that Brogan and his gang would never let that load of fur get through to the coast, if there was any mortal way to stop it. There was only one way to stop it—with powder and lead. Those six gangsters from the *Samarak* were armed to the teeth.

Terry knew he would have to work fast. Somehow he would have to slip away from the village, and get a start on Brogan before the other man got wise to what was going on.

An idea flipped into Terry's mind. He acted on it without a second thought. He dumped the remainder of the trade goods out on the snow.

"Divide it up among the men of the tribe," he told the chief. "And make a big potlatch on me."

The village went into an instant uproar. Everybody scrambled forward to get his share of the presents.

Captain Rion swung his team into the trail, and went scooting off into the shadows, following the home-bound road to Exile Bay. He laughed to himself as he followed his team

through the night. Back in the village the Nomads were making a merry hell of it—and Jake Brogan was going to start a little private hell of his own when he discovered that the sled load of sable skins had slipped through his fingers.

There was no need to urge the dogs now. Captain Rion was no miser when it came to feeding his team, and always there was a special meal waiting for them when they got in from a trip.

The sled rocked and swayed as it plunged across the humpy snow fields. Terry hung on to the handle bars, and kept turning anxious glances over his shoulder as he ran.

Nothing was there except the empty trail and an empty sky line.

The captain of the *Anyox* clung to the lurching sled, while the home-bound dogs swept on and on across the snow fields. That trail behind him would not long remain empty. Speed and more speed was all that could save that load of skins.

He glanced up at the sky, measuring the hour by the swing of the stars. If the dogs could hold out, he had a fighting chance.

Then a rifle sputtered behind him.

HE turned and saw them coming. Vague specks they were, out there against the glow of the aurora. But they were coming fast.

Captain Rion yanked his rifle from beneath the lashings, and pulled his cartridge bag out where he could get at it in a hurry. He would have to do something more than run tonight. He would have to fight.

Jake Brogan had dumped off his load of trade goods, and was sweeping down the trail with an empty sled, lashing his dogs at every jump.

Terry shot a swift glance up ahead, where the broken bluffs of the Barrier Ridge cut a ragged ruffle on the sky line. He had to make it through to the Pass, where he would have a

fighting chance against Brogan and his gang. He just *had* to make it.

Once more the guns were rattling behind him, and this time he heard the whine of a bullet in the frosty air. They were getting his range.

THE dogs broke into a swifter run. They too had heard the sputter of gunfire down the trail; and they seemed to understand the menace that was following them.

Captain Rion felt his wind growing shorter and shorter. The men from the *Samarak* were taking turns riding the sled runners—while Terry did not dare to add another pound to the load which his light team was hauling. He knew he could not hold out much longer, but he gritted his teeth, determined not to give up.

The sheer bluffs of the Barrier Ridges were showing plainer up ahead. He glanced back at the pursuing team, measuring the distance that separated him from his enemies. He snarled an oath as he reached for his gun. Yes he was going to make it to the Pass, but he wouldn't have a foot to spare.

The high bluffs lifted themselves out of the darkness ahead, and the racing team swung into the narrow opening. Terry clutched at the cartridge bag, and with his rifle in his hands, he leaped for the shelter of a pile of rocks that lay at the mouth of the Pass.

The dog team raced away through the darkness, following the home-bound road that led to Exile Bay and the supper that was waiting for them. Captain Rion flipped his rifle over the top of a boulder, and blazed away at the approaching team.

A roar of angry voices lifted loudly in the night. Guns sputtered their little jets of flame from Brogan's advancing sled, and bullets spattered against the rocky barricade.

Once more Terry squinted over the rifle barrel—and pulled the trigger.

A dog went down in the harness, and the sled came to a stop. Every gun was blazing at him now, and the bullets buzzed like hornets about his ears. Flying lead thudded against rocks, went whining off into space.

TERRY stepped out into the open. and pumped the lead into them as fast as he could swing the lever. Then the hammer spat against a dead chamber. His gun was empty. Once more he crouched down behind the boulder, and began shoving cartridges into the magazine. Brogan and his gang were going to earn all the sable skins they got from him.

The sudden attack had thrown the fur thieves into a panic. But a moment later they had settled down to business. It was an old game to them, and they knew how to play it.

The team was driven into a little gully, where they would not be exposed to the gunfire. The men themselves burrowed among the drifts, and began working their way toward the mouth of the Pass.

Nothing was visible now. The snow fields were empty. Nothing could be seen but rolling drifts of white that swept away to the far horizon where the aurora was dancing.

Captain Rion swore to himself as he stared out into the tundra. This trench warfare wasn't a bit to his liking. Why didn't they charge the mouth of the Pass, and get things over with! Then his sharp eyes caught sight of something over to the east of the trail, something that flashed into sight, then disappeared into the whiteness of the snow fields.

So that was their game, was it? Jake had taken his gang of killers and had swung over to where a series of little gulleys would allow them to creep up to the face of the cliffs. From there, they could work their way along the edge of the barrier, without being exposed to gunfire from the Pass; and when they got

close enough, they would charge down upon him and take the place by storm.

An idea popped into Terry's head. Brogan had left his team in the gully at the other side of the trail. If he could only get over there and get that string of dogs!

It was a big risk to take—but it was worth the chance.

Flattening himself in the snow, he began crawling back across the tundra. He knew if one of the men from the *Samarak* spotted him, it was going to be just too bad. But Jake and his friends were busy with their own little game; too busy to waste any time looking back across the tundra.

Captain Rion grew bolder as he increased the distance between them. Now if Jake did happen to look over that way, it would be a diagonal view across the face of the aurora, and the snow fields would be in the shadow.

He found the team in the gully. The lead dog snarled at him as he drew near, but Terry had a way with dogs. He spoke softly to them as he swung them out into the beaten track. Then flattening himself upon the sled, he sent them racing down the trail, straight for the Pass.

A BLURTED oath came from the snow fields over to the east and Brogan and his men came floundering out from among the drifts. Shouting and cursing, they tried to stop the dogs in their flight. As yet they had not noticed the man lying flat upon the sled, and thought that the team had bolted for home.

Captain Rion raised up and waved at his old enemy as the sled ducked into the mouth of the Pass. Rifles rattled behind him, and the bullets sang their whine-song overhead as the swift-footed team raced down the trail toward Exile Bay.

After all, that hunch of his had been on the level. It certainly had been a lucky night for him!

The GLOBE-TROTTER



“BELIEVE me, matey, I figured my number was up that time all right. There I was, backing down a narrow sort of alleyway, with, it looked like a thousand Chinks hacking away at me and howling for my blood. At the end of that alley was a pool; and I knew mighty well what was in that pool—crocodiles! Nasty, mean-eyed devils with great, jagged-jawed mouths.”

Chief Petty Officer Donegan's gray eyes gleamed and his square jaw hardened at the memory.

“My gun was empty, and all I had was a heavy sword I'd grabbed from one of the Chinks I'd dropped. They were pressing me back and back. I knew it was only a matter of minutes. Dying wasn't so bad, you understand; it was knowing that that devil Ah Chung was sitting up there on his balcony, grinning down at the performance and licking his lips.”

Action—in a Big Way!

Donegan's tough fingers curled as if the fat neck of his hated enemy were right there before him.

“I needed a miracle to get me out of that mess—and I got it. This red-headed baboon was it.” The chief nodded toward his grinning, flaming haired pal, Harris. “When his ugly mug loomed up there alongside of Ah Chung, things started to happen in a big way.”

“Yeah,” Harris nodded, solemnly. “They hadda. Couldn't waste the rest o' the night foolin' around there. We had less'n half an hour to make the last boat back to the ship—an' I wasn't missin' that boat, brother!”

That yarn, and hundreds like it, have been sailing around Ye Olde

Globe Trotter's cubbyhole until the air is blue with them. Yep, you've probably guessed it; the Fleet's in town. We've been entertaining adventurers—some thirty-five thousand of them! From ninety-six of Uncle Sam's battle wagons lying all around little old Manhattan.

Thirty-five thousand sailors and marines, bringing with them the tang of salt air, the rolling gait that tells of stormy days at sea, those tiny creases around the eyes that hint of tropic sun beating down on distant beaches, and that swashbuckling air that distinguishes the adventurer the world over.

Adventurers' Holiday

Thirty-five thousand adventurers on a holiday! On a vacation—for that's what their three weeks' stay in America's greatest city was to most of them. A vacation from the things



most of us would consider a vacation in themselves!

Vacation Days

Of course, there are all sorts of vacations, and some of you fellows will probably be in the midst of a swell one when you read this. Ye Olde Globe Trotter was sitting here day-dreaming about vacation ideas of his own, when along comes a fellow

with a plan that sounds mighty good. Says he:

Dear Globe Trotter:

THRILLING ADVENTURES gives me no end of enjoyment. I'm cursed with a wandering disposition and an ingrowing thirst for adventure which won't let me settle down to any ordinary pursuits. I've knocked around a bit; hold a commission in the Military Intelligence Reserve, U. S. Army, and I like to read stories with the correct atmosphere such as L. Ron Hubbard puts into his tales.

This summer I expect to spend about six weeks cruising about in a forty foot boat, and I've stocked up a good supply of back issues of THRILLING ADVENTURES for entertainment.

Incidentally, I've spent a good deal of time in the East—Burma, Siam, China—and this bird Hubbard knows his Orient all right. He seems to understand the psychology of the natives.

H. L. Lewis.

Washington, D. C.

Lawrence of Arabia

So much for vacation chatter. There's a scad of interesting stuff to bring before the Globe Trotters this month, so let's get down to business.

First of all, there's the matter of a query from Maurice Lacasse, of Claremont, N. H., which we published some time ago. Lacasse wanted to know what has become of Colonel Lawrence—Lawrence of Arabia. It's taken a while to get the full dope for him, but here it is—sent in by D. F. Willis, of London, England.

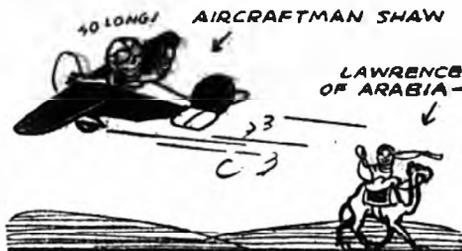
Lawrence of Arabia is dead. He made away with himself deliberately, and he will never let himself be resurrected. In his place is Aircraftsman Shaw, a fair-haired, grim-jawed man, who lives in modest lodgings a few miles from Southampton, England.

Bitter disillusionment has been the lot of this great adventurer who played so important a rôle in winning and keeping the Near East for the Allied cause during the World War. All that he asks now is to be left alone, to follow his hobby and serve inconspicuously in the air forces of his king.

So potent was the part that Lawrence played, so mighty the influence that he wielded, in Arabia, that the great nations of the world view him with suspicion.

"No country will have me," he says. "France, Germany, Turkey—all of them refuse me a passport visa. I have been deported from India and sacked from the Air Force because of my fame—no, call it infamy or notoriety.

"I am banned from every country of



the world because I am supposed to be a secret service agent. I am nothing of the kind, and I never have been. Next year I leave the Air Force. I do not want to, but I cannot sign on for another twenty years; I am too old. The Air Force would not have me.

"What I am going to do after that I do not know. No reputable firm will have me because of my reputation. I will not entertain any offer from any firm that wants to make capital out of my reputation."

Man of Mystery

One of the oddest adventurers of all time is this man who could have used his power to win himself a great fortune. Today he is an enlisted man in the Air Force in order that he may work on the great planes he loves—and which he never hopes to be able to own. Why is this man, who was once an uncrowned king, not even a commissioned officer today?

"Because officers only fly the machines," he answers. "We in the ranks make them and run them, and I am interested in machines, not money or rank."

Yet, if he chose to exploit the thrilling story of his adventures, tens of thousands of pounds would be his for the taking—sufficient to buy any of these planes he loves. But that is one thing Aircraftsman Shaw will not do.

What he did he narrated once, in his official report. The rest is a sealed book. Aircraftsman Shaw loses himself in the bowels of a mighty aero-

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Characters that Live

Men like Colonel Lawrence are thrilling stories in themselves — knockout adventure yarns all ready for the spinning. And, more often than not, behind these gripping yarns in THRILLING ADVENTURES you will find a powerful, dominating character such as this out of real life.

Take for example Charles Green's story, "A Man Amongst Men," in this issue.

About it Bro. Green writes:

Dear Globe Trotter:

There wasn't much I had to do to "A Man Amongst Men." It was really a story ready made; an actual adventure of one of the most remarkable personalities I have ever met. Lloyd Bennet—and, incidentally, that isn't his real name—told me the yarn in his shack in New Mexico.

I met Lloyd Bennet—Lloyd Ben-Ed, as the Arabs call him—driving to the West Coast two years ago. Picked him up just outside of St. Louis. He had jumped a freighter in New York, having worked on it as a fireman clear up from Sydney.

Why did he return to the U. S. after eight year's absence? He shrugged. I did not question him further. Somchow, one doesn't, when Bennet looks at you with those quiet gray eyes of his.

I was driving through on my way to Albuquerque, with time to spare, so when Bennet invited me to spend a couple weeks with him I jumped at the chance.

The man intrigued me. One could see that he was a true adventurer. A man familiar with the far corners of the earth. I knew that he could supply me with a wealth of rich, colorful material drawn from his own experiences.

And he did. Some of the things he told me were unprintable—they would interest too many police officials—but some of the others were splendid yarns in themselves. I only hope I've done him justice in "A Man Amongst Men."

Charles Green.

True Adventurers

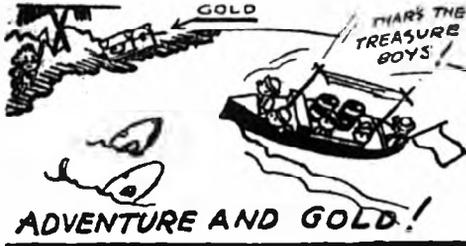
Speaking of great adventurers in this issue Arthur Burks concludes his graphic, first-hand story of one of the best of them—Smedley Butler.

What did you think of that yarn? And how do you like having one of these thrilling fact stories in each issue of your magazine?

Ye Olde Globe Trotter and the rest of the gang back here in the office are

doing our darndest to give you a bang-up magazine in **THRILLING ADVENTURES**—a magazine that will knock you for a loop each month and give you as many thrills as we can possibly pack between its covers.

Because truth is so often stranger—and more thrilling—than fiction, we figured that these true accounts would



give the magazine just a bit more kick for you.

How about it? Let's know how the idea strikes you.

Treasure-Hunters, Ahoy!

Gold—there's a magic word for you. Ever since Ye Old Globe Trotter stood up on his hind legs and had his say on buried treasure and lost gold, the mails have been full of it. No, not exactly full of gold, but full of schemes for locating it and digging it up.

I can't print 'em all, but here's a treasure proposition that's crying to be passed on to you.

Dear Globe Trotter:

The enclosed letters will be self-explanatory. I am very much interested in getting a crowd together to go and hunt for this treasure, as I have every reason to believe it is there.

I found the original of this letter and a map in a bottle off the coast of Mexico two years ago. That bottle had been cast in the sea from a little island off the coast of Borneo thirty-five years before. I had the writing tested by a chemist and found the ink to be the juice of a tropical tree. The paper is of a type used in 1897.

How would the Globe Trotters like to sponsor a trip for this lost treasure? I don't mean to put up the money, but to get the crowd together. I would like to get started next winter and make the cruise completely around the world. We could take a year and make it a pleasure trip as well as a treasure expedition.

I know where to locate a good four-masted schooner and how to supply her.

(Continued on page 154)

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30x4	75-19	2.45	0.95	32x4	2.35	0.85	
32x4	75-20	2.50	0.95	33x4	2.55	0.85	
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32x4	85-18	2.60	1.15	34x4 1/2	2.55	1.15	
32x4	85-19	2.65	1.15	34x4 1/2	2.55	1.15	
32x4	85-20	2.65	1.15	34x4 1/2	2.55	1.15	
31x3 1/2	23-21	2.25	1.15	34x4 1/2	2.55	1.15	
32x4	80-18	2.35	1.15	34x4 1/2	2.55	1.15	
32x4	85-18	2.40	1.15	34x4 1/2	2.55	1.15	
31x3 1/2	20-18	2.40	1.15	34x4 1/2	2.55	1.15	
32x4	80-20	2.45	1.20	34x4 1/2	2.55	1.15	
32x4	80-21	2.55	1.25	32x4-10 p. 7.00	1.75		
31x3 1/2	20-19	2.60	1.35	32x4-10 p. 7.00	1.75		
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31x3 1/2	20-20	2.80	1.45	32x4	2.95	1.35	
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FROM OUR SANCTUM

- ☛ There are stories for every taste and every member of the family in our companion magazines for September.
 - ☛ Don't miss **THRILLING WESTERN** with its great full book-length novel of hard-fighting, hard-riding hombies—**OUTLAW GUNS**, by Cleo Woods. Also novelettes and stories by Johnston McCulley, Jackson Cole and others. 10c at all newsstands.
 - ☛ **ACE OF DOOM**, by James Perley Hughes, a complete book-length war-air novel, is featured in **SKY FIGHTERS**. Also, a novelette by **GEORGE BRUCE**. Zooming stories and features! 10c.
 - ☛ A compelling mystery by Preston Grady—**THE RED MASK MURDERS**—opens this issue of **THRILLING DETECTIVE**, which also contains novelettes and stories by such well-known authors as Oscar Schisgal, Johnston McCulley and L. Ron Hubbard. Thrills on every page of this action-packed magazine. 10c.
 - ☛ Follow the Lone Eagle through war-torn skies in **WINGED WARRIORS**, the featured novel in this issue of **THE LONE EAGLE**. Rip-roaring, hell-busting short stories and features. 10c.
 - ☛ For romantic stories of the ranch and range, read **THRILLING RANCH STORIES**—15c. This month's novel is **WRANGLER OF HEARTS**, by Ray Nafziger, and J. Edward Leithand, Arthur Hawthorne Carhart, and Cliff Walter are others contributing to a gala fiction rodeo.
 - ☛ Detective fans will thrill to the action-packed exploits of the world's greatest sleuth, Richard Curtis Van Loan in this month's featured book-length novel in **THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE**, entitled **SPAWN OF DEATH**. Other bang-up stories. 10c.
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in plain wrapper, a trial package of Golden Treatment. You will be thankful as long as you live that you did it. Address Dr. J. W. Haines Co., 1111 Glenn Building, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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POST YOURSELF! It pays I paid J. D. Martin, Virginia, \$200 for a single copper cent. Mr. Manning, New York, \$2,500 for one silver dollar. Mrs. G. F. Adams \$740 for a few old coins. I want all kinds of old coins, medals, bills and stamps. I pay big cash premiums.

WILL PAY \$100 FOR DIME 1894 S. Mint, \$50 for 1913 Liberty Head Nickel (not buffalo) and hundreds of other amazing prices for coins. Get in touch with me. Send 4c for Large Illustrated Coin Folder and further particulars. It may mean much profit to you. Write today to

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LADIES END PAIN AND DELAY NOW. Get a married woman's secret when nature fails. I positively guarantee my successful "Special Relief Compound" is praised and used by thousands of women for relief! Compounded of ingredients used by physicians and nurses more than a quarter of a century because of power to relieve pain and induce flow. Relieves many of the most stubborn unnatural delays, often in 3 to 5 days. Mrs. G. "After 3 1/2 days it worked." "I missed several weeks. Only took half a box to get results." Mrs. V. "Used two boxes and the flow started." Mrs. C. "I was about 6 weeks past, in 5 days I was O. K." Send for this proven remedy today. Regular package, \$2.00. Special Formula No. 2 for obstinate conditions, \$8.00. Valuable knowledge FREE. Private information from a married woman with order.

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Standard Art Studios, 164 S. Jefferson St., Dept. 824-L, Chicago

(Continued from page 153)

Let me hear from anyone who is seriously interested in such a project.

G. P. Bradley.

St. Louis, Mo.

The Treasure Messages

Here are the messages on which Mr. Bradley bases his hopes. If you feel like digging up treasure, get in touch with him. The first reads:

To whoever finds this which I am about to cast into the sea—help—I am cast away on an island whose latitude is—, and whose longitude is—.

For three years I have been a prisoner to Chinese pirates who have raided several pearlers and other vessels and have accumulated a vast amount of wealth, which I have saved from the wreck and buried under a rock on the south end of the island and under a cross—over \$40,000 worth of gold and silver coins and a stone jug over half full of pearls.

Eleven perfect black pearls of immense size and 143 others that are over one half inch in diameter. The rest are smaller. I am all alone and cannot live much longer. So I only ask the finder to give one of the black pearls and \$10,000 of the money to my little daughter, Nellie Farley, who lives with a Mrs. Susan McCarty, in Stockton, Calif. Find her, please, and give her this and the rest is yours, and may God bless you.

James Farley.

August 18, 1897.

The second message, with the map, reads:

There is no water on this island, which is very small, and I have no hope for myself, but please help my little girl when you get what I have hidden.

Many other valuable things are buried near-by. There are letters with the money that will tell you all.

Thank God, my suffering is about over.

Inca Gold

Gold — lost treasure — furnished the basis for Lieutenant Scott Morgan's outstanding novel, "Trail of the Gold Skulls," in this issue. And there is a lot more fact behind that you than you probably supposed. Hear what the lieutenant has to say about it:

Dear Globe Trotter:

The basis for "Trail of the Gold Skulls" is grounded in hard fact.

There is still plenty of the gold of the ancient Incas buried in Peru, or so the Peruvians would have you believe. There may be gold in the Lake Titicaca region or there may not be, but two well seasoned Englishmen I met in Cuzco, Peru, told me

that there was and that they were going after it.

They had an ancient map, supposed to have been drawn by one of Pizarro's soldiers, which showed the exact location of the precious metal. They invited me in on their game, and I accepted.

We had bad luck from the start. One of our guides mysteriously disappeared and was never heard from; another was picked up in a dark alleyway in the town, stabbed through the back. A wealthy private individual, who had promised to finance the expedition on a percentage basis, suddenly withdrew his support and would give no reason for his action.

There were various explanations as to the cause of all this bad luck, but I am still inclined to take stock in the furtive whis-



pers that reached us concerning a certain organization of Peruvian Indians who had determined to stop us from desecrating the temples of their ancestors.

I once saw the head of this organization in a cafe in Lima—much, much later. His face was singularly striking. It was long, thin, cadaverous. He was gray-haired and stoop-shouldered. There was in his glossy black eyes the mystery of eternal defiance which is the soul of the Andes.

"That is Quispé," my host told me. "He is the pretender to the ancient throne of the Incas. He has no official position in the government, but his word and authority rate high among the people. If he had his way every pure-blooded white man and woman in South America would be killed. He makes a bad enemy."

Viewing his saturnine countenance, I could well believe that! And afterwards I was to think of him many, many times.

The Englishmen were not daunted by our early setbacks, but the loss of time in getting started forced me to drop out. In February, on a shoestring stake, they started. They were scheduled to come out in May, but in late August, they had neither emerged nor been heard from. I never heard of them again. Friends among the natives whom I questioned merely shrugged.

I thought of Quispé, you can be sure; but I had no proof nor even the shadow of a clue. Only persistent, ominous rumors.
Lieut. Scott Morgan.

The Power of Gold

Gold means many things to many
(Continued on page 156)

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 Ellipone added five inches to his arms; E. Peter added one inch to each bicep the first week! What they have done, you can do!

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Become the center of attraction wherever you go! Decide now that you are going to have muscles that not only look good but are good! Get sinews of steel! The Iron shoe will develop them to the super-state that cannot be equalled. Some of our pupils have put four inches on their biceps and increased their shoulder spread six inches.

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(Continued from page 155)

men, but to some men it means power; and of those men history has plenty to say. Gold—power—world domination. Fred Painton tells us how they built his outstanding novelette, "Emperor of Asia," which is featured in this issue:

Dear Globe Trotter:

The most fascinating subject in history is the struggle of individual men for power.

In the prehistoric days a man obtained power by the strength of his body. But as civilization began its long history, the man with cunning became the leader.

But within the past fifty years the men who struggled for power learned that there is a greater weapon, a greater force than armies and navies. Gold!

With gold the foreign policy of nations has been determined; with gold wars have been declared and won.

So the thought occurred to me: what would happen if some man, unscrupulous, became possessed of a limitless supply of gold? Next I heard of an engineer who firmly believes that the great mother lode from which sprang the great gold discoveries in Alaska, lies somewhere in Kamchatka, the Pacific or the Siberian coast.

An evil man possessed of billions desiring to make the world his plaything, opposed by—well, evil always has been opposed by good since the world began.

That is the genesis of "Emperor of Asia"—and, as I write this, I wonder, idly, just what will happen when the great mother lode off Kamchatka is discovered. I wonder how closely I have prophesied what will happen. It is strange how often the writer's imaginative creations of today become the stark fact of tomorrow.

Frederick C. Painton.

We're After You!

Before getting on to this month's questions and answers, Ye Olde Globe Trotter has a word for you procrastinators—I'd sure hate to be called that!—who have been putting off until tomorrow before sending in your application blank and getting lined up with the *Globe Trotters Club*.

Let me repeat, there are no dues, no initiation fee, no charges of any sort to joining up with the Globe Trotters. Just fill in the coupon with the requested information, and mail it to us, enclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope. That's easy enough, isn't it?

We'll line you right up with the

rest of the gang, and will send you a handsomely engraved membership card that will identify you at any time and will tie you up with adventurers the world over. If you haven't gotten in under the wire yet, it's high time you came in out of the rain.

Okay—send along that application today, and see how quickly your membership card comes smacking back at you!

Globe Trotter Pins

We've had several letters in these columns from Globe Trotters who want the club to adopt some sort of identification by which members may recognize each other without presenting their membership cards. Here is a Globe Trotter who is getting a bit impatient and wants some action:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I am writing again to ask you what chance there is of getting the Globe Trotters to adopt a pin or an emblem that could be worn on a coat. I am sure every member would be glad to put up whatever you asked for one.

Not long ago someone wanted a flag. That's all right, but you can't pin one on your coat. Let's get something we all can wear. I wish you would find room to print this and hear what other members think of it.

James Hayes.

Sea Breeze, N. Y.

All right, Globe Trotters, there it is. Do you want something of this sort, or don't you? Suppose all who want the Globe Trotters to adopt some inexpensive pin, write and tell me so. That way we'll be able to know what we're at and whether it's worth while going on with the idea.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Here is a flyer who is glad to join up with the Globe Trotters and is looking for action. He thinks maybe we can put him on the right track.

Dear Globe Trotter:

In your column in the current issue of THRILLING ADVENTURES, you mention a Mr. Clint Dawson and his enlistment in the Colombian Air Force. I wonder if you can give me the information about this service I desire?

I'm interested in joining the above-mentioned air force and have tried unsuccessful-

(Continued on page 158)

Dead Doctor Heals Stomach Ailments

The strange weird story is told of the kindly healing hand of a well-known specialist—reaching from the grave to help people ward off stomach suffering. This specialist years ago created a prescription for stomach ulcers, acid stomach, gas pains heartburn, indigestion and other indications of excess acid. One patient after another reported marvelous results, restored weight and appetite, sound sleep and freedom from distress. Then the good doctor died. But, like Lincoln, his fame grew greater after death as one stomach sufferer told another of this marvelous prescription. Under the name "UDGA" it is now known to over 200,000 former stomach sufferers. Over 50,000 people have written letters telling how UDGA brought lasting relief when all else had failed.

Any stomach sufferer who writes UDGA, Inc. 3459 Foote-Schulze Bldg., St. Paul, Minn. will be sent a 15-day supply to try without risking a cent. Write them today.



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INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
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 Dept. 77-44

(Continued from page 157)

fully to get any dope on the procedure. Even went as far as to start for Colombia, but didn't make it. Got as far as Mexico City, then got on a detour and ended up back here.

I've been flying for nine years and am a licensed transport pilot. Was operating a small air service of my own until I lost my ship and equipment last fall by fire. Now I'm at loose ends. As I haven't sufficient experience to make one of the air lines, I have been looking upon South America with longing eyes.

James H. Hosler.

Streator, Illinois.

Answer:

The signing up of the fifty aviators who sailed for Colombia a few months ago was managed right here in New



York. The word went out along the flyers' grapevine, and the fifty were in line even before the thing became public property.

There was a bit of a ruction then: talk of international complications and what not. But the outfit sailed, anyway. So far as their contracts are concerned these flyers have signed on as instructors in the Colombian Air (Concluded on page 160)

STILL IN LOVE

At 45 and 50!



Enduring, ennobling Love with all its tenderness—as well as Success, Ambition, Regularity—depends so much on Physical and mental fitness. Don't sit by the sidelines, watching others having a mighty nappy and prosperous time in life. Resolve and WILL that you, too, will be one of the "fortunate" ones. No one dare say you cannot! Right now, if you are "run-down," below par—if Life has been a dull, monotonous grind, instead of each day being a brand new joy to live through, THEN GIVE PRINCESS ANNE STIMULATORS A CHANCE TO PICK YOU RIGHT UP! It may give you a brand new outlook and "that something" in a new spirit which enables people to accomplish bigger things and get the most out of life! Astonished users report great beneficial Results positively guaranteed or money returned. Price per full-size box, \$1.00. Trial, 25c. PRINCESS ANNE CO. [C] P. A. Co. 1934]. Dept. TA-25, Baltimore, Md.

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(Continued)

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 (Print name plainly)

Address

City..... State.....

My hobbies are.....

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To obtain a membership card, enclose 5-34 a self-addressed stamped envelope

(Concluded from page 158)

Force. But Clint Dawson winked when he mentioned that—so you can draw your own conclusions.

Because of the nature of the deal, I imagine you will find it a bit hard to get information on it, Hosler. You might try the Colombian consul in New York or Chicago; or the Colombian Minister in Washington. Better still, why not write direct to the War Department, Bogota, Colombia?

United States Services

There have been quite a few of you lately who have been asking about the various branches of Uncle Sam's service. Here is a typical letter:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I want to join some branch of the United States service other than the army and navy. What do you think of the Marines?

Do you know of any other branches of the United States services—something to do with forestry perhaps? I'd like something I can get to without too much expense.

Robert L. Parker.

Leominster, Mass.

Answer:

I think the Marine Corps would be great, Robert, and there's a chance for you to step up and sign on the dotted line now. The Corps is recruiting again, but I understand that their requirements are pretty stiff these days.

You say you would like to get into something that you could get to without too much expense. How about the Coast Guard? You may run up against a pretty full house, but write to the Commander, U. S. Coast Guard, Washington, D. C., for information.

It's too bad you did not get in on the C. C. C., if you are interested in forestry work. Most of these units are filled up and have waiting lists, but you might investigate.

And now, adventurers, don't miss next month's great novel—**DRUMS OF EBONY**, by Arthur J. Burks, which takes you to Haiti. A yarn smack-full of whirlwind action and adventure! Then there'll be **SOLDIERS ARE BORN**, by Carl N. Taylor, and many other exciting thrill-packed novelettes and stories. All in all, the October issue will be a humdinger you can't afford to miss.

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By Virginia Hudson Brightman

This Book Includes an Up-to-Date Dictionary of Broadway Slang Used by Girl Racketeers

Former Police Reporter in Chicago, New York and Boston. Author of "What Happens to Innocent Girls," "How Girls Go Wrong," etc.

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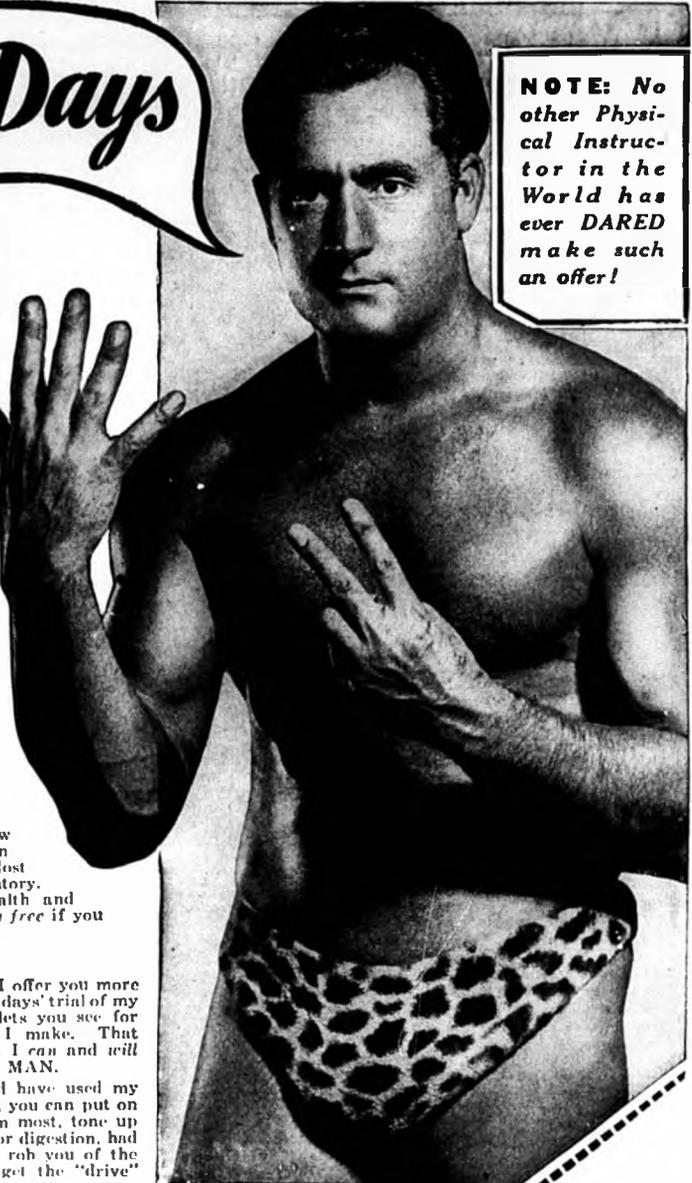
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